



**University of Pittsburgh  
School of Arts and Sciences  
Department of Economics**

**Graduate Student Handbook  
Updated August, 2011**

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## Contents

I. Overview.....	3
II. Advising .....	3
A. Registration Guidelines.....	4
B. Cross-Registration Program.....	4
III. Requirements for the PhD Degree .....	4
A. Credit Requirements .....	4
B. Minimum GPA .....	6
C. Preliminary Examination Requirement .....	6
D. Comprehensive Examination Requirement (PhD Comprehensive Research Paper) .....	6
E. Field Requirements .....	7
F. Dissertation Overview (Admission to Candidacy).....	8
G. Dissertation Defense.....	9
IV. Job Market Participation/Placement Assistance .....	9
V. Satisfactory Progress, Probation, and Dismissal.....	9
A. Guidelines for Satisfactory Progress .....	10
B. Probation.....	10
C. Dismissal.....	10
VI. Teaching Assistantships, Teaching Fellowships, and Graduate Student Assistantships .....	11
A. Funding Priorities .....	11
B. Continuing Award Eligibility .....	11
C. Rights and Duties of TA/TF/GSAs.....	11
VII. Other Fellowships and Funding Sources .....	12

## **I. Overview**

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The aim of the doctoral program in economics at the University of Pittsburgh is to prepare students to be professional economists in academia, business, or government. The normal time to completion of the PhD degree is five years. The department does not offer a master's degree program.

This document describes the rules, requirements, and responsibilities of doctoral students during their residency in the Department of Economics at the University of Pittsburgh. It is assumed that all students in the doctoral program are familiar with the material in this document and agree to abide by the rules, requirements, and responsibilities as set forth below. **Students also agree to abide by all University of Pittsburgh academic regulations for graduate students as set forth in the University's Graduate and Professional Bulletin, [www.umc.pitt.edu/bulletins/graduate](http://www.umc.pitt.edu/bulletins/graduate).**

The director of graduate studies works with members of the department's graduate committee to certify the completion of graduate student requirements and to resolve any graduate program problems or disputes.

The graduate committee currently comprises:

- Associate Professor Randy Walsh, Director of Graduate Studies ([walshr@pitt.edu](mailto:walshr@pitt.edu))
- Assistant Professor Arie Beresteanu
- Associate Professor Luca Rigotti
- Associate Professor Marla Ripoll
- Associate Professor Lise Vesterlund
- Graduate Program Administrator Amy Linn
- Graduate Student Representative – To be determined

Students should feel free to contact the director of graduate studies, the graduate administrator, or the other members of the graduate committee regarding any problem they are having with the graduate program. Problems unrelated to the graduate program should be brought to the attention of the Department Chair, Jean-Francois Richard.

## **II. Advising**

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The director of graduate studies is the principal advisor for all new graduate students. Beginning in year two, students should first consult with the director of graduate studies who will work with them to find a faculty member who will advise them about their continued course of study. Once chosen, this faculty member will continue to be the principal advisor until the end of spring term of the student's third year in the program. At this time, the student will identify a faculty member to act as the major advisor for his/her dissertation research, and to act as the chair of the committee once the student constitutes a committee for the dissertation overview.

### **A. Registration Guidelines**

Full-time graduate students are those registered for nine or more credits in any given term. All graduate students must be in active status and must register for at least one credit during the term in which they are completing their preliminary examinations, comprehensive examination, field requirements, admission to candidacy, dissertation defense, and graduation.

Full-time teaching assistants, teaching fellows, graduate student assistants, and graduate student researchers are required to be full-time students during the fall and spring terms of their appointment and may register for up to 15 credits each term.

Doctoral students who have completed the 72-credit requirement (See section III-A), have a minimum cumulative grade point average (GPA) of 3.0, have completed both field requirements (see section III.E), and are working full-time on their dissertation may register for “Full-Time Dissertation Study” (FTDC 3999), which carries no credits or letter grade, but provides students with the full-time status necessary to meet funding and/or visa eligibility requirements. Students who register for FTDC are assessed a lower tuition fee.

### **B. Cross-Registration Program**

Graduate students can register for courses at Carnegie Mellon University (or other approved universities). Cross-registration requires prior approval by the director of graduate studies, is limited to one course per term, and counts toward the 45 graded credit requirement as well as toward the student’s GPA. The student must be registered at the University of Pittsburgh for at least nine credits (full time status) *before* cross-registration, but once the cross-registered course is posted on the study list, one of the University of Pittsburgh courses may be dropped. There are no additional tuition charges for cross-registration.

