

Ashoka University: Psychology PhD Program

Structure

The PhD programme trains the next generation of rigorous, confident, responsible, and competent scholars who will address important problems, problems where the answer matters to science in particular, or to humanity in general (Medawar, 1979, *Advice to a Young Scientist*).

Accepted students are expected to commit full-time to their PhD studies. They are not allowed to take on paid jobs outside their studies, unless it can be demonstrated that these jobs contribute to their research. They are expected to spend no less than 40 hours a week, for 51 weeks annually. Candidates should know that it is not uncommon to spend 70 hours a week working towards their degree.

Vision and Mission statement

The Psychology PhD program at Ashoka University wishes to train a generation of psychologists from diverse backgrounds, irrespective of gender, caste, creed, orientation or religion. *We expressly seek individuals from marginalized groups and communities to be included in our program.* Our guiding principles are founded on imparting rigorous scientific training and building cross cultural awareness to address relevant psychological research problems. We will stress holistic development of our trainees into responsible scholars who are methodologically robust and ethically sound, and adept at principles of praxis. We want the graduates of this program to be well rounded individuals who practice and promote the discipline of psychology with meaningfulness to science and humanity.

General Structure of the PhD Program:

The PhD program will include academic and research training as well as ethical and career development training. The first two years (one year, in case of M.Phil./ M.Tech. entrants) will be heavily tilted to coursework and professional development and career planning workshops.

Students need a minimum of 24 coursework credits to advance to PhD candidacy in year 3. To maintain good academic standing in order to receive your fellowship, all PhD students are required to maintain a minimum GPA of 7.5 (i.e. A minimum grade of B- or above) for all coursework.

From third year onwards, gradually the research components will start to predominate, and years 4 and 5 will be more or less research centric.

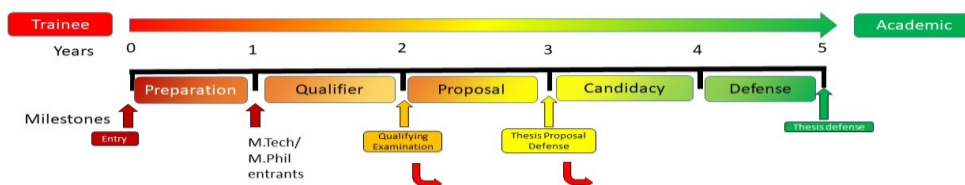
Three activities will be suggested for all PhD students through their tenure at the Department of Psychology at Ashoka University.

1. **Psychology Journal Club:** Every week a student will present a journal article. Attendance is mandatory for all PhD students. Senior students will present in the earlier part of the academic year for the newer entrants to learn from their peers
2. **Graduate research seminar in Psychology:** Every week two students will present their own research in front of the department. Attendance is mandatory for all PhD students and all faculty members are encouraged to attend the weekly GRS
3. **Teaching assistantships:** Each student will serve as graduate TAs in a course in consultation with the thesis advisor every semester starting from the beginning of second year. The particular arrangements will be worked out by the advisor and the department on a case by case basis.
4. **Individual Development Plan(IDP):** Every year, starting from the first year, students will submit an individual development plan to the PhD coordinator and the advisor by **October 1 of every academic year.** This will serve as a roadmap to the upcoming year for the student, and will be reviewed as part of their annual progress review. Further resources on how to think about an IDP is available online and some guidelines are provided below. The students will receive more guidance on this as they enroll in the program

Duration of the PhD program: For candidates with M.Phil or M. Tech, the duration of the PhD Fellowship is 4 years. For every other entrant, the duration of the PhD fellowship is 5 years. The PhD curriculum has been developed within this framework.

