

Department of Psychology Graduate Student Handbook

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1. Introduction

This handbook brings together information and department-level policies relevant to Psychology graduate students at the University of Pittsburgh. It complements the student handbooks for each of the core program areas in the department (Biological & Health, Clinical, Cognitive, Developmental, Social), which describe program-specific requirements and information. Additionally, a department-level Teaching Handbook provides guidance on teaching within the department. All program-level handbooks are available through the [departmental website](#), and [on KennyNet](#).

Students should be aware that additional requirements and policies apply at the level of the Kenneth P. Dietrich School of Arts & Sciences. These are described in the Dietrich School Graduate Handbook, which includes topics such as: teaching and research assistantships, academic and research integrity, faculty-student relationships, sexual misconduct, and parenting accommodations for graduate students.

[Dietrich School of Arts & Sciences Graduate Studies website](#) (see below for links from that site)

General Policies

- [Academic Integrity Code](#)
- [Faculty-Student Relationship Policy](#)
- [Graduate and Professional Catalog](#)
- [Parental Accommodation Guidelines](#)
- [Request for Parental Accommodation Form](#)
- [University of Pittsburgh Policies and Procedures Home](#)
- [Research Integrity Policy](#)
- [Sexual Harassment Policy](#)

Graduation

- [Graduation Forms](#)
- [Electronic Theses and Dissertations](#)

TA, TF, GSA, GSR, and Predoctoral Trainee/Fellow

- [GSR Policy](#)
- [TA/TF/GSA Policy Statement](#)
- [Predoctoral Trainee/ Predoctoral Fellow Policy](#)
- [TA/TF Handbook](#)
- [Advising and Mentoring](#)

Resources

- [Discounted Software](#): From Adobe to EndNote, Pitt offers software at great prices for students.
- [Writing Center graduate writing support groups and resources](#)

Students are responsible for being familiar with and complying with all levels of University policy and procedures. These are described online:

[Comprehensive listing of University policies and procedures](#)

[University of Pittsburgh Academic Integrity Guidelines and Policy](#)

(see also plagiarism.org)

[University of Pittsburgh Student Code of Conduct](#)

[The Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences Academic Integrity Code](#)

[Guidelines for Responsible Conduct of Research](#)

[University of Pittsburgh Title IX Office](#)

[University Sexual Misconduct Policy](#)

[Non-Discrimination, Equal Opportunity, and Affirmative Action Policy](#)

[Consensual Relationships Policy](#)

[Notice of non-discrimination](#)

[University travel reimbursement policy](#)

Finally, graduate students are expected to adhere to the current Ethical Principles of Psychologists, the Code of Conduct and related policies of the American Psychological Association (<https://www.apa.org/ethics/code>) and the official policies of the federal Office for Human Research Protection (<https://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/regulations-and-policy/index.html>).

2. Organization of Graduate Training

Faculty advisors

The Department uses an apprenticeship model of research training. In this model, students engage in an increasingly independent program of research over the course of their training, supervised by a faculty advisor chosen by the student. A student's program of research typically includes a component that is closely related to the research interests of the student's faculty advisor and may also involve work done in collaboration with one or more additional faculty members inside or outside of the Department. Faculty advisors may have primary appointments in the Department, or they may have primary appointments in other departments (e.g., the Department of Psychiatry) and be approved by the relevant program to train graduate students in Psychology. The selection of an advisor occurs as part of the admissions process and typically a student works with the same primary advisor throughout the student's training. However, it is possible for a student to switch advisors (see [Raising and Resolving Issues and Concerns](#)).

Program Areas

Graduate training is organized around five core programs (Biological & Health, Clinical, Cognitive, Developmental, and Social). The Department has delegated to these core programs major responsibilities associated with graduate training, including recruitment and admission decisions; curricular requirements beyond those mandated by the Department; review and evaluation of student progress; and training requirements beyond those mandated by the University or Department.

The core programs are complemented by two standing joint programs (Clinical-Developmental and Clinical-Health), and an individualized cross-program training option (see [Cross-Program Training in the Department of Psychology](#)). A student in more than one program is responsible for meeting requirements associated with both programs, with the student's progress overseen by both of the relevant Program Chairs.

Graduate Education Committee

The programs work together through the Graduate Education Committee. This committee is chaired by the Director of Graduate Studies and includes the core Program Chairs, the Associate Chair of the Department, the Graduate Administrator, and two student representatives. This committee meets about once per month during the academic year to consider graduate training issues from a department-wide perspective. Students with department-wide suggestions or concerns about graduate training should bring them to the attention of a member of this committee.

Kenneth P. Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences

The overall administrative responsibility for departmental students falls to the Graduate Studies Office within the Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences. This office oversees the implementation of all University policies and requirements associated with graduate training and handles the formal record-keeping associated with students' completion of major training milestones.

3. Key Individuals Involved in Graduate Training

The individuals listed below, in addition to a student's faculty advisor, have specific responsibilities for supporting graduate student training. Students should feel free to contact any of these individuals with questions or concerns. The Department website provides names and contact information.

Director of Graduate Studies

This faculty member, appointed by the Department Chair, establishes and monitors departmental graduate program policies together with the Program Chairs and the Associate Chair of the Department. This person can provide confidential, impartial advice from a department-wide perspective. They also oversee any student appeal or petition to the Graduate Education Committee (see [Adjudication of student appeals and petitions](#)).

Program Chairs

Each of the core programs (Biological & Health, Clinical, Cognitive, Developmental, Social) has a Program Chair who is appointed by the Department Chair. They have program-level responsibilities for graduate training, including recruitment and admission decisions, curricular requirements beyond those mandated by the Department, specific aspects of milestone requirements, and annual review of student progress. These individuals are usually the first person a student should turn to for questions or assistance.

Graduate Administrator

This staff member has administrative responsibility for course registration, applications, admissions, milestone documentation, graduation procedures, University regulations, and other record-keeping. This individual is the go-to-person for questions about University administration and record-keeping aspects of graduate training.

Mentoring Committee Members

Every student in the Department has a mentoring committee consisting of the student's advisor and at least one other faculty member appointed by the student's Program(s). The committee is chaired by a faculty member other than the advisor and is expected to meet at least annually. This committee can be a good resource for discussing points of concern and for obtaining training, professional development, and career planning advice. Students should feel free to contact committee members outside of the meeting context for individual advice.

Department Administrator

This staff member oversees the allocation of departmental student research and travel funds, requests for reimbursements and student-sponsored events, and assists with record-keeping of student admissions and support throughout training.

Director of Diversity Initiatives

This faculty member chairs the departmental committee on Equity, Inclusion, and Community, which is open to all faculty, staff, and students with a shared interest in increasing representation, pride, inclusion, and equity within the department and in the broader research community. This individual also works with the Department Chair to help create a positive environmental climate that is welcoming to all and can help relay concerns and suggestions about the climate and

departmental culture to the Chair for action.

Associate Chair of the Department

This faculty member monitors and implements TA/TF assignments and assists with record-keeping of student admissions and support throughout training.

Chair of the Department

This faculty member, who is the administrative head of the Department, has overall responsibility for graduate training in the department and receives annual student feedback about faculty advising. The Chair can provide confidential, impartial advice from a department-wide perspective and play an active role in resolving student problems if necessary.

Student Representatives

The Graduate Education Committee includes student representation. Additionally, each core Program has one or more student representatives, as does the Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences Graduate Council. These representatives can be approached with suggestions and concerns about graduate training, especially for those concerns best brought to the attention of a larger body.

Graduate Student Ombudsperson

If a student believes their concerns cannot be addressed within the academic department the Ombudsperson from the Dietrich School can help mediate conflicts and provide information about institutional policies related to the student's issues, including the University's grievance procedures. The Ombudsperson directs students to further resources on campus as appropriate. The Ombudsperson for graduate students in the Dietrich School is Philippa Carter, who also serves as Director of Diversity Initiatives and Academic Affairs. Ms. Carter can be contacted at pkc3@pitt.edu or 412-624-6096.

[Click here to schedule a meeting with Philippa](#)

4. Student Resources

Support for living expenses and tuition

The department provides support for students in good standing for up to 6 years and in some cases longer. The support includes a stipend or fellowship support for living expenses, health insurance, public transportation, and tuition reimbursement. Support comes from a mix of sources that vary across students and across years of training. These sources include Graduate Student Researcher (GSR), Teaching Assistant (TA), Teaching Fellow (TF), Clinic Assistant appointments, University and external fellowships, and appointments to institutional training grants. Clinical students receive funding in their final year directly from their internship host institutions.

Students are expected to work proactively with their advisor to formulate their funding mix throughout their graduate training. As part of this effort, they complete an annual survey about their anticipated funding needs in the coming year, which assists students and the department in planning graduate admissions and TA/TF allocations.

Criteria for making TA/TF assignments

Important factors in making TA/TF assignments include area of graduate training, content area of the course to be taught, need to complete the one-term teaching requirement, and quality of academic progress. Generally, students are not allowed to serve as TFs in areas for which they have not had graduate level preparation, and students who have not made good academic progress are not granted high priority for TA/TF assignments. Furthermore, students typically do not serve as TFs in their first year in the program. Consideration is also given to student preference in course selection, although it is not possible to guarantee that each student's preferences can be met. In general, priority will be given to less senior students and those who are fulfilling their teaching requirement.

Students beyond the sixth year may receive TA/TF support, depending on the department's teaching needs and the availability of appropriate courses. In general, students beyond the sixth year will have lower priority for teaching support than will more junior students.

Summer courses are rated by the University as 0.75 TF positions. Supplemental fellowship funding of the remaining 0.25 stipend has been provided by the Dean in the past but is not guaranteed. If only partial funding is available, it will be distributed to less senior students first, as described above.

Fellowships, awards, research and travel funds

1. Departmental research and travel funds

Each fiscal year, for up to a total of six years, all students have access to departmental travel and research funding, as long as they are in good standing (i.e., not on Provisional or Probationary Status). The amount is established on a periodic basis and becomes available at the start of each fiscal year (July 1 of a given year).

Beginning July 1, 2023, the policy is as follows (on a trial basis): graduate students will be awarded \$500 per year for travel and other research expenses, capped at a total of \$3000 during graduate training.

Students may use their allocation to support a flexible mix of scientific travel, research expenses, and training-related expenses (e.g., internship travel costs, scholarly book purchases, academic workshop fees, membership fees for professional societies, etc.).

Given the university policy that any technology that is purchased with university funds must be returned to the department when the purchaser leaves the university, students may not combine these funds with non-university funds to purchase technology, and any application for using these funds to purchase technology must be accompanied by (1) a clear explanation of how this technology is vital for a particular research project and (2) a written statement, signed by the advisor, that the advisor will assume responsibility for making sure the technology stays in the department after the student leaves the university. Please copy the DGS on these.

In rare cases, students may request an exception to our typical procedures so that they may either gain access to their funds a year early (and then not have funds in the subsequent year) or bank their funds from one year to use the following year instead. We expect that these exceptions will happen infrequently; an online form will be used for exception requests.

To gain approval for using these funds, students must email the Department Administrator,

with their faculty advisor copied on the email. The email should: (a) indicate the amount of the request, (b) list the total the student has spent from her or his allocated amount thus far, and (c) provide a brief statement for how the requested funding will benefit training. It is strongly recommended that students obtain pre-approval of a request before they commit to an expense, because requests will be denied if they are deemed ineligible.

Please also note the [university travel reimbursement guidelines](#).

These must always be followed, otherwise reimbursement will not be possible.

2. Departmental and program-level student fellowships and awards

Department faculty are involved in multiple training grants that provide stipend support for students in Psychology and other departments. Information about these training grants is usually circulated via email to relevant faculty and potentially interested students. Students can learn more by discussing the topic with their advisors or Program Chairs. The Department and individual Programs sponsor multiple annual student achievement awards for teaching, research, and mentorship. Most include a modest monetary prize. Award information is disseminated and maintained by the Department Administrator and relevant Program Chairs.

