



DEVELOPMENTAL PROGRAM HANDBOOK

**From A to Ph.D.:
A Guide to Successfully Traveling
the Epigenetic Landscape
of Graduate School**



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About the Developmental Program Handbook

The developmental program handbook was first developed by Ross Thompson, one of the co-founders (with Jan Jacobs) of the Developmental Psychology Program at UNL. In the first edition, Dr. Thompson noted that the handbook had been suggested by graduate students who felt they would have benefited from guidance of this kind. In a footnote, he explained that the term “epigenetic landscape” was coined by

... Waddington nearly a half-century ago. Waddington portrayed the course of human development as being like a ball rolling down a miniature terrain with hills and valleys to direct the course of the ball's trajectory, along with the influences of the wind sweeping over the landscape, well-furrowed pathways in the terrain, and many other influences. Waddington developed this metaphor to characterize the complex and interweaving influences of heredity, experience, culture, self-determination, and the multitude of other influences on human development. Because the course of graduate study can sometimes make one feel like a ball rolling through the hills and valleys of academia (or, on other occasions, a ball in a pinball machine!), the term seemed apt for this handbook.

Much of the information covered in the original handbook has been incorporated into the Psychology Department *Graduate Guidebook*, which offers general information for all graduate students in the Psychology Department. Because the goal of the *Developmental Program Handbook* is to serve as a program-specific resource, material that is redundant with the *Graduate Guidebook* has been eliminated. Thus, students should download the *Graduate Guidebook* from the departmental web page and become familiar with its contents.

The *Developmental Program Handbook* and the Psychology Department *Graduate Guidebook* are good sources of information for students. Although we attempt to keep these resources up-to-date, it is important to be aware that policy changes can occur quickly. Thus, students should regularly check the following additional resources:

- The Office of Graduate Studies web site is an excellent source of updated information concerning graduate program requirements, and enables you to download the official forms that you will need to file as you progress through the program.
- The Graduate Studies Bulletin covers graduate program requirements at UNL, and is the final authority on all formal aspects of graduate study.
- The Psychology Department and Developmental Program web pages are frequently updated and can provide up-to-date information about faculty and programs.
- Your advisor, advanced graduate students, and other people in the department (e.g., Developmental Program coordinator, departmental Graduate Chair, Graduate Secretary) are important resources regarding graduate issues and requirements. Other faculty members can also answer questions and provide guidance (solicited or unsolicited) on anything you need to know, whether concerning course selection or presenting a paper. Fellow students are also excellent informants who can often provide valuable insights, especially about how things "really get done" in graduate school.

Welcome to Graduate Study . . . and to Developmental Psychology!

When you received your undergraduate degree, it culminated a program of study that changed you. You are probably a very different person today than when you graduated from high school in how you think about the world and yourself. You are now embarking on a program of graduate study that offers remarkable opportunities for additional professional and personal growth. This is why people in the academy and the professions view graduate study as among the most formative periods of their lives. You will be a very different person when you receive your Ph.D. than you are today.

Graduate study begins in a manner that seems similar to undergraduate school. You take courses and strive to do well. But even at the beginning, differences are apparent. You will have the opportunity to work closely with one or more faculty members on research and writing projects. You have curricular hours devoted to independent research, and you are expected to become involved in research from your first semester. You are also likely to be on an assistantship, either as a teaching assistant (TA) or research assistant (RA). As a TA, you will experience (perhaps for the first time) the thrills and excitement of inspiring others in the classroom. As a RA, you will assist with a faculty member's research project and supervise a team of undergraduates. All of these experiences are important aspects of your professional development.

Over the course of graduate study, you will find that you are devoting less and less time to coursework, and more and more time to independent research and teaching. As an increasingly independent scholar, you will attend conferences and work on publications. By the time you finish your degree, you will act very little like an undergraduate student and much more like a professor -- and this will reflect how much you have grown professionally during your time with us.

As an undergraduate student, you were identified with the department in which you were a major. As a graduate student, you are even more closely connected with our department and program. You not only take graduate courses, but also contribute considerably to the research and teaching missions of our department. You will also have opportunities to become involved in service (e.g., by serving as a GSA representative or participating on a faculty search committee). You will also take part in the other activities -- brown bag luncheons, colloquia, symposia, and social get-togethers -- that animate our life together. The relationships that you will develop with faculty and fellow students will be among the most memorable features of these years.

