Psychology Department Graduate Program Evaluation and Retention Policy

The Department of Psychology program directors and advisors oversee the performance of all graduate students in order to ensure that they maintain academic standards that have been agreed upon by faculty members in the Department, and that they are making good progress. Graduate students must meet the Psychology Department degree requirements in a timely manner. When a student fails to meet program guidelines for satisfactory progress, the student will receive written notification with a clear statement of what the student must do and a date by which such actions must be completed. Students will be given an opportunity to appeal by following the appeals guidelines stated below. Students who fail to take remedial actions by the deadlines specified may be dismissed from the program, and a recommendation will be sent to the Graduate College to move the student to non-degree seeking status. Students have the right to appeal such decisions to the Graduate College.

Yearly Evaluations
Each September, students prepare progress reports that are examined by their major advisors and program directors, who prepare written feedback addressing (a) the student’s productivity and achievements, (b) the student’s progression through the program’s milestones, and (c) expectations for the coming academic year. These letters with feedback are then collected and reviewed by the Psychology Department Director of Graduate Studies in order to ensure that evaluation criteria are applied consistently across programs and advisors. The letter serves to establish an agreement between the student and the program regarding performance expectations.

Students are required to discuss the content of the letter with their advisor, sign the letter, and return a signed copy to the Graduate Program Coordinator for record keeping. If the student disagrees with the content of the letter, further discussion with the advisor, the program director, and the Director of Graduate Studies takes place. Recommendations may be made to the Department Head regarding revisions, if any, to be made to the letter. When a student falls behind schedule or in case of sub-standard achievement, the letter serves to provide students with advice regarding steps to remediate problems (e.g., setting deadlines, decreasing activities that are incompatible with timely completion), reminds the student of resources available to them, and notifies them of potential consequences if deadlines are not met.

Note that a student who does not provide a yearly progress report or does not maintain adequate contact with their advisor and the department will be considered inactive and may be dismissed from the program.

Satisfactory progress
Students must maintain a GPA of 3.0 or higher in order to be considered in good standing in the Graduate College. Students whose GPA drops below 3.0 are automatically placed on probation by the College. Information regarding probationary status due to grades is available on the Graduate College website. In addition to the grade requirements set out by the Graduate College, students in Psychology are expected to complete their graduate studies following a five-year program:

Year 1: Approval of the Master’s proposal
Year 2: Completion of all requirements for the Master’s degree
Year 3: Completion of written and oral comprehensive examinations
Year 4: Approval of the Dissertation proposal
Year 5: Completion of all requirements for the Ph.D.

Note that the five year plan is extended to six years for graduate students in the Clinical Program, due to the internship year that normally occurs after completion of the Dissertation proposal and prior to the Dissertation defense.

A student is behind schedule when they:
• Have not proposed a Masters by the end of the first year.
• Have not defended a Masters by end of the second year.
• Have not completed written and oral Comprehensive Examinations by the end of the third year.
• Have not completed a Dissertation proposal by the end of the fourth year.
• Have not successfully defended a Dissertation by the end of the fifth year, or the end of the sixth year for students in the Clinical Program.

The Evaluation Letter
The evaluation letter should include several key points:
• The letter should note the student’s productivity and achievements, including program milestones such as completing the Masters or comprehensive exams, publications and presentations of their work at professional conferences, and other academic achievements.
• The letter will state where the student is in their 5 year training schedule as outlined in the graduate program handbook. Students are either (a) ahead of schedule, (b) right on track, or (c) behind schedule.
• For students who are on track in the program, the letter will note what the expectations are for the coming year including expected dates of completion for upcoming milestones. If a student is behind schedule, the advisor should note any special circumstances that may have led to the delay in completing the milestones.

When the student is behind schedule in their progress, four levels of warning may appear in the evaluation letter:

Level 1 Caution: When a student is behind schedule, the letter will include a plan for getting back on track during the coming year with expected dates of completion for required milestones. The letter should encourage students to get focused and work with their advisor closely to stay on track. Students will be warned that failure to progress through the graduate program in a timely manner may result in academic sanctions in the future, including being placed on provisional status within the Department of Psychology or being dismissed from the graduate program.

Level 2 Warning: A student who has been cautioned and who does not meet the expectations outlined in the previous letter will be given a Level 2 Warning. This letter will state that the student is seriously behind schedule, and will outline specific steps that the student must take by the end of the Spring (year) semester in order to be viewed as making adequate academic progress. The evaluation letter will state that: “If you do not meet these requirements by the end of the Spring (year) semester, you will be placed on provisional status within the Department.”
Level 3 Provisional Status: Students who have been given a Level 2 warning in a previous evaluation and who fail to meet all the expectations outlined in the previous letter will be sent a letter stating that:

“Given that you did not meet all of the requirements outline in last year’s letter, you have been placed on provisional status within the Department of Psychology effective immediately. You will be need to meet all the program requirements listed below before the end of the Spring (year) semester. During the period of probation, you remain eligible to take courses and are considered for funding with the same priority as other students in your year, but you must focus on meeting the departmental milestones outlined below. Failure to do so will result in you being dismissed from the Psychology Department Graduate Program for lack of adequate academic progress and converted to non-degree seeking status, as per Graduate College Guidelines.”

The letter must outline the specific requirements with expected completion dates required in order for the student to be removed from academic probation.

Level 4 Non-degree Seeking Status: Students who have been placed on provisional status in the Department and who have completed all the requirements outlined in the previous evaluation letter will be sent notification by registered mail that they are being officially dropped from the Psychology Department Graduate Program. The evaluation letter will state the following:

“The previous evaluation letter placed you on provisional status within the Department of Psychology and stated what you had to do in order to revert to good standing in the graduate program. Because you did not meet the requirements outlined in last year’s letter, we are requesting that the Dean of the Graduate College dismiss you from the Psychology Graduate Program and convert your status to non-degree seeking graduate student, effective immediately. In order to re-enter the Psychology Graduate Program you would have to re-apply and be considered along with new applicants during the regular graduate recruitment cycle. The decision to accept you back into the graduate program would be at the discretion of the faculty.

A student who believes with good academic reason, that they deserve redress or exception to this decision can formally petition for an exception. A petition form must be submitted to the Graduate College Degree Certification Office explaining all relevant facts. Such petitions must be accompanied by supporting documents and a letter of support from the student’s Major Advisor, Director of Graduate Studies, or Department Head and required signatures. Petition forms are available from the Graduate College website.”