

UNO SCHOOL OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
 DOCTORAL STUDENT HANDBOOK
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Introduction

This Doctoral Program Handbook presents the policies of the School of Public Administration (SPA) at the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) regarding the Doctor of Philosophy in Public Administration degree program. The policies presented here are in addition to [general policies](#) set forth by the [Graduate School](#) at UNO. Students and prospective students should consult Graduate School policies as well as this Handbook.

Provisions of the Handbook may change as a function of modifications of policies, procedures or requirements made by either the public administration faculty or the University Graduate Council. As such changes occur, new editions of the Handbook will be posted on the SPA web page. Handbook curriculum policies in effect in a student's first semester of doctoral work following admission, relating to the courses and credit hours required for the core, specializations, and research portions of the program, continue to apply to the student through graduation. In some circumstances, students may be allowed to switch from an older curriculum model to one recently adopted. All other current Handbook policies apply equally to all students in the program regardless of date of entry into the program.

Program Objectives

The Ph.D. program in Public Administration at UNO creates a supportive, collaborative, and rigorous environment for students to develop their intellectual identities and a comprehensive understanding of the field and a range of research traditions. Our students and alumni make significant contributions to theory, policy, research, and practice towards enhancing a democratic society. We value intellectual openness, collaboration, diversity, and excellence.

The Ph.D. program in Public Administration is a research degree in public administration and management. The focus is on public administration and management in a democratic and diverse society. The program offers advanced education in the foundations of public administration, knowledge frameworks in the study of public administration, the relationship between public organizations and other institutions and organizations in society, and the history of management in the public sector.

The Ph.D. in Public Administration is the terminal degree for research and theory development. While this definition of the doctoral degree does not preclude people who wish to further their education while remaining in professional public management careers, it should communicate that the doctorate in public administration focuses upon developing a student's ability to conduct research and engage in theoretical and scholarly reflection.

Because the Ph.D. program seeks to provide students with the competencies necessary to achieve distinction in higher education or leadership positions in public administration, the faculty expect students to exhibit a serious and well thought out commitment to the profession of public service in a democratic and diverse society. The

Ph.D. program assists students in their individual development toward a professional sense of personal responsibility and public accountability, providing a foundation for a successful career in academia and/or in public administration.

Admissions

Admission to the Ph.D. program in Public Administration is the decision of the Dean of Graduate Studies based on the recommendations of the SPA Doctoral Program Committee (DPC). The primary application deadline is **January 15** (required for applicants seeking financial assistance). Applications may also be submitted by **March 15** for the cohort starting the following fall. There are several elements in the application portfolio (listed below), and all application materials must be received by the deadline for the application to be reviewed by the DPC. Applicants should apply online [here](#); materials to submit include:

1. All official transcripts from post-secondary educational institutions, sent to: Office of Graduate Studies and Research, Eppley Administration Building 203, University of Nebraska at Omaha, Omaha, NE 68182.
2. \$45.00 application fee.
3. Completed graduate application.
4. Minimum TOEFL score of 557 (or 233 on computer-based test or 90 on Internet based test), minimum IELTS score of 6.5, or minimum Pearson score of 61.¹
5. A minimum Graduate Record Exam (GRE) combined verbal and quantitative score of 305.
6. A five-page statement of intent describing academic and professional goals, background, and research interests; the career the applicant wishes to pursue after completion of the Ph.D.; desired areas of specialization in the Ph.D. program; and faculty with whom the student might work and why.
7. Résumé or curriculum vitae of professional work experience.
8. Three email addresses for your writers of letters of recommendation (at least two must be academics); the Graduate Studies Office will contact each via email to obtain the letters.

Governance of the Doctoral Program and Student's Supervisory Committee

The DPC and the student's Supervisory Committee play important roles in administering the doctoral program and in monitoring and supporting a student's progress throughout the program.

The Doctoral Program Committee (DPC)

The DPC administers the Ph.D. degree program. The Committee takes primary responsibility for supervision of the program, including admissions, interpretation of policy and socialization of doctoral students into a community of scholars, and maintaining the quality standards of the program. The Committee conducts an annual review of the academic progress of each doctoral student. The full-time tenure-track or

¹ Required if applicant's native language is not English and master's degree is not from a university in a country where the official language is English.

tenured faculty members of the SPA nominate members of the Committee to the Director of the SPA, who makes appointments. Committee members recommend one member to the SPA Director to serve as Chair of the DPC for a three-year term, with a possible three-year reappointment.

