

USC PhD Program Handbook

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I. Introduction

Introduction to the Marshall School of Business Ph.D. Program

The goal of the Marshall School of Business Ph.D. Program is to bring in the brightest and most motivated students, engage them in the research and learning process, and challenge them intellectually so that they may become productive, scholarly researchers and outstanding educators. We strive to place our students at the top research universities in the world upon completion of the Ph.D. degree. To achieve this goal, interaction in the research process with faculty is crucial. Hence, we also seek to create a culture of creativity, free exchange of ideas, and lifelong relationships.

In addition to this handbook, students can find more information about the PhD Program and PhD Program Community at [PHD - Home](#)

Introduction to the Graduate School

The mission of the USC Graduate School is to provide a distinguished educational experience at the graduate level for an outstanding and diverse student body, to support and celebrate graduate student achievements, and to lead in establishing and communicating policies, standards, and processes related to graduate education.

Purposes of the PhD Program Handbook

Graduate student success is the result of a collaborative effort among students working at their highest levels, faculty dedicated to high-quality mentorship, and staff who coordinate and advise. One of the most important ingredients in this cooperative effort is a shared understanding about what is required and what resources and supports are available.

This document serves as a roadmap for PhD students. It offers a review of expectations for students and for the faculty and administrative staff who support them. The handbook provides three types of information: 1) guidance on program requirements, including university and departmental policies, resources, and expectations; 2) practical advice for common challenges at USC; and 3) information about relevant support services and professional development opportunities.

We hope that the handbook serves as a valuable resource for PhD success, providing students with the information to complete their programs while maintaining academic momentum and personal well-being.

The handbook includes policies and practices noted in the university's catalogue, collective bargaining agreement, and other sources. It does not fully address the terms of the collective bargaining agreement, which is available for your reference on the Graduate School's [website](#).

The PhD at USC

The Doctor of Philosophy at USC is a full-time program. It is a rigorous course of study that requires original research, professional maturity, sustained intellectual focus, and academic discipline. Students are expected to devote full-time study to this degree and not undertake employment or other time-consuming commitments during the academic year, from the end of August through mid-May.

Marshall PhDs are not required to enroll in the academic coursework for the summer. They are expected to register for GRSC 802.

II. Curriculum and Program Milestones

Marshall School of Business Ph.D. Program Curriculum Overview

Program Overview

Year One: Take Core & Elective Coursework

- Meeting with your PhD Coordinator and/or your faculty advisor
- Taking courses as needed and determined by your department
- Working on and learning about research via courses and other research-based interactions
- Attending departmental seminars and colloquiums (including seminars)
- Understanding the procedures and processes governing the departmental screening exam or summer paper

Year Two: Continue Coursework & Begin Research

- Taking courses as needed and determined by your departments
- Working on research with faculty and other PhD students
- Attending departmental seminars and colloquium (including seminars)
- Forming a Qualifying Examination committee
- Understanding procedures and policies for the qualifying exam
- Take BUCO 637 - typically offered towards the end of summer before 3rd year. This course is required for all Marshall PhD students and must be taken before you serve in a TA/AL role.

Year Three: Take Your Qualifying Exams

- Take your Qualifying Exams
- Working on your Dissertation Research/Proposal
- Attending departmental seminars and colloquium (including recruiting seminars)
- Attending (and ideally presenting research papers at) top academic conferences
- Working with faculty on co-authored research papers targeted to major academic journals
- Fulfilling the TA requirement (two sections in one semester) and serving as a Research Assistant for the other

Year Four: Work on the Dissertation

- Making substantial progress on the dissertation and defending the Dissertation Proposal (if not yet defended—see year 3 for more details)
- Working on research projects targeted for submission to major academic journal
- Attending departmental seminars and colloquium (including recruiting seminars)
- Attending and presenting papers at top academic conferences

- Satisfying any outstanding requirements
- Satisfying the one-course teaching (Assistant Lecturer) requirement
- Preparing for the academic job market and holding a dissertation seminar
- Serving as a Research Assistant for two semesters (if the TA and Assistant Lecture assignments have already been completed) or serving as a Research Assistant for one semester (if only one of the TA and Assistant Lecture assignments have been completed). If the student has not completed either TA or Assistant Lecture assignments, they will not serve as a Research Assistant in either semester.

Year Five

- Completing the Dissertation
- Completing any outstanding requirements
- Submitting papers to top academic journals
- Attending departmental seminars and colloquia (including recruiting seminars)
- Securing a job at a top research university

Coursework

The majority of coursework is taken (credits are earned) during the first two years of the program. After passing the qualifying exam in year 3, students take GSBA 794, Doctoral Dissertation, each fall and spring until graduation. Students may take additional course work if needed to meet the unit requirement or if advised to do so. Ph.D. students without a prior graduate level degree are required to earn 60 units of coursework to graduate.

Each student's course registration must be approved by the student's Faculty advisor/Faculty Ph.D. Coordinator each semester.

By the end of the second year, a Ph.D. student must have successfully completed at least:

- One course in microeconomics or behavioral science
- One course in statistics or programming
- One course in research design
- BUCO 637 (during the 2nd year summer semester)
- Any additional courses which are required by their department

Note: The specific courses that satisfy the first 3 requirements are determined by the Ph.D. Committee in the student's home department. Please see Appendix for program-specific requirements.

- Any other courses recommended by their Faculty Advisor and Qualifying Examination committee in preparing for the qualifying exams. Students must select sufficient additional courses to complete the background requirements for their fields of specialization and to fulfill the full-time (minimum six units per semester) course requirement.

- In addition, each student's course registration (program of study) must be approved by the student's Qualifying Examination committee chair each semester.
- While taking courses outside of Marshall School of Business is allowed with your chair's approval, pursuing a secondary degree in another school is prohibited. We expect you to devote your full academic progress toward your Ph.D. degree in Business Administration. If there is a compelling reason why the secondary degree will be helpful toward your satisfactory performance and progress in the Marshall Ph.D. Program, you can submit a request prior to taking 3 courses and applying to the secondary degree in another school and your request will be reviewed on case-by-case. Such request should be submitted to the Marshall Ph.D. Program office. If the pursue of the secondary degree is granted and approved by the department and Associate Dean, the student may continue taking courses toward that degree. However, the tuition for the courses applied to the secondary degree will not be covered by the Marshall Ph.D. program. Marshall Ph.D. program will only pay for the courses that are applied to the Marshall Ph.D. Degree. No Exceptions.
- BUCO 637: Communication for Doctoral Students: Succeeding as a Teacher (1 unit)
Second year students must register and attend BUCO 637 conducted by Marshall Business Communication during the summer at the end of their second year. It is designed to prepare the students for teaching assistantship duties and the teaching assignment. Attendance is mandatory and ALL Marshall Ph.D. students must receive credit for the course in order to graduate. TA assignments and teaching assignments will be postponed until completion of the BUCO 637. This course is mandatory per university requirements.
- ALI Coursework: Many international students are from countries where English is not spoken as a native language. The American Language Institute (ALI) provides classes and other resources to assist international undergraduate and graduate students in improving their English and adapting to an American university program. Before students can be cleared to begin teaching at USC, all international Teaching Assistants are required to take part in a training program run by ALI.
- The Marshall School of Business PhD Program will not pay for any courses that are not directly related to the PhD degree (e.g., physical education, music, foreign languages, etc.).

Screening Exam

The department or program will administer a screening examination or other procedure designated by the department or program before the student completes 24 units. Students must pass this procedure to continue in the PhD program. If students fail the screening procedure, they will be dismissed from the PhD program without a written warning. Students who fail the screening examination are entitled to appeal pursuant to the Academic Dismissal Appeal procedure set forth in Section III of this Handbook.

- Students are directed to check with the Ph.D. Coordinator in their Department as soon as possible to learn the nature of the screening exam or procedure and when it is given.
- The evaluation results, coupled with feedback on the student's first year performance in classes, assessments of oral and written communication skills, faculty advisor assessment and any other data deemed pertinent by the department is used by the Ph.D. Committee and any other faculty who have a basis for judging student performance to judge whether the student's performance merits continuation in the Ph.D. program.
- Students who have not performed satisfactorily may have their funding discontinued and be dropped from the program.
- The first year evaluation is normally completed and results communicated to students after the screening exam has been graded.
- Students should meet with their advisor, Ph.D. Faculty Coordinator in their department, and the faculty with whom they have had interaction following the conclusion of the first year evaluation.

Students should strive to obtain constructive feedback on areas of strength, weaknesses and steps for development.

See Appendix for program specific screening exam requirements.

Qualifying Exam

The qualifying examination is designed to assess a student's readiness to undertake independent research for their dissertation. It is comprehensive and includes both written and oral parts.

Before taking the qualifying examination, the student must have met all of the university's and program's requirements for the PhD degree, except the dissertation. The student must have a GPA of at least 3.0 on all USC coursework available for graduate credit and the approval of their qualifying exam committee to proceed to the exam.

Intensive study for the qualifying exams is one of the most important learning experiences for the Ph.D. students. Such study begins during the 2nd year and proceeds until the student has finished classes at the end of the spring semester of the 2nd year. Written and oral portions of the qualifying examination are required of, and must be passed by, each student. After successful completion of the qualifying exams, the student is admitted to candidacy.

In addition to the university requirements list above, Marshall School of Business requires that qualifying exam can only be taken if students:

- Have satisfied all of the coursework and other requirements set by the department, the Marshall School and the University
- Have taken at least 24 units in residency and applicable toward the Ph.D. degree
- In residence: in the Los Angeles Area
- Have an Appointment of Committee form on file with the Ph.D. Program.
- The above forms must be completed one semester before the exam and submitted to the Ph.D. Program office no less than 30 days before the exam
- The qualifying exam (both portions) must be taken in the semester for which permission is granted
- Both portions of the qualifying exam must be completed within 60 days, during the semester for which permission is granted
- Each department may have a different format and procedure for the Qualifying Exam.

Please also see Appendix for department-specific practices.

Since different departments offer different processes and formats for their qualifying exam, students should become aware of their department's process and format during the first semester of the second year and should plan their study accordingly. Students are responsible for scheduling the dates for both the written and oral components of the exam.

If not otherwise enrolled in six units, a student must enroll in a GRSC 800abz *Studies for the Qualifying Examination* course during the semester in which they take the qualifying examination. Students are allowed to enroll in the GRSC 800abz courses a maximum of three times, first in GRSC 800a, followed by GRSC 800b, and, only if necessary, GRSC 800z.

Because two semesters of preparation for the qualifying examination should be sufficient, students enrolling in GRSC 800z must obtain a D-clearance from the Graduate School. In addition, the student will

receive a warning letter from their program outlining academic expectations and a path toward completing the PhD in a timely manner.

If the student's written examination is satisfactory, the student may proceed to the oral portion of the exam. The student must complete the oral portion within 60 days of submitting the completed written portion to the qualifying exam committee. If additional material is to be covered in the oral portion, the committee should notify the student of the content expectations in advance.

See the table below for a comparison of the Departmental Screening Exam and Qualifying Exam

Departmental Screening Exam vs. Qualifying Exam

	Screening Exam	Qualifying Exam
Who administers the exam?	The screening exam is administered at the discretion of the department.	The appointed committee with the approval of the Marshall Ph.D. Program.
Who is in this category?	Usually First and Second Year Ph.D. Students (dependent on department policy)	Third Year Ph.D. Students
Do you need to select committee members?	No	Yes. At the start of their second year, students are expected to identify a qualifying exam Chair and work with their Chair to identify four other committee members. Once identified, students will submit their Appointment of Qualifying Exam Committee Form no less than 30 days before their exam date.
Residency and Units Requirement	-	A minimum of 24 units must be completed at USC and student must be in residence in the Los Angeles area.
GPA requirement	Minimum 3.0 GPA	Minimum 3.0 GPA
Coursework	Student must have satisfied coursework and other requirements set by the department.	Student must have satisfied all coursework and other requirements set by the department, the Marshall Ph.D. Program and the University.
When should I take the exam?	Screening exams are administered by the department at the end of the student's first year at the discretion of the department. Some departments may administer a second year screening exam as well.	All students (except FBE) are expected to have completed their qualifying exams by January 1 st of their third year. FBE students are expected to have completed their qualifying exams by spring semester of their third year.

Qualifying Exam Committee

The qualifying exam committee is responsible for supervising the student's preparation for the exam and for the fair and timely administration and evaluation of the written and oral parts of the examination.

The qualifying exam committee is composed of five members. The committee chair and at least two additional members must have an appointment in the student's program.

The *Appointment or Change of Qualifying Exam or Dissertation Committee* form, available on the [Graduate School website](#), establishes the committee for the qualifying exam. The form requires the signatures of each committee member, the department chair or program director, the dean or the dean's designee.

Each student should first work with the Ph.D. Coordinator in his/her department (ideally in the first semester of the second year) to identify a tenured/tenure-track faculty member who will serve as the Chair.

The role of the Chair is to:

- See that the student is on track with their program of study and has taken courses relevant to their program of study.
- Help the student identify other members to include in the Qualifying Examination committee.
- Make sure that students understand the nature of the department's Qualifying Exam.
- Evaluate what steps the student has taken to address specific weaknesses and make further recommendations for improvement.

During the first part of the second year, students should work with their qualifying exam committee Chair to select a qualifying exam committee. This committee is responsible to the University for determining whether the student qualifies for the Ph.D. degree candidacy. Students select the members of the Qualifying Examination Committee. The Qualifying Examination Committee is not assigned to the student. Hence, the responsibility of asking faculty members to serve on the committee rests with the student. However, the student's decision on an appropriate Qualifying Examination committee should strongly consider any input provided by the Ph.D. Coordinator and the Qualifying Examination Committee chair regarding appropriate members.

Students should talk to members of the committee to seek help on their research, discuss problems, and solicit advice about developing an individualized program. Faculty members on the qualifying exam committee are important and valuable resources for the student during the middle part of the Ph.D. Program. The committee directs the student's program of studies in the second year, recommends proper preparation for the qualifying exam, and administers and grades the written and oral portions of the qualifying exam.

- The Qualifying Examination committee should be established at least two semesters prior to taking the qualifying examination— hence in the beginning of the fall semester during third year or 30 days in advance. The form should be on file with the Marshall Ph.D. Program office.
- The Qualifying Examination committee consists of five faculty members.
 - At least three members must be from the student's home department.
 - At least one member must be a tenured faculty member in the student's home department.
 - All should be tenure-track/tenured faculty from Ph.D. granting departments

- At least one outside member is required: the outside member can be from the Marshall School of Business outside of the student's home department or outside the Marshall School of Business within USC.
- The committee may also include a faculty member from an institution other than USC, called an external member.

The appointment of committee form is also available as a DocuSign form at [this link](#).

For additional information on graduate school policies and procedures, please see [this website](#).

Changes in Qualifying Exam Committees

The *Appointment or Change of Qualifying Exam or Dissertation Committee* form, available on the [Graduate School website](#), must be completed whenever there is a change to a qualifying exam committee.

Changes to the qualifying exam committee must be made well in advance of the qualifying examination. Informal substitutions for the qualifying examination's written or oral parts are not permitted. Changes in a qualifying exam committee are not permitted between the written and oral portions of the examination. Modifications made without the prior approval of the dean of the degree program are not recognized and may invalidate the examination.

The examinations must be scheduled when it is possible for all committee members, including the outside member, to participate. All qualifying exam committee members may participate remotely.

A student may not change committee members after failing the qualifying examination the first time. The same faculty must reexamine the student on the same subject matter. If a faculty member is unable to serve on the committee, the dean of the degree program must be notified in writing in advance of the rescheduled exam to approve the change. The faculty replacement must be approved by the dean of the degree program, and the student must file a change of committee form well in advance of the exam.

Outcomes of the Qualifying Exam

There are three possible results of a qualifying exam:

- Pass, and proceed to candidacy based on a favorable vote by a majority of committee members.
- Fail, with the option to retake either specific sections of the exam or the whole exam, at the discretion of a majority of the committee. The student should not be required to repeat parts of the qualifying examination passed on the first administration. The retaking of a failed qualifying examination or any portion of a qualifying exam must occur between one and six months from the date of the first examination. If not otherwise enrolled, the student must be enrolled in GRSC 800abz *Studies for the Qualifying Examination* in the term in which any portion of the exam is repeated.
- Fail, resulting in dismissal from the program. If a majority of the committee concludes that the written portion of the exam is so weak that the oral portion cannot compensate for it, the student does not proceed to the oral portion, and the exam is failed. The committee may provide the option of a retake, but is not required to do so. If a majority of the committee determines that a retake is not warranted, the student will be dismissed from the program.

A student may not take the comprehensive or qualifying examination more than twice and must be appropriately enrolled at USC during the semester in which any such examination is taken or retaken. A student who fails the qualifying examination a second time will be dismissed from the degree program at the end of the semester in which the second examination was taken. No exceptions are permitted.

Report on the PhD Qualifying Exam

Upon the successful conclusion of the qualifying exam, the committee will certify on the *Report on the PhD Qualifying Examination* that: (1) the exam was appropriately rigorous; (2) the student's performance on the exam was at the doctoral level; and (3) the entire qualifying examination process was fair and in keeping with USC's academic and ethical standards. The *Report on the PhD Qualifying Examination* is available to graduate advisers on the Graduate School website in myGradSchool.

Advancement to Candidacy

Graduate students are officially advanced to candidacy for the PhD degree when they have completed the residency requirement and passed the written and oral portions of the PhD qualifying examination.

Application for the PhD

After advancing to candidacy, students must contact their academic department or program to initiate an online degree check that will be transmitted to the Degree Progress Department. Degree Progress counselors will prepare a Degree Audit Report (STARS Report) listing any remaining requirements. Programs must apply all appropriate courses in the Student Information System for the degree to be conferred.