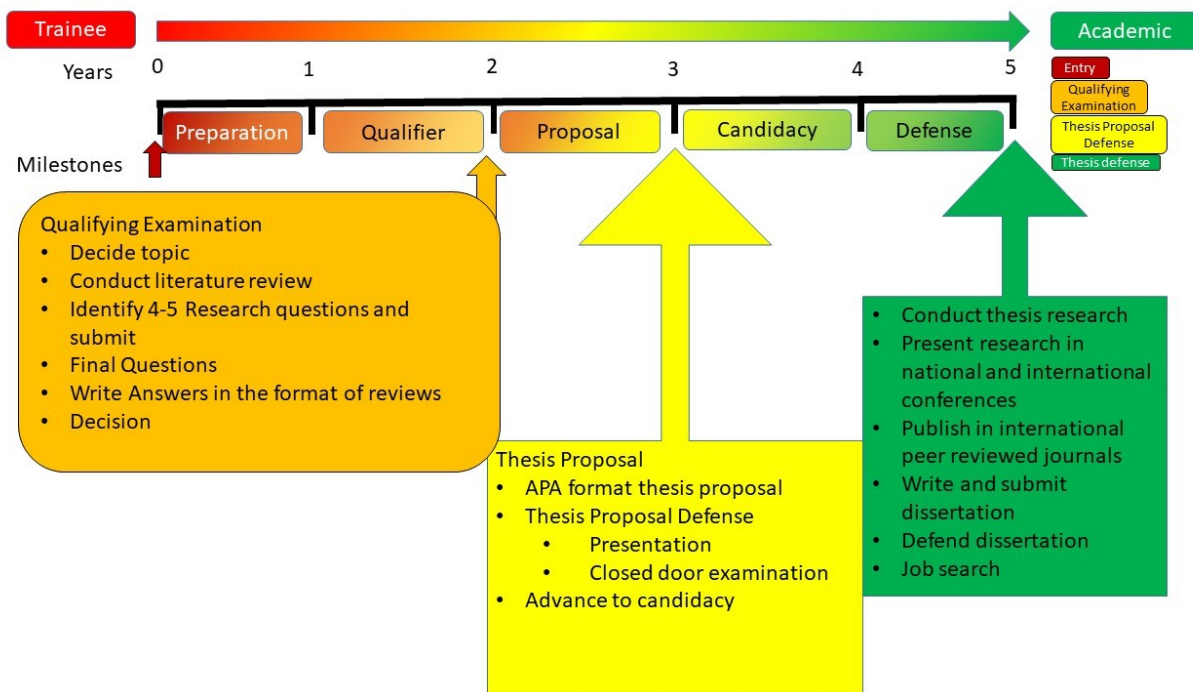
Major Milestones in the PhD program:

- For candidates with M.Phil or M. Tech: 4 years (100 Credits)
- For every other entrant, the duration of the PhD fellowship is 5 years. The PhD curriculum has been developed within this framework.



- Qualifying exam at the end of year 2
- Thesis proposal defense and advancing to candidacy year 3
- Thesis defense at the end of year 5
- If student/trainee is unable to clear the qualifying exam or the thesis proposal they will be asked to leave.

Elaborating the milestones briefly:



Tentative guidelines are provided below for structuring each year of the PhD Program

Between selection and enrollment

- After the students have been selected for admission, they will actively correspond with the potential thesis advisors and finalize this by a process of mutual agreement. This should be completed as soon as possible but no later than July 1, 20xx for a September 20xx admission.
- Familiarize yourself with the proposed project(s) you will be working on for the first two years of your PhD. One of these could potentially become your dissertation project.
- Using the time between selection and enrollment, the prospective student is encouraged to think and formulate a plan for their tenure at Ashoka University. Sample but not exhaustive pointers to think about could be
 - What are your strengths? (academically, and non-academically) How will these strengths become complementary to your advisor's expertise for the project(s) discussed? How well do you fit in to the research group?

- What are your weaknesses? (academically and non-academically). How can you improve yourself in these areas using the resources and the PhD experience at Ashoka University?
- How well do you understand ethical issues for responsible conduct of research and academic integrity? If there are gaps, which areas do you need to address first?
- What are your short term and long-term goals? How can the PhD Program at Ashoka University help you attain those?
- What parallel skills can the program give you in addition to theoretical and technical expertise directly related to your PhD program?