3. Other sources of stipends, awards, research, and travel funding

Students are encouraged to investigate award and funding opportunities outside of the department. The Dietrich School of Arts & Sciences provides support for graduate student fellowships and travel, and it sponsors several annual awards. This support includes the prestigious Andrew Mellon Predoctoral Fellowship, which is awarded to advanced graduate students. The Graduate Student Organization also sponsors travel funding. Additionally, the Office of Research provides information on internal and external fellowship opportunities such as NSF and NIH fellowships, for which our students have been very competitive. More details can be found on the websites of these units. Students have responsibility for seeking out and taking advantage of other external prizes and awards, such as travel awards for scientific conferences and dissertation research awards; Program Chairs and other faculty members can sometimes be helpful in identifying these.

Other valuable resources

Students have access to a variety of resources within the department. These include computing services support, statistical consulting, a shareable archive of fellowship documents and other useful information, a teaching mentor, teaching materials from previous TFs, a professional development library, and an alumni database. Many of these resources are available through the [graduate student page on KennyNet](#). Students who desire information about any of these resources should contact the Graduate Administrator.

The University offers a wide array of services and support. Major hubs are highlighted below. More information about these and other resources can be found on the Department website.

The Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences maintains a [graduate studies website](#) filled with resources and relevant links for graduate students. These include resources for professional development, experiencing Pittsburgh, teaching, enhancing diversity, graduate student leadership, financial assistance and fellowship opportunities, and student life.

The [University Center for Teaching and Learning](#) provides a rich array of teaching-related

resources. These include access to teaching technology, individualized tutoring, workshops, advice on creating teaching portfolios, and an excellent teaching handbook.

The [University Library System \(ULS\)](#) has a dedicated Psychology Librarian who is available for consultation. ULS services include provision of dissertation writing carrels, article delivery, research consultation, guidance on electronic thesis preparation, and assistance with digital management of references, research profiles, publications, and data. Importantly, the library supports the publication costs associated with Open Access journals.

The [Clinical and Translational Science Institute \(CTSI\)](#) supports training in the responsible conduct of science through an online portal and an annual workshop series.

The [Office of Research](#) provides a database regarding funding and fellowships that can be searched to identify possible sources of stipend and research support.

The [Writing Center](#) provides a place where graduate students can work on writing. The Center provides both individualized tutoring by appointment and group-based writing events (e.g., writing days).

The [Office of Academic Career Development](#) provides resources for career success. It is oriented toward the health sciences, but its website contains valuable general resources (e.g., a video library) and it hosts numerous events that are open to the campus community.

The [Center for Doctoral and Postdoctoral Career Development](#) provides resources for professional development. These include a seminar series that helps graduate students take charge of their career development and another in which professionals from different career fields share their experiences.

Pitt is a member of the [National Center for Faculty Development & Diversity](#). This provides access to a wide array of resources relevant to graduate students, such as the Dissertation Success Curriculum for graduate students.

The [Office of Student Affairs](#) provides resources to support student life and a positive work-life balance. Its website content is slanted towards the undergraduate population, but these resources are also available for graduate students. This is the place to look for information on counseling and mental health, disabilities services, university support for diversity and inclusion, student pricing for seats to arts events, volunteer opportunities, fitness and recreation, etc.

[Disability Resources and Services](#) provides support to students who would like to pursue reasonable accommodations and services during their training. Note that pursuing these earlier in training is generally better than doing so later; offered accommodations can be waived but it is typically better to have these on file if needed.

[Global Operations Support](#) provides assistance with international travel, including required registration of international travel and health resources for global travel.

The [Office of International Services](#) provides services and community to support international graduate students.

The [English Language Institute](#) provides support and coursework designed to enhance classroom communication for international teaching assistants.

[Plagiarism.org](#) provides information about what plagiarism is and how to avoid it.

5. Cross-Program Training in the Department of Psychology

Students can design and formalize a program of cross-training involving any combination of our five core training areas, as described below.

Administration of cross-training

- Students must first be admitted into a departmental core Program.
- The admitting Program will be the Administrative Head for the cross training.
- For cross-training that involves the Clinical Program, the Clinical Program must be the Administrative Head program. Students who wish to pursue cross-training in Clinical-Developmental or Clinical-Health must follow the procedures associated with these joint programs. Students who are not admitted into the Clinical Program cannot pursue Clinical training under these procedures.
- With the exception of the circumstances described above, students may formally pursue any combination of cross-program training. Note that some programs may have already developed established cross-training programs with detailed outlines of requirements.
- Students who wish to add a second training area must obtain a letter of approval from each relevant Program Chair and their primary research mentor.
- Approval letters will be reviewed by the Director of Graduate Studies, who will coordinate with the Graduate Administrator to formally acknowledge the joint training commitment. Documentation of approval will be maintained in the student's academic record.
- Approval to add a cross training area can be granted as part of the initial admissions process or after the commencement of training (cross affiliation will typically begin before the start of a student's 3rd year).
- As part of the approval process, a student will provide a cross-training plan that (a) describes the rationale for cross-training, (b) outlines the coursework that will satisfy the requirements of both programs, and (c) details the student's plans for cross-cutting research experiences and coursework. This statement should be accompanied by information about the student's training record and comment on the student's ability to take on the additional demands associated with cross-training.
- The relevant Program Chairs will review the submitted materials and, in consultation with each other and the faculty in the involved programs, reach a decision about whether to approve the proposed cross-training plan.
- Students will follow the specific milestone requirements of the Administrative Head Program.
- As part of the annual report process, students will comment on their cross-training progress.
- Students will receive an annual evaluation letter from the Chair of the Administrative Head Program, with an opportunity for review by the Chair of the cross-program.
- Students will have at least one member from each training area on their mentoring committee and all their milestone committees.

Requirements associated with cross-training

- Students should have a program of research that will benefit from the cross-training.

- Students are expected to be active members of the scholarly communities associated with each of their training programs (though some adjustment for dual-training demands will be made). For instance, frequent attendance at the talk series of each program is expected.
- Students are expected to gain some research experience in both areas of study. This may come from a variety of sources, and the students' plans in this area should be described in their cross-training plans. Options include (but are not limited to): (a) working with a primary advisor whose work cuts across the program areas, (b) working with a faculty collaborator to extend into a training area outside of their primary advisor's expertise, or (c) completing one or more "rotation experiences" via enrollment in one or more directed research courses (3 credits) supervised by a faculty member who can provide exposure to a training area outside of the primary advisor's expertise.
- Students must satisfy the course requirements of both programs, as indicated in the approved training plan. Students should begin by consulting the Program Handbooks of each program to determine the required coursework for each and then work with their advisor, their mentoring committee, and the respective Program Chairs to define the coursework that will satisfy each program's requirements. Note that some flexibility may be available, with individual accommodations possible with the approval of the Program Chairs. Typically, required coursework will include both programs' core courses at a minimum. By taking advantage of the elective options in each program, cross-training can often be completed without a substantial increase in a student's overall course load.

6. Degree and Milestone Requirements

Overview

The Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences (DSAS) prescribes six milestones that must be completed to obtain a Ph.D. degree. These DSAS milestones partially overlap with department-level milestones that mark a student's progress through training (see [Degree and Milestone Requirements](#)). Each of the core programs in the department also has specific requirements that are described in the Program Handbooks.

Students are responsible for providing timely information about the completion of each milestone to the Graduate Administrator. DSAS milestone information must be on file in the DSAS Dean's Office before a degree is granted. Additionally, a student must be registered in the term in which a DSAS milestone is entered on the student's official record.

In addition to the milestones students are required to complete a one-term teaching requirement (see [Teaching Requirements, Policies, and Resources](#)).

Master's level milestones

A. Propose a Master's thesis or thesis equivalency (Department Milestone #1)

Passing this milestone indicates that a student has identified a research project that will be suitable for a Master's thesis, once the work has been successfully completed.

B. Completion of a Preliminary Exam (DSAS Milestone #1)

A student passes this milestone when they have satisfactorily completed the core courses required by the student's Program(s). As soon as a student finishes these, they should contact the Graduate Administrator to distribute the milestone card to be electronically approved by the relevant Program Chair(s). This milestone may be completed before or after DSAS Milestone #2, described below. Because course requirements and sequencing vary across programs, the department does not specify a specific rate of progress towards this DSAS Milestone.

Generally, students complete this requirement within the first three years.

C. Master's Thesis Defense (Department Milestone #2), which is also Final Oral Examination of Master's Thesis (DSAS Milestone #2)

Passing this milestone indicates that a student has written and orally defended a Master's thesis document, or an equivalent described in a Program Handbook. As part of the Final Oral Examination, a decision is made regarding whether the student is approved or not approved to continue training at the doctoral level.

D. Formal receipt of a M.S. degree (optional)

Once a student has documented completion of DSAS Milestones #1 and #2, and earned at least 30 credits, they may choose to formally obtain a Master's of Science (M.S.) degree. To do so, they must apply for graduation and submit an appropriately formatted Electronic Thesis to the Office of Graduate Studies before the M.S. can be awarded.

All students are reviewed by their programs at completion of the Master's and either approved or not approved for further study toward the PhD. This decision is communicated to DSAS as part of the departmental certification of the degree requirements. If a student has not been

approved for doctoral studies, the M.S. degree would become the student's terminal degree. Otherwise, the student will begin to work towards the Ph.D. level milestones described below.

Ph.D. level milestones

A. Specialty Exam Proposal (Department Milestone #3)

Passing this milestone indicates that a student has identified an appropriate topic for a scholarly review that will connect meaningfully with the student's planned program of doctoral research. The scholarly review takes the form of a Specialty Paper, or its alternative, as described within each Program Handbook.

B. Specialty Exam Defense (Department Milestone #4), which is also Comprehensive Examination for the Ph.D. (DSAS Milestone #3)

Passing this milestone indicates that a student has successfully completed a written Specialty Paper and its oral defense, or the equivalent. Passing fulfills the DSAS requirements for a Comprehensive Examination for the Ph.D.

C. Dissertation Proposal (Department Milestone #5), which is also Admission to Candidacy for the Doctoral Degree (DSAS Milestone #4)

Passing this departmental milestone indicates that a student has identified a research project that will be suitable for a doctoral dissertation, once the work has been successfully completed. This is a Departmental Milestone that is closely intertwined with a formal process required by DSAS by which a student designates a Dissertation committee and gains Admission to Candidacy for Doctoral Degree. Consequently, this milestone has four special administrative requirements.

First, the signatures of the student's dissertation committee members on the Candidacy form indicate their approval of the student's dissertation proposal. The Committee must consist of at least four members of the Graduate Faculty, three from the Psychology Department and one from another department or university. Note that not everyone on the "faculty" is a member of the "Graduate Faculty." The committee must also meet the DSAS Milestone requirements. In some cases, outside members of the committee have to be approved by the Dean of Graduate Studies. A student must check with both the relevant Program Chair(s) and the Graduate Administrator when forming the committee to assure that all member requirements are met. The student should be sure to allow time for the approval process before scheduling a proposal meeting. Failure to take these steps well in advance of the proposal meeting can significantly derail milestone progress.

Per DSAS requirements, the dissertation proposal meeting may take place either in person or remotely. However, the student, committee chair, and at least one other committee member must attend the dissertation defense in-person. If a student has co-chairs, then the student, BOTH co-chairs, and at least one other member must attend in person. If the defense will have any configuration other than this, a Remote Participation Request form must be submitted and approved prior to the defense. The Graduate Administrator can assist in completing this request form. The student is responsible for informing all committee members, including those not on campus, of this requirement.

Third, the Admission to Candidacy Form must be signed and processed a minimum of eight months prior to the final oral dissertation defense. The Office of Graduate Studies considers the date of the student's admission to candidacy as the date on which it is approved, not the

date on which the meeting was held. For this reason, it is very important that the Candidacy form be turned in to the Graduate Administrator as soon as it is signed. If the student neglects to turn in the form soon after the meeting, it can significantly delay completion of the Ph.D.

Fourth, DSAS requires that meetings of the doctoral committee must occur at least once every 12 months from the date the student's admission to doctoral candidacy is recorded. During these meetings, the committee assesses the student's progress toward the degree and discusses objectives for the following year and a timetable for completing degree requirements. A record of each meeting must be maintained in the student's departmental file. The student is responsible for making sure that these meetings are held and that notes from the meeting are placed in the student's departmental file.

