

University PhD Policies & Requirements

Academic PhD Programs

The following university-wide policies and practices apply to all PhD students regardless of school affiliation. They are specific to PhD program administration and PhD student experience. Schools/divisions may set stricter standards for students within their ambit, but they may not set standards that fall below university-wide policies. This page *does not* include those policies and practices that apply to the student community as a whole (e.g., the University Student Conduct Code).

Academic and Professional Integrity for PhD Students

The Academic and Professional Integrity Policy for PhD Students (PDF) continues to apply to all PhD students on the Danforth and Medical campuses, including dual-degree students when one of the degree programs is a PhD program.

Involuntary Leave of Absence

The Involuntary Leave of Absence Policy that applies to undergraduates was adopted to apply to all PhD students in 2014.

PhD Student Support Policies and Resources

New Child Leave

Full-time PhD students may request a New Child Leave to assume care for a new child. They should maintain their full-time student status. Students on New Child Leave are not expected to participate in mentored teaching or research experience for up to 60 calendar days and will receive their current stipend support during this 60-day period. Students may request additional time off via a leave of absence without receiving a stipend (for up to a full semester) if approved by the student's department/program. A leave of absence pauses the academic clock.

New Child Leave does not affect the student's full-time status and will not appear on the student's official transcript. New Child Leave must be taken within the first year after the child's date of birth or adoption. Students should contact their department/program to request a New Child Leave. Students who receive support from external agencies should consult the policies and guidelines of the sponsor as well as their Vice Dean or designee before requesting a New Child Leave.

Child Daycare Subsidy

The Child Daycare Subsidy is sponsored by Washington University in St. Louis, and its purpose is to help PhD students with children under their care (who meet the requisite eligibility criteria) to meet the costs of child daycare while they pursue their studies.

The amount of the Child Daycare Subsidy awarded to eligible applicants is based on their financial need, the number of children they have enrolled in child daycare facilities, their child daycare expenses, and available funding. Eligible PhD students can expect the following:

- For one child, the maximum award is \$3,550 per Fall/Spring semester.
- For two children, the maximum award is \$4,550 per Fall/Spring semester.
- For three or more children, the maximum award is \$5,550 per Fall/Spring semester.

The subsidy amount cannot exceed the cost of the daycare facility.

The application is available on the Office of the Provost website.

Financial Policies

PhD Student Minimum Financial Award

The education of PhD students represents a significant commitment on the part of both Washington University in St. Louis and the students admitted/enrolled. Washington University in St. Louis typically funds most full-time PhD students for a minimum of five years (with the exception of post-professional PhD programs in the School of Medicine). Funding typically consists of full tuition scholarship and financial support to defray living expenses. Financial support may also be referred to as stipends or fellowships. Such financial support may be sourced internally from university-wide fellowships such as the Olin Chancellor's Fellowship, the McDonnell International Scholars Academy, or school/program/department funds or from external sources (e.g., external research contracts and grants, external fellowships such as NSF GRFP).

The minimum PhD financial support rate for the 2024-25 academic year is \$36,050 annually, dispersed on a monthly basis while the student is enrolled full time. The rate applies to all PhD programs with the exception of post-professional specialty programs in the School of Medicine. Departments, schools, cross-school interdisciplinary programs, and other fellowship programs may choose to offer a rate higher than the established minimum, but they must do so for all students in their cohort. The eligibility criteria for PhD students receiving such financial support are outlined in the PhD Student Funding section below.

Students admitted to a part-time PhD program or on a part-time basis are not usually eligible for this minimum financial award.

PhD Student Funding

Financial support at or above the university-wide PhD minimum stipend rate allows PhD students to focus on their programmatic requirements, enabling them to make expeditious progress toward degree completion. This section predominantly pertains to PhD students, but it may apply to other graduate and professional students receiving financial support from the university.

