



**TEXAS A&M**  
UNIVERSITY®

# PSYCHOLOGICAL AND BRAIN SCIENCES

## Graduate Student Handbook

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

DEPARTMENT CONTACTS

GENERAL EXPECTATIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

UNIVERSITY AND DEPARTMENTAL DEGREE REQUIREMENTS

    General Graduate School Requirements

        Credit Hours

        Advisory Committees

        Degree Plans

        Formal Master's Thesis Process (Clinical and I/O only)

        Preliminary Examination for Doctoral Students

        Formal Doctoral Dissertation Process

    General PBSI Requirements

        Sustained Research Activity

        Course Work

        First Year Graduate Student Seminar

        First Year Research Project

        Second Year Poster Presentation

        Specific Training Area Curricula Requirements

    PBSI Doctoral Program Timeline and Checklist

PBSI POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

    Annual Student Evaluations

    Changing Advisors and/or Training Areas

    Leaves of Absence

    Grievance Procedures

    Professional Conduct

    Title IX and Harassment

    Dual Roles and Consensual Relationships

GRADUATE STUDENT FUNDING

    Graduate Assistantships

    Payroll

    Health Insurance

    Other Funding Opportunities

    Travel and Research Support

GRADUATE TEACHING

    TA Training

    Instructor of Record Training

GRADUATE STUDENT RESOURCES

    Mental Health Resources

    Library Resources

    University Writing Center

    Computers and Printing

    Graduate Transportation and Parking



## INTRODUCTION

The Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences (PBSI) in the College of Arts & Sciences at Texas A&M University is a recognized leader in psychological science and features doctoral training programs in Behavioral and Cellular Neuroscience (BCN), Clinical Psychology (CLYP), Cognition and Cognitive Neuroscience (CCN), Industrial and Organizational Psychology (I/O), and Social and Personality Psychology (SPP). All of these programs share two common goals:

- To prepare students to conduct high quality research, to direct research by others, and to communicate research findings through teaching and writing.
- To prepare students for careers in academic settings or organizations that involve practical solutions to personal, social, or organizational problems.

This handbook provides detailed information about Department, College, and University policies that are pertinent to graduate training. You will find information on a range of topics, including specific PBSI training area requirements, university level doctoral degree requirements, graduate student rights and responsibilities, and roadmaps for efficiently pursuing the degree.

It is, however, unlikely that this handbook will answer every single question that might come up, and specific requirements and processes change frequently in universities as large as TAMU. The information presented in the handbook is current as of 4/23/2023. The Associate Head of Graduate Studies will provide updates about any information that may have changed since the handbook was last updated.

## DEPARTMENT CONTACTS

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## GENERAL EXPECTATIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Doctoral training *should* be challenging. We expect students to develop into independent scholars with the highest level of expertise in their particular training area. Students should therefore master knowledge and skills at levels beyond what might constitute an “A” in an undergraduate course. That is what a PhD signifies and requires.

Faculty and staff in our department and the university are here to help students navigate this intense graduate training process, but students must ultimately take full responsibility for their own development. **We expect students to know and meet their degree requirements, to be aware of fiscal deadlines and work with our business office to comply with state and university regulations, to responsibly perform duties in their assistantships, to show students, faculty, and staff respect, and to represent our department and university well.**

### Advisor and Advisee Expectations

The advisor/advisee relationship is the core of our graduate training model. Graduate students receive individualized training in their advisor’s laboratory to develop into independent scholars in particular areas of scholarship. Because of this, each student will have different experiences in their graduate training. This is a strength because it allows for students to receive individualized training tailored to their career goals.

At the same time, there are uniform standards that all students and advisors in our programs should expect.

1. The training environment will be safe, respectful, honest, and intellectually challenging. Advisors and advisees will respect the bounds of the professional relationship and communicate clearly with one another. Diversity in backgrounds, needs, and goals will be recognized and appreciated.
2. Advisors and advisees will understand and adhere to the ethical guidelines of the University and Department (<https://orec.tamu.edu/>), as well as the professional guidelines of their discipline (e.g., APA).
3. Specific expectations, responsibilities, and work-related processes (e.g., typical working hours, absences) in each individual laboratory will be clearly communicated and congruent with university policies and the law.

### Multiple Roles and Responsibilities

Graduate students in our program often hold two related, yet very distinct roles. They are students in the sense that they are enrolled in degree programs at Texas A&M University. They are also employees in the sense that they hold paid assistantships. Each of these roles come with particular responsibilities and conflicts can exist between them. As one example, certain forms of speech (e.g., political advocacy) might be perfectly acceptable in the role of a student, but problematic as an employee of the state of Texas. Students should remain cognizant of the different responsibilities/expectations that exist in their multiple roles and, when in doubt, consult with faculty and staff about appropriate conduct.

### Aggie Honor Code

For many years, Aggies have followed a Code of Honor, which is stated in this very simple verse: An Aggie does not lie, cheat, or steal or tolerate those who do. The Aggie Code of Honor is an effort to unify the aims of all Texas A&M students toward a high code of ethics and personal dignity. For most, living under this code will be no problem, as it asks nothing of a person that is beyond reason. It only calls for honesty and integrity, characteristics that Aggies have always exemplified. The Aggie Code of Honor functions as a symbol to all Aggies, promoting understanding and loyalty to truth and confidence in each other.

## PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

Navigating and keeping track of all the doctoral degree plan requirements at TAMU can be a chore. Part of the

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reason for this difficulty is that the requirements exist at multiple levels. For example, all doctoral students are governed by universal doctoral degree requirements set by the Graduate School. These include things like preliminary examinations, doctoral degree timelines, and credit-hour requirements. Within PBSI, however, each specific training area has its own curriculum and mechanisms for meeting Graduate School doctoral degree requirements. For example, the Clinical and I/O programs require a Master's thesis in route to the PhD, while our other training areas do not.