The Doctoral Program Committee Chair

The DPC Chair takes primary responsibility for facilitating the doctoral program and liaising between the DPC and students and between the DPC and rest of the SPA faculty and Graduate Studies. The DPC Chair:

- Facilitates and administers all policies articulated in this Handbook, by the DPC, and/or SPA Director, and suggests policy updates to the DPC.
- Serves as liaison between the DPC and Graduate Studies.
- Approves travel and travel funding requests, supervisory committee appointments, and program of study plans before forwarding to the SPA Director and/or to Graduate Studies.
- In consultation with the DPC and other faculty members, makes graduate assistantship (GA) appointments and GA contracts.
- Schedules Ph.D. courses and in consultation with supervisory committee chairs and the SPA Director, and assigns PhD students to teach undergraduate courses.
- Manages the student annual review process.
- Organizes and facilitates new student orientation, all-PhD student meetings, the Teaching and Professional Skills Workshop, conference practice presentations, and mock academic job interview sessions.
- Keeps current Ph.D. students informed of funding, conference, professional development, and other opportunities.
- Attends all dissertation proposal and dissertation defenses.
- Recruits and discusses with potential students application to the Ph.D. program, and manages the application review process.
- Provides support to Supervisory Committee chairs.
- Provides support to the Waldo Society student association.

All questions or concerns students or faculty have regarding the doctoral program, program of study, etc. should be directed initially to the DPC Chair. If needed, concerns can also be brought to the SPA Director.

The Supervisory Committee

The Supervisory Committee guides the student through their entire program of study. The student's Supervisory Committee must be formed while the student is enrolled in the first semester of doctoral course work. To form a Committee, the student should contact an appropriate (in terms of research and professional interests) faculty member in the SPA to request to serve as Supervisory Committee Chair. The student should then work with the Supervisory Committee Chair to form the rest of the committee, which should include two additional SPA faculty members and one faculty member

outside of the SPA. This “outside” member should be within the University of Nebraska (NU) system. An additional person outside of the NU system can also be added to a committee. If outside of the NU system, approval will need to be obtained from the DPC Chair, School Director, Dean of the College, and Dean of Graduate Studies by completing the [Appointment of Courtesy Committee Member](#) form (and attaching a copy of the outside member’s CV).

Once the committee has been formed, and with the approval of the Supervisory Committee Chair, the student should submit an [Appointment of Supervisory Committee for the Doctoral Degree](#) form to the Chair of the DPC, who may approve and then forward it to the Dean of Graduate Studies for final approval. After the Dean signs the form, a copy is sent to each committee member, the Director of the SPA, the Chair of the DPC, and the student. The original is kept in the student's file.

A student may change their Supervisory Committee Chair but should consult with the DPC Chair before seeking a change. A student may also change committee members in consultation with their Chair. In some instances, a faculty member may also ask a student to find a new chair if research interests or some other issue makes a change appropriate. Faculty members are asked to consult with the DPC Chair if a change is being considered. If any Committee change is made, a new Appointment of Supervisory Committee form must be submitted to the Chair of the DPC. Students should note that if they are not able to form a full committee, they may not be able to continue in the program.

Responsibilities of the Supervisory Committee

The Supervisory Committee advises students on the Program of Study, designs and evaluates the field exam, evaluates and hears the defense of the dissertation proposal, evaluates the dissertation, hears final oral defense of the dissertation, and when applicable recommends approval of the dissertation to the Dean for Graduate Studies. Committee members and students need to be aware of their mutual responsibilities to consult with one another at each stage of the process.

Responsibilities of the Supervisory Committee Chair

The Chair of the Supervisory Committee is the student’s primary advisor throughout the doctoral program. Students should meet regularly with the Supervisory Committee Chair to confer on course load, research plans, conference attendance, and so on. The Supervisory Committee Chair’s role includes:

- Recommends to the Chair of the DPC and Dean of Graduate Studies approval of the student’s Program of Study.
- Reviews and provides mentoring and feedback on the student’s annual review of academic progress and plans.
- Reviews and must approve conference submissions and travel and travel funding requests.
- Provides mentoring and feedback on student teaching assignments, as applicable (see [checklist for Ph.D. students teaching classes](#)).

