Senior Thesis Helpful Hints
Psychology Department
Union College
Updated Spring 2015

How to Get Started on a Senior Thesis

NOTE: PSY 200 (Statistics) and PSY 300 (Research Methods) are prerequisites for the thesis.

1) Identify a topic to research.
   - Eventually, you will need to narrow your topic to something specific, but this is usually done with the help of the faculty member who is willing to supervise your project.

To get you started you may wish to:
   - Look at the type of research the faculty are working on (see descriptions below), and see if any of those projects seem interesting to you. Some faculty will only supervise students who work on one of their projects, and most faculty will only supervise students who select a topic that is related to their general area of expertise.
   - Begin by thinking about the areas of psychology you have found most interesting. It may help to look back through the index of introduction to psychology textbooks. Once you have some general ideas of areas that interest you, you might check Shaffer Library’s PsychINFO database, searching out different topics to see what kind of work has been done in the past.

2) Find an advisor who will agree to supervise your work.
   - Talk with faculty who are in the general area that interests you. Below is a list of the faculty, their research interests, and contact information. Before you approach a faculty member, you should attempt to articulate possible research questions. For example, if you are interested in memory, you may approach the professor and say you are interested in “how glucose levels affect memory recall” or “how stress levels affect memory recall.” Alternatively, you could say that you are interested in one or more of the research projects the faculty member is working on.
   - Due to the fact that thesis supervision is a very large time commitment, faculty typically will take on only a small number of thesis students. This is especially true when the thesis projects are not closely aligned to their own research, since such projects usually require a larger time commitment.
   - If you are uncertain about which faculty member would be appropriate for your project, contact a professor that you know well, or the Psychology Department Chair.

3) Submit a proposal of your project.
   - After your thesis advisor and you have agreed to work together, your thesis advisor will assist you in preparing the proposal, which will be evaluated by the departmental committee.
   - Proposals must be submitted to the department chair no later than the end of the eighth week of the spring term. The thesis proposal form is provided on the last page of this packet.
Answers to Some Common Questions

☐ *Do I have to do a thesis to get honors?*
   Yes. In addition, you must meet the other criteria for honors in the department (see the current College Catalogue.

☐ *Do I have to be eligible for honors to do a thesis?*
   No. Anyone can apply to do a thesis.

☐ *Do I have to do a thesis if I want to go to graduate school?*
   No. While most graduate programs look favorably on you having research experience, it is probably not that important that your experience is from writing a thesis. Your research experience can come from other sources, such as an independent study, a senior project, a summer research fellowship, etc.

☐ *What about interdepartmental majors?*
   To get honors, interdepartmental majors must meet the criteria for honors in both departments. That means they must do a thesis for psychology. It is normally an interdepartmental thesis (two advisors, one course credit in each department).

☐ *Must theses be done in the fall and winter terms?*
   No. Theses are usually done fall-winter in order for the work to be presented at the Steinmetz Symposium in the spring; however, they can be done in any two terms of the senior year. Under special circumstances, it is also possible to begin your thesis in the spring or summer before your senior year.

☐ *Do I have to do a thesis if I want to do a research or a major project in my senior year?*
   No. You can do a one or two-term senior project. However, this will not qualify you for honors.

☐ *Does a thesis have to be an empirical study?*
   No, but most are. A thesis can be based on an empirical investigation (an experiment, an analysis of survey data, interviews) or on library/textual research. However, a thesis should be more than a literature review – you should make some original scholarly contribution to the field.
Psychology Department Faculty 2015-2016

Cay Anderson-Hanley
Associate Professor, Butterfield Hall Room 304, 388-6355, andersoc@union.edu
My research interests lie primarily in the realm of clinical neuropsychology and health psychology. In particular, I am interested in the neuropsychological effects of exercise for older adults, especially as it might relate to the maintenance of cognitive and emotional functioning, and the prevention of dementia. Recent studies completed in my lab indicate the executive function benefits of both strengthening exercise as well as virtual reality-enhanced exercise (cybercycling) for older adults. Other recent research out of my lab has examined the effects of therapy groups for older adults, expressive writing for the emotional and physical well-being of dementia caregivers, and the benefits of exercise in schizophrenia and autism.