This section of the handbook describes the doctoral degree requirements that students in our program must meet. The section is organized from the "top-down." General Graduate School requirements are described first, followed by PBSI requirements for all doctoral students, followed by specific area requirements and curriculums.

## General Graduate School Requirements

Core Graduate School requirements are described below. Students should also consult Graduate School resources for additional information and full descriptions of Graduate School policies and procedures.

**Graduate School "Steps-to-the-PhD"** <https://grad.tamu.edu/academics/degree-completion/steps-to-doctoral-degree>  
**Graduate and Professional Catalog** <https://catalog.tamu.edu/graduate/#text>

### *Credit Hours*

The Graduate and Professional School requires a minimum of 96 credit hours for the doctoral degree. This total includes hours earned for research activities via PBSI 685 and PBSI 691. Full time status for doctoral students is 9 CR per semester in the Spring and Fall. Full time status in the summer for doctoral students is 6 CR.

The Graduate and Professional School requires 32 credit hours for a master's degree. **Students in the Clinical and I/O programs will therefore complete 32 credit hours for the master's degree and a minimum of 64 additional hours for the doctoral degree.**

Students who earned a master's degree from another university prior to admission into our program must complete at least 64 credit hours at TAMU for a doctoral degree. These students might exceed 64 hours, however, depending on the nature of their prior graduate coursework and whether it meets the specific expectations of the student's doctoral training area. Students entering with a master's degree should discuss these issues with their advisor, training area head, and the Associate Head for Graduate Studies upon admission.

Some degree plans may exceed the minimum number of credit hours due to specific curriculum requirements. Faculty advisors and training area heads can provide more details about these situations.

### *Advisory Committees*

Graduate students at Texas A&M are to be guided by faculty advisory committees. Any member of the Graduate Faculty at TAMU can serve on an advisory committee. You can find a full list of graduate committee faculty [here](#).

Typically, the student's primary advisor serves as the committee chair. On special occasions, experts from outside TAMU can serve on a student's committee. Please discuss this option with the Associate Head for Graduate Studies.

Clinical and I/O students will first create an advisory committee to supervise their Master's Thesis. The M.S. advisory committee consists of at least three faculty members, with one member selected from a department other than PBSI. The committee chair will advise the student with respect to selection of other committee members. Discussions about forming the committee should begin during the student's first year in the program.

**\* *Deadline:* The Master's advisory committee must be formed by March 1<sup>st</sup> of the student's first year.**

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A doctoral advisory committee will guide preliminary examination and dissertation processes. The doctoral advisory committee consists of at least 4 faculty members, with one member selected from a department other than PBSI. The committee chair will advise the student with respect to selection of other committee members. Discussions about forming the committee should begin early in the student's third semester in the program (Fall of 2<sup>nd</sup> year).

**\* *Deadline:* The Doctoral advisory committee must be formed by the 8<sup>th</sup> week of the student's third semester.**

Students may request a change in the membership of their advisory committee at any time. A petition to request change of committee members may be submitted online using the Document Processing Submission System (DPSS) at: <https://ogsdps.tamu.edu>. You can contact the Graduate Advisor if you need further assistance with this procedure.

## *Degree Plans*

<https://grad.tamu.edu/knowledge-center/miscellaneous/review-student-degree-plans-and-petitions>

All graduate students are required to file a degree plan that corresponds to the degree they are pursuing. The degree plan is the official listing of coursework for the degree, and it is the formal declaration of a graduate advisory committee. Failure to meet the deadlines for degree plan submission will result in a "block" on the student's account. This "block" prevents students from being able to register for courses in subsequent semesters.

Clinical and I/O students will need to submit two separate degree plans during their time in the program. They will submit a Master's degree plan and a doctoral degree plan. To add the Master's degree plan, however, these students will also need to submit an MDD form to add a secondary degree, the Master's degree, to their student record.

- Clinical and I/O students must submit an MDD to add the Psychology Master's degree as a secondary degree. Once the MDD is approved, they will be able to submit a master's degree plan. Information about the MDD process can be found [here](#).
- Clinical and I/O students must submit a Master's degree plan to the Graduate School by March 1 of their first year.

All students in the program are required to have an approved doctoral degree plan on file with the Graduate School by the beginning of the fourth semester in the program (Spring of 2<sup>nd</sup> year). Because of the processing time required, all students should submit their doctoral degree plan by the 8<sup>th</sup> week of the Fall Semester in their 2<sup>nd</sup> program year. This means, of course, that Clinical and I/O students will submit a doctoral degree plan prior to the completion of the Master's degree. This is okay and required by the College of Arts and Sciences.

All degree plans are submitted using the online Document Processing Submission System (DPSS) at: <https://ogsdps.tamu.edu>. The degree plan may be changed at any time by filing an online petition using the DPSS. **Changes in degree plans are common; they are often the rule rather than the exception.**

### Steps to File a Degree Plan once a Graduate Advisory Committee is Formed:

1. Consult your area curriculum documents and discuss your plans with the chair of your advisory committee.
  2. Create and submit the degree via DPSS
  3. Submit the degree plan via DPSS
    - The pre-committee staff approver is the PBSI Graduate Staff Advisor.
    - The department head or intercollegiate faculty chairperson on the degree plan is the PBSI Associate Head for Graduate Studies.
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4. The submitted degree plan will route for approval from Graduate Staff Advisor (pre-committee), the committee chair, all committee members, and the Associate Head for Graduate Studies.
5. Once approved, the degree plan will then forward electronically to the Graduate School for final processing and approval.
6. The Graduate School will notify you (and Associate Head of Graduate Studies) by email when the degree plan has been formally approved.

### *Formal Master's Thesis Process (Clinical and I/O Students Only)*

Clinical and I/O students must follow the Graduate School's requirements for completing a Master's Thesis. There are several steps to this process, including the submission of a research proposal approval form, applying for the degree, and successfully defending the Master's Thesis. The Graduate School sets the deadlines for all of these steps. Students must be aware of and adhere to those deadlines.

The formal steps to the Master's Thesis can be found [here](#).

