Department of Economics, Brown University
The Handbook of the PhD Program
October 2011

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. A different math class may substitute for EC2010 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 a research paper, to be presented at the end of the third year.
• To successfully make at least two seminar presentations of research papers at the lunch workshops of the department.
• 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.

First-year courses

The first-year courses are organized in four sequences. Each sequence consists of a course offered in the fall semester and a course offered in the spring semester. Students should register for these courses following the "satisfactory/no credit" option and are required to obtain a grade of "satisfactory" in each of them. The first sequence consists of two tool-oriented courses, which are the following:

• EC2010, Mathematics for Economists (fall).
• EC2020, Applied Economics Analysis (spring).

A different math course may substitute for EC2010, with permission from a Faculty Advisor and the Director of Graduate Studies.

Each of the other three sequences consists of a comprehensive presentation of the core areas of economics, both in economic theory (microeconomics and macroeconomics) and econometrics (the basis of empirical economics). Each of the three sequences is intended as preparation for the core examinations, which take place at the end of the first year. The three sequences consist of the following courses:

• EC2030, Econometrics I (fall).
• EC2040, Econometrics II (spring).

- EC2050, Microeconomics I (fall).
- EC2060, Microeconomics II (spring).
- EC2070, Macroeconomics I (fall).
- EC2080, Macroeconomics II (spring).

The core examination

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 on May 21 (micro), May 24 (econometrics), and May 27 (macro), adjusting for weekends as necessary. 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 during early August. Students who have not passed all three exams after the second re-take will be forced to leave the program.

[Note: students entering the program prior to 2012 will be allowed to have a third-retake, during May of their second year, should they have passed two out of three exams after the August re-take. Students in this situation should not expect to be funded during their second year.]

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 EC291 (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 in most cases take place at the end of the second year in the program, and in all cases no later than the end of the fall semester of the student's third year. If a student fails the field exam the first time he or she takes it, there will be a retake exam scheduled within the next six months from the date of the first exam. 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 and whether he/she has obtained a grade of "distinction."

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 followup 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 three grades for the third-year research paper: "fail," "pass" and "pass with distinction." Students receiving a grade of fail will be required to hand in a new paper on September 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 given a final chance to hand in their papers on December 1 of their fourth year. Students failing for a third time will be removed from the program.

[For students entering the program after 2011, the following rules apply. The due date for the paper is May 15. There are three grades for the third-year research paper: "fail," "pass" and "pass with distinction." 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 for 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 for at least two years 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, but the requirement will be satisfied when two papers that are complete or close to complete are presented successfully. When such presentations are scheduled, the student will alert the Director of Graduate Studies about them, who will seek for an evaluation of the presentations from the relevant Faculty Members. Usually, this evaluation will take place during the end-of-semester progress review faculty meeting.

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.

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 within the three semesters after the first year. Many students will be able to take the necessary courses to define fields and pass the field exam at the end of the second year. Others will need an extra semester, perhaps because the necessary courses for their fields have not been offered early on. The regular course load during the second year should consist of two or three courses per semester, to ideally complete a load of about five 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.
- Third-year students: You should continue to talk to at least one Faculty Member seeking his/her advice. Your goal should be to complete your fields and pass the field exam if you didn't during the second year, and to complete your course work, with a load of around one course per semester. Remember you need a total of seven courses beyond the first-year courses to get the PhD. However, you should not look at just doing the bare minimum. If you are interested in a specific course that goes beyond the minimum number, go ahead and take it. Your intellectual excitement should be the engine of all your actions in the program. Of course, during this year, 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 during this year. 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.

• 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." Two consecutive semesters of "warning" may result in the student being forced to leave the program.

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.

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.