

PhD STUDENT HANDBOOK

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Overview

The PhD process for the Food Systems, Nutrition, and Health Program's ("FSNH" or "the Program") consists of three main components: coursework, research, and dissertation preparation. Each PhD student:

- will take courses from an array of graduate topics covering core skills across the different types of thinking and research approaches that are relevant to the field of nutrition and/or food systems;
- will develop and refine their research skills, including information analysis and synthesis, as well as written and verbal presentation capabilities; and
- will, of course, conduct original research.

Milestones

There are three key milestones during a general PhD process: the Qualifying Exam, the General Exam, and the Final Exam (dissertation defense).

The purpose of the Qualifying Exam (often called "Quals") is to make sure that each student has demonstrated the potential to complete a high-quality PhD. Because the PhD application is currently open only for internal applicants who already have a nutrition master's degree, internal PhD students do NOT need to take a traditional qualifying exam. Instead, we have added some of the elements of the traditional qualifying exam that we do want students to demonstrate to the general exam.

FSNH students with a master's degree will begin their PhD in the second main portion of doctoral work: preparing for the General Exam. During this period, students will work with their Doctoral Supervisory Committee Chair to develop a course plan to fulfill any remaining coursework needed for their degree. They will also focus on more intensive research efforts aimed at defining and intellectually pursuing a specific dissertation topic. After the successful completion of all coursework, General Exam activities begin. These involve a written exam, creating a proposal for the final dissertation, and the presentation of the dissertation proposal to a selected audience.

Passing through the General Exam gateway, which culminates in a Candidacy of Philosophy, lets a student begin dissertation preparation. It is in this stage that all the skills a student has learned up to this point are synthesized and applied as they carry out the research that will form the core of their dissertation.

The final step consists of writing the complete dissertation document and orally defending the dissertation before the Doctoral Supervisory Committee. The Committee may require document changes after the oral defense. The successful culmination of these activities yields a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree.

Through all these activities, students can expect to receive the support and guidance of the student services team, one or more faculty research advisors, and many mentors and friends. We wish to ensure that each student has a positive and highly productive experience and is fully prepared to be successful in whatever career they choose post PhD.

PhD Leadership

There are a few defined roles that take the lead on PhD oversight in the Program (see [UW Graduate School Policy 4.3](#) for more information about the GPA and GPC roles). While you are, of course, welcome to reach out to anyone in the Program for advice or support, the following three people will be your core team, in addition to your Doctoral Supervisory Committee.

Program Director: Michelle Averill

The program director oversees the success of the PhD program and is available to meet with students for advising and support.

Graduate Program Coordinator: Cristen Harris

The GPC advises students about academic coursework and helps students navigate the PhD process. All incoming students have the option to meet with the GPC for assistance in planning their schedules or for extra support navigating coursework or dissertation preparation.

Graduate Program Advisor: Jenifer Hiigli

The GPA helps with all things non-academic, including general advising, student support, course planning, registration, policy navigation, form submission, and petitions.

Doctoral Supervisory Committee

The Doctoral Supervisory Committee ("Supervisory Committee") is primarily responsible for guiding students toward their general exam, dissertation, and final exam, with the greatest burden placed on the Supervisory Committee Chair. A subset of the Supervisory Committee, called the Doctoral Reading Committee ("Reading Committee"), approves the dissertation itself. To allow time to identify a suitable Graduate School Representative (GSR), it is suggested that the Supervisory Committee be established **at least four months** prior to the intended date of the General Examination. (*While internal admission is in effect, however, students should be in discussion about the formation of a committee prior to application*). After finalizing Supervisory Committee members, the GPA will enter their information in MyGrad.

The Supervisory Committee is comprised of a Chair, a GSR, and at least two additional faculty members. All appointed Supervisory Committee members are voting members of the committee. With the exception of the GSR, committee members are scholars with expertise in the student's regional, theoretical, or methodological areas of interest. These members are responsible for:

- approving a course of study which will fulfill the general course requirements of the student's major and supporting fields;
- conducting the student's Preliminary/Qualifying Exam (as needed);
- conducting the student's General Exam;
- providing ongoing oversight and giving input on dissertation-related research;
- approving the Candidate's dissertation proposal; and
- conducting the Candidate's Final Exam

Chair

The Chair of the Supervisory Committee assumes principal responsibility for advising the student; attends the preliminary/qualifying, general, and final exams and any additional committee meetings; and signs all relevant forms, including those to approve the student's General and Final Exams and the dissertation signature page acknowledging approval of the dissertation.

