



A Guide for Self-Representation as a Doctoral Student at the University of Ottawa

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Preamble

What is Self-Representation?

Self-representation is the act of identifying aspects of oneself to a person or a group of people. In the context of doctoral studies, self-representation encompasses anything where students would divulge their status as a doctoral student to members of the community, practicum settings, clients, as well as internship programs/sites and potential employers. It represents how graduate students present themselves to the public. Examples of self-representation include but are not limited to:

- Email signatures
- Titles (e.g., Ph.D. Student, Ph.D. Candidate, Ph.D. ABD, etc.)
- Biographies for training sites/post-internship work
- Public statements
- Cover letters, CV

Why is Self-Representation Important?

It is important that clinical psychology students from the University of Ottawa use consistent language surrounding self-representation as it sets a consistent standard for how the public (i.e., outside the university) sees the students and it prevents the misunderstanding and potential misrepresentation of credentials and/or status. We need to consider carefully how the public understands what is communicated in a signature or other statement.

Ethical Considerations

The College of Psychologists of Ontario does not have specific guidelines for graduate students in clinical psychology. However, elements of the Standards of Professional Practice for registered clinical psychologists are pertinent and are outlined below. Although the CPA and APA also do not currently have clear guidelines for self-representation of doctoral students, there are aspects of the CPA and APA ethics codes that encourage transparency in representing oneself and these aspects of the ethics codes have been used as a guideline for this document.

College of Psychologists of Ontario

- **Standard 6 Representation of Services (in particular: 6.2 Accuracy of Public Statements)**
 - A member must not knowingly make public statements that are false, misleading or fraudulent, concerning his/her psychological services or professional activities or those of persons or organizations with which he/she is affiliated. Accordingly, a member must not misrepresent directly or by implication his/her professional qualifications such as education, experience, or areas of competence. Moreover, a member must not misrepresent his/her qualifications by listing or displaying any affiliations with an organization that might be construed as implying the sponsorship or certification of that organization. A member may list or display an affiliation only if such sponsorship or certification does, in fact, exist.

Canadian Psychological Association

- **Principle III: Integrity in Relationships**
 - **Accuracy/honesty:** Accurately represent their own and their colleagues' qualifications (e.g., credentials, education, experience, competence, affiliations) in all spoken, written, or printed communications, being careful not to use descriptions or information that *could be misinterpreted* (e.g., citing membership in a voluntary association of psychologists as a testament of competence).

American Psychological Association

- **Section 5: Advertising and Other Public Statements**
 - **5.01: Avoidance of False or Deceptive Statements:**
 - a) Public statements include but are not limited to paid or unpaid advertising, product endorsements, grant applications, licensing applications, other credentialing applications, brochures, printed matter, directory listings, personal resumes or curricula vitae, or comments for use in media such as print or electronic transmission, statements in legal proceedings, lectures and public oral presentations, and published materials. Psychologists do not knowingly make public statements that are false, deceptive, or fraudulent concerning their research, practice, or other work activities or those of persons or organizations with which they are affiliated.

b) Psychologists do not make false, deceptive, or fraudulent statements concerning (1) their training, experience, or competence; (2) their academic degrees; (3) their credentials; (4) their institutional or association affiliations; (5) their services; (6) the scientific or clinical basis for, or results or degree of success of, their services; (7) their fees; or (8) their publications or research findings.

- **Section 10: Therapy**

- **10.01 Informed Consent to Therapy:**

- c) When the therapist is a trainee and the legal responsibility for the treatment provided resides with the supervisor, the client/patient, as part of the informed consent procedure, is informed that the therapist is in training and is being supervised and is given the name of the supervisor.

Self-Representation in Email Signatures

A majority of communication takes place over email, understanding the importance of self-representation in emails and email signatures is crucial for appropriately representing oneself to other academics, clinical practicum training directors, and clients. As there is no Comprehensive Examination at the University of Ottawa for clinical psychology students, there is no current standard for what determines a traditional doctoral “candidate.” In consultation with other doctoral students across Canada, the general consensus is that, for programs without Comprehensive Examinations, doctoral students become candidates once they have successfully defended the thesis proposal.

→ ***You enter the program and present as a “Doctoral Student” and once you have defended your thesis proposal you become “Doctoral Candidate.”***

Ph.D. or Doctoral, does it matter?

In our consultation, some clinical training directors wished for students to *not* use Ph.D. initials in their communications, as it could be misconstrued for meaning that the student has a Ph.D. In order to reduce the chances of this occurring, we are recommending that all students use “Doctoral” or “Doctorate” instead of “Ph.D.” when communicating through email—including email signatures (e.g., Jane Doe, Doctoral Student).

What if I am almost done?

In addition to Doctoral Student and Doctoral Candidate, some individuals choose to self-represent as “Ph.D. ABD” meaning “All But Dissertation.” This is often used to represent that the student has completed all necessary coursework, practica, internship, and other program requirements but have yet to deposit and successfully defend their dissertation. While “Doctoral Student” and “Doctoral Candidate” are recognized statuses, Ph.D. ABD is *not*. As such, students should refrain from using this status, because individuals outside academia may believe a person who has Ph.D. ABD in their email signature or website has graduated from a doctoral program.

Public Statements

The general public likely does not have detailed knowledge of graduate programs, and as such, they may not understand what constitutes a doctoral candidate. Therefore, in accordance with public transparency and protection, we are recommending that students should *not* use the term “Doctoral Student” or “Doctoral Candidate” in verbal or written communication with the public (e.g., clients, media, etc.), and instead, we are strongly encouraging you to use “Practicum Student” for the *entire* duration of the program prior to internship. Once on internship, you should verify with the internship training director the term that should be used in your communications.

