

First-Year Research Project

This document is intended as an introduction to the First-Year Research Project (FYRP). Information regarding the history and rationale of the requirement as well as various deadlines is included. Students are encouraged to discuss any questions with their supervisors or the Associate Chair for Graduate Studies.

Reasons for the Requirement

Prior to the introduction of the first-year research requirement in 1984, faculty members and some students were concerned that first-year students were neglecting research in favour of seminar-type courses. After some consideration of alternatives, the research requirement was adopted for several reasons:

- To emphasize that research is a major, not a minor, component of graduate training in our department;
- To indicate that early participation in research is intended to be the norm for first-year students, not merely an ideal;
- To provide an opportunity to adjust to the demands that are characteristic of PhD training and post-PhD experience; and
- To minimize the time required for a student to become a productive member of a laboratory group.

Since the requirement was adopted, it has often served students in other ways. The research often provides a good basis for the development of a second-year project. It has also provided a project for presentation at the annual departmental research conference. Finally, along with other initiatives, it has helped prepare new students in the development of the competitive research records needed to win scholarships.

Features of the Research Project

- The first-year research project is an original contribution to knowledge in the student's focal area. Reflecting the diversity of theoretical and methodological approaches in the Department, the project may be based on (1) data collected by the student; (2) existing datasets (e.g., longitudinal data collected by a faculty member or by an organization such as Statistics Canada); (3) data based on mathematical models of natural phenomena; (4) analyses of data and statistical inferences derived from studies of other researchers (e.g., meta-analysis); or (5) a theoretical or historical examination and analysis of existing literature. The student's supervisor is in the best position to know what constitutes original research in the area and to advise the student in choosing a project that can be completed in the first year.

- The project may not serve as a substitute for second-year or master's research, but it may be a pilot study or an early study in a series of studies that contributes to the second-year or master's research. It is recognized that scientists often conduct programmatic research, and in that context, it might well be appropriate for a student to report his or her previous research when writing a second-year research project report, Master's thesis, or dissertation, perhaps in some detail. It is the responsibility of the student's supervisory committee to interpret and apply this guideline.
- The role of the student is to be that of a research collaborator or of an independent investigator. The project should not consist merely of running subjects or tabulating data under someone else's direction. The "idea" need not be the student's, but he or she should make significant contributions to design, implementation, and analysis. The APA guidelines for determining the characteristics of authorship are useful in this regard.
- The goals of the student should be: (1) to acquire knowledge about methods and procedures; (2) to gain experience in collecting and analyzing data; and (3) to become familiar with conceptual and methodological issues in a particular area of study. It is important to stress that although a publishable paper is an ideal goal of this research, pilot studies or "unsuccessful" studies are acceptable for purposes of the first-year requirement, and completion of the first-year research project is not contingent on finding publishable results.
- To facilitate progress on the project, students may, in consultation with their supervisors, choose to write papers or research proposals for a course that is related, directly or indirectly, to their research projects. Students must be sure, however, that anything turned in as part of a course requirement is entirely their own work. It would be inappropriate, for example, for students to turn in research proposals for a class when their supervisors had substantial input into the design of the proposed experiment. Students are encouraged to discuss any questions about this issue with their supervisors, course instructors, or the Associate Chair for Graduate Studies.

Deadlines for Completion of FYRP

Deadlines have been established to help first-year students maintain an adequate pace for developing their research projects and for completing the requirement.

- January 15. A 1- or 2-page prospectus for the research project, approved by the research supervisor, is to be submitted to the Associate Chair of Graduate Studies by this date. This prospectus should include: (1) a brief description of the topic area and specific questions to be addressed; (2) a general description of the method to be used; and (3) a project timeline. The description of the research need

not be terribly specific at this point, but it should indicate roughly where the project is headed. The timeline should outline approximate dates for reaching certain benchmarks. These benchmarks might include a literature review, ethics submission, data collection, analysis, and a first draft or presentation outline.

- August 31. This is the date by which the results of the research should have been presented to the Department by the student, for example, at the Royce Conference or at a research day organized by the Associate Chair of Graduate Studies (Option 1 for fulfilling the first-year research project requirement) or submitted to the Associate Chair of Graduate Studies as a final report written up by the student in the form of a brief journal article (Option 2 for fulfilling the first-year research project requirement). The student's supervisor determines which option will be selected to meet the requirement.

Options for Completion of FYRP

- Option 1: The Presentation. Where the option of a presentation of the results of the first-year research project is selected, the presentation may take the form of either an oral presentation of at least 15 minutes duration or a poster presentation (choice to be determined by the supervisor in consultation with the student). The format of the presentation should follow typical APA style, with background, method, results, and conclusion sections. The presentation is to be open to the Department. The annual Royce Conference is one venue for the presentation. For students not ready to present at Royce, a research day could be organized at which multiple presentations take place. There could also be individual presentations to which the Department is invited in the event that a student cannot present at Royce or at a research day.
- Option 2: The Written Report. In the final report, the research should be described clearly and succinctly, in approximately 15 to 20 pages. The report should include a brief review of relevant literature and a clear statement of the problem addressed. Methods should be described, indicating how they are related to the issues. The results should be described, using tables and graphs to highlight them as appropriate. Finally, the results and their implications should be discussed. There should be an assessment of how well the results answer the original question. APA format and stylistic conventions for research reports should be followed closely. A highly valued skill in writing experimental reports is the ability to produce clear but concise prose, so students are urged to make the reports succinct. Students are encouraged to ask their supervisors for editorial advice regarding clarity, format, and so on.

Documentation that Requirement is Fulfilled

Students' supervisors must submit to the Associate Chair for Graduate Studies copies of the departmental form indicating that first-year projects have been completed to their satisfaction. Where the student fulfills the requirement with an oral or poster presentation, a 250-word abstract of the presentation should be distributed to members of the student's supervisory committee, for comment if appropriate. Where the student fulfills the requirement with a written report, copies of the final report should be distributed to members of each student's newly formed supervisory committee, for comment if appropriate. One copy of the abstract (in the event of a presentation) or the written report, and any relevant feedback from the student's committee, should be submitted to the Associate Chair for Graduate Studies for placement in the student's file. The abstract or report will be kept available for perusal by other faculty members for one year.

Revision History

Amended September, 1999

Amended December, 2002

Editorial Revision August, 2003

Amended November 10, 2004

Editorial Revision November 2008

Amended on the basis of a motion in Department Council, February 12, 2010

Department of Psychology
First-Year Research Project
Progress Report

Student's Name: _____

Supervisor's Name: _____

Each student entering the program without a Master's degree is required to conduct a First-Year Research Project under the supervision of a faculty member. The rationale for this requirement is to help students become involved in research as soon as possible and to encourage them to remain active in research throughout their tenure in the department. The requirement is fulfilled by either presenting the results of the research to the Department or by writing a final report, in the form of a brief journal article. The presentation or final report is to be completed by August 31 of the first full year of the program and is subject to the Supervisor's approval.

Please indicate how the requirement was fulfilled.

- The student's first-year research project requirement was fulfilled through a presentation to the Department. A 250-word abstract of the presentation is attached. Copies have been distributed to the student's Supervisory Committee.

Title of Presentation _____

Date and Venue _____

- The student's first-year research project requirement was fulfilled through a final written report (attached). Copies have been distributed to the student's Supervisory Committee.

Signature of Student _____ Date _____

Signature of Supervisor _____ Date _____

Please complete this form as soon as possible and submit it to the Associate Chair for Graduate Studies.