As you can see, graduate study involves formal coursework and requirements, but also informal expectations and opportunities. It is easy to check-off required courses and credit hours (as you did in undergraduate school), but more difficult to figure out how to get a research program initiated or choose members of a supervisory committee for your graduate program. This handbook is intended to help you make your way through graduate study in our program.

The Developmental Psychology Graduate Program

The graduate program in Developmental Psychology focuses on exploring the conditions of children's lives in which development unfolds. Faculty members have expertise in fundamental processes related to child and adolescent development (e.g., social, cognitive, and behavioral development). They are also committed to integrating their knowledge with application and public policy issues concerning adolescent risk-taking, child maltreatment, educational contexts of development, and cultural processes related to morality and self. This research-oriented, multidisciplinary program is a collaborative effort with developmental faculty in the College of Education and Human Sciences. The developmental program is strongly allied with the Center on Children, Families and the Law, so it provides valuable opportunities to explore the policy implications of developmental research. Several faculty members are members of the Latino Research Initiative, which pursues interdisciplinary scholarship on issues relevant to Latino youth and families. To take advantage of these varied opportunities, students are encouraged to work with several faculty members during their graduate careers.

The developmental program is oriented toward students who are interested in careers involving research, teaching, and the systematic application of developmental science to “real world” situations. Program graduates tend to pursue one of two alternative professional avenues. Most of our graduates become faculty members at universities or colleges in Departments of Psychology, Human Development, or related fields. As researchers and teachers they advance understanding of developmental processes and their implications for programs and policies that affect children and families. Other graduates have obtained positions at state, federal, or private institutes where they work directly on research problems involving children and families. The professional skills needed for each of these professional avenues are those we seek to develop in all our graduate students: a high level of research expertise in developmental psychology (including understanding of research methodology and quantitative analysis of data), a strong grasp of the relevant scientific literature, the ability to think insightfully about complex problems in human development, and skills in communicating clearly in written and oral media.

Each student's graduate program in developmental psychology is individually tailored to that student's specific interests, needs, and goals. Although it is possible to identify the general outlines of a graduate program, it is expected that each student's course of study and research will be unique in the coursework selected, teaching and internship opportunities chosen, research expertise developed, and professional goals toward which the program is oriented. This flexibility is intended to ensure that the graduate program can be adapted to specific student interests, but it also means that graduate students assume considerable responsibility for charting the course of their own program. Designing a graduate program that will achieve your goals requires considerable thought, and consultation, concerning the interests and skills that you want to develop during your years in our department.

So What Do I Have To Do?

In this section, we discuss the basics of coursework, research, and teaching – three major activities that will occupy your time (in varying proportions) throughout your graduate career.

Coursework

A standard doctoral program at the University of Nebraska consists of a minimum of 90 credit hours. A typical graduate curriculum will include a variety of required courses, additional (elective) courses, and independent research and directed readings courses. Although the early years of the graduate curriculum include a greater proportion of formal coursework, the advanced graduate years emphasize independent research and dissertation work, and throughout the graduate program a balance of formal coursework and independent study courses is always wise. Courses should be selected in consultation with the faculty advisor.¹ Students should be aware that grades of A or B in graduate courses and seminars are considered passing grades.

Required Courses

Students in the developmental psychology program take a set of core developmental, methodological, and ethics courses. Typically, students complete these requirements during their first two years in the program.

Required Core Developmental Courses (18 credit hours)

Two developmental pro-seminars (PSYC 902A and PSYC 902B)

Three advanced topical courses in developmental psych (see *Sample Program of Studies* in the Appendix)

One course on cultural foundations of development (PSYC 979 or equivalent)

Required Methods Courses (9 credit hours)

Two semester sequence in Psychometric Methods (PSYC 941 and 942)

An advanced psychometrics or statistics course (e.g., EDPS 971, PSYC 930) or an equivalent number of stats modules

Additional Course Requirements (2 credit hours)

One seminar in research ethics (PSYC 925) (1 credit)

One seminar in teaching methods (PSYC 974) (1 credit) *** *Required of students who will be teaching assistants or instructors; strongly recommended for all students* ***

Electives, Independent Research, and Directed Reading Courses

To arrive at the total of 90 credit hours required for the Ph.D., students supplement these required courses to create a program of studies that reflects their interests. As described later in this document, the program of studies is developed in consultation with the primary advisor and must be approved by the student's Supervisory Committee. The program of studies is generally a mix of elective courses, independent research, and directed readings courses.

