Psychology Honours Thesis & Applying to Graduate School

Fall 2026 Information Session

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Agenda

I. Honours Thesis:

- What is an Honours Thesis
- Why do an Honours Thesis
- Admission requirements
- Application process
- Finding a potential supervisor
- Timeline

II. Applying to Graduate School:

- Types of degrees
- What grad school is about
- Funding/scholarships
- Finding schools & supervisors
- GRE
- Curriculum vitae (CV)
- Reference letters
- Personal statement

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What is an Honours Thesis

- Four-Year Honours Degree: Coursework vs. Thesis option
- PSYC 4020D Honours Thesis is a capstone project course
  - more than just a 'big paper'
  - more than being a research assistant
  - independent empirical research under faculty supervision
  - double-credit = high workload

  ~15-20 hours per week for 2 terms

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What is involved:

- Participate in research skills seminars
- Search, read and review relevant literature
- Plan and design an original empirical study
- Write a substantial research proposal
- Collect and analyze data
- Report the results in a written report, oral and poster presentations

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Why do an Honours Thesis

- Expected if you plan to go on to graduate studies in psychology or other social sciences
- Competitive edge in job applications (shows marketable skills)
- If you are unsure of future goals (don't limit your options)
- Networking with professors, stronger reference letters
- Research is fun, stimulating, and rewarding - the best educational experience we offer!

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PSYC 4010Y vs. 4020D

- PSYC 4010Y is only for students doing a *Joint* Honours Thesis in Psychology (1.0 credit) and another program (1.0 credit)
  - If you are interested in PSYC 4010Y, contact Robyn Calvert
- Note: Joint PSYC majors can still do the double-credit PSYC 4020D thesis (you do not *have* to do a Joint Honours Thesis)

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Thesis Admission Requirements

- **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)
- **An average of 75%** or higher across all PSYC courses completed
- Permission of Psychology Department
- Faculty member willing to supervise you
- Note: Some faculty supervisors have specific pre-requisites for content courses

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A2	A3	B2	B3
PSYC 2200H	PSYC 3210H	PSYC 2300H	PSYC 3300H
PSYC 2210H	PSYC 3220H	PSYC 2310H	PSYC 3330H
PSYC 2400H	PSYC 3230H	PSYC 2550H	PSYC 3500H
PSYC 2600H	PSYC 3240H	PSYC 2700H	PSYC 3510H
—	PSYC 3420H	—	PSYC 3550H
—	PSYC 3430H	—	PSYC 3560H
—	PSYC 3440H	—	PSYC 3590H
—	PSYC 3451H	—	PSYC 3710H
—	PSYC 3460H	—	PSYC 3725H
—	PSYC 3610H	—	PSYC 3730H
—	PSYC 3690H (3790H)	—	PSYC 3740H
—	—	—	PSYC 3750H
		—	PSYC 3760H
2025-2026 Academic Calendar		—	PSYC 3770H

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Application Process

- You must apply to the Psychology Honours Thesis Program
- Spaces are limited and competitive
- It is your responsibility to find a faculty member willing to supervise you

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Finding a Potential Supervisor

- Be professional and respectful with your peers and professors
  - your academic career begins in undergraduate studies
- Networking is an important skill
  - in life and in getting into graduate programs – start now!
- Approach professors whose research work interests you and who are available

Faculty research page:
https://www.trentu.ca/psychology/faculty-research

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Tips for approaching professors

- Identify professors with whom you are most interested in working
  - familiarize yourself with their research and publications
  - look for a 'good fit' personally and professionally
- Be open to working with a professor whose research does not match your current interests
  - main goal is to gain research skills, educational enrichment, strong reference letters
- Contact professors to see if they are taking on new students
  - email, make appointment, visit office hours, etc.
  - provide your academic transcript, CV/resume, career goals
  - profs are busy – it's okay to follow up if you don't hear back

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Finalizing your Thesis application

Once a faculty member has agreed to supervise you:

- Complete, sign, and have the supervisor sign the application form
  - available from the Psychology Office and online https://www.trentu.ca/psychology/undergraduate-programs/honours-thesis-courses
- Submit to Psychology Office, LHS C104, psychology@trentu.ca
- Application deadline for 2027AY: **March 5, 2027**
- Acceptance will be confirmed in late May/early June, after verifying that all admission requirements have been met
- If you are completing course requirements in the summer, your application will be considered after summer grades are available

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Timeline

- **Late July/early August:** Registrar's Office will enroll you into PSYC 4020D.
- **Summer:** Meet with your supervisor to plan the thesis project and start doing prep readings.
- **End of October:** Thesis Proposal is due.
- **Early April:** Submission of completed thesis is due.
- **Late April:** Poster Day!

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Applying to Graduate School

Big thanks to Drs. Neil Fournier and Kevin Peters:
These slides are adapted from their presentations

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Types of Degrees

Do you want to be...

