

Graduate Handbook & Program Rules for the Doctoral Program in Economics

Michigan State University

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Introduction and Overview

Welcome to the Graduate Program in Economics at Michigan State University. We have provided this document as an information source that will answer your questions. Please feel free to inquire in the office, located at 110 Marshall-Adams Hall, if you have any additional concerns. Our e-mail address is ecgrdsec@msu.edu.

A Ph.D. in Economics from Michigan State University prepares the recipient to become an active economics scholar. While the economics profession as a whole is very broad, our faculty has reached a high level of consensus regarding the traits we want our Ph.D. graduates to share. We intend for Michigan State Ph.D. economists to be well prepared for successful academic careers at major research universities and in research and policy oriented positions outside of academia in international agencies and governments around the world. This is reflected in the research focus of our required curriculum, in the high level of professional mentoring through research collaboration, initiatives, and seminars, and in the successful placement of our students at research- and policy-oriented institutions.

Students must complete ten (10) major requirements for the doctoral degree in economics. They must (1) satisfactorily complete the core course requirements (usually during the first year of study), and (2) earn a Major Pass grade on the Economics and Economic Methods Preliminary Examination before the start of the second year of study. They must (3) demonstrate proficiency in advanced methods by earning a grade of 3.0 or better in EC821, EC822, EC823, EC911, or EC912. They must (4) demonstrate proficiency in a major field of study by passing a comprehensive examination ('field exam'), and (5) demonstrate proficiency in a minor field by earning a grade of 3.5 or better in one of the two minor field classes and a grade of 3.0 or better in a second minor field class of the same subject. They must also (6) complete two additional economics courses aside from courses satisfying field, core course, or advanced methods course requirements with a grade of 3.0 or better. The two courses must be chosen from the set of economics courses numbered in the range EC815 to EC925 (including EC992). There are three components constituting the research requirements: (7) a Spring Conference Research Paper, (8) enrollment in a department research seminar, and (9) presentation of a proposal for the dissertation. Finally, (10) the dissertation must be completed and successfully defended in an oral examination.

1. Guidance Committee and Dissertation Committee

Upon matriculation, the Director of Graduate Programs assigns each doctoral student a Chair of a guidance committee. The role of the chair of the guidance committee (and later the chair of the dissertation committee) goes beyond narrow research consultation. He or she serves as a mentor to the student in the student's training as a professional research economist (see also references listed in Section 17 of this document). As such, students are encouraged to communicate frequently with their chair concerning professional issues outside their dissertations. These include – but need not be limited to – issues concerning teaching, research integrity, professional service (e.g., conduct at conferences, when peer-reviewing others' works, etc.), as well as professional conduct in general. Ideally, this relationship can be extended beyond the students' time at MSU and continues into their professional careers.

As research interests crystallize, each student is responsible for shaping the composition of his or her committee. It is not uncommon for the student to replace the initial Chair of the committee as the student's interests evolve. The guidance committee must include at least two members by the time the student begins preparing for the Spring Conference, as approval for paper presentation at the Spring Conference (usually in a student's third year) requires two signatures from the student's guidance committee.

Each student is required to assemble their full guidance committee, and file a guidance committee report with the College of Social Science, by Nov. 1 of the fourth year or immediately subsequent to the presentation of the dissertation proposal, whichever comes first (see Section 10).

The guidance committee must have at least four members, four of whom must be tenure-line MSU faculty and three of whom must be from the department. The chair of the committee must be a regular member of the faculty of the department of economics. For the dissertation defense (Section 12), the Dean of the College of Social Science will appoint an outside representative. If one (MSU faculty) member of the guidance committee is from outside the department, this member may serve as the Dean's representative, at the Dean's discretion. It is recommended that each student select one MSU faculty member from outside the department to serve on the committee.

