

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY
McGILL UNIVERSITY
2023-2024

YEARLY OBJECTIVES

Early each fall, students meet with their supervisor and the other members of their advisory committee (students select the members of their advisory committee in consultation with their supervisor) to map out the objectives for the year. A Graduate Planning Form outlining the agreed upon objectives is submitted to the Graduate Program Director by November 1st. The objectives for the year include, among others, research objectives, publication and conference plans, and the following formal milestones:

First Year Research Paper

Students in MA/MSc1 and PhD1 write a paper to fulfill the requirement of PSYC 601 (First Year Research Paper [Master's Comprehensive]). This paper is due at the end of the student's first year in the program (April 15). The content of the First Year Research Paper depends on each student's background and interests. Its purpose is to encourage students to begin their research in the first year. The form and content will be discussed and agreed on by the supervisor and student, and approved by the student's advisory committee. The paper should consist of a broad review of the relevant literature on a topic germane to the student's developing research interests. It may additionally contain a research proposal or the methods and results of a study the student conducted during their first year. The paper should be detailed enough to show the depth of the work that the student has accomplished. This can often be achieved by a paper that is around 15 to 20 pages long.

The student emails the finished paper no later than April 15th to the supervisor and their advisory committee. Students must notify the Graduate Program Administrator (by email) when the finished paper is submitted. Students who foresee that they will be unable to meet this deadline need to inform the Graduate Program Director (michael.sullivan@mcgill.ca) before April 15, providing a reason for the delay and the expected date of submission.

Each member of the advisory committee preferably provides written feedback by email directly to the student with a copy to the supervisor. Alternatively, the committee member may contact the student to meet with them to discuss the First Year Research Paper. If the student has not received written feedback by May 1st, then the student should take the initiative to meet with the respective committee member(s) to discuss their paper. Students should also meet with committee members if they provided written feedback with which they disagree or that they do not understand.

Based on the feedback from the advisory committee and the supervisor's own evaluation, the supervisor assigns a letter grade and reports it back to the Graduate Program Administrator

(chantale.bousquet@mcgill.ca) without delay in the beginning of May so that the grade can be submitted to Graduate and Postgraduate Studies (GPS) on time (i.e. early May).

The First Year Research Paper may form part of a Fast Track/Qualifying Paper, a Master's Thesis, or a dissertation.

Students who entered the program with an MA/MSc are usually exempt from writing a First Year Research Paper. These students submit a Research Progress Paper instead. However, if they have little or no background in psychology, then they may be asked to submit a First Year Research Paper.

Research Progress Paper

In a year in which a student is not submitting their First Year Research Paper, their Fast Track/Qualifying Paper, their Master's Thesis or their dissertation, they must submit by April 15 (by email) a Research Progress Paper to their supervisor, advisory committee members, and the Graduate Program Administrator (chantale.bousquet@mcgill.ca). Students who foresee that they will be unable to meet this deadline need to inform the Graduate Program Director (michael.sullivan@mcgill.ca) before April 15, providing a reason for the delay and the expected date of submission.

The form and content of the Research Progress Paper depends on the stage that a student's research has reached during the past year. It might involve the theoretical background, methods and results of a study conducted during the year written like in a regular manuscript, or a manuscript submitted for publication that summarizes the student's progress during the year. The Research Progress Paper may include sections from previous years (e.g. from the First Year Research Paper or the Fast Track/Qualifying Paper) and build upon them (e.g. adding the methods and results of a study that was proposed in the First Year Research Paper). The student must demonstrate in the Research Progress Paper how they made progress in their research beyond what they had submitted in the previous year. This should be done by explicitly stating in a brief paragraph at the beginning of the paper what parts of the research reported in the paper had been completed before the past year and which parts have been completed during the past year, i.e. are new.

The advisory committee provides feedback (e.g. by email) to the student and supervisor by May 15 so that the supervisor can include this information together with their own evaluation of the Research Progress Paper into the student's annual progress evaluation.

Special Comprehensive Examination

The Special Comprehensive Examination is completed by students in PhD 3. The **Special Comprehensive Examination** takes the form of a **candidacy examination**, i.e. it is an oral examination based on the candidate's written thesis proposal. The candidacy examination is a test of the student's ability to recognize, evaluate, plan, and perform original scholarship and to demonstrate that they are a suitable candidate for a PhD degree. Because the student's committee will receive an update on the student's progress in their research through the candidacy examination, students will not have to submit a Research Progress Paper for April 15.

