



University of  
Massachusetts  
Lowell

# DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

## Senior Honors Theses

*Prepare, Propose, Present*

Guidelines and requirements for students in the Honors College at UMass Lowell who are planning to conduct their senior honors thesis in the Department of Psychology.

December, 2015

The  
Honors  
College  
at UMass Lowell

# Prepare

There are several forms that need to be completed along the way. They are as listed here and are appended to this document:

1. Thesis Advisor Declaration Form
2. Thesis Proposal
3. Thesis Completion Form

Theses in Psychology are primarily two-semester enterprises. It is best to be thinking about your thesis the semester *before* you begin it (that is, at least 3 semesters before you intend to graduate). You will need to find a faculty member to serve as your thesis advisor and reach some agreement on a topic, before you can begin to work on your thesis. Submit your Thesis Advisor Declaration Form to the Honors College at the end of the semester before the first semester of your thesis begins.

The Honors College defines the Honors Thesis Experience as a 12-month experience with two semester's work for credit. In other words, you are expected to begin your honors thesis over the summer before your senior year. In fall and spring of your senior year, you are expected to engage in two semesters of thesis work for a total of 6 credits. Summer work will probably involve reviewing the literature and thinking about the thesis you will propose to your advisory committee early in the fall semester of your senior year. Your thesis advisor will provide you guidance with regard to what you should be doing over the summer. Note that these expectations assume you have identified your thesis advisor during the semester *before* you begin thesis work for credit.

## **How do you identify a thesis advisor?**

You undoubtedly have some area of Psychology that you are interested in. Your interests may match up with the interests of a faculty member you know and with whom you have had for a class. Or they might not—particularly if you have transferred to UMass Lowell or if you have had many adjunct (part-time) instructors for courses in the major (please see p.3 if you are interested in having an adjunct family member on your thesis committee).

It is unlikely that you will be able to propose a totally independent research study for your senior thesis, and much more likely that you will work with a faculty member on some aspect of work that he or she is already engaged in. A piece of that work will become your thesis. It may be the initial phase of an investigation, or perhaps a project that replicates and extends prior work, for example adding more controls or using a different sample.

*What to do and whom to ask:* Familiarize yourself with the department faculty and their research interests. You can do this by thinking about the courses they teach, looking at their publication record on *PsycInfo*, going to their faculty profile on the UMass Lowell website, and perusing the Psychology department colloquia.

<https://www.uml.edu/FAHSS/Psychology/faculty>

<https://www.uml.edu/FAHSS/Psychology/Research/Departmental-Colloquia.aspx>

Once you have identified a faculty member, set up an appointment to talk about your interests and inquire whether he or she will be willing and available to act as your thesis advisor. Occasionally, faculty are already too busy with other research projects, or they may plan to be on-leave for a semester. In those cases, they will decline, but they should still be able to help you identify another person who would be a logical choice to ask next.

Once you have identified a faculty member to be your thesis advisor, you will need to meet about specifics—what topic you will investigate and how. You will also need to identify two other faculty who can serve as committee members for your thesis.

*Can I ask an adjunct faculty member to be my thesis advisor?* In many disciplines you could, but in Psychology there are special considerations. Most theses involve Human Subjects Research, which requires ethical review by the *UMass Lowell Institutional Review Board (IRB)* before you can begin to recruit people for your study. The IRB requires that the Principal Investigator (the PI, or the person responsible for the study being proposed) be full-time faculty or have otherwise been granted PI status. Granting PI status to adjunct members of the faculty is an exceptional circumstance, so you should not count on being able to secure one of our adjunct faculty members to serve as your thesis advisor

However, adjunct faculty can certainly serve on thesis committees. Still, it is worth remembering that these individuals are paid only for the classes they teach and not for additional commitments at UML (like thesis committees). In fact, many adjunct faculty members have other jobs or teach at other universities. So, do not take it personally if they simply do not have availability to be on your committee.

Once you have an agreement in place with a faculty member to advise your thesis, you need to register for Thesis credits with that person. Ask your thesis advisor for a permission number to add his or her section of **PSYC.4910 Directed Study: Psychology**.

# Propose

Your thesis proposal will be written early in the first semester of your thesis work. The Honors College requires a cover page that includes the following information centered in the middle of the page:

- Title
- Name
- UMS #
- Advisor Name
- Department

The majority of undergraduate theses in Psychology are empirical (that is, original data are collected and analyzed). However, on occasion an extensive and critical review of the literature, without any new data, would make for an acceptable thesis. The proposal for review theses is no less rigorous, though it will be organized differently. Checklists for proposal organization follow.

