

PSYC9000: Doctoral Thesis
Section: TB
Credits: 1-3

Summer 2026

Instructor Information

Instructor: Thackery Brown
Email: tbrown338@gatech.edu

General Course Information

PSYC 9000 (Doctoral Thesis) represents the pinnacle of your graduate training in the School of Psychology. This supervised research sequence spans the final years of your doctoral journey, culminating in the independent design, execution, and defense of a major, original empirical contribution to the field of Cognitive Neuroscience. Building upon the foundational skills developed during your Master's thesis, the dissertation demands a higher level of theoretical sophistication, methodological rigor, and scientific autonomy.

Prerequisites and Timeline

You cannot officially initiate your primary dissertation research until you have successfully passed your preliminary examinations and formally completed the oral proposal of your dissertation project. You should aim to complete and defend your dissertation within five years of your entry into the doctoral program, with an absolute maximum limit of seven years.

Course Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of your Doctoral Thesis, you should be able to:

- **Conceptualize** a novel, high-impact research paradigm that significantly advances theoretical or applied knowledge within Cognitive Neuroscience.
- **Design and execute** a highly rigorous, complex empirical investigation that adheres to the highest ethical and methodological standards of the discipline.
- **Defend** your scientific rationale, statistical methodology, and conclusions against intensive critique from a multi-disciplinary panel of expert scholars.
- **Author** a dissertation manuscript that meets the exacting formatting standards of the Georgia Tech Graduate School and is of sufficient quality for publication in top-tier, peer-reviewed academic journals.

Required Course Material

There is no required textbook for this course.

Grading Policy

Milestones and Project Sequence

The dissertation follows a structural sequence similar to the Master's thesis, but with an expanded scope and stricter committee requirements.

Phase 1: Conceptualization and Committee Formation

- **Committee Composition:** Your dissertation committee must consist of exactly five faculty members. This must include at least three tenured or tenure-track faculty members from the School of Psychology, and at least one faculty member external to the School.
- **External/Non-Tenure Track Members:** If you wish to include a scholar who is not a tenured or tenure-track faculty member at Georgia Tech, this requires a vote of approval from the CBS or ADA area faculty. To request this, provide me with a biosketch of the proposed member and a brief explanation of why their expertise is necessary for your committee, and I will initiate the approval process with the faculty.

Phase 2: The Proposal

- **Public Oral Presentation:** You must deliver a public oral presentation of your proposed dissertation methodology to your committee and the broader academic community.
- **Document Distribution:** A complete draft of your proposal must be submitted to each of your five committee members and the Graduate Program Administrator at least two weeks prior to the scheduled proposal meeting.
- *Note: Official dissertation data collection should not commence until this proposal is successfully passed.*

Phase 3: The Oral Defense

- **Document Submission:** Your finalized dissertation must be distributed to your full committee and the Graduate Program Administrator at least two weeks prior to your defense date.
- **The Defense:** You will publicly defend your completed research. The committee will issue a binding vote on the outcome (pass, pass with revisions, or fail) and determine the oversight process for any required manuscript revisions.

Phase 4: Institute Finalization

- **Formatting Requirements:** The final manuscript must adhere strictly to the specific formatting templates established by the Georgia Tech Graduate School, which differ significantly from the standard APA format used in the School of Psychology.
- **Final Submission:** Once approved by your committee, you will submit the final, properly formatted document to the Graduate School via their electronic thesis portal.

Assignments and Grading Policy

Because PSYC 9000 spans the multi-year process of your dissertation research, your grade is assessed on a semester-by-semester basis. You are not graded on a traditional point system or curve; rather, your grade reflects your consistent, professional progression toward your final defense.

At the beginning of each semester you are enrolled in thesis hours, you and I will establish a written set of **Semester Research Goals**. These goals will be tailored to your current phase in the dissertation sequence (e.g., drafting the proposal, submitting to the IRB, collecting data, analyzing results, or writing specific chapters).

Criteria for a Satisfactory Grade (A / Satisfactory):

To earn full credit for your thesis hours each semester, you must demonstrate:

- **Consistent Momentum:** Successfully meeting the agreed-upon deadlines outlined in your Semester Research Goals.
- **Scientific Independence:** Proactively managing your project timeline, troubleshooting methodological issues, and demonstrating ownership over the research process.
- **Professional Engagement:** Arriving prepared for our 1-on-1 supervisory meetings with concrete updates, data, or manuscript drafts, and incorporating previous feedback effectively.
- **Committee Communication:** (When applicable) Managing the logistics of your five-member committee, providing them with necessary updates, and respecting their required two-week review windows for all documents.

