

Doctoral Candidacy Requirements

The University of Calgary [Candidacy Regulations](#) (“the Regulations”) govern the conduct of admission to doctoral candidacy at the University of Calgary. This document establishes program-specific requirements associated with the conduct of admission to graduate candidacy in economics under those *Regulations*.

A. Statement of Purpose

Admission into candidacy in the Economics Graduate Program requires that students have a solid foundation in the microeconomics, macroeconomics, and econometrics, and also in their particular fields of research. It requires that they have a well-developed plan for thesis research (i.e. a complete proposal with a well-motivated research question and potential contribution to the economics literature) and that the student have the necessary technical skills and background preparation to be able to follow through successfully on the proposed research plan.

B. All doctoral students in the Economics Graduate Program must successfully complete the following components:

1. All course requirements
2. Field of study (FOS) examinations in microeconomics, macroeconomics, and econometrics
3. Second-year paper requirement
4. Thesis proposal
5. Oral examination of the thesis proposal

Field of Study (FOS) Examinations

Format of the Field of Study Examinations

PhD students in the Economics Program must complete written field of study examinations in microeconomics, macroeconomics, and econometrics. Each examination will have a duration of 3 hours, and will be a closed-book exam. The exams will be comprehensive, offering broad coverage of the relevant topics. Students can access a test bank of previous comprehensive exams on the [Grad Students Only Site](#). Detailed questions about coverage and format should be directed to the exam committee chairs.

Process of Field of Study Examinations

Each written examination will be set and evaluated by a committee of at least three economics faculty members selected by the Department Head. Normally, the microeconomics exam committee will consist of the instructors of Economics 707 and 757 and at least one other member, the macroeconomics exam committee will consist of the instructors of Economics 709 and 759 and at least one other member, and the econometrics exam committee will consist of the instructors of Economics 705 and 715 and at least one other member.

A “pass” on each examination requires unanimous agreement among all members of the respective committee. Examinations will be graded on a five-point scale. A “pass” is a score of three or above. A “fail” is a score of one. Students must not fail any of the exams and must pass at least two. Decisions by examination committees are recommendations to the Graduate Program Director.

Scheduling of the FOS Examinations

The Graduate Program Administrator (GPA) will announce the examination dates and committee members in January. Students will normally write the examinations in May of their first year in the program. Any student who does not pass one or more field of study examinations will be given an opportunity to rewrite the examination or examinations in August of their first year in the program. A student will be required to withdraw from the program upon a second failure of any candidacy component.

Appeal of Failed Field of Study Examination Results

In the case of a failed examination, students have the right to appeal. Please see the Faculty of Graduate Studies Calendar – [Candidacy](#) – *Appeals of Decisions Regarding Candidacy Components*.

Second-Year Paper Requirement

The purpose of the research paper requirement is to launch a doctoral student’s research agenda by requiring them to synthesize the concepts covered in field courses and begin the exploration of research questions in their areas of specialization which may lead to their dissertation work. To complete this research paper requirement, students will write a research paper that contains, as a minimum, a literature review, an original research idea and a strategy for tackling it.

1. The paper should demonstrate a student’s understanding of the literature covered in field courses and allow them to explore possible dissertation topics. In terms of scope, the paper will normally cover the following: The paper should address a key

issue or research question in a specific field, which can lay the groundwork for the student's dissertation research question and thesis proposal.

2. The paper should demonstrate an understanding of the literature in the student's main fields of research and the topics and methods germane to the research question.
3. While students typically specialize in one primary field for their dissertations, some research questions cover more than one field. In such cases, the student will draw from more than one field and the paper should address the literature in the relevant fields. However, the paper need not cover material from all the field courses taken by a student.

The paper can build on previous papers submitted in their field courses, but it cannot be a replication of these documents. The second-year paper is intended to be an independent document that contains a concise review of the literature related to one or more research questions in the field of specialization. However, a literature review is not sufficient, and the paper must propose an extension to the frontier of economic research. It can serve as a bridging document toward the thesis proposal. The paper should be presented in a scholarly format, meeting the standards of the economics discipline. Papers should adhere to the following guidelines: approximately 20 pages in length (excluding references, tables and figures), double spaced, and formatted in accordance with an academic journal standard in economics.