¹ Students who enter with a Masters degree should consult with the Developmental Program Director or their advisor for guidance about how to obtain credit for previously completed coursework.

Electives. These typically consist of advanced courses in developmental psychology, pro-seminars in other program areas within the department, and courses offered by other departments. Many students take advanced courses in quantitative methods or pursue a Graduate Specialization (see “What Else Should I Do?” later in this document). Ordinarily students enroll in courses numbering 900 and above to receive graduate credit, although 800-level courses taught in other departments may satisfy graduate credit expectations with prior consultation with your advisor. Graduate students should consult regularly with their faculty advisors in the selection of these additional courses.

Independent research. Research is an important aspect of graduate training, and students are expected to take research courses appropriate to their career stage. To sign up for research hours, students must identify a faculty supervisor and complete the appropriate departmental form. Depending on their level, students may sign up for one of two research courses:

PSYC 996 (Research Hours -- *minimum 12 hours required*)

PSYC 999 (Doctoral Dissertation Hours -- *minimum 18 hours required*)

Directed Readings. Students who are interested in reading up on a topic that is not covered in-depth in a regular class may do a directed readings course. For example, some students use readings courses as a way of exploring a potential dissertation topic; others create a specialized course that reflects a particular interest. To sign up for a readings course, students must identify a faculty supervisor and obtain that faculty member’s signature on the “Green Sheet” (a departmental form available in the main office). Students may select from two options:

Psychological Literature I (PSYC 971) and Psychological Literature II (PSYC 972)

Credit Hours and Scheduling

A typical semester course schedule totals 9-12 credit hours (students on teaching or research assistantships must enroll for at least 9 hours in the Fall and Spring semesters). Usually this includes 2-3 formal courses (totaling 6 credit hours or more) and an independent research or readings course. Because each credit hour means 1 hour of class time and 2-3 hours of independent preparation each week, a 9 credit hour semester schedule accounts for around 27-30 hours of work weekly. Assistantships typically require 19.5 hours/week so most students do not sign up for more than 9-10 credit hours in a typical semester. This ensures that they have plenty of time to work on research, fulfill the requirements of their assistantship, and read and think about what they are learning. Graduate students must also enroll for 1 to 6 hours of coursework during the summer session if they have an assistantship, and many students enroll in summer coursework even if they are not required to do so.

A 90 credit hour doctoral program can be completed in the course of four years of graduate study, with each semester accounting for 9-12 hours and each summer session accounting for 1-6 hours of coursework. However, the majority of developmental students take longer to complete the program given the time demands of data collection and opportunities to develop the research and scholarly skills they will require for their professional goals. A sample five-year doctoral program is included as an appendix to this handbook. It is intended as an illustration of what one student’s graduate program might look like, keeping in mind that each student’s program is uniquely tailored to her or his own interests and goals.

Research

Research training is the hallmark of a Ph.D. graduate program. Training in research is provided in multiple ways. Students should refer to the Psychology Department *Graduate Guidebook* for information on choosing an advisor and getting started in research, and for information on obtaining departmental research funds and accessing the undergraduate subject pool.

Special resources for developmental research students include:

- The *Developmental Research Laboratory* in Burnett Hall consists of a suite of research rooms equipped with one-way viewing windows and video resources for research projects.
- The developmental program maintains the *Community Subject Pool* – a database of individuals from the community (including families with young children) who have indicated their interest in being contacted for potential research studies.
- The *Ruth Staples Child Development Laboratory* (affiliated with the College of Education and Human Sciences) on East Campus provides practicum training as well as a research site for the study of preschoolers and their families.

Students should complete the on-line CITI Training (required for all who will conduct human subjects research at UNL) during their first semester, as certification of training in research ethics is necessary to become involved in research. This is true even if students are using an existing dataset collected by a professor; students must be added to the project's IRB protocol (or submit an IRB protocol for use of existing data) before starting to analyze data. Students who are collecting their own data will need to submit their own IRB protocol.

Teaching

The Psychology Department has a long tradition of excellence in graduate student teaching, and the developmental program shares that tradition (previous developmental students have won College or University teaching awards). Students should refer to the Psychology Department *Graduate Guidebook* for information on teaching opportunities and training.

It is our goal to allow developmental students to gain experience teaching the types of courses they will teach if they enter academic careers, so most students will have taught (or co-taught) one or more undergraduate developmental courses by the time they graduate. They will also have numerous opportunities to give guest lectures in classes taught by fellow students or faculty members, which offers excellent practice and a chance to prepare lectures for future courses. Students who are on research assistantships can also obtain teaching experience during the summer.

