

GUIDELINES FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS IN ECOLOGICAL-COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY

Last Modified in 2017

The Ecological-Community Psychology Program has been designed to bring humanitarian and scientific thought and research to the understanding and solution of critical human problems. For this reason, students entering the program should have both scientific and humanitarian interests. Ecological-Community Psychology is concerned with a broad range of human problems. Gender-based violence, child-abuse, juvenile delinquency, developmental disabilities, substance abuse, race relations, over-population, mental health, educational deprivation, public health delivery systems and alternative system creation are current examples of such problems. The intent of the program is to produce psychologists who can carry out socially relevant research aimed at understanding and solving such problems in their natural setting.

It is recognized that students will vary in their speed of progress through the program. It is the goal of the program that students will complete the Master's portion of the program in approximately two to three years beyond the Bachelor's degree and the Ph.D. portion of the program in two to three years beyond the Masters. Students who enter the program with a Master's degree from another institution may be asked to complete a Master's thesis equivalency paper if their Master's degree did not include a research oriented thesis. Whether or not a Master's equivalency paper is required is at the discretion of the student's Doctoral Guidance Committee.

The following guidelines present a description of the graduate program.

Advising Committees and Annual Program Planning Sessions

There are a number of processes through which students and faculty collaborate concerning each student's graduate education. This includes decisions about course work, field work, assistantship, informal experiences, etc.

Master's Guidance Committee

Upon entry into the program, an incoming Masters level student is assigned a faculty member as temporary advisor. During the second semester, the student must form a three-person Master's Guidance Committee of at least two regular faculty members from the Department of Psychology. The chair of this committee must be a member of the Ecological-Community Psychology Interest Group. This is done by discussing the formation of this committee with the chair of one's committee and then involving two other faculty. Once this committee is formed, the chair of the Master's Guidance Committee will officially become the student's advisor. The student and their Guidance Committee will jointly develop a Master's Plan of Study consisting of courses, seminars, research, and community experience. The [Master's Plan of Study](#) form must be submitted to the Graduate Office by the end of the second semester of graduate study. The Master's Guidance Committee may waive or enhance the course requirements noted below.

Doctoral Guidance Committee and Program of Study

For students admitted to the program with a Master's degree, they will also be assigned a faculty member as temporary advisor. During the second semester following the completion of the Master's (for students admitted with a Bachelor's degree) or in the second semester following program entry (for the student admitted with a Master's degree), the student will work closely with their chair to prepare a Doctoral Plan of Study. It will then be presented to their Doctoral Guidance Committee for approval.

For students admitted with a Bachelor's degree, it is recognized that the Doctoral Guidance Committee cannot be formed until the Master's level work (courses and thesis) are completed. However, given that Master's level course work is often completed by early in the second year and the thesis is typically not completed by then, students will begin taking courses which will ultimately be on their Doctoral Plan of Study before the Doctoral Guidance Committee is formally assembled. In this common situation, students are encouraged to consult closely with their chair in planning their course work throughout their graduate careers.

The Doctoral Guidance Committee will consist of at least four faculty members (at least three from the Department of Psychology). Membership on the committee may be identical or different from the Master's Guidance Committee. The chair of this committee must be a member of the Ecological-Community Interest Group. The committee may have a faculty member representing the student's other area of interest (e.g. minor or cognate). Again, committee membership and Plan of Study must be filed with the Graduate Office (room 202). The Doctoral Guidance Committee oversees the administration of the comprehensive exam. The Doctoral Plan of Study should include any of the required courses that were not completed for the Master's degree. The Doctoral Guidance Committee may waive or enhance the course requirements noted below.

