PhD Program Requirements

Introduction

The Department of Nutritional Sciences at the University of Arizona (UA) offers both Master of Science (MS) and Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degrees in Nutritional Science. A total of 83 students have graduated from the Nutritional Sciences Graduate Program (NSGP) since 2000, 44 (53%) with the Master of Science degree and 39 (47%) with the Doctor of Philosophy.

Regardless of your interests, experience, or background the program requirements for your degree will be similar to other students in the program. In the next several pages we have outlined these requirements. Successful students will visit this document regularly to assure they are meeting required "markers" along the way.

Questions you may have can be directed to Nancy Driscoll, Coordinator of the NSGP, Dr. Kirsten Limesand, Chair of the NSGP and/or once established your Advisor and Advisory Committee Members.

Doctor of Philosophy Program Considerations

It is the goal of the NSGP that students entering with no or only one course deficiency will complete their PhD degree within 5-6 years after entering the program. To accomplish this, new PhD students must specify a laboratory for their dissertation research by the end of their third semester in the program (1 January).

With the guidance of their Advisor they must select an Advisory Committee to guide their dissertation research. The NSGP requires a minimum of four members, three must be UA tenured, tenure-track, or approved as equivalent and three must approve the dissertation. There may be one dissenting vote.

The fourth member may be tenured or tenure-track, or a special approved member. Special members must be pre-approved by the Dean of the Graduate College. Any members beyond the fourth can also be tenured or tenure-track, or special approved members.

All dissertation committee members are expected to attend the final defense. An approved Plan of Study must be completed by the end of the third semester (1 January). Failure to meet the deadlines of laboratory selection, Advisory Committee selection or Plan of Study approval will be deemed lack of progress and can result in a loss of funding or a written reproach.

All students should refer to the Graduate College website for forms and Graduate College rules and policies. Graduate College policies are the final authority in the event of any conflicts. It is each student's individual responsibility to familiarize themselves with the Graduate College policies.

Coursework and Mentoring
You may have been admitted with one or more course deficiencies; these deficiencies should be completed as soon as possible, preferably during the first semester in the program. The Coordinator and Chair of the NSGP, with the support of the Graduate Program Executive Committee will assist you with selection of courses for the first semester that you are enrolled in the program.

Once you have selected an Advisor, the Advisor will support you in selecting coursework through the remainder of your degree program.

**Required Courses**

1. NSC 520 Advanced Nutritional Science (3 units)
2. NSC 602, Metabolic Integration (3 units)
3. NSC 604 Nutrition and Cell Signaling (3 units)
4. NSC 622A Vitamins (3 units)
5. NSC 623 Mineral Metabolism (3 units)
6. NSC 699 Laboratory Rotation (3 units)
7. Statistics (3 units)
8. Seminar (4 credits)
9. NSC 920 Dissertation, 18 units
10. Units for Nutritional Sciences Minor (9 units) or number of units required by minor department
11. Electives - remaining units needed to fulfill Graduate College requirement of 63 total units (maximum of 3 units of house-numbered courses in your credits of electives)

**University-wide house-numbered courses comprise two categories of courses using alternative teaching formats: (1) courses offered in small group settings, and (2) courses taught on an individual basis. An example of a university wide house-numbered course would be 695 or 699.**

A typical course schedule for the first semester of a first year student may be similar to the following:

1. NSC 520-3 units---this course is offered every year and should be included for most students.
2. NSC 602 3 units---this course is offered every other year, in even-numbered years, so it should be taken as soon as available
3. NSC 699 3 units rotation--- must be taken by students on a departmental assistantship
4. Elective- 2-3 units--- these units may be used to make up any deficiencies you had at the time of admission or to begin your study in the specific area in which you are interested.

**Students funded on an assistantship through the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences are required to enroll in > or = 10 course units per semester.**

It is highly recommended that all students take a course in ethics before graduating. Two possible ethics courses are listed below

1. MCB 695e, Science, Society, and Ethics
2. PS 595B -- Scientific Writing Strategies, Skills and Ethics
3. SPH 549, Survival Skills for Scientists

If you have decided on an Advisor then they will advise you regarding the selection of courses for the remaining semesters, bearing in mind that you must meet the coursework requirements of the NSGP and the Graduate College. The Chair of the NSGP can advise you on your second semester courses. It is the student’s responsibility to know exactly which courses and the total number of units they are registered for each semester.