Keeping Track: The *Cumulative Graduate Student Activity Report*.

At the close of each semester, students are required to file a *Cumulative Graduate Student Activity Report*. This departmental form enables the faculty to identify the coursework you have completed, the status of your research activities, your progress in teaching, your financial support, and other activities (such as conferences you have attended or departmental activities in which you have participated). The completion of this form is a departmental and program requirement. In addition, because the form provides a detailed cumulative record of your activities, it can be a valuable resource when you are updating your *c.v.* or preparing to go on the job market. This form is completed and submitted on line through the department website.

Milestones on the Way to the Ph.D.

As graduate students make their way through the developmental psychology program, they will pass many milestones. In this section, several of the most important (and tangible) milestones are described.

The “996 Project”

All students are required to complete a Masters Equivalent Research Project (MERP), also called the “996 project” after the course number students use to sign up for research credits early in their graduate careers (PSYC 996). (See the *Graduate Guidebook* for detailed information.)

In brief, students are expected to start working on their 996 project as soon as they arrive at UNL, have an approved proposal before the start of their second year, and complete the project by the end of their second year. Students should identify two readers in addition to their primary advisor to evaluate the written 996 project. If the student plans to earn a master’s degree, the readers and advisor will administer the informal oral exam (see requirements of masters degree below).

Masters Degree

The Psychology Department does not admit students who intend only to obtain a Masters degree. However, many students obtain their Masters (M.A.) degree in Psychology as an early achievement (it can also be helpful to show parents that your years in graduate school are achieving results!). Graduate students in the developmental program ordinarily receive an "Option III" Masters, which is designed for students who are continuing toward the Ph.D. degree. Its requirements are straightforward: you must earn at least 36 credit hours in graduate coursework and complete an oral examination supervised by a three-member examining committee..

You must file a *Memorandum of Courses Required for Candidacy for the Masters Degree*² form before you have completed half of the required 36 credit hours for the degree. In the spring of your first year, consult with your faculty advisor about the coursework you expect to complete during the next few semesters. The courses you list as your "Proposed Program of Studies" will consist of the courses you have already completed and those you expect to complete, for a total of 36 credit hours. (Do not worry if it is difficult to predict precisely your coursework for next year -- it is possible to amend your Memorandum of Courses.) Indicate that you are pursuing the M.A. degree with the major area being Psychology (most of our students do not elect a minor area). Once you have completed the form, obtain the necessary signatures and return it to the Office of Graduate Studies.

Early in the semester when you will complete 36 credit hours (usually the Fall of the second year), additional action is needed. The oral examination must be scheduled well before the end of the semester in which you will complete the required coursework for your degree, so allow plenty of time for these steps. First, obtain the Masters Degree Deadline Dates from the Office of Graduate Studies website. Second, complete and file an *Application for Degree* (a fee is required). Third, obtain a *Final Examination Report for Masters Degree* form. A written or oral exam is required for your Masters degree, and most students in the developmental program opt for the oral exam. Thus it is necessary to:

- (a) identify a three-member faculty examining committee for your oral exam (e.g., your advisor plus two other program faculty – often this will be the group that evaluates the 996), and
- (b) set a date and time for the oral examination (allow at least an hour).

² All forms are available for download from the Office of Graduate Studies website.

In completing the *Final Examination Report* form, you should:

- enter the same information in Part 1 as you did on the *Memorandum of Courses* form
- indicate that the written comprehensive exam in major is waived (in Part 2),
- indicate that the final oral examination is not waived, and provide its scheduled date, time, and location (in Part 4), and
- provide the names of the examining committee members (in Part 4). (Nothing is necessary for Part 5, as you are not submitting a formal thesis.)

Obtain the relevant signatures, and file the form with Graduate Studies (it will be returned to your faculty advisor prior to the scheduled oral examination). At the oral exam, each member of the examining committee must sign the form and indicate whether you passed the exam. The form is then returned to Graduate Studies.

What should you expect for the oral examination? In our program these are treated informally because your Masters degree is not the end of your graduate studies. Typically, therefore, the oral exam consists of a conversation between you and the faculty committee during which you discuss your progress as a graduate student, your interests in developmental psychology, your progress on your 996 project and other research activities, your plans for the future, and related topics. In general, students need not fear "passing" or "failing" this exam -- rather it is an opportunity to discuss your progress toward the Ph.D.

