



# Developmental Science Program Graduate Student Handbook

**2025-2026**

**DISCLAIMER:** This handbook contains information specific to the Developmental Science doctoral training program. Graduate Students assume responsibility for knowing and abiding by additional Departmental and University level policies and procedures during their training at FIU. A non-exhaustive list of links to these resources appears at the end of this handbook.

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# 1. WELCOME AND POINTS OF CONTACT

## *Welcome to the Developmental Science Community at FIU*

We are so glad you are here! This handbook was written with **you** in mind. It provides a roadmap for successfully earning your PhD in Psychology with a major in Developmental Science. Grad school has many ups and downs, and we are here to help every step of the way on your journey. Our goal is to make sure you feel seen, heard, and above all, valued during your training with us.

## *Who do I contact if I have a question or a concern?*

Questions about the Developmental Science program should go to the **Program Director (PD)** Dr. Eliza Nelson ([elnelson@fiu.edu](mailto:elnelson@fiu.edu)).

General questions about graduate training should go to the **Graduate Program Director (GPD)** Dr. Deborah Goldfarb ([dgoldfar@fiu.edu](mailto:dgoldfar@fiu.edu)).

Each training program sends a graduate student representative to department meetings and Graduate Education Committee (GEC) meetings. If you have a question or feedback that you'd like your representative to share with faculty in either of these settings, reach out to your **Developmental Science Student Rep** Abenaa Yamoah ([ayamo001@fiu.edu](mailto:ayamo001@fiu.edu)).

## Anonymous Graduate Student Online Comment Boxes

To make a suggestion or an idea for an action item, an observation, experience, or concern related to your **training and education as a graduate student or something related to your graduate experience**, visit the Graduate Education Committee online comment box at this link: [https://fiu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_cVkpsmltFwDjWiW](https://fiu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_cVkpsmltFwDjWiW)

For concerns related specifically to **diversity, equity, or inclusiveness**, use this link for the Psychology Department Diversity Committee: <https://redcap.fiu.edu/surveys/?s=R7HEC3394P>

For **conflict resolution**, go to section 8 in this handbook.

## 2. PROGRAM HISTORY AND VISION

### *What is the origin of the Developmental Science program at FIU?*

The Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology degree launched at FIU in fall **1984** with two main foci: (1) Child, adolescent, and adult development and (2) Aging and the later years. The program emphasized normal development as well as cross-cultural and urban perspectives on the life span. The curriculum was designed to foster a commitment to both basic research and application as part of the individual student's specialty area development. The first PhD was awarded in **1990**. By **2005**, the PhD in Psychology had three foci including Life-span Developmental, I/O, and Legal. The name officially became Developmental Science in **2009**. The Program Directors have been:

- Dr. William Kurtines (1984-2012)
- Dr. Anthony Dick (2012-2014)
- Dr. Dionne Stephens (2014-2016)
- Dr. Shannon Pruden (2016-2020)
- Dr. Eliza Nelson (2020-Present)

### *What is the vision of the Developmental Science program today?*

The program in Developmental Science is designed to provide you with the skills to describe and explain change over time in humans and other organisms. As your PD, I have implemented change at the program level to meet you where you are and ensure you can get to where you want to go, whether that is in academia or industry. My vision is grounded in my core value of *transparency in training*. The changes I have championed were designed to ensure you can develop a marketable research portfolio that includes advanced training in statistics/methodology. There are clear training benchmarks to guide you on your journey, and I am tracking your progress so I can celebrate every milestone with you. Please let me know when you have scheduled a defense meeting with your committee (thesis and dissertation) so I can be there to support you.

- Dr. Eliza Nelson, PD -

### 3. PROGRAM FACULTY AND LAB TEAMS

Faculty Member	Lab Name and Developmental Science Trainees
<b>Lorraine Bahrck</b> Distinguished University Professor	<b>Infant Development Lab</b>  (1) Kelsey Macdonald (2) Bethany Ramirez
<b>Anthony Dick</b> Professor	<b>Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience Laboratory</b>
<b>Robert Lickliter</b> Professor	<b>Developmental Psychobiology Lab</b>
<b>Eliza Nelson</b> Program Director, Associate Professor	<b>Human and Nonhuman Developmental Science (HANDS) Lab</b>  (1) Atefeh Karimi (2) Katherine Long (3) Chris Shoukry
<b>Shannon Pruden</b> Associate Chair for Graduate Studies, Professor	<b>Project on Language and Spatial Development (PLSD) Lab</b>  (1) Bridgette Avila (2) Carlos Desme (3) Nicholas Mattox (4) Karinna Rodriguez (5) Abenaa Yamoah

