

Department of Economics, Brown University
The Handbook of the Graduate Program

August 2019

Requirements for the MA Degree

Although we do not offer a terminal MA degree, we do offer an MA degree to students in the graduate program on their way to the PhD degree. To receive the MA degree in economics at Brown University, students are required to obtain a passing grade in the following eight first-year courses:

EC2010, Mathematics for Economists (fall).
EC2020, Applied Economics Analysis (spring).
EC2030, Econometrics I (fall).
EC2040, Econometrics II (spring).
EC2050, Microeconomics I (fall).
EC2060, Microeconomics II (spring).
EC2070, Macroeconomics I (fall).
EC2080, Macroeconomics II (spring).

Students should register for these courses following the “satisfactory/no credit” option. Substitutions for these courses are possible with permission from a Faculty Advisor and the Director of Graduate Studies.

Requirements for the PhD Degree

The requirements to receive the PhD degree in economics at Brown University are the following:

- To obtain a passing grade in each of the eight first-year courses listed above. Substitutions for these courses are possible with permission from a Faculty Advisor and the Director of Graduate Studies.
- To obtain a passing grade in all three core exams: econometrics, microeconomics, and macroeconomics.
- To obtain a grade of at least B in at least seven additional graduate economics courses taken at Brown. Courses taken in other universities or other Brown departments may substitute for Brown economics courses with permission from a Faculty Advisor and the Director of Graduate Studies.
- To obtain a passing grade in the field exam, which will include two fields or areas of specialization.
- To obtain a passing grade on the third-year research paper.
- To make at least one seminar presentation of research papers at the lunch workshops of the department each year.
- To write and defend successfully the Doctoral Dissertation, which will usually consist of three research papers. The appropriate flexibility is allowed, so that the Dissertation Committee, led by the Dissertation Main Advisor, can determine and approve the contents of the Dissertation.

The following sections will outline the administration of each of these requirements.

Core examinations

At the end of the first year in the program, each student must take the three core examinations in econometrics, microeconomics and macroeconomics. These three exams are first offered by the department in late May.

Below are the core exam dates for the upcoming year:

2020: May 14 (micro), May 18 (econometrics), and May 21 (macro)

In order for students to have sufficient time to study for these core exams, no course exams should be given during the spring semester final exam period. For students who do not pass all three exams in May, there is a retake of each of these three exams that takes place later in the summer. Students who have not passed all three exams after the second re-take will be forced to leave the program.

Below are the core exam re-take dates for the upcoming year:

2020: July 15 (micro), July 20 (econometrics), and July 23 (macro)

The writing and evaluation of each core examination is the responsibility of the Faculty Members that teach the relevant course sequences (EC2030-80). In addition, after each round of core exams, a Core Examination Committee, consisting of these Faculty Members and the Director of Graduate Studies, will convene to make the final grading decisions (fails and passes).

Advanced courses

After the first year in the program, the student is required to take at least seven additional graduate economics classes at Brown. These courses must be taken in the “grade option” and must be passed with a grade of at least B. Courses taken at other universities or at other Brown departments may substitute for some of these classes, with permission from a Faculty Advisor and the Director of Graduate Studies. If such courses are taken, a Faculty Member of the Department will be responsible for their validation as a requirement in the program. The Faculty Member will agree with the student on the form of testing to be used. For example, on the basis of the syllabus/reading list of the course the student plans to take at a different institution, an oral or written exam can be administered. In cases like these, the student will register for EC2980 (Reading and Research) under the sponsorship of that Faculty Member, and a grade of at least B in such a course will be required.

Fields and field examinations

The advanced courses taken during the second year and first half of the third year that are central to each student’s interests should be chosen around the idea of “fields.” A field is defined as two advanced graduate courses, with some connection between them. The student will be asked to declare one of his/her fields as the “major” field, and the other field will be his/her “minor.” The

“major” field must be approved by two Faculty Members of the Department, and the “minor” field by a different Faculty Member of the Department.

These three Faculty Members will be responsible for the administration of the student’s field exam. The courses comprising each field include regular courses offered by the Department, courses taken at other institutions or other Brown departments, and reading-and-research courses. Fields can be defined with flexibility, allowing for different levels of generality. For instance, examples of fields are: economic growth, macroeconomics, econometrics, development economics, urban economics, labor economics, applied microeconomics (labor/health), finance, microeconomic theory, game theory, political economy, etc.