The Special Comprehensive Examination will ordinarily be completed in PhD 3. At the latest, it has to be completed three years after first registering in the PhD program. The oral examination should take place before May 15 of the given year.

The Written Thesis Proposal for the Special Comprehensive Examination

The written thesis proposal must provide a concise review of the background literature, and must discuss the proposed problem, its importance, and the methods to be applied to its examination. The proposal shall contain a timetable. The proposal must be well thought-out, carefully written and edited, and finished with appropriate references and illustrations. It should be around 20 double-spaced pages in length, not including figures and bibliography. The student must present a draft proposal to their supervisor in a timely fashion, and take account of the supervisor's comments and required revisions before preparing a final draft.

Before the Oral Special Comprehensive Examination

1. The supervisor and student will create the **candidacy examination committee**. It consists of the supervisor, at least one member of the student's advisory committee, and one external member (a faculty from another department at McGill or from another university). Serving as a member of the student's advisory committee on the student's candidacy examination committee does not preclude the advisory committee member to later on also serve on the student's oral defense committee. If the external member is not located in Montreal, he or she can participate in the committee through video-link. Serving as external member on the student's candidacy examination committee does not preclude the external member to later on serve as external member of the student's oral defense committee. Only in exceptional circumstances can the external member be a faculty member from the department. One of the advisory committee members will chair the oral examination (the supervisor cannot chair the oral examination).
2. Students will next submit a Candidacy Examination Schedule Form. This form can be obtained by contacting Nina Pinzarrone (nina.pinzarrone@mcgill.ca). **The form and copy of the thesis proposal must be received at least two weeks prior to the scheduled oral examination.** The Graduate Program Director will examine the proposal and the composition of the examination committee to ensure that both meet graduate program requirements. If all in order, the Graduate Program Coordinator will distribute the thesis proposal to the examination committee. If problems are identified, the Graduate Program Director will inform the student and supervisor; if necessary, the oral examination will be postponed until outstanding issues are resolved.

Format of the Oral Special Comprehensive Examination

1. The oral examination begins with a formal 20-minute presentation by the student that reviews the background and the rationale for the proposed study, the specific hypotheses and objectives, the methodology, results obtained to date and future directions.
2. The candidate will then be asked to respond to questions from the examination committee, including the supervisor. The student will be queried on topics related to the proposed area of research. The goal of the examination committee is to determine that the candidate has sufficient understanding of the background information, rationale, and methodological issues to perform and analyze their research topic. This section of the oral examination will typically last 1-2 hours. The examination chair will act to ensure that the oral examination is conducted in an orderly and constructive manner. The oral presentation and examination are not open to the public.
3. At the end of the oral examination, the chair will ask the candidate to leave and the examination committee will meet in closed session. The examination committee will deliberate and make a judgment of "pass" or "fail". Comments and judgment will be recorded on the Candidacy

Evaluation Form and results will be communicated to the student by the examination chair. The supervisor may remain for the closed session but will act only as a resource allowing the committee to make an informed decision; he/she will not cast a vote to determine whether the performance is a “pass” or a “fail”.

4. If the judgment is “fail”, the student will be required to re-take the candidacy examination within four months. For a second examination, the composition of the examination committee must remain the same, but needs to contain an additional faculty member from the department.
5. A second “fail” will require withdrawal from the PhD program.

Additional Activities. This category includes courses or internships you feel would increase your expertise on a topic. Three criteria must be met by such activities: (a) Justification must be given for why the activity is necessary or desirable. It is assumed that students will not engage in such activities unless there is a clear rationale for doing so. (b) Such activities will not exceed the equivalent of one normal course per term. (c) If an activity is worth doing, it should be taken for credit.

Each spring, after courses, Comprehensives, and the Research Progress Paper are completed, the supervisor submits to the Graduate Program Administrator an evaluation of the student's research progress, taking into account feedback from relevant others. At the annual student review in May, faculty members meet to evaluate the extent to which each student has achieved the year's objectives. The evaluation is reported in writing to the student.

ADDITIONAL OBJECTIVES FOR EXPERIMENTAL PROGRAM

Students admitted as MA 1 / MSc 1: Master's Thesis or Fast Track Paper
Students admitted as PhD 1: Qualifying Paper

Students in the Experimental Program who were admitted as MA 1 / MSc 1 will select one of two options in their second year: Either to submit a Master's Thesis or to submit a Fast Track Paper. Students should discuss these options with their supervisor in their first year.

