PSYC 700 – Thesis (first semester)

**INSTRUCTOR:**

Email: Office: Office Telephone:

Office Hours:

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES:** Students enrolled in this course will:

1. use information resources and search strategies to identify reliable, reputable sources of information

2. organize, synthesize, and evaluate existing literature to address a specific issue within the psychological sciences

3. propose original research questions that will contribute to the existing literature in psychological science and describe how the research questions relate to what is already known

4. identify measurement, research design, and data analysis techniques used in a given area of study and evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, and feasibility of each

5. select and use appropriate measurement, research design, and data analysis techniques to answer specific research questions based on an understanding of the advantages, disadvantages, and feasibility of each technique

6. use appropriate technology to collect, summarize, and analyze data

7. interpret research results within the context of specific research question(s) and more broadly within the context of the existing psychological science literature

8. prepare coherent, well-organized abstracts, literature reviews, and research reports in a style consistent with the most recent version of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association

9. formally present research orally with appropriate use of visual aids (e.g., presentation software)

**DESCRIPTION:** Every student in the Psychological Sciences Program must complete a **thesis** project that includes conducting an **empirical** **research study** that makes a scholarly contribution to the current body of knowledge in some area of psychological science. It is the student’s responsibility to complete all of the necessary work for the thesis project in a timely fashion. A student who fails to meet deadlines and submit high quality work or who otherwise deviates from the timeline specified by the adviser should not expect the adviser to adjust his/her schedule to accommodate the student.

**Proposal.** As part of the thesis project, each student must complete a **thesis proposal** for the study he or she intends to conduct. The thesis proposal should be consistent with current standards and practices for information dissemination in the field of psychological science and thus be prepared in accordance with the guidelines described in the current *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* in terms of both form and content. The thesis proposal is written under the supervision of the adviser with the expectation is that the final document will result from an **iterative** process where, in order to develop a high quality product, the adviser edits **multiple drafts** of the thesis proposal that the student prepares. In order to create high quality drafts, each student should visit the **Writing Center** to review initial drafts of each section **prior** to submitting them to the advisor. Please visit the following website for more information on the Writing Center policies: <http://www.jmu.edu/uwc/index.shtml>. The student may not submit an IRB/IACUC protocol for review, begin collecting data, or begin analyzing data until **after** the thesis committee approves the proposal **unless** the pre-proposal process (see below) is completed and the thesis committee grants approval to move forward in the absence of a full thesis proposal.

#### *Pre-Proposal Process.* A student must complete the pre-proposal process if he or she (a) desires IRB/IACUC approval before completing a full proposal of suitable quality, or (b) needs to begin data collection before completing a full proposal of suitable quality, or (c) intends to use a pre-existing data set. In such cases, the student will work with the adviser to develop a pre-proposal document for the thesis committee to approve. The major issues to address in the pre-proposal document are those related to the proposed method and analyses; however, the document must include a clear rationale for the research question so that the thesis committee can evaluate the proposed method and analyses within the appropriate context. The student or members of the thesis committee may request a meeting to discuss the pre-proposal document, but a meeting is not required. If the committee grants approval, the student may move to the next stage of the project after submitting the pre-proposal document to the Program Director. The pre-proposal is NOT a replacement for the full thesis proposal; students who complete the pre-proposal process also must prepare a full thesis proposal that the thesis committee ultimately approves.

During preparation of the proposal, the student should consult committee members only if he or she needs their expertise. The proposal is to specify clearly, what the student proposes to do for the thesis project so that the student and the committee can discuss the details and arrive at definite decisions and agreement about the feasibility and quality of the proposed research. **Minimally,** the proposal should include:

* an introduction that provides a context for the project, summarizes relevant literature to provide a rationale for the project, and describes the proposed research question(s);
* a method section that describes the proposed subjects/participants, apparatus and/or materials, and procedures;
* a data analysis and interpretation section that describes how the data will be analyzed and interpreted in light of the literature reviewed and proposed research question(s);
* references, and;
* appendices that include the IRB/IACUC Protocol, any materials that will be used (questionnaires, stimulus sets, etc.), and/or descriptions of equipment or materials that will be used (such as transcripts or descriptions of the content of audio or videotapes, information sheets describing the technical specifications for equipment, etc.), etc.