Proposal Defense

Each student is expected to make substantial progress on the dissertation proposal during the third year.

Students are expected to begin work on their dissertation proposal immediately after they have passed their qualifying exam. Students may find it helpful to look at proposals of students who have previously passed their dissertation proposal defense to understand the structure and format of the proposal. In all cases, the Dissertation Chair and the Committee should be consulted for information on structure and format.

A dissertation proposal defense is not required by the Graduate School but is required by some departments in the Marshall School of Business. Please see Appendix for program specific practice. Such a defense should be useful to the student in preparing themselves for the academic job market. Students may seek help from consultants in the Business Communication department to improve the style and clarity of the writing.

Students should consult with their Dissertation Chairs regarding when the dissertation proposal is ready for defense. The student should then schedule the proposal defense and should make sure that all Committee members have at least 2 weeks to review the proposal before the proposal defense date. Students should consult with their Chair about the format and structure of the oral presentation. Students should expect that the Committee will question any and all aspects of the proposal as well as offer their comments and criticisms to improve the research ideas and quality of the final dissertation. Ideally, the successful completion and defense of the dissertation proposal should occur no later than the second semester of the fourth year.

The dissertation proposal generally lasts about two hours and the student either passes or fails. To successfully complete the proposal defense, all members of the committee should be present and should approve the proposal.

Depending on the department, you may be required to submit the Dissertation Proposal Report form. This is not required by the Marshall Ph.D. program. Please consult with your dissertation committee chair and department regarding the form to be filed.

Students must conform to University regulations regarding the timing and submission. Detailed guidelines are available from the Graduate School [Thesis & Dissertation Submission – USC Graduate School](#). Students who have made sufficient progress on the dissertation to hold a dissertation defense should adhere to the procedures outlined in the 5th year.

Dissertation

A dissertation is an original contribution to knowledge in the field and a demonstration that the PhD candidate has sufficiently mastered the field to pursue independent research and scholarship. A dissertation represents the individual candidate's research and writing. In fields where collaborative research has become the norm, the candidate is the sole author of the dissertation. When a paper included in a three-paper dissertation has co-authors, the dissertation candidate must specify their contributions to the research and delineate the contributions of their colleagues.

Dissertations are required to be written in English. Exceptions require the approval of the Vice Provost for Academic Programs or their designee before beginning the work. The exceptions will be granted only when there is scholarly justification.

Students must conform to University regulations regarding the format and style of the dissertation submission. Detailed guidelines are available from [this](#) Graduate School website.

Dissertation Committee

The dissertation committee is appointed as soon as possible after the qualifying examination has been passed and a dissertation topic approved. The committee must be appointed at least one month before the dissertation defense. The Appointment or Change of Qualifying Exam or Dissertation Committee form, available on the [Graduate School website](#), establishes the dissertation committee. The form requires the signatures of each committee member, the department chair or program director, and the dean or dean's designee. The completed form is filed in the student's home department or program, and a signed copy is provided to the student.

The dissertation committee is composed of at least three and no more than five members. The committee chair must have an appointment in the student's program. All committees must have a majority of members from the student's home program.

PhD students may take advantage of the full array of faculty expertise available at USC. This includes the expertise of tenured, tenure-track, and RTPC (i.e., research, teaching, practitioner, clinical) faculty. A USC faculty member from outside the student's home program is referred to as an "outside member." The committee may also include a faculty member from an institution other than USC, referred to as an "external member."

The Qualifying Examination Committee may become the student's dissertation committee—assuming all parties are willing. After successfully passing the qualifying exams, the students must appoint their Dissertation Committee by filling out the Appointment of Committee form for their Dissertation Committee. All members of the Qualifying Examination Committee and Dissertation Committee can be tenured or tenure-track, and the committee chair should be tenured or tenure-track. The dissertation committee must consist of at least three tenured or tenure-track faculty, two of whom must be from the student's home department. At least one faculty member from the home department must be tenured. One member must be from outside the student's home department. The outside member can be from the Marshall School of Business (outside of the student's home department) or from outside of the Marshall School of Business.

Students may add additional faculty to the committee, especially those who might provide valuable expertise that improves the dissertation. However, you can only have up to 5 maximum number of members on the dissertation committee.

It is important that the student ask faculty members who are committed to and interested in serving on the committee, since a quality dissertation requires extensive interaction with and a sizable time commitment from individual faculty members.

Marshall School policies indicate that:

- A dissertation committee chair must be identified *within ninety days after the student has passed the qualifying exams*.
- The remaining faculty on the dissertation committee must be appointed *within six months* after the student has passed the qualifying exams.
- To ensure satisfactory progress toward the degree, each student is *required to meet jointly once each semester of the third and all subsequent years with their dissertation committee chair*. At this on-campus meeting, the student will describe the status of the dissertation and plans for progress towards the degree.

Any faculty member – external, outside, or from the student's home program – who serves on PhD dissertation and qualifying exam committees must have a professional profile that demonstrates academic impact on the field in significant, measurable ways. The judgment about these qualifications will be made using the following guide:

- For faculty within the student's home program at USC and external faculty members (who are professors at universities other than USC), the dean, or dean's designee, of the school that houses the student's PhD program will assess a professor's qualification to serve
- For outside faculty (who are professors outside the student's program but internal to USC), the judgment of qualification to serve will be made by the dean or dean's designee of the school/college of the outside faculty member's primary appointment.

In both cases, the CV of the external member must be uploaded to the Thesis Center along with the appointment of committee form, and will become part of the official record. Judgments of demonstrated impact will be based on evidence: for example, peer-reviewed publications in major journals and presses, grant funding, and exceptionally influential practice in a given field, taking into account the person's total career, current stage of career, and any changes in performance in a more recent period.

Faculty who are evaluated based on criteria other than those noted above will not normally be considered appropriate members of PhD and qualifying exam committees, except with the explicit permission of the Vice Provost for Academic Programs acting on the advice of the school dean.

Emeriti faculty appointed to a qualifying exam committee when they were full-time faculty at USC may continue to serve on the dissertation committee as "internal" committee members until the student has graduated. Similarly, a former USC faculty member who was appointed to the qualifying exam committee while they were a full-time faculty member may continue to serve on the dissertation committee as an internal committee member until the student graduates.

Defense of the Dissertation

After passing all required courses and the qualifying examination, and after meeting all other requirements, the candidate must write and defend the dissertation. The doctoral dissertation must be an original contribution to scholarship or scientific knowledge. The dissertation defense assesses whether this standard has been met.

While the oral examination is open to the general university community, only the members of the dissertation committee have the authority to recommend acceptance of the dissertation. Their recommendation must be unanimous.

For the dissertation defense, some committee members may participate remotely. The committee chair and the student must be present in person, unless the relevant dean and the Vice Provost for Academic Programs provide express written permission for remote participation.

Final Approval of the Dissertation

After the dissertation defense has been completed, and the committee determines that no further edits or revisions are required of the dissertation manuscript, each member of the committee electronically certifies on the *Approval to Submit Defended and Final Copy of Doctoral Dissertation* that: (1) the defense was appropriately rigorous; (2) the student's dissertation makes an original and substantial contribution to its field of study; and (3) the defense process was fair and in keeping with USC's academic and ethical standards. This includes adherence to departmental formatting requirements. No changes can be made to the manuscript's content after the *Approval to Submit* form is complete. The *Approval to Submit* form is electronically available through [Thesis Center](#), the Graduate School's online thesis and dissertation processing system.

The dissertation committee must unanimously agree for the student to pass the defense.

Dissertation Submission

Doctoral dissertation manuscripts must be submitted to the Thesis Center on the [Graduate School website](#). At the time of submission, all manuscripts should be formatted and edited according to the style determined by the student's department or program. Students have three months from the date the committee chair signs the electronic *Approval to Submit* form to complete any required formatting corrections in the Thesis Center. After the Graduate School has approved the dissertation manuscript, a copy is sent to the USC Libraries. All dissertations will be made available digitally via the USC Libraries.

Completing the Dissertation

The Graduate School provides a [schedule for completing the dissertation](#) on its website. Students must submit complete documentation and finish all corrections to the manuscript before the degree can be conferred. Upon completing all requirements, the official USC transcript will serve as evidence of the degree until the student receives their diploma.

III. Making Good Progress

Student progress and success reflect the combined effort of students, faculty, staff, and the university. This section provides information on access to and systems for mentoring and advising, as well as opportunities for professional development and academic expectations.

Mentoring

Each department has a faculty Ph.D. Coordinator who meets and advises the students. The duties of the coordinator typically include:

- Communicate program and department-level practices and procedures.
- Provide students with a description of requirements, and courses, for earning their degree.
- Check in with the student's progress regularly to ensure that the student is on track in the program.
- Communicate faculty feedback to the student if there are issues with the student's progress in the program.

- Communicate to the students the availability and the likelihood of financial and resource support within their academic program as well as the criteria for support.
- Help the student navigate any issues if they arise.

A faculty advisor, or a combination of advisors, will be appointed by the department's Ph.D. Program Coordinator to each first year student at the beginning of the academic year. Advisors will:

- Help the student select courses and design a program of study.
- Help the student understand department requirements and offer suggestions about meeting them.
- Discuss research ideas and problems that the student may have.
- Help the student understand areas in which they may need development and how they might address them.

First year students should meet with their advisors as soon as possible to plan a program of study (i.e., select which courses will be taken during which semesters).

Academic Advising

The Marshall Ph.D. Program Office provides services and support for all Marshall Ph.D. Program students. We partner with many Marshall and University departments to support our Ph.D. student community. When you are not sure who to ask, make the Ph.D. Program Office is your first stop for help.

Ph.D. Program Office: Bridge (BRI) 306; phd@marshall.usc.edu

Ph.D. Faculty Department Coordinators: In each department, a faculty member serves as a coordinator for its Ph.D. students and Ph.D. faculty. When you have questions about department policies, what courses to take, or other concerns related to your department or field of study, you should contact your department's Ph.D. coordinator(s).

For more information

[PhD Program Contact Information](#)

Program/School Conduct Expectations

Ph.D. students are expected to:

- Understand the requirements for their degree program.
- Understand the proper and expected relationship between faculty mentor and student.
- Actively participate in developing effective relationships with faculty members.
- Devote appropriate time and effort toward completing the degree.
- Uphold accepted academic standards for scholarship including accurate and honest reporting of research results, ethical research methodology, and responsible teaching practices.
- Work with faculty to provide an environment that contributes to diversity of ideas and individuals.

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity depends on our collective commitment as a university community. Reporting academic integrity issues helps reinforce academic standards and preserves the value of USC degrees. If faculty suspect academic misconduct on any work that a student submits (in final or draft form), they are required to submit a report to the Office of Academic Integrity (OAI).

Information about the university's academic integrity policies is available in the USC Student Handbook and from the Office of Academic Integrity.

Because PhD students have already earned a bachelor's degree and are enrolled in advanced academic training, they are held to a higher standard of integrity in all academic work. This standard reflects the heightened ethical expectations of advanced scholarship, the student's potential role as a mentor and instructor to others, and the impact of their conduct on the broader research and academic community.

OAI is responsible for investigating and adjudicating academic integrity violations. If OAI determines, by a preponderance of the evidence, that a PhD student has committed an academic integrity violation, there is a presumption that dismissal from the academic program without conferral of the degree is the appropriate outcome. This presumption applies regardless of whether the violation occurred in coursework, research, examinations, or instructional settings.

In such cases, doctoral students are not entitled to a Review Panel under the general disciplinary process. Instead, the findings and determination of responsibility will be referred directly to the student's academic program. The program will issue a decision letter that includes outcomes and any additional information relevant to the student's academic standing. No prior written warning is required to support dismissal under this policy. The program's decision will be provided to OAI for record-keeping, and a transcript notation indicating program dismissal for academic integrity reasons will be entered.

PhD students may not appeal the findings or sanctions through the general academic integrity appeal process. Instead, their sole opportunity to challenge the finding or rebut the presumption of dismissal is through the Academic Dismissal Appeal process described in the Student Handbook.

PhD students are expected to familiarize themselves with the full list of academic integrity standards and examples of violations outlined in the USC Student Handbook, including but not limited to plagiarism, cheating, unauthorized collaboration, falsification, misrepresentation, and misuse of instructional materials. Ignorance of policy or lack of intent is not a valid defense.

In cases where a student has registered for a course on a Pass/No Pass (P/NP) basis and an academic integrity violation has occurred, a penalty letter grade will be assigned when a grading option exists. A Pass or No Pass determination is only issued in these circumstances when a letter grade cannot be issued. A student may not withdraw from a course in which they committed or were accused of committing an academic integrity violation.

Satisfactory Progress, Academic Warning, and Dismissal

Students are expected to maintain satisfactory progress towards their degree. If a student has a question or concern about their progress, they should consult with their faculty advisor or PhD program coordinator.

If a student fails to make satisfactory progress, the department chair, program director, or school/college dean will notify them in writing. Written letters should a) explain how the student is falling short of the satisfactory progress standard and b) include specific benchmarks describing how the student can succeed in the program within a reasonable timeframe. Warning letters are sent as early as possible so the student can take advantage of the recommended actions.

A warning letter should be issued if a PhD student is showing any of these signs:

- GPA below program requirements (typically 3.0).
- Failure to meet program milestones or make adequate research progress.
- Inability to secure necessary academic support, such as an advisor or committee.
- Poor attendance or participation in classes or research settings.

Students who do not meet the established benchmarks may be dismissed.

For more information, please visit the USC [website](#).

Academic Dismissal Appeal

The [USC Student Handbook](#) includes information on how to appeal a dismissal. The Graduate School Dismissal Appeal provides the final consideration of a student's dismissal from a graduate program when the dean of the relevant school has upheld the dismissal. This does not include students who have not met the conditions for continuing registration or those who have violated the Student Code of Conduct. The Graduate School will schedule the appeal once the student provides written verification of dismissal and states in writing that they want to proceed with the appeal within 30 days of the dismissal. For more information, please visit the Graduate School [website](#).

IV. Academic Policies and Procedures

Unit Requirement

The minimum number of units for a doctoral degree is 60, including at least four units of 794ab Doctoral Dissertation. At least 24 units must be completed at USC (excluding Doctoral Dissertation 794).

A minimum of 36 units of course work beyond the first graduate degree, exclusive of 794 Doctoral Dissertation, is required for doctoral degree students admitted with Advanced Standing. Additional course work may be required if deemed necessary by the student's faculty. See link [here](#) for USC catalogue.

Enrollment Status

To be considered full-time, a doctoral student must be enrolled in at least six units of 500-level and above coursework each semester. Most students enroll in 12 units to make timely progress toward their degree; 16 units constitute the maximum load. Students wishing to carry more than 16 units must have prior permission from the degree-conferring unit; such permission will be granted only in exceptional circumstances.

There are two exceptions to this six-unit requirement:

1. A student who has completed all coursework for the doctoral degree will be considered full-time during the semester in which the student is preparing for the doctoral qualifying examination, provided the *Appointment or Change of Qualifying Exam or Dissertation Committee* form has been completed and submitted to the program and the student is enrolled in GRSC 800abz, Studies for the Qualifying Examination.
2. Doctoral students who have been advanced to candidacy, that is, who have completed all coursework and have passed the qualifying examination, will be considered full-time when enrolled in 794 Doctoral Dissertation.

Enrollment Information for F-1 and J-1 International Students

F-1 and J-1 international students on student visas who are not enrolled in either GRSC 800abz or 794 must be enrolled in at least six units or receive authorization from the [Office of International Services](#) to enroll in fewer than the minimum units. International student with questions about their registration should consult the Office of International Services.

Immigration regulations require F-1 and J-1 student's physical attendance for classes during each fall and spring semester of their program. If the summer term is the student's first or last semester at USC, then physical attendance for classes is also required.

No more than one online class (up to 3 units) per semester can be counted towards the full course of study for an F-1 or J-1 student. If you only need to be registered in one course to complete your degree program during your final term, it must be in-person.

794ab Doctoral Dissertation

794ab Doctoral Dissertation confers full-time enrollment status on students who have been admitted to candidacy. Students are expected to be enrolled in 2 units of 794 each semester, except summer sessions, for a minimum of two semesters, until all degree requirements are completed.

Students are expected to complete and defend their dissertation in less than five semesters of 794. No more than eight units of 794 will be applied toward the PhD degree.

Concurrent Enrollment

If a student is simultaneously enrolled elsewhere, they may not transfer credits to USC without advance permission from the dean of the school that hosts the USC degree program. Failure to obtain permission will invalidate coursework taken during periods of unauthorized concurrent enrollment.

Transfer of Credit

The Degree Progress Department in the Office of Academic Records and Registrar determines whether coursework taken elsewhere is available for transfer credit. The faculty of the student's degree program determines whether such credit is applicable toward a specific graduate degree, subject to approval by the dean of the degree-conferring unit. The faculty will decide by the end of the second year.

Continuous Enrollment

Students are considered to be pursuing advanced degrees only when formally enrolled. PhD students must be enrolled at USC for fall and spring semesters each year until all degree requirements have been satisfactorily completed within the time limit.

Marshall PhDs are not required to enroll in the academic coursework for the summer. They are expected to register for GRSC 802.

Enrollment in graduate-level course work is necessary to meet the continuous enrollment requirement. Graduate students who fail to register are no longer considered to be enrolled in a graduate degree program. After an unauthorized absence, formal readmission is required. Students who have been granted an official leave of absence do not need to apply for readmission following the approved leave. However, students who fail to return at the conclusion of any form of leave without obtaining an approved extension violate the continuous enrollment policy.

A doctoral candidate who has passed the qualifying examination must enroll each fall and spring semester in 794 Doctoral Dissertation until the dissertation has been approved. Students are expected to complete and defend their dissertation in less than five semesters.

