



# HANDBOOK FOR DOCTORAL STUDENTS

DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS  
COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES  
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA

Revised January 2023

## Purpose of the Handbook

This Handbook is designed to provide both applicants to and current students in the PhD in Economics program at the University of South Florida a guide to the policies and procedures of the University, College, and Department as they pertain to the doctoral program in economics. Additional information may be obtained from the USF Graduate Catalog.

## Program Objectives

The PhD program in Economics at the University of South Florida offers a challenging environment for personal intellectual development. The program prepares students for teaching and research positions in universities and for economist positions in business and government.

## Admission Requirements

A bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university is required for admission to the program. In addition, applicants must meet the following entrance requirements:

- Quantitative GRE score of at least 65<sup>th</sup> percentile.
- For students from non-English speaking countries:
  - TOEFL (iBT at least 79; paper-based test at least 550)
  - PTE-A at least 53
  - IELTS at least 6.5 on the overall score
  - GRE Verbal at least 153
  - Duolingo at least 110 on the overall score
- An overall GPA of at least 3.0 or better in the last 60 hours of undergraduate coursework as well as in any previous graduate coursework.
- A grade of "B" or better in each of the following prerequisite courses:
  - Calculus (at least two semesters)
  - Statistics (at least one semester)
  - Intermediate Microeconomics
  - Intermediate Macroeconomics

Inasmuch as graduate work in economics is highly theoretical and quantitative in nature, the above prerequisite courses represent the bare minimum necessary to be considered for admission. Students who have taken additional courses in mathematics (such as linear algebra, differential equations, etc.) and statistics (such as probability theory) will have a comparative advantage upon entering the program. The PhD in Economics is a **full-time** program and will only admit students who are in a position to attend on a full-time basis.

Students from countries that are not predominantly English speaking and who receive funding from the department should be aware that they must demonstrate **proficiency in speaking English** by the beginning of their third year in the program. The Office of Graduate Studies has determined that speaking proficiency is met by either a minimum score of 26 on the spoken portion of the

internet-based TOEFL or of 160 on the spoken portion of the TOEIC. These scores are valid for up to 5 years after administration. As an alternative, the university administers its own test of spoken English. Failure to meet this requirement may result in a loss of funding.

### **Application Procedure**

The Ph.D. program admits students each fall. The deadline for applying for admission is January 31. This deadline applies to both domestic and international applicants and to applicants who are interested in applying for financial aid as well as to those who are not.

Applicants must complete the online Office of Admissions application at <http://www.usf.edu/admissions/index.aspx> and pay the required application fee. As part of this application, the names and contact information for three letter writers must be included. In addition, applicants must submit the department's online application by completing the following form <http://economics.usf.edu/forms/phd.aspx>. The required personal statement can be attached to the department's application. Applicants interested in applying for financial aid should mark the appropriate box on the department's application.

Copies of unofficial transcripts must be uploaded into the university's application system. Should admission be granted, then official copies of all transcripts must be sent to the Office of Admissions by standard mail.

Official copies of GRE scores, and for international students, TOEFL/IELTS/PTE-A must be sent by ETS directly to the Office of Admissions. For the GRE and TOEFL, USF's Institution Code is 5828. To expedite the admissions process, it is recommended that applicants upload unofficial copies of their test scores into the university's application system.

An MA degree is not required to apply for the PhD. Applicants who currently hold or are enrolled in a Master's degree program may be able to either transfer hours or waive certain requirements upon admission to the PhD program. Such students will need to consult with the PhD Director to determine their eligibility to transfer or waive prior coursework.

### **Financial Aid**

Applicants interested in financial aid should denote this in the appropriate place on the departmental application. The department has a limited number of Graduate Teaching Assistantships for its doctoral students. At present a GTA provides a salary of \$23,600 per year (for a half-time, 20 hours per week, appointment), a tuition waiver covering a minimum of nine hours fall and spring and six hours summer, and a health insurance subsidy. A GTA is renewable for up to four years as long as the student remains in good academic standing. GTAs are expected to serve as teaching assistants for either undergraduate or graduate courses during their first two years and to teach six courses, one per semester, during their third and fourth year of funding.

Exceptional applicants may be eligible for a University Graduate Fellowship or a Presidential Doctoral Fellowship. Minority applicants may be eligible for a Graduate Student Success

Diversity Fellowship or a McKnight Foundation Fellowship. Information on other forms of financial aid can be found at the Graduate School's website.