Cross-registration is handled through the Arts & Sciences Graduate Dean’s Office, Room 5141 Sennott Square.

## **III. Requirements for the PhD Degree**

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### **A. Credit Requirements**

The minimum requirement for the PhD is 72 credits in academic courses. Credits in courses such as physical education, music, languages, etc. count toward the cumulative number of credits, but do not fulfill the 72 credit requirement. Credits in courses in which the student earns a grade of C or lower also do not count toward the 72 credit requirement. Of the 72 credits, 45 must be earned in graded course work. The remaining 27 credits can come from non-graded courses, independent study, dissertation research and/or transfer credits. The student’s graduate advisor must approve graded courses that are taken outside of the department. The Department of Economics graded coursework requirement is to be completed according to the following schedule:

First year of study: 8 required courses, 24 total credits, 21 graded credits

- ECON 2001, Introduction to Mathematical Methods\* (3 credits, non-graded)<sup>1</sup>
- ECON 2010, Mathematical Methods of Economic Analysis (3 credits)
- ECON 2020, Introduction to Econometrics (3 credits)
- ECON 2100, Advanced Microeconomic Theory I (3 credits)
- ECON 2110, Advanced Macroeconomic Theory I (3 credits)
- ECON 2120, Advanced Microeconomic Theory II (3 credits)
- ECON 2130, Advanced Macroeconomic Theory II (3 credits)
- ECON 2150, General Econometrics (3 credits)

Second year of study and beyond:

- ECON 2740, Teaching Economics, typically offered in fall term (1 credit, non-graded)
- Six graded field courses in Economics (see Section III.E. Field Requirements)
- Two graded seminars in Economics

Third through fifth years of study:

- One seminar each semester and any remaining required field courses. Students who have passed the PhD Comprehensive Exam, have earned 72 credits, and who register for Full Time Dissertation Study are exempt from formally registering in any seminars, although they are expected to continue attending seminars on a regular basis.

Notes:

- The list of elective graded courses in each term must be approved by the student's advisor (see section II) prior to registration.
- Elective graded courses must be used to satisfy the field requirements as described in section III.E.
- Courses must carry graduate-level credits (i.e. 2000- and 3000-level courses). Some 1000-level courses *may* qualify, but courses numbered below 1000 *do not* qualify.
- The student must receive a letter grade. Satisfactory/Not Satisfactory, Audits, or Credit/No Entry grades do not count toward the graded course work requirement.
- Transfer credits, preliminary examination preparation credits, comprehensive examination preparation credits, directed study credits, dissertation research credits, independent study, and individual research credits *do not* count toward fulfillment of the graded course work requirement.

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<sup>1</sup> ECON 2001, is offered over three weeks in August prior to the start of the first year. These credits do not count toward the 45 graded credits requirement. After completing ECON 2001, students have the option of taking a test that would allow them to waive ECON 2010. The course instructor for ECON 2010 will give this test at the end of August. If a student passes, he/she must substitute another graded course.

## **B. Minimum GPA**

To be certified for the doctoral degree in economics, all students must attain a minimum cumulative GPA of 3.00 in all 2000- and 3000-level economics course work and in all courses qualifying for graduation.

## **C. Preliminary Examination Requirement**

The PhD preliminary examination consists of a four-hour exam in microeconomic theory and a second four-hour exam in macroeconomic theory. Students must pass both examinations to satisfy the preliminary examination requirement and to continue in the program.

The exams are to be taken at the end of the spring term of the first year of study (typically in June). If a student fails either or both preliminary examinations given in June, a second attempt is offered later in the summer of that same year (typically in August). The exact dates of all examinations will be announced in advance.

A student who has failed both exams after two attempts at each will be dismissed from the Ph.D. program. However, a student who has earned no less than a grade of B in each of the seven first year courses may continue to take coursework until he/she has accumulated enough credits to receive a terminal master's degree (MA). The requirements for the terminal master's degree are: 1) either passing each of the seven first year courses with a minimum grade of B or passing one of the preliminary exams; and, 2) completing 30 credits of graduate level coursework with a cumulative GPA of 3.0.

Under exceptional circumstances, a student who has passed one preliminary examination but not the other after two attempts may petition for a third attempt at the remaining examination (which would be given in June at the end of the student's second year). Granting of these petitions is at the discretion of the graduate committee. Students who are granted a third attempt will still be expected to satisfy all second year course requirements. A student who fails in the third attempt at an exam will be dismissed from the program, although he/she may apply to receive a terminal master's degree (MA) if 30 credits of graduate level coursework are completed with a cumulative GPA of 3.0. (Continuing PhD students who have passed both preliminary examinations and completed 30 credits of graduate-level coursework may also apply to receive a master's degree).