Suzie Benack
Professor, Bailey Hall Room 311B, 388-6258, benacks@union.edu
My interests include adolescence and early adulthood, gender roles, sexuality (especially non-normative sexualities), moral development, epistemological development, depression, object relations & attachment, romantic relationships, self/ego development. In addition to my specific interests, I am open to working with students on their interests in the areas of personality, adolescent/adult development, clinical psychology, and applications of psychology to philosophy and the arts.

George Y. Bizer
Professor, Bailey Hall Room 301B, 388-6228, bizerg@union.edu
www.GeorgeBizer.com
As a social psychologist, I have a broad interest in exploring how the social world in which we live impacts our affective, behavioral, and cognitive processes. One area within this domain involves how and why we like and dislike the people, things, and concepts we experience. These likes and dislikes – social psychologists call them “attitudes” – are important because, when assessed correctly, they are excellent predictors of human behavior. My students and I have explored attitudes in a variety of contexts, including marketing and advertising, politics, the media, sexuality, and a variety of other areas. For a list of recent thesis topics, visit GeorgeBizer.com, then click “Lab Groups.”

Daniel J. Burns
Professor, Bailey Hall Room 301D, 388-6275, burnsd@union.edu
http://minerva.union.edu/burnsd/index.html
The ability to remember our past is a relatively unique human ability. We use this knowledge about our past to help us plan for the future, a human quality that has tremendous implications for our survival. It makes evolutionary sense that a memory system that helps us plan for the future might be particularly good at storing information that will help us survive and/or reproduce in the future. My students (both Psychology and Neuroscience majors) and I have been exploring this topic and several other memory topics (e.g., false memories and why they are so detailed, the interactions between stress, fasting, cortisol levels, and memory) over the past couple of years. In addition, I have also supervised several students whose projects were related to educational issues (e.g., test anxiety, study strategies, etc.).

Christopher F. Chabris
Associate Professor, Butterfield Hall Room 306, 388-6259, chabrisc@union.edu
www.chabris.com
Each of us is unique. My research asks how and why. My overall goal is to understand the different ways in which individuals differ from one another, and the reasons for these differences. To do this, I study several areas, including cognitive abilities (such as social intelligence, general intelligence, and spatial/mechanical reasoning), decision making (including traits like confidence and impatience), and expertise (how people who are very skilled in a particular task or field differ from novices). I use a variety of methods, studying both individual performance and group interactions. I am also interested in the topic of "cognitive illusions," which are intuitive but erroneous beliefs we have about how our minds work, and I co-authored a book about this topic (“The Invisible Gorilla”).
Kenneth G. DeBono
Gilbert R. Livingston Professor of the Behavioral Sciences, Bailey Hall Room 311A, 388-6542, debonok@union.edu
I am interested in the relations between personality factors and responsiveness to different kinds of persuasive messages. In particular, I study whether differences in self-monitoring tendencies are related to: the kinds of persuasive information to which people are responsive and how they process that information. I often study these questions in the context of advertising.

Joshua J. Hart
Assistant Professor, Bailey Hall Room 302, 388-6353, hartj@union.edu
http://muse.union.edu/psychology/joshua-hart/
I have three overlapping areas of research interests, which are: (1) The effects of psychological security and insecurity. Humans are fundamentally motivated to feel secure, which influences many psychological phenomena. I and my students have studied the effects of security and insecurity on close relationships, self-esteem (e.g., academic, athletic, and appearance strivings), attitudes (e.g., belief in evolution and intelligent design; support for military interventions and political candidates), risk-taking, information-processing, and decision-making. (2) Attachment and close relationships. I am interested in how security-related individual differences (specifically, attachment style, a personality trait thought to result from close-relationship experiences across the lifespan), influence close relationship and non-relationship phenomena. (3) Self-esteem and belief systems. I am also interested in the ways that people enhance and maintain their self-esteem and beliefs about the world. Therefore, research on self-esteem or worldviews (e.g., politics, religion, morality) is generally in my wheelhouse. For more information, please click the link at the bottom of this site:

Lindsay Morton
Visiting Assistant Professor, Bailey Hall Room 313, 388-8012, mortonl@union.edu
Although we might all want a magical elixir that prevents disease, prolongs life, and promotes health, it turns out the path to well-being requires substantial self-regulation. Self-regulation is the ability to forgo short-term interests in the pursuit of long-term goals, and this is what I study in my research. Specifically, I study how self-regulation impacts healthy behaviors and how individuals can use social influences to promote successful self-regulation. I have explored how significant others affect goal pursuit and the execution of self-control, two specific types of self-regulation, and I am currently testing how the social modeling of exercise influences others’ physical activity. I plan to continue this work and further explore how self-regulation plays a role in the formation of healthy habits and in compliance with health-related communication.

Stephen G. Romero
Associate Professor, Butterfield Hall Room 308, 388-7106, romeros@union.edu
Current research pursues three general goals: (1) Investigating neuronal plasticity associated with acquisition of new cognitive skills, recovery of function after brain injury, and associated with neurological and psychological disorders. These studies include the use of behavioral, neuroimaging and EEG methods with patients and unimpaired volunteers; (2) Investigating the role of optimism in cognitive skill learning through the use of behavioral, EEG, and Neuroimaging methods with patients and unimpaired volunteers; (3) Investigating neurological basis of musical processing through the use of behavioral, EEG, and Neuroimaging methods with patients and unimpaired volunteers.
Linda N. Stanhope  
Professor, Bailey Room 301A, 388-6543, stanhopl@union.edu  
I am interested in factors relating to the social development of children and young adolescents. In particular, I study the interrelationship among such factors as parenting styles, children’s personalities, their theories of mind, and their social behavior (e.g., helpfulness, peer relations). Some examples of recent research projects include: predicting middle school children’s susceptibility to peer pressure and early dating from their own self-monitoring styles and their parents’ discipline practices; understanding preschool children’s helpfulness in the classroom in terms of their temperaments and their theories of mind (awareness of others’ thoughts); investigating middle school students’ views of cyber-bullying compared to conventional bullying.

D. Catherine Walker (starting September 2015)  
Visiting Assistant Professor, d.catherine.walker.phd@gmail.com  
My research focuses on body image, eating disorders, and disordered weight- and shape-control behaviors. Specifically, individuals with body dissatisfaction repeatedly engage in body checking or body image avoidance behaviors, to gain or avoid information about their shape, weight, and size. My research has examined how body checking and avoidance behaviors impact body image and weight- and shape-control behaviors. I also have a research interest in body image and disordered eating and exercise behaviors in men. Lastly, my research focuses on clinical applications of prevention and treatment for eating disorders and body image dissatisfaction.

Carol S. Weisse  
Dir. of Health Professions Program, Bailey Room 101E, 388-6300/6352, weissec@union.edu  
My research interests are in the area of Health Psychology. Past research projects have investigated those factors that influence pain perception and pain management, including gender, race, and stress. I am particularly interested in end of life care and patient satisfaction as well as in ways to improve empathy in care givers.
Senior Thesis Proposal Form for Psych. and ID Psych. Majors
(This form is not appropriate for Neuroscience majors)

This form must be handed in to the Psychology Department Administrative Assistant no later than Friday of the 8th week of the term prior to beginning your thesis. Please write neatly.

Student Name_________________________ Major_________________________

E-mail address________________________________________________________________________

Name of Psychology Department Professor Supervising the Project (adjunct professors may not supervise senior theses).

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Working Title of the Project:

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Brief Description of the Project. (Please provide a brief description of the project. If you prefer, you may use a separate sheet of paper and attach it to this form).