- Supervises the PA 9800: Advanced Research Design seminar, which includes the development of the dissertation proposal.
- Coordinates the field exam process by consulting with other members of the Committee about the design and evaluation of the exam questions.
- Approves the dissertation proposal and dissertation before it is sent to the rest of the Supervisory Committee.
- Presides at the oral defense of the dissertation proposal and dissertation.
- Provides advice and support related to going on the academic or other job market, as applicable.

Progress toward the Degree

The curriculum and course schedule are designed to enable full-time students to complete their degree within about four years. Typically, the first year consists of taking the core seminars and the first of two research seminars (quantitative methods). The second year consists of taking the second research seminar (qualitative methods) and courses in the area of specialization. The third year consists of completing course work in the area of specialization, the seminar in advanced research design (which entails writing the dissertation proposal), field exams, and defending the dissertation proposal. The fourth year (and beyond) consists of competing and defending the dissertation.

Pre-Requisites

Applicants who enter the program with a master's degree in a field other than PA may need to complete pre-requisite courses or readings as determined by DPC when applications are reviewed. This will be communicated to the student upon acceptance to the program. Applicants may take master's-level courses before acceptance by applying to the SPA Graduate Certificate in [Public Management](#). Please consult with the DPC Chair and SPA Academic Program Coordinator for guidance.

Residency Requirement

All doctoral students, whether full-time or part-time, must complete 24 credit hours within the first 24 months of the program in order to meet the residency requirement of UNO. The residency requirement insures that progress toward the degree occurs within a reasonably compact timeframe. Once doctoral students begin their program, and before they become a Candidate (after successfully completing field exams), they may not stop out for one or more semesters without an approved leave of absence from the DPC. A student must be continuously enrolled once they become a Candidate.

Program of Study

The student's Supervisory Committee must be formed while the student is enrolled in the first semester of doctoral course work. In the process of forming the Supervisory Committee, the student and the Supervisory Committee Chair develop the student's Program of Study.

The Program of Study serves to guide the student through their doctoral education. The [Program of Study](#) form must be submitted to the Chair of the DPC within three weeks of

the appointment of a student's Supervisory Committee. It is recommended that first year students take the two required core courses the first semester, then after that, full-time students may take two to three courses each semester. Because of the residency requirement (see above), all students must take a minimum of two courses a semester during the first two years. Students with graduate assistantships must take a minimum of two courses a semester. International students who are in the US on F-1 or J-1 status are required by law to pursue a full course of study every semester of the academic year. "Full-time student status" is defined as 9 credit hours for graduate students. However, students may request a reduced course load for various reasons noted in the [Reduced Course Load Recommendation Letter](#).

Please see the [PhD Course Checklist](#) to plan out the Program of Study.

Following approval of the Program of Study by the Dean of Graduate Studies, a student wishing to change any courses on the Program of Study must submit a request to the DPC Chair with the approval of the Supervisory Committee Chair.

Coursework

There are four required core seminars in the doctoral program of study. These seminars are taken at the beginning of a student's program of study and cover the theoretical foundations of the field, the major knowledge frameworks that form the basis for research design and methods, the political social and economic environments of public administration, and theories.

- PA 9000 | Foundations of Public Administration
- PA 9300 | Knowledge Development and Use
- PA 9400 | Environment of Public Administration
- PA 9600 | Seminar in Advanced Management Theory

There are three required research seminars. The first two courses are taken during the first or second year of a student's program and cover quantitative and qualitative research design and methods. The third course on advanced research design is taken at the end of the student's course work under the direction of the supervisory committee chair, and covers the elements of a successful dissertation proposal.

- PA 9950 | Quantitative Methods in Public Administration
- PA 9960 | Qualitative Research Methods
- PA 9800 | Advanced Research Design

There is also a required 1-credit hour workshop (PA 9920) doctoral students typically take in year two of the program. A team of faculty facilitate discussions on topics related to teaching, publishing, and job search skills.

The faculty offer seven areas of specialization. Doctoral students choose two courses (6 hours) in each of two areas, for a total of 12 credit hours. The area of specialization includes a seminar or pro-seminar and second course drawn from the graduate

curriculum of Public Administration, a related academic unit in the university system, or an independent study course. The specialization areas are:

- Information & Technology Management
- Nonprofit Management
- Public Administration Theory
- Public Aviation & Transportation
- Public Budgeting & Finance
- Public Policy
- Urban Management

Field Examination

Following completion of course work, doctoral students take the field examination, which includes three questions covering course work in the areas of specialization and one question related to research methods. The field exam is given in closed-book format in an eight-hour period, which can be divided into two four-hour sessions. The field exam testing periods are September 1 through November 15 in the fall semester and February 1 through April 15 in the spring semester, and must be taken during weekday business hours.