It is very important that students select an Advisor as soon as possible in their program and then together with their Advisor select a graduate Advisory Committee. The student's research program cannot be planned before selecting an Advisor, and not having a designated research project will delay your graduation.

A recommended procedure is for the student, with advice from his/her Advisor, to identify an appropriate project, prepare a 1-2-page summary/outline of the research methods and to schedule a committee meeting to discuss the proposed research and obtain approval. This should be done before the preliminary examination for PhD students.

**Laboratory Rotations**

Laboratory rotations are a valuable experience for students. They provide an opportunity for the student to learn new techniques, to be exposed to different approaches to nutrition research and to meet faculty and students in the program.

Hence, the rotation experience should be taken seriously, and students should immerse themselves in each rotation and maximize the amount of time they spend in each laboratory and with the people in it, including evenings and weekends as appropriate.

All incoming Ph.D. students supported by departmental assistantships/funds must select research laboratories to rotate through during their first two semesters. Ph.D. students must rotate through a minimum of two research laboratories but no more than four.

Rotations are generally for a period of 6-8 weeks. Students can select a laboratory from any of the tenure-track departmental or joint appointed faculty in the NSGP.

If necessary, the Chairs and Coordinator of the NSGP can assist students in selection of their first rotation, but students should familiarize themselves with all available faculty early in the first semester so they can select a laboratory for their second rotation.

The laboratory for the first rotation will be chosen before the start of the semester or no later than the second week of the semester; the laboratory for the second rotation should be chosen by the second Friday in September. It is the student's responsibility to contact the laboratories in which they wish to rotate.

Keep in mind that some laboratories may be fully committed and unable to accommodate a rotation student, so start your selection process early. Professors are very busy so contact may need to be done by e-mail or by directly going to the laboratory to set up a meeting with the professor.
Course credits are awarded for laboratory rotations. Students completing a rotation will enroll in 3 units of NSC 699 each semester that they are completing research laboratory rotations.

Once a laboratory has been selected for rotation, you must register for this NSC 699. Grades for NSC 699 are S, P, C, D, E, I, and W.

Students are expected to spend a minimum of 9 hours/week (1 unit/3 hours) in the laboratory in which they are doing their rotation. There are no maximum allowable hours for lab rotation but rather it is at the discretion of faculty and the individual student in order to assure an ample and optimal learning experience.

**Graduate Student Progress Report**

At the end of each semester graduate students will document their progress toward degree completion. All students are required to submit this biannual progress report by starting/updating a Progress Report form. Your Advisor will review your progress report to help make an assessment of your progress toward degree completion. The Progress Report must be submitted to the student’s Advisor 10 days after the end of each semester. A copy must also be submitted to the NSGP Coordinator. A copy of the policy along with the Graduate Student Progress Report form will be posted under graduate forms on this website.

**Graduate Student Annual Review**

The purpose of the Graduate Student Annual Review is to promote optimal student performance. By assessing in a systematic way evaluations provide a basis for accountability. Annual reviews are expected to give an accurate analysis of successes and to identify areas for improvement. Annual reviews will help to identify an individual student's performance in training, to provide constructive feedback on performance and to support the highest standard of performance. Every graduate student will be evaluated on a yearly basis.

The annual review will be completed by the student's major Advisor. If a major Advisor has not been identified the Chairs of the NSGP will evaluate the student. The annual review should be completed by the end of the spring semester of every academic year or by May 20th. The Graduate Student Progress Report should be provided to the major Advisor 2 weeks before the review meeting. The Graduate Student Annual Review form is available on the department website under graduate forms. In addition to completing the written review form the major advisor should schedule a meeting with the student to review the written review. At the end of the meeting this written review must be signed by the student and the major Advisor and submitted to the NSGP Coordinator.

The Graduate Student Progress Report and the Graduate Student Annual Review Form will be maintained in the student’s records in the office of the NSGP Coordinator. These annual reviews may be shared with the student's advisory committee, the NSGP Coordinator, the Department Head and the Graduate College Dean's office.

**Plan of Study**

The Plan of Study is the document used by the UA Graduate College to track student course work and progress to a degree. All Ph.D. students must have a Plan of Study on record by the end of their third semester.
The Plan of Study identifies (1) courses the student intends to transfer from other institutions; (2) courses already completed at UA which the student intends to apply toward the graduate degree; and (3) additional course work to be completed to fulfill degree requirements.