When determining your Committee Chair, please note that they must be a member of the Graduate Faculty. Graduate Faculty are members of the University faculty who have been designated by the Dean of the Graduate School as actively participating in graduate education. Please search the [Graduate Faculty database](#) to determine if your chosen faculty member is qualified to act as chair.

Graduate School Representative (GSR)

The GSR is a voting member of the Supervisory Committee who does *not* have a primary, joint, or affiliate appointment in FSNH. Neither should this person should have any type of appointment within the Chair's department (see [GSR eligibility policies](#)). The GSR must attest to having no conflict of interest, defined by the Graduate School as having no budgetary, personal, research, and/or publication-related relationships. Their responsibilities are to represent the broad concerns of the University with respect to high standards of scholarly performance; provide, for the Graduate School, a non-specialist's view of the quality of the student's work, ensuring that the student's mastery of the subject matter is broad and comprehensive; assure that all procedures are carried out fairly and according to the guidelines of the Graduate School; participate in conducting both the General and

Final Exams; and verify that the required four Supervisory Committee members (Chair, GSR, and at least two other members) are present for the student's exams.

Use the [Graduate Faculty database](#) to discover a potential GSR's appointments.

Doctoral Reading Committee

The Reading Committee is comprised of at least three faculty members on the Supervisory Committee who are appointed to read and approve the dissertation. It is the responsibility of the Reading Committee to: (a) ensure that the dissertation is a significant contribution to knowledge and is an acceptable piece of scholarly writing; (b) determine the appropriateness of the Candidate's dissertation as a basis for moving forward to the Final Exam; and (c) approve the Candidate's dissertation.

Appointing the Supervisory Committee

To formally appoint the Supervisory Committee, the student should email the GPA to have their names declared in MyGrad. In the email, please clarify whether the committee member has agreed to be a part of the Reading Committee in addition to the Supervisory Committee. Some GSRs elect to be a part of the Reading Committee, while others choose not to (it is most common that they do not). All other Supervisory Committee members have the implied responsibility of being on the Reading Committee, but, out of courtesy, please ask them to be a part of both the Supervisory and Reading Committees.

Student Status and Student Standing

Annual Progress Reviews

The PhD program requires that all doctoral students file an Annual Progress Review, evaluating their academic performance on an annual basis. Progress reports allow faculty chairs, the Supervisory Committee, and staff advisers to monitor student progress, learn about issues in a timely manner, and provide support as needed.

Annual Progress Reviews will be due September 20 each year. The [Annual Progress Review](#) template can be found on the Program's [Graduate Student Resources](#) page.

Annual Progress Reviews will be assessed by the GPA, GPC, and graduate faculty leadership. All communications back to students will be copied to the GPA, GPC, and Supervisory Committee Chair. Students with questions about their evaluations should reach out to Program leadership.

Academic Progress Timeline

Doctoral students are expected to complete the required curriculum listed under "Course Requirements" (below) within two years of entrance into the program. Students should complete their required coursework and pass the Qualifying (if applicable) and General Exams in their second or third year to be eligible to continue in the PhD program. We know, however, that each student's journey is unique. If you have concerns about this timeline, please reach out to graduate leadership and your Supervisory Committee as soon as possible to discuss next steps.

Credit and Course Requirements

Objectives

There are three objectives for our course requirements:

- to ensure that each student obtains subject breadth by taking graduate-level courses that expose them and help them develop core skills across the different types of thinking and research approaches that are relevant in the field of nutrition.
- to gather information on the student's potential to complete the PhD program, collected over an extended period of interaction between the student and instructors. This information will be used in the Qualifying Exam as described below.
- to enable each student to obtain depth in their chosen research area by taking advanced courses.

