LANGUAGE & COGNITION PHD PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

Last updated: January 21, 2021

Section 1: Course requirements

1. Students must complete at least four courses taught by L&C faculty.
2. Of these, two are core courses that all students must complete: Cognition and Psychology of Language.
3. As a department requirement, students must complete three breadth courses taught by faculty outside L&C. These can be from Ecological Psychology (within the Perception Action and Cognition division, of which L&C is a part), or from the SLAC or CNC-CT graduate programs.
4. Similarly, students must complete a two-course sequence in statistics, including PSYC 5104 and PSYC 5105.
5. A total of 30 credits are required to complete the program. These include 9 credits that are assigned through working towards the Master’s degree (see below). Satisfying the course and Master’s requirements will accumulate more than the required 30 credits.
6. Typically, students will complete all 9 courses by the middle of Year 3.

Other general requirements and recommendations:

1. The Master's degree (see Section 2) requires that students register for at least 9 Graduate School credits GRAD 5950 (Master's Thesis Research). We recommend registering for 4 credits in Fall Year 2 and 5 Spring of Year 2 (but other combinations are possible). There is no coursework associated with these credits (the credits reflect working towards the Master’s).
2. The Master's requirement may be waived, but typically only under extraordinary circumstances. Typically, students with a Master’s from another institution will nonetheless take the Master’s at UConn as a part of their graduate studies. The Language & Cognition faculty will review and be the final arbiters of any requests to waive the Language & Cognition Master's requirement.
3. Students are expected to be engaged in research throughout the PhD program, and we recommend registering for at least three credits of 5800/5801 every semester with the major advisor (and register for additional credits with that advisor or other faculty as appropriate).
4. The PhD requires students to register for at least 15 Graduate School credits of GRAD 6950 or 6960 (Doctoral Dissertation Research). The dissertation proposal cannot be submitted to the Graduate School until the ninth credit has been completed.
5. Students are expected to attend weekly Language & Cognition talks (currently not offered as a course).

Section 2: Milestones/paperwork

Master's of Science (MS):

1. Students in our program complete the UConn "Plan A (with thesis)" Master's degree. By
Spring of Year 1 or Fall of Year 2, students must plan a publication-quality project with their major advisor. (This means a professional quality research project; it does not entail that the student obtain positive results, for example.)

2. Master’s plan of study. Students in consultation with the major advisor should assemble a Master’s committee and file the Master’s plan of study no later than Fall of Year 2. The committee should consist (minimally) of the major advisor, two other Language & Cognition faculty, and one faculty member from outside Language & Cognition.

3. The research and analysis should be written up as a Master's thesis by the end of the Spring semester or Summer of the student's second year. The student then presents the project in an oral defense, typically in the Language & Cognition Brownbag (with other members of the program present as well as the committee) and no later than the Fall of Year 3.

4. As per departmental recommendation, students should ensure that an email announcement of their Master's defense be sent to departmental mailing lists by a member of the Psychological Sciences staff 1-2 weeks prior to the defense.

5. Note the requirement above that students register for at least 9 Graduate School credits GRAD 5950 (Master's Thesis Research).

**PhD General Exam**

Completing the General Exam involves writing two review papers and answering questions related to these at the General Exam oral defense. The papers are generally proposed and reviewed in the fall of Year 3, written in the summer between Years 3 and 4, and defended in the fall of Year 4. See the General Exam Appendix below for instructions on how to complete the General Exam.

**PhD**

1. Committee. The committee must have at least 3 members: the major advisor and two associate advisors, one of whom must be from Language & Cognition and the other of whom must be from outside Language & Cognition.

2. Timing. The PhD committee may be formed any time, but should be formed no later than Fall of Year 4.

3. Plan of study. No specific courses must be listed. Language & Cognition does not require additional credits beyond the minimum 30 required by the Graduate School. The Plan of study may not be filed until the general exam has been passed.

4. Examiners. For the dissertation defense (not the proposal), the Graduate School requires at least 5 faculty examiners. The student and major advisor must ensure that at least 5 qualified faculty (including the committee) attend the dissertation defense.

5. Dissertation Research credits. Note the PhD requirement above to register for a total of at least 15 credits of GRAD 5960 (over the course of Years 4 and 5).

**Dissertation proposal**

1. Timing. The dissertation proposal should be submitted to the committee ideally in Spring of Year 4. The dissertation proposal is similar to a Master’s thesis, with an introduction and literature survey, followed by a description of the planned studies and a discussion of how those studies would contribute theoretically and/or empirically to the literature.
2. Announcing. As per departmental recommendation, students should ensure that an email announcement of their dissertation proposal defense be sent to departmental mailing lists by a member of the Psychological Sciences staff at least 2 weeks prior to the defense.

3. Structure. The typical structure of a dissertation proposal defense in Language & Cognition is a 20- to 30-minute presentation of the proposed research by the student, followed by questions from committee members, followed by questions from other faculty, followed by questions from anyone attending. Following questions, the proposer, the committee, and any faculty who wish to participate remain for a discussion of possible changes.

4. Evaluation. The student's PhD committee evaluates the written proposal and the oral presentation. The committee determines whether the proposal is accepted, accepted with revisions, or is not accepted.

