

Interdisciplinary Degrees

The Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research (FGSR) has made provision for individual interdisciplinary studies and devised a procedure that enables students, with the support of cooperating departments, to receive interdisciplinary degrees. Interdisciplinary studies are intended to provide students with the opportunity to receive degrees that cannot be obtained in a regular program of study at the University of Alberta.

The graduate program in Psychology is designed to accommodate students with interdisciplinary interests. For some students, however, a specially designed interdisciplinary program might meet a unique need or provide a special advantage. The objective of these guidelines is to clarify the process for obtaining departmental approval for such a program. Specific characteristics of interdisciplinary degrees vary, depending on the goals of the student and the characteristics of cooperating departments. In each case, however, the following guidelines apply for interdisciplinary degrees involving the Department of Psychology.

In these guidelines, “home department” refers to the department in which the student’s supervisor holds a faculty appointment. This department is also responsible for handling all matters of administration, including any arrangements for funding. The conjoint department is the department in which the co-supervisor holds a faculty appointment. These and other details can be found in the document entitled *Proposals for Individual Interdisciplinary Studies*, published by FGSR. The latter document serves as a framework for, and has precedence over, departmental guidelines.

Eligibility

As specified in the FGSR regulations:

- The applicant should have a superior academic record. He or she should have substantial background knowledge in one of the disciplines and sufficiently strong background in the other to enable sponsoring departments to make an initial judgment about the student’s potential to complete the proposed individual program.
- Qualifying or probationary students in either department are not eligible for individual interdisciplinary programs.

Conditions for Departmental Approval of Interdisciplinary Graduate Degrees

Proposal. The student shall prepare a brief written proposal that includes the documentation required by FGSR. The purpose of the proposal is to establish whether there are strong reasons for developing an individual program rather than operating within the context of the regular graduate program. In the proposal, the student should:

- (a) provide a statement of interests that indicates why his or her personal goals are better met by the creation of a unique, interdisciplinary program rather than in the regular graduate program;
- (b) indicate who will serve as members of the supervisory committee, including the supervisor (home department), co-supervisor (conjoint department), and additional members;
- (c) suggest the title of the degree sought;
- (d) detail the proposed structure of the individual program, including required courses, course options, research focus, time lines, and other related issues; and
- (e) indicate whether or not assistantship funding is requested. Completing such a proposal will require consultation and advice from the proposed supervisor and co-supervisor.

Supervisory Committee. When Psychology is the home department, at least one other faculty member in the Department of Psychology must agree to serve on the supervisory committee in addition to the supervisor. This arrangement ensures that the student's interests are adequately represented at evaluation meetings and at meetings concerning awards, funding, and other resources. When Psychology is the conjoint department, only the co-supervisor need be from Psychology.

Letters of Support. Letters of support from prospective supervisory committee members in the Department of Psychology must be provided with the student's proposal. The letters should encompass four issues:

- (a) There should be an assessment of the need for or advantage of the unique interdisciplinary program proposed and/or reasons why the program cannot be accommodated within the framework of the existing graduate program.
- (b) Support must be expressed for specific details of the student's proposed program. Approval of details is critical at this stage because changes in the program, once approved by the Dean, have a status similar to making changes to the program requirements normally included in the University Calendar.
- (c) Because the degree will have Psychology in the title in some form, how the degree will involve psychological research must be specified.
- (d) Potential supervisory committee members should address specifically how the student's program satisfies the equivalent of the Psychology graduate program Principles 2 and 3 if the specific requirements in the individual program differ from those in the regular graduate program. These principles are:

Principle 2. A doctoral degree in psychology requires early and sustained involvement in psychological research. (This principle is implemented in the regular graduate program, in part, by the formal requirements of a first-year research project, second-year research project or Masters thesis, and the doctoral dissertation.)

Principle 3. Training in the graduate program in psychology should ensure that a student possesses sufficient knowledge of focal and related domains. (This principle is implemented in the regular graduate program, in part, by course requirements, the written qualifying exam, and the candidacy exam.)

The manner in which these principles are implemented shall be at the discretion of the proposed Supervisory Committee.

Departmental Considerations

Because the requirements of the graduate program in Psychology are quite flexible and designed to accommodate interdisciplinary interests, students applying for interdisciplinary degrees must normally satisfy the requirements of the regular graduate program, unless exceptions are granted in the proposal supported by the Department Chair and Associate Chair for Graduate Studies. The Department Chair or Associate Chair may choose to seek advice about exceptions from the Graduate Curriculum Committee.

Students applying for entry to interdisciplinary degree programs must apply to the Graduate Selection Committee and meet all the conditions and standards normally required of students admitted to the regular graduate program. If Psychology is the home department, the student will be assigned a priority for funding within the department using normal procedures and criteria. Students who transfer successfully to a specially created interdisciplinary program with Psychology as the home department shall retain their priority for assistantship funding as outlined in *Guidelines for Assigning Graduate Students Assistantships*. If Psychology is the conjoint department, the student will be assigned sixth priority for funding as defined in those guidelines.

Students in interdisciplinary programs for whom Psychology is the home department shall be eligible for the same privileges and subject to the same expectations, responsibilities, and procedures for evaluation as other graduate students in the department.

The student's brief written proposal, along with the letters of support, shall be submitted to the Associate Chair for Graduate Studies. The proposal and the title of the degree must be approved by the Department Chair.

Revision History

Adopted March 17, 1997

Editorial Revision April, 2003

Updated January, 2005

Editorial Revision November 2008