D. Dissertation Defense (Department Milestone #6), which is also Final Oral Examination of the Dissertation (DSAS Milestone #5)

Passing this milestone indicates that a student has successfully defended a dissertation. As noted above, the student, committee chair, and at least one other committee member must attend the dissertation defense in person. If a student has co-chairs, then the student, BOTH co-chairs, and at least one other member must attend in person. Students should consult with the Graduate Administrator to obtain approval for any deviation from these requirements and must ensure that all committee members are aware of their attendance obligations.

E. Dissertation Approved (DSAS Milestone #6)

Completing this milestone indicates that all revisions of the dissertation have been completed and approved by the Dissertation committee.

F. Formal receipt of a Ph.D. degree

Once a student has documented completion of all six DSAS Milestones, and all department and program-level requirements, they are eligible to obtain a Ph.D. degree. To do so, they must apply for graduation and submit an appropriately formatted Electronic Thesis to the Office of Graduate Studies. The Graduate Administrator can assist with the relevant paperwork. University Library staff can provide guidance on the ETD process (see [Student Resources](#)).

Documenting the completion of a milestone

1. There are separate electronic milestone cards and forms for each DSAS Milestone. Department Milestones #1 (Master's Proposal) and #3 (Special Exam Proposal) are documented by a departmental form. Please see the Graduate Administrator to assist in completing the forms via DocuSign. The remaining Department Milestones are documented through completion of the corresponding DSAS Milestone paperwork. At the conclusion of any milestone meeting or completion of any milestone, please contact the Graduate Administrator to begin distribution of the milestone card to each committee member via DocuSign. Note that DSAS Milestones #5 (Dissertation Defense) and #6 (Dissertation Approval) now must be documented separately. It is important to inform the Graduate Administrator as soon as possible (within two weeks) both after the defense and also after any revisions are approved. The Graduate Administrator will record the milestone information in the department records and provide relevant Program Chair(s) with copies. For DSAS Milestone events, The Graduate Administrator will submit milestone cards to the Graduate Studies Office for processing. It is important that the student reach out to the Graduate Administrator to begin the completion process of the departmental forms/milestone cards immediately after they complete a milestone to avoid any delays in processing.

IMPORTANT NOTE: This document is not exhaustive. For additional information about graduate requirements, see the Departmental & DSAS Graduate Studies websites. Detailed information about requirements is also provided when a student submits an application for graduation.

7. Satisfactory and Timely Degree Progress

Satisfactory progress towards degree

As the highest degree conferred in recognition of academic achievement, a Ph.D. implies specialized expertise, broad related knowledge, and the commitment and ability to carry out independent scholarly inquiry of significant scientific merit. Students are expected to:

1. Complete course requirements in a timely manner and maintain a minimum 3.0 grade point average, with no course grade below B- or other grade minimum established by the student's Program(s). If a student's GPA goes below 3.0, the university will place them on academic probation, and they will not be eligible to hold TA/TF/GSA or university awarded pre-doctoral appointments.
2. Complete Program, Department, and DSAS degree requirements in a timely manner as specified in their Program Handbook(s) and in the timeline below.
3. Demonstrate the motivation, commitment, and ability to design and carry out research of publishable quality. Intellectual contributions and scholarly abilities of students are expected to increase over time in the program.
4. Demonstrate the motivation, commitment, and ability to identify and articulate significant substantive issues in the field and to think and write integratively, critically, and creatively about them. The level of scholarship is expected to increase over time in the program.
5. Demonstrate the motivation, commitment, and ability to sustain problem-oriented, theoretically-grounded scientific inquiry and to disseminate scholarship effectively in written and oral forms. The quality of the scholarly products, both written and oral, is expected to increase over time in the program.
6. Meet their responsibilities as graduate students (see [Graduate Student Responsibilities](#)).

Students' progress relevant to these expectations will be evaluated annually (see [Evaluation of Student Progress](#)). Failure to comply with these expectations, or failure to address and resolve inadequate progress or significant weaknesses constitute grounds for dismissal from training.

Note that the Dietrich School of Arts & Sciences has implemented a change to the summer term's required credits and has added a new course registration called "Summer Milestone Study" (SMS). You are no longer required to register for 3-credits during the summer term, and instead will just need to be registered in the SMS course (or FTDB if you have passed your PhD Comp exam and have 72+ credits). This course takes the place of any non-requirement courses that you may take over the summer, such as Independent Study, Directed Study, Research & Thesis, etc. (excluding FTDB). This course does not have any meetings or requirements to it, and is just used for registration purposes. SMS is worth 0-credits and does not have any negative impact to your tuition. Unfortunately, because this course is worth 0-credits, any credits that you were previously taking through non-requirement courses will need to be taken elsewhere in your Fall and Spring terms.

Any specific degree requirement courses that you may take over the summer will be unaffected by this change and can still be taken for up to 3 credits. For example, the Clinical program's PSY 2220: Clinical Practicum course will be unaffected as it is a degree requirement.

Timely progress towards degree

All graduate students in the Department of Psychology are expected to complete a doctoral degree in a timely fashion (4-6 years, excluding a final internship year for Clinical students). To meet this goal, it is important that students and faculty work together to ensure that each student is making appropriate progress and that the department’s expectations are clearly communicated. To this end, the Graduate Education Committee has established a timeline that outlines optimal, potentially problematic, and unacceptable rates of progress. In addition to providing a communicative function, this timeline will play a role in the annual evaluations of student accomplishments and the quality of faculty mentoring.

Faculty in the department recognize that the progress of each student will vary, and for this reason rates of progress are defined in terms of various “zones,” rather than specific cut-off dates for each milestone requirement. The three zones – green, yellow, and red – are defined below.

Table 1: Expected Rate of Progress

Year	1			2			3			4			5			6			7			8		
Term (Fall=1, Spr=2)	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
Propose Masters Equivalency		X	X	X	X	X	X	X																
Defend Masters Equivalency				X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X													
Propose Specialty Exam						X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X									
Defend Specialty Exam*							X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X							
Propose Dissertation									X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Defend Dissertation											X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

* Estimate: Time limits for completion of the Speciality Exam are established by each program, based upon when the exam is commenced.

Table 1 above outlines the rate at which students are expected to progress through the milestones associated with the Department’s graduate training programs. The purple line shows the end of guaranteed funding. In 2024, the department revised the charts so that all yellow zones are two semesters (as shown in these tables). If this change ends up lengthening our average time-to-degree, we may change back to the former system. For all student cohorts accepted prior to 2022, the zones are pushed back by two semesters to account for pandemic-related delays. Table 2 below shows this revised timeline.

Table 2: Expected Rate of Progress. Revised to include 2-semester buffer zone, February 2022 (for all cohorts accepted prior to 2022).

Year	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	
Term (Fall=1, Spr=2, Sum=3)	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	
Propose Masters Equivalency				X	X	X	X	X	X	X												
Defend Masters Equivalency						X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X									
Propose Specialty Exam								X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X						
Defend Specialty Exam*								X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X					
Propose Dissertation										X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Defend Dissertation												X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

* Estimate: Time limits for completion of the Specialty Exam are established by each program, based upon when the exam is commenced.

NOTE: If a student receives a parental leave, then all zone requirements will move back one semester.

Time-to-degree zone status (green, yellow, red)

Green (optimal) zone: Completing each milestone requirement within a Year/Term that is coded as green will yield a doctoral thesis in the expected 4-6 years.

Yellow (cautionary) zone: This is considered to be a cautionary zone. For some students, spending time in the Yellow Zone is not a problem as long as milestone progress does not slip into the Red Zone. This is especially true if performance is otherwise high (e.g., coursework is strong, the student has multiple research projects, the work has resulted in conference presentations and journal submissions), or if the student experienced a temporary research or personal setback that stalled progress. For other students, time in the Yellow Zone may be viewed with a high degree of concern by faculty. This is especially true when the outer range of the Yellow Zone is approaching without a successful milestone event in sight, or when slow progress toward the degree is coupled with other signs of lackluster performance. There are multiple factors that may place a student in this less optimal position. These include unanticipated research setbacks, a nonproductive student-advisor relationship, personal setbacks caused by physical or mental health problems, a low degree of enthusiasm about the academic research track, or a sense of isolation from the departmental faculty and graduate student peers. Regardless of the cause, it is imperative that students and faculty work together to identify the cause(s) behind a problematic level of performance and develop a plan for positive change. Students should not wait for faculty to determine that a problem exists – instead, if they are concerned about their progress they should confer with a relevant individual ([Key Individuals Involved in Graduate Training](#)) to address relevant issues or concerns ([Raising and Resolving Issues and Concerns](#)). Students in the yellow zone will receive a formal warning letter from the Director of Graduate Studies indicating the steps (and required dates of successful completion of those steps) that need to be taken to avoid being placed on University Academic Probation and eventual dismissal from the student’s doctoral training program.

Red (danger) zone: Students who reach the Red Zone will automatically be placed on Provisional Status. They may also be placed on University Academic Probation and will receive a formal letter outlining the steps that must be taken to avoid dismissal from the student’s doctoral training program.

A student's rate of progress through the various training milestones provides a valuable internal measure of performance. But students should also be mindful that individuals who are external to the department will typically give substantially more weight to measures of achievement that appear in an individual's curriculum vitae. The most important of these measures is the number of peer-reviewed publications, especially first-authored publications. A variety of other measures, such as the number of conference presentations, history of honors and awards, and documented teaching and mentoring experience, also tend to receive close examination. With this in mind, the department has established the following recommended targets to help guide students and advisors:

1. Students are encouraged to present their work locally at least several times during their graduate career. There are multiple poster session opportunities each year and program-level talk series that provide valuable training opportunities.
2. Students should present a first-author poster or talk at a national forum at least every other year. Students interested in an academic research career should strive to leave the program with at least three national conference presentations, with at least two of these being first-author submissions.
3. Students should aim to submit their initial first-author publication by the end of their 3rd year. An earlier submission is preferable, and the lack of a submission by the end of the 4th year is a point of concern. The first paper will often derive from the Master's thesis.
4. Throughout training, students should aim to be working on 1-3 research projects at any given time (not necessarily all as the first author). The number of projects will depend on several factors, including the amount of effort each project requires, the research environment in which the student is situated, and the ability of the student to juggle multiple projects and responsibilities.
5. Students should tackle a dissertation project that is expected to produce at least one first-author publication. This work should be submitted within one year of completing the dissertation.
6. Students interested in an academic research career should strive to leave the program with at least two publications and a third published or planned from the dissertation. At least two of the published or planned publications should be first-author publications.
7. All students should develop a teaching philosophy and record of teaching success. Students interested in a teaching career should have experience teaching two or more different courses.
8. Students are encouraged to take advantage of undergraduate mentoring opportunities, which can help develop and document research training and mentorship skills.
9. Students are encouraged to seek out and take advantage of opportunities to compete for fellowships and other academic awards (see [Student Resources](#)). These can provide valuable sources of funding, and they serve as indicators of research quality and intellectual achievement.

8. Teaching Requirements, Policies, and Resources

Teaching Requirements

The Department of Psychology requires all graduate students to teach a course as part of their graduate training. This requirement can be met by serving as the instructor for a departmental course or certain lab or recitation sections. Students receive support as a Teaching Fellow during the term in which the teaching requirement is being met. Students are required to complete their teaching requirement within their six years of training, but are encouraged to do so by the end of their fourth year.

It is possible to petition the Graduate Education Committee to ask them to approve an alternative teaching experience (e.g., teaching a summer workshop; TAing that involved much more than the traditional TA role) to satisfy the teaching requirement. Students seeking such approval must write a memo to the Graduate Education Committee in which they document the ways in which the three following criteria are met, and include approval by a supervising faculty member who was involved in the teaching activity.

- *Instructional activities.* The alternative experience should involve the core elements of teaching a course: planning course structure or revising an existing plan and/or developing new class materials, delivering lectures to students, assessing students, and responding to student questions/concerns.
- *Independence.* For the core instructional activities, the graduate student may begin with an initial model or draft, but they should either create or substantially revise/update the materials (e.g., the lecture slides) and implement the activities independently (give the presentation, directly respond to students).
- *Intensity.* The independent instructional activities should be roughly equivalent in length/intensity of a regular course.