### *Preliminary Examination for Doctoral Students*

Doctoral students must pass a preliminary examination on their way to the PhD. These examinations can take different forms, depending on the training area.

Preliminary Examination for each Training Area:

- BCN: Research Proposal or Major Area Paper and Oral Defense
- CCN: Major Area Paper and Oral Defense
- Clinical: Dissertation Proposal and Oral Defense of that Proposal
- I/O: Written and Oral Comprehensive Examination
- SPP: Dissertation Proposal and Oral Defense of that Proposal

**\* *Deadline:* The preliminary exam must be completed no later than the end of the semester following the completion of the formal coursework on the degree plan. Results must be received by The Graduate and Professional School 10 working days after exam date.** The report form can be found [here](#).

### *Formal Doctoral Dissertation Process*

Doctoral students must follow the Graduate School's requirements for completing the Doctoral Dissertation. There are several steps to this process, including the submission of a research proposal form, applying for the degree, and successfully defending the dissertation. The Graduate School sets the deadlines for all of these steps. Students must be aware of and adhere to those deadlines.

The formal steps to the Dissertation and Doctoral Degree can be found [here](#).

## **General PBSI Requirements**

### *Sustained Research Activity*

We expect students to be involved in research with their primary mentor as soon as (or before) they begin graduate study. Psychological science and research training are the primary focus of our graduate students, and therefore the bulk of their time and effort should be devoted to conducting and disseminating research. Research activity in our program includes more than the doctoral dissertation project. Being active in all parts of the research process, ranging from IRB preparation, to data collection, to data management and analysis, to manuscript preparation, is

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critical. Your primary mentor will provide opportunities to be involved in research beyond the dissertation and we expect students to take advantage of those opportunities.

## *Course Work*

Methods and Statistics. Proficiency in methodology and statistics is foundational to graduate study in psychology. **All graduate students take PBSI 607 (Experimental Psychology) and PBSI 671 (Experimental Design for Behavioral Scientists) during their first year in the program and must earn a grade of B or better in both courses.**

Breadth Courses. **All students are required to take two graduate Psychology courses (6 credit hours) outside their specific training area.** The purpose of this requirement is to ensure that students acquire breadth of knowledge in psychology beyond their specialty area. Graduate level survey courses and specialty seminars (e.g., PBSI 689) offered by faculty outside the student's training area can be used to satisfy this departmental requirement. In addition, students can petition their training area to permit them to substitute one graduate course taught outside of PBSI to count towards the breadth requirement. This option must be approved by the primary advisor and training area. All breadth courses must be completed with a grade of B or higher.

Area Specific Course Requirements. In addition to the general course requirements noted above, each training area has its own list of required courses that must be completed. These area specific curricula are designed to ensure that students acquire the depth of knowledge in their particular training area that would be expected from someone holding a doctoral degree in that area. Details about each area's curriculum requirements can be found in each training area's specific handbook.

## *First Year Graduate Student Seminar*

A first-year professional development seminar (PBSI 691) is required for all first-year graduate students. This series provides initial training in teaching introductory psychology (PBSI 107) and laboratory courses in statistics (PBSI 301) and experimental psychology (PBSI 302). These trainings are required by Texas law for all graduate teaching assistants. We require students in our program, regardless of whether they currently possess a graduate teaching assistantship, to complete the training during their first semester. Other topics in the seminar include professional ethics in research, IRB policies and compliance, grant writing for NIH-NRSA and NSF fellowships, and exposure to PBSI graduate student policies and procedures.

## *First Year Research Project*

We expect graduate students to work closely on research projects with faculty and other graduate students. To facilitate this research involvement for new students, first-year students are required to carry out a first-year research project with their advisor. This research project typically represents a collaboration between students and faculty, but does not need to be an independent project designed by students. The nature of the project is determined through consultation with the primary advisor, and students should plan to initiate a discussion of this requirement with their advisors early in their first semester.

## *Second Year Poster Presentation*

Students must present the results of their first-year research project in an annual poster session held in the Fall semester of their second year. The poster session provides a forum for students to demonstrate what they have done and learned during their first year of training. All posters are evaluated by a group of PBSI faculty and awards are given to the highest rated presentations. Details about this event are provided in the First Year Graduate Student Seminar.

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## Specific Training Area Curricula Requirements

Each area also has a number of specific requirements. These requirements can be found in the specific training area documents.

- [BCN Documents](#)
- [CCN Documents](#)
- [Clinical Documents](#)
- [I/O Documents](#)
- [SPP Documents](#)

## PBSI Doctoral Program Recommended Timeline and Checklist

Below is a chronological list of university and PBSI steps towards the doctoral degree. Please keep in mind that policies do change and, while we do our best to update this handbook regularly, updates to the handbook can lag behind the adoption of new university guidelines. Check with the AHGS and the Graduate and Professional School to ensure that all the steps described are up-to-date.

\* Additional information about specific area requirements, such as required courses, are provided in specific training area documents.

### Year 1 Steps

What to do	When/Deadline	Notes
TAI and Department TA Training	TAI training posts its dates ahead of the fall semester. The department TA training occurs in the PBSI first-year student seminar.	The AHGS will communicate the training dates (typically, the TAI occurs prior to the start of the academic term).
<b>Clinical and I/O Students</b> must submit an MDD petition to add a master's degree as a secondary degree. These forms are submitted through <a href="#">DPSS</a> .	November 1	Approved by graduate staff advisor, AHGS, and the graduate and professional school
Complete PBSI 1 <sup>st</sup> Year Graduate Student Seminar	During 1 <sup>st</sup> semester	The AHGS will communicate meeting times and lead this seminar.
<b>Clinical and I/O Students</b> must form a Master's advisory committee and submit a Master's Degree Plan through DPSS.	March 1	Approved by graduate staff advisor (pre-committee), advisory committee, AHGS, and the graduate and professional school.
<b>First year students.</b> Complete first year research project	End of first program year.	Consult with primary advisor and adhere to training area guidelines.
Complete required course work.	---	Students must be enrolled in graduate courses full time during academic year. Consult area specific curriculum documents for required courses.

