

Psychology Honours Thesis and "How to apply to Grad School"

Information Session Winter 2025



Contact Information

- ▶ Honours Thesis Coordinator:

Professor Kevin Peters

kevinpeters@trentu.ca

- ▶ Psychology Dept. Coordinator:

Robyn Calvert

robyncalvert@trentu.ca

To be discussed...

► Honours Thesis

- Introductions
- What is an honours thesis?
- Why do an honours thesis?
- Admission requirements
- Application process
- Finding a potential supervisor
- Timeline

► Grad School

- What is grad school?
- Types of degrees
- Curriculum vitae (CV)
- GRE
- Reference letters
- Personal statement
- Finding potential supervisors
- Funding/Scholarships



What is an honours thesis?

- ▶ Four-Year Honours Degree
 - ▶ Coursework vs. thesis option
- ▶ Thesis is more than just a ‘big paper’
- ▶ Workload is high!
(PSYC 4020D = app. 16 hours per week for 2 semesters)

What is an honours thesis?

- ▶ Thesis requires the student to:
 - ▶ Participate in thesis seminars throughout year
 - ▶ Search, read and review relevant literature
 - ▶ Plan an empirical study
 - ▶ Write a substantial thesis proposal
 - ▶ Collect and analyze data
 - ▶ Report the results via written, oral and poster presentations

PSYC 4010Y vs. 4020D

- ▶ PSYC 4010Y is only for students doing a Joint Honours Thesis with Psychology and another program (1 credit from Psychology, 1 from the other program)
- ▶ If you are interested in PSYC 4010Y contact Robyn Calvert in the Psychology Office
- ▶ Note: You do not have to do a Joint Honours Thesis if you are a joint PSYC major, you are eligible to complete 4020D

Why do an honours thesis?

Good...

- ✓ If you are planning to go on to a graduate program in psychology (or many other social science-based programs)
- ✓ Competitive edge in job market (shows marketable skills)
- ✓ Are unsure of future goals (don't limit your options)
- ✓ Networking with professors, better letters of reference
- ✓ Research is fun, educational and stimulating
- the best educational experience we offer

Admission Requirements

- ▶ For admission to PSYC 4020D
 - ▶ A grade of 75% or higher in each of PSYC 3016H and 3017H (or in PSYC 3015Y)
 - ▶ At least 0.5 credit from each of the A2, B2, A3, and B3 categories (see next slide).
 - ▶ 75% average over all Psychology courses.
 - ▶ Permission of Psychology Department.
- ▶ Some faculty supervisors have specific pre-requisites for content courses, etc.

Page 453 of the Academic Calendar (2024-25)

A2 Natural Science

2200H
2210H
2400H
2600H

A3 Natural Science

3210H
3220H
3230H
3240H
3420H
3430H
3440H
3451H
3460H
3610H

B2 Social Science

2300H
2310H
2550H
2700H

B3 Social Science

3300H
3500H
3510H
3550H
3560H
3590H
3710H
3725H
3730H
3740H
3750H
3760H
3770H
3780H

Application process

- ▶ You must apply for the Psychology Honours Thesis Program.
- ▶ Forms are available from the Psychology Office and online.
- ▶ Limited space.
- ▶ Application deadline for 2025AY: **March 3, 2025**
 - ▶ email to robyncalvert@trentu.ca, in the Psychology Office, DNA/LHS C 104.

Finding a potential faculty supervisor

Thoughts....

- ▶ Your academic career begins in undergraduate studies,
 - ▶ Important - be professional and respectful with your colleagues and professors.
- ▶ Networking is an important skill.
 - ▶ in life and in getting into graduate programs - start now!
- ▶ Approach faculty whose research work interests you.

Finding a potential faculty supervisor

Specifics....

- ▶ Identify faculty members with whom you are most interested in working.
- ▶ Look for a 'good fit' personally and professionally.
 - ▶ see online for faculty research interests.
 - ▶ Suggestion: Be open to working with a faculty member whose research interests do not match with your present interests.
- ▶ Faculty Research
<https://www.trentu.ca/psychology/faculty-research>
- ▶ Contact potential faculty to see if taking on new students.
 - ▶ email, make appointment during office hours, etc.

Finding a potential faculty supervisor

Finalizing application to program....

- ▶ Once you have a faculty member willing to supervise you
 - ▶ Complete, sign, and have the faculty member sign the application form.
 - ▶ Submit form to Robyn Calvert in the Psychology Office.
 - ▶ This is your application to enter the thesis program.
 - ▶ Acceptance is confirmed only after all course requirements are met.

Timeline

- ▶ Application forms will be available in January from the Psychology Office or online.
 - ▶ <https://www.trentu.ca/psychology/undergraduate-programs/honours-thesis-courses>
- ▶ Application deadline for 2025AY:
 - ▶ **March 3, 2025** (email to: robyncalvert@trentu.ca in the Psychology Office, LHS C 104).
- ▶ If you meet course requirements, you will be notified late May when your marks become available.
- ▶ If you are completing course requirements in the summer, you may apply after the March 4th deadline and your application will be considered when summer final grades are available.