Students are also required to take a three-credit teaching seminar. This requirement can be met by taking the departmental Teaching of Psychology course (PSY 2970; typically offered each fall) or the seminar offered by the Faculty Development office (FACDEV 2200). It is strongly recommended that students enroll either during the term prior to their first TF assignment or during the term of their first assignment. Each Spring, the department also offers a one-credit teaching preparation course to assist students who will be teaching in the accelerated six-week format of the summer term. Although all students who plan to teach in the summer are encouraged to take this course in the spring term, it does not fulfill the graduation requirement of completing a three-credit teaching seminar.

In rare instances, students with extensive prior experience in college-level teaching may be granted an exception to these training requirements. Requests for exceptions must be approved first by the student's program and then by the Graduate Education Committee.

Teaching Handbook and Teaching Mentors

A comprehensive manual for Department TFs contains an outline for course planning as well as links to various University support services. The manual can be obtained from the Graduate Administrator. Each year the department appoints a faculty member and a senior graduate student as Teaching Mentors. These individuals are available to all students for consultation on any matter related to teaching.

Teaching Assistants

TA assignments may involve assisting an instructor who is teaching a course, teaching a lab section or recitation, or performing other course-related duties as needed. A full-time TA is expected to devote a maximum of 20 hours/week, on average, to teaching-related activities.

All TAs are required by the University to participate in the teaching assistant orientation provided by the University Center for Teaching and Learning. All first time TAs are also required to participate in the Department of Psychology's TA/TF orientation.

TAs are generally supervised by the instructor of the course in which they assist. The exact nature of the TA's responsibilities varies with the particular course. Usually, a TA helps in constructing and grading examinations, preparing classroom demonstrations, conducting review sessions, grading papers, and holding office hours to answer student questions. Occasionally, a TA may prepare and deliver a class lecture. Instructors who are assigned TAs are expected to (a) report to the Associate Chair on the effectiveness of the TA's performance and (b) provide feedback to the TA regarding strengths and weaknesses.

Teaching Fellows

For TF positions associated with a stand-alone course, the student assumes full responsibility for the course. For TF positions associated with a lab section or recitation, students work with a lab coordinator who plans activities and assures consistency across sections. A full-time TF is expected to devote a maximum of 20 hours/week, on average, to teaching-related activities.

Teaching responsibilities: TFs are expected to put forth a strong effort in teaching. Some specific tasks TFs are expected to perform (typically in consultation with the Teaching Mentor) include: (a) ordering textbooks through the online system provided by the University Book Center; (b) if needed, placing materials on reserve in the library; (c) obtaining training in the use of the learning management system (e.g., Canvas) and setting up the class website; (d) preparing a course syllabus, which specifies the requirements of the course and is available for distribution at the first class meeting (sample syllabi are available online through the department website); (e) being on time to class, or arranging a substitute if unable to attend; (f) maintaining office hours on two different days and preferably at two different times (not "by appointment only"); (g) grading accurately and fairly; and (h) posting grades as soon as possible after an examination (one-week maximum, unless holidays intervene); (i) submitting grade rosters and other required forms by the University deadlines; and (j) adhering to departmental rules concerning the use of office supplies, copiers, and audio-visual equipment.

Teaching appointments are typically for 10 (.5 assignment) or 20 (1.0 assignment) hours per week. Responsibilities are carried out throughout the semester, including finals week and until final grades are due. An effort is made to accommodate student preferences for specific course assignments, within the context of the overall need of the department to meet its instructional priorities. Faculty advisors, in consultation with their trainees, are asked to provide information about planned student support several terms in advance. Once a teaching appointment is requested for a student, it is the student and advisor's responsibility to keep the Associate Chair apprised of potential changes in the support plans (e.g., likely new funding for a GSR or fellowship appointment). Students will typically receive an appointment offer with the details of a TA assignment at least a month in advance, and the details of a TF assignment at least two months in advance, but sometimes circumstances beyond the control of the Associate Chair will lead to shorter notice or a switch in the specific course assignment. Once a student signs their TA/TF appointment letter, this is considered a binding commitment. Should an alternative source of support arise after an appointment letter has been signed, it may be possible for the student to be released from this commitment if a replacement can be identified, but this is not guaranteed. Additionally, students should be aware that last-minute shifts in appointment types (e.g., from TA to GSR) can lead to a delay in funding because they require paperwork to be filed with and processed by several offices prior to payment being made.

Evaluation: All TFs must have their course(s) evaluated by their students, using the online format administered by the Office of Measurement and Evaluation of Teaching (OMET). These evaluations are reported by OMET to the Associate Chair. In addition, all new TFs must make arrangements with the Teaching Mentor to observe their teaching at least once, and preferably more often, during the term. Additional meetings with the Mentor should be scheduled as needed.

Summer TA/TF Policy- International Travel

It is strongly preferred for continuing TAs and TFs assigned to teach remote courses in the summer to be physically located in the United States throughout the duration of their instructional responsibilities. New TAs and TFs cannot be placed into appointments for the first time in a remote setting outside of the United States. This university payroll requirement is in place to ensure adherence to relevant taxation and compensation laws.

In cases where a TA or TF anticipates being outside of the United States during the summer term while teaching, they must contact the Graduate Administrator as early as possible to coordinate submitting a written request for permission to teach internationally to the dean's office.

It is important to note that approval for remote instruction from outside the United States is not guaranteed, and factors such as the student's location and the duration of their stay will be considered in the decision-making process. Please submit requests well in advance to allow for thorough review and timely decisions.

9. GSR Requirements and Policies

This section reflects Pitt's GSR Academic Regulations, which can be found here: [GSR Policy](#)

GSR Requirements

Graduate Student Researchers ("GSRs") are full-time graduate students who are being supported on research funds while they are working toward their degree. GSRs are expected to effectively carry out their research and participate in orientation and training programs. GSRs are also expected to meet enrollment requirements and to maintain satisfactory academic performance. A GSR assignment is an integral part of a student's training, research project, thesis, or dissertation. When the GSR appointment involves research that is not directly integrated with the student's thesis or dissertation, although still an integral part of the student's academic training, the GSR appointment typically involves an expectation of 20 hours of research per week on average.

To be appointed or reappointed as a GSR, a student must maintain satisfactory academic performance, be making satisfactory progress toward their degree, and sustain the quality of research activities necessary to complete their academic and professional training and degree requirements. Examples of unsatisfactory academic performance would be a GPA below 3.0, completion of fewer than six credits of graduate work per term, or failure to pass preliminary or comprehensive examinations.

GSR Appointment Letters

Each GSR shall receive an appointment letter from the department, school or research center, co-signed by the research advisor, that states the general conditions of the appointment and that specifies the stipend, general expectations for the research, duration of the appointment, other benefits, and any other pertinent terms. If the student is expected to engage in essential research on University holidays when the University is closed (such as time-sensitive experiments or animal care), the details of this expectation must be explained in the appointment letter, including how the student will be provided with alternative, equivalent breaks from their research to ensure that students have time away from academic training and other expectations for their mental and physical well-being. Additionally, if the nature of the research constrains the timing of or number of consecutive days the student can be away from research, these details must be explained in the appointment letter.

10. Faculty Advising Responsibilities & Expectations

General expectations

1. Faculty are obliged to promote graduate students' progress, achievement, independence, and professional development. Graduate students should be treated with respect and courtesy, and faculty advisors should take an active interest in their students' progress. They should establish an individual working relationship with each advisee, based on open channels of communication and a proactive approach to advising that is adjusted to the student's skills and progress in the program. Advisors who leave the University should make arrangements together with the Program for the future of their advisees with respect to continued mentoring and financial support.
2. Faculty are expected to make student degree requirements a priority (see [Degree and Milestone Requirements](#)), with timely mentoring and preparation of the student for each major milestone.
3. Faculty are expected to uphold high standards of scholarly, research, ethical, and professional conduct, as outlined in policies of the Department, Dietrich School, University, and relevant professional societies (see [Introduction](#)).

Availability & communication

1. Number of advisees
Advisors should limit the number of their advisees so that each can be given sufficient and appropriate attention. Although the limit will vary according to the circumstances of the individual faculty member, a maximum of 4 or 5 advisees is typically appropriate.
2. Regular meetings
Advisors should provide the opportunity for regular, uninterrupted meetings with each advisee. As a general rule, the student should expect to spend at least 30 minutes per week talking with their advisor, with longer or more frequent meetings early on and during periods of proposal development, data gathering, and manuscript preparation. Although lab meetings may be a good milieu for such interactions, students should regularly meet individually with their faculty advisors. Meetings should be scheduled at a mutually convenient time, and students should feel free to request more frequent or longer meetings as necessary.
3. Communication
The advisor should establish and maintain an atmosphere of respect and collegiality with each advisee. Advisors should communicate expectations regarding advisees' responsibilities and performance regularly and clearly, with appropriate evaluations of the advisee's progress. Advisees should feel free to raise concerns and issues regarding training, progress, and advising. Advisors who travel frequently or for extended periods should establish mechanisms for maintaining their advising and training responsibilities, including regular communication with students. With the exception of special circumstances noted below, students should be able to contact advisors and receive a response within a reasonable period, generally not exceeding a week.

4. Interruptions of advisor availability

Advisors who anticipate an extended period of limited availability (e.g., a sabbatical, leave, or long stretch of intense demands on their time) should notify their advisees as far in advance as possible and work with them to make plans to minimize potential disruptions in students' progress and training. Generally, this will include working with advisees to select agreed-upon secondary advisors who can stand in for the primary advisors to maintain students' training and progress. These plans should be communicated to the relevant Program Chair(s), and also to the Department Chair as part of written faculty leave requests. If a leave or absence is unexpected and a faculty advisor is unable to communicate with an advisee, the advisee should work with the relevant Program Chair(s) and/or the Department Chair to identify an interim secondary advisor. Additionally, during either a planned or unexpected leave or absence of a student's advisor, the Program Chair(s) should maintain regular contact with the student to ensure the student's training needs are being met.

For advisors who leave the University, the advisor should work with their advisees and the relevant Program Chair(s) to make arrangements for the future of the student with respect to continued mentoring and financial support. For more information, see [Graduate Student Rights](#).

Guidance & professional development

1. Feedback on written documents

Advisors should provide prompt and thorough written feedback on drafts of proposals, thesis chapters, and manuscripts. Students should generally experience a turn-around time of one to two weeks on submitted material.

2. Degree milestones

Advisors should provide active guidance as students prepare for training milestones (see [Degree and Milestone Requirements](#)). This includes steering students toward feasible projects and permitting them to develop their own style and direction. Advisors should be familiar with University, Department, and Program-level milestones and should actively mentor the student in achieving them. This may include mentorship to: define the scope and focus of a project; organize and prepare proposals; design, conduct, analyze, and interpret the research; and prepare the final document in accord with accepted standards of scholarship.

The Department's apprenticeship model of training assumes that the amount (but not quality) of guidance provided by advisors will typically decline as students advance through training.

Advisors are responsible for ensuring that students' milestone documents are ready for presentation to examination committees (except for cases in which the program prohibits advisor input). By permitting a student to distribute a document, the advisor indicates that the document has met the advisor's standards and is ready for defense.

3. Course selection

Advisors, including those whose primary appointments are outside the department, should help students make course selections that optimize their training and progress.

Outside faculty who advise students in the department should consult with other members of their advisee's advising/mentoring committee or the program chair to ensure that they are providing accurate and timely advice regarding courses and training milestones.

4. Relationship to the advisor's research interests and lab group

It is expected that students and their advisors will share research interests, students will draw on the resources of their advisor's lab to conduct their research, and students will in turn contribute as members of their advisor's lab group. At the same time, advisors should respect the distinctions between their research interests and needs and those of their students.

Students may be expected to devote effort to research activities and general lab functions that directly or indirectly advance their scholarly development separate from their milestone progress. However, such expectations should be moderate in scope when they are unfunded or do not advance a student's scholarly development (generally less than 10 h per week). They should be associated with appropriate credit for the work (e.g., co-authorship on resulting publications). Note that this policy does not apply when student effort falls within the scope of a GSR appointment, in which case up to 20 hours of weekly student effort can be required, without expectation of co-authorship or other non-financial gain.