Some courses with no academic credit, including 794z, require payment of tuition.

Grade Point Average Requirement

At no time should the overall GPA drop below 3.0. A minimum grade of C (2.0) is required in a course to receive graduate credit. Work graded C- or below is unacceptable for subject or unit credit toward any doctoral program.

Some Marshall PhD Program departments have additional GPA requirements. See respective department appendix for additional GPA requirements.

Pass/No Pass Coursework

Graduate students may elect to enroll in courses on a pass/no pass basis with department or program approval. However, coursework taken on a pass/no pass basis cannot be applied toward a graduate degree. Students should consult their academic advisors before enrolling in any course on a pass/no pass basis.

Pass-No Pass classes do not count toward the PhD degree and are not paid by Marshall.

Incompletes

An incomplete (IN) is assigned when work is not completed because of a documented illness or another emergency occurring after the 12th week of the semester (or 12th week equivalent for any course scheduled for less than 15 weeks).

If a student receives an incomplete, the instructor will fill out the *Assignment of an Incomplete (IN) and Requirements for Completion* form, which will specify the work remaining to be done, the procedures for its completion, the grade in the course to date and the weight to be assigned to the work remaining to be done when computing the final grade.

One calendar year is allowed to complete an IN. If the IN is not completed within the designated time, the course is considered "lapsed," the grade is changed to an "IX" and will be calculated into the grade point average as 0 points. Courses offered on a Credit/No Credit basis or taken on a Pass/No Pass basis for which a mark of Incomplete is assigned will be lapsed with a mark of NC or NP and will not be calculated into the grade point average.

Completing the IN within the one-year period should be the student's highest priority. A student may petition the Committee on Academic Policies and Procedures (CAPP) for an extension of time for the completion of an IN. Extensions beyond the specified time limit are rarely approved if the student has enrolled in subsequent semesters.

In all cases, a petition for an extension of time to complete an IN must have departmental approval and include a statement from the instructor explaining what is needed to complete the course and why the instructor believes the student should be given additional time for completion.

Audited Courses

Students who wish to audit a course at USC must register for the course on Web Registration and select the Audit grade option. Audited courses will not receive credit and will not appear on the USC transcript or grade report. However, tuition is charged, and students should check with their school or program to determine if auditing courses is an option. As noted in the USC Student Handbook, attending a course without being officially registered in it is prohibited.

Audited classes do not count toward the PhD degree and are not paid by Marshall.

Time Limit for Degree Completion

Progress is measured from the beginning of the first course at USC applied toward a specified degree, and all requirements for that degree must be completed within a specified time. The university's time limit for completing the doctoral degree is eight years. For students who earned an applicable master's degree within the five years before admission to the doctoral program, the time limit for completing the doctoral degree is six years from the date of admission to the doctoral program. Approved leaves of absence (up to two years or four semesters) are not counted in the time allowed to complete degree requirements.

Extensions may be granted in extraordinary circumstances. If granted an extension, the Associate Dean of the Marshall PhD Program will allow registration for the specified extension period.

Leaves of Absence, Sick Days, and Bereavement

Students in good standing and making satisfactory progress toward a degree who must interrupt studies for compelling reasons may petition for a leave for a stated period, usually one semester. A leave must be requested before the drop-add deadline and approved by the dean of the degree program, the committee chair, and the department chair or program director. The request should include a plan for academic progress upon return. During the leave period, a student is not entitled to assistance from the faculty or use of university facilities.

If granted, the leave is recorded on the student's transcript, and the leave period is not counted in the time allowed to complete degree requirements. A leave of absence may be allowed for one semester at a time, up to a maximum of four semesters. Students who fail to apply for a leave of absence or for whom a leave has been denied (or has expired) are subject to policies governing continuous enrollment and readmission.

International students should consult with the Office of International Services before considering a leave of absence.

Parental Leave for PhD Students

PhD students are eligible for a one-semester paid parental leave if they:

- Are pregnant or are the primary caregiver of their newborn child or adopted child under six years of age
- Have completed at least one semester in the PhD program and are making good progress
- Were admitted with a Multi-Year Funding Offer (MYFO) letter that includes a four or five-year "package" consisting of support through any combination of teaching assistantship, research assistantship, and fellowship.
- F-1 and J-1 international students must additionally qualify for a medical reduced course load (RCL) if they plan to remain in the U.S. while taking parental leave

Parental leave may be taken during the semester in which the child is born or adopted, or in the semester immediately following. A student on an approved parental leave will receive tuition, fees, and a stipend. The Graduate School provides the base stipend. Schools and programs provide the tuition, fees, and a top-off the base stipend to the level specified in the student's Multi-Year Funding Offer letter.

Students should enroll in GRSC 804 to ensure continued access to health insurance and the monthly stipend. While on parental leave, students are not eligible for federal financial aid. Students with loans should consult with the Office of Financial Aid before beginning parental leave. F-1 and J-1 international students should consult with the Office of International Services to discuss parental leave and ensure there are no unforeseen issues related to their visa status.

Students interested in taking parental leave should consult with the staff graduate advisor in their department or program. The program will submit a petition to the Graduate School and will be asked to provide a copy of the initial funding letter, a statement as the primary caregiver, and one of the following:

- Verification of pregnancy signed by a US doctor (available at USC Student Health Center), or
- Birth certificate for the infant child, or
- Statement of adoption from an adoption agency

Health Leaves for PhD Students

Health Leaves are administered by USC Campus Support and Intervention (CSI) in consultation with the student's program and the Graduate School, pursuant to the university's Student Health Leave of Absence Policy.

PhD students interested in a health leave should meet with a CSI health leave coordinator to develop an individualized health and academic plan. These plans are developed through an interactive process involving the Health Leave Coordinator, the student, the academic unit, and the Graduate School.

F-1 and J-1 international students are eligible to request a health leave. They must meet with an advisor in the Office of International Services (OIS) before finalizing plans for the health leave. Students can either return to their home country or, if a doctor recommends, remain in the U.S. for medical treatment. The student should request the health leave through a CSI health leave coordinator, who works with the student, their healthcare provider, and the Office of International Services (OIS) to determine the necessary steps to approve the leave request.

A paid health leave, including tuition, fees, and at least the minimum stipend, is available for one semester. A second semester covering tuition and fees may be available if necessary. The Vice Provost for Academic Programs must review and approve additional health leaves beyond two semesters.

Sick Days and Bereavement Leave

PhD students may use up to five days of sick leave per Academic Year due to illness or to care for a family member. Students may also have up to five days of bereavement leave per Academic Year for the loss of a family member.

Contact your PhD coordinator and PhD program office if a student needs to request leave.

Readmission

A PhD student who leaves the university without obtaining a formal leave of absence, or otherwise violates the continuous enrollment policy, is not automatically readmitted. A student wishing to apply for readmission to a graduate degree program must first obtain the recommendation of the department chair or program director and submit an Application for Readmission to the dean of the degree program.

If the student's cumulative GPA is below 3.0 or if readmission is sought after more than two years of an unapproved absence, the Application for Readmission must be sent to the Graduate School for approval.

The readmission approval process must be completed by the first day of classes for the term in which the resumption of graduate studies is sought. Approvals to be readmitted are based on the academic merits of the student's request and the likelihood of academic success and completion of the degree. If readmitted, the student will be subject to all of the current University Catalogue requirements for the degree in effect at the time of readmission. Individual exceptions to the Catalogue year require the approval of the dean of the degree program. Students seeking readmission after an absence of more than 10 years may be required to reapply to the university.

A student may not be readmitted into a terminated program of study. The student must either be subject to retroactive enrollment or admission to the new program of study with the corresponding catalog requirements.

V. Funding and Financial Support

PhD students at USC benefit from fellowships, assistantships, and scholarships administered by the Graduate School and various academic units.

Provided that a student is making satisfactory academic progress, USC Marshall provides five years of funding for Ph.D. students, including a stipend, coverage of tuition and mandatory fees. In addition, students receive health and dental insurance and health center coverage throughout their enrollment in the program. Students are also provided an annual research funds account, known as STARS, to help cover program-related costs including technology, datasets, and conference attendance. Please see the information about STARS below.

In rare cases, Marshall students may wish/need to stay for a sixth year of funding to complete their PhD Program. If students are working steadily towards their dissertation, they should be able to complete all requirements and build an excellent research portfolio in the first five years, but occasionally there are challenges and delays in the process. Students should discuss their wish/need to stay for a 6th year with their advisor and PhD Coordinator(s). The PhD Coordinators can provide information on possible 6th year funding. Please see Appendix for program-specific requirements.

As a Graduate Assistant, students will work as a Research Assistant, Teaching Assistant, or Assistant Lecturer for all three semesters (fall, spring and summer) during the academic year. During this period, students are expected to be in residency and are expected to devote their energies to their Graduate Assistantship as well as their own research (or research done in collaboration with others) and scholarship.

For more information, see [Funding Overview](#).

Graduate Assistant (GA)

GA is an overarching term used to describe Teaching Assistants (TA), Research Assistants (RA), and Graduate Assistant Lecturers (AL). GA appointments include tuition, fees, and a stipend at or exceeding the university's minimum rate. A 50% GA appointment requires an average of 20 hours per week, which is considered "full-time" for a graduate student, as the remaining 20 hours per week should be dedicated to coursework and scholarship leading to the degree. A 33% GA appointment requires an average of 13 hours per week, while a 25% appointment requires an average of 10 hours per week.

GA appointments are confirmed through an official offer letter generated via the university's TARA system or the Dornsife Student Database. The offer letter should be sent to the student at the beginning of the academic year or the start of a semester. These letters must use the standard Graduate School-approved template and detail the length of the appointment, the time commitment, the department's expectations, and benefits. Ideally, the offer letter should include the total stipend the student will receive, including top-offs. The student should sign the letter, which will be shared with the appropriate financial staff and archived by the department or program.

The university requires TAs, RAs, and ALs to be enrolled in a minimum of 6 units every semester or in equivalent full-time courses such as GRSC 800abz or Dissertation 794.

Fellowships

Fellowships provide financial support to PhD students pursuing their degrees. A fellowship is equivalent to a 50% appointment as a Graduate Assistant and includes tuition, fees, and a stipend at or exceeding the university's minimum rate.

PhD students with a fellowship are expected to commit 20 hours per week to their research. PhD students receiving fellowships may not undertake employment or other time-consuming commitments during the academic year from mid-August through mid-May. The Vice Provost for Academic Programs will review exceptions to this policy through the Graduate School's Petition system. Students on fellowships may not receive funding as GAs simultaneously.

External Fellowships

PhD students are encouraged to seek external fellowships and support that encourage intellectual independence and enhance a student's record. The USC Graduate School provides a variety of resources to support PhD students seeking funding, including information sessions, boot camps, and proposal review workshops. Students who receive one of several designated national awards may be eligible for stipend top-offs from the Graduate School.

PhD students applying for external fellowships that are "institutionally limited," meaning that there is a limit placed on the number of students who can apply, or whose applications require the approval of a university official, should contact the Graduate School well in advance of any deadlines.

Tuition Benefits

A 50% TA, RA, or AL appointment and a fellowship include tuition remission up to 12 units per semester and six units of tuition remission for the summer following the fellowship.

A 33% TA, RA, or AL appointment includes tuition remission up to 10 units per semester of the appointment and five units of tuition remission for the summer following the assignment.

A 25% TA, RA, or AL appointment includes tuition remission up to 8 units per semester of the appointment and four units of tuition remission for the summer following the assignment.

TAs, RAs, and ALs who wish to use tuition units for coursework outside their home program must obtain written approval from their faculty advisor, program director, and the dean of the school. If students do not have prior authorization, they may be responsible for covering the cost of these units. The tuition allowance is non-transferable from semester to semester and will be applied to the student's account in the amount appropriate for the courses they take.

Students should contact their staff graduate advisor if tuition is not appropriately credited to their account.

Tuition Refund Insurance

Students should opt out of Tuition Refund Insurance when their tuition is being covered as part of an assistantship or fellowship. If a student has already accepted Tuition Refund Insurance but would like to decline it, they can do so [here](#).

Stipend Distribution

The first stipend of the academic year will generally be available in August. To receive the stipend, students must be registered for classes well in advance of the start of the fall semester. Students are encouraged to work closely with the staff in their programs to ensure their stipend is processed appropriately.

Students switching from Graduate Assistant appointments to a fellowship or vice versa should be aware that the stipend schedules and distributions are different. However, they should still receive the university's mandatory stipend for the academic year.

Stipends are processed through Payroll. Students are highly encouraged to sign up for direct deposit through Workday. Instructions on how to sign up for direct deposit can be found [here](#). Students who do not sign up for direct deposit will have their stipends mailed to the current address listed in myUSC. International students must also have an up-to-date Glacier account to receive their fellowship stipend.

Stipends are not processed on the same day every month. Students on fellowship should expect the stipend early in the month, while students receiving stipends for GA appointments will receive the stipend towards the end of the month.

Stipends are not considered late until after the 26th of the month.

For more information about stipend schedules please refer to [Funding Overview](#).

Summer Support

During the summer semester (mid-May through mid-August), students receiving support as Graduate Assistants (RA, TA, and ALs) with a 50% appointment and PhD students with fellowships may work additional hours beyond the 20-hour maximum, up to an average of 40 hours per week in other on-campus or off-campus roles.

Students who have received offers of full-time employment off-campus during the summer semester may not simultaneously hold positions as Graduate Assistants or PhD Fellows.

Students who wish to decline summer support from USC in favor of full-time off-campus employment or internships will be asked to confirm their decision in writing. This information will be archived in the student's Advise USC file. International students should review the Office of International Services website for information about [Curricular Practical Training](#).

Students who serve as TAs, RAs, and ALs during the summer receive a stipend and tuition remission proportional to the appointment. The health center fee will also be provided, and the student will have access from the first day of the appointment until the end of the summer. (The spring coverage period for the USC student health insurance includes January through the end of the summer as well.)

Students who are invited to campus for any other sponsored academic purpose, such as a professional development institute, receive access to the student health center from the first day of the academic event until the end of the summer.

Mandatory Fees, Health, and Dental Insurance

Graduate Assistant appointments and fellowships include tuition, a stipend at the university's minimum rate or higher, health and dental insurance, access to the student health center, the Student Programming Fee, Norman H. Topping Student Aid Fund Fee, and the Transportation Fee.

Parking and Transit Benefits

PhD students may participate in USC's Student U-Pass program. USC offers PhD students a limited number of permits for 2 or 3 days a week (partial week permits). These passes are available on a first-come, first-served basis. Permits are subject to availability at either UPC (150 campus permits total) - Shrine, Figueroa, and Grand, or HSC (50 campus permits total) - Valley and Lot 71

Support for Conferences

See Marshall PhD student STARS guidelines. Travel and professional development grants may also be available through USC's [Graduate Student Government](#).

For more information, see [Funding Overview](#).

Other Types of Support

PhD students may occasionally be hired as hourly Graduate Student Workers. The duties of Graduate Assistants (TA, RA, and AL) should be distinct from activities performed by hourly graduate student workers.

Collective Bargaining Agreement

Graduate students at USC are represented by the Graduate Student Workers Organizing Committee-UAW Local 872. All graduate students enrolled at USC who are employed as Teaching Assistants, Assistant Lecturers, Research Assistants, or internally-funded Fellows in STEM programs are considered part of the union. The Collective Bargaining Agreement is available on the Graduate School [website](#).

VI. GA Appointments and Responsibilities

Eligibility

To be eligible to serve as a Teaching Assistant (TA), Research Assistant (RA), or Graduate Assistant Lecturer (AL), students must:

- have been admitted to a graduate degree program with regular graduate standing
- be enrolled full-time
- be in good academic standing with a GPA of no lower than 3.0
- be verified by their home program to be making satisfactory academic progress toward the degree
- have met the university's standards for proficiency in the English language

The university requires TAs, RAs, and ALs to be enrolled in a minimum of 6 units every semester or in full-time equivalent courses such as GRSC 800abz or Dissertation 794.

Types of GA Appointments

Research Assistant

RAs are responsible for the accuracy, validity, and integrity of the research on which they are contributing. The quality of the research reflects on the student, the faculty supervisor, and the university. Deliberate falsification of research results may result in dismissal from the university. RAs must maintain the confidentiality of the faculty mentor's professional activities and research before presentation or publication, in accordance with existing practices and policies in the area of research activity. In the publication and presentation of research produced as an RA, the student must acknowledge the contributions of the faculty supervisor and other members of the research team. RAs should assume responsibility for making proper use of the intellectual, instructional, and physical environment in which they are conducting research. The nature of some research projects may require that the RA be available during holiday periods or semester breaks. Students and their faculty supervisors should discuss expectations and time off before the appointment is accepted.

Teaching Assistant

The responsibilities of TAs are carried out under the established supervision of the departmental faculty. The duties of TAs may include the following: reading course texts and materials, assisting during lectures, leading discussion sections or lab meetings, holding office hours each week, responding to student concerns, grading course assignments and exams, leading and monitoring lab exercises, participating in regular meetings with supervising faculty and other TAs, designing and leading review sessions, serving as a liaison between the instructor and students, upholding the university's policy on academic integrity, and assisting with the management of the course details. The Center for Excellence in Teaching is a good resource for support and information.

As with faculty at USC, TAs are evaluated by their students. TAs should review evaluations at the end of each semester, after grades have been submitted. TAs are encouraged to keep a record of student feedback for their teaching portfolio.

Students must complete the course BUCO 637 ("Succeeding as a Teacher"), prior to serving in TA role. Completion of this course is a Marshall School requirement.

Graduate Assistant Lecturer

Typically, Marshall PhD students serve as an AL for an undergraduate class they will teach the following semester.

