REQUIREMENTS FOR THE PH.D. DEGREE IN ECONOMICS
Department of Economics, Vanderbilt University
Revised as of July 2018 (proposal)

I. Introduction to the Ph.D. Program in Economics
   A. Overview of Requirements
   B. Sources of Information
   C. Preparation for Graduate Study

II. Interaction with Faculty
   A. The Director of Graduate Studies (DGS)
   B. Formulating a Dissertation

III. Residence and Transfer Requirements
   A. Residence
   B. Transfer of Credit

IV. Course Work
   A. General Considerations and Requirements
   B. Meeting the Requirements

V. Preliminary Examinations

VI. Theory and Field Requirements

VII. The Oral Qualifying Examination on the Dissertation Proposal and the Formation of the Dissertation Committee

VIII. Research Seminars and Workshops

IX. The Dissertation
   A. Rules and Suggestions
   B. The Final Examination: Defense of the Dissertation
   C. Publication of the Dissertation

X. Option for the M.A. for Ph.D. Students

XI. Financial Aid and Adequate Progress
   A. A Statement on Graduate Financial Support in Economics
   B. Definition of Adequate Progress
   C. Students Who Have Completed All Prelims but Not Passed a Proposal
   D. Preference in Funding and 20-Hour Assignments
   E. Summary Timeline for Economics Ph.D. Program

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I. Introduction to the Ph.D. Program in Economics

A. Overview of Requirements. Students in the Ph.D. program generally take courses during their first two or three years in preparation for their dissertation research. Students take preliminary examinations in Microeconomic theory, Macroeconomic theory, and Econometrics. Students take the preliminary examinations after their first year (see Section V). Students who do not pass the preliminary exam in all areas have the option of a new attempt in the failed exams at the end of their second year. In addition, students must fulfill requirements in Mathematics and in Economic History.

In the second and third year, students take 21 credit hours of specialized classes in the Department of Economics in at least 2 concentrations (see Sections IV and VI). In the third year, students are required to pass a research paper requirement. Having completed all these requirements, the student writes a dissertation proposal and is examined orally by the dissertation committee. Then the dissertation is completed, and it is defended before the student's committee at the final examination. It is possible to complete the degree in four years. The modal period is five to six years.

B. Sources of Information. The general requirements for the Ph.D. degree at Vanderbilt University appear in The Bulletin of the Graduate School. Students should read The Bulletin with care so that they will be aware of all the requirements of the Graduate School. The Graduate School’s website also provides valuable information: www.vanderbilt.edu/gradschool/.

This document states the special requirements for the Ph.D. degree in Economics and contains information with which graduate students in Economics are expected to be familiar.

C. Preparation for Graduate Study. Most students entering our Ph.D. program have majored in Economics as undergraduates; some have a Master’s degree in Economics. Extensive training in Economics is helpful but not sufficient preparation for the Ph.D. program. It is essential, however, that each entering student has taken at least one year of calculus, one semester of statistics, and intermediate-level courses in microeconomic theory and macroeconomic theory. Courses in linear algebra, differential equations, real analysis, and econometrics are also strongly recommended.

II. Interaction with Faculty

A. The Director of Graduate Studies (DGS). The DGS advises graduate students in Economics (except those in the Graduate Program in Economic Development) in planning their programs at Vanderbilt and in the selection of courses. If a student has done graduate work elsewhere, the DGS evaluates it and recommends to the Dean of the Graduate School the credits applicable toward the Vanderbilt degree. Petitions to alter or waive requirements of these rules must be presented to the DGS and will be considered by the Committee on Graduate Studies (COGS).
B. **Formulating a Dissertation.** Students are encouraged to seek faculty advice when formulating ideas for doctoral dissertations (see Section VIII). It is possible and helpful to present the preliminary findings of one’s research in a workshop attended by interested faculty and students (see Section VII).

III. **Residence and Transfer Requirements**

A. **Residence.** Doctoral candidates must complete and pay tuition for 72 semester hours of graduate study, minus any approved hours of transfer credit (see paragraph B below). Most of our students are admitted with funding that covers this tuition. Candidates must complete at least one year of formal course work (24 semester hours) in residence at Vanderbilt. The semester hours not in formal course work consist of Workshop (Economics 9890) or research hours, such as Readings (Economics 8981 and 8982); Non-candidate Research (Economics 8999); or Dissertation Research (Economics 9999).