All these will be essential in writing your Individual Development Plan (IDP) at the very beginning of year 1 and every subsequent years. This is a program requirement and cannot be waived for any student.

Year 1 (25 credits)

1. Deadline to declare primary advisor (s): **September 15**
2. **Monsoon Semester:**
 - a. One Core Course (4 Credits), One elective course (4 credits) or 2 Core Courses (4+4=8 credits) or 2 electives (4+4=8 credits) ([SRM1 is mandatory](#))
 - b. Psychology Journal Club= 1 Credit
 - c. Graduate Research Seminar = 1 Credit
 - d. Research activities- 2 or 3 Credits

Spring Semester:

- a. Graduate research methods (4 Credits), SRM2 (4 credits)
- b. Psychology Journal Club= 1 Credit
- c. Graduate Research Seminar = 1 Credit
- d. Research activities- 2 or 3 Credits

Mandatory workshop:

Science Communication ((Good presentation skills, effective ways to deliver concepts, speaking to a lay audience versus an expert audience)

Based on the student's background, the advisor and the student will determine a set of courses (core or elective) the student needs to take during years 1 and 2, and possibly additional courses in latter years if these courses are relevant. The availability of courses, the nature of the proposed PhD project, and the prior training of the student will all decide the exact nature of the courses the student will pursue.

3. Student training will involve statistical training, data analysis, research design, scientific writing, citations, presentation, management and dissemination of data (including issues concerning data privacy, data protection, data ownership, and intellectual property rights), and programming. These are mandatory.
4. *For SRM-1 and SRM-2 PhD students will take the lectures and the examinations with the undergraduate students but they will not be part of undergraduate group projects. That part of their course grade will be dedicated to their advisors, who would be expected to write assignments for their PhD students, grade the work and provide the course professors of SRM-1/2 with their assessments for the allocation of grades.*
5. All students will take coursework on ethical practices in social science and behavioral research. Unless a centralized ethics course is created, thesis advisor will take this responsibility to train students on matters of ethics in year 1. This is in addition to what will be taught at the end of year 2 in the workshops.
6. Through years 1 and 2 students will also gather preliminary data in order to write their thesis proposal documents.
7. Students will submit an individualized development plan (IDP) by **October 1 to the advisor and the PhD Coordinator**. At the annual review, the IDP will be followed up on. For details on how to write an IDP students will receive guidance once admitted
8. Annual review will be conducted with collaboration with the mentor and submitted to the graduate coordinator no later than **May 28**.

Year 2- The Qualifying Year (25 Credits)

9. Monsoon Semester:

- a. One Course (4 Credits) (recommended: otherwise add to research/teaching credit)
- b. Psychology Journal Club= 1 Credit
- c. Teaching practicum- 1 credit
- d. Mandatory workshops (0.5 credit)
 - Reading for your literature review: Primary Literature searching using databases, collating search, creating a bibliography and maintaining, updating citations

Spring Semester:

- e. One Course (4 Credits) (recommended, otherwise add to research/teaching credit)
- f. Psychology Journal Club= 1 Credit
- g. Teaching practicum- 1 Credit
- h. Mandatory Workshops (0.5 Credit) : Scientific Writing (Writing a research literature review)

By the end of the spring semester in year 2, you should complete the minimum requirement of 24 coursework credits

10. Over the year credits devoted to research: 4 Credits

11. **The Psychology PhD qualifying exam (6 credits):**

The purpose of the qualifying exam is to judge whether the student has enough theoretical knowledge and grasp of primary literature in his/her field of research, and is adequately poised to launch a dissertation project. This examination will be in a descriptive format and will be spread over both semesters of the second year. The monsoon semester will be devoted primarily to reading and understanding the literature and identifying pertinent research questions and the spring to articulately summarizing current research and writing them in the form of a series of mini reviews.