### Year 2 Steps

*Note.* Steps to the MA degree for Clinical and I/O students are sketched out for completion in two years. This is not a hard department deadline - though it does reflect the optimal timeline to strive towards. Please consult your training area and primary advisor for details about the hard deadlines regarding completion of the MA.

What to do	When/Deadline	Notes
<b>All 2<sup>nd</sup> Year Students</b> must present their first year projects at the PBSI 2 <sup>nd</sup> Year Student Research Celebration	The AHGS will announce the date of the research celebration several months prior to the event. It will typically be held early in the Fall semester.	Posters will be evaluated by the PBSI Graduate Studies committee. Top ranked presenters will receive monetary awards that can be used for research and research-related travel.
<b>All 2<sup>nd</sup> Year Students</b> must form a doctoral advisory committee and submit a doctoral degree plan through DPSS	End of Week 8 of the Fall semester (of second year)	Discuss this early with your primary advisor. Approved by graduate staff advisor (pre-committee), advisory committee, AHGS, and the graduate and professional school.

<b>Clinical and I/O Students</b> should identify and follow posted graduate school deadlines for successfully completing the Master's degree for a spring or summer graduation.	We recommend doing this early in the Fall semester; consult with your primary advisor and training area.	<a href="https://grad.tamu.edu/knowledge-center/dates-and-deadlines/dates-and-deadlines">https://grad.tamu.edu/knowledge-center/dates-and-deadlines/dates-and-deadlines</a>
<b>Clinical and I/O Students</b> check to make sure that the Master's degree plan and advisory committee are up-to-date and that course work is complete	Beginning of Spring Semester	The Graduate Staff Advisor can help with this.
<b>Clinical and I/O Students</b> can submit their thesis research proposal and approval form to the Graduate school.	No later than 20 days prior to submitting the announcement of final defense exam; last day to submit these is typically in early February.	Approved by AHGS, Research Compliance and Biosafety, and the Graduate School. <a href="https://grad.tamu.edu/knowledge-center/forms/research-proposal-approval-form">https://grad.tamu.edu/knowledge-center/forms/research-proposal-approval-form</a>
<b>Clinical and I/O Students</b> can apply for Master's graduation if they are able.	Typically mid-February deadline to avoid a late fee, but students should plan to do this at the start of the spring semester for a May graduation.	The Graduate Staff Advisor can help with this.
<b>Clinical and I/O Students</b> can submit the Request for Final Examination to the Graduate School	At least 10 days before the final exam (thesis defense) date; last day to submit is typically late February for a May graduation.	Approved by Advisory Committee and AHGS
<b>Clinical and I/O Students</b> can defend their thesis, submit the final defense report to the Graduate School, and upload a final copy of the thesis	Typically, the report is due in early March for a May graduation. Check the posted Graduate School Deadlines.	<a href="https://grad.tamu.edu/knowledge-center/dates-and-deadlines/dates-and-deadlines">https://grad.tamu.edu/knowledge-center/dates-and-deadlines/dates-and-deadlines</a>
<b>All students</b> should continue completing required course work.	-----	Consult area specific curriculum documents for required courses.

### **Year 3 through Graduation**

<b>What to do</b>	<b>When/Deadline</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Complete required course work detailed on the approved doctoral degree plan.	Prior to doctoral preliminary exam.	
Complete Preliminary Examination and Submit <a href="#">Checklist and the Report of the Preliminary Exam</a> . [Preliminary exams are area specific; check with your advisor and/or training area curriculum document to determine what constitutes your preliminary exam]	The student should complete the Preliminary Examination no later than the end of the semester following the completion of the formal coursework on the degree plan. Results must be received by the Graduate School 10 working days after exam date.	Approved by the Advisory Committee, AHGS, and Graduate and Professional School
Submit research proposal for dissertation and the <a href="#">Research Proposal Approval Form</a> to the Office of Graduate and Professional Studies.	At least 20 working days prior to submission of the Request and Announcement of Final Examination.	Approved by the Advisory committee, AHGS, Research Compliance and Biosafety, Graduate and Professional School
Apply for a degree online at the <a href="#">Howdy portal</a> ; pay graduation fee.	During the first week of the final semester; pay graduation fee after graduate application is submitted; See The Graduate and Professional School calendar for deadlines.	Approved by the Graduate and Professional School
Submit <a href="#">Request and Announcement of Final Examination</a> to hold and announce final examination.	Must be received by the Graduate and Professional School at least 10 working days before final exam date; see the Graduate and Professional School calendar for deadlines.	Approved by the Advisory committee, AHGS, Graduate and Professional School
Successfully complete the final examination and submit the report of final examination to the Graduate School.	The Report of the Final Examination form should be submitted to the Graduate and Professional School within 10 days following the exam by the department.	Approved by the Advisory committee, AHGS, and Graduate and Professional School
Upload one approved final copy of the dissertation as a single pdf file to etd.tamu.edu and submit the fully signed Dissertation/Record of Study Approval Form to the Graduate and Professional School.	See the <a href="#">Graduate and Professional School calendar for deadlines</a> .	Approved by the Advisory committee, AHGS, and Graduate and Professional School

## PBSI POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

This section provides descriptions of policies and procedures that are central to graduate training in PBSI and commonly used to guide responses to issues that our students might face.

### Annual Evaluation Process

Each training area monitors student progress via a regular review process. The purpose of the review is to help students identify areas of strength and correct areas of weakness. We strongly encourage students to discuss the evaluation process with their faculty advisor and/or training area as early as possible. At minimum, students will be evaluated on central dimensions of their student and assistantship (employee) roles. This will include evaluations on:

- (a) Performance in courses
- (b) Progress towards the degree in terms of milestones (e.g., first-year projects, preliminary examinations, etc.)
- (c) Developmental trajectory as a researcher (e.g., engagement, productivity, etc.)
- (d) Performance in graduate assistantship duties
- (e) Performance in teaching, practicum training, and professional internships for students in those positions

All students will receive a formal document that provides evaluative feedback and concrete developmental objectives moving forward. Although specific expectations and evaluations will be tailored to each individual student's needs and trajectory, there are certain performance markers that trigger negative evaluations and demand immediate corrective action.