5. Committee and readers. In addition the PhD committee, at least two readers must be identified by approximately one month prior to the defense. At least one reader should be from L&C. Readers agree to read the written proposal and attend the defense. Reviewers recommend to the committee whether the written proposal and oral presentation should be accepted, revised, or not accepted. The final recommendation is made by the committee, however.

Dissertation defense

1. Timing. The dissertation defense should be scheduled in the Spring semester of Year 5. As noted above, the Graduate School requires a total of 5 qualified faculty examiners (inclusive of the PhD committee) to be present and to sign the defense documents. We recommend that the 5 examiners be identified (and agree to attend the defense) at least one month prior to the defense.

2. Announcing. As per departmental recommendation, students should ensure that an email announcement of their dissertation proposal defense be sent to departmental mailing lists by a member of the Psychological Sciences staff at least 2 weeks prior to the defense.

3. Structure. The typical structure of a dissertation defense in L&C is a 40-50 minute presentation by the student, followed by questions from committee members, followed by questions from other faculty, followed by questions from anyone attending. Following questions, everyone is dismissed except for the committee and any faculty wishing to participate in the discussion of the document and the presentation.

4. Committee and evaluation. The committee and additional examiners determine whether the document and defense are accepted, accepted with revisions, or if one or the other is not accepted.

General Exam Appendix: Instructions for completing the General Exam

Before admission to candidacy for the Doctor of Philosophy degree, the student must pass a general examination in the field of concentration and related fields. This examination will test the student's mastery of a broad field of knowledge, not merely the formal course work completed.

In order to pass the General Exam, all of the General Exam requirements of the Psychological Sciences Department (specified in the Psychology Graduate Student Handbook—see https://grad.psych.uconn.edu) and all of the General Exam requirements of the Language & Cognition Program (specified in this Appendix) must be satisfied. Students should therefore be sure to review both documents.
Preliminary Examination Structure

Students will prepare two literature reviews on topics likely to be related to their dissertation topic or another area relevant to their long-term research plans or career goals. A committee including the student’s major advisor, at least two other Language & Cognition faculty, and (optionally) invited faculty from outside the division will evaluate the proposal and papers.

Proposal. A written proposal containing the questions being addressed in each review and a detailed outline of each review must be approved by the committee by one month prior to start of exam period (see framework for timeline below). Typically, the student and their advisor(s) would discuss the broad topic of each paper, as well as some of the key questions, in advance of preparation of the proposal. The proposal for each review should be 1000-1500 words in length. A two-part list of references must be provided for each review (not included in the word count). (1) Approximately 10-20 “Completed Readings” should be listed to demonstrate that the student has begun reading relevant literature. (2) “Intended Readings” should include about 20-40 additional references that the student intends to consider for the final paper. These numbers are guidelines, and the final paper is not limited to these references. The committee will evaluate the appropriateness of the planned scope and content of each paper, with an eye toward guiding the student to a manageable balance of breadth and depth. The committee will also determine whether there is too much overlap between the two reviews.

Final Papers. The student is expected to write the two review papers, styled similarly to papers published in Frontiers, Psychological Bulletin, Annual Review of Psychology, etc. The paper should be approximately 7000-10000 words (approximately 20-30 pages), not including references. The word-count estimates are meant as rough guidelines; the committee will be looking at whether the substantive goals are achieved and not counting words. (Example papers will be provided.) In both papers, students will need to demonstrate the following abilities: (1) mastery of the relevant literature; (2) the ability to critically analyze and synthesize previous research, rather than simply reviewing/summarizing/listing; and (3) an ability to clearly connect method/data and theory. While the proposal may be developed in consultation with the committee, the papers will be written independently by the student, and will reflect his/her work alone.

Oral defense. The General Examination oral defense cannot be scheduled until the Plan of Study has been approved. At the defense, the student will present both papers (separately) during a single defense to the committee and two additional readers (at least one from the L&C faculty). The discussion of each paper will begin with a 10-minute presentation followed by questions from the committee and readers.

Timeline. Unless there are special circumstances necessitating a committee-approved alteration of the timeline, the generals papers will be completed on the following schedule. Students will formulate their paper topics and write and receive feedback on their proposal in the Fall semester of their third year, and then will complete the papers in the summer between their third and fourth years. Students will turn in both papers to the committee by the first day of the Fall semester, and the defense will be scheduled during the Fall semester of their fourth year (i.e. the first semester of Year 4), typically no later than October.

General Examination Evaluation

The examination will be evaluated at one of 3 levels as determined by the committee:

1. Passed at the Doctor of Philosophy Level: The student has passed the examination at a high level by meeting all expectations (B- or above) on both papers. This is the expected outcome for most students.

2. Failure at the Doctor of Philosophy Level, Option to Revise the paper: The student does not pass at a high level, but is given an opportunity to revise the papers. If the papers
are sufficient in many respects, but have a few notable deficiencies that are relatively straightforward to address, then the option to revise will be considered.

3. **Failure at the Doctor of Philosophy Level:** The papers are deficient in many ways and/or severely so. The student does not pass, and will not be advanced to candidacy for the doctoral degree.

**EXAMPLE REVIEW PAPERS**