### Residency

Under Graduate School guidelines, students accepted into the PhD program in Economics must complete a minimum of three years of coursework beyond the baccalaureate degree. In addition, the majority of the coursework taken towards the degree must be earned at USF-Tampa. To remain in degree-seeking status, students must take a minimum of six hours of coursework over a 12-month period. Failure to do so will result in the student moving to non-degree seeking status and will require that the student file for readmission to the program.

### Doctoral Advisor

Upon admission to the PhD program, the student's advisor will be the department's PhD Director. Once the student enters candidacy, the student's advisor will switch to the major professor or co-major professors of his/her doctoral committee.

### Coursework

The PhD in Economics is comprised of 27 hours of required coursework, 12 hours of coursework across two fields within economics, a minimum of 6 hours of additional structured graduate-level coursework, and a minimum of 21 hours of directed research and dissertation with dissertation comprising at least 11 of these hours. Overall, students must complete at least 72 graduate-level credit hours.

A typical timeline of the degree program is as follows:

<i>Fall Year 1</i> Mathematical Economics I Econometrics I Elective 1* Elective 2**	<i>Spring Year 1</i> Microeconomics I Mathematical Economics II Macroeconomics I Elective 3**	<i>Summer Year 1</i> 1st-Year Qualifier
<i>Fall Year 2</i> Econometrics II Microeconomics II Economics Field 1	<i>Spring Year 2</i> Macroeconomics II <sup>†</sup> or Elective Econometrics III Economics Field 1	<i>Summer Year 2</i> 2nd-Year Qualifier
<i>Fall Year 3</i> Economics Field 2 Elective or Directed Research Third-Year Paper	<i>Spring Year 3</i> Economics Field 2 Macroeconomics II <sup>†</sup> or Directed Research Third-Year Paper presentation	<i>Summer Year 3</i> Directed Research
<i>Fall Year 4+</i> Dissertation/Paper Presentation	<i>Spring Year 4+</i> Dissertation/Paper Presentation	<i>Summer Year 4+</i> Dissertation

\*During students' first semester in the program, the PhD Director will provide students with the set of eligible courses. Other electives will be chosen with the advice of the PhD Director or the student's Major Professor(s) (see below).

\*\*Students may be requested to take a fourth class (Electives 2 and 3) during each of their first two semesters in the program.

†Macroeconomics II is typically offered every other year so students will take the course during the spring semester of either their second or third year in the program depending upon scheduling.

The nine required courses for the PhD program are generally completed during the first two years in program. They are

- Mathematical Economics I, II
- Microeconomics I, II
- Macroeconomics I, II
- Econometrics I, II, III

Fields are two-course sequences on a particular subject area within economics. The set of fields that the Department offers is dependent upon the current composition of the faculty and varies year to year. The set of fields currently available are

- Economics of Health Care
- Industrial Organization
- Labor Economics

Due to programmatic needs, the Department will sometimes allow a specific pair of graduate economics electives to constitute a field. Should this be the case in any given academic year, students will be notified that the two courses in question will serve as a field that year.

The choice of the minimum additional six hours of structured graduate electives will be made with advice and consent of either the PhD Director or the student's (co-) Major Professor(s). These electives will be used to strengthen the student's preparation to undertake independent research.

Students who have either completed all of their coursework or have an open slot in their schedule due to a needed course not being offered in the current semester may register for Directed Research. Once candidacy is achieved, students must enroll in Dissertation until they graduate. Under Office of Graduate Studies guidelines, students have seven years from the date of admission to complete the degree. In addition, should a student earn a grade lower than a "C" in any course, the course in question cannot be applied towards the degree. In such a case, the department's Graduate Policy Committee will review the situation and make recommendations to the student on how best to rectify the situation. Possible actions include retaking the course the next time that it is offered or take an alternative course. Failure to meet the Graduate Policy Committee recommendation leaves the student subject to academic dismissal.

## Qualifying Examinations

The Department requires doctoral students to pass two qualifying examinations, one covering courses taught during the first year of graduate study and one covering the second year of graduate study. Each qualifying examination is comprised of a section of questions drawn from each of the courses that comprise the examination (see below).

For purposes of determining which qualifying examinations a student is required to take and when, the Department counts years of graduate study rather than years in the doctoral program. As an example, students who are initially admitted into the MA program and are then admitted into the PhD program for the following academic year are considered to be in their first year of graduate study. Therefore, they will be expected to take the First-Year Qualifying Examination during the summer prior to their formal entry into the PhD program.

The *First-Year Qualifying Examination* covers material from Mathematical Economics I, Mathematical Economics II, Microeconomics I, and Macroeconomics I. Questions will be written by the faculty member who taught the course the previous fall or spring semester. The exam will be offered in mid-June with a retake offered in early August. To be eligible to receive doctoral funding for following year, the student must pass the exam within two tries. Should the student fail the exam on both tries, s/he will be funded only for the fall semester and, conditional upon passing the MA oral, be awarded the MA degree at the conclusion of the fall semester at which point the student will be dismissed from the PhD program.