Additionally, advisors should support their students' efforts to broaden their scholarly expertise by permitting them to participate in research and training opportunities outside of the advisor's lab and should provide students sufficient independence to pursue such opportunities should they be desired. At the same time, students should be discouraged from pursuing opportunities that are unlikely to contribute to their professional development or that will detract substantially from their progress toward meeting milestones.

5. Teaching support & supervision

Advisors should help students gain an appreciation of teaching and assist them in improving their teaching skills. They should discuss the timing of the teaching requirement early in the student's career and the options available for acquiring and improving teaching skills (e.g., serving as a teaching assistant before taking on the responsibilities of a teaching fellow). When students teach for the first time, advisors should help students manage other demands to permit them to deliver a quality course and learn from the experience.

6. Annual advising/mentoring meetings and evaluations

Advisors should meet with students at least annually to review and evaluate students' progress and performance. This will typically occur in an advisory/mentoring committee meeting and should precede the program's annual evaluation. In these meetings, advisors (and other committee members) should discuss students' progress and performance in relation to (a) program and department expectations regarding acceptable progress toward the Ph.D. degree and (b) the student's career goals. Program Chairs should make sure that these meetings occur annually.

Advisors, including those with primary appointments outside the department, are also expected to participate in the program's annual evaluations of their advisees. Program Chairs should include in students' annual evaluation letters specific details about the Department's

and Program's evaluations of students' past performance and expectations regarding their next milestone(s), including deadline(s).

Resources & support

1. Physical resources

Faculty are expected to provide their advisee(s) with office space in the faculty member's lab or in a department office. This should include an individual desk; individual file drawers outside the desk; individual bookshelf space; telephone (can be shared); a computer for individual use, with email and internet access as well as suitable software (e.g., word processing, statistical analysis).

2. Planning & communication about support

When a student is given an offer of admission into the Department, the prospective advisor works with the department to identify the sources of financial support the student will receive in the first year. Additionally, the prospective advisor should communicate clearly about the likely mix of funding that the student can expect over the course of training (see [Student Resources](#)). This communication should occur in advance of a student's decision to accept an admission offer.

Advisors should be proactive in planning for future student funding and discussing funding options in a timely manner with their students. Advisors who support students on grants should spell out the conditions and length of support. Such discussions of support should occur at least twice per year, no later than early in the fall and spring terms, so that students can anticipate their potential funding options approximately a year in advance. Anticipated changes in student funding should be discussed with the student well in advance of deadlines for TA/TF sign-ups.

3. Summer funding

Less TA/TF funding is available in the summer term than in the fall and spring terms because of lower undergraduate enrollments in the summer. Discussion of summer funding should be initiated by the advisor at the beginning of the academic year. The advisor and student should discuss various possible sources of summer funding, and the advisor should be open to the student working in other labs that can provide funding or exploring other kinds of summer support.

4. Grant support

Advisors who support their advisees from grant funds should ensure that the demands of the grant do not interfere with students' timely progress through the training program or overall professional development. Students should not be expected to devote more than 20 hours per week, on average, for a full-time GSR (proportionately less for part-time appointments) to GSR-related activities that do not contribute to the completion of degree requirements and/or are not likely to result in publications.

Publishing & presenting research

1. Opportunities for publishing and presenting research

Advisors should provide early and frequent opportunities for co-authorship on papers and presentations, within the limits of the student's current expertise. They should encourage students to present their research at professional meetings and provide financial support for conference attendance when possible. Students should also be supported in publishing their research in the field's primary journals, with students as first authors when warranted (see below). When students are supported on advisors' grants and their participation is unlikely to result in publications, the advisor should endeavor to make other publication opportunities available.

2. Authorship: Responsibilities & guidelines

Advisors should discuss authorship issues as they work on papers with their students and should adhere to APA Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct, Effective January 1, 2017:

8.12 Publication Credit

(a) Psychologists take responsibility and credit, including authorship credit, only for work they have actually performed or to which they have substantially contributed.

(b) Principal authorship and other publication credits accurately reflect the relative scientific or professional contributions of the individuals involved, regardless of their relative status. Mere possession of an institutional position, such as department chair, does not justify authorship credit. Minor contributions to the research or to the writing for publications are acknowledged appropriately, such as in footnotes or in an introductory statement.

(c) Except under exceptional circumstances, a student is listed as principal author on any multiple-authored article that is substantially based on the student's doctoral dissertation. Faculty advisors discuss publication credit with students as early as feasible and throughout the research and publication process as appropriate.

Career guidance & placement

1. Career planning

Advisors should help students plan toward employment goals early in their course of study. This includes helping students identify a core set of research interests that will provide them with a scholarly identity upon completing the program. It also includes helping students consider career interests and opportunities in research vs. teaching positions and in academic vs. non-academic university settings.

2. Career opportunities

Advisors should provide students with information about employment and postdoctoral opportunities and encourage exploration of various options. Advisors should introduce students to key figures in the field who are relevant to their interests, or make such introductions possible, and encourage students to establish professional relationships with them and/or their students.

11. Graduate Student Rights

Right to an excellent, welcoming, and inclusive environment

Students have the right to an excellent education and the best possible preparation for their future careers; the right to be free from discrimination based on sex, gender identity, race, ethnicity, age, family status, religion, sexual orientation, gender expression, disability, political beliefs, or country of origin; and the right to be treated with respect, courtesy, and professionalism from all faculty, students, and staff. Accordingly, the Department will not tolerate bullying, discrimination or harassment, including sexual misconduct and sexual harassment. Such behavior not only violates University policies, it violates the ethical standards of the academy and the discipline of psychology (see Introduction), and it does harm to both individuals and the Departmental climate. The Department encourages and supports the reporting of discrimination and harassment ([Raising and Resolving Issues and Concerns](#)). The Department takes educational, restorative, and punitive action as appropriate when interpersonal misconduct or harassment has occurred (see [Reporting and Evaluation of Academic Integrity Violations](#)).

Faculty advising

1. Rights to high quality mentorship

12. Graduate students have the right to work with faculty advisors who provide high quality mentorship. These include the rights to work with advisors who: follow the institutional and disciplinary codes of ethical behavior and conduct; promote students' progress toward departmental milestones, scholarly achievement, independence, and professional development; communicate regularly, with uninterrupted meetings; provide active guidance as students prepare for each of the doctoral milestones; and give prompt and thorough feedback on drafts of manuscripts or milestone-related documents. See [GSR Requirements and Policies](#)

This section reflects Pitt's GSR Academic Regulations, which can be found here: [GSR Policy](#)

GSR Requirements

Graduate Student Researchers ("GSRs") are full-time graduate students who are being supported on research funds while they are working toward their degree. GSRs are expected to effectively carry out their research and participate in orientation and training programs. GSRs are also expected to meet enrollment requirements and to maintain satisfactory academic performance. A GSR assignment is an integral part of a student's training, research project, thesis, or dissertation. When the GSR appointment involves research that is not directly integrated with the student's thesis or dissertation, although still an integral part of the student's academic training, the GSR appointment typically involves an expectation of 20 hours of research per week on average.

To be appointed or reappointed as a GSR, a student must maintain satisfactory academic performance, be making satisfactory progress toward their degree, and sustain the quality of research

activities necessary to complete their academic and professional training and degree requirements. Examples of unsatisfactory academic performance would be a GPA below 3.0, completion of fewer than six credits of graduate work per term, or failure to pass preliminary or comprehensive examinations.

GSR Appointment Letters

Each GSR shall receive an appointment letter from the department, school or research center, co-signed by the research advisor, that states the general conditions of the appointment and that specifies the stipend, general expectations for the research, duration of the appointment, other benefits, and any other pertinent terms. If the student is expected to engage in essential research on University holidays when the University is closed (such as time-sensitive experiments or animal care), the details of this expectation must be explained in the appointment letter, including how the student will be provided with alternative, equivalent breaks from their research to ensure that students have time away from academic training and other expectations for their mental and physical well-being. Additionally, if the nature of the research constrains the timing of or number of consecutive days the student can be away from research, these details must be explained in the appointment letter.

[Faculty Advising Responsibilities & Expectations](#) and the [Introduction](#) for further information.

2. Choice of advisor

Students who wish to change advisors have the right to do so. In such cases, it is the responsibility of the student to identify a faculty member willing to serve as the new advisor, though they should expect guidance about the process from their Program Chair(s). They must receive approval from their Program to change advisors; if a change in program is also expected, the new Program must also approve the student's advisor and program change.

3. Departure of an advisor

A student whose advisor has left the University has the right to expect that the advisor will make arrangements together with the Program(s) for the future of the student with respect to continued mentoring and financial support. These general principles will be implemented individually by programs, including granting exceptions:

A student who wishes to continuing working with the departing advisor while remaining in residence within the Department should have a co-advisor or academic advisor appointed within the department; the student's progress should be reviewed each semester with the student's on-site advisor and/or Program Chair(s) and/or Mentoring Committee Chair; and this should occur for as long as the primary advisor is off-site and the student remains in residence.

If a student wishes to follow the advisor to the new institution but plans to obtain a Ph.D. from University of Pittsburgh, the student needs to complete the comprehensive examination/paper while in residence at the University of Pittsburgh before leaving. A student who has not yet achieved this milestone will be expected to withdraw from the University of Pittsburgh and to matriculate at the advisor's new institution.

A student who is post-Master's degree (or Master's degree equivalent) but pre-comprehensive paper and who plans to remain at the university to complete degree requirements will be encouraged to find a new advisor rather than being advised from a distance to complete the degree program.

4. Redress

Students who feel that their advising needs are not being met have the right to raise concerns without fear of recrimination or negative repercussions. This can be done at any point in time (see [Raising and Resolving Issues and Concerns](#)). Additionally, each year students have an opportunity to provide a written evaluation of the quality of their mentoring as part of the annual review of faculty by the Department's Faculty Evaluation Committee. These evaluations are obtained and confidentially reviewed by the Department Chair.

Professional development and career planning

1. Support for career and professional development

13. Students have the right to support for career and professional development. This includes, but is not limited to, support for the

responsible and rigorous conduct of research, teaching and research mentorship, and career planning and development. This support comes from multiple sources, as appropriate, including support provided by faculty advisors (see [GSR Requirements and Policies](#))

This section reflects Pitt's GSR Academic Regulations, which can be found here: [GSR Policy](#)

GSR Requirements

Graduate Student Researchers ("GSRs") are full-time graduate students who are being supported on research funds while they are working toward their degree. GSRs are expected to effectively carry out their research and participate in orientation and training programs. GSRs are also expected to meet enrollment requirements and to maintain satisfactory academic performance. A GSR assignment is an integral part of a student's training, research project, thesis, or dissertation. When the GSR appointment involves research that is not directly integrated with the student's thesis or dissertation, although still an integral part of the student's academic training, the GSR appointment typically involves an expectation of 20 hours of research per week on average.

To be appointed or reappointed as a GSR, a student must maintain satisfactory academic performance, be making satisfactory progress toward their degree, and sustain the quality of research activities necessary to complete their academic and professional training and degree requirements. Examples of unsatisfactory academic performance would be a GPA below 3.0, completion of fewer than six credits of graduate work per term, or failure to pass preliminary or comprehensive examinations.

GSR Appointment Letters

Each GSR shall receive an appointment letter from the department, school or research center, co-signed by the research advisor, that states the general conditions of the appointment and that specifies the stipend, general expectations for the research, duration of the appointment, other benefits, and any other pertinent terms. If the student is expected to engage in essential research on University holidays when the University is closed (such as time-sensitive experiments or animal care), the details of this expectation must be explained in the appointment letter, including how the student will be provided with alternative, equivalent breaks from their research to ensure that students have time away from academic training and other expectations for their mental and physical well-being. Additionally, if the nature of the research constrains the timing of or number of consecutive days the student can be away from research, these details must be explained in the appointment letter.

Faculty Advising Responsibilities & Expectations) as well as the department and other units within the university (see Student Resources).

2. Choice of career pathway

The mission of the Department's graduate Programs is to provide students with high quality training in research and teaching. Many students progress into positions at major research universities that utilize this training. However, some pursue other career pathways, such as teaching-focused positions in academia, research positions in industry or non-profit institutions, or clinical positions. The Department respects and recognizes that students should pursue whatever career pathway best matches their interests and needs. Therefore, students have the right to tailor their training to best match their career interests and to receive commensurate advising and support, as long as they fulfill department requirements and the requirements of their respective Programs, and as long as they continue to make satisfactory and timely degree progress.