2. The Core Course Requirements

Students entering the Ph.D. program come from varied backgrounds both in terms of their academic preparation as well as their understanding of graduate work in economics. The first year of study in the program is used to establish a foundation from which students embark on their specific training in becoming Ph.D. economists. The complete sequence of core courses covers Microeconomic Theory (EC812A/B), Macroeconomic Theory (EC813A/B) and Econometrics (EC820A/B). These core courses are supplemented by instruction in Mathematical Methods, tied in with microeconomics in the Fall of the first year (EC811A), and taught in conjunction with macroeconomics in the Spring (EC811B). Students are required to satisfactorily complete EC 811A, EC 812A, EC 813A, EC 820A, EC 811B, EC 812B, EC 813B and EC 820B. These courses must be completed during the first year in the program. No substitutions are permitted and no courses are waived.

3. Qualifying Examinations

Students must earn a major pass on the Economics and Economic Methods Preliminary Examination before the start of their second year. This is a written examination covering the material contained in the core courses, as well as other material deemed necessary to commence further training at the Ph.D. level. The exam consists of four sections, two in microeconomics, and one each in macroeconomics and econometrics, each of which being given in a two-and-a-half hour block across two consecutive days.

The exam is administered in May and August. Any departmental faculty member may suggest questions for this examination. This exam may be taken at most two times.

The exams are graded by a committee of at least five faculty members. Committee decisions are by majority vote. The Director of Graduate Programs appoints each examination committee. The names of the committee members are announced at least one month before the scheduled date of the exams. It is generally not the case that all committee members have taught core course requirements, and the composition of the committee is changed in part between the May and the August exam dates.

Students may earn one of three grades on the Economics and Economic Methods Preliminary Examination. A grade of Major Pass is required for continuation in the doctoral program. A grade of Minor Pass is insufficient to continue in the doctoral program, but sufficient to satisfy the comprehensive examination requirement for the M.A. A grade of Fail is insufficient for either the M.A. or Ph.D.

The criteria for assigning grades are left to the discretion of the exam committee. Generally, a Major Pass is awarded to students who have demonstrated competency in all three areas covered by the exam **and** have excelled in at least one area. A Minor Pass is awarded to exams that show competency in all areas **or** demonstrate excellence in at least one area.

In the absence of unusual circumstances (such as serious illness), a failing grade shall be recorded for any student who does not sit for the Preliminary Examination.

In general, only doctoral students are eligible to sit for this exam.

Any student who does not receive a Major Pass on this exam before the start of his or her second year will be reclassified as an M.A. student if at least one Minor pass was awarded; otherwise students are dismissed from the graduate program.¹

4. Proficiency in Advanced Methods

Students are required to demonstrate proficiency in advanced methods by earning a grade of 3.0 or better in one of the following courses: EC821A, EC822A, or EC823, EC911, or EC912.

5. Major and Minor Fields

Students are required to demonstrate proficiency in at least one major and one minor field of study in economics. The major field must be declared before the beginning of the third semester in the program. Students demonstrate proficiency in a major field of study by meeting the requirements of the minor field and by also passing a comprehensive examination (called a 'field exam'). A student may not sit for the comprehensive examination in any one field more than twice. A student may not sit for more than four field exams in total. Students that fail a field exam are required to

- a. re-take the exam at the next possible date, or
- b. re-declare their major field without the possibility of taking this field exam again, but still having three more attempts in other fields.

Otherwise the student is considered to have failed that field and only has two remaining attempts at passing the comprehensive exam in a different major field. If a student re-declares a major field the field exam must be taken no later than the next time it is offered in the Spring. The overall time limitation given in point 11 below applies regardless of whether a student has used or been able to use all four attempts at that point.

Field exams are administered in May and August. Field exams are graded by field-specific committees, each consisting of three faculty. Committee decisions are by majority vote. The Director of Graduate Programs appoints the examination committee. The names of the committee members are announced at least one month before the scheduled date of each exam.

Field exams are graded on a pass/fail basis. The examining committee may choose, however, to award a distinguished pass to an exam that is truly outstanding.