The *Second-Year Qualifying Examination* covers material from Microeconomics II, Econometrics II, and Econometrics III. Questions will be written by the faculty member who taught the course the previous fall or spring semester. The exam will be offered in mid-June with a retake offered in early August. To be eligible to receive doctoral funding for the following year, the student must pass the exam within two tries. Should the student fail the exam on both tries, s/he will be funded only for the fall semester and be awarded the MA degree at the conclusion of the fall semester at which point the student will be dismissed from the PhD program.

Grades on qualifying examinations are Pass or Fail with the former sometimes noted as “With Distinction” or “Marginal.” The PhD Director will notify students of their grade via e-mail and will do so no later than 21 days following the date of the examination.

## Students with MA Degrees in Economics from External Institutions

Students who already hold an MA degree in Economics from an external institution prior to entering the PhD program will be offered the opportunity to take the First-Year Qualifying Examination in the summer before entering the program. Students who chose this option and pass the exam are waived the requirement to take the four classes: Mathematical Economics I, Mathematical Economics II, Microeconomics I, and Macroeconomics I. In addition, the total number of coursework credit hours for these students is reduced from 45 to 39. The minimum total number of graduate level credit hours required is still 72. Students who take the First-Year Qualifying Exam but do not pass it will take all required classes.

### Third-Year Paper

During students' third year of graduate coursework (not necessarily third year of doctoral studies), each doctoral student will be required to write and present an original paper. The guidelines for the third-year paper are as follows:

- By **October 1** of the third year of graduate study, the student and/or the PhD Director will choose a faculty sponsor for the paper. The student is expected to meet with the sponsor on a regular basis in the coming months.
- By **December 1** of the third year of graduate study, the faculty sponsor must provide a progress report to the PhD Director. The sponsor will note whether the student has determined a topic for the paper and if s/he has made sufficient progress to warrant a positive review.
- By **January 15** of the third year of graduate study, the student, with advice from the faculty sponsor, must select two additional faculty members to complete his/her Sponsoring Committee. The student is expected to meet with all members of the committee on a regular basis.
- By **June 15** of the third year of graduate study, the student must present the paper to the department after having received approval from the main faculty sponsor that the paper is ready to be presented. Copies of the paper will be made available to the department at large at least 2 full working days before the date of the presentation.

If, at any time, the sponsor or the Sponsoring Committee determines that insufficient progress is being made, monthly meetings with the Sponsoring Committee will be scheduled and the PhD Director will be notified that these meetings have occurred. To be eligible to receive doctoral funding for the following year, the paper must be presented by the last day of instruction of the spring semester of the third year of graduate study.

### Admission to Candidacy

Each doctoral student set to enter his/her fourth year of graduate study (this may mean the third year of doctoral studies for students) must choose a Doctoral Dissertation Committee and apply for candidacy no later than the beginning of the fourth year of graduate study.

To be admitted to candidacy, a student must meet the following criteria:

- An overall GPA of at least 3.0 and an economics GPA of at least 3.0.
- Removal of all I (Incomplete) and M (Missing) grades
- Successful completion of both qualifying examinations
- Formation of a doctoral dissertation committee of at least four members (see below)
- Be enrolled in a minimum of two credit hours during the semester in which the application for candidacy is filed

To apply for candidacy, the following form is required:

- *Admission to Doctoral Candidacy* form, found at <https://www.usf.edu/graduate-studies/forms.aspx>

This document should be submitted as soon as possible once the criteria for candidacy have been met. **When all necessary signatures have been obtained, both forms are submitted to the CAS Office of Graduate and Undergraduate Studies in BEH 201 no later than the Wednesday of the final week of instruction in the fall, spring or Summer B semesters.** Check with the PhD Director to verify these dates as they may change slightly from year to year.

Once a student has entered candidacy, s/he is eligible to enroll in ECO 7980, Dissertation. Under Office of Graduate Studies guidelines, students in candidacy must enroll in a minimum of two credit hours in each semester up to and including the student's final semester in residence. Failure to do so will result in the student having to file for readmission to candidacy. However, if the student already defended the dissertation in a particular semester but has not yet graduated because the defense was after the deadline, it is not necessary to register in the semester of graduation.

