

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

Information Session Fall 2025



# Contact Information

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# 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 2026AY: **March 6, 2026**
  - ▶ email to [robyncalvert@trentu.ca](mailto: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 2026AY:
  - ▶ **March 6, 2026** (email to: [robyncalvert@trentu.ca](mailto: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 4<sup>th</sup> 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