Keep in mind that receiving your Masters degree is not a requirement of the Ph.D. program, and some students elect to skip this step.

Supervisory Committee

During your initial years of graduate study, you are supervised by the departmental Graduate Executive Committee. Although your research, teaching, and other activities are guided by specific faculty mentors, this group reviews students who do not yet have a Supervisory Committee to ensure that they are making satisfactory progress and identify any potential problems. Each semester, you will receive a letter co-signed by the Developmental Program coordinator and the departmental Graduate Chair reporting the outcome of the evaluation.

To provide more tailored supervision as their interests become more focused, toward the halfway point of their graduate program students are required to identify a smaller *Supervisory Committee*. The Supervisory Committee must be formally appointed before the student has completed 45 credit hours. In addition, the Department of Psychology expects that before the Supervisory Committee can be appointed, students will:

- a) be well advanced (or have finished) their 996 project;
- b) have completed PSYC 941 and PSYC 942; and
- c) have completed at least three graduate seminars or proseminars.

For most students the Supervisory Committee is appointed during the summer following the second year of graduate study (or at the start of the third year).

What does your Supervisory Committee do? When they meet for the first time, they will approve your proposed program of study for your doctoral degree. Later, they will organize and evaluate your comprehensive exam. Your Supervisory Committee will also guide and evaluate your doctoral dissertation and conduct the oral examination that will be the final step in achieving your Ph.D. Thus

this committee has a significant role in your graduate program, and care should be taken in selecting its members. However, it is also important to keep in mind that the membership of your Supervisory Committee can change as your needs and interests change (there is a form that must be completed to change your Supervisory Committee). It is common for graduate students to alter the membership of their Supervisory Committee as they begin their dissertation research because the guidance they need is different from what was needed (or anticipated) when they initially appointed the Supervisory Committee.

Who should be on your Supervisory Committee? At a minimum, your committee must include four faculty members, one of whom is from another department. You must identify a Chair (most often, this person is also your primary faculty advisor). Beyond these minimal requirements, your Supervisory Committee should be constituted in a way that best suits your educational needs and professional goals. Therefore, it is important to consult with your advisor as you select members of your Supervisory Committee. It is also important to talk to each potential member you have identified, to ascertain their interest and availability to serve.

When you have identified your Supervisory Committee and obtained the consent of each member to serve, you (or your faculty advisor) will ask the Developmental Program Coordinator to obtain the approval of the Graduate Executive Committee for this committee to be appointed for you. (This typically occurs at one of the two annual meetings of the Graduate Executive Committee, which meets at the end of the two academic semesters so be sure to plan ahead!) Once your Supervisory Committee has been approved, you must file the *Appointment of Supervisory Committee for the Doctoral Degree* form with the Office of Graduate Studies. The Supervisory Committee is expected to meet within three weeks after it has been appointed to perform its first task -- approving your proposed program of studies for the doctoral degree.

Program of Studies for the Doctoral Degree

At your first supervisory committee meeting, you will present your committee members with several documents to review and discuss. The first document is a draft of the *Program of Studies for the Doctoral Degree* form. On the first page you list the courses that have been approved for transfer credit (if applicable) plus those you have already completed (or are currently taking) at UNL. There is a rule (which is often broken) stipulating that the total credit hours on the first page cannot total more than 45; if the total on the front pages adds up to more than 45, your advisor may have to write an explanatory letter to Graduate Studies.

On the second page you list the courses you plan to take to reach the total of 90 credit hours. (Students who are pursuing "minor or related fields" also list those courses on the second page.) Mapping out the remainder of the graduate program requires some long-range thinking by you and your faculty advisor, as you consider the goals you wish to achieve during the rest of your graduate program, the remaining curricular requirements to be satisfied, any specializations requiring further coursework, and how independent research and readings coursework will be included. (It is always possible to change the Program of Studies coursework if your needs change or a specific course is no longer offered.)

When your Supervisory Committee members meet to approve your Program of Studies, they will be interested in considering whether your graduate program is well-designed to accomplish your personal and professional goals. Thus, it is wise to consider not just the selection of remaining courses but the entire design of the rest of your graduate program to ensure that it achieves your purposes for your doctoral program. What research activities will occur while you are completing coursework? What

plans do you have for satisfying the comprehensive exam requirement? When do you plan to embark on your dissertation research, and what is your general research topic? All of these features of your graduate program (not just coursework) are to be considered and approved by your Supervisory Committee.