- a. **By September 30th** of academic year 2, PhD students will identify a three to five member committee consisting of both internal and external faculty members. (Advisor is a part of the thesis committee) along with their IDP. The names and details of the committee members should be forwarded to the PhD coordinator via email, using the prescribed format.
 - i. **For 2020, in light of the pandemic, this deadline is extended to November 15th**
- b. At the beginning of the monsoon semester, the student will choose a topic of interest allied to the intended dissertation project. Submission deadline for chosen topic to the : **October 15th**
 - i. **For 2020, in light of the pandemic, this deadline is extended to November 20th**
- c. Each student will conduct a comprehensive literature review on the selected topic and create a bibliography of not less than 100 references. Generally, all students are recommended to create a bibliography of 120-150 references minimum. Not more than 5-6 of these should be review articles. Also, not more than 5-6 of the bibliography should be papers published ten years before the current year. Rest should be primary literature. Based on the readings, the student will identify 4-5 existing research gaps in the literature, and write 4-5 questions.
- d. A final list of 4-5 questions should be submitted to the committee members by December 1, with the entire bibliography via email
- e. The committee can keep the questions submitted intact, modify them, add their own or completely change the questions.
- f. By **December 15** students will receive the final version of the questions back from the committee. By the same date they should also submit an annotated bibliography.

- i. For 2020, this deadline is extended to January 30th.
 - g. The students will write the answers to the questions that the committee returned back to them. Each answer should be formatted like a minireview and organized in to subheaders, with a reference section of its own. The submission deadline is **March 31** (Spring semester, academic year 2).
 - i. An extension is possible for AY2020-21. This will be decided around March 1.
 - h. The committee members will review the answers and return an answer via email through the student's advisor whether the student has passed the qualifying exam, will be graded a pass contingent on major or minor edits or has failed the qualifying exam.
 - i. Any student who has been graded a fail, or has been suggested edits, has till **May 15** to rewrite the answers.
12. If the student's progress is unsatisfactory by the end of their second year, or the student is unable to pass the qualifying examination, they will be asked to leave the programme. In exceptional cases (e.g., pregnancy), they may be granted an extended probation period of not more than 12 more months. Annual review must be submitted in the prescribed format to the PhD coordinator by **May 28**.

13. Further guidelines on the qualifying examination

- a. **Goals of this assignment:** This assignment is intended to a) Expose second year graduate students to a wide range of research literature in their selected sub-area of research. This imparts a broad-based knowledge necessary to ground them in research in their chosen field. b) To prepare the literature review which will be submitted as part of their thesis proposal for advancing to candidacy.
- b. **How to frame questions:** Identify research gaps in the literature. Try to envision, very loosely, what the literature review would look like for your thesis proposal document. What critical questions have to be addressed to frame the best possible research question and hypothesis? What is the overarching area of interest and why is that a significant research problem? Situate the importance of your work and use this assignment as an opportunity to familiarize yourself with the literature in your field.
- c. **Once you have your final questions and bibliography:** Format each answer as an independent, APA style review. Each answer should have its own reference section. Briefly, each answer should begin with an introduction, followed by a body, organized into distinct subheadings, followed by a discussion, which will discuss the gaps in the reviewed literature, with possible research that can address this, and have a definitive concluding paragraph.
- d. **Two workshops will aid you through this assignment:** One workshop in Monsoon, November, will address, critical reading, referencing, and building an

annotated bibliography. A second workshop either during the winter break or in the beginning of the spring semester, will aid you to write the reviews.

Summer Semester (Preparation of year 3) :

Mandatory workshops: (0.5X4=2 credits)

- i. Animal Research and laboratory safety, Occupational health and safety/Human Research/ Field research ethics
- ii. Academic Integrity
- iii. Writing a thesis proposal and Dissemination of data (How to make up composite figures for presentation and publication, how to create quality posters for research conferences)
- iv. Pedagogy (Elements of course design, modes of student learning, Writing Assignments, Grading Student work, Writing a good syllabus)

Year 3: The Proposal Year (25 credits)

14. Monsoon Semester:

- a. Psychology Journal Club= 1 Credit
- b. Graduate Research Seminar = 1 Credit
- c. Teaching assistantship- 2 credit

Spring Semester:

- i. Psychology Journal Club= 1 Credit
- j. Graduate Research Seminar = 1 Credit
- k. Teaching assistantship- 2 Credit

15. Submit an IDP by October 1.

16. Research activities for this year will be worth 7 credits total disbursed by the agreement of the student and the advisor through the semesters.

