

What is a project for distinction in Psychology?

A project for distinction is a **two-semester** professional research project conducted by a student seeking to graduate with distinction in Psychology. Distinction requires the majority approval of full-time faculty members of the Psychology Program. Students must register for 0-8 credits in an independent study titled, "Research Project for Distinction". The credits may be divided across two semesters, where appropriate (e.g., atypically large or time consuming projects).

Are there eligibility requirements?

Students must have a minimum G.P.A. of 3.2 in PSYC courses. Students must also have completed or be enrolled in PSYC 3242, Experimental Psychology.

What are some benefits to completing a project for distinction?

Prestige

Relatively few students graduate with program distinction

Increase Competitiveness of Graduate School Applications

Many graduate schools require a record of independent scholarship

Gain Experience Conducting Research

Integrate knowledge from multiple domains

Learn in depth about a topic of interest to you

Understand all aspects of the research process

Demonstrate Research Skills

Comprehend published research articles

Critically evaluate strengths and weaknesses of past research

Generate research hypotheses

Develop research design skills

Collect primary data / Utilize secondary data

Analyze data

Write a complete research paper using the APA style

Orally present research in public

Prepare a manuscript for journal submission

Professional Interactions

Interact closely with faculty

Interact with members of the field at conferences

When should a project for distinction start and finish?

When to Begin. A student may begin a project for distinction any time during or after they complete Experimental Psychology. Some experience as a research assistant to a faculty member prior to beginning a project for distinction is recommended, but not required. To be of greatest benefit to the students, the project should begin early during their junior year and be completed in time to present findings at a professional conference or even submit to a journal during their senior year. Most students begin their project in their first semester of senior year and complete it in their last semester of their senior year. An earlier start would be more beneficial to the

students who are applying to graduate school and desire experience with conference presentations and manuscript submission.

Deadline to Complete. Projects for distinction papers must be complete and submitted to all Psychology Program faculty no later than one week prior to the oral defense. The oral defense is presented during the annual Psi Chi conference scheduled during the last week of April in the Spring semester. Fall oral defenses must be scheduled during the last two weeks of the Fall semester. The deadline for approval by the Psychology Program faculty for a student to graduate with program distinction is the last day of exam week in the last semester of your senior year. Late papers will not be considered for distinction, except in extreme circumstances beyond the control of the student.

What types of research projects are acceptable?

Students may conduct experiments, observational studies (e.g., correlations), surveys, archival research, or qualitative research (e.g., interviews). The research method and design that is used depends on the determination made by the student and their faculty mentor of an appropriate method for testing the hypothesis. Regardless of the chosen methods, research projects must include data and analysis of that data. Data can be collected in-person (e.g., laboratory, classroom, community), online, or through archived or other data banks.

How do I decide my topic for a project for distinction?

The Psychology Program faculty would like for students to pursue areas of research that are of interest to the student. Decide your general area of interest. This can be something as general as your favorite PSYC course. It can also be more specific, such as something you learned in a class or read that you thought was interesting or sparked an idea, or based on your personal observations in your daily life. Project for distinction can also be an extension of a project from Experimental Psychology or an independent study.

Meet with the faculty member of your choice to discuss a research project that is best for you. Each faculty member has a different approach toward projects for distinction. Some faculty may require that you develop your idea independently, some have preferences for topics, some have working hypotheses, and some require that you simply join their ongoing research program where the hypothesis and methods are set. Faculty members will also direct you to others who may be a better fit for your interests and ideas.