Economics 8999 is intended for students who have not yet passed the qualifying examination (i.e., the dissertation proposal). Students must ask specific faculty members to supervise their work for Econ 8999 credit. This does **not** imply that the faculty member will serve as the student’s dissertation adviser, only that the faculty member will supervise the semester’s work and assign a grade at the semester’s conclusion.

Economics 9999 is intended for students who have already passed the oral qualifying examination. In this case, the dissertation adviser would normally supervise Economics 9999 credit hours.

Students who have completed 72 hours of credit must still enroll in either Economics 8999 or Economics 9999 (as appropriate) **without** hourly credit during each semester until graduation. Such registration confers full-time student status.

Students may take courses outside the Department of Economics as part of the 72 hours required for the degree, if permitted by the DGS and approved by the Graduate School.

B. **Transfer of Credit.** Students who have done graduate work in Economics at other schools may request transfer credit for certain graduate courses taken there. In order for a course to qualify for transfer credit, certain conditions must be met: (1) it must have been taken at an accredited graduate school for graduate credit; (2) the student must have received at least a B- in the course; and (3) the Department must be satisfied concerning the intellectual quality of the course and the student’s performance in the course. Note that grades earned in transferred courses do not affect a student's Graduate School Grade Point Average.
IV. Course Work

A. General Considerations and Requirements. Students seeking the Ph.D. degree must take at least 45 hours of formal coursework (the eight first-year core courses, and 21 credit hours of elective courses in economics usually taken in the second and third year), with the exception of courses that are waived or transferred with the approval of the DGS in consultation with COGS. Ph.D. level courses taken outside the Department of Economics can count towards the 45 hours requirement only with the prior approval of the DGS. At least one concentration must be in Economics, but concentrations involving courses offered by other departments may be taken upon approval by COGS (see Section VI). Students are encouraged to take additional formal courses in Economics that are related to their primary research interest in order to facilitate development of a dissertation topic.

Formal courses fall into three general categories:

1. courses needed to help prepare the student for the written preliminary examinations in Microeconomic Theory, Macroeconomic Theory, and Econometrics;

2. courses taken to satisfy the Department's requirements in Mathematics and in Economic History; and

3. courses in the elective concentrations, and free electives.

B. Meeting requirements

A minimum Grade Point Average of 3.0 in all coursework is required for graduation; a grade of B- or higher is required in Economic History (Economics 8400) and in Mathematics for Economists (Economics 8000).

To demonstrate competency in microeconomics, macroeconomics, and econometrics, a student has to pass the corresponding preliminary exams.

Meeting the Requirement in Economic History. A student may satisfy this requirement by:

1. passing Economics 8400 with a grade of B- or better.

2. obtaining a written statement from the faculty member who taught the course (Econ 8400) the last time it was offered or the faculty member who is teaching or will next teach the course (if it is not in progress) that a transferable course satisfies the requirements.

3. (if not currently enrolled in Econ 8400) passing, with a grade of B- or better, an examination equivalent to a comprehensive final examination in the course (Econ 8400). The student may do this by taking the final examination scheduled for the course or by taking a special examination during the periods in which prelim examinations are administered as determined by the DGS in consultation with the relevant faculty.
The maximum number of tries is three under options (1) and (3).

Meeting the Requirement in Mathematics. At least one year of calculus before entering the Ph.D. program is the prerequisite for Economics 8000 (Selected Topics in Mathematics for Economists). To meet the Mathematics requirement, students are normally required to take Economics 8000 (Selected Topics in Mathematics for Economists) and earn a grade of B- or better. The following exceptions apply:

(1) A student may be excused from Economics 8000 by passing a special examination on the subject matter of that course.

(2) A student may petition the DGS to approve transfer credit for a Ph.D. level mathematical economics class taken at another university. The decision on this petition is at the sole discretion of the DGS and will take into account the student’s grade, and whether the coverage of the other class is comparable to Economics 8000.

The maximum number of attempts to pass the requirement is two.
V. Preliminary Examinations. The written preliminary examinations test the student's competence in Microeconomic Theory, Macroeconomic Theory and Econometrics. Exams are held under the rules of the Honor System and without access to the literature or to notes or counsel of any sort.