The field exam will be an oral exam on the two fields of specialization chosen by each student. Each student will arrange the date of the exam with the three Faculty Members responsible for his/her two fields. This exam should take place at the end of the second year in the program. If a student fails the field exam the first time he or she takes it, there will be a retake exam scheduled not later than the beginning of the Fall semester of the third year. If a student fails the field exam for a second time, he or she will be forced to leave the program. The three Faculty Members will evaluate the performance of the student in the field exam and communicate to the student at the end of the exam, after some deliberation, whether or not the student has passed the exam.

The third-year research paper

Within the third year in the program, the student must write a substantial research paper. This may very naturally grow out of work from courses, or may be a follow-up of some summer or regular research assistant position, or may be the outcome of the student’s independent ideas. Although students may hand in papers that grow out of joint research with professors, it is expected that in such a case the paper will contain substantial (and clearly identified) outputs of the students own efforts.

The paper must be approved by a Faculty Member of the Department by the end of the third year in the program. The due date for the paper is May 15. There are two grades for the third-year research paper: “fail,” and “pass”. Students receiving a grade of fail will be required to hand in a new paper on October 1 of their fourth year. This paper will be graded in the same manner as the first (the readers need not be the same). Students failing a second time will be removed from the program.

Seminar presentations requirement

Starting in the third year, each student is required to present research papers at least once a year in one of the department’s lunch workshops. Presentations of research material and ideas at varying stages of development are always welcome in these workshops. During the third year, students must present a draft of the third year paper before March 1st. This presentation will give the student an opportunity to gather useful feedback before the submission deadline for the paper.

Dissertation defense

The final requirement for the PhD degree is to write and defend successfully the Doctoral Dissertation. The Dissertation will usually consist of three research papers, although some flexibility is allowed, at the discretion of the Dissertation Committee. The Dissertation Committee consists of a Dissertation Main Advisor, and two additional readers. The Dissertation must be successfully defended by the student. The defense is a presentation, open to the department's faculty and students. The entire Dissertation Committee usually attends the defense. Exceptionally, if some of the Members of the Dissertation Committee are absent, the Dissertation Main Advisor, in consultation with the Director of Graduate Studies, will establish the appropriate procedure for the defense.

Teaching requirement

Because Brown's doctoral programs train graduate students to become teachers as well as researchers, teaching is an important part of graduate education. All doctoral students in the Economics program are required to gain experience through a teaching position during their graduate studies. This may include, among other related positions, a teaching assistant position. In consultation with the DGS, the exact details and timing of the requirement may vary. The requirement may be fulfilled during any of the years in the program.

Milestones in the Program

The usual duration of most PhD's in economics is five years. Therefore, this is the expectation that the Department has about each of you. In what follows, some tips are provided, meant to orient each of you at each stage of the program.

- **First-year students:** For this first year, your tasks are clearly well-defined. You should take and work hard on the eight courses (EC2010-80) comprising the four first-year sequences. Three of these sequences (econometrics, macro, and micro) will culminate with the core exam, which you are required to pass in all three areas. The fourth sequence (which consists of a course in mathematics and a course in applied economics analysis) is also important, as it provides you with useful tools in your graduate economics education.
- **Second-year students:** You should talk to at least one Faculty Member to seek advice on the courses that you should be taking this year. Also, you need to get in touch with three Faculty Members in order to define your two fields of specialization, to be completed in the second year. Students will take the necessary courses to define fields and pass the field exam at the end of the second year. The regular course load during the second year should consist of three courses per semester, to ideally complete a load of about six courses for the year. You should work very hard on these advanced courses, since they are designed to take you to the frontier of those fields where you are likely to write your Dissertation. If you don't, the quality of your Dissertation will likely suffer from this work deficit. Avoid being just a tourist in these courses: just showing up to lecture is often not enough. In addition, you should start attending some seminars in your area of interest, both the formal afternoon seminars and the lunch workshops. At the end of the second year you should choose an "Advisor of Record." This advisor of record will be in charge of keeping track of your progress in the coming years. The advisor of record

should be chosen with his or her agreement. This advisor can be changed at any time with proper notification to the DGS.

