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# Student Handbook

## Master of Science in Applied Behavior Analysis



UNIVERSITY of  
**SOUTH FLORIDA**

**College of Behavioral & Community Sciences**

Child & Family Studies

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# The USF Master of Science Program in Applied Behavior Analysis

## Overview

The primary goal of the Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) MS Program is for students to acquire knowledge and demonstrate competencies in applied behavior analysis. Students of the program function as practitioners and researchers, applying these skills as they address behavioral issues of social importance in relevant settings. Student preparation for these professional roles will be accomplished through the program's courses, fieldwork experiences, and the thesis mentored by one of the ABA program faculty members.

The master's program in ABA was designed for graduates to obtain the course work and experience necessary for certification by the Behavior Analyst Certification Board (described below).

The Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB) requires that students receive 315 classroom hours of graduate level instruction in the following content areas:

Content Areas	Credits
BACB Compliance Code and Disciplinary Systems; Professionalism	45 hours
Philosophical Underpinnings; Concepts & Principles	90 hours
Measurement, Data Display and Interpretation; Experimental Design	45 hours
Behavior Assessment	45 hours
Behavior-Change Procedures; Selecting and Implement-ing Interventions	60 hours
Personnel Supervision and Management	30 hours

The Association for Behavior Analysis International has designated the USF program a Verified Course Sequence (VCS), which means the USF courses cover all the required course content.

In addition to coursework, students must complete 1500 hours of concentrated supervised fieldwork. The USF Applied Behavior Analysis Program follows the experience guidelines of the Behavior Analysis Certification Board ([www.BACB.com](http://www.BACB.com)), which requires 1,500 total hours of concentrated supervised fieldwork experience learning skills related to the BACB 5th Edition Task List® (see specifics in following section). The concentrated supervised fieldwork requires the completion of activities under the direct supervision of a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) who has been approved by the USF ABA Program as a fieldwork supervisor (see specific requirements below). See the USF Practicum Handbook for details on concentrated supervised fieldwork requirements:

## Curriculum

The ABA Master's Program is part of the Department of Child and Family Studies within the College of Behavioral and Community Sciences. The 45-credit-hour MS Program in Applied Behavior Analysis has been sequenced to emphasize course work in the first year and thesis research in the second year. Students will participate in concentrated supervised fieldwork activities and Practicum Seminar in both years of the program. In addition to required coursework, concentrated supervised fieldwork, and thesis research, graduate students also are encouraged to get involved in research projects conducted by faculty members and fellow graduate students. By assisting in the research of others, students learn valuable research skills they will need when they conduct their own thesis research. In addition, assisting other graduate students conducting their master's theses facilitates the completion of their theses and their timely graduation.

**Table 1. Program of Study**

Course Name	Hours
<b>First Year – Fall Semester</b>	
Applied Behavior Analysis Basic Principles	3
Observational Methods and Functional Assessment	3
Single Case Experimental Design	3
Practicum Seminar	2
Introduction to Thesis Research	2
<b>First Year – Spring Semester</b>	
Behavior Theory	3
ABA in Complex Community Environments	3
Ethics in Applied Behavior Analysis	3
Practicum Seminar	2
Thesis	2
<b>First Year – Summer Semester</b>	
Supervision and Training in ABA	3
Thesis	2
<b>Second Year – Fall Semester</b>	
Practicum Seminar	2
Thesis	2
Behavior Analysis and Dev. Disabilities	3
Experimental Analysis of Behavior 1	3
<b>Second Year - Spring Semester</b>	
Practicum Seminar	2
Thesis	2

The master's program requires 35 hours of course work and 10 hours dedicated to thesis research. The courses are listed below.

