Advanced Examinations

The Advanced Examination is designed to assess expertise in the student’s area of concentration. This examination, which includes both a written and oral part, is graded by a committee of at least two faculty members. The written and oral portions of the advanced examination offer the student an opportunity to demonstrate both in-depth, focused knowledge in their specialty area of study, and also a breadth of knowledge outside of their area of expertise. The student must pass the advanced examination by the beginning of the third year of study.

Topical Seminars

The Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences offers topical seminars in which one or more faculty members leads seminars on topics of special interest, such as cognitive processes, developmental psycholinguistics, neuro-physiological aspects of behavior, mathematical psychology, and information processing. Through participation in these seminars, students are exposed to findings in subfields of psychology. Topics vary from semester to semester and are determined by the interests of both faculty and graduate students. The format of the seminar is optional, and the course may or may not require formal tests of knowledge. Students are urged to complete topical seminars as appropriate.

Research Seminars

Students and faculty engaged or interested in research in particular areas organize these seminars. Participants discuss their own research and other current research in the area.

Teaching Assistantships

Teaching requirements are fulfilled by graduate students serving as teaching assistants to members of the department’s faculty, in courses taught in the School of Arts and Sciences. All graduate students are expected to TA a total of four semesters, beginning in the first semester of their second year, continuing consecutively through the second semester of the third year. The Department Chair, Director of Graduate Studies, Department Administrator, and Academic Program Coordinator collaborate to assess the instructional support needs of the department and assign these teaching duties.

Advanced students may apply for a Dean’s Teaching Fellowship (https://krieger.jhu.edu/research/deans-teaching-fellowship/). This prestigious fellowship provides graduate students an opportunity to grow both as educators and scholars by allowing them to propose, design, and offer an undergraduate seminar course.

Literature Review

Students complete a written literature review in preparation of the completion of their dissertation. The literature review is modeled on articles appearing in professional journals, and it should be suitable for publication in such a journal. Typically the review provides a background for the thesis plan, but for some students it may be prepared on a topic other than the one selected for the thesis. The literature review is evaluated by the same committee that will evaluate the thesis plan.

Thesis Plan

At least one calendar year before receiving the Ph.D. degree, each doctoral candidate must develop a plan for the dissertation research and present the plan before a departmental committee. The thesis plan is a detailed document stating the issue the student wishes to address in a dissertation, the experimental design to be used, and the way the student will interpret the various possible results. In essence, it is a proposal for a research project with predictions and preliminary data, rather than results. The outline of the experiments should be sufficiently clear that
the readers will fully understand the procedures; the plan should also include a timeline.

This plan should be completed as soon as possible, but no later than the end of the fourth year. Dissertation research cannot proceed until the Thesis Plan has formally been approved. With the committee’s approval, the student then prepares a dissertation.

Dissertation
The dissertation represents the student’s culminating piece of scholarly work. It establishes the start of a research career and the basis for postgraduate employment. The Graduate Board of the University administers the final oral examination, a defense of the thesis. The doctoral dissertation must be in a form suitable for and worthy of publication.

Financial Support
Support for graduate students comes from many different sources. Domestic and international students in good standing can expect to receive tuition remission and a stipend.

Stipend support is competitive with that at other institutions and provides sufficient funds to live modestly. Stipends may come from research grants held by faculty members, allowing students to collaborate and be paid as research assistants. The university also provides funds for teaching assistants, as well as special fellowships.

All students are encouraged to apply for national awards, fellowships, and scholarships (e.g., NSF Graduate Fellowships). Our students have been remarkably successful at winning these honors.

The Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences is also affiliated with two diverse training programs (http://krieger.jhu.edu/pbs/graduate/training-programs-and-grants/) supported by the National Eye Institute and the National Institute on Aging, including the NIA-supported training grant titled “Research Training in Age-Related Cognitive Disorders.” Qualified graduate students are encouraged to discuss relevant and appropriate training grant applications with their advisers. Stipend and tuition remission may be provided to accepted applicants through these and other training programs.

For further information on graduate study in psychology, contact the Academic Program Coordinator (ezurbuc1@jhu.edu) for the Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences (https://pbs.jhu.edu/).

Master of Arts in Psychology
A student who has been admitted into the Ph.D. program can earn a Master of Arts degree in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Ph.D. degree. Normally, candidates for the Ph.D. degree in psychology will qualify for the M.A. degree at the end of their second year, after having completed two area seminars and at least two courses in psychological research design and/or advanced statistics, provided that their performance is of the quality judged satisfactory for the M.A. level. There is no terminal master’s program.