The following regulations govern the taking of written examinations:

(1) Students in the Ph.D. program are required to take all three preliminary examinations in mid-to-late May and early June of their first year in the program. Failure to take an exam will result in an automatic failure of that examination.

(2) If a student fails one or more prelim exams, he or she will be required to take the corresponding exams with the new class in the following year. Failure to take a repeat exam will result in an automatic failure of that examination, and subsequently, dismissal from the program.

During the intervening period, the student should sit in the relevant courses of the failed area. The student has a maximum of two tries to pass each of the prelims. If the student fails any examination two times, he or she will be dismissed from the Ph.D. program, subject to the appeals process below.

(3) Students may appeal an automatic prelim failure to the COGS; such an appeal must occur within two weeks of the date the exam was given. Students may also appeal a grade-based second failure of a May theory prelim to the COGS; such an appeal must occur within one week of the release of grade results. A successful appeal of a second failure will generally result in a retake being scheduled for the August following the May exam appealed. In all cases, the student bears the burden of showing that substantial and exceptional extenuating circumstances warrant allowing an August retake.

(4) The marking scheme for any exam is Pass with Distinction, Pass, Marginal Fail, and Fail (both Marginal Fail and Fail represent failing grades).
VI. Concentration Requirements


In addition, students can petition to the DGS to combine at least two related classes to a nonstandard concentration. Nonstandard concentrations may include courses offered in other departments but, to the maximum extent possible, they should rely on courses offered within the Department or by faculty appointed within the Department.

The department maintains a website, linked from the graduate program page that details which classes can be taken in each concentration. Any particular class may be listed in more than one concentration, but a student can use any given class only to satisfy the requirements of one concentration.

Competence in the two elective concentrations is shown by passing each of the courses in the concentration with a grade of B or better.

Students are strongly encouraged to consult with the DGS and their faculty advisers when selecting concentrations. Since many faculty members are reluctant to direct the dissertation of a student who has not passed the courses in the relevant concentration, one should plan to take the most appropriate classes for the dissertation research as soon as possible.

Note that forming a thesis committee remains the student’s responsibility even if he or she passed the concentration; the Department cannot guarantee that a committee can be formed for a student who plans to write a dissertation in any particular concentration.
VII. The third year paper requirement

To be admitted to candidacy, the student has to pass the third year paper requirement. The third year paper is meant to be the student’s first original research work, which could be submitted, possibly with some additional work, to a good academic journal in economics.

At the end of the second year, a student has to find a department faculty member who agrees to advise the student on his or her research paper. The research paper must be submitted by the end of spring break in the student’s third year in the program. For each student, the DGS forms a committee, generally chaired by the student’s advisor, and consisting of at least two additional members. This committee decides, by the end of the spring semester, whether the student’s research paper satisfies the requirement or requires further work. In the latter case, the student has to submit a revised version by the beginning of the seventh semester, after which the committee makes a final decision.
VIII. The Oral Qualifying Examination on the Dissertation Proposal and the Formation of the Dissertation Committee

By the end of the fourth year, students are expected to take an oral qualifying examination for admission to candidacy. The latter examination consists of an oral defense of a written dissertation proposal. The written proposal should include a clear and detailed statement of the central question or questions to be addressed in the thesis, why this issue merits research, the specific hypotheses to be tested, and the data and methods of analysis to be used in the study. The proposal should include a brief summary of previous research on the topic. In a dissertation proposed to consist of a collection of essays, one essay should be substantially complete at the time of the proposal defense.

In choosing the topic of the doctoral dissertation, students may also select the chairperson of their dissertation committee, providing that the selected professor agrees to act as chairperson. Typically, the chairperson is the student’s primary research adviser, although this is not required. On the advice of the committee chair, the student then approaches other faculty members, requesting them to serve on her or his committee. The Committee regularly consists of three faculty from the Department of Economics and one member from outside the Department, but additional members from either group can be added with the approval of the committee chair.

Finally, on the recommendation of the Director of Graduate Studies (and in compliance with the Graduate School’s policies on dissertation committees), the Dean of the Graduate School formally appoints the dissertation committee to conduct the oral qualifying examination.

The written proposal must be made available by the student to all members of the committee at least 21 days prior to the oral qualifying examination.

A student shall have two tries in which to pass this examination, unless the chair of the student's committee, the majority of the student's committee, the Committee on Graduate Studies, and the faculty approve an appeal to allow an additional try based on extenuating circumstances and the prospect of success. Passing requires the affirmative votes of a majority of the committee.