Once the adviser approves the proposal, the student should schedule a meeting (typically 2 hours) to present the proposal to the thesis committee members and obtain their approval to conduct the study (often referred to as the proposal defense or proposal meeting). The student should distribute the completed proposal to all committee members for review no less than one week prior to the proposal meeting and the student should not make changes to the proposal after he or she distributes it to the committee.

Members of the committee read the thesis proposal and complete the written document portion of the Thesis Scoring Rubric prior to attending the proposal meeting. During the proposal meeting, the student makes a brief presentation during which he or she should: demonstrate foundational knowledge, skills, and abilities relevant to the project; interact professionally with the audience; competently field questions about the project and the written document and; effectively use presentation software. Once the student has answered all of the questions, members of the committee rate the student’s performance according to the oral presentation portion of the Thesis Scoring Rubric, discuss the document and the student’s performance, and decide whether they should approve the proposal, approve the proposal with specified revisions discussed in the meeting, or reject the proposal. In all cases, the thesis committee members will provide formative feedback regarding the quality of the written document and oral presentation to aid the student in preparing the written thesis and completing the oral defense of the completed thesis, which serves as the comprehensive examination.

If the committee members reject the proposal, they will make specific recommendations for remediation. In order obtain approval of the proposal, the student might need to make substantial changes to the document, schedule another proposal meeting, or both. **The expectation is that each student will have an approved thesis proposal by the middle of, but no later than the end of, the semester in which he or she enrolls in Psyc 700, Thesis.**

**REQUIRED ACTIVITIES, WORK PRODUCTS, and DUE DATES:**

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| Activities | Work Products | Due Date |
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|  | * Approved Thesis Proposal submitted to Program Director |  |
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**EVALUATION:** Performance in this course is graded on an “S”/”U” (Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory) basis. The student will earn an “S” provided he or she completes all of the activities and delivers all of the work products on or before the due dates listed above. Failure to complete all of the activities or to deliver all of the work products by the due dates could result in a grade of “U.”

A grade of “I” indicates incomplete work in a course and the adviserwill award an “I” only if a student is unable to complete the requirements listed above because of an illness or other equally compelling reason. If a student’s committee has not approved the student’s thesis proposal (*not pre-proposal*) by the time grades are due, the thesis adviserwill assign a grade of “I.”  When a student receives a grade of "I," he or she must complete the work before the end of the next regular semester (i.e., summer sessions are not included) or the grade is reported permanently as a "U."

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:** Academic integrity is central to the mission of this institution. All students deserve a healthy learning environment where their honest independent efforts form the basis of their evaluations. Academic dishonesty violates the most fundamental values of an intellectual community and depreciates the achievements of the entire university community. Every student is responsible for knowing the James Madison University Honor System. The policy appears in the *Student Handbook* (<http://www.jmu.edu/judicial/handbook.shtml>) as well as on the Honor System homepage at <http://www.jmu.edu/honor/>.

Ignorance or misunderstanding of the Honor System will not serve as an excuse for academic dishonesty. Faculty will take vigorous action against students who engage in cheating, plagiarism, forgery, misrepresentation, fraud, or other dishonest practices. Students are always welcome to contact faculty or make an appointment to meet with faculty (by telephone, if you are not in Harrisonburg) for a more detailed explanation of anything pertaining to this course, including clarifications needed regarding academic integrity.

**NOTE TO DISABLED STUDENTS:** Any student who is learning, sensory, or physically disabled, and feels that he or she needs special assistance with any of the work in this course should contact the instructor. The first couple of weeks of the semester are the best time to do this. Faculty will hold all such matters in confidence.

**FERPA:** The federal **F**amily **E**ducational **R**ights and **P**rivacy **A**ct of 1974 (FERPA), as amended (also sometimes referred to as the Buckley Amendment), is a federal law regarding the privacy of student records and the obligations of the institution regarding the release of educational records and the access provided to these records.  Generally the law provides that, with some exceptions, no information, applications, forms, letters, records, transcripts, etc. may be released, whether orally or in writing, without prior written consent, dated and signed by the student, specifying the records to be released, the reasons for release and to whom the records are to be released.  You can find the University's policy on the privacy of student records, Policy 2112, at <http://www.jmu.edu/JMUpolicy/2112.shtml>.