



# DEVELOPMENTAL PROGRAM HANDBOOK

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,” coined by Waddington nearly a half-century before, provided a useful metaphor for both individual development and the experience of graduate study.

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 Department's *Graduate Student Handbook*, which offers general information for all graduate students in the Psychology Department. Because the goal of the *Developmental Program Handbook* is intended to serve as a program-specific resource, material that is redundant with the *Graduate Student Handbook* has been eliminated. Thus, students should download both handbooks from the departmental webpage and become familiar with their contents.

The *Developmental Program Handbook* and the Psychology Department *Graduate Student Handbook* 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 website is an excellent source of updated information concerning university-wide 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 university-wide graduate study requirements.
- The Psychology Department and Developmental Program webpages are frequently updated and can provide up-to-date information about faculty members and research labs.
- Your advisor, advanced graduate students, and other people in the department (e.g., Developmental Program coordinator, departmental Graduate Chair, Graduate Program Assistant) are important resources regarding graduate student issues and

requirements. Other faculty members can also answer questions and provide guidance on anything you need to know, whether concerning course selection or presenting a paper at a conference. Fellow students are also excellent informants who can offer valuable insights, especially about how things “really get done” in graduate school.

## WELCOME TO THE DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY PROGRAM!

When you received your undergraduate degree, it culminated in 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 both academics and professionals 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 are expected to become involved in research from your first semester, and you will receive course credit for conducting independent research as well as for formal classes. 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 thrill and excitement of inspiring others in the classroom. As an 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 time to coursework, and more time to independent research and teaching. As an increasingly independent scholar, you will attend conferences, present your research, and work on publications. By the time you finish your degree, you will act and think 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 your 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 Graduate Student Association representative or participating on a faculty search committee). You will also take part in the other activities – brown bag colloquia, symposia, and social get-togethers – that animate our life together. The relationships that you 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 your undergraduate studies), 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 Developmental Psychology.

## THE DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY GRADUATE PROGRAM

The graduate program in Developmental Psychology is a research-oriented, multidisciplinary program that focuses on understanding human development across childhood and adolescence. Faculty members have expertise in fundamental processes related to child and adolescent development (e.g., social-emotional, cognitive, and behavioral development). They are also committed to research that illuminates the social contexts in which children develop and to applied research with relevance for practitioners and public policy. The developmental program has a long-standing relationship with the Center on Children, Families and the Law, which provides valuable opportunities to explore the policy implications of developmental research. Several faculty members are affiliates of the Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools which conducts large scale intervention studies with children, youth, and families. Some faculty participate in UNL's Minority Health Disparities Initiative and the department's Diversity Brownbag series in which faculty and graduate students share findings from their research related to race, ethnicity, culture, gender, and sexual orientation. 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 or federal agencies or at research thinktanks 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 opportunities chosen, research expertise developed, and professional goals. 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-Lincoln consists of a minimum of 90 credit hours. A typical graduate curriculum will include a variety of required courses, additional (elective) courses, 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 your faculty advisor.<sup>1</sup> Students should be aware that grades of A or B in graduate courses and seminars are considered passing grades.

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### 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)
- Two advanced topical courses in developmental psychology (see *Sample Program of Studies*)
- One course on cultural foundations of development (PSYC 979 or equivalent)

#### *Required Methods Courses (9 credit hours)*

- Two semester sequence in foundational statistics, ANOVA, and regression methods (PSYC 931 and PSYC 932 or PSYC 941 and PSYC 942, depending on time of enrollment)
- An advanced psychometrics or statistics course (e.g., PSYC 944, PSYC 948, PSYC 949) or an equivalent number of stats modules (PSYC 930)

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<sup>1</sup> Students who enter with a Master's degree should consult with the Developmental Program Coordinator or their faculty advisor for guidance about how to obtain credit for previously completed coursework.