Course Requirements

Required Nutrition Courses (32 credits)

Course	Name	Credits
NUTR 500	Food Systems Seminar	1
NUTR 512	United States Food Systems Policy	3
NUTR 513	Food and Society: Exploring Eating Behaviors in a Social, Environmental, and Policy Context	2
NUTR 514	Sustainable Food Systems for Population Health	3
NUTR 520	Nutrition and Metabolism I	4
NUTR 521	Nutrition and Metabolism II	4
NUTR 526	Maternal and Pediatric Nutrition	3
NUTR 531	Public Health Nutrition	6
NUTR 562	Nutrition and Chronic Disease	4
	Additional 500-level NUTR credits	2

Other Requirements

Study/Discipline	Course/Detail	Credits
	Other Sciences to address specific interests	22
EPI	Epidemiology (EPI 511 or EPI 512 and EPI 513)	4-8
BIOST	Biostatistics (500-level)	8
	Research Methods (from EPI 517, EPI 519, EPI 548, EPI 549 or alternative combination as determined by your Committee Chair)	8
HSERV 579	Structural Racism and Public Health	1

Non-Course Requirements

Teaching Experience: Part of realizing the PhD involves the completion of at least one quarter of a teaching assistantship. The GPA can mark that experience as complete in your degree audit.

Waivers

Occasionally, there are reasons why other courses may substitute for a required course. Because a course plan is required for the internal PhD application process, many of these conversations will take place at the time of application and/or admittance. If the GPC and Supervisory Committee Chair agree that a waiver is acceptable, the student should notify the GPA to have that requirement updated in their degree audit.

General Examination

The General Exam follows the completion of required coursework. The components of the exam include a written proposal with an oral defense and a written portion with questions from the Doctoral Supervisory Committee.

Part 1: Final Dissertation Proposal

The proposal should closely follow those for a Predoctoral Fellowship application to the [NIH \(NRSA F31\)](#). This proposal is meant to be hypothesis driven. The following is a sample format but can vary. Students should work in conjunction with their Committee Chair to develop a proposal that works for their project.

1. Cover page (1 page):

- Include the proposal title, student's name, and faculty advisor(s).
- 2. Project Abstract (30 lines or fewer)
 - Provide a concise description of project objectives and methodologies suitable for dissemination to the public.
 - In addition to summarizing the research project to be conducted, describe the project's overall plan and the environment in which the research will take place.
- 3. Specific Aims (limit 1 page):
 - Concisely state goals/objectives of the proposed research. Summarize expected outcomes, including the impact the results will exert on the research field.
- 4. Research Strategy (limit 6 pages):
 - Significance:
 - Explain the importance of the problem or critical barrier to progress in the field addressed by the proposed project.
 - Explain how the proposed project will improve scientific knowledge, technical capability, and/or clinical practice in one or more broad fields.
 - Describe how the concepts, methods, technologies, treatments, services, or preventative interventions that drive this field will be changed if the proposed aims are achieved.
 - Approach
 - Describe the overall strategy, methodology, and analyses to be used to accomplish the specific aims of the project. Unless addressed separately in a Resource Sharing Plan, include how the data will be collected, analyzed, and interpreted as well as any resource sharing plans as appropriate.
 - Discuss potential problems, alternative strategies, and benchmarks for success anticipated to achieve the aims.
 - If the project is in the early stages of development, describe any strategy to establish feasibility and address the management of any high-risk aspects of the proposed work.
 - Point out any procedures, situations, or materials that may be hazardous to personnel and precautions to be exercised.
- 5. Human Tissue or Animal Use (limit of 0.5 page):
 - When proposing the use of human tissues or vertebrate animals, provide a justification for why that use is essential to achieving the goals of the proposal. For animal use, justify the numbers required for the proposed experiment(s).
- 6. Literature Citations (no page limit):
 - Follow a format consistent with the discipline for your proposal.

Part 2: Written Exam

The Supervisory Committee administers the Written Exam to evaluate the student's ability to analyze and synthesize information. The test covers advanced methods coursework, the general area of emphasis within nutritional sciences, and the general topic of the student's dissertation. This is a take-home exam that allows the student to use all available resources. The exam mainly focuses on theory, content, and methods specific to the student's dissertation topic area and area of emphasis within nutritional sciences. See [Graduate School Policy 1.1.4](#) for more information.