When presenting the proposed program of studies to your Supervisory Committee, therefore, you should be prepared to make a brief statement of your professional goals and provide several documents in addition to the draft of the *Program of Studies for the Doctoral Degree* form: (a) a list of courses you have taken and plan to take, in chronological order; (b) the same list of courses organized according to program requirements; (c) a brief statement of your plans for the comprehensive exam and the dissertation.

There are other features of the Program of Studies report that may involve consultation with your committee. The "Language, Research Tool, or Collateral Field Requirements" can be satisfied in many ways, and your advisor can provide guidance here. Your advisor can also help with the selection of your dissertation "reading committee" (more on this later). Planning your remaining graduate program and discussing it with your Supervisory Committee can be one of the more enjoyable aspects of your graduate experience because it means that you have turned a significant corner as a doctoral student -- and you can begin to see the light at the end of the tunnel!

Comprehensive Examination

One of the features of your graduate program that must be approved by your Supervisory Committee is your *comprehensive examination*. In general, graduate students take the comprehensive exam when they have completed most of their formal coursework, but before they are ready to begin their dissertation research (ideally, this will occur during the third year of graduate study).

What is a "comprehensive examination"? In a sense, it is the final assessment of your capabilities as a research scientist. Throughout your graduate program your skills are evaluated in course-specific ways when you complete final exams or term papers. Or your skills are demonstrated in particular research projects or in other professional activities (like teaching). A comprehensive (or "comps") exam is intended to provide a general but inclusive assessment of your scientific abilities. It is meant to demonstrate that you are ready to be regarded as a knowledgeable developmental scientist.

A successful comps exam shows that you are knowledgeable of the general topics that any developmental psychologist should know and have acquired in-depth expertise on the specific issues that interest you (which may also become the topic of your dissertation research). Within these general goals, there are several ways that the comprehensive exam requirement can be satisfied. In consultation with their advisor, developmental program students may select from the following options (or a combination thereof) for fulfilling the comps requirement:³

(a) Written exam. The written exam consists of 9 to 12 hours of questions. The student and primary advisor discuss the general areas the exam will cover, and Supervisory Committee members (or other faculty) write questions, set the date for the exam, and grade the exam. Students may be asked to rewrite parts of the exam if their answers are not satisfactory.

³ This refers only to the Developmental Program comps -- students pursuing informal minors in the department (e.g., quantitative or diversity studies) or formal Graduate Specializations will need to complete additional requirements.

(b) Literature review. In this format, the student writes a critical review of the research literature on a topic of special interest. The review is generally similar in scope and format to a *Psychological Bulletin* or *Developmental Review* article. Supervisory Committee members typically provide feedback at various stages (at a minimum, they approve the general topic and scope of the paper; review a detailed outline; and read and provide feedback on the final draft).

(c) Grant proposal. In this format, the student writes a formal grant proposal that outlines a major program of research. Specific guidelines and format of the grant will depend on the student's interest and the focus of the grant, and will be determined in consultation with the faculty advisor and Supervisory Committee members. Depending on the specific grant proposal format, the Supervisory Committee may require an extended review of the literature to ensure evidence of familiarity with the theoretical and empirical literature. The Supervisory Committee is responsible for reviewing and grading the final product.

Starting with the entering class of 2007-2008, an oral comps defense will be required regardless of the chosen format. This is intended to allow Supervisory Committee members to ask questions and provide verbal feedback, and to give students the opportunity to expand on and integrate the information in their written comps. The oral comps defense will generally last an hour and a half, and be attended by the student and supervisory committee members only (unlike the Ph.D. oral defense, it is not open to the public).

Admission to Ph.D. Candidacy

The *Application for Admission to Candidacy for the Doctoral Degree* form must be signed by each member of your Supervisory Committee, indicating that you have passed the comprehensive examination and completed other requirements for the degree, and are ready to proceed to the doctoral dissertation. You are now A.B.D.!

Doctoral Dissertation

The Dissertation Proposal

Planning for the dissertation begins, as always, with extensive discussions with your faculty advisor, the Chair of your Supervisory Committee. If you have been actively engaged in research to this point, there should be no difficulty in identifying a suitable topic for a dissertation study (indeed, the problem may be in choosing which of many interesting topics you will study, or narrowing broad interests to a smaller set of questions suitable for a dissertation). Your advisor can help you to refine your ideas for the project, identify potential measures and methods, and spotlight potential problems. Your discussions will eventually result in a formal proposal for dissertation research that includes an in-depth literature review, research questions or hypotheses, description of the procedures you will use for investigating them, and a detailed plan of analysis. Expect to go through several drafts of the proposal with your advisor as you refine your ideas.