Funding, workload, leaves, and accommodations

1. Funding duration

The department strives to provide up to six years of funding for all students in good standing, through a mix of fellowship, grant, and teaching (TA/TF) support that varies across students. Support may be provided to students beyond the sixth year of training but is not guaranteed.

2. Funding planning

Students have the right to accurate and timely notification of the availability and likelihood of financial and/or resource support to enable effective planning. Faculty advisors are expected to provide students with regular and timely information about likely sources of funding and to work with students to pursue sources of funding. The Associate Chair, in collaboration with Program Chairs, is responsible for overseeing students' financial support, especially the allocation of teaching (TA/TF) positions (see [Student Resources](#)).

3. Workload

Students should not be expected to devote more than 20 hours per week, on average, to a teaching (TA/TF) or graduate student researcher (GSR) appointment. Because effort associated with a GSR appointment may advance a student's milestone progress, students may choose to devote more than 20 hours to a research project associated with the GSR appointment. Information on additional rights associated with these positions can be found on the policies section Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences Graduate Studies website.

The nature and schedule of the research that GSRs engage in varies widely across disciplines. GSRs should not be expected to engage in research 7 days a week or on University holidays on which the University is closed (see [Calendars](#)) in order to safeguard the mental and physical health of students. In addition to University holidays on which the University is closed, GSRs with 12-month appointments must be given at least 10 additional days per calendar year as breaks from their research to provide students with time away from academic training and other expectations for their mental and physical well-being. GSRs on fractional appointments should receive the equivalent fraction of "break" days without research expectations.

These TA/TF and GSR workload expectations do not include the substantial personal effort that students must invest to meet training and degree requirements and to advance their research and publication records. Students have the right to assistance from their advisor and/or other key individuals in learning how to balance and manage the multiple demands and heavy workload associated with graduate training. Students who find they are unable to sustain a satisfactory work-life balance should seek help from within or outside of the Department ([Raising and Resolving Issues and Concerns](#)).

4. Leaves, absences, accommodations

Students have the right to request leaves of absence, accommodations and services for disabilities, and accommodations for parenting. For more information, see [Raising and Resolving Issues and Concerns](#) and the policies section of the Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences Graduate Studies website.

Clear expectations, fair evaluation & grievance resolution, and representation

1. Clear communication

Students have the right to specific, concrete communication of the requirements for

successfully achieving an advanced degree (see [Degree and Milestone Requirements](#)). They have the right to objective evaluation and regular feedback regarding academic progress, with enough time to correct a problem if that is an option (see [Evaluation of Student Progress](#)). Annual evaluations, sanctions, and appeal/petition decisions will be communicated in writing (via email and/or paper) to the student.

2. Grievance resolution

Students have the right to clear grievance and complaint procedures. For more information, see [Raising and Resolving Issues and Concerns](#), [Evaluation of Student Progress](#) and [Reporting and Evaluation of Academic Integrity Violations](#).

3. Representation

Students have the right to have their views represented by other students in the decision-making process of the department and graduate programs on issues that directly or indirectly affect students. Students also have rights to representation at the university level, most notably through participation in the Graduate Student Organization described on the website for the Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences. For more information, see [Key Individuals Involved in Graduate Training](#).

14. Graduate Student Responsibilities

Ownership of graduate training experience

Students are responsible for taking ownership of their research, scholarly, teaching, and career development. This includes fulfilling the expectations outlined below and speaking up when things are not going well (see [Raising and Resolving Issues and Concerns](#)).

Research and scholarly development

1. Progress

Students should complete degree requirements and milestones in a timely manner and to the best of their ability. See [Satisfactory and Timely Degree Progress](#).

2. Communication with faculty advisor

Students share responsibility for maintaining regular communications with their advisor. Example topics of communications include, but are not limited to:

- Course and degree requirements
- Milestone timing and deadlines
- Research interests, progress, and plans
- Coursework plans and progress
- Teaching plans, requirements, desires
- Balance among research, teaching, and clinical work
- Fellowship proposal planning and submissions
- Publication and presentation opportunities and plans
- Authorship expectations and concerns
- Funding: sources, plans, contingency plans
- Mentorship of undergraduates and/or Honors students in the advisor's lab
- Networking with other scholars
- Professional development opportunities, progress, plans
- Time management and meeting needs

3. Engagement in scholarship

Students should be highly knowledgeable about the theories, methods, and current and past research of the discipline. To acquire this knowledge, students should:

- Fully engage in their courses and satisfactorily complete all course requirements
- Keep up with the recent literature and become familiar with relevant classic work
- Attend and actively participate in scholarly activities (e.g., conferences, symposia, workshops, colloquia, talk series, journal clubs, research group meetings)
- Seek and accept (in consultation with one's advisor) opportunities to review or co-review papers submitted to journals for publication.

4. Engagement in research

Students should be continuously engaged in and make steady progress on research. This includes:

- Taking initiative in reading new literatures, generating new research ideas, & bringing them to fruition with the support and assistance of the advisor
- Taking on responsibility, learning new techniques, and improving one's skills
- Taking increasing responsibility for leading the design, analysis, and writing of research as one's graduate career progresses
- Regularly attending and contributing to lab meetings
- Identifying and planning for conference presentation opportunities
- Writing up research findings for publication in a timely manner
- Attending other students' defenses, departmental colloquia, and program talk series

Teaching and research mentorship

1. Teaching

Students are expected to be committed instructors and to develop strong teaching skills. See [Teaching Requirements, Policies, and Resources](#). They are responsible for taking advantage of the resources that are available to them, especially when their teaching performance is in need of remediation or when they are planning for a teaching-intensive career.

2. Research mentorship

Students are encouraged to mentor and advise undergraduates and post-baccalaureate fellows conducting research in the advisor's lab (with the advisor's agreement) and to serve on undergraduate honors thesis committees when appropriate. Students have shared responsibility (with the advisor) for ensuring that undergraduates engaged in unpaid research experiences have educationally meaningful experiences that are appropriate for the undergraduate's stage of development. They also share responsibility for being aware of departmental and University requirements that pertain to these research experiences (see the Undergraduate Advising section of the departmental website for details).

Professional development and career planning

1. Professional development

A variety of professional skills are important to a successful career. Examples include skills in writing, public speaking, networking, and cultural awareness. Other skills may be particularly relevant to career pathways outside of academia, yet can still be cultivated during graduate training. Students have responsibility for seeking out and taking advantage of relevant professional development opportunities and resources (see [Student Resources](#)).

2. Career planning

Students are responsible for tailoring their training to best match their career pathway interests. This includes responsibility for determining their career pathway(s), communicating this interest to their advisor and program, and seeking out and taking advantage of opportunities for career planning and development. All students are strongly encouraged to create an Individual Development Plan (see the Dietrich School Graduate Studies website) within the first year of training and to update it at least annually.

Service and Citizenship

At the program and department level, students are encouraged to seek and accept opportunities to serve as a representative and/or committee member, contribute to diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts, and participate actively in student and faculty recruitment activities. Beyond the department level, students are encouraged to seek and accept institutional and professional society opportunities for service, including journal reviewing. It is the responsibility of the student and advisor to find an appropriate balance between such service/community activities and progress in other areas such as research and teaching. Students are expected to contribute to a departmental climate that aims for inclusive excellence, and as part of this goal students are encouraged to engage in professional development centered on issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Professional and ethical behavior

1. Respecting the rights of others

Students are expected to be respectful of every member of the department, including:

- Engaging in interpersonal behavior that promotes a positive and inclusive departmental climate free from bullying, discrimination or harassment, including sexual misconduct and sexual harassment;
- Recognizing and respecting alternative points of view, whether intellectual, scholarly, or personal.
- Being on time for classes and appointments; alerting others when tardiness or absence is unavoidable.
- Meeting agreed deadlines with the advisor and for classes; making alternate arrangements when a deadline cannot be met, preferably well in advance.
- Avoiding undue or last-minute demands on others' time.
- Conducting all interactions professionally and with civility.
- Responding to emails in a timely manner.

2. Engaging in professional online conduct

Students are expected to use discretion in online activities, including social networks, blogs, listservs, photo and video sharing, and email, including:

- Being aware that their online presence reflects on their professional life and communities, including their colleagues, program, department, university, and professional organizations.
- Using appropriate privacy settings and considering the potential consequences of anything posted to the internet before posting.
- Using professional greetings and signatures and, where relevant, adding confidentiality disclaimers.
- Making sure that personal communications and representations do not appear to represent the views of the Department, University, or any professional organization.
- Clinical Program students should see Clinical Program Handbook for additional points.

3. Upholding high standards of research, academic, and professional conduct

Students in the Department of Psychology are expected to:

- Comply with all relevant policies regarding ethical behavior, academic and research

integrity, and professional conduct, including those related to discrimination and sexual misconduct (see [Introduction](#)). A breach in compliance will have significant consequences (see [Reporting and Evaluation of Academic Integrity Violations](#)).

- Complete required training, certifications, and clearances in a timely manner (e.g., training in the responsible conduct of research, conflict of interest, sexual misconduct; and criminal background and child abuse clearances, as relevant).
- Observe confidentiality of communications with research participants, authors of papers under review, grants, and fellowship proposals.
- Observe current standards of research conduct, such as established laboratory and data analysis procedures in the field. This includes never fabricating or fictionalizing data.
- Students are responsible for knowing what constitutes plagiarism and how it can be avoided. They are also responsible for honesty in taking exams.
- Clinical students are responsible for observing ethical standards for conducting clinical activities (see [Clinical Psychology Program handbook](#))
- Students are encouraged to report observed or disclosed breaches of ethics or other types of misconduct by a member of the University, and to know the procedures for doing so. For more information, see [Raising and Resolving Issues and Concerns, Reporting and Evaluation of Academic Integrity Violations](#).

4. Breaches of appropriate conduct

Loss of funding or disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal from the doctoral program, may occur upon an infraction of a Program, Department, or University policy, or the standards described in this Handbook. For more information, see [Reporting and Evaluation of Academic Integrity Violations](#).

Administrative responsibilities

1. Communication with those involved in graduate student administration.

Students are expected to maintain close communication with the Graduate Administrator and others who contribute to graduate administration. This includes:

- Promptly reporting address or name changes to the Graduate Administrator, Associate Chair, Department Administrator, and Personnel Administrator.
- Reading all emails from program and departmental graduate administration, and responding promptly when requested or expected to do so.
- Observing deadlines for registration, fee payments, teaching assignment requests, etc.
- Promptly submitting annual evaluation information in the requested format.

2. Program, department, and university milestone protocols

Students are responsible for being familiar with and observing University, Department, and Program-level requirements (see [Degree and Milestone Requirements](#)).

3. Fiscal administration

Students have responsibility for discussing funding options with their advisor well in advance of the term for which funding will be needed. They have responsibility for contacting the Graduate Administrator with any concerns related to funding or tuition payment.

They are also responsible for being familiar with and observing specific requirements and restrictions of various funding sources and University policies regarding fellowships, training grants, etc.

4. Overload requests

Students are responsible for obtaining approval for any overload assignments (combined TA/TF/GSR appointments that exceed 20 hours per week) before beginning the assignment. Overload requests should be sent to the Associate Chair for forwarding to the Dean.

15. Evaluation of Student Progress

Annual self-report, mentoring meeting, and program-level evaluation

Every student in the department has a mentoring committee consisting of their advisor and one or more other faculty members. Students are required to complete an annual self-report each spring and to participate in a meeting with their mentoring committee annually, and more often as indicated by their program. The annual mentoring meeting provides an opportunity to bring up and discuss any concerns about the student's progress over the past year and plans for the coming year. Additionally, the meeting provides support and advice about longer-range topics related to research and teaching, service and citizenship, professional development, and career planning.