Students must seek permission from the Chair of their Supervisory Committees to take the field exam. The request must be made in writing to the Supervisory Committee Chair with a copy to the Chair of the DPC at least 45 days before the first exam session, and should suggest the dates and times of exam sessions. The exam is designed and graded by the student's Supervisory Committee. The student should consult with their Supervisory Committee Chair regarding the question focus areas.

The Chair of the student's Supervisory Committee will work with other Supervisory Committee members to assess the field exam answers. Exam questions are assessed as high pass, pass, marginal pass, or fail. The Committee will return results within *approximately three weeks*.

Students who fail all or part of the field examination may, with the approval of their Supervisory Committee, repeat the examination or a portion of the examination the next time it is offered. A student who fails the examination a second time will be immediately dropped from the program.

Candidacy

Upon passing field exams, students may apply for [Admission to Candidacy for the Doctoral Degree](#). Per Graduate Studies' doctoral degree requirements, once they become a candidate, a student must be continuously enrolled until they graduate.

Dissertation Proposal

Once field exams are successfully completed, students will complete and defend a dissertation proposal before their Supervisory Committee. The proposal should consist

at minimum of a statement of the topic to be addressed, an explanation of why the topic is important, a review of the relevant literature, and an appropriate research design. The Supervisory Committee Chair will assist the student in the development of the proposal (begun in Advanced Research Design). Defense of the proposal will be before a majority of the members of the Supervisory Committee and the Chair of the DPC *no earlier than three weeks* after they have received the proposal. After the oral proposal defense, the [Proposal Defense Form](#) should be submitted to the Chair of the DPC.

Dissertation

The dissertation is the culmination of a student's formal academic education. The faculty expects the dissertation to be an original contribution to knowledge in the field of public administration. Students must work closely with their Supervisory Committee Chair in the selection of a topic for research, the choice of appropriate research methods and techniques, and a timeline for completion. Please see the Graduate Studies [website](#) for information on the dissertation format.

The dissertation defense will be scheduled only when the Chair of the Supervisory Committee indicates that it is ready for the defense. The oral examination will be conducted by the Supervisory Committee and attended by the Chair of the DPC. The defense will also be open to the public. Supervisory Committee members must sign off on the [Application for Final Examination](#) based on a review of the dissertation. Members of the Supervisory Committee will have *at least one month* to read and evaluate the dissertation prior to the oral examination. Upon successful defense of the dissertation, the [Report on Completion of Degree](#) form should be submitted to the Dean of Graduate Studies. Doctoral Candidates should be mindful of the degree deadlines (see [Academic Calendar](#)) if they are interested in participating in Graduation Ceremonies.

Reasonable Progress

Students are expected to maintain reasonable progress toward the degree, as measured by timely completion of their Program of Study and meeting benchmarks outlined in the [PhD Student Activity Goals](#) matrix. Prior to Candidacy, students may “stop the clock” by petitioning the DPC for a leave of absence for a stated period of time, not to exceed one year. A leave of absence must be approved in advance by the Dean of Graduate Studies upon the recommendation of the DPC. Students should contact the DPC Chair to discuss further. The Graduate College requires that a student be continuously enrolled once they are admitted into Candidacy.

Annual Review

The DPC will conduct a review of student progress each year and make recommendations as may be appropriate to Supervisory Committee Chairs. All students are required to submit a summary of their annual progress by **March 1** of each year, reviewed and approved by their Supervisory Committee Chair. The DPC Chair will provide detailed instructions on what to include in the annual review.

Completion Deadline

The time limit to complete the degree is eight years from the date of the filing of the Program of Study. On rare occasion this deadline may be extended for one or more semesters at the discretion of the Dean for Graduate Studies upon the recommendation of the DPC.

Quality of Work Standards

Doctoral students are expected to do work of high caliber and be actively present in courses and other intellectual and professional development activities associated with the School.