Applying to Graduate School

- ▶ Big thanks to Dr. Neil Fournier - This part of the presentation is a condensed version of one of his presentations on this topic!

Graduate School: What to expect and what is it about?

- ▶ Different schedule, different focus
- ▶ Classes are important, but not as important as your research.
- ▶ Your focus should be on the work you do **between** classes – this is when your much of your scholarship happens.
- ▶ Take a moment to really think about why you want to complete a graduate degree?

Types of Degrees

- ▶ Experimental (social, development, cognitive, health, neuroscience)
- ▶ Clinical (child stream, adult stream, or both)
 - ▶ Very competitive (300-600, take around 6-8 applicants)
 - ▶ Some funding
- ▶ Psy.D (Doctor of Psychology)
 - ▶ Clinical treatment-oriented degree; Research is minor focus
 - ▶ Usually, no funding and costly
- ▶ Counselling
- ▶ Other (industrial/organization, quantitative)

Find schools & supervisors

- ▶ What type of degree do you want to do?
- ▶ Which schools offer this?
- ▶ Research supervisors whose research aligns with your interests
- ▶ Make a list of where you will apply to

Curriculum Vitae (CV) Sections

- ▶ Education
- ▶ Research interests
- ▶ Thesis/publications, conference/poster presentations
- ▶ Research and lab experience
- ▶ Professional experience (put academic experience first)
- ▶ Scholarships/academic awards
- ▶ Volunteer work/community service, University involvement
- ▶ Additional skills, info, languages (only if you speak more than one language)

Graduate Record Exam (GRE)

- ▶ Two Types:

- General

- ▶ Verbal Reasoning
 - ▶ Quantitative Reasoning
 - ▶ Analytical Writing

- Subject (Psychology)

- ▶ Many, but not all grad programs require scores for one or both of these tests
- ▶ <https://www.ets.org/gre.html>

Reference Letters

- ▶ Not all references are created equal
- ▶ Many cases: Your honours thesis supervisor should be one of these references
- ▶ Someone who can comment on your:
 - ▶ Writing skills, presentation and communication skills, research potential
- ▶ Pick someone who knows you **WELL**. Who understands what you have **DONE** in psychology, what you strive to **BECOME**
 - ▶ Work hard at forming a strong relationship with them, show them what you can do

Making the Request for Reference Letters

- ▶ Be organized (schools have different deadlines and requirements for letters)
- ▶ Be respectful of referee's time (ask well IN ADVANCE)
- ▶ Be appreciative
- ▶ Ask if they can write you a STRONG letter
- ▶ Give them a list of things to mention or what exactly the school(s) will be looking for, possibly even strengths/weaknesses and specific examples
- ▶ May also be helpful to give them your CV, up-to-date transcript, and research/personal statement for any scholarship/graduate program you are applying too

Personal Statement

- ▶ Very important! This is your opportunity to be more than grades, test scores, etc.
- ▶ Customize somewhat for each school.
- ▶ Every school has different requirements: length, topics, format, etc. Make sure to follow these requirements! If not, may tell the person reading you cannot follow instructions, or not that interested in the program
- ▶ The committee will use this to determine your fit to their program
- ▶ They will examine the clarity and focus of your statement
- ▶ They will examine your writing and communication skills
- ▶ Basic goal: convince your potential advisor to offer you an interview or admission into their program
- ▶ Remember, your committee/supervisor will be reading many other statements!

Approaching Potential Supervisors

- ▶ Introduce yourself, mention you will be applying
- ▶ Outline your interests (be specific)
- ▶ Attach your CV, transcript(s), and GRE scores
- ▶ Offer to meet with them, but be clear that you understand if they're too busy or if it's not possible
- ▶ How do your interests fit with theirs?
- ▶ Make it clear you've read their work
- ▶ Recommendation: start doing this between May-October the year before you would like to start
 - ▶ Why? Because you can apply to one of the tri-agencies (NSERC, CIHR, SSHRC) and already have a project in my mind

Funding/Scholarships

- ▶ Federal: Tri-Council Agencies
 - ▶ Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC)
 - ▶ Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC)
 - ▶ Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR)
- ▶ Provincial
 - ▶ Ontario Graduate Scholarship (OGS)
- ▶ Institutional
 - ▶ Research assistantship, graduate teaching assistantship
- ▶ <https://www.trentu.ca/graduatestudies/>

How to pick a graduate program?

- ▶ Check out schools online
- ▶ Why is one program 'better' than another?
 - ▶ Prestigious school?
 - ▶ More interesting city?
 - ▶ Closer to home?
 - ▶ Supervisor is a big name in the field?
 - ▶ Positive and successful grad school experience is dependent on the **quality** and **style of support** and **guidance** that you will receive from your advisor/supervisor