- (a) Students are expected to earn a grade of B or higher in all courses. Grades lower than a B are viewed as substandard performance and, although a single grade of C will not automatically result in termination from the graduate program, it will negatively influence the overall evaluation of the student's progress. **A student with a GPA below 3.0 for two consecutive semesters will lose any financial assistance that they are receiving, will no longer be in good standing, and may be dismissed from the program.**
  - (b) Students are expected to make satisfactory progress towards their degree and to meet all requirements for the degree that are set by the Graduate School. Missing deadlines for important milestones (e.g., completion of thesis defense, dissertation proposal, etc.) will trigger negative evaluations and require immediate corrective action. **Insufficient progress for the degree can be grounds for dismissal from the program.**
  - (c) Students are expected to be active in research. Evaluation of research skills will be conducted by the student's primary advisor and the faculty within each student's area of specialization. Primary mentors and their students should set clear expectations and standards for research activity each year (e.g., timelines, projects, etc.). Students will be evaluated against these expectations and underperformance will be documented in the formal evaluation document and can trigger more frequent evaluations (e.g., semester by semester evaluations). **Consistent underperformance in this area can lead to a lack of financial assistance and dismissal from the program.**
  - (d) Most students admitted to the graduate program receive a graduate assistantship of some kind. These assistantships offer experiences that are directly relevant to careers in psychological science – but they are also the form of “employment” that allow students to earn stipends and tuition/fee waivers while in our program. There are a variety of duties that accompany these assistantships. Graduate Assistantships in Research (GAR) carry expectations for work on research activities that are directed by a faculty member. Graduate Assistantships in Teaching (GAT) carry expectations for teaching activity (e.g., laboratory instruction). We expect that all students will perform their assigned assistantship duties in a competent, professional, and conscientious manner. **Failure to do so will result in termination of the assistantship and the funding that comes with it. Problems performing assistantship duties are also grounds for dismissal from the program.**
  - (e) Each student in the Clinical Psychology program is required to complete a professional internship as their last year of training (typically the 5th or 6th year). This training is considered essential to the student's professional development. The student is expected to perform the internship training in a professionally
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competent and ethically acceptable manner. Each Clinical student will be evaluated on the basis of performance during the internship training. **Although this training comes at the end of the student's graduate studies, a negative evaluation of this internship experience may lead to termination from the program without granting the doctoral degree.**

## Changing Advisors and/or Training Areas

Students are admitted into our doctoral programs to work with a particular primary advisor. Sometimes, it becomes clear that the student-advisor fit is poor or that a student's goals no longer align with the training opportunities that a particular lab/advisor can provide. In these situations, students and advisors are expected to discuss viable options for addressing these mismatches. It might be the case that a switch to another training environment is the best solution. The student and advisor should consult with the Associate Head of Graduate Studies (AHGS) about navigating this change. **Switching advisors will not affect a student's funding if they are currently in good standing in the program.**

It may also be the case that an advisor change introduces a need to switch to a different training area. The AHGS will facilitate this sort of transition, as it may require a formal "Change of Major" application and updates to degree plans on file with the Graduate School. Any change in training area will also require a vote of admission from all faculty in the new training area. Students not in good academic standing in their current training area will not be considered for transfer to another concentration, except in rare circumstances handled by the Department Head in consultation with the affected programs, student, and advisor.

## Leaves of Absence

Students who have personal difficulties that prevent them from participating in the program for a given period of time may request a leave of absence. In most cases, a leave of absence is granted for no more than one year. To obtain a leave of absence, the student must write a letter of petition to their training area head. Upon approval of the area, the request is forwarded to the Associate Head of Graduate Studies and Department Head, and then to the Graduate School. **Leaves of absence can trigger termination from the university as an employee because the student will no longer be working in an assistantship. There are implications for employee benefits (e.g., student insurance).** Students exploring a leave of absence should consult with their advisors and the Associate Head of Graduate Studies so that they are aware of these implications.

## Grievance Procedures

All members of the University community are expected to observe high standards of professional conduct and ethical behavior in education and in the supervision of student research and teaching. In a large heterogeneous scholarly community, however, problems may arise.

**Informal Grievance Procedures:** The department strongly encourages all students who believe they have a grievance to pursue informal resolution before initiating a formal grievance. If deemed reasonable by the grievant, a student in Psychological and Brain Sciences is encouraged to discuss the issue with the faculty or staff member with whom the problem has arisen. If a satisfactory solution is not forthcoming or if a discussion with the other party is not reasonable given the situation, the student should use all appropriate avenues, including, but not limited to, discussing the issue with his or her advisor, his or her Area Director, the graduate student representatives to the areas, the Associate Head of Graduate Studies, the Associate Head, or Head of the department, who shall attempt to find a resolution acceptable to all parties. The student may also consult with Graduate Studies, Undergraduate Studies, the International Affairs Center, or other sources.

**Formal Grievance Procedures:** Students can initiate formal grievances and appeals through the Office of Graduate and Professional Studies. This should typically start by consulting with the Graduate School Ombuds Officer (<https://grad.tamu.edu/academics/academic-success-resources/conflict-resolution>). The Ombuds Officer for

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Graduate Education (<https://grad.tamu.edu/academics/academic-success-resources/conflict-resolution/ombuds-services>) represents a valuable resource for questions regarding grievances and appeals. The ombudsperson advocates for the processes of graduate education and provides equal, open access to all parties - students, faculty, staff, and administrators. The range of issues that can be brought to the attention of ombudspersons is not limited to sexual harassment. They can be approached with any complaint and concern ranging from issues related to actions taken by the Chair, through students concerns about their relations with their faculty mentors. Issues of academic integrity and ethics can also be discussed with the ombuds officers before they become formal complaints.