Second-Year Paper Requirement Evaluation

The research paper will be evaluated as follows: No later than the middle of the 21st month of the program (May 15th of the second year of the program) students must have picked a supervisor and developed a research topic resulting in a one- or two-page research proposal. [The Second-Year Paper Proposal and Supervisor Form](#) must be submitted to the Graduate Program Administrator, GPA. The Supervisor will provide research guidance in the development of the project over the next three months. Working together on a second-year paper does not commit the student and supervisor to working together on the student's dissertation. At the latest, by the middle of the 24th month of the program (August 10th in the second year of the program) a research paper must be submitted. A committee of three reviewers (including the Supervisor) from the relevant fields reviews this paper with an emphasis on providing brief yet substantive feedback about the research direction and questions that the paper has highlighted. Each member of the committee writes a referee report on the paper in a manner consistent with the peer-review process at editorial boards for economics journals, and assigns a pass or fail grade.

Reviewers should attempt to complete these reviews within two weeks of receiving the paper. The reviewers will decide by majority rule if further revision of the paper is needed before the doctoral student passes the second-year paper requirement. If a student has a specific question or questions on which they would appreciate feedback (for example, some particular part of the model or empirical specification), they may attach an optional cover letter to the reviewers asking for comments.

Should a revision of the paper be required, the Supervisor will set an appropriate deadline for the revised paper (perhaps the end of the 25th month of the program – i.e. end of September in the third year of the program). The committee either accepts the revised paper or returns the paper to the student for further revisions. The student must submit and have the final version of the paper approved by the end of the 26th month (end of October in the third year of the program) at the very latest. The committee either accepts or rejects the paper, and the Supervisor submits [the evaluation form](#). If the paper is rejected, the student must withdraw from the program.

Students are expected to arrange with the research activities committee to present their second-year paper in the weekly seminar series (ideally in the fall). Dates fill up quickly, so students are encouraged to schedule this in advance.

Appeal of Failed Second Year Paper Requirement

In the case of a failed second year paper requirement, students have the right to appeal to the Graduate Program Director (GPD) or to the Department Chair (in the event that GPD was involved in the initial decision). Students must submit their appeal in writing within two weeks of being notified of the decision. If the fail upholds, the student may appeal the decision. Please see the Faculty of Graduate Studies Calendar – [Candidacy – Appeals of Decisions Regarding Candidacy Components](#).

Thesis Proposal

Thesis proposals should be examined before the end of the 28th month in the program. This timeline is quite tight and we encourage students to begin work on their thesis proposal as early as possible. Normally, the thesis proposal consists of at least two paper proposals (presented as sections or chapters within the thesis proposal). It should be formatted in a scholarly format, double-spaced, and be approximately 25-35 pages long (not including references, figures, and tables). The first paper (sometimes a revised version of the second-year paper) should be in draft form, with the second paper in the form of a detailed proposal. A third paper may be included

in a tentative form, demonstrating what additional research the student is considering for their thesis. Each chapter must have a clear motivation, research question, suggested contribution, methodology, and literature review.

For each proposal, the following format is probably most useful:

1. Research question and motivation
2. Proposed contribution and relationship to literature
3. Methodology to address research question
4. Preliminary results (if applicable)
5. Other details (e.g., timeline or research plan)

Composition of the Thesis Proposal Oral Examination Committee

Immediately after declaring a Supervisor, a student should arrange their Thesis Committee (consisting of two other departmental faculty members and, potentially, one non-departmental member). This should be done in consultation with their Supervisor. The Thesis Committee will also serve as the Thesis Proposal Oral Examination Committee.

Scheduling of the Thesis Proposal Oral Examination

The oral examination should be scheduled before the end of the 28th month in the program. Once a student is ready to set up their thesis proposal oral examination, their Supervisor should notify the Graduate Program Director (GPD) and the Graduate Program Administrator (GPA) at least two weeks before the exam date. The Supervisor should schedule the exam and send the GPA the details (date, time and committee members). The GPA will arrange a room for the exam. At least two weeks before the exam the student must circulate a copy of their Thesis Proposal to all members of the committee and the GPA.