Students demonstrate proficiency in a minor field by earning a grade of 3.5 or better in at least one of the two courses corresponding to the chosen field, and a grade of 3.0 or better in the other course. If a student chooses econometrics as a minor field, he or she must earn a grade of 3.0 or better in courses EC820A and EC820B. In addition, the student must earn at least a 3.0 in three of the following courses: EC821A, EC822A, EC821B, EC822B, and EC823 with one grade of 3.5 or better. (One of these courses will satisfy the Advanced Methods requirement described in Section 4). Students majoring in econometrics must take EC821A and EC822A as part of the three course requirement. Students are not allowed to take more than two econometrics courses in a semester. The econometrics field exam is based on the first-year courses and the material in EC821A and EC822A.

¹ For purposes of these standards, exam grades are considered to be earned on the date on which the exam is taken regardless of when the grades are actually reported.

If a student chooses advanced theory as a minor field, he or she must, in consultation with the main advisor and graduate director take one additional theory relevant course beyond EC911 and EC912 (i.e. a course in advanced mathematics). The student selecting advanced theory as a major or minor field must earn a grade of 3.0 or better in EC911, EC912, and in the approved third course and attain a grade of 3.5 or better in either EC911 or EC912.

With the approval of his or her guidance committee and the graduate director, a student may choose an area outside of economics (such as Agricultural Economics or Finance) or may choose a non-standard combination of courses within economics as a minor field.

For a listing of fields offered through the Economics Department, and pre-approved minor fields offered elsewhere in the university, see <http://www.msu.edu/~ec/academic/graduate.htm#fields>.

6. Additional Course Requirements: Breadth Requirements

Students are required to satisfactorily complete two additional economics courses aside from courses in the student's major or minor fields, core courses, or course requirements. The two courses must be chosen from the set of economics courses numbered in range EC815 to EC925 (including EC992). Students must attain a grade of 3.0 or better in these courses.

7. Grade Requirements

Students are required to maintain a minimum grade point average of 3.0, and may not accumulate more than two courses with grades below 3.0. Failure to adhere to the latter requirement will result in dismissal from the program. Failure to adhere to the former requirement will result in dismissal from the program if the deficiency is not overcome after one semester.

8. Research Requirements

8.1 - Spring Conference Research Paper

The Spring Conference is offered by the department of economics as a forum for the presentation of student research. A student may not present their research at this conference without prior written approval from the chair and one other member of his or her guidance committee certifying that the paper is acceptable.

Students are required to write a research paper and to present it at the Spring Conference in their third year of study. If this research paper is completed prior to the third year of study, it can be presented at any Spring Conference (in the first or second year) as long as it is approved by the chair and one other member of his or her guidance committee.

It is expected that this paper will be an outgrowth of papers or research done in field courses. It must have an original research component that goes beyond a review of the literature in an area. In order to be acceptable, the research paper must present an original research idea and conform to professional standards of evidence and argument. The paper should be sufficiently well developed to convince the guidance committee that, with further work, it would result in a publishable-quality paper.

The Spring conference is organized by a committee of graduate students and is usually held in April.

8.2 - Departmental Research Seminar

Students are required to participate in one of the Department Research Seminars (EC950). Students cannot fulfill this requirement until the academic year in which they present their dissertation proposal, which is typically the fourth year. They must attend throughout the year and present a paper; the paper cannot be presented until the dissertation proposal has been approved. Students must earn a grade of 3.0 or better in the seminar.

8.3 - Dissertation Proposal Presentation – Committee Composition

Before the actual writing of the dissertation, students are required to prepare a written proposal outlining the intended research program. The proposal must be approved, in writing, by the guidance committee, following a satisfactory presentation of the proposal to all committee members and interested members of the department. The proposal presentation must be scheduled with at least one full week notice. Ideally, the student's ultimate dissertation topic will be an outgrowth of the Spring Conference paper.

Approval by the guidance committee will be contingent on the written proposal and its presentation convincing the committee that the student has identified a legitimate dissertation topic. In order to schedule a presentation a student must provide the approving signatures of *at least three* committee members. The dissertation proposal is considered approved after a successful presentation and *at least four* regular MSU faculty members, three or more of whom are from the department have approved and signed the requisite forms. These faculty members are the student's complete dissertation committee. The composition of the committee must be approved by the chair of the department, who may recommend up to one addition to the committee in order to ensure uniform standards across the department. Subsequent changes to the composition of the committee must be approved in writing and the department chair, the College, and the Graduate School must be informed of these changes.