Before the course begins, the student-instructor should do the following:

- Complete the course BUCO 637 ("Succeeding as a Teacher"), usually in the summer of year 2. Completion of this course is a Marshall School requirement.
- After successfully passing the qualifying exams, students should work with the Ph.D. Program Coordinator and Department Chair to determine when they will fulfill their TA and Assistant Lecturer assignments.
- Observe one or more sessions of the same class taught by a faculty member.
- Meet Lanore Larson (lanorela@marshall.usc.edu), an Educational Program Designer in Marshall, to discuss the class, development of the syllabus, learning objectives, use of Brightspace and related matters.

Arrange for your faculty advisor and Ms. Larson to attend at least one class session as an observer during the first half of the semester. The advisor and Ms. Larson should meet with the student-instructor after the class is ended to offer both verbal and written feedback. The feedback is confidential for the student-instructor

Expected Effort

A graduate student's first responsibility is to their doctoral research and studies. For this reason, GA awards cannot exceed 20 hours per week for a 50% appointment or 10 hours per week for a 25% appointment, averaged over a semester. Students receiving a 50% GA appointment may not undertake employment or other time-consuming commitments during the academic year from mid-August through mid-May. Students receiving a 25% GA appointment during the academic year may be eligible for part-time, off-campus employment.

F-1 and J-1 International students with a 25% GA appointment may be eligible for part-time Curricular Practical Training (CPT), if they meet the CPT eligibility requirements, and if academic department signs

off on the CPT request. The Vice Provost for Academic Programs reviews exceptions to this policy through the Graduate School's Petition system.

Appointment Periods

Semester	Approximate Start Date	Approximate End Date
Fall	August 16	December 31
Spring	January 1	May 15
Summer	May 16	August 15

Financial Support

All TA, RA, and AL appointments include tuition units, health insurance, access to the student health center, and a stipend. Each year, the Provost sets the base stipend for TAs, RAs, and ALs. Schools, programs, and PIs may offer appointments with higher amounts.

Tuition Remission

The tuition allowance is non-transferable from semester to semester and will be applied to the student's account in the amount appropriate for the courses s/he takes. Students should contact the program of appointment if the tuition is not credited to their account.

A 50% TA, RA, or AL appointment includes tuition remission up to 12 units per semester of the appointment and six units of tuition remission for the summer following the assignment.

A 33% TA, RA, or AL appointment includes tuition remission up to 10 units per semester of the appointment and five units of tuition remission for the summer following the assignment.

A 25% TA, RA, or AL appointment includes tuition remission up to 8 units per semester of the appointment and four units of tuition remission for the summer following the assignment.

Tuition Refund Insurance

Students should opt out of Tuition Refund Insurance when their tuition is being covered as part of an assistantship or fellowship. If a student has already accepted Tuition Refund Insurance but would like to decline in, they can do so [here](#). Students should opt out of Tuition Refund Insurance before late fees are assessed.

Payroll Set Up and Direct Deposit

As part of the Orientation/onboarding process, the Marshall payroll team sets students up for payment.

The new cohort will receive information as part of Orientation/orientation. The first fellowship stipend will be available in August and, to receive the stipend, you must register for classes. It is always a good idea to arrive with sufficient funds to carry you through the first month of school.

Please note the following:

- All students (domestic and international) should be sure to sign up for direct deposit via Workday to receive fellowship and assistantship stipends.
- Please make sure your current address is up to date in myUSC.
- International students should work with their home departments to make sure their Glacier account is up to date

Fellowship Stipends for International Students

International students will receive their stipends through Payroll and can sign up for direct deposit through the USC Workday system.

If you are a returning/continuing international student, please make sure your Glacier account is up to date. This will ensure that you receive your stipend in a timely matter. Your current address should also be up to date in myUSC and Workday. You can update your current address in myUSC.

Payroll questions should be directed to the Marshall Payroll team at marshallpayroll@marshall.usc.edu

GA-related Warning and Dismissal

PhD students serving as a GA may be disciplined, suspended or discharged for absenteeism; lateness; failure to adhere to stated course or research deadlines; failure to aid in the preparation of course or research materials; failure to hold sections, labs, or office hours; failure to grade, failure to perform assigned lab duties, willful abandonment of teaching or research assignments; failure to comply with applicable policies. Students and their faculty supervisors should discuss expectations and time off before the appointment is accepted. Discipline will only be for just cause and each case will be taken very seriously, recognizing that the Collective Bargaining Unit also may need to be involved.

When possible, a conference meeting will be held with the student and their supervisor before a suspension or discharge. The student may request to have Union representation present at the conference meeting. The University will notify the student and the Union in writing of the issuance of discipline or any investigative leave.

VII. Tax Information

Taxable Income and Withholding

General tax information for PhD students is available on the [Student Financial Services website](#). USC staff cannot provide tax advice. We strongly advise students to contact the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) or consult with a tax professional for tax-related questions.

International Student Considerations

International students may wish to consult the [Office of International Services \(OIS\)](#) website, which offers general information about tax exemptions, tax-related forms, and access to Sprintax, a tax preparation software. OIS cannot advise on tax-related issues. Students should consult with a qualified tax professional for individual assistance.

Graduate Students Supported by Fellowships

The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) provides information regarding the tax treatment of fellowship awards. The IRS also provides information regarding the 1098-T form. Some education-related items that are included in your fellowship may not be taxable, for example, tuition remission. Other items, such as

living expenses including room and board, transportation, and entertainment, are generally considered taxable.

While receiving a fellowship, domestic students will not receive a W-2 form. However, according to the IRS, you must report all taxable amounts, whether or not you received a Form W-2. If you have taxable income from your fellowship, you may need to make estimated tax payments. For more information, see Pub. 505, Tax Withholding and Estimated Tax, and the IRS help on estimated taxes.

International students (non-resident aliens for tax purposes) on fellowship receive their stipends through University Payroll Services. The stipend may be treated as taxable income by the IRS. Therefore, the university may be obligated to withhold income taxes. The amount of this tax withholding depends on the individual's circumstances, including their total stipend and the status of the tax treaty between their home country and the United States. Tuition remission provided to an international student on fellowship is not taxable.

Graduate Students Supported by Graduate Assistantships

The stipends provided via the University Payroll Services to domestic and international students who are serving as TA's, RA's, and AL's are treated as taxable income by the Internal Revenue Service. Therefore, the university may be obligated to report the income and withhold income taxes. The amount of this tax withholding depends on the individual circumstances of the student, including the total stipend, the instructions provided by the student on Form W-4, and, if an international student, the status of the tax treaty between their home country and the United States, as well as Form 8233. Tuition remission provided to a TA, RA, or AL is not reportable or taxable.

Students Hired as Graduate Student Workers (Hourly)

The payment that domestic and international students receive as hourly graduate student workers is treated as taxable income by the Internal Revenue Service. The amount of this tax withholding depends upon the individual circumstances of the student, including the total amount paid per pay period, the instructions provided by the student on Form W-4, and, if an international student, the status of the tax treaty of their tax residence country and the completion of IRS Form 8233.

VIII. Health Insurance and Health Center Access

The Engemann Student Health Center website provides information about the USC health insurance, on-campus medical services, student counseling services, and wellness. Students can also make appointments through the website. The Engemann Student Health Center is used primarily by students based at UPC.

The Eric Cohen Student Health Center website provides information about the USC health insurance, on-campus medical services, student counseling services, and wellness. Students can also make appointments through the website. The Eric Cohen Student Health Center is used primarily by students based at HSC.

IX. Academic Calendar

Holidays

PhD students with graduate assistantship (GA) appointments will observe the academic holiday schedule. If a student serving as a GA is unable to observe a holiday due to the obligations of their appointment, they will be provided with an alternative day off instead of the missed holiday during the same semester, with the advance agreement of their designated faculty supervisor and, as needed, the Director of Graduate Studies.

X. Resources, Support, and Problem Resolution

Child Care Fund

A childcare subsidy of up to \$1,800 is available per semester for each child under the age of six. The subsidy is considered taxable income and is subject to reporting on the appropriate forms. The student is solely responsible and liable for any tax liability resulting from the subsidy provided to the student or their dependent.

If a student has a loan, particularly Direct Loans, the Child Care grants could reduce the student's loan eligibility. Students should contact the Financial Aid Office to confirm.

International students should note the following:

- To remain eligible for this grant, students must maintain valid F-1 or J-1 status, and their dependents must maintain F-2 or J-2 status.
- This grant cannot be used as proof of funding for bringing dependents (spouse and/or children) to the U.S. under F-2 or J-2 status. Information regarding proof of funding for dependents is available on the Office of International Services [website](#).
- J-1 students who receive this grant must request a new DS-2019 with updated funding information by submitting a Financial Update Request through the [Trojan International Portal](#). Once processed, a new DS-2019 will be issued.
- Students in F-1 status on post-completion Optional Practical Training (OPT) or STEM OPT Extension, as well as J-1 students on post-completion Academic Training, are not eligible to apply for or receive this grant.

Child Care Fund Eligibility Criteria

The student must be a graduate student worker in the union bargaining unit in the semester in which the provider expense was incurred. Applicants must furnish supporting documentation as reasonably requested by USC. Eligible childcare providers include:

- A licensed childcare center
- A licensed family childcare provider
- A licensed after-school program
- A daytime summer camp program
- An in-home provider with a Social Security or Tax I.D. number. An in-home provider cannot be a spouse, relative, child under age 19, or anyone who lives in the same household as the student. Nannies and nanny shares are covered if the caregiver has a valid Social Security number or Tax ID Number.

Funds are not available for overnight camp, team registration fees, extracurricular activities, or club sports. The program's primary intent must be to provide childcare while the parent is working. Summer programs can be considered a childcare program if they meet the requirements above.

Applications are processed in the order received. Applications will not be accepted or processed when funds for the academic year have been exhausted. More information is available on the [Graduate School Website](#).

Short Term Hardship Grant

Short-term hardship grants are available to students with dependents. Grants are subject to a cap of \$2,500 per graduate student worker per semester. Grants may not be used for expenses that are covered by another fund or account. The grant is taxable income and is therefore subject to taxation and reporting on the appropriate forms. The student is solely responsible and liable for any tax liability resulting from the grant.

Short Term Hardship Eligibility

The student must be a graduate student worker in the bargaining unit in the semester in which the provider expense was incurred. The student must have a dependent, and they must furnish supporting documentation as reasonably requested by USC.

Hardships may include, but are not limited to, events resulting from a sudden or unexpected illness, imminent loss of housing, loss of property due to natural disaster, or medical, dental, and vision expenditures not covered by any other source.

If the dependent is covered by a health insurance plan, unanticipated emergency or short-term out-of-pocket expenses are not covered by the insurance plan. If the dependent is not covered by a health insurance plan, unanticipated emergency or short-term out-of-pocket medical expenses incurred by the Graduate Student Worker.

Applications are processed in the order received. Applications will not be accepted or processed when funds for the academic year have been exhausted. More information is available on the [Graduate School Website](#).

Resources for International Students

The Office of International Services (OIS) supports F-1 and J-1 international students, helping them maintain immigration status, navigate complex immigration regulations, and succeed academically and personally. Key services include immigration advising, travel advising, and guidance on employment rules, such as on-campus work, CPT, and OPT.

With expertise in F-1 & J-1 immigration regulations, OIS advisors collaborate with government agencies and university departments to ensure students comply with their visa requirements while at USC. For more information, please visit the OIS website at ois.usc.edu.

OIS advisors are available for [one-on-one meetings](#) daily via Zoom - no appointment is necessary :

- Mondays, Wednesdays, & Fridays: 1 PM-3 PM
- Tuesdays & Thursdays: 10 AM-12 PM
- J-1 advisors are available Tuesdays, Wednesdays, & Thursdays

Lactation Support

PhD students have access to spaces for expressing and storing breast milk. Rooms on the UPC and HSC campus are listed [here](#).

American Language Institute

Many international students are from countries where English is not spoken as a native language. The American Language Institute (ALI) provides classes and other resources to assist international undergraduate and graduate students in improving their English and adapting to an American university program. Before they can be cleared to begin teaching at USC, all international Teaching Assistants are required to take part in a training program run by ALI.

Marshall PhD students take the International Teaching Assistant (ITA) exam as part of Orientation /onboarding. If, based on the results of the exam, students need to take ALI course work, the coursework should be taken in the first semester.

Center for Excellence in Teaching

The Center for Excellence in Teaching (CET) is the university's think tank for innovative teaching. As a faculty-led initiative, CET draws upon the talents of experienced faculty to promote a commitment to excellence in teaching, learning, and scholarship. CET provides training and resources to improve teaching at USC, including supporting faculty and Teaching Assistants as they devise new courses and develop enriching out-of-class activities. CET offers seminars and lectures throughout the semester on a variety of topics and provides a training session at the beginning of each semester for Teaching Assistants.

Library Resources

Accessibility Training for Teaching Assistants at USC

Organized and developed by a collaboration between the Undergraduate Student Government (USG), Graduate Student Government (GSG), and USC Libraries as a resource for accessibility training for teaching assistants.

Accommodations

The University provides reasonable accommodations to PhD students who are disabled or become disabled and need reasonable accommodations to perform the essential functions of their job. More information is available from USC's Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS).

Graduate Student Government

The mission of GSG is to enhance the graduate and professional student experience by serving as the face of the student body. GSG is responsible for managing student resources efficiently, providing a voice for the student community, building a community that fosters interdisciplinary exchanges, and informing students about their rights, resources, and opportunities. Elected officers, senators who represent all schools and departments, and special interest committees tackle issues specific to graduate and professional students and provide venues for interaction beyond the academic realm. An Executive Board of 29 officers is selected every spring by the GSG senators and outgoing executive board members. The Executive Board oversees the daily operations of GSG and works closely with the Senate to promote graduate and professional student interests within the USC administration and academic departments.

More information is available from the Graduate Student Government website.

Other Support

Campus Support and Intervention (CSI)

CSI connects with members of the USC community when they need support in achieving their academic, professional, and personal goals.

(213) 740-0411

uscsupport@usc.edu

USC Kortschak Center for Learning and Creativity

KCLC offers outreach, programming, and individual coaching services to USC students and departments to promote a campus-wide understanding of learning differences and their potential to facilitate creativity and academic excellence.

(213) 740-7884

kortschakcenter@usc.edu

Office of the Ombuds

Available to faculty, staff, and students experiencing University-related concerns, conflicts, or challenging situations.

(213) 821-9556 (University Park Campus)

upcombuds@usc.edu
(323) 442-0341 (Health Sciences Campus)
hscombuds@usc.edu

Counseling and Mental Health
Provides counseling and support for all students.
(213) 740-9355 (WELL)

Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS)
Provides support services for individuals with disabilities.
(213) 740-0776 (University Park Campus)
(323) 442-1000 (Health Sciences Campus)
osasfrontdesk@usc.edu

XI. Post-Graduation

Accessing Your Dissertation

The dissertation manuscript will be available for search and download from the [USC Digital Library](#) shortly after completing all of the steps in the Thesis Center, or after any requested restriction expires.

Official Transcripts and Diploma

The Registrar's Office oversees the distribution of university diplomas and transcripts, in compliance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Most diplomas are mailed to the permanent address on record six to eight weeks after a degree is conferred. More information is available on their [website](#).

Appendix: Program-Specific Requirements for Leventhal School of Accounting

Course Requirements

There are three types of classes: (1) core courses, (2) elective courses in accounting, and (3) elective courses offered by other departments within Marshall and USC. Students will receive guidance and mentoring from their faculty mentors about which elective courses they should take. (1) The core courses cover crucial topics and skills relevant to accounting research and provide the necessary foundations for other components of the coursework. They are mandatory and must be completed as scheduled. (2) The elective courses in accounting are offered by research faculty in the Leventhal School of Accounting. An important distinguishing feature of the program (relative to other schools) is the wide range of elective courses that are available. (3) Students are encouraged to undertake additional courses from other departments according to their individual needs and interests. USC is an internationally renowned institution, affording students access to world-class courses in disciplines such as Finance, Economics, Statistics, and Data Science.

The core courses are taught every year. PhD students in accounting must take GSBA 604 (Regression and generalized linear models for business applications), GSBA 612 (Microeconomic Theory II), and ACCT 615 (Financial Reporting Research) during their first year. Students are required to take ACCT 611 every year (Selected Topics in Accounting Research). Students are required to take ACCT 621 in both their first and second years (Research Forum).

Elective courses in Accounting are offered on a bi-annual basis subject to student demand. The elective courses are ACCT 602 (Judgement & Decision Making), ACCT 604 (Management Accounting Research), ACCT 606 (Survey of Tax Research), ACCT 624 (Capital Markets Research in Accounting), ACT 606 (Advanced Capital Markets Research in Accounting), ACCT 630 (Archival Auditing Research), ACCT 641 (Debt Contracting & Banking), ACCT 642 (Disclosure & Information Intermediaries), ACCT 643 (Measuring and Evaluating Earnings Quality), and ACCT 699 (Accounting Theory). Because these elective courses are offered every other year, students in years 1 and 2 should take their preferred courses the first time they are offered in order to complete the coursework requirements by the end of year 2

Screening exam/First-year summer paper

There is no screening exam in the Leventhal School of Accounting. However, a first-year summer paper is required.

The first-year Summer paper is written at the end of the Summer of the first year under the guidance of the student's two faculty mentors. The Summer paper should be 20-30 pages in length (excluding references and tables). Following the structure of top-tier journal articles, the Summer paper should include the following:

- Background, Motivations, & Prior Literature
- Theories & Hypotheses
- Data & Research Design
- Main Results
- Conclusions & Contributions

Dates: On or before August 30th, the student must submit to the Ph.D. Program Coordinator the completed Summer paper and a form (see Appendix A.2) which discloses: (1) whether the Summer paper is entirely the student's own idea, and (2) whether the Summer paper is an extension of an earlier research proposal from the student's coursework. The student must orally present the first-year Summer paper in an open seminar involving both faculty members and students, with questions and comments from the audience. This presentation must be given before the end of the Fall semester in year 2. The oral presentation will normally be 30 minutes long.