Formal Course Requirements

All students will be expected to acquire a sound background in psychology and social science relevant to their chosen problem area. Specific required course work for all students is as follows: Quantitative Research Design and Analysis in Psychology (PSY 815), Psychometric Theory and Test Construction (PSY 818) or equivalent; Ecological-Community Psychology (PSY 870), History and Theory in Ecological-Community Psychology (PSY 871), Field Research in Psychology (PSY 872), Community Interventions (PSY 873 and PSY 992), and Models of Community Change (PSY 970). Students are also required to enroll in 2 Advanced Topics in Ecological and Community Psychology (PSY 970). These requirements may be met at the Master's or Doctoral level.

Area of Specialization and Breadth

Ph.D. students are required to become competent in an area outside of Ecological-Community Psychology and to become a multi-disciplinary scholar. This requirement has two components.

The first involves a minor or a cognate. Each student must take either a minor or a cognate. A minor involves taking 12 semester credits in some other area of psychology outside of Ecological-Community (e.g., Industrial/Organizational, Social/Personality, etc.). A cognate involves taking 12 semester credits in a department other than Psychology or taking 12 credits organized around a theme (e.g., measurement, youth issues) in more than one department. The Applied Developmental Science sequence offers one example of such an interdisciplinary cognate. The second component involves breadth. If the student elects a minor in Psychology, they are required to take six credits outside of Psychology. If they elect a cognate, they are required to take at least six additional credits within Psychology, not more than three of which may be in Ecological-Community.

Students must also meet departmental course requirements or other requirements agreed to by the student his or her committee. The student may also make a case to their committee to waive any of the above requirements.

The Sequence of Course work

During the first year, the student will enroll in PSY 815, 870, 871 & 992 in the Fall Semester and PSY 872 & 873 in the Spring semester. Following the first year in graduate school, the sequence of course work will be determined by the relevant Plan of Study.

Master's Thesis

The primary goal of the Master's thesis is for the student to begin gaining experience in conducting community research. A wide variety of topics, issues, theoretical perspectives and methods may be used in the Master's thesis. The scope of the Master's thesis may vary considerably across students. However, a number of benchmarks are relevant. First, the thesis could begin as early as the end of the student's first year in the program. It is the goal of the program that the master's thesis will be finished by early in the student's third year. Second, while the methods may also vary across students, it should be kept in mind that a reasonable thesis project will be accomplished within a 12-month time frame from proposal acceptance to thesis completion. In this regard, data collection should not extend beyond a six-month period. Third, the research methodology should be driven by the student's research question and the methodological scope (e.g., sample, numbers of constructs or variables, measures, sites) of the project should be reasonable given the six-month data collection time frame and resources available to the student.

The topic area for the thesis may be driven by the student's area of interest or may involve the student taking advantage of ongoing projects or existing data sets. In combination with the dissertation, the Master's thesis should build skills relevant to the student's career goals. The thesis is carried out in a community setting. It may include a needs assessment, intervention, survey, longitudinal data collection, systems analysis, and use either qualitative or quantitative methodology. It is often desirable, but not required, that the thesis serves as a prelude to the dissertation in terms of topic area, theoretical perspective, setting, or methodology.

Master's thesis committee. The thesis committee is comprised of at least three faculty members. Two of the three must be members of the Psychology Department. The Chair must be a member of the Ecological Interest Group. Three of the committee members must be regular faculty (as defined by the [Graduate Student Handbook](#)). There may be additional committee members.

Master's thesis process. Procedurally, the thesis is done working closely with a chair and two additional members of the thesis committee. The student prepares a proposal working closely with the chair. The proposal includes an introduction, literature review, and proposed methodology. After the student and the chair are satisfied with the proposal, it is distributed to the other thesis committee members. A proposal defense/thesis planning meeting is then held. A defense meeting usually consists of a brief oral presentation by the student followed by questions from the committee. The conclusion of the meeting involves reaching consensus as to precisely how the thesis will be completed. This often involves revision of the research proposal. Once the committee has approved the proposal, the student executes the proposed research using faculty as resources as needed. Once the Master's project is completed, a Master's thesis document is prepared by the student working closely with the chair. This may involve several drafts. After the student and the chair are satisfied with the thesis, it is distributed to the other committee members for review. A final defense of the Master's thesis is then held. In terms of process, the final defense is similar to the proposal defense. Please consult the [Graduate Student Handbook](#) for the necessary forms (filed with the Graduate Office) to mark your progress on your thesis. In the case of both the thesis proposal defense and final defense, the student will "pass" if all or all but one of the committee members assign a grade of "pass". In the case of failure, the student will, at the discretion of the committee, be given a second chance to pass the defense. All cases of failing grades will be filed with the department's graduate office by the faculty.