## Professional Conduct Policies

- [APA Code of Conduct](#)
- [Texas A&M University Policies](#)
- [Texas A&M Student Rules](#)

## *Title IX and Harassment*

<https://law.tamu.edu/current-students/student-affairs/title-ix>

Title IX of the Education Amendment of 1972 prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in educational programs and activities at federally funded institutions. Title IX protects students, faculty, staff, and visitors to our campus from all forms of sex discrimination.

Sexual harassment, including sexual violence, is a form of sex discrimination and is prohibited under Title IX. Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal, and nonverbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment when this conduct is so severe, persistent or pervasive that it affects an individual's employment, unreasonably interferes with an individual's work or educational performance, or creates an intimidating or hostile work or educational environment.

The Department Psychological and Brain Sciences will not tolerate sexual harassment by any person associated with the department directed at any member of our community, be it faculty, students, or staff members. Formal complaints alleging sexual harassment will be investigated and adjudicated through the disciplinary mechanisms provided by the department and the university.

In addition, as psychologists, we are expected to understand and appreciate diversity and individual differences. Indeed, this is one of the criteria that are considered in accreditation of doctoral programs in clinical psychology and part of the ethics code of the American Psychological Association. Therefore, the Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences will not tolerate harassment of or discrimination against any individual because of their age, gender, sexual orientation, disability, language, or socioeconomic status by any person who is acting in a role assigned by the department.

## *Dual Roles and Consensual Relationships*

A dual role is a conflict of interest that exists when people simultaneously are involved in a personal or romantic relationship and also a professional relationship in which one party directly or indirectly supervises, directs, or evaluates the professional and/or educational activities of the other. The APA code of ethics specifically prohibits these "multiple relationships" (<https://www.apa.org/ethics/code>).

Texas A&M University prohibits certain kinds of consensual amorous, romantic, and/or sexual relationships. The prohibition below is relevant to graduate students in all assistantship positions (employees).

A system university employee is prohibited from pursuing or having a consensual relationship with an undergraduate student at that institution. A consensual relationship in violation of this section

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may result in disciplinary action against the member employee, up to and including dismissal. An employee may request an exemption from the prohibition set forth in this section from the president or designee of the member for whom the employee works. Exemptions may be granted only in exceptional circumstances. Documentation of an exemption will be signed by the president or designee and placed in the employee's personnel file.

In addition,

Unless alternative arrangements are approved under Sections 4.1 and 4.2, a consensual relationship is prohibited between a member employee and another individual (graduate student, staff, faculty, or third party) who is under the employee's authority or supervision. An individual is under an employee's "authority or supervision" if the employee has one of the following: authority over any term or condition of the other individual's employment or academic status; job duties making the employee directly or indirectly responsible for the other individual's hiring, supervising, evaluating, teaching, coaching, grading, advising, mentoring, or providing benefits to or obtaining benefits from the other individual, including employment. This prohibition applies whether the other individual is an employee, student or third party.

4.1 For a consensual relationship covered by this section, the employee with the hiring, supervisory, evaluative, teaching, coaching, grading or advisory responsibilities, or the employee providing benefits to or obtaining benefits from the third party, must promptly notify their immediate supervisor of the relationship and engage in a discussion of alternative arrangements for hiring, supervising, evaluating, teaching, coaching, grading, advising, mentoring, or providing benefits to or obtaining benefits from the other individual. An employee's failure to promptly self-report a consensual relationship under this section or a consensual relationship under this section that is not remedied through approved alternative arrangements may result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal.

4.2 Documentation of the alternative arrangements will be signed by each affected employee and placed in their personnel file. The individual's immediate supervisor must ensure that the issue is promptly reported in writing to the member chief executive officer. The member retains the right to determine if alternative arrangements are possible and, if so, which arrangement(s) is selected.

## GRADUATE STUDENT FUNDING

Educational expenses for nine months will vary according to your personal needs and course of study. Scholarships & Financial Aid provides an estimated budget for new graduate students (including tuition and fees, books, supplies, transportation, room and board, incidental and living expenses). The latest cost of attendance estimates can be found [here](#).

Students in our program are funded through a variety of different mechanisms, ranging from internal fellowships (e.g., College Merit Fellowships) to external fellowships (e.g., NSF graduate fellowships) to teaching and research assistantships.

### Graduate Assistantships

The majority of our students will be employed as a Graduate Assistant. These positions provide the stipend and tuition/fees waivers that are central to graduate student funding. Initial offer letters to graduate students contain information about the financial support from the department, including the type of support and the number of years the support is available. After the first year, all students will receive letters indicating the type of assistantship they are being offered for subsequent semester funding. These letters will come from the Graduate Staff Advisor. Decisions about which assistantships are offered are determined by funding availability, departmental need,

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student/faculty preference, and performance history. The Department Head and the Associate Head make the final decisions regarding student funding mechanisms.

Graduate students holding assistantships must be registered for a minimum of nine credit hours during a fall or spring semester, or for six credit hours during the summer. Assistantships terminate upon failure to maintain the minimum enrollment requirement. Students serving in these roles are eligible for insurance benefits and cover tuition and fees at the in-state rate. Graduate Assistants cannot be employed greater than 20 hours per week (50% FTE) by anyone without approval from the PBSI Department Head, the student's advisory committee chair, and the Office of Graduate and Professional Studies. **The work required in any assistantship should never exceed 20 hours per week on average.**

If the University pays you, you are an employee of the State of Texas. You are bound by state law and university business and ethics policies. All state employees are required to complete Human Resources trainings. A listing of required training courses can be found in the TrainTraQ portal [here](#).