Evaluation: Following the submission of the Summer paper, the paper will be reviewed by two members of the Ph.D. Committee together with the Ph.D. Program Coordinator (the reviewers are not the student's faculty mentors). The student will receive written comments aimed at helping the student improve the paper prior to the student's oral presentation. Following the oral presentation, the faculty reviewers provide the student a formal evaluation, including an assessment of whether the Summer paper has potential for publication in a top-tier journal.

Qualifying exam

Students will give an oral presentation of their second-year Summer paper during the Fall semester of year 3. The Summer paper is written under the guidance of at least three research faculty (normally two of the three faculty are the student's mentors). The second-year Summer paper cannot be coauthored with any other Ph.D. students or faculty because the paper forms the basis of the student's qualifying exam (see below). The second-year Summer paper is expected to contain original research and be in the form of a scholarly paper. The paper should be written and formatted with sufficient rigor to meet submission standards at the top journals in accounting. The paper should be 20-30 pages in length (excluding references and tables).

Following the structure of top-tier journal articles, the Summer paper should include the following:

- Background, Motivations, & Prior Literature
- Theories & Hypotheses
- Data & Research Design
- Main Results
- Conclusions & Contributions

The qualifying exam has both a written and oral component. The second-year Summer paper serves as the written component. For the oral component, the student must present the paper in an open seminar involving both faculty members and students, with questions and comments from the audience. This presentation must be given before the end of the Fall semester in the student's third year, giving students time to respond to feedback from the submission made at the end of August. The oral presentation will normally be an hour long.

A student will be eligible to take the qualifying exam if the student's work during years 1 and 2 is satisfactory. The Ph.D. Committee and Ph.D. Program Coordinator will make this assessment based on the student's two research proposals during the Winter recesses of years 1 and 2, the first-year Summer paper, and coursework grades throughout years 1 and 2. A decision on whether or not a student will be eligible to take the qualifying exam will be made at the end of the Spring semester in year 2.

The written and oral components are assessed by a committee of five research faculty: a minimum of three faculty are from the Leventhal School of Accounting and at least one faculty is from outside of Leventhal.³ Each member of the committee has to sign the "Appointment of Committee" form from the

Graduate School's web site. It is the student's responsibility to submit this form to Marshall, USC, and the Ph.D. Program Coordinator by August 30th.

Following successful completion of the qualifying exam, the student is admitted to candidacy. At the discretion of the qualifying exam committee, one retake is permitted if a student fails the qualifying exam. The retake must be taken within 3 to 6 months from the original exam date. Students who fail the retaken qualifying examination will not be allowed to continue in the Ph.D. Program.

If a student passes the qualifying exam, the student advances to the next stage of the program. If a student does not pass the qualifying exam, the student may not continue in the program. After passing the qualifying exam, the student must appoint their Dissertation Committee by filling out the Appointment of Committee form for their Dissertation Committee. Assuming all parties are willing, the faculty members of the student's Qualifying Exam Committee may become the student's Dissertation Committee.

Proposal defense

The doctoral dissertation comprises one or more papers that are the student's original work. The dissertation proposal is an event in which the student presents a scholarly paper that outlines preliminary research findings and future directions, and an oral presentation to the Dissertation Committee, which assesses the dissertation proposal. The committee must be constituted according to Marshall and University rules, and the appropriate forms must be completed and submitted to the Marshall School and University.

The dissertation proposal should occur no later than the end of the Fall Semester of year 4. If the proposal is not approved by the dissertation committee, another proposal must occur. A student must have an approved dissertation proposal by no later than the end of the Spring Semester of year 4.

GPA requirement

Students are required to maintain a minimum average grade of B+ in their courses.

Six-Year Funding

Please see Section V. **Funding and Financial Support** in the main text for details.

Appendix: Program-Specific Requirements for Operations Management

This document outlines policies and requirements for the PhD Program in Operations Management (OM) that are more specific than or differ from the general guidelines for the Marshall School of Business PhD Program. This appendix should be read in conjunction with the main Marshall PhD Program Handbook, which contains university- and school-wide policies.

Course Requirements

All OM students are required to take the following courses:

- Core First-Year Courses:
- DSO 699: Fundamentals of Probability for Data Science and Operations Research
- ISE 631: Linear Programming
- Other Required Courses:
- Students who have not yet passed the qualifying exam must enroll in DSO 621 whenever it is offered, for up to six iterations.
- Students who have not yet passed the qualifying exam should enroll in the following DSO courses when they are offered:
 - DSO 670: Current Research in Operations Management
 - DSO 677: Dynamic Optimization and Reinforcement Learning
 - DSO 699: Stochastic Modeling for Optimization and Learning
 - DSO 699: Acquiring and Managing Unstructured Data for Applied Research
 - DSO 699: Bandit Algorithms and Reinforcement Learning
 - DSO 699: Advanced Data Science: Statistical Modeling, Computation, and Optimization

A waiver for a required course may be granted in rare circumstances by the PhD Coordinator.

Seminar Attendance: All OM PhD students are required to attend all OM seminars organized by the department. These are research presentations by esteemed faculty from across the world and are important to students' education.

Screening Exam

The screening procedure occurs at the end of the first year and consists of a written exam and a summer paper. Students are strongly encouraged to start preparing for the written exam months in advance, study in groups, and reach out to faculty for support. The exam is challenging, and students should plan accordingly.

Written Exam

- Format
 - The exam takes place over two days between June 15th and June 30th. One day is dedicated to optimization, and the other to stochastic processes. Each exam is typically five hours long, closed-book, and allows for one double-sided page of notes, which must be turned in after the exam. The faculty may adjust this format with advance notice if deemed necessary.
 - Past exams are available from the department website here:
<https://uscmsb.sharepoint.com/sites/DSO/SitePages/PhD-Program.aspx>
- Optimization Exam Details
 - The exam covers linear programming, along with introductory convex and integer programming. The standard of mastery is high: a well-prepared student is expected to be able to solve every end-of-chapter question from the specified chapters in the textbooks listed below.

- Topics Covered: Formulations, Geometry of linear programming, Simplex Algorithm, Duality Theory and Its Applications, Sensitivity Analysis and Parametric Programming, Network Flow Models, Formulating Optimization Problems, Lagrange Duality Theory, Optimality Conditions in Convex Optimization, Formulating Basic Integer Programming Problems, Linear Relaxations.
- Authoritative References:
 - Bertsimas and Tsitsiklis, Introduction to Linear Optimization, 1997. (Ch. 1-5, 7, 10-11)
 - Boyd and Vandenberghe, Convex Optimization, 2004. (Ch. 1-5)
- Stochastics Exam Details
 - The exam covers stochastic modeling at an advanced level. The standard for preparation is rigorous: a well-prepared student is expected to have mastered the material in the referenced chapters to the extent that they can solve every end-of-chapter problem.
 - Core Topics & References: The material is covered in A Probability Path by Sidney I. Resnick (Ch. 1-10) and Probability and Random Processes by Geoffrey Grimmett and David Stirzaker (Ch. 1-5, 7).
 - Measure Theoretic Probability: Sample spaces, σ -fields and probability measures, properties of probability measures (countably additive, union bound, inclusion-exclusion, continuity of probability), Carathéodory Extension Theorem, Lebesgue measure on $[0,1]$ and \mathbb{R} .
 - Random Variables: Random variables as measurable functions, σ -fields generated by random variables, discrete and continuous random variables, cumulative distribution functions, summary statistics, moment generating functions, probability generating functions, and examples of useful discrete and continuous random variables.
 - Independence: Independent random variables and Borel-Cantelli Lemma.
 - Integration and Expectation: Measure theoretic development, Fatou's Lemma, Dominated Convergence Theorem, product measure, Fubini's Theorem.
 - Modes of Convergence: Almost sure convergence, convergence in probability, connections between a.s. and i.p. convergence, L_p convergence and uniform Integrability, convergence in distribution.
 - Laws of Large Numbers: Strong Law of Large Number, Weak Law of Large Number, Chernoff bounds, and other large deviation inequalities.
 - Introduction to Stochastic Processes: Bernoulli and Poisson processes, stationarity and memoryless property, stopping times.
 - Martingale Theory: Conditional expectation, martingales, martingale convergence, central limit theorems, optimal stopping theorem, and applications.
 - Advanced Stochastic Processes: Students must be comfortable with topics covered in Probability and Random Processes by Grimmett and Stirzaker (Ch. 6.1-6.9, 8.1-8.7, 10.1, 10.2, 10.6, 11.1, 11.2). Topics include Markov Chains (classification of states/chains, stationary distributions, reversibility, continuous-time chains), specific queues (M/M/1, M/M/k, M/M/infinity), and Renewals.

Summer Paper:

- Requirement: Students must complete a summer research paper under the supervision of a tenured or tenure-track DSO faculty member. An advisor and topic must be identified by the end of the second semester of the first year.

- Timeline: A completed paper must be submitted by September 15th, and an oral presentation to the OM faculty must be completed by September 30th.
- Components: The paper must contain a literature review, a modeling section, and a detailed analysis.
- Goal: While the aim is to produce a high-quality research project, a publishable paper is not required for a passing outcome. The goal is to demonstrate substantive progress and an aptitude for research.

Screening Procedure Outcome:

Based on the student's performance in their coursework, written exam, summer paper, and presentation, the Ph.D. committee will determine whether the student should continue in the program. Students who have not performed satisfactorily may be dropped from the program or asked to complete remedial work. The review shall normally be completed and results communicated to students by October 15th.

Qualifying Exam

The qualifying exam must be completed by January 1st of the third year. The OM department's specific requirements are listed below. For all other university and school-wide policies regarding the qualifying exam, including general procedures, timelines, and outcomes, students must refer to the main Marshall PhD Program Handbook.

- Committee Composition:
 - The Chair of the Qualifying Committee must be a tenured or tenure-track faculty member in the DSO department.
 - Of the five total members, at least three must be from the DSO department, and at least one of these three must be tenured.
- Written Exam: The written component is a research paper, primarily authored by the student, that contains original research and is structured with sufficient rigor to meet the submission standards of top-tier OM journals (e.g., *Operations Research*, *Management Science*, *M&SOM*).
- Oral Exam: The oral examination (typically 1.5-2 hours) will cover: (1) questions related to the written paper, (2) the student's overall knowledge of the field, and (3) future dissertation topics.
- Retake Policy: One retake is permitted at the discretion of the qualifying exam committee. The retake must be completed within 3-6 months from the original exam date. Students who fail the second exam cannot continue in the Ph.D. Program.

Proposal Defense

A dissertation proposal defense is required for all students in the OM program. This serves two important roles: first, as an opportunity for the Dissertation Committee to provide early feedback, and second, as a mutual agreement on the elements the completed thesis will contain. For general university policies on dissertation committees and defenses, students should refer to the corresponding section in this Handbook.

- **Timeline:** The proposal must be defended no earlier than the first semester of the fourth year and no later than nine months prior to the final dissertation defense.
- **Process & Outcome:** The candidate presents their completed work and a detailed plan for the remainder of their thesis to their Dissertation Committee. If the committee requests substantial changes, the student may be required to repeat a portion of the proposal defense within six months.

GPA

The GPA requirement is governed by the policy in the Marshall School of Business PhD Program Handbook, which states that a student's overall GPA must not drop below 3.0. The OM department has no additional GPA requirements.

Sixth-Year Funding

While the Marshall PhD Program Handbook provides general guidance, the OM department has a formal process for requesting sixth-year funding.

- **Application Timeline:** Students interested in sixth-year funding must request it at the end of their fourth year (end of the spring semester). This early deadline is intentional; if the request is denied, the student still has sufficient time to enter the job market in the fall of their fifth year.
- **Application Materials:** The student must submit a CV and a letter from their advisor(s) detailing their progress to date and explaining how a sixth year of funding would be beneficial.
- **Decision Process:** The OM faculty will discuss the case and vote on the request. The PhD Coordinators are the point of contact for students throughout this process.

Appendix: Program-Specific Requirements for Statistics

This document outlines policies and requirements for the PhD Program in Statistics that are more specific than or differ from the general guidelines for the Marshall School of Business PhD Program. This appendix should be read in conjunction with the main Marshall PhD Program Handbook, which contains university- and school-wide policies.

Course Requirements

Statistics PhD students are required to take the following courses:

- DSO 603 – Causal Inference with Modern Machine Learning Methods
- DSO 604 – Modern Statistical Inference
- DSO 607 – High Dimensional Statistics and Big Data Problems
- DSO 615 – Fundamentals of Probability for Data Science and Operations Research
- DSO 699 – Advanced Data Science: Statistical Modeling, Computation, and Optimization
- DSO 699 – Bandit Algorithms and Reinforcement Learning

- EE 588 – Optimization for the Information and Data Sciences
- MATH 541A – Introduction to Mathematical Statistics
- MATH 541B – Introduction to Mathematical Statistics
- DSO 699 – Acquiring and Managing Unstructured Data for Applied Research
- DSO 699 -- SMOL

Some of these courses may not be offered every year. In such cases, or under other exceptional circumstances, a waiver may be granted by the PhD Coordinator. However, it is the student's responsibility to proactively contact the PhD Coordinator to request and obtain such a waiver.

Other Required Components:

- DSO 621 – Students who have not yet passed the qualifying exam must enroll in DSO 621 whenever it is offered, for up to six iterations.
- Statistics Seminar – All PhD students, regardless of year, are expected to regularly attend Statistics seminar talks.

Screening Exam

In addition to the first-year courses, a screening process will occur no later than the start of second year. The screening process will consist of a comprehensive review of each student's academic performance, an assessment of research competence, and a written examination. The exam will cover material from the first-year coursework as well as foundational undergraduate-level knowledge relevant to statistics.

The faculty will review the following three things for the screening process (a) student's performance in the written screening exam (b) student's performance in first year classes (c) quality of the summer paper.

A high score in the written screening exam does not automatically guarantee a pass; the students must have satisfactory performances in all three categories.

Based upon this review, the Ph.D. committee will determine whether the student should continue in the Ph.D. program. Students who have not performed satisfactorily will be asked to leave the PhD program. Depending on their performance they may be allowed to enroll in a terminal master's degree. The review shall normally be completed, and results communicated to students by October 15th.

Students are strongly encouraged to start preparing for their screening exam well in advance, study in groups, and reach out to faculty for support or with questions. Past exams are available from the following departmental link:

<https://uscmsb.sharepoint.com/sites/DSO/SitePages/PhD-Program.aspx>

Written Exam

- Students with average GPA less than 3.3 (B+) are not allowed to take the exam. Exceptions can be made under unusual circumstances. The screening exam has two parts (a) an open book written exam (but no internet or electronic gadgets such as iPad, laptops, etc is allowed) whose duration is for 5 hours (b) a take home exam that will test applied statistics and coding skills. Students will have a maximum of 24 hours to work on this take home exam. The 5 hours exam should be taken before the take home exam. We can allow a gap of one day between the two exams. The written exam needs to

be taken between May 20th to June 15th. A syllabus of the written exam is attached at the end of this section.

Summer paper

- Students will complete a summer paper under the supervision of a faculty advisor. Students should identify a faculty advisor and a topic for their summer paper by the end of the second semester of the first year. If they have trouble coming up with a research topic and advisor, students can consult the Ph.D. coordinator. While students should begin the research for their summer paper upon joining the program, most of the work for the summer paper can take place in the summer after they have taken the screening exam. Students should plan to work closely with their advisor throughout the summer. A completed paper must be submitted to the Ph.D. coordinator by September 15. It should contain the following components:
 - Literature review. Relate the problem to what has been done and identify the significance of the work being done.
 - Proposed Methodology. Clearly present the statistical methods that you intend to develop. Include implementation details.
 - Numerical or Theoretical Analysis. Analysis of the operational characteristics of the proposed method via simulations or theory.
 - Oral presentation. Students should present and defend their work in front of the Statistics faculty by September 30.
 - While the goal is to write a publishable quality paper, this is not necessary for a passing outcome. Indeed, the goal is to have substantive progress towards a high-quality research project and demonstrate an aptitude for research.

Syllabus of the Screening Exam

- **In-person Open Notes 5 hour Written Exam Syllabus**
 - Probability Theory
 - Probability spaces, measures and sigma-algebra, random variables and their distribution, abstract integration and expectation, independence, and product measures
 - Weak laws of large numbers, the Borel-Cantelli lemmas, Strong law of large numbers, modes of convergence, dominated convergence, maximal inequality, convergence of random series, Fatou's lemma, Kolmogorov's 0-1 Law
 - The Central Limit Theorem, Weak convergence, characteristic functions, random vectors and multivariate CLT
 - Conditional expectation, properties of conditional expectation, regular conditional probability distributions, martingales
 - Discrete time Markov chains
 - All the topics covered in DSO 615: Fundamentals of Probability for Data Science and Operations Research.
 - References: A probability path by Sidney Resnick.
 - Statistics Theory

- Point Estimation and Basic Decision Theory. Sufficiency, Minimal Sufficiency, Ancillary and Complete statistics; UMVUE, Rao-Cramer Lower bound; Exponential families, Bayes risk and estimators, Risk comparisons, Admissibility and minimaxity; Asymptotic distribution of maximum likelihood estimators

References:

Statistical Inference, Casella-Berger: Chapters 5, 6 (barring equivariance) and 7
Theory of Point Estimation, Lehman-Romano, Ch 5.1, 5.2, 5.4, 5.5

- Hypothesis Testing and Confidence Intervals. Method for finding and evaluating tests and interval estimates; likelihood ratio tests; asymptotic properties.

