Graduate Program Overview

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Doctoral Program

The PhD program in economics consists of three phases:

- One year of core courses, followed by core examinations in microeconomics and macroeconomics.
- Approximately one year of elective courses, followed by examinations in the student's fields of specialization.
- Successful completion of a dissertation.

There is no foreign-language requirement for the doctorate in economics.

Phase 1: Core Courses and Examinations

All doctoral students regularly complete a set of core courses in microeconomics (Econ 500, 501, and 508), macroeconomics (Econ 502, 503, and 509), and econometrics (Econ 580, 581, and 582). All PhD students are expected to pass core examinations in microeconomics and macroeconomics. The core courses are completed during the first year of the doctoral program and the core examinations are taken two weeks before the second year begins. Although students are not expected to have done course work beyond the core courses before taking these examinations, they are expected to review and integrate material from the first year courses in preparation for the exams.

Phase 2: Field Courses and Examinations

In addition to the core courses, each doctoral student must satisfactorily complete at least eight elective field courses in economics at the graduate level. At least one of these must be in advanced microeconomics or advanced macroeconomics, and at least three must be in applied areas.

Each doctoral student must satisfy the requirements for two fields of specialization. The field requirements can be satisfied either by passing two field examinations or by passing one field examination and receiving an average grade of at least 3.8 in the elective courses corresponding to a second field.

Phase 3: Dissertation Research

The doctoral dissertation is the final major requirement for the PhD degree (for a list of completed dissertations since 2010, see here). After completing the core and field requirements, the student chooses a dissertation topic and a doctoral supervisory committee is appointed. Students are encouraged to discuss potential dissertation topics with faculty members early in their graduate studies. The Department offers three ongoing workshops in the areas of macro and international economics, labor and development economics, and natural resource economics to assist students in finding and developing dissertation topics. The faculty uses these workshops to present work in progress as well.

After the supervisory committee has been appointed and a dissertation topic has been developed, the student takes the general examination. This examination is an oral defense of the formal dissertation proposal. When the dissertation is completed, the student takes the final examination, which is an oral defense of the completed dissertation.

The doctoral program may be completed in four years, although most students take longer. During the last few years, the average length of time to completion of the PhD was approximately five years.