### 4. PROGRAM MENTORING MODEL AND POLICIES

#### *Who can serve as your Advisor in the program?*

The Developmental Science program is built on a **1:1 mentoring model**. The match between you and your Advisor began at the application stage. You were offered admittance to our program because your research interests closely align with one of our faculty. When you enter the program, you will immediately begin working in your Advisor's lab. Over the course of your first year, you are expected to establish your dissertation committee. Faculty selected for your dissertation committee will provide additional guidance during your training. The composition of the committee is determined between you and your Advisor but must include: (1) **Developmental Science Advisor as Chair or Co-Chair** (termed Major/Co-Major Professor), (2) One additional faculty

member from Developmental Science, (3) One faculty member from outside of Psychology, and (4) One additional faculty member (no stipulations). The committee may include more than four faculty members if you want additional expertise, and it also may include faculty from outside FIU. Your dissertation committee can be changed within reason (you change labs; a faculty member leaves the university; you change research topics). Non-Developmental Science faculty can Co-Chair, but not Chair, Developmental Science graduate student dissertation committees.

### *Why should you initiate an Advisor-Advisee agreement?*

We recommend that you initiate an Advisor-Advisee mentoring agreement in your first semester and revise it every year you are in the Developmental Science program. This document is also called an **Individual Development Plan (IDP)**. Explore examples on the web and find something you are comfortable using. The IDP sets the tone for your mentoring relationship with your Advisor by jumpstarting open and honest dialog about you can do (your strengths), and what you want to improve (your needs). Because your career goals may shift, update your IDP annually. Having an IDP helps avoid mismatched expectations between you and your Advisor. Remember, be your own advocate! Maximize your IDP to tailor your training to your specific needs and career path. You will have many different types of Advisors, and what you need from an Advisor will change as you advance in your career. Also, no two Advisor-Advisee relationships are alike. You may have a different relationship with your Advisor than another trainee in your lab group, and that's ok. Individual differences and change over time are the cornerstones of developmental science.

### *What happens if you need to change your Advisor?*

You may find that your Advisor is no longer the right person to mentor you to reach your goals. When this happens, you have options. If you can discuss changing labs with your current Advisor, start there. If you feel you cannot have this discussion with your current Advisor, the next person to approach is the Graduate Associate Chair. The PD does not manage Advisor-Advisee conflicts. You have the right to request confidentially in handling a change in Advisor. Depending on your research goals, it may be appropriate to work directly with another faculty member from your dissertation committee. Alternatively, you may want to shift direction completely and identify a new Advisor outside of your committee. If you change Advisors, you need to work out expectations for work on outstanding projects between you and your old Advisor such as authorship on future

publications. You will also be required to file paperwork to formally change membership on your dissertation committee. Keep in mind your preference for a new lab placement is not guaranteed—faculty have the right to refuse to mentor you. To continue in the program, you must have a Developmental Science faculty member as Chair or Co-Chair. **You will be formally dismissed from the program if you cannot secure an Advisor under this policy.**

## 5. PROGRAM TRAINING BENCHMARKS

*What are the benchmarks for making adequate progress towards the Doctorate of Philosophy in Psychology: Major in Developmental Science?*

### Year 1: Establish Dissertation Committee and Propose Master's Thesis

The dissertation committee should be established in Fall of Year 1.

This milestone is met by filing the appropriate UGS form online and requires signatures.

The Master's Thesis proposal meeting should be held no later than Fall of Year 2.

There are no formatting or length requirements for the master's proposal document.

Typically, the dissertation committee serves as the master's thesis committee.

This milestone does not require filing any formal paperwork.

**Note:** The Master's Thesis in Psychology is in-house. Sign up for Supervised Research while you are completing your thesis project (typically fulfilled through continuous summer enrollment). This course is limited to 6 credits per term. You should add Directed Independent Study (3 credits) to maintain full-time status in the fall or spring semesters if you are not taking a content course.