References: Statistical Inference, Casella, Berger: Chapters 8, 9, 10.

○ Statistics Methodology

■ Classical Linear Regression

- Ordinary Least Squares (OLS)
 - § Estimation
 - § BLUE, Gauss-Markov Theorem
- Confidence Regions
 - § Confidence Interval for a single Linear Parametric Function (LPF)
 - § Confidence Regions for multiple LPFs
 - § Simultaneous Confidence Intervals for multiple LPFs
 - § Prediction Interval
- Hypothesis Testing
 - § Testing for the significance of a single LPF
 - § Testing for the significance of individual predictors: t-test
 - § ANOVA Table and testing hypothesis involving several LPFs
 - § Testing for the significance of the entire model/testing for lack of fit: F-test
- Categorical Predictors, Interaction models
- Least Squares in Heteroskedastic Models
 - § Generalized Least Squares
 - § Weighted Least Squares
- Robust Regression
- Quantile Regression
 - § M-Estimation: Huber loss, Robustness

■ Other Regression Topics

- Non-Linear Regression
- Polynomial Regression
- Regression Splines*
- Local Regression
- Generalized Additive Models (GAM)
- Popular Generalized Linear Models
- Binary Data (Logit and Probit)
- Count Data: Poisson GLM, Contingency tables

○ High-dimensional Regression

- Curse of Dimensionality

- § Multicollinearity and VIF
 - § Bias-Variance trade-offs
 - Dimension Reduction Methods
 - § Principal Component Regression
 - § Partial Least Squares
 - Variable/Model Selection
 - § Forward Selection
 - § Backward Selection
 - § AIC, BIC, Cp
 - § Best Subset
 - § Cross Validation
 - Penalized Regression/Shrinkage Methods
 - § Ridge and linear shrinkage
 - § Lasso and Variable selection
 - § Lasso-type methods
- Machine learning methods
 - k-nearest neighbors, decision trees, random forest, svm,
 - Resampling methods such as cross-validation and bootstrap
 - Clustering, Bagging, boosting

References: Practical Regression and Anova using R, Julian James Faraway: Chapter 2, 3, 5, 6, 8,9, 10, 13; Introduction to Statistical Learning, 1st Edition, James et. al. Chapters: 5 to 10
- Optimization
 - Chapters 1-5 from “Convex Optimization” by Boyd and Vandenberghe.
- **Take-home Applied Statistics Exam**

Students should know the following things in addition to the methods described in the section 3 of the syllabus.

- Data handling and visualization with R or Python. Suggested references: “R for Data Science” by Hadley Wickham and Garrett Grolemund; “Python Data Science Handbook” by Jake VanderPlas.
- Fitting, applying, and interpreting generalized linear regression models. Suggested references: “Applied Linear Regression” by Sanford Weisberg; “Categorical Data Analysis” by Alan Agresti (Chapters 4-6).
- Creating and describing contingency tables, carrying out inferences for categorical data. Suggested references: “Categorical Data Analysis” by Alan Agresti (Chapters 1-3).
- Carrying out numerical simulations and applying computational techniques (e.g., Monte Carlo, resampling, cross-validation, conformal inference) to approximate various unknown quantities of possible interest, including probabilities, expected values, point estimates, p-values, confidence intervals, prediction intervals, generalization errors.
- Building, applying, and interpreting common statistical learning models for prediction, including regularized generalized linear regression models, k-nearest neighbor classifiers, decision trees, random forests, SVMs, and neural networks.

- Understanding and applying Monte Carlo random sampling techniques, including importance sampling, rejection sampling, Metropolis-Hastings, Monte Carlo Markov Chain, and Gibbs sampling.

Qualifying Exam

The qualifying exam must be completed by January 1st of the third year. The specific requirements pertaining to statistics PhD students are listed below. For all other university and school-wide policies regarding the qualifying exam, including general procedures, timelines, and outcomes, students must refer to the main Marshall PhD Program Handbook.

- Committee Composition:
 - The Chair of the Qualifying Committee must be a tenured or tenure-track faculty member in the DSO department.
 - Of the five total members, at least three must be from the DSO department, and at least one of these three must be tenured.
 - One faculty member must be from outside the student's home department – he or she can belong to another department within Marshall or another school within USC.
- Written Exam: The written component is a research paper, primarily authored by the student, that contains original research and is structured with sufficient rigor to meet the submission standards of top-tier statistics journals.
- Oral Exam: The oral examination (typically 1.5-2 hours) will involve a presentation of the paper by students and will include: (1) questions related to the written paper, (2) the student's overall knowledge of the field, and (3) future dissertation topics.
- Retake Policy: One retake is permitted at the discretion of the qualifying exam committee. The retake must be completed within 3-6 months from the original exam date. Students who fail the second exam cannot continue in the Ph.D. Program.

Proposal Defense

A dissertation proposal defense is required for all PhD students. The Qualifying Exam Committee may serve as the Dissertation Committee. This is allowed if all parties agree. However, students must still submit separate forms for the Appointment of the Qualifying Exam Committee and the Appointment of the Dissertation Committee. Students must formally appoint their Dissertation Committee after passing the qualifying exams. The committee must include at least three members, with at least one tenured faculty member from the DSO department and one faculty member from outside the DSO department. The chair must be a tenured or tenure-track faculty member in DSO.

The proposal defense must be held between the first semester of the fourth year and at least nine months before the final dissertation defense. The chair of the committee typically advises the student on when the dissertation is ready for the proposal defense.

The student is responsible for scheduling the final dissertation defense. This includes arranging a room and confirming availability of all committee members. A complete draft of the dissertation must be submitted to the committee at least two weeks prior to the defense date.

The final defense consists of a public presentation followed by a private examination. The public portion is open to the university community. After the presentation, the committee conducts a closed-door session to question the student. The decision to approve the dissertation must be unanimous. If substantial changes are requested, the student may be required to repeat part of the defense within six months.

GPA requirement

The GPA requirement is governed by the policy in the Marshall School of Business PhD Program Handbook, which states that a student's overall GPA must not drop below 3.0. The Statistics PhD students do not have any additional GPA requirements.

Six-Year Funding

Funding beyond the fifth year is rare and granted only under exceptional circumstances, subject to departmental approval. Students seeking sixth-year funding must apply by the end of their fourth year in the PhD program. The application should include: (a) a written proposal outlining how sixth-year funding will support the completion of their dissertation, (b) a current CV, (c) an up-to-date transcript, (d) a cover letter, and (e) a letter of recommendation from their faculty advisor(s). These materials should be submitted to the PhD Coordinator, who will convene a meeting of all tenured and tenure-track faculty in the Statistics group. During the meeting, the faculty will decide on full, partial, or no funding. The student will be informed of the decision by the end of the first semester of their fifth year in the program.

Additional Information

Additional Funding Information

Students receiving full funding are not permitted to engage in external employment without prior approval from the PhD Coordinator and/or their faculty advisors. All summer internship plans must be discussed and approved by a student's faculty advisor and the PhD Program.

Student Presentations

Every PhD student is expected to present one or two research talks per academic year to the Statistics group. Following each presentation, the PhD Coordinator will provide the student with feedback on behalf of the faculty.

Teaching Assistantship and Assistant Lecturer Assignment

After passing the qualifying exams, students should coordinate with the PhD Program Coordinator and Department Chair to determine the timing of their teaching assistant (TA) assignments. Each student is

expected to serve as a TA for a course and subsequently teach the same course in one of the following semesters. This structure is intended to provide continuity and practical teaching experience.

As a TA, students assist a faculty member with course responsibilities. This role is designed to help students develop instructional skills and gain exposure to teaching practices in a mentored setting. Each student is also required to serve as an Assistant Lecturer. In this capacity, the student serves as the instructor of record and assumes full responsibility for all aspects of the course, including syllabus design, instruction, and student evaluation.

Appendix: Program-Specific Requirements for Finance

Course Requirements

Students are required to complete a series of classes. The total number of required units is specified by the university. Required courses are:

- GSBA 602. Selected Issues in Economic Theory I
- GSBA 612. Selected Issues in Economic Theory II
- FBE 630. Fundamentals of Corporate Finance
- FBE 633. Fundamentals of Asset Pricing
- FBE 631. Advanced Corporate Finance
- FBE 634. Advanced Asset Pricing
- FBE 670. Selected Topics in Finance Research [choice, but at least two topics]
- BUCO 637. Communication for Doctoral Students
- FBE 621. Research Forum [students should enroll in this continuously from the first year on, unless there is a scheduling conflict with another class]

Students typically take 3 to 4 courses per semester. A typical schedule over five years is shown in the table below. See the appendix for more examples. Classes indicated with an asterisk are required to graduate; others are electives.

Year 1	Classes	Units
Fall	GSBA 602. Selected Issues in Economic Theory I*	3
	GSBA 604. Regression and Generalized Linear Models for Business Research [or similar e.g. ECON 513]	3
	FBE 621. Research Forum*	1
	Elective(s)	0-6
Spring	GSBA 612. Selected Issues in Economic Theory II*	3
	FBE 630. Fundamentals of Corporate Finance*	1.5

	FBE 633. Fundamentals of Asset Pricing*	1.5
	GSBA 603. Causal Inference	3
	FBE 621. Research Forum*	1
	Elective(s)	0-3
Summer	Paper #1	
Year 2		
Fall	FBE 631. Advanced Corporate Finance*	3
	FBE 634. Advanced Asset Pricing*	3
	FBE 621. Research Forum*	1
	Elective(s)	
Spring	FBE 670. Selected Topics in Finance Research #1*	1.5
	FBE 670. Selected Topics in Finance Research #2*	1.5
	FBE 621. Research Forum*	1
	GSBA 690. Tutorial on the Research Process	
Summer	BUCO 637. Communication for Doctoral Students*	1
	Paper #2 (Screening Exam)	
Year 3		
	FBE 670. Selected Topics in Finance Research #N	
	FBE 621. Research Forum*	
	Dissertation proposal (USC Qualifying Exam)	
	Paper #3	
Year 4		
	GSBA 794. Doctoral Dissertation	
	FBE 621. Research Forum*	
	Job market paper	
Year 5		
	GSBA 794. Doctoral Dissertation	
	FBE 621. Research Forum*	

Screening Exam

The screening exam takes the form of a research paper, namely the second-year paper (or “screening paper”), which is written during the second year of the program, and polished and completed during the second summer. The second-year paper is expected to include independent research, and is the primary basis upon which students are assessed for continuing in the program. Students are expected to begin work on the second-year paper immediately at the start of the second year, if not earlier.

- *Due Dates:*

The precise date is determined by the PhD Co-Directors each year, but the final paper is usually due within two weeks before to two weeks after the start of Fall Semester of third year. The paper proposal is due no later than the last day of the Spring Semester of the student's second year.

- *Description:*

The second-year paper is expected to contain original research and be in the form of a scholarly paper. It should contain an introduction motivating the paper, a section describing the related literature, a description of data and methods (for empirical papers), and presentation of results. The paper should be formatted with sufficient rigor to meet submission standards at top journals in finance. Because successful students must be able to produce a flow of research, and because the process of producing new papers is valuable for learning, the second-year paper must be separate from the first-year paper. The paper may not be coauthored.

- *Process:*

The second-year paper has three components: an advisory committee, a paper proposal, and the final paper and presentation.

The second-year paper is supervised by a three-person advisory committee selected by the student, upon approval of the PhD Directors. The chair of the committee and at least one other member must be FBE faculty members. At the discretion of the PhD Directors, one committee member may be an emeritus faculty member of FBE.

The committee should be established in the beginning of the Fall Semester of the second year, and the Advisory Committee of the Second Year Paper Form should be submitted to the PhD Directors by the sixth week of the Fall semester. The form should be submitted by the chair of the advisory committee, not the student.

The student must submit a two to three-page paper proposal to the PhD Directors ideally by the end of Spring Break of the second year, but no later than the last day of the Spring Semester of the student's second year. The proposal should indicate the paper's research question, methodological approach, including details about data sources or relevant theoretical frameworks, and an estimated timeline for reaching key milestones in the paper's development, such as data collection completion

and first draft completed. The proposal is written by the student, but should be submitted by the chair of the advisory committee, not the student.

- *Screening Exam:*

The screening exam has both a written and oral component. The exams typically are organized and administered as follows, but the routine may be modified by the PhD Directors.

Both components will be assessed by a Screening Exam Committee appointed by the PhD Directors that is composed of five or more members, with at least three members holding appointments in FBE. In many cases, the Screening Exam Committee will be comprised of the Finance PhD Program Committee plus other faculty members. The chair of the student's paper-writing advisory committee may not serve on his or her Screening Exam Committee.

- *Written Component:* The second-year paper serves as the written component. Students also submit their curricula vitae to be used in the evaluation.
- *Oral Component:* The paper is presented in late summer or fall semester in an open seminar involving both faculty members and students, typically at the Finance PhD Mini-Conference. The specific format for the presentation will be established on a year-by-year basis, but typically takes the form of a 45-minute workshop-style presentation, with questions and comments from the audience. Attendance includes members of the Screening Exam Committee and is open to other faculty members and graduate students from across USC who wish to attend.

After the paper is presented, the faculty members in attendance meet to discuss the paper and the student's potential for successful advancement in the program. The members of the student's advisory committee may offer introductory comments at the start of the discussion, but after that should remain silent or recuse themselves. After the discussion, all faculty members present who read the paper cast an advisory vote on the quality of the work. Faculty members who did not read the paper may not vote. Voting is by secret ballot.

- *Assessment:* After reviewing both the written and oral component, the Screening Exam Committee meets, discusses the case, and assigns an outcome. The outcome on the screening exam is FAIL, PASS, or in rare circumstances HIGH PASS. In making the assessment, the Screening Exam Committee considers both the paper and presentation. Both the quality of the work to date and its prospects upon future revision are considered. The assessment is intended to determine a student's fitness to undertake independent research, and successfully write a dissertation. As a very rough rule of thumb, the expected quality for a passing paper is: *The paper meets the standards of a typical paper that would be accepted for the FMA Conference.* (This is intended to provide a conceptual target; it does not imply that a paper actually accepted for the FMA Conference would automatically pass.) In order to earn a HIGH PASS, one can imagine a paper that would meet the standards of acceptance for the AFA meetings.

- *Advancement in the program:*

If a student passes the screening exam, has earned a 3.5 GPA in core economics and finance classes, and is otherwise in good academic standing, he or she advances to the next stage of the program. If a student receives a failing assessment on the exam, then the student may

not continue in the program. The PhD Directors may make an exception to this rule in extenuating circumstances. There is no provision to “retake” the screening exam.

Dissertation Proposal/Qualifying Exam

The dissertation comprises one or more papers. The dissertation proposal/qualifying exam is an event in which the student presents preliminary research and gathers feedback from faculty members about the potential of the research to comprise a dissertation, and directions to proceed. Typically, a student will later present more advanced versions of the dissertation in department seminars or workshops.

The writing and presentation of the dissertation proposal serves as the University’s Qualifying Exam, and is governed by procedures established by the Marshall School and the University.

- *Due:* The dissertation proposal/qualifying exam must occur no later than April 15th of a student’s third year in the program. If the proposal is not approved, another proposal must occur. A student must have an approved proposal no later than the end of Summer Semester before the start of the fourth year.
- *Description:* The dissertation proposal/qualifying exam involves preparation of a written document in the form of a scholarly paper that outlines research findings and future directions, and presentation of the contents of that document to a faculty committee. A faculty committee selected by the student supervises and assesses the proposal. The committee must be constituted according to Marshall and University rules, and the appropriate forms must be completed and submitted to the Marshall School and University.
- *Process:* See corresponding section in the main text for Marshall and USC guidelines.

GPA Requirement

Students must maintain an average GPA of 3.5 in the core economics and finance classes (GSBA 602, GSBA 612, FBE 630, FBE 631, FBE 633, FBE 634). In addition, students are expected to maintain an overall GPA of 3.0; failure to meet this standard may result in withdrawal of finance support, among other things.

Sixth-Year Funding

In extremely rare cases, the program may choose to provide sixth-year funding in the form of a stipend, usually equal to the full amount or half the full amount, and Marshall will cover tuition and benefits for sixth-year students. Students seeking sixth-year funding are expected to pursue other funding opportunities, both inside and outside USC.

- *Process:* Students may apply for sixth-year funding by the start of Fall semester of their fifth year. The process is as follows:
 - Student submits a letter requesting funding, explaining how the request meets the funding criteria below, and a CV, transcript of course grades, and all working papers that are publicly available.
 - Student's advisor submits a letter outlining progress to date and the extent to which the request meets the funding criteria.
 - The Finance PhD Committee reviews the materials and confidentially votes on whether to approve funding, and at what level. Student's primary advisor(s) does not attend this meeting. In most cases, student is notified of the final decision before the end of September of their 5th year.
- *Funding criteria:* The overarching rationale for sixth-year funding is to provide an already high-performing student with an opportunity to polish his or her record so as to compete for top jobs. Funding is available only for students with 1) a demonstrated record of accomplishment that suggests they have a reasonable chance of placing at a top-20 school, and 2) a specific plan for the 5th year that demonstrates how an additional year will significantly improve the chance for a top-20 placement. Funding is not available to give students who are not prepared for the market an additional year to prepare. An example of a potentially fundable case is a student with several strong working papers and one or more R&Rs at a good journal – in the hope that an R&R could be converted to an accepted paper with additional time.

Accordingly, the committee evaluates applications based on whether (i) the student has demonstrated a strong record of performance to date in terms of actual research production, and (ii) an additional year in the program would materially increase the student's prospects of placing in a top program.