Failure to maintain quality of work standards will result in probation or dismissal from the program. Reasons for probation or dismissal include:

- Failure to maintain a 3.33 average for all course work
- A grade of C+ or below in one course
- Failure to maintain continuous enrollment (unless approval is obtained otherwise—see above)
- Failure to pass field exams (see above)
- Failure to form a supervisory committee (see above)
- Violating [Student Code of Conduct](#) standards

A student who has been dismissed for failure to meet one or more of the Quality of Work standards may petition the DPC for probation or full reinstatement. The petition should include the issues or circumstances the student thinks need to be addressed to enable them to meet quality of work standards and what they will do to improve to be in compliance by the end of the following semester. The DPC will forward its recommendation to the Dean of Graduate Studies. The DPC may recommend one of the following options:

1. Full reinstatement
2. Conditional reinstatement or probation
3. Immediate dismissal from the program

Graduate Studies' Graduate Assistantship ([GA Academic Standards](#)) stipulate that student must be in good standing in a program to maintain their GA position and may only be eligible for an assistantship once they are fully reinstated into the program and the program decides to re-award the assistantship. Re-awarding of an assistantship depends on funding availability.

Graduate Assistantship Procedures and Expectations

GAs are intended as awards to students who have demonstrated high academic performance and potential at the graduate level. The DPC determines to whom GAs are awarded, based on available resources provided by the SPA or through grant funding

obtained by faculty and staff. The faculty expect GAs to perform high quality, ethical, dependable, and professional work.

GAs are typically awarded to applicants who apply by January 15, and for up to four years as long as adequate progress in the program and meeting Quality of Work Standards (see below) are met and funding is available. A student may be removed from a GA position if they do not adequately meet Quality of Work standards or do not meet expectations articulated in the student's GA contract.

The DPC Chair, in consultation with faculty and Supervisory Committee Chairs, assigns GA positions to a faculty GA advisor (who may or may not also be the student's Supervisory Committee Chair). Contracts are typically completed during the May before the student starts the position the following August. The first two years of a GA position usually entail research and/or program-related support to faculty members. The third and fourth years usually entail responsibilities for teaching undergraduate courses. The DPC chair consults Supervisory Committee Chairs and students in assigning appropriate teaching responsibilities. GA funding past year four is typically not available and will only be considered in unique situations that coincide with the availability of funds in the School.

The terms of a GA contract are typically 9 months, with payments made over 10 months. GAs include a tuition waiver, a stipend for approximately 20 hours of work per week, and subsidized health care benefits. GAs are typically expected to work each semester starting the week before the semester starts and ending the week after. Students should discuss their work schedule with their GA advisor before the start of the semester. GAs are expected to be physically present in the Omaha region and regularly available on campus to meet with advisors and other students and to attend School-related events. In extraordinary circumstances, the DPC may consider exceptions to this policy.

Per the requirements of Graduate Studies, GAs must be registered for at least six credit hours of coursework per semester. GAs may request an exception to this if they are nearly done completing their dissertation.

At the end of each semester, the GA advisor will evaluate the performance of the GA under their direction. The nature of the student's role and responsibilities are to be articulated by the faculty supervisor and should be commensurate with the student's skill level and experience. In compliance with policies articulated by Graduate Studies, GA work should not be primarily clerical in nature.

While faculty needs for GAs with particular skills must be considered, in rare instances a GA may petition the DPC for a change in GA assignment and advisor. This petition should be submitted in writing to the DPC Chair, outlining the reason for the request. The DPC Chair and Committee may consult with relevant faculty and the SPA Director in making a decision. The desire to change GA assignments should first be discussed with the DPC Chair.

Travel Policy and Funding

Students are encouraged to present high quality work at academic conferences to enable them to strategically network and engage with the scholarly community. Graduate Studies (see [application information](#)) and the SPA (see [application information](#)) typically have a small amount of funds available to support students who apply for conference travel funding. Students may apply for these funds if a conference proposal is accepted for presentation, and with the approval of their Supervisory Committee Chair

Students who receive funding (or are employees of the university) must submit a travel authorization request before traveling (submitted via [Firefly](#)). If funding from the university is received, an authorization request must be submitted before purchasing plane tickets through the university's approved travel agent (or getting permission to purchase elsewhere), or making other travel-related purchases. If this is not done, students **will not receive reimbursement** for their purchases. Please review the policy [here](#).

Waldo Society

The purpose of the Waldo Society is to provide a forum in which doctoral students can discuss research ideas, exchange academic and professional skills, and collaborate. The Waldo Society strives to create a community for doctoral students in the SPA that helps meet both their social and professional development needs. Officers from among current PhD students are elected annually, with the aim to represent students across cohorts.