Chapter 8. Research Apprenticeship and the Semester Plan

An important component of research training in our doctoral program consists of three semesters of Research Apprenticeship (PSY 793). Enrollment in the 3-credit course Research Apprenticeship, which is intended to foster development of research competence in every student, typically begins in the second semester of the first year of the program. While students may develop and demonstrate such competence by completing a relatively independent and original empirical study (see point (4) below), the primary vehicle for acquiring research competence is the Research Apprenticeship.

The research apprenticeship model recognizes that students enter our doctoral training program with a broad range of research competencies. Some have more focused research questions, while others are open to a variety of possible research directions. Not only do students vary in how well thought out their research ideas are, they also bring to the program various technical skills including mastery of a significant literature, ability to formulate research questions and hypotheses, familiarity with data analytic strategies, and technical writing capabilities. The research apprenticeship is designed to individualize the research experience, providing faculty and peer support to those requiring or desiring more direction and encouraging greater independence for those already possessing basic skills and familiar with a faculty research area.

The Research Apprenticeship is also designed to foster professionally relevant research activity. Through participation in ongoing research projects, students can expect to contribute to the science of psychology at a level commensurate with their competencies. The program strongly encourages communication of research through scholarly products such as convention presentations, journal submissions, book chapters, and other professional writings.

Some of the qualities of an apprenticeship training model that we hope to achieve include:

(a) The development of a close working relationship with a faculty mentor who is intimately involved with and committed to a given research area or issue.

(b) The development of a working relationship with advanced students who themselves are working in close alignment with the same mentor on the same or a related research agenda.

(c) The student's adoption and expansion of a mentor's research perspective in order to enhance the student’s professional development and contribute, in turn, to the collective research effort.

The formal characteristics of the Research Apprenticeship are as follows:

(1) During their first semester in the program, students are encouraged to talk with both clinical and nonclinical faculty about their current research interests. A pizza lunch is held every fall for all new graduate students, where department faculty present their research areas and current projects. Many students join and begin meeting with their faculty mentor’s research team during
that first semester, and may wish to begin background reading in that research area prior to officially registering for Research Apprenticeship (i.e., PSY 793) in the spring.

(2) By the end of the first semester, students are expected to have negotiated an agreement with a Psychology faculty member (either clinical or nonclinical) to supervise their research training via the Research Apprenticeship. Since a primary objective of the apprenticeship model is individualized training, the negotiated agreements will be varied. In general, the apprenticeship will require three semesters of work with 8 hours devoted per week. If a student has not negotiated an apprenticeship agreement with a faculty member by the end of the second week of the second semester, the clinical faculty will assign a research advisor to supervise the student's apprenticeship work.

(3) While it is generally expected and desirable that an apprentice relationship will continue for the three required semesters, the option to freely renegotiate this relationship is available to the student and/or the advisor at the end of the first semester. The last two semesters of the apprenticeship must be completed with the same advisor.

(4) The specific activities required in the apprenticeship program are negotiated between the student and advisor at the beginning of each semester, and recorded on the Semester Plan (see Chapter 5). These activities may include participation in faculty-student research team meetings and assistance provided to the advisor in all aspects of the research endeavor (literature search, review, and discussion; study design; obtaining IRB approval; data collection; data entry and analysis; report write-up; preparation of grant proposals; etc.). The student's level of participation will undoubtedly advance and become increasingly independent with the acquisition of specific skills over time. This is in keeping with one of the ultimate goals of apprenticeship training, to foster the skills necessary to design and conduct a dissertation-level research project.

Alternatively, the student's primary activity may center around the design, completion, and write-up of an independent and separate empirical study. Such an independent, free-standing project must receive the explicit written approval of the faculty advisor, based on a written proposal submitted by the student. Until such time as the student has received approval for an independent project, it is assumed that the student's activities will center around the advisor's programmatic research efforts.

(5) The overall goal of the Research Apprenticeship is acquisition of the basic skills required for undertaking high-quality research at the doctoral level. Recognizing the importance of writing skills, students are required to demonstrate their competence at preparing a professional manuscript. The format of this product is flexible; it could be a review paper (such as might appear in Clinical Psychology Review), a research report (as might appear in a refereed journal), or a theoretical exposition (as might appear in a scholarly book). The specific requirements for any written research product are determined by the faculty advisor. The deadline for submission of this written research product is the end of spring semester second year. After the faculty mentor
approves the final draft, students must give a copy of this manuscript (signed by their advisor) to the Assistant to the Chair of the Department, along with a signed form that documents the completion of the Research Apprenticeship and thus the eligibility of the student to register for the Comprehensive Examination.

