

PREPARING AND APPLYING FOR REGISTRATION IN THE THESIS IN PSYCHOLOGY COURSE (PS499*) FOR 2016/2017

Acceptance into PS499* is based on a variety of criteria including:

- A) Having met the **prerequisites** for the course:
 - Year 4 of the BA or BSc Psych Research Specialist or Bio/Psych or Computing Science/Psych Honours program, normally including having completed at least one 300-level Research Experience course and one 400-level Seminar course;
 - Completion of PS394, and at least one of PS395, PS397, or PS398.
- B) Your academic **grades**:
 - usually a minimum GPA of 8.5 or close to 8.5 in psychology courses by the end of Winter term; students with a GPA somewhat lower than 8.5 may still be considered.
- C) The **number of students** seeking admission to PS499*:
 - Up to approximately 30 - 60 students are accepted into the thesis course each year
- D) The **number of students** being supervised by the faculty member who has signed your application letter.

Do you need a thesis?

Yes, if you are planning to do a graduate program in psychology although some Psychology programs do not require a thesis. Check online or contact individual graduate programs in which you are interested.

No, if you are planning to do a graduate or professional program that does not require a thesis (e.g., social work, law school, teacher's college etc.) or if you are not planning on a post-graduate program.

What can I expect in the thesis course?

Students will learn how to:

- develop a research idea,
- look for important and useful sources,
- write and orally present a research proposal,
- design the research study and collect, analyze, and interpret the necessary data,
- present the results, verbally and in writing, in a professional manner.

Classes meet twice a week

Course work makes up approx. 40% of your PS499 grade

Information about:

- Writing the GRE exams,
- Applying for scholarships,
- Applying to graduate programs,
- Careers in Psychology
- Presentations of thesis proposals

Workshops:

- Health & Safety
- Writing an application for ethical review
- Recruiting participants using the PREP system
- Writing a thesis proposal
- Creating a Research Poster

Thesis Poster Conference

PREPARING FOR A THESIS:

- 1 *Choosing a topic area:* There are many ways to arrive at a thesis topic. Think about the various psychology courses you have taken, the topics that have particularly caught your interest, and the various ideas that have been generated (whether by yourself, other students, your professors, or by authors of articles or books you have read). This is not to imply that you should use someone else's idea without his/her permission, but rather that other peoples' ideas can be excellent starting points for thinking about a thesis. A rich source of ideas will be the seminar course(s) you will take in third year. If you have vague ideas, but nothing specific, go online and start reading articles in appropriate journals. Start tracking down articles that sound interesting. You should always feel free to go to one or more professors who have research interests compatible with your own. Tell them about your ideas, whatever they are, and ask for advice on relevant sources, current issues in the area, and so on. You can also talk things over with the Undergraduate Advisor or the PS499 instructor(s) at any time during the year. Do not panic, just ask for help. Given the above, keep in mind that your thesis topic will most likely depend on your faculty supervisor's area of research.

2. **Finding a faculty supervisor:** All faculty members are expected to advise one or two fourth-year thesis students, and you should feel free to approach any of them for such assistance. But keep in mind that many faculty members will want to advise students whose thesis interests complement their own research programs. This does not mean that the faculty member will hand you a ready-to-go research project, or even that you have to do something precisely in the faculty member's defined area of research interest. But it does mean that the farther away from the faculty member's own interests you are, the less likely it is that person will agree to supervise your thesis. The primary reasons for this are, first, that the faculty member may feel uncomfortable supervising a student in an area in which he or she has little specific background knowledge and, second, the time commitment on the part of the faculty member to gain the necessary background knowledge may be too demanding.

It is a good idea to familiarize yourself with a potential supervisor's research interests by reading a couple of his or her recent publications or conference presentations. There is a link on the Psychology Department web page: [Research Interests](#) - a list of all faculty members in the department, with a brief description of their areas of interest. The development of your thesis proposal will be an interactive process between you and your advisor, to the extent that you can define your thesis topic, so much the better. But do not feel that you have to develop the final research proposal entirely on your own.

You may initially approach potential supervisors by e-mail, by dropping by during their posted office hours, or by phoning and asking for an appointment to discuss possible thesis supervision. It is beneficial if you bring along an unofficial transcript (with your computed GPA in all Psychology courses), and a rough statement of interest which includes your future goals (e.g., graduate program in Developmental Psychology with a focus on cognitive development) and the topic(s) you are interested in researching for your Honours thesis (e.g., children's eyewitness testimony or children's experiences with the justice system). This statement of interest should be geared towards the potential supervisor's research interests.

You should not expect an immediate yes or no response from a potential supervisor. Most faculty members will wait until they have heard from a number of potential Honours thesis students, and will make their decision based on several factors including the students' research interests and future goals, background preparation (courses taken, research experience, and grades), and the faculty member's previous experience with the student (from courses and RA assignments). As well, faculty members' ability to supervise thesis students may depend on the number of graduate students they will be supervising, and whether or not they will be taking sabbatical or other types of leave in the following year.

Accordingly, you should approach at least two or three potential thesis supervisors.

It is suggested that students start contacting potential supervisors in January or early February. Faculty members typically make their final decisions regarding student supervision by mid-March, if not earlier.

3. *Getting a "head start" on your thesis:* It is highly recommended that students taking PS499* spend some time over the summer before their thesis year (typically fourth year) developing their research proposal. One excellent way to do this is to organize a preliminary reading list with your advisor before you leave for the summer.

APPLYING FOR REGISTRATION

1. You should start the following preparations for PS499* during the second term of third year.
2. Shop around. Gather information. Talk to potential thesis supervisors about their research interests and style of supervision. Talk to students currently registered in PS499* for their advice. Attend the Honours Thesis Poster Conference held each year in the second to last week of classes in winter term, or contact the PS499* instructor(s) who can show you photos of the conference posters, including thesis titles.
3. Once you have reached agreement with a thesis supervisor, complete the PS499* application form found at: [Application Form](#)
4. Submit this completed form along with a copy of your transcript (if requested), to the faculty member who has agreed to be your thesis supervisor. He/she should then sign the written statement which you have provided.
5. Give the signed letter to the Department Chair by the **first Monday in April (Monday April 4, 2016)**. The department will notify you of your status in PS499* by email to your Laurier email no later than June 1.

If you have any questions, contact the Psychology Undergrad Academic Advisors from your Laurier email:

Dr. Max Gwynn (Surnames: A – K): psychadvising@wlu.ca

Dr. Nancy Kocovski (Surnames: L – Z): psychadvising@wlu.ca

OR

PS499 instructor: Dr. Max Gwynn: mgwynn@wlu.ca.

Dr. Tobias Krettenauer: tkrettenauer@wlu.ca

Appointments for academic advising can be made by speaking to Kim Susanna in the Psychology Office (N2006), 884-0710 ext. 3664 or ksusanna@wlu.ca

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