## Required Courses

Course Name	Credits
Applied Behavior Analysis Basic Principles	3 credits
Observational Methods/Functional Assessment	3 credits
Single Case Experimental Design	3 credits
Behavior Theory	3 credits
ABA in Complex Community Environments	3 credits
Ethics in Applied Behavior Analysis	3 credits
Supervision and Training in ABA	3 credits
Behavior Analysis and Developmental Disabilities	3 credits
Experimental Analysis of Behavior 1	3 credits
MHS 6940 Practicum Seminar	
Students enroll in Practicum Seminar across 4 semesters for a total of 8 credits (2 credits each fall and spring semester)	8 credits
MHS 6971 Thesis	
Students enroll in 10 thesis credits. (2 credits every semester in the program) The master's thesis is described below	10 credits

## VCS Content by Course

Course Number	Course Title	A: Philosophical Underpinning	B: Concepts & Principles	C: Measurement, Data Display, Interpretation	D: Experimental Design	E: Ethics	F: Behavior Assessment	G: Behavior Change Procedures	H: Selecting and Implementing Interventions	I: Personnel Supervision & management	Totals	Credit Hours	Credit System
<b>Content Needed</b>		<b>90 (45 in concepts and principles)</b>		<b>45</b>		<b>45</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>60</b>		<b>30</b>	<b>315</b>		
MHS 6615	Observational Methods and Functional Assessment						35.00	5.00	5.00		45.00	3	Semester
MHS 6201	ABA in Complex Community Environments						10	35.00			45.00	3	Semester
MHS 6937	Behavior Theory	30.00	15.00								45.00	3	Semester
MHS 6701	ABA Basic Principles		45.00								45.00	3	Semester
MHS 6744	Single Case Experimental Design			20	25.00						25.00	3	Semester
MHS 6780	Ethics in ABA					45					45.00	3	Semester
MHS 6900	Supervision & Training in ABA							5	10	30	45.00	3	Semester
<b>Content Offered</b>		<b>90</b>		<b>45</b>		<b>45</b>	<b>45.00</b>	<b>60.00</b>		<b>30</b>	<b>315.00</b>		

## Concentrated Supervised Fieldwork and Practicum Seminar

The USF Applied Behavior Analysis Program follows the experience guidelines of the Behavior Analysis Certification Board ([www.BACB.com](http://www.BACB.com)), which require 1,500 total hours of concentrated supervised fieldwork experience learning the skills related to the BACB 5th Edition Task List.

Students will participate in a Practicum Seminar offered each fall and spring semester. Students are required to successfully complete at least 4 semesters of Practicum Seminar. The seminar will involve skills training activities, case review and discussion, tutorials, assignments designed to apply content discussed in class, and a final project.

The USF ABA Student Fieldwork handbook provides more information on the practicum requirements.

## Professional Behavior

All graduate students will be expected to engage in professional behavior as they engage in activities related to the master's program. Professional behavior includes (but is not limited to) the following:

- **Class attendance and participation.** Students are expected to attend all classes and to let instructors know in advance of any unavoidable absences. As classes occur on a schedule, students should not plan trips or vacations that conflict with the semester schedule. Students are responsible for any class assignments, schedule changes, etc. that occur in class if they must miss class.
- **Participating in class.** Students are expected to participate in classes by paying attention to the person speaking, asking questions, and contributing in other expected ways (e.g., participating in class activities or active responding modalities). Unacceptable behavior in class includes using your phone for any reason, using your computer for any reason except note taking, and engaging in rude or disrespectful behavior. If you must take a call or receive a text due to an emergency (e.g., you have a client in crisis, you are waiting for a call from a sick family member) you must leave the class to receive the call or text or make a call or text. Otherwise, students must not have a phone out of their pocket, purse, or handbag in class. Phones must be set on silent or vibrate in class. Students using computers or tablets in class to take notes cannot use the internet for non-class purposes (no email, Facebook, or web browsing) and cannot work on other class or work assignments.
- **Respectful interactions with others.** Students are expected to interact with other students, faculty, clients, supervisors, and others in a respectful manner. This means respecting diversity among individuals and respecting differences in professional approach. Not all individuals with whom you interact with will be like you and not all professionals will be behavior analysts. Your acceptance of others and of others' perspectives will make you better able to work with them. What is implied here is that students must engage in positive and constructive interactions with others. Furthermore, students must refrain from engaging in negative, critical, and demeaning talk about others (gossip).
- **Assertiveness.** If a student has a concern with the actions of another student, coworker, or faculty member, the student should address the concern with that person as soon as possible. Often, problems with others arise because of misunderstandings. The only way problems or concerns can be resolved is by talking with the individual(s) involved.
- **Punctuality.** Students are expected to show up on time for classes, meetings, fieldwork, and any other scheduled activities. Showing up on time means leaving on time (and anticipating traffic). It is also important to call the person with whom you have a commitment or meeting if you will be late for some unexpected reason.
- **Responsibility.** Students are expected to complete assignments on time and in an accurate fashion, whether related to class, research, or practicum. It is the student's responsibility to clarify the nature of assignments if they aren't clear and to seek assistance when necessary. In addition, students should attempt to be proactive with regards to communication and request help or information in a timely fashion.
- **Proper attire.** As professionals in practicum settings, you should dress in attire appropriate to the setting. Others' impressions of you, and of applied behavior analysis more generally, will be determined not just by how well you do your work but by how you present yourself as well.