Psychology Thesis proposal exam (8 credits) :

17. By November 15th of their third academic year, students will submit the first draft of their thesis proposal document, styled as an APA project proposal to their thesis committee. The students will be encouraged to turn this proposal to a funding application from external sources.

18. By the end of the semester students will present their thesis proposal defense followed by a closed examination with the thesis committee. On passing the proposal defense, students will advance to PhD candidacy and be registered for a PhD. Following the thesis proposal, student should schedule biannual committee meetings with the thesis committee to track progress until the defense of the thesis.

19. Depending on the opportunity and funding, students may apply to be a visiting scholar at another university for a limited period of time. The learning outcomes of such visiting positions must be discussed with their advisor(s).

Summer workshops (Preparing for year 4):

Mandatory workshops (0.5X2= 4 credits)

- i. Applied statistical/programming training (*research specific- student and advisor will decide*)
- ii. Specialized methods training (*research specific- student and advisor will decide*)
(If such training is not needed, please talk with your advisor about adjusting these credits with your research or teaching assistantships)
- iii. Pedagogy-I (Elements of course design, modes of student learning, elements of course design)
- iv. Pedagogy-II (Writing Assignments, Grading Student work, Writing a good syllabus)

Year 4: Candidacy Year (25 credits)

20. Monsoon Semester:

- a. Psychology Journal Club= 1 Credit
- b. Graduate Research Seminar = 1 Credit
- c. Teaching assistantship- 2 credit
- d. Research- 8 credits

Spring Semester:

- l. Psychology Journal Club= 1 Credit
- m. Graduate Research Seminar = 1 Credit
- n. Teaching assistantship- 2 Credit
- o. Research- 8 credits

Summer Semester (Preparation for year 5)

Workshops (0.5X2= 1 credit)

- p. Effective conference strategies
- q. Thesis writing I
- r. Alternative careers for PhDs (no credits)

21. IDPs are due by October 1

22. Bi-annual SRC meetings are required, with reports submitted to the coordinator at the ends of monsoon and spring semester

23. Annual review submitted by May 28.

Year 5: The defense year (25 credits)

24. Monsoon Semester:

- a. Psychology Journal Club= 1 Credit
- b. Graduate Research Seminar = 1 Credit
- c. Teaching assistantship- 2 credit
- d. Research- 8 credits

Spring Semester:

- s. Psychology Journal Club= 1 Credit
- t. Graduate Research Seminar = 1 Credit
- u. Teaching assistantship- 2 Credit
- v. Research- 8 credits

Summer Semester (Preparation for year 5)

Workshops (0.5X2= 1 credit) (Might have to be administered in the winter break)

- i. Effective academic job search strategies, Writing research and teaching philosophy statements
- ii. Writing good grants, turning a thesis to a paper

