



Master of Arts in Psychology

Program Supplement to the Graduate Student Handbook

3/2024

OVERVIEW / GOALS OF ACADEMIC PROGRAM

The terminal MA program offers post baccalaureate training in psychological science research. Graduates of this two-year program will be better prepared to enter doctoral programs in psychology. The program provides focused training in cognitive neuroscience, cognitive psychology, developmental psychology, and social psychology. Skills acquired in the program may also augment eligibility for positions in research institutions and private sector employment venues.

To best serve the needs of our students, the MA program offers a combination of standardized coursework and customized research experience. In terms of research, the program follows a mentorship model where masters students will work closely with a faculty advisor. That advisor will guide the student in conducting original research. Skills include idea development, research design and administration, thesis write-up, and communication of results through interactive presentation.

The need for a terminal MA Program:

Each year the Department of Psychology at Rutgers University—Newark receives frequent inquiries from prospective students asking about MA degree opportunities in our department. Although many of them contact us to inquire about clinical tracks, other students express interest in a research-focused track to increase their eligibility for doctoral training, or to enhance applications for research positions in public or private research institutions or industry. Indeed, faculty in our program have noted an apparent increase in the number of PhD program applicants who already hold masters degrees, making for particularly strong applications. Given faculty expertise, program resources, and the only neuroimaging center at Rutgers University (the Rutgers University Brain Imaging Center, RUBIC), an MA program will expand and strengthen the graduate experience within the Psychology Department and in collaboration with other Departments/Campuses.

There is also an urgent need for increasing the diversity of scientific researchers in the field, including in the psychological sciences. Rutgers University—Newark is consistently ranked the most culturally-diverse university campus in the nation, placing the proposed MA program in an excellent position to recruit and mentor a diversity of trainees. While our existing BA/MA program also helps fill this need, many students do not discover their desire for an MA in psychology until very late in their undergraduate career, after the deadlines for the BA/MA program have passed. A psychology MA will allow us to serve a wider pool of trainees.

Masters Planning Committee (MPC)

We are also proposing that there be a sub-committee or independent standing committee that oversees the Masters program Tracks (MPC). This independent MA committee, including an MP Program Director, would coordinate with the PhD program, but would permit the PhD program to focus on the unique and consuming demands that the PhD program entails.

Eligibility

Academic Record: We recommend that students have at least a 3.0 overall GPA to apply. The Graduate Record Examination (GRE) is not an entrance requirement, but may be included with applications. Completion of classes in research methods or statistics is not a formal requirement. Instead, we will ensure students have necessary background in this area by requiring a methods “boot camp”. This will be a relatively brief but intensive training to ensure all entering students are familiar with at least the basics of statistical methodology, a critical component of conducting psychological science.

Students Per Lab: Individual faculty may not admit more than one student per year (for a maximum total of 2 MA-level students in their lab, summed across terminal MA and combined BA/MA students), unless a letter of justification and approval from the MPC is provided. MA advisors will provide students with basic information needed to quickly assume research tasks, such as completing IRB applications, data management, and the like, and will help guide them through thesis development. Advisors will be obligated to serve on as many MA thesis committees as they have MA students. For example, if the head of a lab with two MA students will be expected to serve on those plus two more committees.

Application requirements:

The following items are required for MA Program applications:

1. Letters of support/recommendation.
 - Three letters of recommendation. Applicant must identify the three letter writers by name and contact information. Letters from referees should be received by the deadline.
 - If the required letters are not received by the deadline the applicant will be notified. The MPC reserves the right to solicit these letters directly.
2. Academic transcripts from all previous institutions of higher education.
3. Personal statement. Strong personal statements typically include information about previous research experience, a brief description of current research interests, and general plan for future career direction. Personal statements should not exceed 4 pages, double spaced. Students are encouraged to specify their area of interest (i.e., cognitive, developmental, neuroscience, or social) and the faculty member or members they would like as mentors.

GRE scores are NOT required for acceptance into the program but may be submitted at the applicants' discretion.

Specific application deadlines are posted by the MPC. Consideration will not be given to applicants who fail to provide all of the materials by the deadline.

The MPC will meet in April to decide which candidates will be admitted into the program.

Course of Study

Thirty-six (36) credits in graduate coursework are necessary to earn an MA degree; at least 18 in coursework, and at least 12 in research. Students should consult with their faculty supervisor to select specific courses.

Credits include:

- Graduate statistics and methods: Students must take at least one graduate level statistics or methodology course (3 credits total), although two courses are recommended.
- Five additional courses (15 credits) in any of the areas of study offered by our psychology department, including: cognitive neuroscience, cognitive psychology, developmental psychology, social psychology, or statistics/methods.
- At least 3 credit hours of research with their faculty research mentors for every semester enrolled in the program (for a minimum of 12 research credit hours total).
- Students must be enrolled in at least 9 credit hours per semester of combined research and coursework. Students must receive at least a “B” in all graduate courses.

Enrollment in the terminal MA program is expected to be as a full-time student. Time expectations for lab research correspond to the number of credits for which the student is enrolled. For every 3 credit hours enrolled in research, students are expected to devote between 8 and 10 hours a week to lab research, to average 3 hours of lab work a week per research credit. Students are not expected to work in a lab over the summer unless paid summer salary by the mentor/principal investigator.