Comprehensive Examinations

Goals. Comprehensives in Ecological/Community Psychology have three aims. First, comprehensives provide an opportunity for the student to integrate knowledge and skills **and/or** develop and expand a particular skill or competency congruent with his/her professional aims. The comprehensives are designed to be individually tailored in format to allow for maximum fit between the mode of the comprehensives and the style, needs, and goals of the student. Second, comprehensives provide the opportunity for the student to be evaluated on his/her readiness to complete the doctoral degree. Students will be evaluated on the degree to which they are competent to perform as independent scholars. Third, it is the aim of the comprehensive exam to move students closer to readiness to propose a dissertation. In short, the comprehensives aim to provide students with additional work in both the breadth and depth of the field. The comprehensives are designed to insure that all students know Community Psychology in general **and** how it applies to their specific sub-field of interest. This requires a balance between the particular topic/format of the comprehensive exam and general field of Community Psychology. The philosophy of the Community Psychology Faculty is to have students complete the comprehensives successfully. While it is specifically **not** the intent to use the comprehensives to remove students from the program, students must pass comprehensives in order to move on to the doctoral dissertation.

Areas to be covered. Comprehensive exams can be accomplished through a variety of formats. It is the intention that the same areas of knowledge will be assessed by each comprehensive option. In the interest of specifying the areas to be covered by all options, the non-exhaustive list below is provided. These areas are not mutually exclusive, but represent broadly defined domains. While specific areas may receive differential attention based on individual student needs and educational goals, the evaluation standards for all students and all options are the same. In other words, all students will be held accountable for demonstrating the same knowledge, though the format of the comprehensives may vary.

- **Background Information**

- *History and Systems.* This area is necessarily very broad covers the **historical** perspectives that defined the field, the values that guided the development of the field, and alternate historical models that impacted the field (e.g., person-environment fit, value base, collaboration, prevention as a service ideology, multilevel conception of behavior, philosophies of science). Examples of this domain include the major historical and theoretical events leading to the development of Community/Ecological Psychology.
- *Major Theoretical Positions.* This area covers the major theoretical positions or philosophies in the field. This domain is interdisciplinary in scope and includes coverage of individual, group, organizational, institutional, and societal perspectives as applicable. Depending on a student's particular interests, this area could also include specific theories pertinent to that particular problem. Examples of this domain include such major theoretical positions as ecological models, empowerment theory, organizational theory, etc.

- **Contemporary Work**

- *Social Change Strategies.* This area addresses the major intervention paradigms and approaches used in the field. The comprehensives need to demonstrate linkages, or lack thereof, to the theoretical positions or social philosophies covered above. This analysis provides the background for an in-depth description of the field's major intervention approaches. Examples of this domain include alternative setting creation, prevention, self-help, dissemination, policy change, organizational change, consultation, community organizing, advocacy, etc.
- *Knowledge of Existing Research.* This area includes description and critique of the research results presented in the scientific literature. Examples of this domain include literature reviews, meta-analyses, methodological critique, etc.
- *Research Design.* This area includes knowledge of research designs and logical inference procedures used in the field and critiques of their adequacy for addressing the important questions. Examples include review of designs used, critique of the adequacy of the designs, and alternative research designs. Coverage includes experimental designs, quasi experimental designs, case study designs, and qualitative methods. This area also includes coverage of statistical techniques.
- *Assessment Procedures.* This area includes coverage of the major assessment and measurement approaches. Central to this area is coverage of the adequacy of the major approaches to assessment (i.e., participant-observation, systematic observation, interviewing, paper-pencil surveys/questionnaires, etc.) There should

also be a concern with the applicability of relevant measurement approaches and their psychometric adequacy in terms of reliability, validity, and generalizability.