The proposal is submitted to your Supervisory Committee for approval and discussed at a meeting during which your committee members will ask you to explain your choice of questions and procedures and provide comments and suggestions. This meeting will generally last anywhere from 1 ½ to 2 hours. Sometimes dissertation research proposals change significantly as the outcome of these meetings, and sometimes they are not modified at all. If significant changes in your research plan are suggested, it is advisable to send your Supervisory Committee members a memo that describes your

understanding of how your proposal has been revised. By the time your dissertation proposal is finally approved, it should have benefited from your best thinking, and the good ideas of your entire Supervisory Committee.

Doing the Dissertation: Data Collection, Analysis, and Writing

At this stage of your graduate career, you are unlikely to be taking courses but will instead be registered for Doctoral Dissertation (PSYC 999) credits as a full-time student. Throughout the process of data collection, analysis, and writing up, your advisor will provide assistance and feedback. The other members of the Supervisory Committee do not usually provide extensive feedback during early stages of the research, although members with specific expertise (e.g., in statistical methods) will be willing to help with questions or concerns.

Typically, a doctoral dissertation in developmental psychology has chapters that correspond to the four major parts of a research report (introduction, methods, results, and discussion) but is a more complete report than the kind found in a research journal. (See *Guidebook for Preparing Theses and Dissertations*, available at the Office of Graduate Studies website, and sample dissertations available in the Psychology office.) Again, expect to go through several drafts of each section as you refine and polish your work in response to your advisor's feedback. You should aim to have a polished draft of your dissertation ready at least one month before your defense (oral exam).

The Oral Exam

Scheduling the oral exam may take some time, so plan well ahead. Many faculty members leave campus during the summer, so if you are aiming for summer graduation consult your committee members well ahead of time to identify a convenient time for the defense. Allow plenty of time for the oral exam (at least 2 hours).

Give your dissertation to the two-person Reading Committee you identified on the *Program of Studies for the Doctoral Degree* form at least six weeks prior to the oral examination. They will read your dissertation carefully to ensure that it is acceptable and that the oral examination may proceed as scheduled. These readers must sign the *Application for Final Oral Exam or Waiver of Examination for the Doctoral Degree* (which sets the date, time, and location of your oral examination). The signed form must be filed with Graduate Studies at least three weeks before your oral examination. You must also complete the *Application for Degree* form, and provide a copy of your dissertation and abstract to the doctoral specialist in the Graduate Studies Office for preliminary review at least three weeks before your oral examination. (Once the *Application for Final Oral Exam* has been filed with Graduate Studies, instructions for accessing all remaining forms and paperwork will be provided.)

At the oral examination, you will briefly present your study to your Supervisory Committee (and other interested observers) and then engage in an extended, scholarly conversation about your research and its results. You should enjoy the process of discussing your science with your senior colleagues in the department, almost as much as being addressed as "Dr. . . ." for the first time after they have approved your examination.

What Else Should I Do . . . ?

As detailed in the Psychology Department *Graduate Guidebook*, students will engage in many activities other than those described here during their graduate careers. Students are required to attend the Nebraska Symposium on Motivation (held each Spring) and are also expected to attend departmental colloquia and other departmental events. Developmental students should read the major journals in their discipline (e.g., *Child Development*, *Developmental Psychology*, *Journal of Research on Adolescence*) and become professionally connected. Most developmental students attend the biennial meetings of the Society for Research in Child Development, where the developmental program typically hosts a major reception. Students also attend more specialized conferences (e.g., Society for Research on Adolescence, Cognitive Development Society, International Society on Infant Studies). These (and other) opportunities will all contribute to your transformation into a developmental scientist!

Besides the curricular and research requirements of the developmental program, a number of other opportunities exist for graduate students to develop these professional skills. Within the department, students may pursue informal “minors” in quantitative psychology or in diversity studies. Others obtain a Graduate Specialization (a formal concentrations approved by the Office of Graduate Studies). There will also be opportunities to engage in professional development activities (e.g., the Office of Graduate Studies offers various courses and offers the Preparing Future Faculty program). These and other credentials supplement the major achievement of obtaining the Ph.D. in Psychology and can offer you a valuable “edge” when you move onto the next stage of your career.