Should any problems or difficulties arise in carrying out an assistantship, the student should consult with his or her assistantship supervisor (e.g. course instructor, research supervisor, etc.). Acceptance of an assistantship implies a professional commitment, and assistantship duties must be carried out regardless of demands of coursework and other educational or personal responsibilities. Should a problem arise such that the student is unable to complete these duties, he or she should notify his or her advisor and the Graduate Advisor as quickly as possible, and then should make every effort to continue in that assistantship until a replacement can be arranged. **In these ways, the assistantship is like all other types of employment that involve pay, benefits, etc.**

#### **Common Graduate Assistantship Policies**

- Graduate Assistants are employees of the State of Texas bound by state law and University Employee policies.
- Graduate Assistants must be enrolled full time in courses to work in an assistantship.
- All state employees are required to complete Human Resources trainings. A list of required training courses can always be found in the TrainTraQ portal [here](#).
- Vacations consist of university holidays, not academic breaks. This means that students may have to perform job duties on days when the university is open, but classes are not in session (e.g. reading days which typically occur around holidays and exams). You should check the university academic calendar for official university holidays.

#### ***Graduate Assistant Teaching (GAT)***

Teaching Assistantships in the Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences take different forms. Some GATs involve assisting a professor in a course that they teach; some GATs involve teaching a laboratory section of an undergraduate course (e.g., PBSI 301 and/or PBSI 302); some GATs involve teaching an actual course. The GAT funds a student's stipend, their tuition and fees up to 9 credit hours per semester (6 hours in summer), and their employee benefits (e.g., health insurance costs).

#### ***Graduate Assistant Research (GAR)***

Research Assistants are paid to complete research under a specific Principle Investigator (PI). The PI typically is the student's faculty advisor, but may be another faculty member. Research assistantships typically involve assisting a faculty member with their research. The PI, in this case, has secured funding for the graduate student to be involved in the research and the graduate student is employed to be an assistant on the project(s). The GAR funds a student's stipend, their tuition and fees up to 9 credit hours per semester (6 hours in summer), and their employee benefits (e.g., health insurance costs).

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## *Graduate Assistant Non-Teaching (GANT)*

Non-Teaching Assistants typically work 20 hours per week completing various non-teaching duties within the department. This designation is rare in PBSI, but funds a student's stipend, their tuition and fees up to 9 credit hours per semester (6 hours in summer), and their employee benefits (e.g., health insurance costs).

### Payroll

Processing payroll paperwork takes time, especially at the beginning of a semester when hundreds of new employees are being added. Your new employee paperwork must be processed by the deadlines that our business office provides each semester. Like all TAMU employees, Graduate Assistants are paid for work already performed. Students with a nine-month appointment that starts on 9/1 will therefore receive their first paycheck for that appointment at the beginning of October. The business office HR coordinator can always provide details about when students will be paid.

### Health Insurance

All students holding graduate assistantships will be eligible for health insurance beginning 60-days after employment. The university will cover a portion of the monthly premium, with the employee being responsible for the remaining amount. Students who begin receiving health insurance before the 60-day waiting period will be responsible for the entire monthly premium until the waiting period ends. The business office HR coordinator can provide details and information about all things related to student health insurance. Please remember, though, that graduate student health insurance coverage is connected to employment as a graduate assistant.

### Other Funding Opportunities

We encourage students to explore other funding opportunities that they might be eligible for. In particular both [NSF](#) and [NIH](#) offer competitive and prestigious predoctoral fellowships that fund students during graduate training. The process of applying for these can be an incredibly valuable training experience that looks particularly attractive on the CV. All students should discuss these mechanisms with their primary advisor and/or faculty in the department.

[The Office of Graduate and Professional Studies](#) also maintains a detailed list of TAMU and external funding opportunities for new and current graduate students including information on fellowships, scholarships, financial aid, and awards. Texas A&M University administers several loan funds for students who need financial assistance. Students must meet the eligibility requirements of the various programs, be in good standing with the University, and be making satisfactory academic progress. Holding a fellowship or assistantship does not necessarily disqualify one from obtaining an educational loan. Changing fellowships or assistantships, however, may affect the terms of existing loans. It is the responsibility of the student to work with the Financial Aid Office in these circumstances. Information concerning student financial aid programs may be found [here](#).

### Graduate Student Travel and Research Support Funds

There are a number of support mechanisms for graduate student research and travel. Listed below are sources of financial support for which you may apply. If you are eligible, it is strongly recommended that you apply well before the cut-off date so that you will be eligible for available funding. The funds that support these mechanisms often come from finite pools. Funding opportunities will be announced throughout the year via emails posted through Graduate Student Listserv.

#### *PBSI Graduate Student Travel Awards*

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The PBSI Graduate Student Travel Fund was developed to assist students in the dissemination of their work at professional conferences. Students who are in good standing in a PBSI PhD program may apply. To be eligible, students must be scheduled to be a presenter (e.g., talk, a poster) at a National or International conference in their academic area. Funds are not available for local or regional meetings, but are available for virtual conferences. The amount of funding that a student can receive is determined by several factors, including scholarly productivity and accomplishment. Possible funding amounts are spelled out clearly each year in the annual application form. The AHGS will email students the form at the beginning of each fiscal year (~September). Students can apply for these funds once each fiscal year that they are in the program.

### *PBSI Professional Development Awards*

The Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences receives funds from the College of Liberal Arts to support strategic programs for graduate students. The bulk of these funds are used to support professional development opportunities for students. These can include, but are not limited to, attending short courses during the summer or between long semesters at another institution (e.g., ICPSR Summer Methods Program), intensive language courses to develop research skills, and other similar activities. Dissertation related research travel and travel to conferences to present papers cannot be supported with these funds. Possible funding amounts are spelled out clearly each year in the annual application form. The AHGS will email students the form at the beginning of each fiscal year (~September). Students can apply for these funds once each fiscal year that they are in the program.

### *The Graduate and Professional School Research and Presentation Travel Award*

The Graduate and Professional School's Graduate Student Research and Presentation (RAP) Travel Award supports educational and professional development opportunities for graduate students. The program currently reimburses students up to \$750 for travel expenses associated with academic conferences and research projects in the United States and abroad. Information about this opportunity can be found [here](#).