### Year 2: Complete Required Coursework and Defend Master's Thesis

The program is designed so that you fulfill all required coursework by Spring of Year 2.

Track your progress toward degree requirements regularly with your **Panther Degree Audit**.

If you find errors in your PDA, email the Psychology Graduate Office ([psygrad@fiu.edu](mailto:psygrad@fiu.edu)).

The Master's Thesis defense meeting should be held no later than Fall of Year 3.

There are no formatting or length requirements for the master's thesis document.

Developmental Science requires the student is **first author on the publishable manuscript**. This milestone requires formal paperwork including a memo, rubrics, and iThenticate report. Documents are sent to GPD Dr. Deborah Goldfarb ([dgoldfar@fiu.edu](mailto:dgoldfar@fiu.edu)) and Cc [psygrad@fiu.edu](mailto:psygrad@fiu.edu).

You may want to take additional courses to obtain further expertise beyond your requirements. All optional coursework must be completed before filing the form to advance to candidacy. Once you advance to candidacy, you can only take Dissertation credits until you graduate.

### Available Graduate Certificates

- (1) **Applied Behavior Analysis**: The Graduate Certificate in Applied Behavior Analysis consists of seven courses that comprise the FIU graduate Verified Course Sequence. The certificate is designed for individuals who already have a graduate degree and wish to complete the coursework required to become a Board-Certified Behavior Analyst. For more info, see <https://case.fiu.edu/psychology/graduate-certificate-in-applied-behavior-analysis/index.html>
- (2) **Applied Social and Cultural Psychology (ASCP)**: The ASCP certificate gives doctoral-level Psychology students an opportunity to learn culturally-humility-based frameworks and methods for working with diverse populations. The certificate requires 6 courses. For a list of approved courses and admission information, see <https://case.fiu.edu/psychology/graduate-certificate-in-applied-social-and-cultural-psychology/index.html>

### **Year 3: Defend Comprehensive Exam Paper/Dissertation Prospectus**

UGS policy stipulates you must have at least 60 credit hours to advance to doctoral candidacy. The program is designed so that you will advance to candidacy in Spring of Year 3. Students who waive in courses from a prior graduate program (up to 6 credits) are eligible in Fall of Year 3.

Developmental Science doctoral students must write an **additional first-author paper beyond the master's thesis paper for the comprehensive exam (also called "quals")**. There are no restrictions on the format of the paper, but it should be publishable and submission-ready at the time of the oral defense. **Your committee must approve your quals before you can schedule your defense. The quals oral defense occurs at the same time as the dissertation proposal.**



The dissertation proposal is a prospectus for two additional planned student-as-first-author manuscripts beyond the quals paper. UGS has a new required form for the dissertation proposal. This document should be approved by your dissertation committee before you submit it online. UGS also requires a Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) certificate and IRB or IACUC approval (if appropriate for your dissertation research) to file the dissertation proposal online milestone tile. Your name must appear in the CC line of the research protocol approval, and the approval memo must be valid for at least 1 year. You do not need to include your quals paper in the UGS dissertation proposal form. However, your final dissertation will be the quals paper, the two additional papers from the proposal, plus a general introduction and general conclusion.

Your oral defense should be held with your dissertation committee no later than Spring of Year 3. You should file UGS forms (candidacy/dissertation proposal) no later than Summer of Year 3.

#### **Year 4: Defend Dissertation and Submit Electronic Dissertation Document**

The program is designed so that you can complete your graduate training by Fall of Year 5.

Developmental Sciences students will have a dissertation comprised of three first-author papers (candidacy/quals paper and two additional papers beyond the master's thesis paper) bookended by a general introduction and conclusion. There are no restrictions on the format of the papers, but they should be publishable and submission-ready at the time of the oral defense. UGS has very strict formatting requirements. Make sure to adhere to their guidelines as you prepare your file. The dissertation defense date must be advertised with an abstract of your project.

This milestone requires filing formal paperwork including rubrics from each faculty member on your committee and a full iThenticate report generated by your Advisor (Major Professor).

Documents are sent to GPD Dr. Deborah Goldfarb ([dgoldfar@fiu.edu](mailto:dgoldfar@fiu.edu)) and Cc [psygrad@fiu.edu](mailto:psygrad@fiu.edu).