Project for Distinction Timeline and Checklist

Before You Begin:

- PSYC GPA is 3.2
- You are enrolled in or have completed Experimental Psychology
- You wish to conduct independent research
- You can commit two semesters or at least 8 months to your project

Semester 1: Developing the thesis proposal

- Develop Idea:
 - Meet with a PSYC faculty member to develop an idea, set goals, and provide direction.
 - This person will become your faculty mentor and committee chair.
- Form Thesis Committee:
 - Thesis committee chair/mentor. Discuss forming a thesis committee your mentor
 - Two additional Psychology faculty members. Any PSYC faculty member can serve in this capacity. Faculty members with expertise in your area and/or expertise in research methodology are most appropriate. In rare cases, it may be appropriate to include faculty from outside the Psychology program. Inclusion of faculty members outside of Psychology must be discussed with your mentor and require majority approval by the Psychology Program.
 - Meet or email with potential committee members to inquire about their availability and interest to serve on the committee.
- Write and Finalize Thesis Proposal: Your proposal may require several drafts to finalize so allow for an entire semester. Work closely and diligently with your faculty mentor. [A Brief Guide to Writing the Psychology Paper](#) may be a useful reference for you. The final thesis proposal must be in [APA style](#) and include the following:
 - Introduction
 - Review of the relevant literature
 - Statement of the research problem and hypothesis
 - Method Section
 - Participants (target sample size, relevant demographics, sampling procedure)
 - Materials (tools, stimuli, equipment, facilities)
 - Procedure (design of study, step by step description of participant session)
 - Results Section
 - Data to be collected (e.g., responses, scores, response times) for the behavior of interest or dependent variable. If conducting an experiment, also state the independent variable.
 - Statistical analyses that will test the hypothesis (e.g., correlation/regression, t-test, ANOVA, Factor). Directly state the expected outcome of your statistical analyses that lend support to your hypothesis and indicate why this supports the hypothesis. If the hypothesis is non-directional, indicate the implications of alternate outcomes as relevant to suppositions made in your introduction. It is not necessary to fabricate numbers, but fabricated graphs may be helpful. It is

essential that your proposal demonstrate an understanding of the statistical analyses that are appropriate to test your hypothesis.

- References must be APA style
- Apply for Approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB):
 - Complete [CITI training](#) prior to submitting the forms to the IRB. IRB approval requires completed CITI training.
 - Apply for IRB approval after your Introduction, Methods, and Results are set. It is not necessary to finalize your proposal to apply for IRB approval, but you will need to submit copies of all of your materials, a solid research design, and a background rationale (with references). Click here: [IRB forms and guidelines](#).
- Submit final thesis proposal to thesis committee
 - Obtain approval from faculty mentor to submit final proposal to committee
 - Submit final proposal to committee.
 - Schedule a meeting date and time to present the proposal with the committee. Plan for a one-hour meeting.
 - The thesis committee must receive the final proposal at least 2 weeks in advance of the scheduled proposal meeting.
- Thesis Proposal Meeting with Committee. The purpose is to orally present a summary of your proposal, ask questions, receive feedback about the proposal, discuss methodology changes, and obtain approval to move forward and begin data collection. This meeting must occur during the semester prior to data collection/analyses.
 - Create a 10-15 minute presentation summarizing the rationale for the hypothesis, methods, and results. Use presentation software (e.g., PowerPoint)
 - The committee may suggest minor or major changes to any or all sections of the proposal.
 - If the proposal requires minor changes to the method and results sections agreed upon during the meeting, then no resubmission is required and the committee must grant final approval of the thesis proposal during semester one.
 - If the proposal requires major changes to the methods and results, then the student must submit a revised proposal to the committee. In this case, committee members must receive the revised proposal prior to the first day of semester in which the student plans to collect data. Final committee approval indicates that the revised proposal needs minimal or no changes. The committee must approve the resubmitted proposal no later than the end of the first week of the same or the students cannot pursue distinction.
 - After the meeting, you may need to submit a [Change in Research Form](#) to the [IRB](#)
 - Revise your paper. It is best to revise and finalize your introduction and method sections in your paper as soon as possible after receiving feedback from your committee.

Semester 2: Collecting Data and Completing the Thesis Paper.