- Licensed/Registered Psychologist? → Clinical PhD, PsyD, Couns. PhD
  Licensure/registration requirements vary by province
- Mental health practitioner w/o becoming a Registered Psychologist? → Counselling, Psychotherapy, Social Work, Occupational Therapy
  Licensure/registration requirements vary by province
- Employed in academia, government policy & analytics, NGOs, public sector, private industry? → Non-Clinical Psychology MA/MSc, PhD

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Clinical PhD (MA/MSc+PhD, 6-7 yrs):

- equal focus on research and clinical training (scientist-practitioner model)
- highly competitive (4-8 per program out of 300-600), funding available

PsyD (Doctor of Psychology, 4-6 yrs):

- practice-oriented, less focus on research (practitioner-scholar model)
- 4x larger intake, high tuition, little funding, rare in Canada

Both Clinical PhD & PsyD:

- leads to registration as a Licensed/Registered Psychologist
- includes required clinical practicum hours and a mandatory competitive fulltime pre-doctoral internship/residency (typically 1 year)
- make sure the program is **accredited by CPA or APA**

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Counselling Psychology (MA/MEd - 2 yrs, PhD - 4-5 yrs):

- practice-oriented training in psychotherapy and counselling
- MA & PhD programs include a research component (e.g., thesis)
- MA/MEd leads to registration as a Registered Psychotherapist
- PhD leads to registration as a Licensed/Registered Psychologist

Psychotherapy (MA/MSc - 2 yrs, MDiv - 3 yrs):

- practice-oriented training in specific psychotherapy approaches
- leads to registration as a Registered Psychotherapist

Social Work (MSW - 2 yrs, or 1 yr if have BSW):

- professional degree focused on intervention, advocacy, system change
- leads to registration as a Registered Social Worker (authorized to practice psychotherapy)

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Occupational Therapy (MScOT - 2 yrs)

- healthcare degree focused on rehabilitation and daily functioning
- training in neurology, anatomy, kinesiology, cognitive-behavioural
- leads to registration as a Registered Occupational Therapist

Non-Clinical Psychology (MA/MSc - 2 yrs, PhD - 3-4 yrs, Direct Entry PhD - 5-6 yrs)

- social, developmental, cognitive, health, neuroscience, school, quantitative, industrial/organizational
- primary focus on research
- prepares for careers in academia, government policy & analytics, NGOs, public sector, private industry

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What Grad School is About

- Different schedule, different focus
  - fewer classes
  - research programs: primary focus is on research (independent work between classes)
  - applied programs: include clinical practica
- Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) duties
- Extra professional development opportunities
  - e.g., side projects, conferences, publications
- Really think about why you want to pursue grad school:
  - motivations? short-term, long-term goals?

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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, GTA, internal scholarships

  https://www.trentu.ca/graduatestudies/

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Finding Schools & Supervisors

- Apply to multiple schools!
- Make an Excel spreadsheet of all schools
- Which schools offer the degree you want?
- Which cities are you prepared to relocate to?
- Which schools/programs are prestigious, highly ranked?
- What funding options are available at each school?
- Research potential Supervisors at each school:
  - research aligns with your interests & background?
  - big name in the field?
  - accepting students?
  - supervisor fit is very important!

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Approaching Potential Supervisors

- Introduce yourself, mention you will be applying
- Outline your interests and background (be specific)
- Attach your transcript(s), CV, GRE scores
- Offer to meet/videoconference/call 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
- Start reaching out between **May-October** the year before
  - your scholarship applications will be stronger if you already have a specific supervisor and project in mind

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Graduate Record Exam (GRE)

- Standardized admission exam ($250 USD)
- Two types:
  1. **General**
     - Verbal Reasoning
     - Quantitative Reasoning
     - Analytical Writing
  2. **Subject (Psychology)**
- Some, not all grad programs require scores for one or both of these tests

  https://www.ets.org/gre.html

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Curriculum Vitae (CV) Sections

- Education
- Research and career interests
- Thesis, publications, conference/poster presentations
- Research and lab experience
- Professional experience (put academic first)
- Academic distinctions (scholarships, awards, prizes, Honour Roll)
- Professional development (micro-credentials, certifications)
- Volunteering, community service, university involvement
- Additional skills, languages (only if you speak more than one)

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Reference Letters

- References are very important part of your application!
- Most schools ask for academic references; some give an option of adding a professional reference
- Not all referees are created equal
- Pick someone who knows you **WELL**, who understands what you have **DONE** in psychology, and what you strive to **BECOME**
- Someone who can comment on your: writing skills, presentation and communication skills, research potential, interpersonal skills
- Your Honours Thesis Supervisor should be one of your referees
- Work hard at forming a strong professional relationship with your potential referees, show them what you can do

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Making a Reference Request:

- Profs are very busy – give them everything they need in one email
- Remind them how they know you (course, year, project/paper, grade)
- State what programs you are applying to and why, briefly describe your grad school goals and career aspirations
- Ask if they can write you a **STRONG** letter that would speak to:
  - what the school(s) are looking for
  - your attributes you'd like highlighted, with specific examples
- State the earliest deadline and ask way IN ADVANCE (4 to 6 weeks)
- Attach your up-to-date transcript(s), CV, draft of Personal and Research Statements
- Give them an easy out if they do not have the time

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If they agree, follow-up with:

- List of schools, deadlines, reference requirements and submission instructions (these differ for every school)
- Reminders of the upcoming reference due dates (please!)

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Personal Statement

- This is your opportunity to be more than grades, test scores, etc.
- Customize your statements for each school (at least somewhat).
- Be sure to follow specific instructions for each school (length, topics, format) – shows you care and pay attention to detail.
- Use ALL the space available to you.
- The committee will use this to determine your fit to the program.
- They will examine the clarity and focus of your statement, your writing and communication skills, your overall attitude.
- Basic goal: convince your potential Supervisor to offer you an interview or admission into their program.
- They will be reading many other statements – make yours stand out! (make it personal and specific)

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