## **D. Comprehensive Examination Requirement (PhD Comprehensive Research Paper)**

All students are required to complete a research paper demonstrating their ability to initiate original research in economics. The department recommends single-authored papers, but allows the PhD comprehensive paper to be co-authored with a member of the faculty if the faculty co-author writes a letter to the graduate committee describing the student's substantial contribution to the joint project.

The timeline for the completion of this requirement is as follows:

1. Submission of a short (two- or three-page) research proposal by April 14 of the second year of the program. This proposal must clearly state the problem or “question” the student intends to address, explain how the student’s work fits into the relevant literature, and describe the student’s original contribution. The proposal should provide as much detail as possible on methods the student will use to address the problem. The proposal should list two faculty members who will supervise the project. These faculty members should be consulted prior to the submission.
2. Faculty acceptance of the proposal by May 1. By accepting the proposal, the two faculty members commit to supervision of the PhD comprehensive paper to completion of the review process. This is not, however, a commitment to supervision of the dissertation.
3. Submission of a complete paper by the final full week of August. A complete paper is one that states a question, reviews the relevant literature, presents a coherent methodology, and provides results.
4. Presentation of the paper in a seminar by October 30 in the fall term of the student’s third year. Both faculty supervisors, as well as a member of the graduate committee, should be present at the seminar.
5. Following presentation of the paper, the student needs to meet with the two faculty supervisors for discussion/direction on changes and additions necessary to complete the research paper requirement. (While working to complete this paper, students should meet *regularly* with their advisors.)
6. The completed paper must be delivered to the two faculty supervisors by December 5 in the third year of study. Supervisors will then submit their pass-fail grades to the graduate committee by the end of the fall term.
7. Failure to pass the comprehensive examination requirement is grounds for dismissal from the PhD program.

### **E. Field Requirements**

A variety of fields are offered within six different areas. The six areas are:

- Microeconomics
- Macroeconomics
- Applied Microeconomics
- Experimental Economics
- International, Comparative, and Development Economics
- Econometrics

The list of fields offered within each area is periodically updated by supervising faculty members within the relevant area. These faculty members shall be responsible for the enforcement of field requirements.

Students are required to take coursework in two major fields, consisting of two graded courses and one graded seminar in each field, and one minor field consisting of two graded courses. The two major fields must be completed within different areas.

Course descriptions will indicate with field requirement(s) are satisfied by successful course completion.

Core areas will offer seminars in one semester; Experimental, International and Applied Micro seminars will be offered in the other semester.

#### **F. Dissertation Overview (Admission to Candidacy)**

At the University of Pittsburgh, all PhD students must complete and defend a doctoral dissertation. An early step in this process is the Dissertation Overview where the student presents a summary of his/her proposed research to the doctoral committee. The overview requires the student to carefully formulate a plan and permits the doctoral committee members to provide guidance in shaping the conceptualization and methodology of that plan. The doctoral committee must unanimously approve the dissertation topic and research plan before the student may be admitted to candidacy for the doctoral degree. Approval of the proposal does not imply either the acceptance of a dissertation prepared in accord with the proposal, or the restriction of the dissertation to this original proposal. The student is responsible for ensuring that all appropriate regulatory approvals are obtained for the proposed research. For example, if the research proposed in the overview or prospectus involves human subjects, that proposed research must be approved by the University Institutional Review Board (IRB) before it may be carried out.

By the end of spring term of the third year in the program, the student must identify a faculty member from the Department of Economics who agrees to serve as the major advisor for the student's dissertation research. In so doing, the student is required to obtain the faculty member's signature on a form that will be kept on file in the Economics graduate office. Subsequent changes in the designated major advisor must be approved by the Director of Graduate Studies.

The dissertation overview is typically scheduled with the consent of the student's major advisor(s) only when the student has one or more completed chapters of his/her dissertation and has a thorough outline of how the other chapters will be completed. The overview consists of both a written statement and an oral presentation to the major advisor (committee chair) and a tentative doctoral committee on:

- a) the general subject of the proposed dissertation,
- b) the principal source materials to be used,
- c) the techniques and methods to be pursued, and
- d) a survey of the literature relevant to the chosen topic.

Candidates may appear for the overview only after they have completed the preliminary examination, comprehensive examination, and other departmental requirements.