Evaluations are based primarily on concrete evidence of actual accomplishment. Such evidence could include: polished and publicly available working papers that have been accepted at high quality conferences and/or journals; manuscripts that have received revise-and-resubmit requests from strong journals; strong solo-authored work; best paper prizes or other external recognition of quality work. Significant effort applying for funding from other sources will also be taken into account.

Additional Information

Seminars and Brownbag

The department sponsors weekly seminars for the presentation and discussion of current research in finance. Seminars are an important forum for exchange of information throughout the academic community, and attending and participating in seminars is an essential professional activity of a successful researcher. Speakers include internal faculty and doctoral students from USC and external faculty from other universities. Students at all stages of the program are encouraged to attend and participate.

The department reserves a time slot on each speaker's schedule specifically to meet with students. Students that have passed their screening exam (third year and up) are strongly encouraged to meet with visiting speakers, especially those working on related topics. These meetings provide an opportunity to share ideas with speakers and get their feedback, to learn more from speakers, and to develop informal communication skills. Students may meet with speakers before the third year if they wish.

First-Year Paper

The first-year paper is written during the summer of the first year, under supervision of a faculty member. The paper consists of a literature review that discusses directions for future research; optionally, the paper also contains original research. The purpose of the paper is to familiarize the student with the literature in an area of interest and begin the process of identifying promising directions for the student's own research.

- *Due:* First class day of Fall Semester of second year (approximately August 21)
- *Description:* The paper is expected to focus on a particular topic or area in finance. It should be approximately 3,000 to 6,000 words, with about three-quarters focused on literature review and one-quarter focused on directions for new research. The paper should be double-spaced and formatted following a leading journal in finance.

The literature review is expected to be based on 5-15 central or current papers in the area, and should summarize and connect the work, drawing out central themes and lessons. The literature review should go beyond summarizing the papers under review; it should attempt to draw general lessons from the work, assess which conclusions in the literature are reliable and which are questionable, highlight points of dispute, and critique shortcomings. Criticism is especially important because that is one way new projects are identified. For examples of how to write a survey, consult the following articles (of course, student papers are not expected to be as comprehensive and fundamental as these published articles):

- Shleifer, Andrei and Robert W. Vishny "A Survey of Corporate Governance," *Journal of Finance*, 1997.
- Harris, Milton and Artur Raviv, "The Theory of Capital Structure," *Journal of Finance*, 1991.
- Jensen, Michael C. and Richard S. Ruback, "The Market for Corporate Control: The Scientific Evidence," *Journal of Financial Economics*, 1983.
- Fama, Eugene F., "Efficient Capital Markets: A Review of Theory and Empirical Work," *Journal of Finance*, 1969.

The section on new directions should identify open questions, and suggest directions for future research. Directions for future research should be specific, ideally in the form of a paper proposal; the proposal should be feasible in the sense that data have been identified or (in the case of theoretical research) the main modeling elements are clear. Students are encouraged to begin implementing their research ideas, if time permits, but this is not required for the first-year paper. The paper may not be coauthored.

- *Process:* Each paper is supervised by a faculty member approved by the PhD Directors. Students should seek a faculty advisor once they determine their area of interest. The faculty advisor meets with the student and approves the list of papers to be reviewed. The faculty advisor must be selected, the main papers to be reviewed must be identified and approved, and the First-Year Paper Form must be submitted to the PhD Directors no later than June 1 of the first summer. The form should be completed by the student but submitted to the PhD Directors *by the faculty advisor*, not by the student.

- *Evaluation:* The first-year paper is reviewed by a committee of two faculty members nominated by the faculty advisor and approved by the PhD directors. The faculty advisor may not serve as a reviewer. The two reviewers read the paper, discuss their views, and assign an outcome: (i) FAIL; (ii) PASS; (iii) HIGH PASS. A paper is assigned a grade of FAIL if it fails to meet the minimum conditions of reviewing the literature and proposing new directions for research. A necessary condition for a paper to be graded HIGH PASS is inclusion of a new result, empirical or theoretical, that could become the basis for an original scholarly contribution. The committee reports the result of the review to the PhD Directors no later than the start of the third week of Fall Semester; the PhD Directors notify the student.
- *Advancement in the program:* Based on assessment of the first-year paper and the student's first-year grades, the PhD Directors determine whether the student may continue to the second year of the program. The expectation is that students will continue into the second year unless there is clear and compelling evidence that advancement is not warranted.

Third-Year Paper

The third-year paper is written during the third year of program and presented at the Finance PhD Mini-Conference in the fall of the fourth year. The third-year paper is expected to contain independent research, and together with the second-year paper, gives the student two credible working papers.

- *Due:* First class day of Fall Semester of fourth year (approximately August 21).
- *Description:* The third-year paper must be distinct from the second-year paper. The third-year paper may build on or be a revision of the first-year paper. The third-year paper may be coauthored with faculty members or other students.
- *Evaluation:* The paper is presented at the start of fall semester in an open seminar involving faculty members and students, typically in the Finance PhD Mini-Conference. At a minimum, the paper should be of sufficient quality and care to be posted as a working paper on SSRN. The student's faculty advisor, together with the PhD Directors, determine whether the paper contains original research, and constitutes a valid working paper. If so, the student advances in the program. The student's faculty advisor submits to the PhD Directors the Upper-Year Review Form that indicates the student's progress in the program.

Fourth-Year Paper

The fourth-year paper is intended to be the third "serious" paper in a student's portfolio.

- *Due:* First class day of Fall Semester of fifth year (approximately August 21).
- *Description:* The fourth-year paper should be distinct from any previous papers. Together with the second-year paper and third-year paper, the fourth-year paper gives the student three working papers.

- *Evaluation:* The student's faculty advisor together with the PhD Directors determine whether the paper contains original research and constitutes a valid working paper. If so, the student advances in the program. The faculty advisor submits to the PhD Directors the Upper-Year Review Form.

Research Mentors and Assistantship

Doctoral students are assigned a research mentor during each semester of the program (sometimes called a "research assistant (RA) assignment"). These research relationships are intended to advance the student's education by giving the student advice and experience in research projects led by the faculty. Ideally, the research relationships will lead to coauthored projects. Although described as an RA assignment, the research relationships are not intended solely to provide research assistance to faculty.

- Assignment of Faculty Mentor

Each student will be assigned a research mentor (given an "RA assignment") at the beginning of each year by the PhD Directors. Assignments are expected to last the entire year, but may be changed during the year if a different match seems appropriate. Assignments may continue over multiple years, or may last for only one year, as appropriate. At the start of each year, the PhD Directors solicit proposals from the faculty for research projects that involve doctoral students. Proposals should indicate the role of the student and the skills that will be learned. Projects that may lead to coauthorship are favored. The PhD Directors may share the proposals with any interested faculty members and students, in order to provide examples and promote best practices.

- Activities and Responsibilities

The following schedule lists the typical faculty-student research activities and responsibilities for each year in the program. The schedule and nature of relationships for a student may vary somewhat from the typical case. Students and their faculty mentors are expected to hold regular meetings. Except as noted, students assigned as research assistants should not provide teaching-related assistance, such as grading, holding class sessions, or other administrative tasks.

- *Year 1.* The primary purpose of the relationship is to advise the student with his or her courses, studies, and overall strategies in the program. Students may assist with a faculty research project if it offers a good learning experience and does not interfere with classes and other program requirements. Students may not assist with teaching, for example, grading or holding class sessions.
- *Year 2.* The primary purpose is for the student to gain research skills by assisting the faculty mentor with a research project. Acceptable activities include data collection, data cleaning, data organizing, coding, and estimation, for empirical projects, and checking models and proofs for theoretical projects. In some cases, the relationship may involve the student working on his or her own project, in which case the faculty member serves as an advisor. Students may not assist with teaching, for example, grading or holding class sessions.
- *Year 3.* The primary purpose is the same as in year 2, for the student to gain research skills by assisting the faculty mentor with a research project. Students will also be assigned to serve as a teaching assistant in one semester-long PhD course. Teaching assistant duties may include grading but should also include in-person class meetings with students in which the doctoral student lectures or solves problems.

- **Year 4.** The primary purpose is the same as in years 2 and 3, for the student to gain research skills by assisting the faculty mentor with a research project. The projects in year 4 may be continued from previous years, and ideally should involve coauthorship. Students may not assist with teaching, for example, grading or holding class sessions.
- **Year 5.** The purpose is primarily to advise the student on completion of the dissertation. In most cases, the student's dissertation chair will serve as research mentor. Ideally, students also continue coauthored work with the faculty member. Students may not assist with teaching, including grading or holding class sessions.

Teaching

As part of the degree requirement, students are required to serve as a teaching assistant for one class, and to teach one class, typically an undergraduate core class in finance (BUAD 306), microeconomics (ECON 351x), or macroeconomics (ECON 352x). In order to ensure that teaching a class is a valuable learning experience for the doctoral student, teaching is performed as part of a mentoring program. The premise of the program is that learning is most effective when it is structured and the doctoral student ("student-instructor") is given guidance and feedback. Accordingly, student-instructors are mentored by both a faculty member and an educational designer on the Marshall staff.

Each student will have two mentors:

- **Faculty mentor.** Typically, the dissertation chair serves as the faculty mentor. The PhD Directors may assign a different faculty member to serve as faculty mentor in place of the dissertation chair. The faculty member is listed as co-instructor in the registration system. The faculty mentor should consider nominating the student for Marshall and university teaching awards, if appropriate.
- **Teaching coach.** Lanore Larson (lanorela@marshall.usc.edu), an educational program designer and pedagogical consultant, serves as the teaching coach. If Ms. Larson is unavailable, the PhD Directors will identify an alternative.
- **Before, during, and after the semester** the student-instructor's mentors should indicate completion of the various tasks below by signing the appropriate items on the Instructional Mentoring Form. The completed, signed form should be submitted to the PhD Directors once before the start of class (no later than one week before the first session) and once after the end of class (no later than one week after grades are submitted).

Before the course begins, the student-instructor should do the following:

- Complete BUCO 637, usually in the summer of the second year. This is a Marshall School requirement.
- One semester in advance: Observe one or more sessions of the same-numbered class taught by a Marshall faculty member. For example, if the student will be teaching BUAD 306, he or she should observe one or more class sessions of BUAD 306 taught by a Marshall faculty member. (Because students may not know their teaching assignments long in advance, they should plan to observe classes well enough ahead of time to be prepared to teach.)
- Consult the Faculty Development Companion web site on MyMarshall. This site contains a wealth of information regarding instructional technology, syllabi, learning goals, and teaching resources.
- Meet with faculty mentor to discuss class and development of syllabus.
- Meet with teaching coach to discuss the class, development of syllabus, learning objectives, and related matters.

- Prepare the syllabus in consultation with both mentors. Both mentors should indicate approval on the Instructional Mentoring Form.

While Teaching

- During the course of the semester, the student-instructor meets periodically with the faculty mentor to discuss the class. Weekly meetings are ideal initially, but there should be at least one meeting in the first half and one meeting in the second half of the semester. There should also be a final meeting after the class has ended.
- *In-class observation:* During the first half of the semester, the faculty mentor attends at least one class session as an observer. The faculty mentor meets with the student-instructor afterwards, and offers feedback. *There should be both verbal and written feedback.* The feedback is confidential for the student-instructor. Also during the semester, the teaching coach attends at least one class session as an observer. The teaching coach meets with the student-instructor afterwards and provides both verbal and written feedback.

Appendix: Program-Specific Requirements for Management and Organization (MOR)

Course Requirements

Common course requirements

All MOR Ph.D. students are required to take the following core doctoral courses:

- MOR 601: Organizational Behavior
- MOR 602: Organizational Theory
- MOR 603: Strategic Management

Students are required to take courses in all three areas—OB, OT and Strategy. All courses are required in order to provide students a solid foundation from which to build strong research capabilities. Being a good scholar involves understanding a variety of theories and areas, while developing mastery in at least one. Some students will undertake research that is at the intersection of multiple disciplines, while others will focus within a single discipline; both paths are valid and fall well within the parameters of MOR doctoral training. Students focusing in one particular area may also choose to collaborate with students or faculty in other areas on projects that draw upon multiple disciplines.

All MOR PhD students are required to take the following MOR methods class:

- MOR 605: Research Methods in Organizational Behavior (Micro)

There are also two GSBA research methods courses that all students are required to take:

- GSBA 603: Causal Inference Research Methods (Macro)

- GSBA 604: Regression and Generalized Linear Models for Business Applications (Micro & Macro)

The methods courses are not part of the screening exam that occurs at the end of the first year in the program.

Area course requirements

The MOR Ph.D. program focuses on three primary areas: (1) organizational behavior, (2) organization theory, and (3) strategic management. Each of these areas, in turn, relies on one or more underlying disciplines (such as economics, psychology, or sociology). Students are encouraged to build a strong base in the disciplines and literatures relevant to their field of interest. To this end, students complete at least four additional content courses.

NOTE: Please refer to the schedule of classes or courses offered in each school/ department in the USC catalogue.

- **Strategic Management**

Students interested in emphasizing Strategic Management can select one of the following three discipline bases and the corresponding course options:

- *Economics*: One required course and at least three electives:

Required (choose one):

- ECON 500: Micro-economic Analysis and Policy *or*
- ECON 501: Macro-economic Analysis and Policy *or*
- ECON 503: Micro-economic Theory 1 *or*
- ECON 504: Macro-economic Theory 1 *or*
- ECON 680: Industrial Organization

Possible electives include all economics courses. Other options include economics-oriented classes offered at Marshall or the Policy school.

- *Sociology*: See listing under Organization Theory
- *Psychology*: See listing under Organization Behavior

- **Organizational Behavior**

Students interested in emphasizing Organizational Behavior must take both:

- PSYC 512: Seminar in Social Psychology *and*
- PSYC 612: Advanced Seminar in Social Psychology

Two other Ph.D. level courses are required.

- Organization Theory

Students interested in emphasizing Organization Theory must take:

- SOCI 510: Sociological Theory I *and*
- SOCI 610: Sociological Theory II

Two other PhD level courses are required.

- Methods Courses

Students are required to take at least the following four methods courses: MOR 605, GSBA 603, GSBA 604, and one elective methods course.

Directed research courses

Students can take directed research courses with a faculty member during their first year in the program as part of their 12 units per semester with the approval of both their mentor and the MOR PhD Coordinator. Such directed research is treated as a course and is in addition to the student's research apprentice responsibilities.

Masters courses

Students need approval from their mentor and the MOR PhD Coordinator to take any masters-level courses within Marshall. MBA classes are typically not appropriate for doctoral-level education, so such permission is only given in rare circumstances.

Special topic directed reading course

In the Spring or Summer semester of the second year, students work with their Guidance Committee chair in a GSBA 790 Directed Reading course that is focused on the Special Topic portion of their Qualifying Exam. This provides the student with the necessary background for moving ahead on the dissertation proposal. The reading list is developed jointly by the student, the Guidance Committee chair, and the MOR Ph.D. coordinator.

Screening Exam

Shortly after the end of the spring semester of the first year, students take an exam on the material they have covered in their MOR theory seminars (i.e., MOR 601, MOR 602, and MOR 603). Screening exam results, coupled with feedback on the student's first year performance in classes, RA performance, assessments of oral and written communication skills, and any other pertinent data is used to judge whether the student's performance merits continuation in the Ph.D. program. Students who have not performed satisfactorily may be asked to revise parts of the exam or be asked to withdraw from the program.

Qualifying Exam

Timing

All Ph.D. students complete the Qualifying Exam no later than the end of the fall semester of their third year.

Scope

The MOR Ph.D. committee has outlined suggested courses appropriate for each of the three main areas, OB, OT, and Strategy (see above). These course requirements are designed to ensure that our students go into the job market with strong methods and content skills. Students complete these area course requirements before they take the Qualifying Exam. Students must remove any incompletes in these required courses before taking the Qualifying Exam. To gain approval to schedule and take the Qualifying Exam, students write the MOR Ph.D. Coordinator a memo outlining how they have met these requirements.

Qualifying Exam Guidance Committee

Each student's should begin forming their Guidance Committee in the fall of their second year in the program and submit the required "Appointment of Committee" form to the PhD Program office in your second year. While the Qualifying Exam occurs in the fall of the third year, the University wants the Guidance Committee formed as soon as possible (the PhD Program Manual states it should be formed two semesters before the exam is administered, which would be fall of the second year). The Marshall PhD Program Manual contains the current requirements for creating the committee and the forms to file before taking the Qualifying Exam. Currently, the requirement for the composition of the five-member committee are:

- At least three members must be from the student's home department.
- At least one member must be a tenured faculty member in the student's home department.
- All should be tenure-track/tenured faculty from Ph.D. granting departments.
- At least one outside member is required: the outside member can be from the Marshall School of Business outside of the student's home department or outside the Marshall School of Business within USC
- The committee may also include a faculty member from an institution other than USC, called an "external member." This is not the same as an "outside member," which is a USC faculty member from outside the student's home program. If you include an external member, please submit the CV for that person at the time you submit your appointment form.

The Exam Format

The Qualifying Exam involves conceiving, writing, and defending a formal proposal for the planned dissertation research. The student writes a paper that outlines the foundation for their dissertation. This paper will be distributed to members of the student's Qualifying Exam Committee and a time will be scheduled for the student to defend the paper before the committee. The committee will assess not only the specific content of the paper but also the broader research area; how the research topic fits into the wider literature to which it is contributing (in either OB, OT or Strategy).

Sixth-Year Funding

The MOR department makes sixth-year funding decisions on a case-by-case basis. Students interested in applying for sixth-year funding must submit their CV and a 1–2 page statement that describes why they would benefit from staying one more year in the program (e.g., how the extra year would help improve their dissertation/research and hence their success on the job market, hardship that they might have experienced during the program that impacted their productivity, etc.) to the PhD coordinator(s) by September 1st of their fifth year.