### **Dissertation**

The final stage of the PhD program is the writing and defense of a dissertation. The doctoral dissertation must represent original and significant research and is undertaken with the guidance of the student's doctoral dissertation committee chair or co-chairs. As part of the process of writing and defending the dissertation, the candidate must:

- Write a detailed dissertation proposal and defend it orally before the candidate's committee as well as all other interested persons
- Upon passing the dissertation proposal defense, incorporate the comments of the committee and interested persons into the candidate's research as work on the dissertation moves forward
- When the doctoral committee is satisfied with the dissertation, provide a final dissertation defense before the committee and all other interested persons

The following sub-sections provide additional information on the doctoral committee, the dissertation proposal defense, and the dissertation final defense.

#### *Doctoral Dissertation Committee*

The Doctoral Dissertation Committee has the responsibility of guiding and approving the student's dissertation. The committee must have either a single major professor (chair) or co-major professors (co-chairs). Any member of the graduate faculty may serve as a major professor although the department requires that untenured faculty may only serve as a co-major professor with the other co-major professor being a tenured member of the department. Untenured associate or full professors may serve as major professors with the approval of the Department's Chair.

Office of Graduate Studies guidelines stipulate that a doctoral dissertation committee must have a minimum of four members of which at least three must come from the student's academic area (i.e., must be professional economists) and at least one committee member must come from outside of the Department of Economics (but can be an professional economist affiliated elsewhere). Non-faculty may serve as members of a doctoral committee subject to approval by the Department's Graduate Policy Committee. Should the composition of the Doctoral Committee change for



whatever reason, it is necessary to file a *Changes to Graduate Student Supervisory Committee* form which is found here, <https://www.usf.edu/arts-sciences/students/graduate/forms-and-links.aspx>

### *Dissertation Proposal and its Defense*

Once a Doctoral Dissertation Committee is in place, each student in candidacy must meet regularly throughout the academic year with his/her major professor(s) and committee members. The major professor(s) will keep the PhD Director informed as to the state of the student's progress. Each student in candidacy must present part of his/her ongoing research by the end of last week of instruction during the fall semester of his/her fourth year of graduate study. This presentation can serve as the student's Thesis Proposal Defense if the defense did not occur previously.

The dissertation proposal is a formal document that provides a discussion of (i) the problem to be studied and why further study of the problem is warranted; (ii) the methodology proposed to undertake the study; (iii) the data to be used in the study; and (iv) the extant literature on the subject; (v) a preliminary set of results and their interpretation. By design, the dissertation proposal should be a concise document; on the order of 25 – 30 pages in length (not including the title page, abstract, list of contents, tables, graphs and references) with at most 1.5 spacing, a font of size 12, and at most 1 inch margins. This is to allow the candidate to make changes in the research design, should they be necessary, at an early enough point in the work so as to avoid a large-scale reworking of the entire project.

Once it is determined that the proposal is ready to be defended, the candidate should contact the Department's Staff Assistant to schedule a day and time for the defense. If possible, this should be done at least two weeks prior to the scheduled date of the proposal defense thereby allowing sufficient time for members of doctoral committee to review the proposal. Additional copies of the proposal will be made available to the department at large at least 2 full working days before the date of the proposal.

The proposal defense will be chaired by the candidate's major professor or by one of the co-major professors. If the major professor cannot attend the proposal defense either in person or online, then another member of the dissertation committee with prior approval from the Department's Chair. Following the candidate's presentation, each member of the committee will be invited to ask questions. Once all members of the committee have finished, the chair will open up questions to others in attendance. After all questions have been answered, all in attendance save for the doctoral committee will exit the room while the committee deliberates. The committee can chose from the following three choices:

- Unrestricted approval of the proposal
- Approval of the proposal subject to modifications
- No approval

Assuming that the first or second option is invoked the candidate will follow the approved research plan for the dissertation. Should the third option be invoked, the candidate will have to rework the

proposal to obtain the necessary approval and do so within the relevant time frame. Failure to meet this deadline may result in placement on probation and eventual dismissal from the program.

### *Requirements for Eligibility for Adjunct Positions*

For students currently in their fourth year of graduate study who either are unfunded or will see their doctoral funding end that summer, priority for adjunct funding in the following year will be given to those students who successfully defend their dissertation proposal by the last day of instruction of the fall semester of the fourth year of graduate study. If adjunct positions for the next year remain available after this first allocation, then students in their fourth year of graduate study who defend their dissertation proposal by the last day of instruction of the spring semester will be given the next highest priority.

Each doctoral student in his/her fifth or later year of graduate study must meet regularly with his/her major professor(s) and committee members. The major professor(s) will keep the PhD Director informed as to the state of the student's progress. Each such student must present his/her ongoing research at least once during the academic year. It is recommended that a student on the job market present his/her job-market paper during the fall semester.