Information on the Thesis Proposal Oral Examination

The purpose of the thesis proposal and its oral exam is to ensure that a student has sufficient preparation to be successful with thesis research. This does not mean that they must have read every paper in the extended literature, have derived all of their results, or be certain of what their findings will be. The expectation is that they have a clearly defined and well-defended research plan.

A student who is advanced to candidacy must know the related research literature well. They should be able to answer questions on how their research fits into that literature: What are they

contributing? Why is it important? What methodology are they planning to use? Why is this methodology appropriate? What data are they planning to use? Will they have access to it? What potential problems are they anticipating?

Students should not worry if they cannot answer every question. Rather, the thesis proposal oral examination should be considered a constructive experience where they will learn something, be exposed to new perspectives, develop new ideas, and become aware of issues they should consider in their research. Students should take advantage of this opportunity to get some detailed feedback.

For some students, this format is challenging. It is an oral exam. Students struggling with anxiety should consider contacting [SU Wellness Centre](#). SU Wellness Centre not only has counselling services but also workshops on preparing for oral examinations. Students with difficulties comprehending and communicating in English should be encouraged to work on these skills as early as possible (the return is extremely high – both during their program and on the job market). [MyGradSkills](#) routinely offers programs and assistance with English comprehension and communication skills.

Finally, students should organize practice oral examinations with other students, in which they take turns presenting their work and practice answering questions from the audience.

Format of the Thesis Proposal Oral Examination

The examination will be less than two hours, not including requested breaks and deliberation time for the Committee. In terms of format, a student makes a 15-minute presentation briefly introducing the motivation, research questions and expected contribution for the proposed thesis chapters. This is followed by examiners asking questions, usually in rounds (questioning goes around the room a few times with examiners asking questions each round). The Supervisor will chair the exam and serve as an active examiner. Examiners are encouraged to ask clear and succinct questions. The student will be given reasonable time to answer and should feel free to ask for questions to be repeated or rephrased. If the student has understood the question and cannot answer, the examiner should pass to another question and not attempt to extract an answer by prolonged interrogation or by leading the candidate. The Supervisor will ensure that these guidelines are followed during the exam.

At the end of the examination, the student is asked to withdraw from the room. Before any discussion of the candidate's performance, each examiner must provide a non-binding recommendation (pass/fail) by secret ballot. This procedure provides the committee with a frame of opinion upon which to base a full discussion of the student's performance.

Outcome of the Thesis Proposal Oral Examination

The student will be evaluated on the basis of a number of criteria that are specified [in the evaluation form](#). Examiners make a final decision on the thesis proposal and the thesis proposal oral examination by unanimous agreement, as indicated by their signatures on the evaluation form. In the event that examiners recommend a fail, or if they cannot reach unanimous agreement, examiners supply reports to the GPD and the student's supervisor within one week of the examination date.

In the case where the first attempt at the exam results in a failure, the student will be entitled to re-take the exam no earlier than 2 months and no later than 6 months from the date of the original exam. A student will be required to withdraw from the program upon a second failure of any candidacy component.

Appeal of Failed Oral Thesis Proposal Examination

In the case of a failed examination, students have the right to appeal. Please see the Faculty of Graduate Studies Calendar – [Candidacy](#) – *Appeals of Decisions Regarding Candidacy Components*.

Extension to Candidacy Requirement Deadline

Students who will not complete their candidacy requirements by the end of their 28th month in the program must have an extension request approved by FGS. When requesting an extension, the student and supervisor should discuss an approximate date of the thesis proposal oral exam and plan the extension request around that date. Once a date has been decided, the extension request form should be completed with an explanation of the reasons for the delay. Normally, it must be signed by the Supervisor and the GPD. The completed and signed form should be submitted to the GPA to be sent to FGS for approval. Please note that the form should be submitted by the end of the 27th month in the program to allow time for processing.