1. Master's Thesis Option: A Master's Thesis can be submitted after at least three semesters of residency. **It must be submitted by April 15 of MA 2 / MSc 2.** It needs to be submitted at the very latest by August 31st of MA 2 / MSc 2.

A Master's Thesis should demonstrate good scholarship and research ability. Master's Theses are frequently publishable, and students are encouraged to publish them. However, publishability and originality are not criteria for passing a Master's Thesis and students should not delay completing their Master's degree to meet unnecessarily high standards that are more appropriate to a dissertation. The MA/MSc thesis course numbers are PSYC 690D1, 690D2 and PSYC 699. **Students who foresee that they will be unable to submit the Master's Thesis by April 15 of MA 2 / MSc 2 need to inform the Graduate Program Director (michael.sullivan@mcgill.ca) before this deadline, providing a reason for the delay and the expected date of submission.**

Please consult the thesis preparation and submission website for the thesis submission guidelines: <http://www.mcgill.ca/gps/thesis>.

The initial thesis submission process is now done through the MyThesis platform. Guidelines regarding the intent to submit (**8 weeks** before initial submission), and all subsequent steps can be found using this link: https://www.mcgill.ca/gps/files/gps/mythesis_guidelines_student_final.pdf. Should you have any questions regarding the process, please contact Nina Pinzarrone (nina.pinzarrone@mcgill.ca).

Students who desire to continue their studies in the PhD program upon completion of their Master's degree must complete an online application form for promotion to PhD 2. They will receive an email informing them when to submit this application by mid-May from the Graduate Program Administrator. **Students' application for promotion into the PhD program will be brought to the department's evaluation meeting in May, where it will be decided to promote the student to PhD 2 if the following criteria are fulfilled: (1) the formal evaluation of the Master's Thesis had a positive outcome, (2) the student's progress in the program is evaluated positively, and (3) the student is evaluated as demonstrating good research potential.**

2. Fast Track Paper Option: Students who opt for the Fast Track Paper option must complete a piece of research that meets the criteria for a Master's Thesis. However, the paper summarizing this research needs to be written in the form of a manuscript for a journal. The decision to do the Fast Track Paper option is made by the student and their supervisor. The advantage of choosing this option is that the Fast Track Paper can become part of the dissertation. In contrast, the Master's Thesis cannot be included in the dissertation. It can only be seen as a preliminary study, the conclusions of which may provide the basis of doctoral research.

The Fast Track Paper must be submitted to the Graduate Program Administrator by April 15 of MA 2 / MSc 2. Students who foresee that they will be unable to submit the paper by April 15, need to inform the Graduate Program Director (michael.sullivan@mcgill.ca) before this deadline, providing a reason for the delay and the expected date of submission. It needs to be submitted at the very latest by August 31st of MA 2 / MSc 2. At the time of submission, the student will nominate three professors as readers. One of them will be their supervisor and the other two will usually be professors from the department. One of the nominees may be a professor from outside the department within the Montreal academic community. The paper needs to be submitted in three hardcopies to the Graduate Program Administrator, who will then distribute them to the nominated readers. If the Fast Track Paper receives a 'pass' evaluation from all three readers, the student is required to make a presentation of their research to a research group in the department (the group needs to include at least the advisory committee members and some graduate students). Students will be required to complete an online application form for promotion to PhD 2. They will receive an email informing them when to submit this application by mid-May from the Graduate Program Administrator.

Students' application for promotion to PhD 2 will be brought to the department's evaluation meeting in May, where it will be decided to promote the student to PhD 2 if the following criteria are fulfilled: (1) the Fast Track Paper received a 'pass' evaluation, (2) the student's progress in the program is evaluated positively, and (3) the student is evaluated as demonstrating good research potential.

If the Fast Track Paper is not submitted by August 31st of MA 2/ MSc 2 students are automatically expected to submit a Master's Thesis within the next year.

3. Qualifying Paper Option: Students admitted as PhD 1 must submit a Qualifying Paper **by April 15 of PhD 2** to be promoted to PhD 3. **The deadlines, procedures and evaluation criteria for submission of a Qualifying Paper are identical with the Fast Track Paper.**

Students admitted as PhD 1 will only submit a Master's Thesis in the **exceptional circumstance** that they and their supervisors are *convinced* that they want to end their studies with a terminal Master's degree. The decision to switch from the PhD program to the Master's program and submitting a Master's Thesis implies that the student will not be allowed to apply to continue on to do their PhD (McGill University regulation).

May 2023