- **Ethics and Social Values.** This area includes coverage of potential and existing ethical issues in the field in terms of treatment of participants. The social values implied in the use of the social change and/or measurement techniques should also be discussed.
- **Future Directions and Policy Implications.** This area includes a projection of future work that needs to be done in the field and the policy implication of the work to date. Included in this area are: suggested future theoretical developments, change strategies, research methodologies, and systems of implementation.

General Format for Administering the Comprehensive.

Timing. Students are expected to take their comprehensives after the completion of the Master's thesis and must complete comprehensives exams before submission of the doctoral dissertation proposal. All students are encouraged to complete the comprehensives option of their choice within 24 months of the completion of the Master's degree. For those students who come to the program with a Master's degree from another institution, they are strongly encouraged to complete the comprehensives option of their choice within 24 months of program entry. The comprehensives options have the following time frames:

- course design – materials submitted within 90 days of proposal being approved,
- policy white paper – submitted within 90 days of proposal being approved,
- review paper – submitted within 90 days of proposal being approved,
- written test – taken within 90 days of proposal being approved.

The Comprehensive Proposal. Each of the options described below will be carried out according to a general format consisting of an agreement between the student and their Doctoral Guidance Committee. Each option calls for the student to propose to the committee, in writing, the option that will be taken and a detailed plan for execution. The proposal will describe two areas.

- First, the format of the comprehensive option will be described and how it will be executed will be detailed. For example, a proposal for a written test will specify the areas to be covered. A reading list will detail the material for which the student will be held responsible. A proposal for design of a course will include all of the areas to be covered, a preliminary syllabus, and an outline of the final product. A proposal for a review paper will provide a detailed description of the literature to be covered and a tentative outline of the review including a specification of the methodology to be employed. A proposal for a grant application will include a statement specifying the potential funding agency, a detailed summary of the domains to be covered, and a preliminary outline of the grant. The proposal should also include a detailed time line for completion including: 1) a deadline for completion of comprehensive not to exceed three months from the time of acceptance of the proposal, 2) provisions for faculty review of drafts, and 3) contingencies in the

case of a failed comprehensive that specify issues of timing and form of any retake option.

- Second, the proposal will detail how each of the areas mentioned above will be covered in the particular option selected. In other words, the proposal will specify how History and Systems, Major Theoretical Positions, etc. will be covered.
- A meeting between the student and the doctoral guidance committee will occur before the comprehensive begins. This meeting will result in a written agreement between the student and the committee as to what will be expected for the comprehensive.

Grading System. Each option will be graded using the following system. It is the expectation that students will demonstrate performance in the comprehensives commensurate with that expected of independent scholars at the doctoral level. Demonstration of that level of proficiency is the criterion for successfully completing the comprehensive. Each Guidance Committee member will provide the following ratings of performance on the comprehensive.

- Pass - performance indicative of demonstrating knowledge/skills expected of an independent scholar.
- Pass with revisions - performance that requires minor modification to achieve a pass. To assign this rating, the individual faculty member must specify in writing what would be needed to make the performance achieve a pass.
- Fail - performance failing to demonstrate knowledge/skills expected of an independent scholar.