Format, Timeline and Process

To schedule a written exam, the student and their Committee Chair should find a suitable time to conduct the exam. This exam can only happen while the student is registered as full-time.

The format of a written exam can differ from student to student but usually is comprised of four (4) to seven (7) questions. The student is usually given two (2) weeks to complete the exam, but the time frame is determined by the Supervisory Committee. During this time, the student is still expected to keep up with any current coursework

and perform their duties as an Academic Student Employee (ASE), if they hold a current appointment, though students are welcome to talk with their ASE faculty supervisor to see if extra flexibility may be available.

The Supervisory Committee is responsible for creating and administering the exam with support from the PhD program director, as needed. Each member of the Supervisory Committee (except the GSR) typically writes at least one question for a subject area in which they specialize. The Chair compiles the questions into an exam, making changes or requesting additional information as needed. The entire committee, including the GSR, approves the Written Exam before it is offered to the student. On the day the exam begins, the Chair will send the approved exam to the student via email, copying the full committee and the GSR.

If the student has a question about an exam question at any point during the exam period, they should send an email to all committee members, including the GSR. The committee member who wrote the exam question will then reply to the message. When the student completes the exam, they should send it to the Chair, copying the full Supervisory Committee and the GSA.

Scoring and Outcome

After the Written Exam, the full Supervisory Committee reviews the student's answers and all members except the GSR give initial grade recommendations. The Chair assigns a grade of Pass, Rewrite, or No Pass for each question based on these assessments. Grading should be done within two (2) to three (3) weeks of submission.

If Pass grades are earned on all questions, the student passes the exam. Otherwise, the Chair informs the student about problematic responses and any rewrites/revisions required. The outcome of the exam is conveyed to the student within a month. Additional coursework may be required to address perceived deficiencies. All questions must be passed before the Final Dissertation Proposal (Part 2 of the General Exam).

Part 3: Oral Defense of Dissertation Proposal and Written Exam

During the Oral Defense, the student needs to show in-depth knowledge of the dissertation area and what they wrote in their written exam. For the dissertation portion, it is not enough to defend only the proposed experiment(s). The student also needs to explain and defend why the questions to be addressed are important and place them in the broader context of the field. The student should use relevant literature to support their argument. The student may also be asked to clarify their answers and expand on points made on the written exam.

Student Steps for Scheduling and Submitting the Oral Defense

1. Schedule the exam via [MyGrad](#). Once logged in, navigate to "Request Degree" followed by "Doctoral (General Exam)" to schedule your General Exam. You will need to check with your Supervisory Committee *early* to ensure they have a shared time available. Be sure to include a self-hosted Zoom link in the location field if you have a virtual or hybrid presentation. In addition, work with the GPA to reserve a room if you plan to present in person. You cannot schedule or take a General Exam in summer quarter without being enrolled. No exceptions.
2. Arrange accommodations. The University of Washington and FSNH are committed to providing access and reasonable accommodation in their services, programs, and activities. For currently enrolled UW students, accommodation requests related to a disability should be made through Disability Resources for Students ([myDRS](#)) at least 10 days ahead of the scheduled presentation. Accommodation requests on behalf of other guests should be sent to the GPA at least 10 days ahead of the scheduled defense.
3. Provide your Supervisory Committee with the written proposal at least two (2) weeks prior to your Oral Defense so they have adequate time to read and reflect on your work before the presentation.
4. Give your Oral Defense presentation! You will do great! If you pass, make sure your full committee signs your Committee Approval Form (sent to you by the GPA).
5. Send the signed Committee Approval Form and a copy of your Dissertation Proposal to gradnutr@uw.edu.

After we receive your signed form and a copy of your proposal, we will approve your candidacy. You will receive a promotion and subsequent ASE pay raise after your exam is processed. You may begin taking dissertation credits

(NUTR 800) once you have passed the General Exam. If the committee approves, you may begin taking these credits in the same quarter the exam is taken.