### *Additional Course Requirements (2 credit hours)*

- One seminar in research ethics (e.g., 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 required and elective courses, independent research, and directed readings courses.

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### 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.

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### 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)
- PSYC 999 (Doctoral Dissertation Hours – *minimum 12 hours required*)

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### 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 complete an Independent Study form (a departmental form available in the main office). Students may select from two options:

- Psychological Literature I (PSYC 971) or Psychological Literature II (PSYC 972)

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## 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 may also take courses during the summer session.

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 five years 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 at the end of 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 Student Handbook* for information on getting started in research, obtaining departmental research funds, and accessing the undergraduate subject pool.

We also recommend that graduate students explore the lab websites of developmental faculty members: Lisa Crockett ([psychology.unl.edu/lycp/](http://psychology.unl.edu/lycp/)), Anne Schutte ([psychology.unl.edu/smclab](http://psychology.unl.edu/smclab)), and Jenna Finch ([ladr-unl.com](http://ladr-unl.com)).

The Center for Brain, Biology, and Behavior maintains the *CB3 Participant Volunteer Registry* – a database of individuals from the community (including families with young children) who have indicated their interest in being contacted for potential research studies.

Students should complete the online 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, because 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 Handbook* for information on teaching opportunities and training.

It is our goal to allow developmental students to gain experience teaching the types of courses they would teach if pursuing an academic career, so most students will have taught (or co-taught) one or more undergraduate developmental courses by the time they graduate. Students also have 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 as long as they have taken the teaching methods course (PSYC 974).

## KEEPING TRACK: THE GRADUATE STUDENT ACTIVITY REPORT.

At the close of each semester, students are required to file a *Graduate 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, assistantships, 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 *curriculum vitae* 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 MASTER'S EQUIVALENT RESEARCH PROJECT OR "996 PROJECT"

All students are required to complete a Master's 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 Student Handbook* for detailed information.

**Students are expected to complete their MERP by the last Friday of September at the start of their third year.**

In brief, students are expected to start working on their **MERP** 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 (typically other developmental faculty) in addition to their primary advisor to evaluate the written **MERP** project. The Developmental program requires students to complete an informal oral exam (defense of the MERP project), regardless of whether they decide to get a master's degree.

What should you expect for the oral examination? In our program these are treated informally because you are not at the end of your graduate studies. Typically, the oral exam consists of a short presentation of your research project, followed by questions from faculty members and a conversation between you and the committee during which you discuss your MERP. You may also discuss your progress as a graduate student, your interests in developmental psychology, your progress on 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 research and your progress toward the Ph.D. This oral defense can also serve as your oral examination if you are obtaining a Master's degree (see below).

## MASTER'S DEGREE

The Psychology Department does not admit students who intend only to obtain a Master's degree. However, many students obtain a non-terminal Master's (M.A.) degree in Psychology as an early achievement. Graduate students in the developmental program ordinarily choose 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, as described above.

You must file a *Memorandum of Courses Required for Candidacy for the Master's Degree*<sup>2</sup> 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 in the next year, 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 spring 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 master's 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 Master's Degree* form. A written

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<sup>2</sup> All forms are available for download from the Office of Graduate Studies website

or oral exam is required for your Master's degree, and most students in the developmental program opt for the oral exam. Thus, it is necessary to:

- identify a three-member faculty examining committee for your oral exam (e.g., your advisor plus two other program faculty—the group that evaluates the MERP), and
- set a date and time for the oral examination (allow an hour and a half).

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.

Keep in mind that receiving your Master's 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, the Graduate Executive Committee reviews students who do not yet have a Supervisory Committee to ensure that they are making satisfactory progress and identify any potential problems. Each year, you will receive a letter signed by the Developmental Program coordinator 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.

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. If the timing works out, you can combine the initial Supervisory Committee meeting with the oral defense of your MERP or master's thesis.