- Collect Data:
 - It is important to collect as much data as you can and to begin as early as you can in the semester. Plan to collect data for two full months and as frequently as possible. The frequency of data collection will vary based on your target sample size, sample availability, and sampling procedure.
 - Your mentor and committee members can advise you, based on your specific project.
 - Score/code and enter your data into a spreadsheet you will be using for analysis concurrently with your data collection, It will be extremely burdensome to wait until after data collection to begin this aspect of data collection.
 - Save at least one month for data analysis, writing the results section, submitting drafts to your faculty mentor, and sending the final paper to the Psychology Program faculty.
 - If you are using students as participants, you must obtain a research account to recruit participants via SONA, our online research scheduling system. Request a researcher account by sending your name, email address, and phone number to psyclabadmin@stockton.edu.

- Analyze Data.
 - Allow for at least one month for data analysis, writing the results and discussion sections, finalizing your paper, and preparing your presentation.
 - Use SPSS or other statistical package for statistical analyses.

- Finalize Thesis Paper. Work closely with your mentor to prepare the final paper. [A Brief Guide to Writing the Psychology Paper](#) may be a useful reference for you. The final paper must include the following in [APA style](#):
 - Cover page (replace **[bold]** items with your information). Your mentor (thesis chair) and committee members must sign the cover page. This indicates approval of your proposal.
 - Introduction
 - Incorporate any changes requested by your committee at your proposal meeting.
 - Method Section
 - Participants (sample size(s), relevant demographics, population, how they were obtained)
 - Materials (tools, stimuli, equipment, facilities)
 - Procedure (design of study, step by step description of participant session)
 - Results Section
 - State what data for the behavior of interest/dependent variable was collected (e.g., responses, ratings, scores, response times) and submitted to statistical analysis.
 - Statistical analyses conducted to test hypothesis (e.g., correlation/regression, t-test, ANOVA, Factor). Write the outcome of the analyses using APA style and conventions used by researchers in your field.
 - Include graphs and/or tables that depict the statistical findings you report.
 - Discussion

- Explain your findings in plain English, as they relate to your hypothesis. Follow this with any interesting findings that were not expected.
- Explain how your findings make a contribution to published knowledge on the topic
- Briefly discuss the potential value of your findings to the population you studied.
- Briefly discuss future directions for this research. You may discuss shortcomings of your study that you would fix in the next study, why replication might be important, or interesting new hypotheses and next steps for researching your topic.
- References
 - Must be APA style
 - Must be complete. It is important to ensure that all the research cited throughout your paper is included and that all the references appear somewhere in your paper.
- Submit Final Thesis Paper to Psychology Program Faculty
 - Obtain approval from faculty mentor to send final paper to Psychology Program faculty. Your committee members do not need to approve or review the final paper before sending it to the Psychology Program faculty.
 - Distribute final paper to Psychology faculty no later than one week before your oral presentation. Late papers will not be considered for distinction, except in extreme circumstances beyond the control of the student.
- Oral Defense to Psychology Program Faculty. Spring oral defenses coincide with the Psi Chi Undergraduate Research Conference. Fall oral defenses are typically coordinated with other Fall distinction candidates during the last two weeks of the Fall semester.
 - Prepare a presentation of 20 minutes that includes the following:
 - Summary of the most relevant literature underlying the rationale for your hypothesis
 - State the hypothesis(es)/Purpose
 - Summarize the method
 - Include sample size, relevant demographics
 - Include samples of materials, stimuli, survey questions
 - Describe what participants did during a data collection session
 - Include graphs to show results
 - Indicate which statistical findings support, refute, or fail to support your hypothesis
 - Conclusions that state the important findings in plain English
 - Speculate on value of your findings and/or future directions.
 - Leave 5 minutes for question from the audience.

Cover Page

[TITLE OF PAPER]

Research Project for Psychology Program Distinction

Presented to

The Psychology Program

Stockton University

Galloway, New Jersey

By

[Your Name]

[Month Year]

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Committee Chair: **[Name, degree]**

Committee Chair signature

Committee Member: **[Name, degree]**

Committee Member signature

Committee Member: **[Name, degree]**

Committee Member signature