The student will also have completed a sufficient amount of work to demonstrate that the research will lead to a successful dissertation. One way this can be demonstrated is by including in the proposal at least one core paper or chapter. Additionally, a detailed discussion of the direction in which the research will be expanded to complete the dissertation should be included. The proposal must represent substantial progress beyond the research paper presented at the Spring Conference. The proposal may either extend that paper from the conference or pursue a different line of research.

With the advice and consent of the director of graduate programs students may alter the composition of their committees even against the advice of individual members of the committee. Should an adversarial relationship develop between members of the committee and the student, students are urged to consult with program administrators. Should the adversarial relationship extend to the director of graduate programs and/or to the department chair, students are urged to seek advocacy through the department's graduate instruction committee or at the college level or in the graduate school.

8.4 - Additional Research Presentations

The research presentation requirements listed in Sections 8, 9, and 10 constitute the required minimum for all students. However, it is expected that students attend seminars, departmental presentations, brown bag and other informal research discussions throughout their careers as graduate students. Moreover, students are encouraged and expected to make use of these fora to gain experience at presenting and to get feedback for their own research. Finally, whenever possible, the department gives financial support to students who present their work at professional conferences. Financial assistance is also available from the College and the Graduate School (<http://www.msu.edu/user/gradschl/>).

8.5 - Dissertation

Students are required to write an acceptable dissertation containing a contribution to knowledge, conforming to professional standards of evidence and argument and presented in clear and correct language.

After completion, the dissertation must be successfully defended in an oral examination. Students must provide all members of the guidance committee and the graduate secretary a complete draft of their dissertation no later than **one month** before the scheduled date of the oral examination. The dissertation must be approved by at least a $\frac{3}{4}$ vote; with no more than one dissenting vote.

At least one bound copy of the dissertation is to be provided to the department after successfully defending the dissertation. These are kept on file and may be accessed by graduate students and faculty members.

8.6 - Research Involving Human Subjects

Any research involving human subjects must adhere to strictly accepted guidelines and must be cleared with the department and the University *prior to* any research involving human subjects having begun. To this end you must consult the University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (UCRIHS) at http://www.humanresearch.msu.edu/regs/regs_index.htm.

9. Job Market

The job search process for students starts in the Spring, a full year-and-a-half prior to when the anticipated job is to begin. Students begin by preparing a writing sample and vita in the summer the year before they formally enter the job market. Thereafter applications, largely consisting of a working paper, statement of purpose, letters of recommendation, and vita, are completed to be sent in October of the year preceding their degree completion.

The Allied Social Science Association (ASSA) has its annual meeting in the first week of January of every year. This meeting doubles as the forum for initial interviews of job market candidates for the majority of position openings (including, incidentally, many foreign employment opportunities). Candidates are invited to interview with prospective employers on the basis of the applications sent out the previous October.

The top interviews are frequently followed up with so-called fly-outs – on-site, e.g., campus, visits, hopefully resulting in job offers for the following Fall.

Students are prepared for the job market in a string of meetings. While initial meetings may be open to all who are considering entering the job market, the subsequent meetings require that the students have their committee's assent and a prognosis of being able to complete their degree in the spring or the summer of the following year. The placement director (often the DGP) conducts these meetings, covering both the logistical aspects of the job market as well as content concerning vitae, statements of purpose, dissertation abstracts and the like.

10. Good Progress

Only students making good progress are eligible for departmental support. A student is making good progress as of the beginning of the *second year* if he or she:

Earns a Major Pass on the Economics and Economic Methods Preliminary Examination by June 1st of his or her first year. Completes all core courses in the first year of the program.

A student is making good progress at the beginning of the *third year* if he or she:

Demonstrates proficiency in Advanced Methods by the first day of the Fall semester of his or her third year.

Completes his or her minor and major field requirements, including passing the comprehensive exam in the major field by June 1st of his or her second year; unless the relevant courses are not offered, in which case one field (but not both) can be postponed until the following year.