Eligibility and Status

Students receiving university financial support must do the following:

- Enroll and maintain full-time student status in a graduate or professional program during the academic year;
- Make satisfactory academic progress in accordance with their degree program requirements; and
- Report to their degree program and university fellowship program (if applicable) any additional financial award(s) they receive or employment they engage in as outlined in this policy.

Because graduate students sometimes receive funding from multiple sources, it is the responsibility of the student, the student's department/degree program, and the Principal Investigator (if applicable) to understand and abide by the terms and conditions of each funding source.

Funding From Multiple Sources

Eligible students are encouraged to seek additional fellowships from external agencies. In addition to the funding amount, which can be more generous than that of a university financial award, these external fellowships are prestigious; they provide valuable training, experiences, and resources, and they enhance future career opportunities. In addition, securing external funding to support training and research is often an important component of the professional development of graduate students.

PhD students receiving university financial support who also receive an external fellowship or stipendiary award **may not** combine or "stack" the external award with the university financial support.* Students receiving an external fellowship or stipendiary award have two options.

Option 1: Supplementation of an External Fellowship or Stipendiary Award

If the sum of all external fellowship or stipendiary awards is less than the university financial support, the university funds may supplement the total amount of external funding to bring the student up to their guaranteed university fellowship or to the minimum university financial support for PhD students.

Students who receive external fellowship or stipendiary awards providing annual stipends that total more than the university financial support will retain the full external award(s) and will receive no additional university financial support for the duration of the external award.

- *Example One:* A student has a university award of \$38,000. The student receives a \$34,000 external award; the university will supplement the external award by \$4,000 to bring the student up to their university award of \$38,000.
- *Example Two:* A student has a university award of \$38,000. The student receives an external foundation award of \$42,000. Since the external award is greater, no university funds will be distributed while the student is supported by the external award.

Option 2: Deferral of University Fellowship or Stipendiary Award

Students receiving an external fellowship or stipendiary award during years one through five of study may, with program approval, defer up to one year of the university fellowship or stipendiary award made at the time of admission, if permissible based upon the award criteria from the external funding agency.

The university fellowship program and/or the student's home department or program can assist students when considering the benefits of each option. For cases in which a student has access to multiple sources of funding, external funds must be used before university funds are applied. University, school, and degree program funds will be the last source of funds to be applied to a student's financial support.

Schools and departments/programs may choose to offer an additional financial incentive to students who are awarded competitive external funding. Any such incentives must be uniformly awarded to all qualifying students within a degree program. Incentive awards given by school or degree programs to students who win external awards do not count toward the total university financial support; these incentive awards are in addition to the fellowship or stipendiary award.

All financial support will be applied in accordance with the terms and conditions of each funding source. In consultation with the student, departments/programs should ensure financial support is dispersed in the correct amount and in accordance with applicable policy.

- * Limited exceptions may occur for instances in which the external award is explicitly contingent on the continuation of the university stipendiary award. In such instances, the decision on stacking is at the discretion of the school dean or their designee for support provided by the school or by a cross-school interdisciplinary program and at the discretion of the fellowship administrator for university-wide fellowships (e.g., OCF, MISA).

PhD Student Employment

Full-Time Employment

University financial support that is provided at or above the university-wide PhD minimum stipend rate is intended to enable students to focus exclusively (i.e., full time) on their studies. Students who receive university financial support at or above the university-wide minimum PhD stipend rate are not permitted to hold full-time employment.

Students who perform full-time employment during the summer term will have their university fellowship or stipendiary award stopped for the duration of their full-time employment. Students are also subject to any school or program-based policies regarding employment, which may be more restrictive. Students should consult their school and degree program for approval.

Part-Time Employment

To ensure that students receiving university financial support can focus on their programmatic requirements and make expeditious progress toward degree completion, part-time employment should not exceed an average of 10 hours per week. This allowance may be restricted by schools/departments/programs to a smaller number of hours per week to conform with a student's funding source policies and with federal time and effort reporting guidelines (as applicable).