**You must route your UGS-formatted dissertation at least 6 weeks in advance of your defense date.** You should obtain signatures from your committee before sending to the GPD. The GPD handles the final routing to the dean/UGS. No exceptions will be made to this timeline.

### *What happens when you DO NOT meet a program benchmark?*

There are two mechanisms for addressing progress towards program benchmarks:

- (1) Annual Evaluation (Required by UGS for all graduate students at FIU)
- (2) Fall Check-in with PD (Specific Requirement for Developmental Science trainees)

#### Annual Evaluation

The UGS Annual Evaluation is completed online through MyFIU through a series of steps:

- (1) You complete a form on your accomplishments and set SMART goals for next year
- (2) Your Advisor writes a summary and rates you on satisfactory/unsatisfactory progress
- (3) You present your annual evaluation in a meeting with your dissertation committee
- (4) You approve your review and fill in the date when your dissertation committee met
- (5) The committee signs off electronically and your form goes to the GPD and Deans

A **Performance Improvement Plan (PIP)** is included in your Annual Evaluation if you are rated as occasionally or consistently not meeting expectations in a core competency OR the overall rating of your evaluation is unsatisfactory OR you did not meet a program benchmark. The PIP will explain how you did not meet expectations and will stipulate how to improve your performance with a timeline for completion and evaluation. You will receive a PIP if you have *not* proposed your Master's Thesis by Spring Year 2, *not* defended your Master's Thesis by Spring Year 3, or *not* defended your candidacy paper/proposed Dissertation by Spring Year 3. **If you receive three unsatisfactory Annual Evaluations, you will be formally dismissed per UGS policies.**

#### Fall Check-in with PD

To make sure you are on track, you will fill out a check-in survey every Fall starting in Year 2. Information collected goes to the PD who will initiate a meeting with you and your Advisor if there are concerns about your timeline for these major research milestones: (1) Master's Thesis proposal; (2) Master's Thesis defense; and (3) Candidacy Paper/Dissertation proposal defense.

A PD-initiated remediation plan is informal and not put in your file. **The intent of the fall check-in is to avoid a lack of progress resulting in a PIP at your UGS Spring Annual Evaluation.**

## 6. DEGREE REQUIREMENTS

The Ph.D. in Psychology: Major in Developmental Science requires a minimum of 75 semester credits of graduate work beyond your bachelor's degree, including a dissertation based on your original research. You will earn your master's degree (M.S.) on the way to your Ph.D.

*Can you waive courses if you're coming into the program with a master's degree?*

You can request to **transfer two graduate courses from another institution** towards your Ph.D. Requests should be approved first by your Advisor and then sent to the PD with the course syllabi (Form on SharePoint). The PD will consult faculty who have taught equivalent courses at FIU. If your prior course is comparable, the waiver request will be approved. If your prior course is *not* comparable or does not meet the standards for graduate training at FIU, the waiver request will be denied. Requests to waive courses in the common quant core are unlikely to be successful as the FIU curriculum was designed as a three-course sequence. Students who waive in courses are eligible to advance to candidacy one semester earlier than students entering without credits.

*What are the course requirements for the Developmental Science major?*

### 1. Common Core Courses in Statistics/Methodology (9 credits)

Developmental Science doctoral students are required to complete 9 credits of departmental core courses in statistics/methodology comprised of the following 3 credit courses:

1. PSY 5939 Special Topics in Psychology Quantitative Methods I (**Fall Year 1**)
2. PSY 5939 Special Topics in Psychology Quantitative Methods II (**Spring Year 1**)
3. PSY 5246C Multivariate Analysis in Applied Psychological Research (**Fall Year 2**)

### 2. Theory and Methods Requirement (9 credits)

Developmental Science doctoral students are required to complete 9 credits in theory and methods comprised of the following 3 credit courses, or another course approved by the PD:

1. DEP 5608 Theoretical Perspectives in Developmental Psychology
2. PSY 5605 History & Systems
3. Advanced Statistics/Methods (**choose 1**)
  - DEP 5986 Developmental Methods
  - PSY 5930 Qualitative Research Methods in Psychology
  - PSY 5939 Special Topics in Psychology: Longitudinal Data Analysis
  - PSY 5939 Special Topics in Psychology: Introduction to SEM for Psychological Research
  - PSY 5939 Special Topics in Psychology: Categorical Data Analysis
  - PSY 5939 Special Topics in Psychology: Missing Data
  - PSY 5939 Special Topics in Psychology: Multilevel Models
  - PSY 5939 Special Topics in Psychology: Statistical Graphics and Communication