A student is making good progress at the beginning of the *fourth year* if he or she:

Completes his or her minor field, passes a comprehensive examination in a major field, and presents an approved research paper at the Spring Conference by June 1st of his or her third year.

A student is making good progress at the beginning of the *second semester of the fourth year* if he or she:

Presents an acceptable dissertation proposal no later than October 31st of the fall semester of his or her fourth year.

Students that have not met their minor or major field requirements by the beginning of their 6th year, or have not passed their dissertation proposals by the beginning of their 7th year in the program will be terminated from the program. In any event, the graduate school requires students to complete their degrees within 8 years.

The progress of every student is monitored every year by the director of the graduate program to ensure that students adhere to the program requirements. Students found to be behind are notified in writing and may be requested to follow up in person. Students may request that the results of these reviews be made available to them in writing and that they be included in their academic files.

Students are entitled to review their academic file in the presence of the graduate director within one week's time upon submitting a written request to do so. In general, any understanding or agreement reached between the student and the department, or the department's representatives (e.g., concerning funding arrangements, course waivers, waiver's of program requirements, or anything else that is considered binding) must be included in the student's file in writing (a print-out of an email suffices). Students may challenge contents of the academic file and discuss potential differing interpretations or discrepancies with the graduate director and the graduate secretary. Should a resolution not take place to the satisfaction of the student, the student is entitled to add a written protest to his or her file stating any remaining concerns. Conflicts not resolved, can be further pursued as described in Section 16 of this handbook.

11. Academic Integrity

All students are expected to adhere to the highest standards of academic integrity in their roles as students, researchers, and teachers. Students are expected to be familiar with the basic standards as contained in the *Guidelines for Integrity in Research and Creative Activities* (available at <http://www.msu.edu/user/gradschl/all/ris04activities.pdf>).

Students are urged to consult with faculty concerning any doubts about the standard of academic integrity.

Students who are found to have willfully engaged in an act of scholastic dishonesty in any of their courses are assigned a grade of 0.0 in that course. In addition, the instructor of the course may request that the student be dismissed from the program. Such a request is acted on by the graduate instruction committee and decided by majority vote after having heard the student.

Students who are found to have willfully engaged in an act of scholastic dishonesty in the course of their dissertation research are dismissed from the program, unless the work in question has not been disseminated in any way (presented at conferences or published) and there is demonstrated *active* regret on part of the student (i.e., the student was in the process of correcting the act and/or notified his or her committee chair of the offense prior to having been detected and confronted). If the act is ascertained after the dissertation defense has been completed, steps are initiated in order to have the degree revoked.

12. Flexibility

In order to accommodate students with special circumstances, the Director of Graduate Programs may, with the consent of the Graduate Instruction Committee, adapt the course requirements and schedule of good progress to suit the particular circumstances. Examples of students with special circumstances include, but are not limited to:

- a) students who are unable to enroll for the normal first-year courses because of a language deficiency;
- b) students who are advised by the Director of Graduate Programs to undertake preparatory work in math or statistics prior to beginning the normal first-year courses;
- c) students who are trying to obtain a joint degree with another department; and
- d) students who transfer from other programs and have significant prior coursework.

The Director of Graduate Programs and Graduate Instruction Committee shall enforce the requirements of the doctoral program, while occasionally adapting them to individual circumstances. But under no circumstances is a student permitted more than two attempts to pass the Economic Methods Preliminary Examination, or to substitute a comprehensive examination in a field outside of economics for a comprehensive exam in economics.

In no case will a student be eligible for consideration under the guidelines for semester-to-semester funding until after he or she has passed the Economics and Economic Methods Preliminary Examination.

Students may petition the Director of Graduate Programs for a leave of absence in order to fulfill obligations unrelated to their academic progress. Examples of such obligations include military service, financial distress, health-related issues, and family obligations. Leaves may also be granted for students whose scholarly activity requires their absence from the University. Examples include research or teaching abroad. Leaves of absence will stop the clock on good progress, subject to the approval of the Director of Graduate Programs. For example, a student taking a leave of absence at the end of his or her second year will be treated upon his or her return as if he or she was just starting his or her third year.