The doctoral committee must be constituted as follows:

- Three faculty members from the Department of Economics and one faculty member from either another department at the University of Pittsburgh, or from another university
- One of these four faculty members (usually the student's major advisor) is designated as the committee chair. In cases where the student chooses a faculty member from outside of the department as the dissertation committee chair, the student must also choose a faculty member from the Department of Economics as the co-chair.
- Committee members from outside of the University of Pittsburgh must be present for the Dissertation Overview.

### **G. Dissertation Defense**

The dissertation defense is conducted by the student's doctoral committee and chaired by the student's advisor(s). **All members of the committee must be present at the dissertation defense.** This final oral presentation and examination primarily consists of the candidate's defense of the dissertation, though the examination is not limited to materials in and related to the dissertation. One copy of the dissertation must be provided to each member of the doctoral committee at least two weeks prior to the date set for the oral examination. The examination is open to the public and must be announced at least two weeks in advance.

**A minimum of eight months must elapse between the date of the student's Admission to Candidacy and the Dissertation Defense. Note that this does not mean eight months from the date of the Overview, but eight months from the date that appears on the formal Admission to Candidacy letter from the Dean.**

### **IV. Job Market Participation/Placement Assistance**

There is a centralized academic job market in economics that is held annually as part of the Allied Social Sciences Association meetings (typically held the first full week of January). Students who wish to participate in this job market must have the permission of their primary advisor and must have completed their dissertation overview (i.e. achieved doctoral candidate status) by the end of the spring term immediately preceding the job market year.

### **V. Satisfactory Progress, Probation, and Dismissal**

The award or renewal of teaching assistantships depends, in part, on satisfactory progress in the academic program (see section VI). Failure to make satisfactory progress, as defined below, is grounds for discontinuation of funding. Students who do not presently have teaching assistantships but who expect to apply for one later should be aware of the requirements they must meet in order to receive an award in later years of graduate study.

## A. Guidelines for Satisfactory Progress

- GPA requirement: Minimum 3.00 cumulative GPA while in residence.
- Pass both PhD preliminary examinations by the second attempt (in August following the first year of study).
- Pass the English language fluency test administered by the English Language Institute before the start of the second year of study (non-native English speakers only).
- Completion of four graded field courses (12 credits) during the second year of study (i.e. 2 courses per semester).
- Submission of the PhD comprehensive exam (research paper) by the final full week of August at the end of the second year and receipt of a “pass” grade on this paper by the end of the fall term of the third year.
- Completion of the field requirements by the beginning of the fourth year of study.
- Completion of a dissertation overview (advancement to candidacy) by the end of the fourth year of study.

## B. Probation

If the overall GPA falls below 3.00, the student is automatically on academic probation. In addition, any student who is not making satisfactory progress toward completion of the degree, as defined above, may be placed on probation by the department. The student will be informed in writing of such action.

## C. Dismissal

Students may be dismissed from the program for any of the following reasons:

- Violations of the University’s Academic Integrity Code ([www.as.pitt.edu/faculty/policy/integrity.html](http://www.as.pitt.edu/faculty/policy/integrity.html)) which governs cheating, plagiarism, etc.
- Failure to achieve the minimum required GPA or to maintain satisfactory progress.
- Failure to pass the preliminary examinations after two attempts.
- Failure to complete the comprehensive examination (research paper requirement). **Note that there is a seven-year statute of limitations on the PhD Comprehensive Exam (Research Paper). Doctoral students must retake the PhD comprehensives if they do not graduate within seven years of the exam date. An extension of the seven-year limit on the comprehensive exam is not permitted.**
- Failure to complete the dissertation overview requirement.
- Failure to complete all requirements for the PhD degree within a period of 10 years starting from the date of the student’s initial registration for graduate study.
- In addition, students may be removed from teaching or research responsibilities if their performance in these tasks is judged to be unsatisfactory. The graduate committee will serve to arbitrate any disputes.

## VI. Teaching Assistantships, Teaching Fellowships, and Graduate Student Assistantships

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A teaching assistant (TA) is a graduate student who holds a University teaching or teaching-related appointment. A teaching fellow (TF) is the same as a TA except that a TF has passed all preliminary examinations. A graduate student assistant (GSA) is a graduate student who performs duties to assist in the educational or research mission of the university, but does not teach classes or recitation sections. Stipend rates for TAs, TFs, and GSAs can be found at [www.pitt.edu/~graduate/stipends.html](http://www.pitt.edu/~graduate/stipends.html).

### A. Funding Priorities

Priority for funding is based on academic performance, teaching qualifications, competency, teaching evaluations, participation in department seminars (as noted in section III.E), and length of time in the program. The specific priority used is:

1. Students who have received funding in the immediate past semester, who are in their first 10 semesters in the program, and who are currently meeting all guidelines for satisfactory progress.
2. Students who have *continuously* met guidelines for satisfactory progress in the past. This group includes incoming students.