Faculty Chair Steps for the General Exam Process

1. Assist the student with forming and finalizing their Supervisory Committee, if not already done. The student may need some guidance. Every person on the Committee must be able to be present for the General and Final Exams.
2. Review the full General Exam process in this handbook, and familiarize yourself with [UW Graduate School exam policies](#), particularly sections 1.1.4.1 and instructions for what to do for virtual exams and if a committee member is missing.
3. Work with the rest of the Supervisory Committee (minus the GSR) to create exam questions for the Written Exam. Ensure that the questions are cohesive and represent the breadth of work the student will be covering in their final dissertation.
4. Administer the Written Exam.
 - Work with the student to set a two (2)-week period in which they will complete the written exam. Remember that your student is expected to keep up with classwork and/or ASE duties during this time.
 - Send the exam questions to your student at the start of the period and monitor email for any questions they may have about the content.
 - After the exam is returned to you, grade as appropriate following the policies outlined in the Written Exam portion of this document. Support the student with any revisions or corrections that may be necessary.
5. Help the student prepare and review their Final Dissertation Proposal. The student should send their proposal to the Supervisory Committee no later than two (2) weeks prior to their General Exam date to give the Committee time to read and reflect on the work before the presentation.
6. Attend the scheduled Oral Defense. You're almost there!
7. If the student passes, sign the "Committee Approval Form" provided by the student. If the student does not pass, notify the GPA/GPC as soon as possible.
8. After the Committee Approval Form is signed by all Supervisory Committee members present at the Oral Defense, you are done! Congratulate the student on achieving this important milestone in their PhD journey.

Final Exam/Dissertation

This phase of the PhD is marked by intensive research and writing efforts culminating in a finished dissertation and Final Exam (dissertation defense). The established Supervisory Committee remains active throughout this phase. Students should be aware that the UW Graduate School has very strict [deadlines](#); the deadline listed is for *both* the Final Exam *and* submission of the final dissertation, including revisions. The student would be well served to present their defense *at least* two (2) weeks before the deadline listed by the UW Graduate School.

For clarity:

- The Reading Committee is tasked with reading and approving the full written dissertation.
- The entire Supervisory Committee is invited to the dissertation defense. At minimum, the GSR, the Committee Chair and at least one other committee member must be present.

UW Graduate School Dissertation Resources

- [Scheduling the Defense](#)
- [Dissertation Formatting Guidelines](#)

- [Preparing to Graduate and Graduation Checklist](#)

Student Steps for the Final Exam

1. Review the Graduate School's [Graduation Checklist](#). This contains links you'll need throughout the process. *International students:* [Review the OPT process](#) and consider when you should begin an OPT application (OPT typically takes at least 90 days to process, often longer).
2. Declare your Reading Committee by emailing members' names to gradnutr@uw.edu at least two (2) months before your exam date, if you haven't already. If a member of your Reading Committee does not have a UW NetID, they will be asked to create one.
3. Schedule the exam via [MyGrad](#). Check with your Doctoral Supervisory Committee *early* to ensure they have a shared time available. Be sure to include a self-hosted Zoom link in the location field if you have a virtual or hybrid presentation. Don't forget to work with the GPA to reserve a room if you're presenting in person! You can find deadlines for this process [on the Graduate School website](#). You should try to schedule your Final Exam far enough in advance to handle revisions *before* the end of the quarter. Remember that summer quarter ends earlier than the start of fall quarter! You cannot schedule or take a Final Exam in the Summer without being enrolled. No exceptions.
4. Confirm that your Reading Committee members will be available to 1) attend the exam; 2) approve the Final Exam by signing your Committee Form; and 3) sign off on the dissertation when you plan on turning it in. Be explicit with your expected dates, especially if you expect your Reading Committee to sign off in the summer. If we can't get a hold of that committee member's signature, you don't graduate.
5. Email gradnutr@uw.edu with confirmation of your presentation date/time/location/dissertation title. This must happen no later than three (3) weeks prior to your exam to have notifications sent to program members on your behalf (Note: if you would rather not have notifications of your presentation sent to the community, please let the GPA know in your confirmation email).
6. Provide your Reading Committee with the written dissertation at least three (3) weeks prior to your Final Exam so that they have adequate time to read and reflect on your work before the presentation. If you have time, requesting feedback at this stage may reduce the number of revisions you need to make to your dissertation after your exam.
7. Present your Final Examination to your Supervisory Committee. You're almost there!
8. If you passed, remind your Supervisory Committee to sign the "Committee Approval Form." This form is generated in MyGrad and will be emailed to you by the GSA, as well.
9. YOU ARE NOT DONE YET! Please review "Student Steps for Dissertation" below. The Final Exam and dissertation submission are treated by the University as two separate events.