Students in their fifth or later year of graduate study will be considered for any adjunct positions that remain following their allocation to eligible fourth-year students. Priority will be given to those students with fewer years in the program and with more complete research as judged by the department's Graduate Policy Committee.

### *Final Defense*

Students planning to graduate need to be aware that there are several steps involved in the process each of which has its own particular deadline. These deadlines should be considered as firm, and failure to meet them will likely result in a delay in graduation. Some of these requirements need to be met in the semester **prior** to the semester of graduation while others need to be met early in the semester of graduation. Therefore, students who are **within twelve months of the anticipated graduation date** should **immediately** consult the links provided below and carefully read the instructions provided therein.

There are several sets of such requirements set at different administrative levels.

- For the requirements and deadlines set at the University level, students should consult the following webpage <https://www.usf.edu/graduate-studies/students/electronic-thesis-dissertation/current-etd-deadlines.aspx>
- For requirements and deadlines set at the College of Arts and Sciences level, students should consult the file titled Dissertation Defense Instructions from the following webpage: <https://www.usf.edu/arts-sciences/students/graduate/forms-and-links.aspx> Note that the **College has its own deadline for requesting a PhD defense, which is 7 calendar days prior to the scheduled defense date** (the College would prefer receiving the forms even earlier than 7 days, ideally 14 days in advance). As stated in those instructions, among other forms, students should submit the "Successful Defense Form". This form should *not*

yet be signed by the committee members at the time when it is submitted by the student to CAS. The Chair of the dissertation defense will receive this form from CAS and bring it on the day of the defense; the committee members will sign it at that time if the defense is successful. Students who changed their dissertation committee since entering candidacy and who have not submitted the form “Changes to the Graduate Supervisory Committee” should also submit this form. The form can be found on the same webpage. Besides all other forms listed in the Dissertation Defense Instructions file, it is advisable to also submit the form titled “Graduate Student Supervisory Committee Appointment Form – New Appointment” found on the same webpage. This form may not be necessary for all students, but it is safer to submit it.

- The Department requires that a draft of the dissertation, one that the doctoral committee has determined to be complete, be made available to the rest of the faculty in the Department **prior** to the scheduling of the final defense date. The candidate must provide the Department’s Academic Program Specialist with a copy of this draft and suggest a day and time for the final defense. The Chair of the Department will not sign off on scheduling the defense unless this requirement has been met. Since the forms have to be submitted to the College at least 7 calendar days before the desired dissertation date, the draft should be ready to be made available at that time at the latest. An updated version of the paper can be submitted to the Academic Program Specialist up until 7 calendar days before the final defense date, when the paper will be made available to the whole department.

The defense is chaired by either a non-committee member from outside of the department or by a doctoral dissertation committee member from outside of the department. As a general rule, the defense is comprised of a presentation by the candidate followed by each member of the committee questioning the candidate. Following the completing of questioning by the committee member, the chair, as well as others attending the defense, may question the candidate. Once the questioning period is complete, all in attendance save for the committee and the defense chair will exit the room.

The defense chair will preside over the committee’s deliberations. Upon completion of the committee’s deliberation, the chair notifies the candidate that s/he has passed or failed. If the decision is the former, then the defense chair and members of the committee sign the *Successful Defense Form* from <https://www.usf.edu/arts-sciences/students/graduate/forms-and-links.aspx> and the candidate is notified of the committee’s decision. If it is the latter, then the candidate’s major or co-major professor will meet with the candidate to determine a plan to improve the quality of the dissertation prior to another defense.

The candidate must finish the electronic submission process, as specified by the University requirements, by downloading the Thesis and Dissertation *Certificate of Approval* from <https://www.usf.edu/graduate-studies/students/electronic-thesis-dissertation/current-etd-deadlines.aspx> and obtaining all necessary signatures. The chair of the dissertation committee should sign this form only after all the changes suggested on the day of the dissertation defense have been incorporated in the manuscript. The other committee members can sign it on the day of the defense. Before submitting it, the student will need to have the manuscript verified for plagiarism as specified in the instructions on that form.

For additional information on the procedures of the final defense, students should consult the section titled Degree Requirements from the Graduate Catalog on the following webpage: <https://catalog.usf.edu/index.php?catoid=18>

### **Probation**

Failure to meet any of the requirements for progress towards dissertation listed in this handbook by the relevant deadline will result in the student being placed on probation the following semester.

At the end of each probationary semester, the department will recommend to the College Dean one of the following:

1. Removal of probation
2. Continued probation; OR
3. Dismissal from the degree program.