## Student Advisement and Major Professor Assignment

During the first semester of coursework, the student will select a major professor who will serve as the student's advisor and thesis committee chair. The student must identify a major professor by end of the first semester in the program.

## Thesis Requirement

The culmination of a student's experience and training will be the execution of the research thesis. The thesis requirement will involve the execution of a research project and the writing of a thesis manuscript that is accepted by the student's committee and the Graduate School. The purpose of the thesis is to enhance student abilities to:

- 1) Conceptualize research questions that are socially significant and important to the further development of applied behavior analysis; and
- 2) Apply sound research strategies in answering one of these questions.

The thesis will consist of a) conceptualizing an original research project, writing a thesis proposal and orally defending the proposed research in a thesis proposal meeting and b) implementing the proposed research, writing the thesis manuscript, and orally defending the completed thesis in the final defense meeting. The study must involve the collection of empirical data that are analyzed quantitatively to answer an important question relevant to the practice of applied behavior analysis. It is expected that the study will involve the manipulation of environmental variables to determine their functional relation to behavior of social importance.

All three members of the student's thesis committee must approve a thesis proposal in advance of data collection. A thesis proposal includes an introduction section (that includes the research question with appropriate reference to the supporting literature), a method section, and a brief results section describing expected results with a graph of hypothetical data. Prior to starting data collection, the student must also complete all IRB documentation and training requirements and obtain IRB approval. The thesis will consist of the conceptualization and defense of a written proposal, implementation of the research, and final thesis manuscript. The final thesis document must be presented to the student's committee in an oral defense according to the guidelines of the Graduate School. The thesis document and process must meet all Graduate School timelines and format (<http://www.grad.usf.edu/policies.php>).

The student's major professor will ensure that the proposed methods of research are consistent with behavior analytic standards. Prior to formulating the proposal and conducting the research, the major professor will ensure that the student has acquired the skills necessary for using the proposed measurement and/or design strategies.

## Thesis Committee

The composition of the Thesis Committee will involve the student's major professor (the thesis committee chair) along with a minimum of two other faculty members with doctoral degrees in applied behavior analysis or other discipline relevant to the thesis research. The committee chair must be a doctoral level faculty member in the ABA program. The other committee members may be ABA faculty members, faculty from other academic departments at USF or other universities, or doctoral level behavior analysts from community agencies.

A more detailed description of the process of conducting the thesis and the timeline in which thesis activities should occur is provided below.