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 obtaining 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: three from the Psychology Department and one 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 you must have your supervisory committee meeting before you have taken 45 credits, including the credits you are currently taking. If you have taken more than 45 credits, 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.) For a PhD, at least 12 credits must be devoted to dissertation research (PSYC 999). 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. 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 through particular research projects or in other professional activities (like teaching). A comprehensive 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.

**The comprehensive exam should be completed by the last Friday of September at the start of your fourth year.**

A successful comprehensive 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:<sup>3</sup>

### **1. *Written Exam***

The written exam consists of a week-long take home exam that typically includes four 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.

### **2. *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, though it does not need to be of publishable quality when submitted to meet the comprehensive exam requirement. Supervisory Committee members typically provide feedback at various stages including approval of the topic and scope of the paper, review of a detailed outline, and reading and providing feedback on the final draft.

### **3. *Grant Proposal***

In this format, the student writes a formal grant proposal that outlines a major program of research or an aspect of their dissertation research. Specific guidelines and format of the grant will depend on the student's interests, 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 also 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. This can be done through a group meeting, individual meetings with each member of the Supervisory Committee, or via e-mail.

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<sup>3</sup> 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.

## ADMISSION TO DOCTORAL 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

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### THE DISSERTATION PROPOSAL

Planning for the dissertation begins with extensive discussions with your faculty advisor, who serves as 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 1.5 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.

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### 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, 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.

There are two models for organizing your doctoral dissertation. The conventional model generally has chapters that correspond to the major parts of a research report: an initial chapter introducing the problem and reviewing the literature on the subject area; methodological chapter(s), results chapter(s), and a chapter discussing the findings along with conclusions and implications for policy, practice, and/or further research. The chapters are more detailed than the corresponding sections found in a research journal article. The “multiple paper” model generally consists of three separate, publishable papers (of normal journal length), an introduction to the overall topic, and a conclusion which includes implications of the studies for policy, practice, or future research. Speak with your advisor about which model would be best for your dissertation.

See *Guidebook for Preparing Theses and Dissertations*, available at the Office of Graduate Studies website, and sample dissertations from former students in your field. 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).

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## 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 at least a few weeks prior to the end of spring semester 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 four 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 two 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 two weeks before your oral examination.

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 Student Handbook*, students will engage in many activities during their graduate careers other than those described here. 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. Each journal's website allows you to sign up for alerts when new papers are published and Google Scholar can send email alerts when papers on specific subjects or by certain researchers are published. Most developmental students attend the biennial meetings of the Society for Research in Child Development, where the developmental program sometimes hosts a major reception in collaboration with other UNL programs. Students also attend more specialized conferences (e.g., Society for Research on Adolescence, Cognitive Development Society, American Education Research Association). 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 (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 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.

Once again, we welcome you to the developmental program and look forward to working with you over the next few years as you develop the knowledge and skills to become an independent developmental psychologist. We hope it is a stimulating and rewarding journey, and we enjoy the prospect of seeing you pass the major milestones enroute to achieving your professional goals.

## SAMPLE GRADUATE PROGRAM IN DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY

Required course are in normal font and sample electives/suggestions are italicized.