Unless you took *PSYC.2690 Research I: Methods* at another institution, you have already written a research proposal. Refer back to your course materials for writing and APA style assistance.

## A. CHECKLIST FOR EMPIRICAL STUDY PROPOSALS

Most Honors theses in Psychology will be empirical studies. You may gather data in correlational, experimental, or even descriptive designs. Your data may be more quantitative or more qualitative. However, there are commonalities to the proposals for empirical studies that cut across these distinctions. The proposal for an empirical study will include the following components:

- Abstract (a summary, maximum 150 words)
- Introduction (a statement of the purpose of your study followed by a review of the relevant literature, which leads to a concise rationale for your research questions and/or hypotheses.)
- Methods (study design, participants, assessment instrumentation and materials, procedures)
- Plan for analyzing your data
- Discussion of what your results mean relative to your research questions/hypotheses, and what are the implications for this field of study and for future research
- References

What follow are both requirements and suggestions, first in general and then by section. **Your thesis advisor will provide guidance beyond what is written here. There may be some variability across disciplines within the field, so it is important to always follow your advisor's recommendations. You may also find it helpful to look at the department writing resources, which include detailed examples of paper sections, information about language usage, how to search the literature, and other nuts and bolts that might be helpful as you develop and complete your proposal.**

<http://www.uml.edu/FAHSS/Psychology/Current-Students/Writing-Resources.aspx>

Your proposal must be **written in your own words**, with citations for *ideas* and *direct*

- ✓ Your proposal must be **written in your own words**, with citations for *ideas* and *direct quotations* (rarely used) clearly identified and appropriately cited in APA style. Plan to submit your proposal to Turnitin.com to check for plagiarism.
- ✓ All references cited in text—but no others—must be listed in the *References* section using complete APA style; this includes electronic sources.
- ✓ All sources must be academically and scientifically appropriate for inclusion—i.e., empirical or theoretical papers from scholarly journals or texts, rather than journalistic pieces or material taken from popular websites.
- ✓ Text must be arranged in APA style, including title page, running head, and appropriate sections: Abstract, Introduction, Methods (participants, assessment, instrumentation and materials, procedures), Data Analysis Plan, Discussion and References.
- ✓ Informed consent and IRB review must be addressed for Human Subjects Research; i.e., you must indicate that IRB review and approval will be obtained prior to recruiting participants.

### **Abstract**

- ✓ Must be on a separate page, after the title page and before the body of your paper.
- ✓ Provide a brief (approximately 125 words) synopsis of the study you are proposing, including the research question, participants, methods, and hypothesized results.

### **Introduction/Literature Review**

- ✓ Your introduction should provide a theoretical and empirical framework for your research question.
- ✓ You should summarize relevant prior work in a way that leads to a concise rationale for your hypotheses at the end of this section.

- ✓ You should describe the literature in past tense since these are studies already done and conclusions already reached.
- ✓ Your literature review should be organized thematically, rather than just talking about Study 1, Study 2, etc. It helps to prepare an outline of the key ideas you need to cover in your review.
- ✓ Most proposals should not use direct quotations. If you do, be sure to include page numbers in addition to regular APA citations (i.e., authors and year).
- ✓ Your assertions must be supported with research and citations rather than broad sweeping generalizations or opinions.
- ✓ When you describe previous studies, don't just report what the authors concluded. You should say enough about what the authors found and how they found it (not just their conclusions, but the evidence—the data and results—on which the conclusions were based). Use operational definitions. Note that your descriptions may be more thorough than some you find in journal articles
- ✓ You should have 10-12 references (follow your advisor's guidance here since topics may vary considerably with respect to the extant literature) that *provide a rationale* for the study you are proposing.
- ✓ You should tie together the results of research that you are citing, rather than just listing studies.
- ✓ The previous research you cite must lead to the research question posed by the study you are proposing. Here you should begin to shift to future tense (e.g., "Therefore, the proposed study will examine the effects of...").
- ✓ End with a clear statement of the hypothesis or hypotheses for your proposed study.

**Methods—all written in future tense since you are proposing the study**

***Participants***

- ✓ Describe who your participants will be, especially highlighting the demographic characteristics that matter for your study.
- ✓ Use real data for relevant information (if you want a representative sample of UMass Lowell students by race or gender, for example, you need to know what the distribution is in the population of students at UMass Lowell).
- ✓ Identify the source for any data that you plan to use in determining parameters of your sample, e.g., US Census or UMass Lowell Office for Institutional Research (OIR). Give

complete citations. For example, if you want a proportional representation for gender across different majors, find out what that proportion is for the university from OIR.