## Thesis Activities and Timeline

1. **Chose a thesis topic (done by end of first fall semester) How do you choose a topic?**
  - a. Read research articles.
  - b. Think about what you are interested in.
  - c. Think about what sites are available to you.
  - d. Talk to faculty members about your interests and potential topics.
2. **Choose an advisor (done by end of fall semester) How do you choose a thesis advisor?**
  - a. Talk to faculty members to determine their interests.
  - b. Consider who matches your interests.
  - c. Consider whether you would like to work with the person.
3. **Complete an area paper (Start spring, finish no later than early summer semester)**
  - a. The purposes of an area paper are to review literature related to your thesis topic and become knowledgeable about the literature; learn to conduct a literature search; learn to write in a coherent and organized fashion; learn to write in APA format.
  - b. Meet regularly (weekly) with your advisor as you work on the area paper.  
*\*\*Continue to meet regularly with your advisor as you write the proposal, conduct the thesis research, and write the thesis manuscript.\*\**
  - c. Have weekly goals for work you will accomplish on the area paper.
  - d. Work on the area paper should be done in a stepwise fashion to help break down the requirement into manageable units of work each week. For example, a student might commit to work x number of hours for the week or might commit to a specific product for the week (e. g., accumulating 20 references; reading and summarizing six research articles, writing the outline of the paper, etc.)
  - e. Turn in drafts of the paper (or parts of the paper) to your advisor for editing (may require a number of drafts).
  - f. Incorporate your advisor's editing and turn in a final copy of the area paper to your advisor
4. **Put together a thesis committee (spring semester)**
  - a. The committee has to have a minimum of 3 doctoral level faculty members (one committee member might be a doctoral level behavior analyst from a local agency, approved by the ABA Program Director) with expertise in ABA.
  - b. Ask faculty members to be committee members after you have decided on the study with your advisor.
  - c. Complete the thesis committee form required by the College of Behavioral and Community Sciences.
5. **Write the proposal (spring and summer semester)**
  - a. The proposed research must be developed after consideration of the research site and potential participants.
  - b. You have to have a site with a high likelihood of securing acceptable participants before writing your proposal.

- c. The proposal consists of an introduction section, a method section written in future tense, and a results section with a description of expected results and a graph(s) with hypothetical data.
  - i. The introduction orients the reader to your purpose in the paper, briefly reviews relevant literature, and justifies the importance of the study. It ends with your purpose statement(s) - otherwise known as your research question(s).
  - ii. The method section details exactly how you will conduct the study. Consider writing this section in such a way that a person skilled in ABA but not knowledgeable of the subject matter could understand your procedures well enough to replicate them.
  - iii. The results section describes the expected data and the graph shows how you will display the data
- d. You should provide your advisor with a first draft of the thesis proposal manuscript (or sections of the manuscript) after you have given your very best effort towards investigating the topic and writing the manuscript (you should edit your own work a number of times before giving a draft to your advisor). It is your responsibility to ensure your proposal is cogent, well laid out, free of errors or typos, and written in APA format. To ensure the quality of your writing, your advisor will edit your draft and ask for changes. This process will continue a number of times until the proposal is acceptable.
- e. The proposed research must meet two important criteria.
  - i. It must address a worthwhile research question (the study adds to the literature by answering a research question that has not been answered in any previous studies) and
  - ii. It must be doable (able to be completed in 2 to 4 months)

## **6. Defend the proposal (summer semester)**

- a. Schedule a meeting with your committee once the final draft of the proposal is accepted by your advisor.
- b. Ask Tracy-Ann to:
  - i. send you the proposal defense forms
  - ii. schedule a room for the proposal defense at a couple weeks in advance of the proposal and
  - iii. send out an announcement for the thesis proposal defense to the University community
- c. Give your proposal to your committee at least 7 days in advance of the proposal meeting. Ask committee members whether they want a hard copy or an electronic copy.
- d. The proposal should be your best work; free of errors and in APA format.
- e. At the proposal defense, engage your committee in a PowerPoint presentation explaining the study and be ready to field questions by the committee.  
*\*\* Your committee will use a rating form to evaluate your presentation \*\**
- f. It is common for your committee members to suggest changes to your document at the proposal defense meeting.

- i. Some changes may be rather minor such as grammatical changes, or asking for more detail while others may require you to revisit the literature and re-write portions of your paper.
- ii. Take these suggestions seriously, make the changes, and let your committee members know how you made the changes.
- g. Bring the proposal defense form to the meeting, typed out and ready for committee members' signatures.