### 3. Developmental Science Breadth Requirement (6 credits)

Developmental Science doctoral students must take 6 credits from the following list of 3 credit courses, or another course approved by the PD:

- DEP 5058 Biological Basis of Behavior Development
- DEP 5065 Cognitive Development
- DEP 5099 Proseminar in Infancy, Childhood, and Adolescence
- DEP 5405 Proseminar in the Psychology of Adulthood and Aging
- DEP 5725 Seminar in Psychosocial Development
- DEP 5936 Integrating Theory and Research in Developmental Science
- DEP 6046 Cross Cultural Perspectives of Emerging & Established Adulthood
- DEP 7096 Seminar in Psychology of Life-Span Social Development

### 4. Supervised Research/Ind. Study/Field Experience/Internship Requirement (18 credits)

Developmental Science doctoral students must take 18 credits of supervised research, independent study, field experience, or internship credits as appropriate to their plan of study. Typically, you sign up for Supervised Research while completing your master's thesis project.

When signing up for Supervised Research, you are limited to 6 credits in any one semester. You can also take Directed Independent Study for 3 credits if you need to make a 9-credit load.

## 5. Electives (12 credits)

Developmental Science doctoral students must take 12 credits of electives comprised of four 3 credit graduate-level courses. Selecting electives should be done in consultation with your Advisor and approved by the PD. You can use your electives towards one of the graduate certificates. Your tuition waiver will not cover courses beyond 9 credits in fall or spring. We do not advise paying out of pocket for extra courses. You can continue taking electives until you advance to candidacy. After you reach candidacy, an option may be to audit a course. Permission to audit is at the discretion of the instructor and not guaranteed.

## 6. Master's Project (6 credits of Supervised Research)

You will complete your master's degree on the way to your Ph.D. The Master's Thesis Project should be a publishable research article based on your original scholarship conducted under the direction of your Advisor. Developmental Science requires that the student is first author on the Master's Project paper. Your paper should be submission-ready at the time of the oral defense. The Master's Project requires 6 credits of Supervised Research.

Specific benchmarks for Developmental Science students include:

- Oral defense of Master's Project proposal no later than Fall of Year 2.
- Oral defense of Master's Project paper no later than Fall of Year 3.

## 7. Comprehensive Exam

Developmental Science doctoral students must write an additional first-author publishable paper beyond the master's thesis paper for the comprehensive exam. There are no restrictions on the format of the paper, but it should be publishable and submission-ready at the time of the oral defense. The oral defense for the comprehensive exam paper occurs at the same time as the dissertation proposal. The dissertation proposal must include (1) the complete comprehensive

exam paper and (2) a prospectus for two additional planned student-as-first-author manuscripts. **Your committee must approve your document before you can schedule your defense.**

Specific benchmark for Developmental Science students:

- Oral defense of comprehensive exam paper/prospectus no later than Spring of Year 3.
- Candidacy/dissertation proposal paperwork should be filed no later than Fall of Year 4.

## 8. Ph.D. Dissertation (15 credits)

You are expected to complete a doctoral dissertation, which is a supervised original research project that makes a novel and substantive scientific contribution to your area of specialization. The dissertation must be 3 publishable papers (comprehensive exam paper plus two additional papers) joined by an introduction and a conclusion. The more products you produce, the stronger you will be on the job market. You do not have to have published any part of your dissertation to defend. Developmental Science requires that the student is first author on the dissertation papers.

You qualify to begin your dissertation after advancing to candidacy. For Developmental Science, that means you have completed (1) all coursework, (2) your master's project, and (3) passed the defense of your comprehensive exam paper/dissertation prospectus. Once you reach candidacy, you must be enrolled in 3 dissertation credits until you defend your dissertation.