- ✓ Provide a target N and clearly identify your sampling units if they are other than individuals (neighborhoods, for example). Justify.
- ✓ Describe your method of recruitment and how participants will be compensated for their time (e.g. course credit, money, etc.).
  - Remember that the Honors College has some funding available to support senior theses. One appropriate use of such funds is to provide incentives for participation.

### **Materials or Apparatus**

- ✓ If you are using existing instruments:
  - Provide complete citations for tests or questionnaires that you are using from journal articles or other published sources.
  - Describe in your own words what each test or questionnaire is designed to do and what response options it includes (e.g., Likert scales, adjective checklists, etc.).
  - Report norms and/or psychometric data on tests or measures you plan to use (test-retest reliability coefficients, for example).
- ✓ If you are choosing items to create tests or assessments (and you should do so only if you and your thesis advisor agree that you need to; the preference is to use already-established instruments):
  - Indicate what constraints you are putting on the stimuli so that extraneous factors are controlled (e.g., word lists for verbal learning should address frequency of usage or type of word).
  - Indicate how will you evaluate the psychometric properties (reliability and validity) of your own homegrown survey or questionnaire (e.g., through a pilot study).
- ✓ If you are developing stimuli (e.g., written scenarios or videotapes) for an experiment, indicate how you know they will induce what you intend them to induce (i.e., include manipulation checks). Here, too, it often makes sense to use stimuli that have been used in prior studies unless a change of stimuli is key to your research plan.
- ✓ Specify how extraneous variables will be (a) held constant and/or (b) counterbalanced.

- ✓ The data point(s) each measure will provide should be clearly specified.

### **Procedure**

- ✓ Address the need for informed consent.
- ✓ For experimental designs:
  - Specify whether you are using a between-subjects, within-subjects, or mixed design. If there are multiple factors, indicate which are manipulated between-subjects and which are manipulated within-subjects.
  - If you are proposing an experiment with more than one group, be clear which aspects of the procedures vary between groups and which are the same for everyone (e.g., “All participants will be asked to .... Half of the participants will then... and half will ... Finally all participants will be asked to....”).
  - For groups designs, specify how you will create the groups (which typically means some form of random assignment).
  - Be specific about all aspects of your experiment. These may include items such as length of exposure period, number of trials or blocks of stimuli, and manner of response. Your advisor will guide you in identifying the important aspects for your particular
  - Describe any counterbalancing your design may require. We frequently think of counterbalancing for order of presentation, but it may also be required for the manipulation of traits across stimuli, such as when examining ratings of infant traits from video recordings when the infant in the recordings are alternately labeled with a boy’s or a girl’s name.
- ✓ If you are obtaining qualitative data or observational data that will later be coded, indicate how you will develop your coding scheme (or what system you are using if it is already established), and how reliability will be assessed.
- ✓ Make sure the relevance of all the procedures you describe is clear from the introduction. Your Introduction provides context for your methods, which allows your readers to see the logic and relevance of procedures as they go along
- ✓ Be clear about exactly what your data will be, i.e., what score(s) each participant will have at the conclusion of the study.
- ✓ Describe debriefing if used.
- ✓ Although some of the details of your procedure may not be final when you are writing



your proposal, *your aim is to write this section, to the extent possible, so that someone else could take over for you in administering your study based on what you have written.*

### **Data Analysis Plan (*this will later become the Results section*)**

- ✓ Indicate exactly what data you will be analyzing (e.g., test scores, weight before and after, number of words correctly recalled, number of responses in each coded category from interview responses).
- ✓ Identify exactly what statistical tests you will conduct, and be sure they are clearly tied to your hypotheses.
- ✓ You may want to indicate what your expected findings will be, or discuss various possible outcomes.

### **Discussion**

- ✓ Obviously, you cannot be expected to discuss results you do not have yet. However you should have some idea of what you expect to find and what that might mean.
- ✓ Identify limitations in the study. Remember, these are not design flaws, but the types of limitations that every study has. Design flaws should be addressed in your methods and eliminated. Limitations, such as those driven by sampling, should be identified. For example, you will probably not include individuals of every age in your study. If you propose testing university students, would your results generalize to children or to the elderly? In this case you are identifying what your study may not tell you, not because you plan to do something wrong, but simply because you cannot do everything!
- ✓ Discuss how your findings will contribute to the field of investigation and what possible next steps they will suggest. You may also develop interpretations based on different data patterns (if one outcome happens, it could mean X, if another outcome happens, it could be explained by Y).