**7. Complete and submit IRB materials (summer semester)**

- a. You have to have thesis committee approval for the thesis proposal before you can submit IRB materials
- b. Work on the IRB application as you are preparing your proposal so you are ready to submit the materials as soon as you defend your thesis.
- c. The IRB meets once a month so schedule your committee meeting to get your IRB materials in before the deadline for the next meeting.

**8. Conduct the thesis study (fall and early spring semester)**

- a. Recruit and train research assistants. If possible, recruit and train RAs while awaiting IRB approval in order to avoid delays in getting started with the study.
- b. Following IRB approval, recruit participants and get signed consent forms.
- c. It may be a good idea to pilot the assessment procedures before starting actual data collection so you can work out any problems.

**9. Apply for graduation (spring semester)**

- a. Check with the Graduate School on deadlines. The deadline to apply for graduation typically is near the beginning of the semester in which you want to graduate. The deadline for submitting your completed thesis typically is about one month before the end of the semester in which you want to graduate.
- b. There are several steps to the process so keep in mind multiple deadlines.
- c. The Graduate School website is <http://www.grad.usf.edu/newsite/current/asp>.

**10. Complete an ETD Boot Camp Help Session conducted by the Graduate School**

- a. Electronic Thesis and Dissertation (ETD) Boot Camps are conducted every semester by the Graduate School. Students must complete an ETD Boot camp prior to graduation (typically in the semester prior to graduation). Check the Graduate school website for the schedule. (<http://www.grad.usf.edu/newsite/current/asp>)

**11. Write the final thesis manuscript (spring semester)**

- a. The thesis manuscript must be your best work; error free, clear, and well organized.
- b. It must be written according to Graduate School formatting requirements (these requirements are somewhat different from APA format).
- c. You should provide your advisor with a first draft of the thesis manuscript (or sections of the manuscript) after you have put your very best effort into writing the manuscript (you should edit your own work a number of times before giving a draft to your advisor). It is your responsibility to ensure your thesis manuscript is cogent, well laid out, and written in APA or Graduate School format. To ensure the quality of the writing, your advisor will edit your draft and ask for changes. This process will continue a number of times until the thesis manuscript is acceptable.

## **12. Defend your thesis before your committee (spring semester)**

- a. Schedule a meeting with your committee once the final draft of the thesis manuscript is accepted by your advisor.
- b. Ask Tracy-Ann to:
  - i. send you the thesis defense forms
  - ii. schedule a room for the thesis defense meeting at least a couple weeks prior to the defense and
  - iii. announce the defense to the University (this is not optional as the University community must be notified of graduate defenses).
- c. Give your thesis manuscript to your committee at least a week in advance of the defense meeting (7 days minimum). Ask committee members whether they want a hard copy or an electronic copy.
- d. Give your thesis manuscript to your advisor at least 3 or 4 weeks before the date of the defense meeting so your advisor has time to provide editing. Often the thesis advisor will edit a number of drafts before the manuscript is acceptable.
- e. The thesis manuscript should be your best work; free of errors and in APA or Graduate School format.
- f. At the thesis defense meeting, engage your committee in a PowerPoint presentation explaining the study and results and field questions by the committee  
*\*\*Your committee will use a rating form to evaluate your presentation\*\**
- g. It is common for your committee members to suggest changes to your document at the final defense meeting.
  - i. Some may be rather minor such as asking for grammatical changes or for more detail; others may require you to re-write portions of your paper.
  - ii. Take these suggestions seriously, make the changes and let your committee members know how you made the changes.
- h. Bring the thesis defense form to the meeting, typed out and ready for committee members' signatures.

## **13. Submit the completed thesis to the Graduate School**

- a. Look at the Graduate School website for the deadline.
- b. You must include the plagiarism check verification
- c. The manuscript must be in the proper format.
- d. The manuscript must include all changes requested by your committee.
- e. You cannot graduate until you receive final approval from the Graduate School.

## **14. Complete IRB project completion paperwork**

The IRB requires a project completion report. It is your responsibility to complete this report as the last duty on your thesis project.