### *The Graduate and Professional School Dissertation Fellowship*

The Texas A&M University Graduate and Professional School frequently offers a Dissertation Fellowship to support students in the dissertation phase of their degree program. This fellowship is intended to support doctoral students in the final analysis of the research topic and the final writing of the dissertation. This fellowship is NOT intended to finance data collection or the completion of doctoral coursework. Priority goes to doctoral students whose primary financial support is NOT related to their research (e.g. GANT, GAL, GAT, Self-funded). Students who have funding related to their dissertation research will be least likely to receive this fellowship. Information about this award can be found [here](#).

## GRADUATE STUDENT TEACHING

Teaching experience is not a departmental requirement. However, we strongly recommend teaching experience for students planning academic careers. There several experiences available.

### Teaching Assistantship Training

All students in our program are required to complete the [Teaching Assistant Institute \(TAI\)](#) hosted by the Center for Teaching Excellence at Texas A&M University and a department specific training hosted by PBSI. We require all students to complete these programs at the beginning of their first semester in the program, regardless of whether or not they are currently assigned to a GAT position. The AHGS will provide details to incoming students about both of these requirements.

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## Graduate Instructor of Record Training

PBSI offers a “Teaching of Psychology” training sequence for graduate students who are seeking opportunities to be an “instructor of record” for an undergraduate psychology course. The sequence consists of two courses.

PBSI 696 is a seminar that provides pedagogical training for graduate students. In this course, students learn how to use active learning, written assignments, technology, and real-world applications in their classes. Additionally, they hear from external speakers from across the campus, highlighting the wealth of resources, skills, and methodologies that are available. Students also complete classroom observations and micro-teaching demonstrations to further develop and reflect on their developing teaching style. Importantly, this course helps graduate students develop their own teacher toolkit that they can use throughout their career, regardless of what course they are teaching.

PBSI 697 is a course tailored to students concurrently teaching an Introduction to Psychology course. Essentially, this is a mentoring course in which students develop skills and materials needed to teach a high-impact interactive class that also satisfies the CORE curriculum requirements. This course is focused entirely on providing and helping students develop the materials for their introductory course, including things like: writing a syllabus, developing lectures, in-class activities (active learning, clips, in-class experiments, etc.), creating exam materials, and satisfying the core curriculum requirements for the course. It is a place to get support, mentoring and clarification as students teach their own course.

## GRADUATE STUDENT RESOURCES

### Mental Health Resources

Taking care of oneself is critical to being successful in graduate school. We encourage students to pay attention to their well-being and we are here to assist in whatever we can. The Graduate and Professional School has a licensed counselor who specializes in graduate and professional student issues. Information about this resource and other Graduate School support services can be found [here](#).

### Library Resources

**Evans Library.** The main university library has several features that are important to graduate students.

- [A specific subject expert](#) who can help students find resources central to psychology and provide introductions to key library resources/features.
- [Library guides](#) that provide information about critical research processes (e.g., writing, systematic literature reviews, etc.)
- Searchable [Databases](#) that are critical to psychological science scholarship (e.g., PSYCINFO).
- [Get It For Me:](#) Request books, articles, theses, dissertations, and other materials for free from the Texas A&M University Libraries or other libraries in the world.

**Helen F. and Saul B. Sells Psychology Resource Collection.** The personal library of S. B. and Helen Sells was donated to the Texas A&M Psychological and Brain Sciences Department. Dr. Sells finished his Ph.D. at Columbia University in 1936 under the direction of Robert S. Woodworth, and he had classes and research training from other well-known psychologists such as Clark Hull, E.L. Thorndike, and Gardner Murphy. Dr. Sells' interest in seeing his library being put to good use was a primary reason for his selecting Texas A&M as the recipient of his personal collection. The Sells Resource Collection is open to PBSI faculty and graduate students. Books can be checked out by contacting the Department Administrative Assistant (Jen Fraustro).

**Medical Sciences Library.** Located on West Campus, the Medical Sciences Library is home to several hundred thousand volumes of Medical Journals related to the medical-science profession. From on-line book retrieval to

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storehouses of information from around the globe, this library has it all.

**West Campus Library.** Located on West campus, this library primarily serves the College of Business Administration and Graduate School of Business and departments within the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. It has a limited, specialized collection of 600 periodicals, reference works, and current monographs in business and agriculture. The library has reading space for 1,000. The focus of the West Campus Library is the R.C. Barclay Reference and Retailing Resource Center. The Barclay Center offers a variety of electronic resources, including compact disk databases, online databases, and access to the Internet, to serve the needs of business and agriculture.

## University Writing Center

The University Writing Center offers graduate students assistance with writing and public speaking, including class assignments, CVs, journal articles, research posters, oral presentations, theses or dissertations, and the oral defense. Please refer to their [website](#) for more details.

## Computers and Printing

[The Texas A&M University Open-Access Computer Labs](#) are available for faculty and students of the University. Seven Open-Access Labs and one dedicated Printing Center provide access to email accounts as well as Web navigation, image-manipulation, desktop publishing, spreadsheet applications, computer-to-computer communications software, programming languages, and a number of course-specific programs. Lab access is 24 hours per day in the Student Computing Center (SCC) in order to better serve the needs of the students and faculty. Equipment varies from lab to lab, but most include Pentium – Based IBM compatible PCs, Apple Macintosh systems, Sun SPARC stations, SGI workstations (which provide access to the campus Supercomputers), optical scanners and a variety of high capacity printers. Color & Transparency printing is also available through the SCC, though this requires special access.

The Open Labs website information about printing at shared kiosks, including the kiosk in the Psychology Building.

## Graduate Transportation and Parking

TAMU operates numerous bus routes to transport students from off-campus locations to campus. There are also numerous parking complexes available to students on campus. Details about both can be found on the transportation services website (<https://transport.tamu.edu/default.aspx>).

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