Faculty Chair Steps for the Final Exam

1. Assist the student with forming and finalizing their Reading Committee, if not already done. The student may need some guidance. Every person on the Reading Committee *must* read the dissertation and approve it through the UW system.
2. Assist with scheduling the exam. You can find deadlines for this process [on the Graduate School website](#). Encourage the student to schedule their Final Exam far enough in advance to handle revisions *before* the end of the quarter. Remember that summer quarter ends earlier than the start of fall quarter!
3. Help the student prepare and review their dissertation document. The student should submit this no later than two (2) weeks prior to their Final Exam to give the Reading Committee time to read and reflect on their work before the presentation. Offering feedback at this stage may reduce the need for revisions following the exam.
4. Attend the final examination. You're almost there!

5. If the student passes, sign the Committee Approval Form provided by the student. If the student does not pass, let the GPA/GPC know as soon as possible.
6. YOU ARE NOT DONE YET! Please review "Faculty Steps for Dissertation" below. The Final Exam and dissertation submission are treated by the University as two separate events.

Student Steps for Dissertation Submission

1. Complete any revisions given to you by the Reading Committee. After your exam, it is common to receive revisions. You will need to complete these before the final approval of your dissertation. You can find deadlines for this process [on the Graduate School website](#).
2. Complete the [Graduate School graduation checklist for doctoral students](#). This checklist includes steps for submitting your dissertation, completing the Survey of Earned Doctorates, and the links you'll need to do so.
3. Remind your *Reading* Committee (not the full Supervisory Committee) to approve your dissertation. This is a separate step from approving your Final Exam. Direct the members of your reading committee to <https://webapps.grad.uw.edu/mgp-faculty>. You will receive an email when each Reading Committee member approves the dissertation. You can also check in MyGrad. This step *must* be completed by the last day of the quarter in which you intend to graduate.
4. Upload your final copy of the dissertation to the Graduate School. The Graduate School refers to this as the ["ETD" or Electronic Doctoral Dissertation approval](#). Review the Graduate School website for more details. The ETD must be uploaded and approved by 11:59:59 p.m. on the last day of the quarter in which you intend to graduate. Remember that summer quarter ends in mid-August!
5. Do you think you may not make the deadline? For \$250, you can graduate in the first two (2) weeks of the following quarter by using the [Graduate Registration Waiver Fee](#). If you fail to meet this second deadline, you will need to enroll for another quarter of study.
6. Do you need degree verification? A future employer may want to verify that you earned your degree. The process of getting degrees posted, however, often takes longer than employers would like. If you need verification before your degree is posted to your transcript, fill out and submit the [Request for Letter of Certification](#) to the Graduate School. They will not issue the letter unless you have met all your degree requirements, including final approvals from your reading committee.

Faculty Chair Steps for Dissertation Submission

1. Give the student any remaining revisions to be made on their dissertation. Please be mindful that all revisions and final Reading Committee approvals must be completed by 11:59:59 p.m. on the last day of the quarter in which the student intends to graduate. Remember that summer quarter ends in mid-August.
2. Approve the final dissertation. Once the student has satisfactorily completed revisions, approve the dissertation through [the Graduate School interface](#). This step must be completed by 11:59:59 p.m. on the last day of the quarter in which the student intends to graduate.
3. Remind the rest of the *Reading* Committee (not the full Supervisory Committee) to sign off on the form available at <https://webapps.grad.uw.edu/mgp-faculty>. This step is especially important for faculty members outside FSNH and must be completed by 11:59:59 p.m. on the last day of the quarter in which the student intends to graduate.
4. Congratulate the newly minted doctor! Not only is it kind, but it also helps the student know that they aren't waiting on any other faculty tasks.