The student will pass the comprehensives if he/she receives at least 75% "pass" ratings. The student will fail the comprehensive if he/she receives more than 25% "fail" ratings. If he/she does not receive 75% pass ratings and not more than 25% fail ratings, he/she may do revisions. For example, if the student selected the review paper option, he/she would receive a single rating from each guidance committee member and need to receive passing ratings from at least three-quarters of the committee members in order to pass outright. If the student selected the written test, he/she would need to receive pass ratings on three-quarters of the ratings given. In this instance, it would be expected that each committee member would rate all four answers resulting in at least 16 ratings and requiring 12 pass ratings. If revision is an option, the student may elect to rewrite only the parts of the comprehensives necessary to attain 75%. If successful, the student would then pass the comprehensives.

At the completion of the comprehensives, the student may request a second meeting with his/her chair, individual faculty, or the committee as a group for the purposes of discussing the comprehensives and receiving feedback.

In the case of failing the comprehensive exam, the student will have the right to a second attempt at the exam. If, after a second attempt, the student does not pass, they will be terminated from the graduate program. All cases of failing grades will be filed with the department's graduate office by the faculty.

Options for Comprehensive

- *Written Test*
 - Format. Each faculty member on the student's doctoral guidance committee will submit to the student's chair two essay questions to be answered in writing. The questions will cover the domains outlined by a reading list that must be part of the student's comprehensives proposal.

The student has two options for taking the test. In the **first option**, on an agreed upon date, the student will receive eight questions (two from each of four committee members). During the next 48 hours, the student would prepare answers to four of the eight questions (one of each of the two submitted by each committee member chosen by the student) in a take-home format. At the end of the 48 hours, the written answers would be turned in. A strict 10-page limit (typed, double spaced, one inch margins, 12 CPI) per question applies.

In the **second option**, on an agreed-on date, the student would receive four questions (two from each of two committee members). During the next 24 hours, he/she would prepare answers to two of the four questions (one of each of the two submitted by each committee member) in a take home format. The same page limit per question applies. At the end of the 24 hours, the answers would be turned in. After a 24-hour pause, the process would be repeated with questions from the two remaining committee members.

- Administration. The written exam will be administered by the chair of the student's doctoral guidance committee. Each committee member will evaluate their submitted question and at least one other comprehensive exam question, although the chair may request that all committee members evaluate all questions. Thus, all four questions will have at least two evaluators.
- *Review Paper*. Students will prepare a comprehensive review of an area of particular professional and scientific interest. The goal of the review paper is to allow the student a format for developing and reinforcing writing skills and to increase his/her expertise in an area of interest. The proposal for this option will take the form of a detailed outline for a literature review covering some social, theoretical, or empirical area of particular interest to the student. The topic of the review paper can be, but does not have to be, consistent with the topic planned for the dissertation. The review paper is not to exceed 40 pages, double spaced, one inch margins, 12 CPI excluding references. When the proposal is approved by all committee members, the student will proceed to write and submit to the committee a review paper covering the material proposed. The review paper is modeled after articles appearing in Psychological Bulletin, Psychological Review, American Sociological Review, Social Service Review, etc.
- *Policy White Paper*. The student will prepare a paper in an area of particular professional and scientific interest translating a literature into useful policy directives. The proposal will take the form of a detailed outline and will include history of the problem, review of prominent theory, review of existing research and ethical issues. Upon acceptance by the committee, the student will proceed to write and submit to the committee a Policy White

Paper. In essence, the policy white paper option would include most of the material in a review paper but be focused on the translation to policy of that review. The body of the White Paper (excluding tables, references, and appendices) may not exceed 25 single spaced pages (one inch margins, 12 CPI).

- *Design an Undergraduate Course.* The student will prepare a course in Psychology, typically Psychology 270 - Introduction to Community Psychology. The course must cover the domains of the comprehensives specified by the guidelines. The proposal will comply with departmental requirements as to content. In general, the proposal requires a course description, a course syllabus, and an outline of all class sessions. The final product will consist of complete course materials, including a syllabus, lectures, handouts, homework assignments, tests, quizzes, exercises, evaluation procedures, etc. for the course.
- *Other options.* The student may propose other options for the comprehensives to their guidance committee consistent with these general guidelines. These could include but are not limited to research grant applications, training curriculum, etc.