Current Graduate School rules specify a maximum time limit of 8 semesters from matriculation till the qualifying exam; students may petition for an extension.
IX. Research Seminars and Workshops

Two goals of graduate education in Economics are the development of proficiency in theoretical and applied economics and the ability to do economic research. The second goal is the more difficult of the two. The intellectual challenge of selecting a topic on which one wishes to do independent research, discovering its suitability as a dissertation topic and making substantial progress in economic research are essential parts of the education of an economist. Third and fourth year students are encouraged to present their preliminary research findings in a workshop. To learn about current research topics, problems, and methods, and to learn how to present seminars, all students should attend seminars by local students and faculty as well as visiting scholars. The research course Economics 9890 requires attending seminars and meeting speakers and may require written submissions or seminar presentations.
X. The Dissertation

A. Rules and Suggestions. Students are encouraged to try out possible ideas for a dissertation topic on faculty members and fellow students during their period of study at Vanderbilt and particularly while taking field courses.

The doctoral dissertation is an original and penetrating treatment of a significant economic problem in any field offered by the Department. Independent research and its presentation in a scholarly document are major steps in the transformation of a student into a scholar. In most cases, they provide a basis for scholarly output in the early years of the career of an economist, and in some cases, they set the direction of one's life work. Only by pursuing independent research do investigators become aware of subtleties in economic concepts and acquire skill in analyzing practical problems with the aid of theoretical tools.

Once a dissertation committee has been formed, it is the student's responsibility to keep all members of the committee regularly informed as to the progress of the dissertation. It is strongly recommended that the student provide all members with written periodic progress reports. These may be very brief; their purpose is to keep the committee members apprised of the status of the dissertation.

When the student is ready to defend the dissertation, the dissertation chairperson will notify the DGS and the Department Chairman at least 21 days prior to the final defense. At the same time, a copy of the thesis and thesis abstract must be made available to non-committee faculty members in the Department Office.

The dissertation must conform to the rules governing style and appearance prescribed by the Graduate Faculty, a copy of which may be obtained from the Registrar of the Graduate School. (The Department has secured approval of the style of the American Economic Review.)

According to the current regulations of the Graduate School, the dissertation must be completed within four years after the student passes the oral qualifying examination and is admitted to candidacy. A limited extension may be granted in cases when the candidate has worked full time since being admitted to candidacy.

B. The Final Examination: Defense of the Dissertation. The candidate's final examination is oral and based on the dissertation and the broader context within which it lies. In addition to the student's continuing committee, the Graduate Dean may invite a representative of the Graduate Faculty Council to be present. The date of this examination is announced in advance, and the University community is invited to attend it. Passing requires the affirmative votes of a majority of the committee.

C. Publication of the Dissertation. If the dissertation is accepted, the Graduate School's requirement that it be published may be met by submitting it to the Graduate School either electronically or in hard copy form. Instructions for both methods can be found at http://www.vanderbilt.edu/gradschool/current_students/index.php#theses.
XI. **Option for the M.A. for Ph.D. Students**

Students who have completed at least 42 semester hours of Ph.D. course work with a GPA of at least 3.0 may be granted the Master's degree without completing a separate M.A. thesis. Qualified students desiring this option for the M.A. should so petition the DGS at least six weeks prior to the commencement in which they wish to receive the M.A. degree.

XII. **Financial Aid and Adequate Progress**

A. **A Statement on Graduate Financial Support in Economics.** This is a statement of procedures followed by the Department of Economics regarding the funding of Ph.D. students. This statement is neither a Vanderbilt University nor a College of Arts and Science policy nor a legally binding contract.

**What is the Nature of Financial Support?** Financial support includes tuition, a stipend, and health insurance. The first year is service-free; that is, the student receives financial support without incurring any work obligations. Thereafter, the student can expect to serve as a Teaching Assistant, or a Research Assistant, for up to twenty hours per week. Most students will serve as TAs for most semesters; this involves grading, holding office hours, and occasionally providing lectures or review sessions. There are some RA positions, but these either are awarded competitively or depend on external funding received by faculty members. Students can further enhance their teaching and research skills, and supplement their incomes, through summer research grants and (for more advanced students) summer teaching opportunities.