### **References**

- ✓ Begin on a separate page and title this section "References."
- ✓ Alphabetize the reference list by authors' last names.
- ✓ Use a "hanging indent." Start typing the reference at the margin and indent subsequent lines of the same reference.
- ✓ Double-space the *References* just like the rest of your proposal, without any additional lines in between references.

- ✓ Use precise APA style.
- ✓ List all references, and only those references, that you have cited in the body of your paper.

## **B. CHECKLIST FOR INTEGRATIVE REVIEW PROPOSALS**

Occasionally a senior thesis will consist of a novel review of the literature. You may not collect data, but will conduct a critical analysis of a body of literature addressing a psychological topic. You will organize a review of that literature, identify strengths and weaknesses in the body of work, and suggest next steps. Many literature reviews are organized by topics (e.g., research with adolescents, research with adults; research addressing Theory A, research addressing Theory B). After a review of different topics, the review would attempt to synthesize these literatures. Whatever the exact organization of a review, it must be logical.

In providing a critical analysis, a literature review does more than merely summarizing the literature:

*The phrase review article is inapt because the goal isn't to merely review what others have done. Like empirical articles, review articles must make a point. The best reviews advocate for a position, review the literature on both sides, address nuances that aren't easily worked into an empirical paper, and point to where the literature should go.*  
(Silvia, 2015, p. 210)

Your proposal should therefore:

- ✓ Describe the area of research and types of studies you will review.
- ✓ Provide a rationale for why your review is relevant to improved understanding of a particular area.
- ✓ Indicate what aspect of the previous literature you are limiting your review to, if you are limiting it, and provide a rationale for this limitation.
- ✓ Provide operational definitions as needed.
- ✓ Indicate how you will select papers or studies for inclusion in your review.
- ✓ Indicate how you plan to organize your review; include the major papers you will include in each section.
- ✓ Summarize the issues you expect your review will cover.
- ✓ Indicate how you expect your review will add to the literature.

Be sure to read some review articles in a relevant area in order to get an idea of what you are aiming for. The following journals are useful sources:

*Psychological Bulletin*  
*Psychological Science* (general articles)  
*Perspectives on Psychological Science*  
*Current Directions in Psychological Science*

The following references also have useful ideas for how to write a literature review:

Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1997). Writing narrative literature reviews. *Review of General Psychology, 1*(3), 311-320.

Bem, D.J. (1995). Writing a review article for *Psychological Bulletin*. *Psychological Bulletin, 118*(2), 172-177.

Carson, S.H., Fama, J., Clancy, K., Ebert, J., & Tierney, A. (2012). *Writing for Psychology: A guide for Psychology concentrators*. Cambridge, MA: President & Fellows of Harvard College. Retrieved from [http://writingproject.fas.harvard.edu/files/hwp/files/writing\\_for\\_psych\\_final\\_from\\_printer.pdf](http://writingproject.fas.harvard.edu/files/hwp/files/writing_for_psych_final_from_printer.pdf)

- Two especially relevant chapters: How to read sources critically; Writing a conceptually coherent paper.

Maher, B. A. (1978). A reader's, writer's and reviewer's guide to assessing research reports in clinical psychology. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 46*(4), 835-838.

## **IRB APPLICATION AND APPROVAL**

**Once your proposal has been approved by your advisor and your committee members, you are ready to conduct the research that will result in your thesis, which you will present both as a written document and an oral, public presentation (e.g., a thesis defense, a poster presentation at the annual UMass Lowell Student Research Symposium, etc.).**

Remember that *you cannot proceed with any human subjects research*—even if you believe it to be very minimal risk—*without first obtaining approval from the IRB*. It is not up to researchers to decide whether studies are minimal risk and therefore exempt from further IRB review; researchers must first describe them and apply to the IRB for exempt status. Only the IRB can award that status. You may be called upon to help prepare the IRB application with your advisor, but the application is ultimately the responsibility of the faculty member.

# Present

## Written Thesis

After you have collected, analyzed, and digested your data, your thesis must be written in APA style. *The only exceptions are the title page, table of contents, and acknowledgements that must conform to the Honors College requirements.* Otherwise, the conventions of our discipline hold.

You will probably go through many versions of the thesis with your advisor before it is ready to be sent to your committee members. Your committee members may then ask for additional changes. Clearly, this means that you must leave enough time at the end of your second semester to go through all of these drafts.

Remember that you will have a great head start on your thesis with a well-written proposal. Often there are changes between the initial proposal and final product, but you will have some of the literature reviewed and much of the methods explained.

Bear in mind that length is not the primary consideration in a well-written thesis. Instead, you should focus on clarity and integration of the literature in your review and your findings. Consult other theses in the Honors College from Psychology, and rely on your advisor for guidance.