Year & Semester (Credits sem/tot)	Courses	Things to Do	Forms to File with Dept/Grad Studies
First Year			
Fall (9 cr)	Dev Prosem I (PSYC 902A – 3 cr) Psyc Methods I (PSYC 931/941 – 3 cr) <i>Research (PSYC 996 – 2 cr)</i> <i>Teaching Methods (PSYC 974 – 1 cr)</i>	Get to know program faculty Complete CITI training Begin planning MERP Apply for University fellowships	Graduate student activity report (Dept)
Spring (9 cr/ 18 cr)	Dev Seminar (PSYC 921 – 3 cr) Psyc Methods II (PSYC 932/942 – 3 cr) <i>Research (PSYC 996 – 3 cr)</i>	Write MERP proposal and submit to faculty advisor for approval	Memo of courses for MA degree (Grad Studies/GS); Graduate Activity report (Dept)
Summer (3 cr/ 21 cr)	<i>Research (PSYC 996 – 1 cr)</i> <i>Stats Modules (2 cr)</i>	Progress on MERP Summer TA or RA	
Second Year			
Fall (10 cr/ 31 cr)	Dev Prosem II (PSYC 902B – 3 cr) Cultural Diversity (PSYC 979 – 3 cr) Ethics (PSYC 925 – 1 cr) <i>Research (PSYC 996 – 3 cr)</i>	Progress on MERP Apply for University fellowships	Graduate Activity report (Dept)
Spring (9 cr/ 40 cr)	Dev seminar (PSYC 921 – 3 cr) <i>SEM (PSYC 948– 3 cr)</i> <i>Research (PSYC 996 – 3 cr)</i>	Complete and write up MERP <i>Apply for Masters degree (optional)</i> Oral exam for MERP <sup>4</sup> or <i>Masters</i> Identify Supervisory Committee members & obtain Grad Comm approval	Graduate Activity report (Dept) <i>Application for Degree (GS)</i> <i>Final Exam Report for Masters (GS)</i> Appointment of Supervisory Committee form (GS)

<sup>4</sup> Should be completed by last Friday in September of third year

Summer (3 cr/ 43 cr)	<i>Research (PSYC 996 – 2 cr)</i> <i>Stats Module (1 cr)</i>	First meeting of Supervisory Committee Summer TA or RA Work on new research Plan comprehensive exam	Report of Supervisory Committee on Program of Studies (GS)
Third Year			
Fall (10 cr/ 31 cr)	<i>Personality (PSYC 903 – 3 cr)</i> <i>Program Eval (PSYC 993 – 3 cr)</i> <i>Psych Lit I (PSYC 971 – 3 cr)</i>	Work on comprehensive exam Continue with research Apply for internal/external grants	Graduate Activity report (Dept)
Spring (9 cr/ 40 cr)	<i>Peer Relations (EDPS 987 – 3 cr)</i> <i>MLM (PSYC 944 – 3 cr)</i> <i>Research (PSYC 996 – 3 cr)</i>	Complete comprehensive exam <sup>5</sup>	Graduate Activity report (Dept) Application for Admission to Candidacy (GS)
Summer (3 cr/ 43 cr)	Doctoral Diss (PSYC 999 – 2 cr) <i>Stats Module (1 cr)</i>	Plan dissertation and write proposal Apply for dissertation grants Summer TA or RA	
Fourth Year			
Fall (10 cr/ 31 cr)	Doctoral Diss (PSYC 999 – 3 cr) <i>Social Policy (PSYC 971 – 3 cr)</i> <i>Longitudinal Data (PSYC 930) or</i> <i>Longitudinal SEM (PSYC 949 – 3 cr)</i>	Dissertation proposal defense	Cumulative report (Dept)
Spring (9 cr/ 40 cr)	Doctoral Diss (PSYC 999 – 3 cr) <i>Psych Lit II (PSYCH 972 – 3 cr)</i>	Dissertation research (data collection and entry)	Cumulative report (Dept)
Summer (3 cr/ 43 cr)	Doctoral Diss (PSYC 999 – 3 cr)	Dissertation research (data analysis)	

<sup>5</sup> Should be completed by last Friday in September of fourth year.

Fifth Year

Fall (10 cr/ 31 cr)	Doctoral Diss (PSYC 999 – 3 cr) <i>Psych Lit II (PSYC 972 – 3 cr)</i>	Dissertation research (analysis/writing) Apply for post-docs/ jobs	
Spring (9 cr/ 40 cr)	Doctoral Diss (PSYC 999 – 3 cr)	Complete doctoral dissertation Thesis to readers & graduate studies Revised thesis to entire supervisory committee Dissertation defense	Application for Final Oral Exam (GS) Application for Degree
		Graduate!	