## **15. Work with your advisor to prepare your thesis manuscript for submission to a journal**

If your advisor deems the thesis to be publishable, begin working on a publication version of the paper

## Summary – Thesis Timeline

### Fall semester of first year

- » Decide on thesis topic and advisor

### Spring semester of first year

- » Start literature review
- » Start thesis proposal

### Summer of first year

- » Finish area paper (literature review)
- » Finish thesis proposal
- » Thesis proposal defense meeting
- » Complete and submit IRB materials

### Fall of second year

- » Start conducting thesis research project

### Spring of second year

- » Apply for graduation
- » Participate in the ETD Boot Camp provided by the Graduate School Finish conducting thesis research project
- » Write final thesis manuscript
- » Participate in the final thesis defense meeting
- » Submit the final thesis manuscript to Graduate School and ABA Program
- » Complete IRB paperwork

### Summer of second year

- » Complete any tasks listed above that are not yet completed

## Other important issues

Register for the proper number of thesis credits:

Register for the thesis course with your advisor listed as instructor. Two thesis credits are required each semester starting in the fall of your first year:

*Tracy-Ann is here to help you register and complete the appropriate paper work for your thesis.*

You can ask her for the following types of assistance:

- » Ask her for help registering for thesis credits.
- » Ask her about the forms you need to complete for your thesis.
- » Ask her about forms you need to graduate.
- » Ask her to schedule the room for your thesis proposal meeting and thesis defense meeting.
- » Ask her about deadlines or any other information you need regarding your thesis.

## Timeline for Graduation in the ABA Program

The Applied Behavior Analysis Master's Program at USF is designed to graduate students in 2 years. Students take most courses in the first 2 semesters (fall and spring) and then have one full year (summer, fall, and spring semesters) to complete 3 additional courses and complete their thesis requirement. It is expected that students will complete an accepted thesis proposal in the summer of the first year and complete the final thesis manuscript by the spring or summer of the second year. As such, our expectation is for students to graduate in the spring or summer semester in their second year of the program (students who started in fall 2021 should graduate by May or August of 2023).

However, some students do not make adequate progress on their thesis and remain in the program beyond this time period with all requirements completed except for the thesis. This situation is undesirable for a number of reasons. First, if the student does not graduate in a timely fashion and the student risks not graduating at all.

Second, as students remain in the program beyond 2 years and make demands on their thesis advisors' time, thesis advisors have less time to devote to new students' projects.

Thesis advisors will do everything they can to help students complete their thesis in a timely fashion.

- » Provide feedback on manuscripts in a timely fashion,
- » Work with you to identify weekly goals when working on the proposal or thesis manuscript,
- » Meet regularly (weekly in most cases) in research meetings to discuss activities, review data, monitor progress, problem solve
- » Meet individually on a regular basis, if needed
- » Offer to develop a behavioral contract with you if needed to motivate action on the thesis

Students must register for thesis credits and work continuously on their thesis each semester until it is completed. It is not acceptable to take a semester off once the thesis activities are initiated. However, if a student encounters personal difficulties that are serious enough to impair progress on the thesis, the student may petition for a leave of absence from the program.

# Petition for Leave of Absence

Date:

Name:

Year entered USF ABA master's program:

Thesis advisor:

## **Please answer the following questions**

1. Describe the progress you have made on your thesis to date. Include progress on
  - a. the area paper (date it was completed or percentage completed to date)
  - b. the thesis proposal (the date of the proposal meeting, or the percentage of the proposal completed to date)
  - c. the IRB process (date materials were submitted, date approved, or the percentage of the application completed to date)
  - d. data collection (when did you initiate data collection, when did you complete data collection?)
  - e. the final thesis manuscript (how much of the paper is written?)
2. Describe reason for leave of absence or extension
  - a. Describe medical or family situation that impeded progress on the thesis
  - b. Describe how you can document these events
  - c. Describe how these events impeded your progress
  - d. Describe the time frame of the events that impeded your progress (include the dates of the events and the thesis activities you were involved in when the events occurred)
3. Identify the time frame of your requested leave of absence and describe your plan for completing your thesis during the extension or after the leave of absence.