## Public Presentation

Your public presentation may be a traditional thesis defense in which you present your work to your committee and to the invited public, and then entertain questions. Your advisor will provide you with the parameters (i.e., how much time to summarize, what visuals to use, etc.).

Your presentation might instead take place at the Annual UMass Lowell Student Research Symposium. Presentations at the Symposium will be poster presentations, and you will be expected to prepare a 2-minute overview of your poster that you will present orally to judges from the College of Fine Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences, as well as to the many people that will stop by your poster. You should also be prepared to answer questions.

The Office of the Vice Provost for Research will print your poster (see Symposium website for guidelines) but you must provide them with enough lead time. Your advisor will also help you to include the right amount of detail in your poster. See the APA and a powerpoint presentation from the University of Regina for suggestions on effective posters:

<http://www.apa.org/gradpsych/2011/01/poster.aspx>

[http://www.schoolofpublicpolicy.sk.ca/\\_documents/\\_resource\\_documents/U\\_of\\_R\\_reference%20materials/Poster\\_Workshop\\_SN.pdf](http://www.schoolofpublicpolicy.sk.ca/_documents/_resource_documents/U_of_R_reference%20materials/Poster_Workshop_SN.pdf)

## **Appendix.**

1. Thesis title page format
2. Thesis advisor declaration form
3. Honors thesis/project proposal form
4. Honors thesis completion form

The Format of the Title Page for the Commonwealth Honors College Thesis

By  
John Q. Doe

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Commonwealth Honors College  
University of Massachusetts Lowell  
(Year)

Faculty Advisor: Professor Jane J. Smith, Department of English

\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Author's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Advisor's Signature

Signatures of Committee Members (at least one):

\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_



### Thesis Advisor Declaration Form

The honors thesis experience is an individual twelve-month research activity that culminates in both a written document and a presentation. Some thesis experiences could have a third output. Examples of such output are: a portfolio of drawings or photographs, a sculpture, a computer program, a children’s book, or a musical score. In all cases, the thesis activity must be overseen and guided by a full-time faculty member who is familiar with what might constitute excellence and creativity in the related discipline.

This form should be filled out 12 calendar months in advance of the anticipated submission of the final written document. The deadlines for submitting this form are posted on the honors website.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Semester and year you intend to graduate: \_\_\_\_\_

Major(s) and minor(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Full-time faculty thesis advisor: \_\_\_\_\_

Thesis Advisor Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Advisor’s Department: \_\_\_\_\_

Tentative title of your thesis: \_\_\_\_\_

Circle below what might best describe the style of your thesis:

- |                     |                    |               |                |
|---------------------|--------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Quantitative Thesis | Qualitative Thesis | Business Plan | Design Project |
| Software Project    | Creative Writing   | Creative Art  | Creative Music |

Other Possible Style (Please describe):

Is this thesis part of a mandatory capstone experience in your major?      Yes      No

If yes, how do you intend to extend the work?

Will your work be done as a member of a team?      Yes      No





## Honors Thesis/Project Proposal Form

This form and your proposal must be turned in to the Honors Office by the date specified by the Honors College the semester you start your research.

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_ ID Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Expected Semester and Year of Graduation: \_\_\_\_\_

Local Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Major(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Faculty Advisor: \_\_\_\_\_

Committee member(s) (at least one): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Duration of Project (1 or 2 semesters): \_\_\_\_\_

Course Name and Number (including section number): \_\_\_\_\_

**Please attach a proposal as approved by your Faculty Advisor and Committee Member(s).  
Proposal should be approximately 2 pages with a 1 page timeline. (See Handbook.)**

Student's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**By signing below, I endorse my approval for the attached proposal and I agree to my role as advisor or committee member for this student's Honors Thesis/Project.**

Faculty Advisor's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Committee Member's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Committee Member's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Honors Director/Coordinator Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Honors Thesis Completion Form

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ UMS Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Faculty Advisor: \_\_\_\_\_

Project/Thesis Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Course Name	Course Number (XX.XXX.XXX)	Grade

Date and Place of Public Presentation: \_\_\_\_\_

Student's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

I, \_\_\_\_\_, certify that this student has satisfactorily completed his/her honors project and has given a public presentation on the date listed above.

Advisor's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

I, as a committee member for \_\_\_\_\_, certify that they have satisfactorily completed their honors project and they have given a public presentation on the date listed above.

Committee Member(s) signature(s):

\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please complete and return this form, along with a copy of your thesis, to the Honors College Office (Southwick 320) **by the end of Reading Day.**