Example Timeline				
	YEAR 1		YEAR 2	
	Fall Semester	Spring Semester	Fall semester 3	Spring semester 4
	3 credits research	3 credits research	6 credits research	6 credits research
	6 credits of courses	6 credits of courses	3 credits of courses	3 credits of courses
Totals	At least 9 credits/semester	At least 9 credits/semester	At least 9 credits/semester	At least 9 credits/semester

Master's Thesis

Students must complete a MA thesis as a condition of graduation. Upon admission to the program, students begin work with their faculty research mentors on a project related to their theses. Students must select their thesis committee (their mentor plus one additional faculty member) and meet with their committee to propose their MA

thesis by the beginning of their third semester in the program (i.e., before the start of their second Fall semester classes). MA thesis projects must be completed by the end of the second, final year of the program, according to University timelines for degree conferral.

The MA thesis must be completed and evaluated by the student's primary advisor and a second thesis committee member, who is also a departmental member of the Graduate Faculty. An optional third committee member may also be included. This third member could be non-tenure track faculty, a post-doctoral associate, from faculty outside of the department, school, or campus, so long as they are approved by the primary advisor. All MA students who have successfully defended their theses will publicly present their work to the department at a MA Thesis Presentation Event. Participation in this presentation is a requirement of program completion. MA thesis procedures are provided in greater detail below.

Financial Considerations

Students are responsible for their tuition for all years of the MA program. Individual faculty may be able to provide stipends or supplements. Students who are Black, Indigenous or People of Color (BIPOC) may receive additional support from specially earmarked university-related funds as available. Students are encouraged to apply for financial support from relevant funding sources to support additional education and research-related activities.

OVERALL THESIS REQUIREMENTS¹

The MA Thesis Common Process

These common procedures and criteria are based on Rutgers University Standard MA procedures from the Graduate college.

Thesis: The purpose of the MA thesis is to help students develop their research and scholarship skills. These skills include concise, focused conceptualization and writing. Accordingly, with the thesis committee, the student will determine a potential target peer reviewed journal for the thesis, determine the potential length of an appropriate article, and write up the thesis in the appropriate format. Additional material, beyond the basic requirements for documenting a research study, can be included in Appendices. The thesis should be in the form of an empirical article, not a review. Actual publication of the Thesis in a peer-reviewed journal is encouraged but not required.

1. Committee approval

A formal proposal for the thesis research must be presented to and approved by the student's committee. Instead of the formal proposal presentation that is required of PhD

¹ Adapted from the Department of Psychology, Rutgers University School of Arts and Sciences in New Brunswick.

candidates, MA thesis candidates will meet with their committee to work out a consensus plan for the thesis. The main purpose of the proposal meeting is to provide clarity and common understanding among committee members and the student regarding the scope, focus, and audience (e.g., journal choice) for the thesis. This meeting should occur before the start of the second year. All members of the committee must approve both the proposal and the final manuscript. When circumstances preclude a full committee meeting, an alternative can be acceptable with the approval of the chair of the MPC. Should some or all of the committee members be unable to meet in person, the meetings are permitted to take place over secure, Rutgers-branded versions of on-line meeting platforms such as Zoom or WebEx. The final thesis committee meeting can occur before, after, or as a planned component of the public presentation of the thesis to the department.

2. IRB

All research that involves human subjects must be submitted to and approved by the Rutgers Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to the collection or analysis of any data. Projects that use existing data may also require submission to the IRB for approval or exemption. Requirements, deadlines, and all forms are available at the website. All students must complete the relevant Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) training before their research proposal will be approved by the IRB. Students are encouraged to take the online course during their first semester. Instructions to access the on-line course and exam can be found at the web site of the Office of Research and Regulatory Affairs (<https://research.rutgers.edu/faculty-staff/compliance/research-integrity/collaborative-institutional-training-initiative-citi>).

3. Timing of the thesis:

- a. Students should begin planning for their thesis research during the first year of graduate study. Their first thesis committee meeting must occur no later than the fall term of the second year.
- b. Students complete their thesis research during the second year of graduate study. In special circumstances, extensions can be granted with approval of the student's primary mentor and the MPC.

4. Procedures and Regulations governing the MA Thesis

- a. Application for Admission to MA Candidacy
Be sure that the original final transcript from the undergraduate school is on file in the Psychology Department, SAS-N, Main office, by the end of the first semester.
- b. Master's Committee:
 - i. The Committee normally consists of a Chairperson (the student's primary advisor) and one additional member. The second member must be either a member or associate member of the Graduate Faculty, according to the current list of members maintained by the Psychology Department (which could be from other Departments). Students may

nominate one additional member of the thesis committee who is not a member of the Graduate Faculty of Psychology. In this case, however, there must still be at least 2 members of the Graduate Faculty on the committee, bringing the total number of members to two or three. Inclusion of a potential third member of the thesis committee is contingent on approval of the advisor. If fewer than two members of the committee are Psychology Department faculty, the committee chair must write a memo explaining why departmental faculty are not appropriate, and why selected committee members are appropriate and this must be approved by the Chair of the MPC.