Additional requirements for the Research Apprenticeship vary among students as well as among faculty advisors. However, the basic criterion is the acquisition of fundamental research skills. Toward achieving this goal, faculty advisors, in consultation with the clinical faculty, may set specific requirements (beyond 8 hours per week and the written product) for satisfactory completion of the Research Apprenticeship. For example, a student who has difficulty writing may be required to complete successfully a writing course.

(6) For each of the three semesters of enrollment in Research Apprenticeship, a student's progress and performance is graded Pass/Fail, whether a student is learning as an apprentice or pursuing an independent research project. Satisfactory performance is assessed in relation to the specific objectives negotiated between each student and advisor at the start of each semester. To ensure that the requirements for each semester are clear to both student and faculty mentor, students are required to prepare a written statement of objectives for the semester using the Semester Plan (see end of this chapter), which includes research goals as well as goals for clinical and professional development. The faculty advisor signs this as well as the student, and a copy is given to the DCT for the student’s file. Adequate performance must be demonstrated to remain in good standing in the program. Note that although the semester plan is discussed here in relation to the Research Apprenticeship, it is to be completed at the beginning of all semesters except those in which the student is on internship.

(7) At the student's option and with the consent of the research advisor, one semester of the Research Apprenticeship may be completed during the summer following the first year. Students who elect this option are required to enroll in summer session and pay the associated tuition and fees.

(8) Students who enter the Clinical Ph.D. program with previous M.A.-level coursework (e.g., Statistics, Research Methods) and have established a relationship with a faculty mentor may be encouraged to register for the first of the three semesters of Research Apprenticeship (PSY 793) that fall, during their first semester in the program.

**Graduate Student Research Symposium**

Students who have completed their Research Apprenticeship project are required to present it in a Department-wide poster session the following Spring semester. In other words, a student would generally present his or her research in the Spring of the third year. Students prepare a poster such as one they would present at a conference (in fact, the poster is often the same as one a student has presented at a conference).
This event serves as an opportunity for us to come together as a Department to learn about the research activities of our students and celebrate students' research accomplishments. The format is much like a scientific conference poster session. It begins with each student taking approximately 2 minutes to briefly explain his or her study to the attendees, after which there is an open poster session. It is meant to be an informal meeting where students have the opportunity to interact with faculty and peers and share the work they have done.

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Semester Plan

The form on the next page is to be completed by each student with his or her advisor at the beginning of each semester. When completed and signed, copies should be made for the student and advisor, and the Director of Clinical Training. The form should be completed no later than the beginning of the third week of the semester.

This procedure is designed to encourage students and faculty to discuss goals and expectations at the outset of each semester. It is intended to be used as a flexible tool to help students and faculty member work more effectively together. As the semester progresses, the student and faculty member are free to modify goals and target dates as necessary. The form is intended to deal not just with goals related to research, but with all the student's professional goals for the semester.

Prior to completing this form, some important issues to discuss include but are not limited to the following:

- focus and goals for the current semester;

- frequency of meeting times throughout the semester;

- expectations the student and faculty member have of each other (e.g., topics on which the student requests advising; feedback process; turn-around time on written products);

- clarification of expectations for the written product associated with the research apprenticeship or dissertation (e.g., length, format of project, final due date);

- clarification of expectations for the final product from research apprenticeship or dissertation (e.g., when manuscript will be submitted for publication, who will write it, authorship, etc.).
### SEMESTER PLAN

**Student:** _________________________________  
**Academic Advisor:** ________________________  
**Semester:** ________________________________  

**Specific goals for the semester** (all professional goals, not just research)  

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**Target date**

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**Professional development issues to discuss with advisor** (e.g., where to do externship, research topics and funding to pursue, type of internship that will help meet goals)

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**General description of research area** (if applicable)

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_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

**Overall research project goal** (if applicable)

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_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

**Student Signature**  __________  **Date**  __________  **Advisor Signature**  __________  **Date**  __________