Study Guides and Scholarly Independence

The Chair of the Comprehensive Exam Committee will provide students with a standard set of materials to aid in their preparation of their comprehensives proposal (e.g., example syllabi and lectures; example grant comprehensive proposals). Students are allowed to use these examples to help them learn how to structure their comprehensive proposal materials. For example, they can use the materials to help them learn how to develop a syllabus/course and design a lecture. They are also welcome to borrow techniques and strategies from these examples. For example, if designing a class for their comprehensives, they could borrow some teaching strategies used by other students or faculty, such as using in-class assignments to promote an active learning environment.

However, given that the Comprehensives are designed to provide students with an opportunity to demonstrate their independence as a scholar, it is imperative that the proposal and final comprehensive materials represent the student's independent work. Any material that is directly copied from another source will not be accepted. For example, it would be considered plagiarism for a student to directly copy lecture or syllabus content from another student, faculty member, or Internet site. If such a situation arises, the Comprehensives Committee would determine appropriate action, as outlined by the Graduate College.

Ph.D. Dissertation and Dissertation Committee

The goal of the doctoral dissertation is for the student to independently carry out community research. To form a dissertation committee, the student develops a dissertation proposal with the assistance of the faculty member chosen as chair. Membership on this committee may be identical to or different from the doctoral guidance committee. The process for proposing, completing, and defending the doctoral dissertation is identical to that described for the Master's thesis. The proposal outlines the dissertation problem and details the method. The proposal is submitted to the other potential committee members. The doctoral dissertation committee must consist of at least four faculty, three of whom are regular members of the Psychology

department. The chair must be a member of Ecological-Community Interest Group. Once a committee is formed they meet to discuss with the student the final form of the dissertation. The dissertation must study the problem in its naturalistic setting. After students have completed the Ph.D. dissertation project and have written the dissertation to the satisfaction of their committee chair, the committee administers an oral examination over the dissertation material. In the case of both the dissertation proposal defense and final defense, the student will “pass” if all or all but one of the committee members assign a grade of “pass”. All cases of failing grades will be filed with the department’s graduate office by the faculty.

Remaining in Good Standing in the Program

It is important to the Ecological-Community Psychology faculty that students have a clear understanding at all times about how well they are progressing through the Program. To that end, we strongly encourage students to maintain frequent contact with their advisor, employer and instructors, and to proactively seek advice about how they are doing and what knowledge, skills and experiences they still need to attain. In addition, annual meetings are held to provide written feedback about how well students are progressing.

Annual Meetings

Annual meetings to discuss students’ progress in the program as well as their future plans are scheduled at least once a year. Meetings are comprised of the student and two regular faculty members within the graduate program, and every effort will be made to include the chairperson of the student's research committee in these meetings. Areas discussed in these meetings include: career goals, intervention in the community, research skills; course work; financial support; and other educational experiences. An annual review summary will then be written by the faculty members present in the meeting (and the student’s advisor if that person was not in the meeting). Students will have an opportunity to review this statement before it is submitted into their official department file. See section 3.2 of the Psychology Department Graduate Student Handbook for more details about annual evaluations.

If a determination is made at any point in the year that a graduate student's progress or performance is unsatisfactory, they will be notified in writing and a copy of that notice will be placed in the student's academic file. If a determination is made that a graduate student's status in the program is in jeopardy, they will be notified in writing and provided with specific steps that must be taken within a specific timeframe to improve their standing. If the graduate student does not meet these requirements to the satisfaction of the majority of the Graduate Program faculty, they will be dismissed from the program. In lieu of dismissal, faculty may also choose to suspend a graduate student from the program until specific requirements are met.

In the case of a student violating academic or professional integrity (see Section 5.1 of the Psychology Department Graduate Student Handbook), dismissal from the program may be immediate if agreed upon by the majority of the Graduate Program faculty.