GPA Requirement

The GPA requirement is governed by the policy in the Marshall School of Business PhD Program Handbook, which states that a student's overall GPA must not drop below 3.0. The Management & Organization program does not have any additional GPA requirements.

Additional Information

Working with a faculty member, students identify a subfield of their area, and develop and run a set of empirical research studies. By the end of the spring semester of the 2nd year, students submit the resulting research paper, which is typically prepared with the collaboration of a faculty member, to the student's mentor and the MOR PhD Coordinator. The paper is due by April 2 of the student's second year in the PhD program. Students present this research paper in an MOR seminar in the latter part of the spring semester.

Students should submit papers that they alone have written. The project can be one for which the eventual publication is coauthored with a faculty member or student. However, the students must develop their writing skills by writing their class papers by themselves. Light editing is fine if the editor would like to provide this service. This should be acknowledged in the submission. These rules also apply to papers submitted to classes.

Appendix: Program-Specific Requirements for Marketing

Course Requirements

Classes

- Classes During Orientation

In August prior to the fall semester of their first year, PhD students are required to attend the orientation workshops offered by the Marshall PhD program. These workshops are designed to prepare incoming students for the start of their program.

- Classes During a Student's Program

Students are required to complete a series of classes. The minimum number of required units is specified by the university and depends on the highest degree the student earned previously.

Prior to taking their qualifying exam in their third year, students are expected to take at least three for-credit classes (a minimum of three units per class or equivalent) in any given semester. Students must take the required PhD classes in marketing and any marketing electives that are offered and that are geared towards their own area of specialty (typically consumer behavior or quantitative marketing /strategy). Students should consult their academic advisor and/or the PhD coordinator to identify additional classes that are relevant to gaining critical substantive knowledge about their field and its empirical methodologies.

- Marketing Classes

All PhD students must complete four required marketing seminars (two in quantitative marketing

and strategy, two in consumer behavior) during their first two years in the program. These seminars are designed to cover the key areas of academic marketing research. Each seminar typically is worth three units. The typical sequence of required marketing classes is provided below.

Fall, even years: MKT 613 - Marketing Models in Consumer and Business-to-Business Markets

Spring, odd years: MKT 616 - Consumer Behavior Theory and Research

Fall, odd years: MKT 615 - Strategic and Marketing Mix Models

Spring, even years: MKT 618 - Consumer Behavior and Decision Making

In addition, students must take the elective marketing classes related to their area of interest if they are offered prior to their qualifying exams. Current electives are:

MKT 614 - Advanced Research Methods in Marketing (consumer behavior students); typically taught in the spring semester in even years.

MKT 620 - Advanced Quantitative Models in Marketing (quantitative marketing and strategy students); typically taught in the spring semester in odd years.

- Communication Classes

Students are encouraged to consider taking classes offered by Marshall's Business Communication department (BUCO). These classes are designed to improve students' written and oral communication skills, which are for being an effective teacher and author. Current classes include:

BUCO 633 - Writing a Journal Article for Publication

BUCO 634 - Presenting Your Research

BUCO 635 - Preparing for the Academic Job Market

Students who complete two of these classes have access to individual coaching by members of

Marshall's Business Communication department (BUCO 636 - Communication for Doctoral Students: Tutorial).

Students are strongly advised to seek out additional classes and tutorials (e.g., by USC's Writing Center) to improve their written and oral communication, particularly if their first language is not English.

Students are required to take BUCO 637 (Communication for Doctoral Students: Succeeding as a Teacher) before their Teaching Assistant assignment (in their third year). This class is offered in the summer and should be taken between students' second and third year in the program.

Prior to a students' teaching assignment (either in their fourth or fifth year), students attend a training workshop offered by Marshall's Instructional Coaches. This training is modeled after the workshop offered to new faculty and prepares students to design their own class.

- **Classes within Marshall**

Depending on their area of interest, PhD Students typically take classes offered by Marshall at large (courses are listed with the GSBA prefix and with numbers 600 or higher) or by one of the other departments (listed under the respective departmental prefix). In the past, marketing PhD students typically took classes offered by the DSO (Data Science and Operations), FBE (Finance and Business Economics), or MOR (Management and Organization) departments. A list of classes that students have taken in recent years is available from the PhD coordinator.

- **Classes at USC**

Students also typically take classes outside Marshall, either within a base discipline (e.g., economics, psychology, and statistics) or other related areas (e.g., computer science, communication). Courses with numbers 600 or higher are PhD level classes. Courses with numbers in the 500s are generally Master level classes, but may be appropriate for students to take as well. Students should consult their academic advisor and/or the PhD coordinator to identify relevant and appropriate classes and to discuss necessary prerequisites.

Departmental Seminars

The department frequently invites external speakers who are leaders in the field to present their research. Seminars are a key forum for the exchange of ideas throughout the academic community. Actively participating in seminars is an essential professional activity of academic researchers. Seminars take place on a weekly or bi-weekly basis (typically Fridays from 9.30 – 11 am). All students regardless of their year in the program are expected to attend these departmental seminars. Students who are taking a class during the time of the seminar are excused during the semester they take that class. However, to the extent possible, students should refrain from taking classes during that time.

A meeting between PhD students and the external speaker typically follows the seminar presentation. Students are also expected to attend these meetings since they provide important opportunities to engage with and to personally get to know key researchers in the field.

Prior to the seminar, students should familiarize themselves with the speaker by reading the speaker's vita and the paper (or extended abstract) on which their talk is based. These materials are circulated prior to the talk.

During the seminars and meetings, students should not use any form of electronic devices (e.g., laptops, tablets, cell phones, etc.) and should actively engage in the discussion.

Research Forum

A research forum (MKT 621 Research Forum) typically takes place every Friday during lunchtime. The forum provides an opportunity for students to gain knowledge about topics and skills typically not covered in classes (e.g., how to network at conferences, how to manage the review process, etc.). It also provides an informal forum for students to present initial research ideas or to practice conference presentations. All students, regardless of year, are expected to register for "MKT 621 Research Forum" and attend all meetings.

Brown Bags

Brown bags provide informal opportunities to present initial ideas or to get feedback on ongoing projects. Separate brown bags are organized for consumer behavior research and quantitative marketing and strategy research. Students (and faculty) are welcome to attend all brown bags. However, students regardless of year are expected to attend the brown bag meetings associated with their main area of interest.

Screening Exam

Objective

Each Ph.D. student will undergo a screening assessment at the end of the summer following their first year. This assessment will include (1) an evaluation of the students' summer research; (2) a review of the student's performance in all courses taken in their first year; (3) an analysis of their writing and communication skills; (4) reports by individual faculty members who have had the student in their courses or worked with the student on research projects.

First Year Summer Research Paper

(Due: First Day of the Fall Semester of the Student's Second Year: approximately the third Monday of August)

During the spring semester of the first year, the student will choose an advisor and a topic for the summer research paper. The advisor should be a tenure-track faculty member in the Marketing Department. The primary role of the advisor is to guide the student in his/her effort to develop the first-year paper. By the end of the Spring semester (approximately mid-May), the student should also identify two other tenure-track

faculty members in the marketing department who will also serve on the student's summer project committee. The proposal, approved by the committee, should be submitted to the marketing department PhD coordinator via email by May 31, along with the names of the project's advisor and the names of the committee members. The first-year summer paper is due on the first day of the Fall semester during the student's second year. The PhD coordinator will distribute the paper to the entire faculty within the same week. All first-year students will present their project to the entire faculty, at the start of the Fall semester of the student's second year. The exact date will be determined based on faculty and room availability.

The project should be of appropriate rigor and scope to indicate the student's research potential. It should be well defined, emphasizing originality and creativity. It should be of adequate scope to be completed within three months.

To demonstrate research potential in the program, the student needs to identify a fruitful research idea with evidence of a plausible strategy for pursuing the project further. The student needs to clearly articulate his/her research questions and/or testable hypotheses. Additionally, the first-year paper needs to include at a minimum: (1) a clear sense of the literature; (2) specification of lab experiments/empirical model/theoretical model that indicate the project's potential; (3) the collection of initial data (except for economic theory paper); and (4) some preliminary results from that initial data collection or a theoretical model.

First-Year Screening Evaluation

Prior to the first-year paper presentation, the primary advisor will be asked to provide the PhD coordinator with a written assessment of the student's overall progress in the program and potential to formulate a promising research program. The primary advisor of the student will not be present during the presentation or the faculty discussion that follows. In this way advising is independent from the evaluation of the first-year student's screening evaluation.

All faculty members present at the first-year paper presentation will vote on whether to allow the student to advance to the second year. The PhD coordinator will share the primary advisor's written assessment with the faculty immediately after the presentation and before the faculty discussion. The faculty will provide an evaluation of the student based on: (1) the first year presentation's originality, conceptual clarity, oral and written communication effectiveness, and use of appropriate methods; (2) an overall assessment of the student's performance in course work; and (3) his/her research capability. The PhD coordinator will coordinate the voting (Pass or Fail) among the faculty present for the presentation and discussion. Voting shall be anonymous. The student needs to receive a minimum of two-third passing votes to pass his/her first-year assessment.

Within a week of the first-year assessment, the PhD Coordinator will communicate to the student whether he/she has met the screening evaluation criteria. Students who have performed satisfactorily will advance to the second year. Students who do not pass the first-year evaluation will discontinue their PhD study.

Qualifying Exam

Following the spring semester of their second year, the student will take part in a qualifying exam which leads to the assessment of whether the student is ready for ascension to candidacy. Even though the topics

pursued in the qualifying exam may evolve into a substantial portion of the student's dissertation, the qualifying exam is NOT a dissertation proposal.

There are two parts to the qualifying exam: The written exam and the oral exam. Passing both is a necessary condition for advancing to the candidacy stage of a PhD in marketing. For advancement to candidacy (i.e., to move from being a PhD student to a PhD candidate), the PhD student is required to propose a research agenda, which demonstrates the student's ability to produce a successful dissertation.

The timeline and procedural details are described below and should be read carefully by the student and members of his or her Qualifying Exam committee.

Format & Evaluation

Written Qualifying Examination. The format of the written exam is at the discretion of the student's committee but must include a preliminary research proposal. Though not required, it may also include one or more questions in (1) take-home or (2) in-class (closed-book) format. The student must submit her/his completed written exam to the committee members by October 17th of the third year.

The student's Qualifying Exam Committee, alone, is responsible for the evaluation of the written

exam and for assessing whether the student is eligible to proceed to the oral exam. If the committee believes that the written exam is of poor quality, the committee is not obliged to give an oral exam. In this case the report to the Graduate School will be one of failure. If, on the other hand, the written exam is marginal, the committee may use the oral exam as an opportunity to confirm or alter its judgment of the student's performance.

Oral Qualifying Examination: The oral examination is administered after satisfactory completion of the written exam. It is no more than a two-hour oral presentation of the student's research

proposal. The exact format of the exam is determined by the committee. The committee, for instance, may require the student to address weaknesses in the written exam.

The oral examination must be taken within 60 days of the evaluation of the written examination.

Marshall School Policy requires that all doctoral students complete the written and oral qualifying exam by January 1st of their third year in the program. The entire qualifying examination procedure shall be carried out by the student's Qualifying Exam committee.

Timeline & Procedural Details

- (Deadlines for selecting the Qualifying Exam Committee) By May 1st of the second year (and preferably earlier) each Ph.D. student should meet with members of his/her Qualifying Exam committee. One of the faculty members is designated by the student as the Chair of the Qualifying Exam Committee. Participating faculty members are those who have agreed to guide the student on the format and evaluation of the qualifying exam.

The Qualifying Exam Committee consists of five faculty members, three of whom must hold regular appointments (not merely courtesy appointments) in marketing and one of whom must be designated

as an outside member. The outside member is defined as a tenured or tenure-track faculty at Marshall or USC who does not hold a regular appointment in marketing.

Students should complete a form (see the corresponding section in the main text for link) that indicates which faculty members have agreed to serve on the Qualifying Exam committee. Their agreement, as indicated by their signatures, indicates their involvement in the exam and their commitment to evaluating the qualifying exam by the relevant dates noted below. The student is responsible for ensuring that the signed form is received by the Coordinator of the Ph.D. program in Marketing by May 1st.

- (Planning for the written exam's content) The student, with input from the committee, should produce a 3 to 6 page written document that (1) identifies 2-3 potential research topics for the qualifying exam; and (2) specifies the format of the exam (e.g. research proposals, take-home exam questions, in-class exam, etc.). The areas should represent a relatively broad sub-area within the marketing field but should be sufficiently narrow to reflect an area of concentration. The exam's proposed content must not be a paper that the student has already submitted to a conference, journal, or class, or work that has already been initiated with a faculty member. Committee members and the student should carefully discuss the areas of specialization and agree that they represent the appropriate level of concentration. A student should circulate the document to the members of his/her committee by May 10th. The chair of the student's committee should submit the document to the PhD coordinator by June 1st. The submission of this document by the chair indicates that the entire committee approves the research focus and format of the exam.
- (Written exam deadline) The student must submit the written exam to the committee chair on or before October 17th of her/his third year. The submitted written exam should reflect the work of the student alone. Students should NOT submit papers that have been written with another person (e.g., supervising faculty) for the qualifying exam.
- (Grading the written exam) The written exam will be graded only by members of the qualifying exam committee. Committee members will provide an overall grade for the written exam (high pass, pass, low pass, fail). If the written exam has multiple questions, faculty members will provide an individual assessment of each part of the exam (high pass, pass, low pass, fail) along with a description of the strengths and weaknesses of the student's responses to each question. The student's committee chair is responsible for notifying the PhD coordinator about the student's exam performance. Grades for the written exam should be provided within two weeks of the submission of the written exam (and no later than November 1st).
- (Notification of results of the written exam) The committee chair will notify the student about their performance on the written portion of the qualifying exam. A student should not ask committee members to provide individualized feedback about the exam performance before meeting with the committee chair.
- (The oral exam) Students who have passed the written portion of their qualifying exam must take a 2-hour oral exam. The student is responsible for scheduling two-hours that all committee members can attend and for reserving a Marshall room for the exam. This exam should be held within 60-days of the date of the student being notified of the outcome of the written exam and before the end of the Fall semester (whichever is earliest). For example, if the student receives the grade of the written exam on October 15th, she/he should take the oral exam by December 14th. The student should notify the Marshall PhD program office immediately after passing the written portion of the exam to obtain the

necessary paperwork (Report on Qualifying Exam). The oral exam must include the members of the student's Qualifying Exam Committee (including the outside member). The Marshall PhD Office needs 30-days' notice of the oral exam, so the student should schedule the exam's time and location as soon as possible (scheduling a time slot where all five faculty members are available is not easy). All committee members have to be present at the oral exam.

As soon as the date of the oral exam is set, the student is required to inform the PhD coordinator immediately. The PhD coordinator will inform all marketing faculty of the oral exam date and its location. Any interested faculty will be invited to attend the oral exam.

Please refer to the corresponding section in the main text of the handbook for general USC Policies.

- Once a student passes the Qualifying Exam, the "Report on Qualifying Exam" form must be signed and filed with the Marshall PhD Program Office.
- After passing the Qualifying Exam, the "Appointment of Dissertation Committee" form must be filed within 90 days. A dissertation chair must be identified within 90 days of passing the Qualifying Exam. The remaining committee must be identified within 6 months.

After the successful completion of the qualifying exam, the student is admitted to candidacy. Failure to pass the qualifying exam may result in the immediate loss of the stipend or dismissal from the program. At the discretion of the Qualifying Exam committee, a student who fails the qualifying examination may be permitted one retake. The retake must be scheduled at a mutually convenient time and not less than 3 months after the initial exam was administered but no more than 6 months after the initial exam. Requests for extensions require the approval of the Vice Provost of the Graduate School. The result of the exam must be rendered to the Marketing Department's PhD coordinator and Marshall Ph.D. Program by January 1st of the student's third year in the program.

Dissertation

Dissertation Proposal

The dissertation typically comprises two or more papers. The dissertation proposal is an event in which the student presents preliminary research results and gathers feedback from faculty members about the potential of the research to comprise a dissertation, and directions to proceed. Typically, the student will present more advanced versions of the dissertation proposal later in job talks.

- **Timeline**

Ideally, the dissertation proposal should be scheduled during the spring semester before the student goes on the job market. A student must have an approved proposal no later than the end of the spring semester before the student goes on the job market.

- **Description**

The dissertation proposal involves the preparation of a written document in the form of a scholarly paper that outlines research findings and future directions, and a presentation of the content of that document to the student's dissertation committee. The committee must be constituted according to Marshall and University policy.

As soon as the date of the dissertation proposal is set, the student is required to inform the PhD coordinator immediately. The PhD coordinator will inform all marketing faculty of the dissertation proposal date and location. Any interested faculty will be invited to attend the proposal defense.

Dissertation Defense

The student will defend his/her dissertation in the spring Semester during his/her final year in the program. The dissertation defense involves the preparation of a written document that adheres to the USC dissertation guidelines, and the presentation of the content of that document to the student's dissertation committee. The appropriate forms must be completed and submitted to the Marshall School and University.

As soon as the date of the dissertation is set, the student is required to inform the PhD coordinator immediately. The PhD coordinator will inform all marketing faculty of the dissertation date and location. Any interested faculty will be invited to attend the dissertation defense.

Process

Please refer to the corresponding section in the main text of the handbook for general USC and Marshall Policies.

GPA Requirement

Students must maintain an average GPA of 3.5 in required marketing classes (MKT 613, MKT 615, MKT 616, and MKT 618). In addition, students are expected to maintain an overall GPA of 3.0, in line with graduate school requirements. Failure to meet these standards may result in dismissal from the program.

Six-Year Funding

Please see Section V. **Funding and Financial Support** in the main text for details.