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 PsycINFO 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.
Cay Anderson-Hanley
Butterfield Hall Room 304, 388-6355, andersoc@union.edu
https://muse.union.edu/cay/
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 or pedaling & playing the iPad-based iPACES neuro-exergame) 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.

George Bizer
Bailey Hall Room 301B, 388-6228, bizerg@union.edu
www.GeorgeBizer.com
As a social psychologist, I have broad research interests that include marketing and advertising, persuasion, perceptions of fairness and unfairness, attitude measurement, and social norms.

Zachary Buchin
Bailey Hall Room 311C, 388-6804, buchinz@union.edu
buchinzl@live.unc.edu
My research on human memory is broadly focused on applying cognitive principles to educational practice. I am particularly interested in retrieval-based learning and the testing effect, in which retrieval practice (e.g., recall, flashcards, practice questions, etc.) benefits later memory to a greater degree than more typical study-based strategies (e.g., restudying, rereading, copying, etc.). Specifically, my research examines: (1) how these memory modifying effects of retrieval are affected by divided attention/distraction; (2) the generalizability of retrieval-based learning across educationally-relevant factors (e.g., task complexity and prior knowledge); and (3) the indirect effects of testing on learning (e.g., taking a practice test on A will enhance the benefits from later restudy of A as well as later initial study of new material B). I plan to examine these topics both in the lab as well as in the classroom (e.g., assessing the effectiveness of different evidence-based learning and study strategies).

Daniel Burns
Bailey Hall Room 311B, 388-6275, burnsd@union.edu
I study human memory. Recently, my students and I have studied 1) the relationship between memory confidence and repetitive checking behaviors, as seen in individuals with OCD (Do people check more because they have less confidence in their memories?), 2) the extent to which evolution has shaped or fine-tuned our memory systems to facilitate the remembering of some information more than others information, 3) the paradoxical finding that perseverating about dying improves memory functioning, and 4) to what extent eye tracking equipment may provide a window into the cognitive processes we perform when studying and committing information to memory.

Kenneth DeBono
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. I am also interested in investigating the role that religiosity plays in aspects of mental and physical health.
Timothy George  
Bailey Hall Room 307, 388-6882, georget3@union.edu  
https://sites.google.com/site/timggeorge/  
My research explores how people generate original ideas, solve problems creatively, and connect concepts through analogy. I use experimental methods to understand the conditions that cause mental fixation in these situations, as well as what conditions mitigate this mental fixation. Some of my recent work explores the effects of exposure to example ideas on subsequent creativity, and the role of forgetting in reducing the accessibility of obvious information.

Joshua Hart  
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, belief in conspiracy theories), risk-taking, information-processing, and decision-making. (2) Attachment and close relationships. I am interested in how security-related individual differences (especially attachment style) 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.

Jenny Weil Malatras  
Bailey Hall 313, 518-388-6825, malatraj@union.edu  
As a pediatric psychologist, my clinical work and research encompasses an integrated field that addresses a range of issues related to the physical and psychological health and development of children, adolescents and their families. My research interests broadly focus on the influences of the family environment on child, adolescent and emerging adult adjustment. I am particularly interested in the ways in which aspects of the family environment, including family stability and parenting practices, influence self-regulatory processes, including emotion regulation and health-related behaviors and outcomes. Additionally, I am interested in examining the impact of prevention and treatment initiatives for children, youth and families that comprehensively address family wellness and are based on integrated, multidisciplinary models of care.

Conor O’Dea  
Bailey Hall 301D, 518-388-6054, odeac@union.edu  
http://odealab.weebly.com/  
My research focuses on factors that affect how individuals perceive, as well as how individuals attempt to justify, antisocial behavior. I approach these topics across two main areas. The first is understanding how different groups in society use derogative language and humor to derogate people belonging to other groups and also factors that promote intergroup affiliation. My second area of research is involved in understanding the link between masculine honor beliefs and expectations for people to respond violently to threats and insults. It is my theoretical perspective that, in order to better understand why people exhibit antisocial behaviors even though they are aware of societal norms that vilify these expressions (e.g., physical violence, racial discrimination), we should examine factors that affect the justification as well as the suppression of antisocial behaviors.

Chad Rogers  
Butterfield Hall Room 306, 388-7040, rogerse@gmail.com  
http://www.chadrogers.com/  
Much of my prior work has been focused on speech comprehension in young and older adults. My approach represents a combination of cognitive psychology, neuroscience, linguistics, and audiology. My specific research topics of late are: (1) The neural reorganization of speech processing. I am interested in how young and older adults may engage different routes to successful speech processing by recruiting different neural mechanisms revealed through EEG, structural and functional MRI. (2) Effortful listening and its impact on semantic processing. In difficult listening situations people report expending cognitive effort to achieve successful speech comprehension. I am interested in how people use meaning and semantics as a “shortcut” to reduce effort. (3) Linguistic and acoustic contributions to auditory memory. I am also interested in how variables like syntax and background noise make information not only difficult to understand, but also less likely to be remembered.
Stephen Romero  
**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 Stanhope  
**Bailey Hall Room 301A, 388-6543, stanhopl@union.edu**

I am interested in factors relating to the social development of children and adolescents. In particular I study the interrelationship among such factors as parenting styles, children’s personalities, and their social behavior (e.g., helpfulness, peer relations, problem behaviors). 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 cyberbullying compared to conventional bullying; looking at helicopter parenting and its relationship to college students’ feelings about their emerging adulthood.

D. Catherine Walker  
**Bailey Hall Room 301C, 388-6538, walkerc@union.edu**

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 Weisse  
**Olin 110C, 388-6300, weissec@union.edu**

My research examines the dying process from both patient and caregiver perspectives. I am particularly interested in a model of care where patients with home insecurity and/or caregiver instability receive care by non-familial caregivers in community-run residential care homes. My research team has been studying the management of symptoms such as pain, anxiety, and restlessness and how caregivers dispense hospice-prescribed medications. Additional projects have examined the development of empathy and self-efficacy when providing care at the very end of life.