Unsatisfactory Progress:

Grades of B, C, or U (Unsatisfactory) will be assigned if there is a pattern of missed deadlines, prolonged periods of uncommunicated stagnation, or a failure to incorporate essential methodological feedback. Consistently failing to demonstrate independent progress may trigger a formal review of your timeline within the doctoral program.

The Final Defense Grade:

During the semester in which you defend, your ultimate evaluation rests with your five-member dissertation committee. Following your public oral presentation, the committee will hold a binding vote resulting in one of three outcomes:

1. **Pass:** The dissertation is accepted as submitted.
2. **Pass with Revisions:** The most common outcome. You must make required methodological or editorial revisions before final Graduate School submission. The committee will determine if I (as your Chair) or the full committee will oversee the final approval of these revisions.
3. **Fail:** The research methodology or defense does not meet the standards of a doctoral degree.

Course Policies

Scientific Independence

As a doctoral candidate, you operate as an independent scientific investigator. While I will provide extensive theoretical and methodological mentorship during our supervisory meetings, the administrative and logistical management of your dissertation is entirely your responsibility.

Project Management

You are expected to proactively monitor the five-to-seven-year program timeline, ensure your external committee members are fully integrated into the scheduling process, and strictly adhere to the Institute's administrative deadlines for graduation.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

If you are a student with learning needs that require special accommodation, [contact the Office of Disability Services](#) (404-894-2563) as soon as possible to make an appointment to discuss

your special needs and to obtain an accommodations letter. Please also e-mail me as soon as possible in order to set up a time to discuss your learning needs.

Student-Faculty Expectations Agreement

At Georgia Tech, we believe that it is important to strive for an atmosphere of mutual respect, acknowledgement, and responsibility between faculty members and the student body. [The Student-Faculty Expectations](#) articulate some basic expectations that you can have of me and that I have of you. In the end, simple respect for knowledge, hard work, and cordial interactions will help build the environment we seek. Therefore, I encourage you to remain committed to the ideals of Georgia Tech while in this class

Campus Resources for Students

In your time at Georgia Tech, you may find yourself in need of support. Below you will find some resources to support you both as a student and as a person.

Academic support

- Center for Academic Success <http://success.gatech.edu>
 - 1-to-1 tutoring <http://success.gatech.edu/1-1-tutoring>
 - Peer-Led Undergraduate Study (PLUS) <http://success.gatech.edu/tutoring/plus>
 - Academic coaching <http://success.gatech.edu/coaching>
- Residence Life's Learning Assistance Program <https://housing.gatech.edu/learning-assistance-program>
 - Drop-in tutoring for many 1000 level courses
- OMED: Educational Services (<http://omed.gatech.edu/programs/academic-support>)
 - Group study sessions and tutoring programs
- Communication Center (<http://www.communicationcenter.gatech.edu>)
 - Individualized help with writing and multimedia projects
- Academic advisors for your major <http://advising.gatech.edu/>

Personal Support

Georgia Tech Resources

- The Office of the Dean of Students: <http://studentlife.gatech.edu/content/services>; 404-894-6367; Smithgall Student Services Building 2nd floor
 - You also may request assistance at https://gatech-advocate.symplicity.com/care_report/index.php/pid383662?
- Counseling Center: <http://counseling.gatech.edu>; 404-894-2575; Smithgall Student Services Building 2nd floor
 - Services include short-term individual counseling, group counseling, couples counseling, testing and assessment, referral services, and crisis intervention. Their website also includes links to state and national resources.
 - *Students in crisis may walk in during business hours (8am-5pm, Monday through Friday) or contact the counselor on call after hours at 404-894-2204.*
- Students' Temporary Assistance and Resources (STAR): <http://studentlife.gatech.edu/content/need-help>
 - Can assist with interview clothing, food, and housing needs.
- Stamps Health Services: <https://health.gatech.edu>; 404-894-1420

- Primary care, pharmacy, women's health, psychiatry, immunization and allergy, health promotion, and nutrition
- Veteran's Resource Center: <http://veterans.gatech.edu/>; 404-385-2067
- Georgia Tech Police: 404-894-2500