- Third-year students: You should be working on your third-year paper, in consultation with at least one Faculty member. This paper may very naturally come out of your work on some of the courses that you have taken, or may be a follow-up of some summer or regular research assistant position, or may be the outcome of an independent idea of yours (but in this case, please talk to a Faculty Member about it, to avoid unwanted surprises at the end of the year). You should schedule a presentation, usually of your third-year paper, in one of the lunch workshops before March 1st. Your usual attendance to seminars is expected at this stage in the program. So you should identify at least one of the workshop series and lunch seminar series, and make both of them the highlights of your academic week, because it is in these seminars where the intense communication of new research ideas really takes place. You may also use this year to take some classes in which you can learn skills important for your research or to complete the course requirement if not completed in the second year.
- Fourth-years and beyond: At this point your absolute priority should be the Dissertation. Communication with at least one, and ideally at this point two or three, or more Faculty Members about your work is very desirable. You should schedule annual presentations of your research in one of the lunch workshops. And do keep your seminars marked on your calendars. Your attendance and participation in the department's regular seminars and lunch workshops in your area is highly desirable, and it is expected from each of you. For students in their third year in the program and above, the department will conduct an individual review of progress every semester. After consultations with the Faculty, The Director of Graduate Studies will communicate individually with each student and send a progress report at the end of each semester, summarizing the academic situation of the student in the program. In this report, each student will be informed of whether he or she is in "good standing," "acceptable standing" or in a "warning status."

Funding

The following policies pertain to funding:

- Students in the PhD program receive five years of funding, subject to the conditions for remaining in the program described above. While some students may choose to remain for a sixth year, there should be no expectation of receiving funding from the department.
- Students who are appointed as TAs are required to attend the new TA orientation session sponsored by the Sheridan Center. This one-day session typically takes place in early September.
- While funding typically takes the form of teaching assistantships and research assistantships, students are also actively encouraged to apply for external fellowships to support their research. The graduate school provides an incentive policy designed to increase stipends for students with external fellowships and to make such students, under certain conditions, eligible for sixth-year funding (please see the graduate school website for further information). The graduate school also maintains a database of such funding opportunities.
- Working toward a Ph.D. in economics is a full time endeavor, including during the summer when classes are not in session. Students are provided with opportunities to receive summer funding that will facilitate their progress toward degree completion. In

the view of the faculty, the best way to do this in the first two summers of the program (after the first and second years) is through participation in ongoing research projects as a research assistant. Participation in this manner will help students learn the skills necessary to translate coursework into publishable research and broaden their exposure to current research topics. The department will therefore support all students in these summers who want to be research assistants. Ideally, students looking to be research assistants and faculty who have projects in which they can assist should find each other, based on common interests. However, in cases where this match is not made independently, the Director of Graduate studies will work with students to find an appropriate placement. Students have the option not to serve as research assistants during these two summers, but in this case they will not receive summer support from the department. Students in the first two summers of the program who have outside funding for the summer that meets or exceeds Brown's funding level will not receive department funding, but are strongly encouraged to participate as research assistants nonetheless. In the case of students who have outside summer funding that is less than Brown's, the department will top up their stipend to equal Brown's level if they participate as summer research assistants. In the summers following years three and four of the program, all students who are not otherwise supported either by an external fellowship or by an internship or job will be supported, and in the case of students who have external funding that is lower than Brown's, the department will top up their stipend to equal Brown's level. Students who the department supports in year six will be similarly supported in the summer after year five.

Responsibilities for the Faculty

The Faculty Members of the Department are understood to have the following responsibilities in the PhD program:

- To teach courses in the program (teaching load of each Faculty Member permitting). It is important that the Department offers a rich supply of courses in the different fields of economics, in reflection of the research interests of each Faculty Member.
- For those Faculty Members teaching the courses in the core sequences (EC2030-80), to take care of the administration of the core examination during the year they teach these courses.
- To advise students in the definition of fields and make themselves available for the administration of field exams.
- To attend students' presentations in lunch workshops, especially those times when one of the
- Faculty Member's students is presenting his/her work.
- To make themselves available to advise students in their research as appropriate.
- To make themselves available to serve in Dissertation Committees as appropriate.
- To participate in the Department's end-of-semester review meetings.