**Who is Eligible?** Vanderbilt's graduate financial support may be granted to Ph.D. students for up to five years inclusive from the date of matriculation. Although funding is not guaranteed, it is rare for students who are making adequate progress to be denied five years of funding. Students with funding from another source are ineligible for aid from Vanderbilt.

If funds are available after supporting all students making adequate progress up to the fifth year, funding may be extended to other students in the Ph.D. program. In all categories of students to be funded, academic and teaching performance are both used to determine preference.

**When Does the Period of Funding Eligibility Begin?** Students' funding eligibility begins at the date of matriculation following formal admission to the Ph.D. program at Vanderbilt. Courses taken elsewhere may be transferred if the DGS and the Chair of the Department so recommend, and the Graduate School approves, but this does not affect eligibility for aid. Graduate courses previously taken by students at Vanderbilt count toward the hours requirement, but do not affect eligibility for aid, except Ph.D. courses: six to twelve hours reduce eligibility by one semester, fifteen hours or more reduce eligibility by two
semesters. Years supported by non-Vanderbilt sources following matriculation to the Ph.D. program count toward the limitation of five years.

Funding Limits (72 hours). A full TA award pays tuition for not more than 72 hours of courses and research hours. Residency requires at least 24 hours of courses, and departmental regulations require 21 additional hours of courses. Permanent Incompletes and withdrawals officially after the full-refund date count against the 72 hour limit of funding, and additional courses needed to reach 72 hours are the financial responsibility of the student.

B. Definition of Adequate Progress. Adequate progress is defined as follows based on the number of semesters following matriculation to the Ph.D. program. The Committee on Graduate Studies determines after each semester which students are making adequate progress.

After one semester, adequate progress requires a minimum average of B (3.0), with a grade of B- or better in Economics 8000.

After two semesters, adequate progress requires passing all three prelims and maintaining a minimum average of B (3.0); in addition, a grade of B- or better in Economics 8400.

After four semesters, adequate progress requires all of the above, as well as maintaining a minimum average of B (3.0).

After six semesters, adequate progress requires maintaining a minimum average of B (3.0); the completion of all 72 hours of courses and research with no incompletes; the completion of field requirements; and passing the paper requirement.

After seven semesters, adequate progress requires that a faculty member has agreed to serve as the student’s thesis advisor.

After eight semesters, adequate progress requires passing a dissertation proposal defense.

Thereafter, adequate progress requires certification from the student’s dissertation adviser that satisfactory progress is being made towards completing the Ph.D. degree.

C. Students Who Have Passed All Exams but Not Passed a Proposal. Such students must present to the DGS evidence of progress toward a proposal, including the name of the faculty member who will be the chair.

D. Preference in Funding and 20-Hour Assignments. Students who are making adequate progress are funded in preference to those who are not. Others may be funded if money remains unallocated. In general, students making adequate progress will be offered 20-hour assignments in preference to those who are not. However, teaching performance is also considered and those whose performance is sub-par may be denied aid.
E. **Summary Timeline.** For convenience, the following timeline illustrates a “typical” path through the program.

**Year 1**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Semester</th>
<th>Second Semester</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Econ 8000 Math for Economists</td>
<td>Econ 8400 Economic History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Econ 8100 Microeconomic Theory I</td>
<td>Econ 8110 Microeconomic Theory II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Econ 8200 Macroeconomic Theory I</td>
<td>Econ 8210 Macroeconomic Theory II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Econ 8300 Probability and Statistics</td>
<td>Econ 8310 Econometrics I</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

May following Year 1: preliminary exams in Microeconomic Theory, Macroeconomic Theory and Econometrics. Failed preliminary exams may be re-taken in May following the second year.

**Year 2 and 3**

By the end of Year 3, complete 7 PhD level courses, including those meeting the requirements for two different fields; complete Graduate School requirement of 72 credit hours; pass paper requirement.

There are 10 standard fields: Advanced Economic Theory; Econometrics; Economic Development; Economic History; Health Economics; Industrial Organization; International Economics; Labor Economics, Money and Financial Institutions; Public Economics. Non-standard fields can be offered by petition.

**Year 4**

By the end of the seventh semester, the student should have formed a dissertation committee. By the end of the year, the student has to pass a dissertation proposal defense.

After passing the proposal defense, the student has 8 more semesters to pass the final dissertation defense (but we strongly encourage completion within 5 or 6 years).