The Plan of Study must have the approval of the student's Advisor, Chair of the NSGP and the Nutritional Sciences Department Head before it is submitted to the Graduate College. The Plan of Study form can be found on the "MY GRADCOLL" section of the Graduate College website. Each student should fill out the Plan of Study form and send an electronic copy to the Coordinator of the NSGP for review.

The NSGP Coordinator will review the form to make sure all Nutritional Sciences Department and Graduate College requirements are being met. Once the form has been approved the student is responsible for getting the signature of the Advisor and Minor Advisor. The NSGP Coordinator will then get the signatures of the Chair of the NSGP and the Department Head, make copies and send the original and two copies to the Graduate College for approval.

An approved copy will be mailed to the student and the Nutritional Sciences Department. If you are unsure as to how to complete the Plan of Study, please make an appointment with the Coordinator of the NSGP for guidance.

Completion of Doctor of Philosophy Requirements

Comprehensive Exam Guidelines

Ph.D. students must pass a Doctoral Comprehensive Examination before being formally admitted to candidacy for the Ph.D. degree. The examination consists of a written section and an oral section. The GEC recommends taking the Comprehensive Examination by the end of the 5th semester and no later than the 7th semester. Requests to take the comprehensive examination past the 7th semester must be made in writing (petition) to the Graduate Executive committee and receive approval prior to scheduling. The written and oral sections of the Comprehensive Examination must take place at least six months prior to the Final Oral Defense Examination.

Purpose: The purpose of the Comprehensive Examination is for the student to demonstrate competency in the core NSc curriculum and the identified competencies of the chosen minor. Using the ASN report as a guide, the Graduate Curriculum Committee created a list describing the breadth of knowledge we expect students within the graduate training in nutritional sciences to acquire and the corresponding course that covers this information. In addition, this exam assesses the student's analytic ability, creativity, and potential for successful completion of the PhD program in Nutritional Sciences.

Committee: The Comprehensive Examination Committee must consist of a minimum of four members. The Advisor and two additional members must be tenured, or tenure-track, or a special approved member. Special members must be pre-approved by the Dean of the Graduate College. Any members beyond the fourth can also be tenured or tenure-track, or a special approved member. A chair of the committee must be chosen from the group and the advisor is not required to serve as chair.

Format: Committee members will write a total of eight questions. For each writing session, the student will be presented with two of the written questions and will select one of the questions for a written response. This is repeated for the next three writing sessions, which are to occur
over two consecutive days. The student will have three hours to write their answer for each
question and this will be conducted as a closed book session. The Oral section of the
Comprehensive Examination must last a minimum of 2 hours but cannot exceed 3 hours. The
oral section of the examination can involve follow-up questions from the written exam, general
questions on the classes/seminars that the student has included on his/her Plan of Study, recent
literature in the student's field, and questioning from the chosen minor area of study.

**Evaluation:** Committee members will create a rubric of scoring for their own question. A pass or
fail grade is given for each question and at least two questions must be passed in order to
progress to the oral section. Faculty members may provide feedback to the student based on their
written responses prior the oral session. The oral session may ask the unanswered questions
and/or may focus on follow-up to the answered question. Students should be evaluated on
accuracy of information provided and any gaps in knowledge.

**Scheduling:** The student should meet with their committee two months prior to the
comprehensive examination and plan a tentative date for the oral examination. At this time, the
committee members should discuss general areas from which questions will be drawn and the
person responsible for writing the questions for each area. The student is allowed to talk to each
committee member to discuss the general topic area where the questions will be drawn from. The
written examination should be scheduled three weeks prior to the oral examination. Committee
members will have one week to grade the written examination and the committee chair will
notify the student of the result.

**Next steps after results:**

**Failure of the Comprehensive Examination**

1. Students will be allowed to retake the oral section of the examination one time if
performance on the initial examination is unsatisfactory. If a second oral examination is
necessary, the exam should be ideally re-scheduled within 3 months of the first
examination. Students will either pass or fail the second examination (i.e., the oral
examination cannot be taken three times).
2. Failure of the Comprehensive Examination on the second attempt will result in dismissal
from the NSC Doctorate Program. With Advisor and Advisory Committee approval
candidates failing the exam can be considered for a M.S. degree.