These self-reports and mentoring meetings are used to provide program chairs and faculty with information about each student's progress through training, as well as to provide students with advice on scholarly and professional development. This information, in combination with input provided by faculty who have interacted with the student (e.g., the advisor, milestone committee members, course instructors, teaching mentor) is used to inform an annual evaluation of each student's progress by the programs. The results of this evaluation, which are communicated to the student in writing (via email and/or paper), include recognition of good performance as well as identification of inadequate progress and/or significant weaknesses in meeting program and departmental expectations regarding satisfactory progress ([Satisfactory and Timely Degree Progress](#)).

At the discretion of the program faculty, a student may be placed on Provisional Status (with risk of dismissal) and/or may be denied University funding (Probationary Status). This would typically coincide with the annual evaluation but is not restricted to this timepoint. Clear guidelines for remedying identified problems will be provided in writing (via email and/or paper) and in a timely manner by the program chair or the Director of Graduate Studies. Guidelines will include both concrete goals or expectations for student performance and a timeline for achieving them. Failure to comply with these guidelines constitutes grounds for dismissal from graduate training.

Annual review of timely progress ("zone status")

The annual program-level review of students is complemented by a departmental review process that focuses on the student's milestone progress. At the beginning of each summer, the Director of Graduate Studies reviews students' timeline of milestone completion and sends each student a standardized letter indicating his or her current zone status ([Satisfactory and Timely Degree Progress](#)) and recommended milestone goals for the coming year. At the beginning of every semester the Director of Graduate Studies reviews students' timelines and identifies every student who is entering the first semester of the "yellow zone," the second semester of the "yellow zone," or the "red zone." Students who are entering the first semester of the yellow zone will receive a pre-warning letter from the DGS. Students who are entering the second semester of the yellow zone will receive a letter that indicates that student must take one of the following actions to avoid placement on Provisional Status and likely Academic Probation:

1. Provide documentation that expected milestone has already been successfully completed.

2. Successfully complete the required milestone before the start of the next semester.
3. File a petition for an extension of the "yellow zone" timeline that is accepted by the Graduate Education Committee (see [Evaluation of Student Progress](#)). The petition must clearly state the extenuating factor(s) that account for the delay in progress, and it must provide a clear plan for how and when the delay in completing the relevant milestone will be overcome. "Yellow zone extensions" are granted only in rare instances. Before submitting a petition, students are advised to confer with the Director of Graduate Studies and with the Chair(s) of their training program(s) to obtain feedback on the likely outcome of a petition effort.
4. Request and receive a leave of absence or withdraw from training.

At the first GEC meeting of each fall term, the progress of students who are in or entering the "red zone" are reviewed. A student may personally present a petition at this meeting, if desired. Any student who has failed to meet the milestone deadline and (a) who is not granted a yellow-zone extension or (b) who has not requested a leave of absence or withdrawn from training receives a letter indicating that they are now on Provisional Status and very likely also indicating that they are on Academic Probation. Red zone letters provide a final deadline for the completion of the milestone and other steps that must be taken to avoid dismissal from the graduate program. If these requirements are not completed, the student will be dismissed from the program.

Evaluation in conjunction with milestone completion

Students' progress will also be evaluated upon completing each major milestone toward the degree. Note that successful completion of a milestone does not in itself denote satisfactory progress toward the PhD. Students should consult their program handbook for more information.

Rights to appeal decisions about adequate progress

Decisions about the training status of a student are made at the Program level, with the exception of decisions based on departmental expectations about timely progress, violations of academic integrity, or violations of Dietrich School or University policies. Students meeting their responsibilities and the departmental expectations for satisfactory and timely progress are considered to be "in good standing." Students who are not doing so may be placed on Provisional Status, Academic Probation, or both. Provisional Status is a special status used within the Department. Typically, a student on Provisional Status will still receive support and have a designated period of time to remediate deficiencies. Academic Probation, which is a University-level status, is applied automatically if a graduate student's QPA falls below 3.00. A student on Probation is not eligible to hold a teaching appointment or fellowship and is subject to dismissal at the end of the following term.

Students may file appeals/petitions about whether they are making adequate progress through a written (paper or email) request submitted to the Director of Graduate Studies, who will refer the request to the Graduate Education Committee (GEC) for a decision. A *petition* is used to request an extension of "yellow-zone" status, and must be made before the start of the term that marks entry into the "red zone." All other requests are considered *appeals*. In the case of a dismissal *appeal*, the student must formally request an appeal within 30 days from the date of the letter indicating the dismissal decision. All student-provided materials and requests for meeting attendees must also be completed within these same time frames. An appeal/petition will be evaluated using the process outlined below. Violations of academic integrity have their own

procedures and due process rights (see [Reporting and Evaluation of Academic Integrity Violations](#)), as do violations of the Student Code of Conduct and other Dietrich School or University policies (see [Introduction](#)).

Rights to appeal decisions about milestone decisions

In the unusual case that a student wishes to appeal a milestone decision, they should contact the Director of Graduate Studies. The procedure involves having the milestone materials (e.g., thesis document and presentation slides) evaluated by the primary faculty members of the program in which the milestone was defended who were not on the original milestone committee. If there are fewer than three faculty in this set, the Director of Graduate Studies will select additional faculty to constitute a committee of three. After a reasonable review period, the newly-constituted committee will make a decision on the basis of the materials alone. The decision will be final.

Adjudication of student appeals and petitions

The GEC Chair (who is the Director of Graduate Studies) retains the authority to modify any aspect of this process in response to the particular situation of each case. However, actions that fall to the GEC Chair shall be taken in consultation with non-student members of the GEC. If the involved student is an advisee of the GEC Chair, the GEC Chair must delegate authority to another faculty member who shall oversee all aspects of the appeal/petition process. The GEC Chair may also approve delegates to act on behalf of individual Program Chairs for any aspect of the appeal/petition process if a Program Chair is unavailable or is the student's advisor.

If a student's *petition* is successful, the student will be granted additional time (the duration of which will be communicated in writing via email and/or paper) before the red zone is entered and the student is placed on Provisional Status. If a student's *appeal* is successful, the student will be placed on Provisional Status, and receive written information from the student's Program Chair(s) and/or the Chair of the GEC regarding the steps, and associated timeframe, that the student will need to follow to return to good standing and avoid a subsequent dismissal decision. If a dismissal *appeal* or milestone extension *petition* is unsuccessful, the result will be dismissal from training or placement on provisional status, respectively. Students have the right to further appeal, first to the Chair of the Department of Psychology and then to the Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences Graduate Studies. If requested, the materials considered during the evaluation process and the vote tally taken at the evaluation meeting will be forwarded to these other parties.

Preparation for the evaluation process

For students who wish to *petition* or *appeal* a status decision, the following applies.

1. The Department will provide copies of all letters and other official correspondence sent by the department to the student and to the GEC, including the final letter indicating a dismissal decision. The GEC Chair may ask the department and/or student to provide additional materials relevant to the case (e.g., milestone documents, teaching records).
2. The student should provide a written summary of why they believe the status decision or dismissal decision should be reversed. The summary should also describe plans for improving the student's status should the appeal/petition be successful, and it should note whether the student plans to continue working with the current advisor or a new advisor. If a new advisor is

planned, the student should describe any steps taken to identify a suitable faculty member. In general, this summary should be less than 4 pages (single spaced).

3. The student may also provide supporting materials or documentation that is relevant to help make the case. For instance, this could include letters from individuals informed about the student's personal history and capacity for graduate study, evidence of extenuating circumstances, relevant updates that indicate a change in the student's ability to conduct graduate-level work, etc. The student may wish to consult with the GEC Chair to determine the suitability of potential materials and documentation.

4. The student may request that additional relevant parties be given the opportunity to participate in the evaluation meeting (e.g., clinical care providers with an informed opinion, a prospective advisor). This should take the form of a written or electronic request to the GEC Chair. The GEC Chair shall make decisions about which individuals shall be approved attendees at the evaluation meeting. The GEC Chair may choose to invite additional relevant individuals (e.g., the student's current advisor is a likely invitee). The student shall be informed about all planned attendees.

Evaluation process

1. The prepared materials from the department and student will be circulated to all Program Chairs (or delegates). The GEC Chair shall poll these individuals to determine whether they are in favor of proceeding to an evaluation meeting to hear the case. If none are in favor of a meeting, the appeal/petition shall be considered unsuccessful.

2. If a majority of the GEC votes in favor of proceeding with an evaluation meeting, the GEC Chair and Chairs of each program in the department (or approved delegates) must attend the meeting. All of these potential attendees will have the right to vote in the final appeal/petition decision, with the exception of faculty members involved in a program-level dismissal decision. Ideally, the meeting will be held before a dismissal decision is scheduled to take effect. If this is not possible, the dismissal decision will be temporarily waived and in the meantime the GEC Chair will place the student on Provisional Status within the department or University Probationary Status. The evaluation meeting will then be scheduled as early as possible thereafter.

3. The student shall be given the opportunity to attend the evaluation meeting, present the case, and respond to any questions. As described above, the meeting may also include additional attendees requested by the student or invited by the GEC Chair. The GEC Chair will moderate the meeting and make decisions about which attendees shall be present for which portions of the meeting. The meeting will conclude with a secret ballot by all attendees with voting rights. A simple majority must vote in favor (excluding abstentions) for a successful appeal/petition. A tie vote will be regarded as an unsuccessful appeal/petition.

16. Reporting and Evaluation of Academic Integrity Violations

Overview

The Department of Psychology follows the DSAS Academic Integrity Code. As stated in this handbook as well as within the Academic Integrity Code, each student has the obligation to "respect the ethical standards of the academy in carrying out his or her academic assignments." This obligates all graduate students to abide by the ethical standards of psychology (set forth in the Ethical Principles of Psychologists, the Code of Conduct and related policies of the American Psychological Association, and the official policies of the federal Office for Human Research Protection) at all times. These standards include norms for behavior that promote a positive and inclusive climate, free from discrimination or harassment, including sexual misconduct and sexual harassment. Students are encouraged to review the full text of the stated policies, which can be found using the links provided in the [Introduction](#). A significant breach in these expectations by a student will be deemed an Academic Integrity Violation and handled as described below.

Any member of the University community who has evidence may bring an alleged academic integrity violation forward to the Department Chair or the relevant Program Chair(s) for evaluation. This includes an observer of the alleged violation, a victim and/or a supporter of the victim, or an individual operating through other reporting channels of the University (e.g., the Title IX Office or the Office of Diversity and Inclusion). For further information, see [Raising and Resolving Issues and Concerns](#).

Adjudication of Academic Integrity Violations

Upon receiving an allegation of an Academic Integrity Violation, the Department Chair or relevant Program Chair(s) will follow the guidelines and procedures of the Academic Integrity Code of the Dietrich School for its adjudication and student due process rights. In accordance with this code, "The degree of formality of proceedings, the identity of the decision maker or decision makers, and other related aspects should properly reflect such considerations as the severity of the potential sanction, its probable impact upon the student, and the extent to which matters of professional judgment are essential in arriving at an informed decision." Imposed sanctions will consider the responsibility of the department to prepare students for a career within the discipline of psychology. As part of this preparation, students must demonstrate the ability to uphold the ethical, professional, and academic norms of the discipline and academy. Lapses in upholding these norms may thus result educational, restorative, and punitive action as appropriate, including possible dismissal from training.

Special procedures for sexual misconduct or harassment

Although sexual misconduct or harassment will be treated as violations of the Academic Integrity Code, any complaints of sexual misconduct or harassment must first be reported to the Title IX office. As described in Chapter 6 of the Student Code of Conduct and related University Policies and Procedures, there are multiple reporting and evaluation options (informal, formal). A Formal Complaint Process is initiated when the complainant provides a signed statement that includes a description of the alleged incident and the name of the accused (respondent). See Chapter 6 of the Student Code of Conduct for a step-by-step summary of the Formal Complaint

Process. (Links to the Student Code of Conduct, the sexual misconduct policy, and the Title IX Office are provided in the [Introduction](#)).