U of O communications and research-related communications

Once you have defended your proposal, you may refer to yourself as a “Ph.D. candidate” when you are communicating on academic or research matters.

Sample Email Signatures

We strongly encourage you to use the following email signatures for your uOttawa email address. In particular, we strongly recommend the judicious and appropriate indication of your “title” and academic credentials that are completed (e.g., B.A., M.A.).

Communicating with **clients and the general public**

NAME OF STUDENT, ACADEMIC CREDENTIALS

Practicum Student, Clinical Psychology

Communicating on **academic or research** matters

NAME OF STUDENT, ACADEMIC CREDENTIALS

Doctoral Student, Clinical Psychology
OR (after successful proposal defense):
Ph.D. Candidate, Clinical Psychology

➔ **Option:** To be *inclusive* in your emails, you may add your preferred personal pronouns (he, him, his; she, her, hers; they, them, theirs; placement of pronouns is variable). Adding your preferred pronouns is a small way to show your openness to accept others’ preferred pronouns and signals that one ought not assume to know preferred pronoun. For more information, see more information below and here:

<https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/GLSEN%20Pronouns%20Resource.pdf>.

Communicating with **clients and the general public**

NAME OF STUDENT, ACADEMIC CREDENTIALS

(*optional: pronouns*)

Practicum Student, Clinical Psychology

Practicum site (appropriate but optional)

Address (some address needs to be given for reference but may be *training site specific*)

School of Psychology

University of Ottawa

Vanier Hall, 136 Jean Jacques Lussier

Ottawa, ON, K1N 6N5

Tel: (613) 562-5800 x. Tel. extension

(may be reception of your external training site)

Communicating on **academic or research** matters

NAME OF STUDENT, ACADEMIC CREDENTIALS

Doctoral Student, Clinical Psychology

OR (after proposal defense):

Ph.D. Candidate, Clinical Psychology

(*optional: pronouns*)

Lab name (optional)

School of Psychology

University of Ottawa

(Address optional) Vanier Hall, 136 Jean

Jacques Lussier

Ottawa, ON, K1N 6N5

Tel: (613) 562-5800 x. Tel. extension

Examples:

Susan Smith, M.A. (she/her)

Practicum Student, Clinical Psychology

Happy Valley Psychological Clinic

14 Sunshine Way

Ottawa, ON, K1X X2X

Tel: (613) 561-1234 x. 56

Karim Aboud, B.A.

Doctoral Student, Clinical Psychology

(he/him)

Best Lab Ever

School of Psychology

University of Ottawa

Vanier Hall, 136 Jean Jacques Lussier

Ottawa, ON, K1N 6N5

Tel: (613) 562-5800 x. 1234

Recommendation: It is always good to verify with your research supervisor or your clinical training director which *specific* coordinates (lab name, training setting, which phone number, etc.) you may include in your signature.

More Information

- http://www.cpo.on.ca/Standards_of_Professional_Conduct.aspx
- <https://www.apa.org/monitor/febo6/ethics.aspx>
- <https://www.apa.org/gradpsych/2007/01/title>

Information on personal pronouns

- <https://www.ryerson.ca/ryerson-works/articles/workplace-culture/2018/why-include-pronouns-in-your-email-signature/>
- <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-preventing-discrimination-because-gender-identity-and-gender-expression/3-gender-identity-and-gender-expression>
- <https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/GLSEN%20Pronouns%20Resource.pdf>

REMINDER:

The use of University of Ottawa letterhead is restricted to staff and professors and is intended only for the communication of university business. The University of Ottawa does not permit the use the letterhead in communications that are not co-signed by a University of Ottawa supervisor/professor. There may be rare exceptions – *always* check with university staff prior to use!

Self-Representation in Biographies

It is also important to consider how we represent ourselves in practicum, internship, and autonomous practice settings. Careful consideration of the language used to describe previous training experiences is important for transparency for clients, training directors, and the public. For example, if students completed a practicum at The Royal Ottawa Hospital, it would not be recommended to say that they *worked* at ROH. As another example, students might say that they have *experience* completing Psychoeducational assessments at the school board for 12-months. Statements like these suggest that the students obtained a work contract and/or were paid for their services: neither one would typically apply in a usual practicum rotation. Furthermore, the aforementioned examples also apply for individuals on internship, in supervised practice, and in autonomous practice. Ways to accurately convey experiences during clinical practica are displayed in the next section.

In addition, according to the ethical codes published by CPA and APA, we are also required to be transparent about the client populations with whom we are competent to work. As doctoral students are not “competent” in any area at this level of their training, we encourage you to be aware of not unintentionally exaggerating your current expertise. If you wish to convey your interests in working with a certain population or a disorder on a practicum website (e.g., children, adolescents, adults, older adults, neuropsychology, forensic psychology, anxiety disorders, PTSD, Borderline Personality Disorder, etc.), we recommend that you are *clear* that experience has been and continues to be acquired through practicum training in order to prevent the misinterpretation that you are competent and/or registered in any of these areas.

Please note also that the College of Psychologists of Ontario limits the use of “psychology” and “psychological” and that, when you completed a psychological assessment or intervention as part of your training, ethically and legally speaking, it is your supervisor who is responsible for the provision of services. The client is the supervisor’s client, not your client. Hence, it is important to make clear that you received training in conducting psychological assessments/interventions.

Examples of Language

We encourage practicum students to use the following language to self-represent when writing about their previous practicum training:

- “During the course of practicum training in clinical psychology at the University of Ottawa, NAME received training at PRACTICUM SETTING 1, PRACTICUM SETTING 2, and PRACTICUM SETTING 3.”
- “NAME has received training with children, adolescents, and adults.”