**Note that there should be no presumption of funding for students who have been in the program for more than 10 semesters.** Such students will have an opportunity to receive funding only if funds remain after priority has been given to students as described above. Students should check with the director of graduate studies well in advance of the eleventh semester to determine their likelihood of receiving continued funding. Typically, these funding decisions are made sometime during the summer.

### B. Continuing Award Eligibility

To be eligible to receive a TA/TF/GSA award the student must:

- Maintain a cumulative GPA of at least 3.00.
- Demonstrate fluency in the English language by passing the English language fluency test by the start of the second year of study.

### C. Rights and Duties of TA/TF/GSAs

A brochure titled “Policy Statement for Teaching Assistants, Teaching Fellows, and Graduate Student Assistants” describing the University-wide rights, responsibilities, and duties of TA/TF/GSAs can be viewed on-line at [www.pitt.edu/~graduate/tapolicyrev.htm](http://www.pitt.edu/~graduate/tapolicyrev.htm). A student who believes he/she has been treated unfairly according to the guidelines set forth in the brochure should first attempt to discuss the problem with his or her supervisor, the director of graduate studies.

All new TA/TFs are required to attend an orientation program sponsored by the University’s Center for Instructional Development & Distance Education (CIDDE). New TA/TFs must also register for

the economics department's one-semester teacher training course, ECON 2740, Teaching Economics which is typically offered in the fall term of the second year. Any student who fails to take this course (or its equivalent, FACDEV 2200, University Teaching Practicum) jeopardizes his or her ability to be certified for graduation.

## **VII. Other Fellowships and Funding Sources**

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Other fellowship and non-teaching appointments are available.

- A&S Fellowships are typically awarded only to first-year students based on their application materials. All new PhD student applicants are automatically considered for A&S Fellowships. These one-year fellowships offer stipends at the level of a TA/TF plus an extra amount to offset the cost of health insurance.
- The Reuben E. Slesinger Fellowship is named in honor of Dr. Slesinger, a distinguished faculty member who taught in the department from 1940-86. The Slesinger Fellowship is awarded annually to the most promising entering PhD student, as determined by the graduate admissions committee. The terms of this one-year fellowship are equivalent to an A&S Fellowship.
- The S.H. Chou Fellowship is named in honor of Dr. Shun-hsin (S.H.) Chou, a distinguished faculty member who taught in the department from 1957-85 and who was active in attracting students from his native China to do graduate work in the U.S. The Chou Fellowship is awarded biennially to a highly qualified entering PhD student from China and provides *two* years of support at a level equivalent to an A&S Fellowship. Students from Yenching Graduate Institute (YGI) or from a joint program between YGI and another academic institution in the People's Republic of China (PRC) are especially encouraged to apply. However, all student applicants from the PRC may be considered for this fellowship.
- A&S Summer Fellowships are offered each year to at least 10 continuing PhD students in the economics department. To be eligible to receive this fellowship, a student should be in their second or higher year in the program and should be in good academic standing (i.e. passed both preliminary examinations, GPA of 3.0 or higher). Applications are available from the graduate secretary and are due January 31 of each year. Fellowship awards are determined by the graduate committee. Students who have been admitted to doctoral candidacy are not eligible for these fellowships.
- Andrew Mellon Pre-doctoral Fellowships are one-year fellowships that provide students with a little more funding than the TA/TF stipend and reprieve from all teaching responsibilities. Applicants should be well under way on their dissertations (typically in the third year or higher in the program). Applications and requirements can be obtained from the graduate administrator. The deadline is January 15 of each year and competition is across all departments in A&S.
- Dean's Tuition Scholarships are awarded by the A&S Graduate Studies Office to continuing graduate students who demonstrate academic achievement and have exhausted their departmental funding. The award provides *tuition only* for one semester and is typically awarded to students who need to be enrolled in order to graduate. Application and further details are available from the graduate administrator.

- Graduate Student Researchers (GSRs) may work with professors on research projects. These positions are subject to funding availability and are only at the invitation of individual faculty members.
- A&S Planning and Budget Committee and Alumni Travel Fellowships are available to graduate students participating in conferences. Students who have completed 18 credits are eligible. PhD candidates may receive a second grant after completing their comprehensive exams. See the graduate administrator for further details and an application.

For a list of further funding opportunities, see the A&S Graduate Studies Office financial assistance website at [www.as.pitt.edu/graduate/assistance](http://www.as.pitt.edu/graduate/assistance).