### Continuous Enrollment Requirement

UGS requires you to be continuously enrolled in the fall, spring, and summer semesters while completing your degree. **Failure to maintain continuous enrollment will result in dismissal.**

- **Pre-Candidacy:** you must enroll in 9 credits in fall and spring, and 6 credits in summer.
- **Doctoral Candidacy:** you may only enroll in 3 dissertation credits in any semester.

The PD reviews requests to substitute a graduate content course from another program/dept to fulfill a degree requirement. Independent study cannot be used to replace a course requirement.

### *Under what circumstances can you be dismissed from the program?*

You may be dismissed from our training program under these circumstances:

- Non-compliance with the continuous enrollment policy
- A third unsatisfactory annual evaluation
- Cumulative and semester GPAs that fall below 3.0 for a third semester
- Failure to make satisfactory progress (program-level guidelines). In Developmental Science, this condition is defined as not achieving a program benchmark by the next Annual Evaluation after receiving a written warning (i.e., 1 year after receiving a PIP for the benchmark) OR failure to secure a Developmental Science Advisor as Chair/Co-Chair of your dissertation committee.

## 7. FUNDING

### *How much money will you make as a graduate student?*

As a Developmental Science student, you will receive a 12-month stipend at the Psychology base TA/GA/RA rate of \$30,000. You are responsible for fees each semester (see **dept handbook**).

### *What resources are available if you experience a hardship?*

#### Bethany Sutherland Hardship Fund

This fund was established by Dr. Bethany Reeb-Sutherland to ensure that doctoral students have the means to cover unexpected financial costs. Dr. Reeb-Sutherland was an Associate Professor in our program who passed away in November 2020 after an extended journey with breast cancer. **The fund is strictly for unforeseen emergencies.** The event or catastrophe must be non-recurring, sudden, unexpected and critical, such as but not limited to the following: (1) acute illness of graduate student (i.e., unexpected, sudden and temporary); (2) Unexpected medical bills not fully covered by insurance (i.e., costly co-pay for emergency visit, surgery, or MRI scan); (3) Fire or other catastrophic damage in primary residence of student resulting in unexpected bills not fully covered by insurance; (4) Temporary housing or rent emergency (i.e., student cannot afford their rent due to no fault of their own e.g., missed FIU paycheck, delay in loan receipt); (5) Other hardship not listed above that has led to unexpected bills (must provide details in application).

You may request up to \$1,000 per application. One application is allowed per semester. All information is held in confidence. Applications are reviewed by the GEC committee. To apply: <https://go.fiu.edu/Sutherland>.

## 8. CONFLICT RESOLUTION

There is a table for who to contact for specific issues in the **Resource** section of this handbook. Use this decision tree to for general issues. Start at #1 and proceed down. If your issue is about the person at a level OR you are not comfortable disclosing to the person at the level, skip levels.

- (1) Advisor
- (2) Developmental Science Program Director (Dr. Eliza Nelson)
- (3) Graduate Program Director (Dr. Deborah Goldfarb)
- (4) Relevant Associate Chair (Dr. Arlene Garcia/Dr. Maureen Kenney/Dr. Shannon Pruden)
- (5) Chairperson (Dr. Dana McMakin)

If your issue is not resolved adequately through this process, seek support outside of Psychology.

## 9. PROGRAM OUTCOMES

*How many students have graduated from the program?*

To date, we have graduated **118** trainees:

- 1990s = 18
- 2000s = 28
- 2010s = 50
- 2020s = 22 and counting!

Our alumni are organized by graduation decade here on the program page under **Team**.

Wherever possible, we have linked the dissertation for each alumni and list their current position. This information will help guide you with your own dissertation and see where our students have ended up. To connect with any of our alumni, please visit their hyperlinked LinkedIn profiles.



## 10. RESOURCE LINKS

FIU Psychology Graduate Catalog 2025-2026 (Official Reference for **Degree Requirements**):

<https://go.fiu.edu/psygradcatalog>

Developmental Science Program Webpage (Read Me for **Your Directory Profile**):

<https://dsp.fiu.edu>

- You are also encouraged to develop and regularly update your own academic website, which you maintain independently of the program webpage.

FIU Department of Psychology Handbook 2025-2026 (Official Reference for **Who to Contact**):

<https://go.fiu.edu/psyhandbook>

- You will be prompted to sign in with your FIU credentials. You are responsible for completing a form stating you have received and reviewed the department handbook.