

The Doctor of Philosophy Degree (PhD)

The Doctor of Philosophy degree is awarded to candidates who provide evidence of high scholastic attainment and research ability in their major field. Specific degree requirements are administered by a committee in charge of the degree program. It is the responsibility of the chair of this committee to certify to the College of Science the completion of each requirement for each candidate.

Residence Requirement

A PhD student must spend the equivalent of at least one academic year in residence at Northeastern University as a full-time graduate student. The committee of each degree program specifies the method by which the residence requirement is satisfied.

Qualifying Exam

In programs where a qualifying exam is required, students must complete this requirement within the time limit set by the program of study.

Comprehensive Examination

Degree programs may require a comprehensive examination. Generally, students are expected to complete all of the required degree coursework prior to taking the comprehensive examination. Students must complete this requirement within the time limit set by the program of study, usually within one term of completing the required coursework.

Doctoral Degree Candidacy

PhD degree candidacy is established when students have completed all departmental and university requirements for candidacy. These requirements vary by department and include completing the minimum number of graduate semester hours required of doctoral students by the department (this may include an earned master's degree accepted by the department) and passing a qualifying examination and/or a comprehensive examination. Once students reach doctoral degree candidacy they will be certified, in writing, by the college. Registration in coursework is not permitted once a student reaches candidacy.

Continuity of Registration

For each of the first two semesters that a doctoral candidate has established candidacy, the student must register for Dissertation. For each semester beyond the two Dissertation registrations, the student must register for Doctoral Dissertation Continuation until the dissertation is approved by the College of Science. During the terms when a student is registered for Doctoral Dissertation or Dissertation Continuation, coursework is not permitted as the course requirements for the degree have already been met. If the academic program requires enrollment in seminars or courses in addition to Dissertation or Dissertation Continuation, the department's graduate director will make a recommendation to the College of Science for approval. Approval must happen prior to registration. Students must be registered for Dissertation or Dissertation Continuation during the semester in which they take the final oral examination (including the full summer semester if that is when defense occurs). Any student who does not attend Northeastern for a period of one year may be required to apply for readmission. A student who does not enroll for a period of three semesters, or one year, will be required to apply for readmission. Readmission is done via Slate. A student who does not enroll for a period of two semesters, or less than one year, may petition their department for reactivation. If the department is supportive, the student will be required to submit a written request to the departmental graduate committee. If the graduate committee feels the student is worthy of reactivation, the student's written request must be submitted to Graduate Student Services. Please note that college admissions deadlines apply to requests for readmission and reactivation.

Dissertation

The dissertation committee shall have at least three faculty members, two of whom shall be from Northeastern. The chair of the dissertation committee (who is presumed to be the thesis advisor) will be a full-time tenured or tenure-track member of the faculty of Northeastern and will hold a PhD (or other research doctorate) or an appropriate terminal degree for the discipline. Exceptions to this policy will be considered and, if appropriate, approved by the provost or their designee. Colleges may permit full-time faculty from other ranks to serve in this role based on the research qualifications and experience of individual faculty members.

The PhD committee should be appointed early enough to advise in the formulation of the student's program and in refining the research topic for the dissertation. Within the constraints of the above criteria, the PhD program faculty will determine the process by which dissertation committees are established. The final list of dissertation committee members shall be reported to the college's associate dean for graduate education or unit managing the degree program.

If a student's major advisor leaves Northeastern (including transition to emeritus status), that person may continue the research direction of the dissertation or thesis. However, a co-advisor must be appointed from the academic department or program. The student will then have two advisors, one an official member of the Northeastern faculty who will be available for research and administrative matters and the ex-Northeastern advisor. If a new major advisor is appointed, the former Northeastern faculty member may serve as an outside member of the committee.

Final Oral Examination

An oral defense of the dissertation is required and must be held at least 14 calendar days before the degree conferral date. The defense shall be conducted with the committee members present either in person or via electronic means. In the case where neither the candidate nor the committee members are present in person on campus (i.e., the candidate and all committee members are connected only remotely via electronic means),

there shall be a location established and technology enabled for public, in-person attendance of the defense by the university community and this accommodation made known to the university.

Interdisciplinary Doctoral Programs

Some graduate students may wish to pursue doctoral programs that involve substantial work in two or more departments. To meet this need, an interdisciplinary program may be established that corresponds in scope and depth to doctoral standards but does not agree exactly with the individual departmental regulations. Consult this graduate catalog for policies and guidelines pertaining to this doctoral option.