If a graduate student is found to have violated the sexual misconduct policy after the completion of the formal Sexual Misconduct process described in Chapter 6 of the Student Code of Conduct (formal complaint, investigation, issuance of finding(s) and sanction(s), and appeal, if any), the Department Chair will be notified. The Department Chair will then evaluate the matter to determine if the violation constitutes a breach of the ethical standards of psychology, thus triggering the academic integrity process. The Department Chair will follow the procedures for evaluating other types of Academic Integrity Violations but will not conduct a separate investigation. Instead, the Department Chair will request necessary information from the Title IX Office to evaluate what sanctions should be imposed for the ethical breach indicated by a finding of responsibility by the Title IX Office. The same is true regarding each stage of the Academic Integrity process, including, to the extent necessary, before the Academic Integrity Hearing Board.

17. Raising and Resolving Issues and Concerns

In general, say something

When problems arise, students should initiate open and honest communication about the issue(s) of concern. For issues and concerns related to fiscal matters (e.g., health insurance and other benefits, student stipend and appointment processing), a student's best starting place is usually the Graduate Administrator, in conjunction with alerting their faculty advisor. For issues and concerns related to research training, the best starting place is usually the Program Chair, but other options include any of the key personnel involved in graduate training ([Key Individuals Involved in Graduate Training](#)). These individuals can either provide direct assistance or information about who would be the better person to provide help. It is also appropriate to involve these same individuals for issues and concerns related to harmful interpersonal behavior. Example situations and avenues for redress are provided below. The worst option is usually to say or do nothing, hoping that the situation will resolve by itself. This is rarely the case, and as a result students can experience undue emotional distress and place themselves at risk for poor degree progress. Informing someone about the problem is usually the best way to start fixing it.

Student Climate Ambassadors

Student climate ambassadors are faculty members in our department who are available to provide guidance to students on how best to address climate concerns that arise through their work in our department. When appropriate, they will refer graduate students to the appropriate individuals at Pitt's OEDI, Title IX office, etc. The student climate ambassadors also liaison with the affinity groups associated with our Psychology Equity Inclusion and Community committee and facilitate communication about student climate to department administration.

Student Climate Ambassadors are meant to augment the existing structures that support students navigating challenges during graduate training, not supplant them. Examples of ways that climate ambassadors can support students: discussing how to have a direct conversation with a faculty member or student about climate concerns; identifying who to contact within the department to discuss next steps (for example, program/area chairs, Director of Graduate Studies, Department Chair); assisting students with bringing concerns to department leadership, if students are not comfortable doing this without support; and identifying which university offices to contact for further support and formal reporting (for example, the Office for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion [OEDI], Dean's office). Climate ambassadors will not provide therapeutic or mental health support (doing so would violate the APA's ethics code forbidding dual relationships for any climate ambassadors who are clinicians), long-term support, or emergency/crisis/immediate support. For therapeutic or mental health support, students can contact the Dietrich School of Arts & Sciences embedded clinician or the University Counseling Center. For ongoing support to resolve specific ongoing and/or severe climate issues related to work in our department, students should rely on doctoral advisors, program/area chairs, the PEIC committee faculty advisor, the Director of Graduate Studies, the Department Chair, and/or members of the Dean's Office and the OEDI.

To request a meeting with a climate ambassador, students should send an email to psychsa@pitt.edu.

Because they are faculty, student climate ambassadors are mandatory Title IX reporters. For information that is not subject to mandatory reporting, students should be clear with the climate ambassadors about what information they want kept confidential and what information they are willing to have shared under what conditions. Although one goal for these positions is to facilitate communication, so that the department administration (i.e. DGS, chair, PEIC committee chair, program chairs) will be more aware of any climate challenges students face, climate ambassadors will keep any information not subject to mandatory reporting confidential at a student's request.

Fiscal concerns, problems, and emergencies

The department is committed to providing students with (1) timely information about the source of their stipend support and related benefits, which can fluctuate from term to term, and (2) seamless transitions between different appointment types. However, sometimes unexpected problems can occur. Students with questions about the monthly stipend amount and benefits they can expect, or with concerns about whether they have or will receive the correct paycheck, should contact the Graduate Administrator, while also informing their faculty advisor about the issue. The Graduate Administrator will work to coordinate with others within and beyond the department as needed to resolve the issue as quickly as possible. If a student or their faculty advisor is concerned about whether the matter is being handled correctly or with sufficient responsiveness, they should contact the Director of Graduate Studies, who can evaluate the situation and coordinate with the Department Chair or others as needed. In the rare event that a paycheck may be delayed, the Director of Graduate Studies is able to authorize the release of funds from a non-university emergency account established through faculty donations.

Experiences of microaggression, bias, discrimination, or harassment

The Department is committed to being a welcoming and inclusive environment for every member of the University community. Despite these good intentions, it will sometimes fall short. Reporting of concerning behavior is an invaluable way to educate all of us about the need for corrective action. Students desiring more direct or immediate action are welcome to contact any of the key individuals involved in graduate training, or any trusted faculty member. Looking beyond the Department, students are welcome to file a report with the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, or to contact any of the individuals responsible for implementing the University non-discrimination and anti-harassment policy (see [Introduction](#)).

Experiences of sexual misconduct or sexual harassment

The Department does not tolerate discrimination or harassment, including sexual misconduct and sexual harassment (see [Introduction](#)). Any individual experiencing such behavior is strongly encouraged to report it to the Title IX Office, which will offer supportive services to the reporting party and address the concerns of the complainant. The procedures for when the accused individual is another student are summarized in Chapter 6 of the Student Code of Conduct (see [Introduction](#) for a link). Further detail, and information about the procedures that apply when the accused individual is a faculty or staff member, can be found in the description of University Sexual Misconduct and Discrimination Policy 06-05-01 on the related Procedure on Sexual Misconduct 06-05-01 (see [Introduction](#) for links).

For information and support related to filing and responding to Title IX case processing, students are welcome to contact any of the key individuals involved in graduate training, or any trusted faculty member. Students have the right to have a supporter attend meetings involving the Title IX staff, which can be anyone they wish to invite. It is important to note that the University considers nearly all staff and faculty to be responsible employees, and as such they are obligated to report any evidence of sexual misconduct or harassment. Individuals who desire confidentiality and/or the involvement of a supporter can learn about their options on the Title IX website.

Requests for medical or family/parental leaves of absence

A student may experience a medical condition or change in family status that makes it difficult to devote adequate time and/or energy to their graduate training. In such cases, the student should initiate a discussion with their advisor or another appropriate individual about taking a formal leave of absence from training. Additional information can be provided by the Graduate Administrator and found on the Dietrich School website. Official leaves of absence are granted by the department and communicated to the Dean, and do not count as time in training. The expected timing of degree progress is automatically adjusted for those students who have an approved period of leave during their graduate training career. If a student receives a parental leave, then all zone requirements will move back one semester.

Stresses of graduate school

Graduate school can be stressful for many reasons. Students who feel overwhelmed are encouraged to seek help. This can come from initiating a discussion with people in the department or by taking advantage of resources outside the department (such as support groups offered by the Student Counseling Center or mental health services provided through students' health insurance). In some cases, a student may elect to take an official leave of absence. The Graduate Administrator can provide information about this option.

Wavering commitment to graduate school

Many graduate students question their decision to pursue a Ph.D. at some point during their training. Typically, such periods of doubt are temporary. But when they are not, students should initiate conversations with their advisor or other trusted persons about whether graduate school is the right choice for them. Options include taking a leave of absence to explore other career pathways or exiting training early (e.g., with a Master's degree).

Changing research interests

The Department uses an apprentice model of training in which students typically enter with the expectation that they will be working with a specific advisor. In most cases this works out well, but sometimes a student finds their research interests no longer align with their advisor's. In such cases, students are encouraged to discuss options with the advisor and Program chair. In some cases, a shift in research projects within the advisor's lab can resolve the situation. In other cases, it may make sense for a student to switch to another advisor. In either case, the student may be advised to delay a shift until a milestone has been completed. Additionally, students should understand that it is their responsibility to identify a faculty member willing to serve as the new advisor, though they should expect guidance about the process from their Program Chair(s).

Difficulties with the advisor relationship

Students who feel that their professional relationship with their advisor is not satisfactory are encouraged to discuss their concerns concretely, honestly, and respectfully with the advisor and to develop a plan for remedying the problem(s). Students who wonder whether a concern is worth discussing with an advisor, who feel that they cannot be honest with their advisor about their concerns, or whose discussions with their advisor have been insufficient in addressing their concerns are encouraged to meet with their program chair or with the DSAS Ombudsperson. These individuals can provide advice about how to manage specific advisor-advisee situations, including how best to approach the advisor, the range of reasonable solutions, and when it might be advisable to change advisors.

Well-being

Graduate school can be an exciting and challenging time for students. Taking time to maintain your well-being and seek appropriate support can help you achieve your goals and lead a fulfilling life.

It can be helpful to remember that we all benefit from assistance and guidance at times, and there are many resources available to support your well-being while you are at Pitt. You are also encouraged to visit Thrive@Pitt to learn more about well-being and the many campus resources available to help you thrive.

If you or anyone you know experiences overwhelming academic stress, persistent difficult feelings and/or challenging life events, you are strongly encouraged to seek support. In addition to reaching out to friends and loved ones, consider connecting with a faculty member you trust for assistance connecting to helpful resources.

DSAS has an embedded clinician for graduate students who provides short-term counseling services pertaining but not limited to: anxiety and depression; adjustment and developmental concerns; interpersonal conflict; self-esteem; concerns related to life transitions, gender identity; sexuality; romantic relationships; substance use concerns; academic, employment and career related concerns; difficulty with concentration, focus or memory; sexual violence/misconduct; racial trauma. To request counseling support, fill out the [Embedded Clinician Request Form](#). The embedded clinician is not for urgent or immediate counseling support needs. For such needs, contact the University Counseling Center, described in the next paragraph.

The University Counseling Center is also here for you. You can call 412-648-7930 at any time to connect with a clinician. If you or someone you know is feeling suicidal, please call the University Counseling Center at any time at 412-648-7930. You can also contact Resolve Crisis Network at 888-796-8226. If the situation is life threatening, call Pitt Police at 412-624-2121 or dial 911.

Student Assistance and counseling

Everyone feels overwhelmed by the challenges of being a student at times. If you need someone to talk to at any point, there are several on-campus resources.

One option is the University Counseling Center (a free, confidential service). They can be reached at 412-648-7930 Monday-Friday, between 9am-4pm (call for a drop-in appointment). University Counseling Center Mental Health Crisis Response: 412-648-7930 x1 or the Resolve Crisis Network: 888-796-8226 (888-7-YOU-CAN).

Another option is the DSAS embedded clinician (information in previous section).

Another option is the Psychology Department's Clinical Psychology Center. They can be reached at 412-624-8822.

Sexual assault services are given at the University Counseling Center (phone: 412-648-7930; after hours call: 412-648-7856).

For emergency psychiatric care, please go to the nearest emergency room, or to the Diagnostic Evaluation Center at Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic.

The clinic is located at 3811 O'Hara St. They can be reached at 412-624-1000.

If the situation is life threatening, call the Police:

On-campus: Pitt Police: 412-268-2121 Off- campus: 911.

Any student who faces challenges securing their food or housing and believes this may affect their performance is urged to contact the Department for support. Furthermore, please notify a faculty member if you are comfortable doing so. This will enable us to provide any resources that we may possess. Pitt has resources for student hardship funding and assistance that can be found here: <https://www.studentaffairs.pitt.edu/vice-provost-dean-students/hardship-assistance>, as well as a network of care managers and care advocates who can provide support for students facing hardships: <https://www.studentaffairs.pitt.edu/care-and->

[resources.](#)

Here is a list of other resources that may be helpful:

The Pitt Pantry: <https://www.studentaffairs.pitt.edu/care-and-resources/pitt-pantry>

Pittsburgh Food Bank: <https://www.pittsburghfoodbank.org>

CHS Oakland Food Pantry: <https://chscorp.org/food-pantry> (412-246-1639)

JFCS Squirrel Hill Food Pantry: [828 Hazelwood Ave., Pittsburgh, PA 15217](#) (412-421-2708)

St. Paul Cathedral Parish Food Pantry: 411 Greenfield Ave., Pittsburgh, PA 15207.

Shelter listings: <https://www.shelterlistings.org/city/pittsburgh-pa.html>

Women's Center and Shelter: <https://www.wcpittsburgh.org>

Shelter List Pittsburgh: <https://www.shelterlist.com/city/pa-pittsburgh>

