



Stony Brook University

Department of Psychology

To: Psychology Department Graduate Students  
From: Susan Brennan, Graduate Program Director  
Date: December, 2022  
Re: Ph.D. Breadth Course Requirement and Rules

I am writing with an update to the Psychology Department's Breadth Course Requirement for graduate students in all four of our Ph.D. programs. It is important to periodically revisit this requirement to avoid any confusion about exactly what the rules are and what courses count toward this requirement. Following discussion on October 24, 2022 with Psychology's Graduate Committee and on November 14, 2022 at a faculty meeting, followed by a unanimous vote on November 28, we are updating this requirement as described below; the update will be reflected on [our website](#).

This update reflects the fact that many (if not all) of our Ph.D. students seek interdisciplinary training as part of their degrees, often in the form of an Advanced Graduate Certificate. This means that the traditional meanings of "depth" and "breadth" have evolved considerably since this requirement was last codified in 2007. The update reflects a liberalization of the older policy and is more student-centered, in that it places more control in the hands of students. The goal is to ensure clear and predictable offerings.

To briefly summarize what a breadth course is: Ever since the Psychology Department's PhD programs were approved by SUNY, they have required that students take three breadth courses outside of their own program's area of specialization (these areas being Clinical Psychology, Cognitive Science, Integrative Neuroscience, and Social & Health Psychology). Previously, this three-course requirement could be satisfied by taking two "traditional" (standard) breadth courses as listed on [our website](#) and one "wildcard", as defined below. **The update to this policy is that students now have the option to deploy these three courses as two "wildcards" and one standard ("traditional") breadth course.**

**Standard Breadth Courses:** The traditional breadth courses are ones that will be offered on a predictable basis. Generally speaking, such courses should be offered every other year. Each of the four areas will offer at least four such courses that can count for breadth for students outside of the area (or for depth, within the area). There are also a small number of courses that are considered to be outside of *everyone's* home area, and thus permissible for everyone to use as a breadth course (but not as a depth course). As a result, for any given student there should be ~15 breadth courses (four courses in each of the three areas outside of the student's own area, plus three that are outside for everyone). Courses may be added to the list on an ad hoc basis, through nomination by a faculty member and approval by the Graduate Committee (if the new course includes the broad content expected of breadth courses).


We will periodically update [the list of regularly offered breadth courses](#) to reflect what is currently offered. The plan is that at the end of each AY (each summer), we will list the traditional breadth courses for the following AY (upcoming two semesters) in time for students to register.

**The Wildcard:** To satisfy the breadth requirement, students may now use up to two wildcard courses, choose from the following options: (a) a broad course offered in another department; (b) a course from outside their own area, even if that course is more specialized and not on the list of breadth courses (e.g., a content-based seminar); or (c) a methods-based course (currently, the two offered regularly are *Meta-*

*Analysis and Multivariate Methods*). Even under the wildcard, professional development courses such as the teaching seminar or grant-writing seminar are *not* usable for the breadth requirement. Of course, students need not elect any wildcard options but are free to satisfy the entire breadth requirement via traditional breadth courses if they wish. Note also that Clinical Area students, due to accreditation rules, may have additional constraints that should be discussed with Clinical Area faculty).

If you have any questions about the updated rules, please contact the Graduate Office for clarification.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'SEB', is written over a light blue rectangular background.

Susan E. Brennan, Ph.D.

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