**Passing the Comprehensive Examination**

1. At the time the student passes the Comprehensive Examination his/her bursar account
will be billed the fee for candidacy, dissertation processing, and archiving. This is a one-
time fee and you will not be billed again if you change your anticipated graduation date.
Copyrighting is optional and carries an additional fee.
2. When the student has an approved doctoral Plan of Study on file, has satisfied all course
work and passed the written and oral portions of the Comprehensive Examination, he or
she must file a **Committee Appointment form.** This form must be submitted to the
Graduate Degree Certification Office as soon as requirements are met but no later than
six months before the Final Oral Defense Examination is scheduled. Deadlines for the
Submission of paperwork pertaining to doctoral programs are available online at [Deadlines for Completion of Degree Requirements](#).

**Funding of Research**

All Ph.D. students are encouraged to apply for funding to support their dissertation project. There are a number of financial resources available to students. The Graduate College website has information regarding funding opportunities including UA funding sources, federal and state resources and a number of fellowships which are available. Foundations often provide funding opportunities for graduate education.

**Completion of Ph.D. Requirements**

The NSGP requires all Ph.D. students write a dissertation, present a seminar of their research findings and complete a Final Oral Defense Examination administered by a student's Ph.D. Advisory Committee prior to graduation. The dissertation must meet required standards of scholarship and demonstrate the candidate's ability to conduct original research. It is anticipated that students will submit at least two manuscripts for publication during their doctoral study program. These manuscripts are generally a result of dissertation-specific research.

Research involving human subjects or live vertebrate animals, requires permission from the relevant UA committee. Consult your Advisor and the Human Subjects Office for details. The Human Subjects Office telephone number is (520) 626-6721. **You must have Human Subjects approval in your own name:** your project is not covered under your advisor's approval.

Upon the completion of the dissertation, the candidate is to submit to a Final Oral Defense Examination. A student must be in good academic standing to schedule the defense. The examination focuses on the dissertation itself but can include general questioning related to the field(s) of study within the scope of the dissertation.

The exact time and place of this examination must be scheduled with the Graduate Degree Certification Office at least 7 working days in advance, and announced publicly in Lo Que Pasa at least one week in advance. Final Oral Examinations should be scheduled during days when the university is in session and during normal business hours. You may contact Trudy Morrow to reserve a room for you for your defense examination.

The dissertation Advisor presides over the Final Oral Defense Examination. The examination is closed to the public, except for the initial seminar portion during which the student presents the dissertation and entertains questions. There is no minimum time limit for the Final Oral Defense Examination, but the entire proceedings may not exceed three hours. Members of the Advisory Committee must be present for the entire examination.

If the Committee requires revisions, those must be done in a timely manner, not to exceed one year. If the revisions are not completed by the dissertation submission deadline for the term when the student defends, the student will be required to register for the next semester and will graduate in the semester when the revisions are complete and approved. If revisions are not done by the end of the time to degree period, the student will have to re-take the comprehensive examination to demonstrate currency of knowledge.

**Submission of the Dissertation**
Upon successful completion of the Final Oral Defense Examination, the candidate submits the dissertation electronically for forwarding to the Library of The University of Arizona and to The University Microfilms, Inc (UMI). A processing and microfilming fee also must be paid to the University Bursar. Upon receipt of the finalized dissertation, the Dean of the Graduate College will recommend conferral of the doctoral degree by the Arizona Board of Regents.

**The Format Check Process**

The dissertation acceptance process consists of the steps outlined below, done after you have defended your dissertation and you have final approval from your committee. It basically consists of two parts; an auditing of your PDF file to verify that it meets archiving standards as listed in step 1, and the collection of documentation as listed in steps 2 through 5.

1. Your format check begins once you submit your dissertation to UMI Electronic Submissions Site. For instructions as to how your dissertation should be formatted, please review our formatting manual at Dissertation Formatting Manual. Your dissertation will be audited against this manual so if you follow the instructions carefully you will have minimal edits to make after we review it. If your dissertation includes published papers or papers accepted for publication, you must use an alternate format. You can find information on this format in the Dissertation Formatting Manual, page 9 in 'Appendix A'.
2. Please submit the Approval Page forms (two original copies required):
3. Please submit a 'Distribution Rights' form: Distribution Rights
4. Please submit the 'Survey of Earned Doctorates' online survey. You can do this by going to [https://sed-ncses.org](https://sed-ncses.org) Please complete the survey online.
5. We need to receive any unreported grades, usually your 920 grades. The grade form should be sent to Admin 316. Your department can help you get these grades to us.

That's it. Once you have completed the five steps above, you are done!

*Portions of this webpage were taken from the Graduate College Website, University of Arizona*