25. IDPs are due by October 1

26. Bi-annual SRC meetings are required, with reports submitted to the coordinator at the ends of monsoon semester and spring semester.
27. Through years 4 and 5. The students will be expected to present their research in reputable national and international conferences, symposia and meetings in the field, contingent to applying and obtaining funding support from appropriate bodies. Students are highly encouraged at this stage to seek extramural travel funding from conference organizers.
28. Ashoka University has a fund of 2 Lakh rupees available for PhD students for a one time international travel to a major conference.
29. The following is excerpted from the official PhD guidelines of the University.
 - a. "Once admitted to candidacy, the student must:
 1. write up his/her research in the form of one or more research or working paper(s) and present them at peer-reviewed research conferences/workshops of international repute, submit them for publishing in peer-reviewed journals of international repute, or write up his/her research as a compilation of essays to be published as a book (note, subject to approval by Dean of Research), individual departments will develop acceptable norms for the manner (viz. form and forum) in which research should be placed for public access, review and study)
 2. document the outcome of his/her research in the form of a draft PhD dissertation
 3. subject the draft dissertation for possible plagiarism using a standard software
 4. present his/her work in the form of a open seminar in Ashoka University before an audience that includes members of his/her SRC, and
 5. submit the draft dissertation to his/her SRC for its (internal) assessment.
30. Pursuant to clause 23(1), the Department of Psychology further notes that, students are expected to publish their research in peer reviewed journals that are internationally reputable. Bear in mind that non-internationally reputable outlets will not be considered, and might even work against you in your career. **At least one article accepted, in press, or published is highly recommended before a thesis defense is scheduled.** Students should note that publications in other forms (e.g., book chapters, encyclopedia chapters, policy papers, user manuals) may not be well-regarded, except when the (expected) impact of their work in such outlets is recognized (e.g., a chapter in *Handbook of Social Psychology*).

Post Defense evaluation of thesis (University guidelines)

31. Post a positive assessment by SRC, the PhD dissertation is sent to at least two external researchers, and to supervisor(s) for their formal assessment and recommendation.
32. A panel of six external examiners is identified by the supervisor(s) and vetted by the Programme Coordinator. The Dean (Research) will select the first two examiners from the panel and seek their agreement to examine the dissertation. In case an examiner is unavailable, the Dean will go down the list and explore other names in the order in which the names are listed. While going down the ordered list of potential examiners, the Dean may skip an examiner, but do so only after consulting the concerned Programme Coordinator and putting his/her reason(s) for doing so in writing.
33. Each external researcher recommended by the Programme Coordinator should be currently active in the research area as *evidenced* by his/her recent research publications.
34. Each external examiner as also each supervisor and co-supervisor will independently recommend either of:
 - i. “the dissertation is accepted without any revision”,
 - ii. “the dissertation is accepted subject to suggested changes/clarifications are incorporated in the dissertation and presented at time of viva-voce”
 - iii. “the dissertation is revised and submitted for re-examination”,
 - iv. or “the dissertation is rejected outright”.
35. Once, the “dissertation is accepted without any revision” or “the dissertation is accepted subject to suggested changes/clarifications are incorporated in the dissertation and presented at time of viva-voce” unanimously by the external and internal examiners, the SRC will formally conduct a viva-voce examination in the presence of at least one, but preferably both, external examiners.
36. The examination will be open to all faculty members and students from Ashoka University.
37. Post viva-voce, a copy of the dissertation is deposited with the INFLIBNET, and with Ashoka University Library.
38. Before they graduate, students should aim to have some international reputation, through their published work, conference presentations, and involvement as reviewers of reputable journals.
39. All students and candidates will abide by policies and standards laid out by the committees of the University with respect to ethics, academic honesty and integrity, professional conduct, disciplinary infractions, and sexual harassment at all times. If there is a conflict between University policy and Departmental policy, university policy will take precedence.

Funding

A limited number of Ph.D. fellowships will be offered by Ashoka University to support Ph.D. students (as per the rules and regulations of the University). The junior research fellowship includes a monthly stipend of INR 35,000 per month, a contingency grant of INR 20,000, and offers extensive teaching opportunities. There is no additional stipend for teaching. Once the student advances to candidacy, the fellowship increases to INR 40,000 per month. The compensation structure is subjected to periodic review by the university.

The monthly stipend and annual contingency grant given to Ph.D. students who receive other scholarships (from UGC, CSIR or a partner organization) will be decided based on terms covering the scholarship itself and as per the regulations of the University. Students will also be offered housing on campus, subject to availability). In case on-campus housing is not available, Rs. 7000 per month rent allowance will be paid towards off-campus housing.