ii. Complete the MA Thesis Committee form. This form can be obtained from the Graduate Program in Psychology Department, SAS-N, Smith Hall, and will be made available online through the department website (<http://psychology.rutgers.edu>). The completion of the form includes obtaining the concurrence and signature (to indicate that concurrence) of the chair of the MPC or equivalent committee. The Graduate Director (or Department Chair) will notify the graduate student of the approval of their Committee. The form is then filed in the Psychology Department office.

c. Final Examination for M.A. Degree

i. Prior to the final committee meeting, all members of the thesis committee must be given a written or electronic copy of the thesis for review and approval. Committee members must be given sufficient time to review the thesis (at least two weeks), and the student should anticipate feedback and recommendations for revisions from committee members at the final meeting. All Committee members must approve the thesis before the thesis is considered completed.

ii. A summary of the thesis project will be publicly presented to the department, at a Thesis Day event at which graduating MA students must present their work. The Thesis Day provides students an opportunity to present their work more broadly and to receive comments and ideas from the entire department. Students may want to incorporate these comments into further thesis work but they are not obligated to do so. The presentation date will be organized by the MPC.

iii. Students must obtain an Application for Admission to Candidacy form and submit it to the Chairperson of the Committee. (Students must have completed at least 36 total course credits, of which 12 will be research credits required for the MA Degree.)

iv. The Chairperson will record the results of the final examination on this form and sign it. The “final examination” is the final decision of the MA Committee to accept or reject the thesis. It is then the student's responsibility to have it signed by the other members of the Committee.

v. The Thesis title must also be completed and returned to the Psychology Department office for processing prior to obtaining the Graduate Director's signature. Completed forms must be filed with the Graduate School no later than three weeks before Commencement (no later than announced deadlines for October and January).

vi. Conflicts at any stage of the process may be submitted to and resolved by the MPC.

d. Submission of the thesis to the Graduate School is done electronically.

i. The thesis must be converted to a PDF file and then submitted online at <https://etd.libraries.rutgers.edu/submit-your-etd>.

ii. Additionally, submission of one hard copy of the Master's thesis is required by the Department.

iii. A booklet entitled "Style Guide for Thesis and Dissertation Preparation" may be obtained from the Graduate Program Director. Students are required to submit an abstract not exceeding 350 words.

e. A Diploma Application must be filled out. This online diploma application is available at <http://www.ugadmissions.rutgers.edu/Diploma/Apply.aspx>.

5. Deadline Dates

The exact deadline date changes by a day or so each semester, so students should check with the Psychology Department Administrator for exact dates.

Timeline Extensions

In extenuating circumstances, students may take more than the allotted 2 years to complete the MA program, pending approval of the student's primary research faculty mentor and the MPC. A six-month extension will be granted if the rationale stated on the written request is acceptable. No meeting is required with the student in determining an extension request. Students can be granted no more than one six-month extension. If the MA thesis is not completed after the 6-month extension has ended, the student will be recommended for termination from the program.

Program Dismissal

The following rules are specific to the Psychology MA program, but they do not supersede the policies set forth by the Rutgers University—Newark Graduate School (<https://www.gsn.newark.rutgers.edu/>). Students may be dismissed from the Psychology MA program for the following reasons:

1. **Unsatisfactory program performance:** Students who do not earn the requisite course credits (within sub-areas and overall), earn B or better grades, and complete requisite research credits may be terminated from the program. Also, students who do not satisfy thesis requirements may be terminated from the program or not granted MA certificates at the end of the program.

2. **Dismissal from advisor's lab:** At the time of the initial thesis committee meeting (between the first and second year in the program), faculty must review the progress of the student and approve the continued participation of the candidate in the lab. Faculty reserve the right to ask a candidate to leave their labs. If this occurs, the candidate may be admitted into another lab within the psychology department, to continue through the program. If the candidate is unable to find a faculty member who is willing to take on the responsibilities of primary research mentor, then the student will be dismissed from the program.

3. **Actions or behaviors inconsistent with University and professional norms:** All MA students are required to abide by the Rutgers University codes of conduct, including but not limited to the ethical conduct of research, abiding by strictures forbidding cheating and plagiarism, and/or failing to comport oneself in a respectful and professional manner with other members of the university community.

Departmental and University Resources

MA students will be regarded as full members of the Department of Psychology community, with access to administrative support, inclusion in departmental activities (e.g., colloquia, book clubs, departmental parties), and access to Smith Hall (where the Psychology Department is located). MA students will also be supplied with work space and appropriate computing support in their respective research labs.

Beyond the MA

Many students may seek entry to doctoral training after earning their MA degree. The Rutgers-Newark Psychology MA program is designed to prepare students for such advancement, but it does not directly provide students with opportunities following achievement of the MA. In particular:

Admission to Rutgers-Newark PhD Program: Students in the terminal MA program WILL NOT be provided any special consideration for admission to the PhD program.

Clinical Licensure: The Psychology MA program DOES NOT lead to licensure as a clinician and does not meet the requirements to sit for a licensure exam.