Any deviations from the standard program rules must ultimately be requested in writing by the student and must be approved by the director of graduate programs in writing. A copy of this correspondence is placed in the student's academic file for future reference.

13. Typical Ph.D. Program

Year 1, fall semester:

EC 811A
EC 812A
EC 813A
EC 820A
(11 credits)

Year 1, spring semester:

EC 811B
EC 812B
EC 813B
EC 820B
(11 credits)

Year 2:

Field 1 (2 courses)
Field 2 (2 courses)
EC 821, EC 822, EC 823, EC 911, or EC 912 (Advanced Methods)
Additional economics course
(9 credits each semester)

Year 3:

Additional economics course, and field 2 if not offered in year 1
EC 999 (fill in remaining credits)
(9 credits each semester)

Year 4:

Departmental Research Seminar (EC 950)
EC 999 (fill in remaining credits)
(9 credits each semester)

Year 5:

Dissertation Completion and Job Market

Note: A minimum of 24 credits of EC 999 must be taken.

14. Funding

The general eligibility requirement to obtain funding as a Ph.D. student in the department is that the student is in good standing, as outlined in Section 13. Moreover, as most department funding is obtained through appointments as teaching assistants, potential candidates must have passed the University English language proficiency requirements, currently fixed at scoring a 50 or higher on the SPEAK test. All appointments as teaching assistants are in accordance with the contract agreements between the University and the Graduate Employment Union, which are contained in the MSU/GEU Contract (<http://grad.msu.edu/geu/agree.pdf>).

The department tries to fund as many students as possible, however students are strongly encouraged to seek outside funding for their studies. Indeed, if a student defers funding that he or she would have obtained from the department in one of their first four years, the student will receive preferential treatment for funding in their fifth year of study – which should regularly result in funding being provided in the fifth year of study. Students should clear such shift of funding with the program director in writing beforehand.

15. Applicability of Program Rules

The rules laid out in this document are binding in full upon students entering the program in Fall 2002 or later. For students entering the program earlier, the rules laid out in earlier versions of this document apply. However, some of the rules laid out in this document apply to Ph.D. students already in the program, as follows:

- a) The rules for the formation of a guidance committee and the filing of a guidance committee report (Section 2) apply to all students entering the program in Fall 1999 or later. Students who entered before that date should form a guidance committee and file a guidance committee report immediately.
- b) Enrollment in a department research seminar (Section 9) is required of all students entering the program in Fall 2000 or later.

16. Conflict Resolution

The University has established a judicial structure and process for hearing and adjudicating alleged violations of recognized graduate student rights and responsibilities (see Article 5 of the Graduate Student Rights and Responsibilities handbook of the Graduate School). However, the first venue to resolve such conflicts informally or formally rests with the department.

Students that find themselves in conflict with other students, course instructors, or committee members are advised to seek guidance and support from their committee chair or from the director of graduate programs. For disputes or grievances involving committee chairs or the director of graduate programs, students are advised to seek council through the department chair or the graduate instruction committee (see also Section 10).

17. University Resources

You will find regularly updated additional information at the websites for the Department (<http://econ.msu.edu/>), the College (<http://www.socialscience.msu.edu/>), the Graduate School (<http://www.msu.edu/user/gradschl/>), and the University (<http://www.msu.edu/>). Moreover, some specific resources referenced in this handbook are also available at the following locations:

- *Academic Programs* - <http://www.reg.msu.edu/ucc/ucc.asp>
- *Graduate Students Rights and Responsibilities (GSRR)* - <http://www.vps.msu.edu/SpLife/default.pdf>
- *MSU/GEU Contract* - <http://grad.msu.edu/geu/agree.pdf>
- *Guidelines for Graduate Student Advising and Mentoring Relationships* - <http://grad.msu.edu/staff/mentoreport.pdf>
- *Guidelines for Integrity in Research and Creative Activities* - <http://www.msu.edu/user/gradschl/all/ris04activities.pdf>

Finally, we encourage you to contact the director of graduate programs at ecgrdsec@msu.edu for any additional questions you may have. We are happy to assist you in your time here at Michigan State University both on and off campus.