Sample Graduate Program in Developmental Psychology

Year & Semester (credits semester/cumulative)	Courses	Things to Do	Forms to File with Dept./Grad Studies
First year, fall (9 cr.)	Dev Prosem I (PSYC 902A – 3 cr) Psych Meth I (PSYC 941 – 3 cr) Research (PSYC 996 – 2 cr) Teaching Methods (PSYC 974 – 1 cr)	Visit with program faculty & choose advisor Complete CITI training Begin planning 996 project Apply for University fellowships	Cumulative Graduate Student Activity Report (Dept.)
First year, spring (9 cr./18 cr.)	Dev Seminar (PSYC 921 – 3 cr) Psyc Meth II (PSYC 942 – 3 cr) Research (PSYC 996 – 3 cr)	Write 996 proposal and submit for approval	Memo of Courses for MA degree (GS) Cumulative Report (Dept.)
First year, summer (3 cr./21 cr.)	Research (PSYC 996 – 1 cr), Stats Modules (2 cr)	Progress on 996 project Summer TA or RA	
Second year, fall (10 cr./31 cr.)	Dev Prosem II (PSYC 902B – 3 cr) Dev seminar (PSYC 921 – 3 cr) Research (PSYC 996 – 3 cr) Ethics (PSYC 925 – 1 cr)	Progress on 996 project Apply for University fellowships	Cumulative Report (Dept.)
Second year, spring (9 cr./40 cr.)	Cultural Diversity (PSYC 979 – 3 cr) Multivariate Stats (EDPS 972 – 3 cr) Research (PSYC 996 – 3 cr)	Complete and write-up 996 study Apply for Masters degree * Oral examination for Masters * Identify Supervisory Committee members & obtain Grad Comm approval	Cumulative Report (Dept.) <i>Application for Degree (GS) *</i> <i>Final Exam Report for Masters (GS) *</i> <i>Appointment of SC form (GS)</i>
Second year, summer (3 cr./43 cr.)	Research (PSYC 996 – 2 cr), Stats Module (1 cr)	First meeting SC Summer TA or RA Work on new research Plan comps exam	<i>Report of SC on Program of Studies (GS)</i>

* Obtaining the Masters degree is optional.

Year & Semester	Courses	Things to Do	Forms to File with Dept./Grad Studies
Third year, fall (9 cr./52 cr.)	Personality (PSYC 903 – 3 cr) Program Eval (PSYC 993 – 3 cr) Psych Lit I (PSYC 971 – 3 cr)	Work on comprehensive exam Continue with research Apply for internal/external grants	Cumulative Report (Dept.)
Third year, spring (9 cr./61)	Peer Relations (EDPS 987 – 3 cr) SEM (EDPS 971) Research (PSYC 996 – 3 cr)	Complete comprehensive exam Oral comps defense	Cumulative Report (Dept.) <i>Application for Admission to Candidacy (GS)</i>
Third year, summer (3 cr./64 cr.)	Doctoral Diss (PSYC 999 – 2 cr) Stats Module (1 cr)	Plan dissertation & write proposal Apply for dissertation grants Summer TA or RA	
Fourth year, fall (9 cr./73 cr.)	Doc Diss (PSYC 999 – 3 cr) Social Policy (PSYC 971 – 3 cr.) Longitudinal Data (PSYC 930 – 3 cr)	Dissertation proposal defense	Cumulative Report (Dept.)
Fourth year, spring (9 cr./82)	Doc Diss (PSYC 999 – 6 cr) Psych Lit II (PSYC 972 – 3 cr)	Dissertation research (data collection & entry)	Cumulative Report (Dept.)
Fourth year, summer (3 cr./85)	Doc Diss (PSYC 999 – 3 cr)	Dissertation research (data analysis)	
Fifth year, fall (9 cr./94)	Doc Diss (PSYC 999 – 6 cr) Psych Lit II (PSYC 972 – 3 cr)	Dissertation research (analysis/writing) Apply for post-docs/jobs	
Fifth year, spring (9 cr./103)	Doc Diss (PSYC 999 – 9 cr)	Complete doctoral dissertation Thesis to readers & Grad Studies Revised thesis to entire SC Dissertation defense	<i>Application for Final Oral Exam (GS)</i> <i>Application for Degree</i>
Graduate!			

Note: Theoretically, it would be possible to complete this program of studies in 4½ years by accelerating progress on the dissertation. Students could also graduate within 4 years by taking additional credit hours (up to 12 per semester and 6 each summer). However, most developmental students take 5 or 6 years to complete the Ph.D. so this program.