If a student and that student's advisor(s) believe that additional part-time employment will enhance the student's outcomes and is unlikely to hinder timely progress toward degree completion, the student may request approval for an exception through their school's graduate program office. Any such exceptions will be documented and kept on file in the school. For students supported on federal grants, it is the school's responsibility to ensure adherence to any constraints derived from time and effort reporting.

To reiterate, students are also subject to any school or department/program-based policies regarding employment, which may be more restrictive. Students should consult their school and degree program for approval prior to undertaking any part-time employment.

Implications for International Students

International students attending Washington University in St. Louis on a visa must consult with the Office for International Students and Scholars (OISS) before accepting any external or internal employment, either full-time or part-time.

Tax Implications

Please visit Washington University in St. Louis's Financial Services site for more information about the taxability of stipend payments. Students are encouraged to consult a personal tax advisor to ensure that they are adhering to federal and state laws and Internal Revenue Service (IRS) regulations.

PhD General Requirements and Policies

To earn a PhD at Washington University in St. Louis, a student must complete all courses required by their department/program; maintain satisfactory academic progress; pass certain examinations; fulfill residence and mentored experience requirements; write, defend, and submit a dissertation; and file an Intent to Graduate form via WebSTAC.

Note: Individual schools and departments/programs may have more restrictive policies than the university-wide policies stated herein.

Residence Requirement

Each full-time PhD student must spend at least one academic year enrolled full-time at Washington University in St. Louis. Any exceptions must be approved by the dean of the student's respective school and the Vice Provost for Graduate Education.

Students admitted to a part-time PhD program must be enrolled in at least 3 units for each Fall/Spring semester until the unit requirements for their program are satisfied.

Time Limit for PhD Enrollment Eligibility

Full-time PhD students are eligible for enrollment at Washington University in St. Louis for a maximum of 14 Fall/Spring semesters (seven years). Enrollment includes traditional course registration and 0-unit courses that carry a full-time enrollment status. Semesters of approved leaves of absence do not count toward this time limit.

Students admitted to a part-time PhD program are eligible for enrollment at Washington University in St. Louis for 18 Fall/Spring semesters (nine years). Semesters of approved leaves of absence do not count toward this time limit.

Full-time PhD students and those admitted to part-time PhD programs may petition for an enrollment eligibility extension for a maximum of one academic year. Petitions must be directed to the student's dean or their designee. Supplemental petitions will not be permitted. In unusual circumstances, the dean or their designee may appeal to the Vice Provost for Graduate Education on behalf of a particular student.

Qualifying Examinations

Progress toward the PhD is contingent upon the student passing examinations that are variously called *preliminary*, *qualifying*, *general*, *comprehensive*, or *major field exams*. The qualifying examination process varies considerably according to the department/program, and the structure and schedule of the qualifying exam are set by the department/program in accordance with best practices within their field. The department/program is responsible for documenting the process properly and ensuring the process is clearly outlined to their students. Each PhD program is responsible for notifying the school registrar or the appropriate record custodian of the student's outcome, whether successful or unsuccessful.

Mentored Experience Requirement

All PhD students at Washington University in St. Louis must complete a department/program-defined Mentored Experience. The Mentored Experience Requirement is a doctoral degree milestone that is notated on the student's transcript when complete. Each department/program has an established Mentored Experience Implementation Plan in which the number of semesters that a student must engage in a Mentored Teaching Experience or a Mentored Professional Experience is defined. The Mentored Experience Implementation Plans outline how doctoral students within the discipline will be mentored to achieve competencies in teaching at basic and advanced levels. Some departments/programs may elect to include the Mentored Professional Experiences as an avenue for completing one or more semesters of

the Mentored Experience Requirement. Doctoral students will enroll in Mentored Teaching Experiences or Mentored Professional Experiences to signify their progression toward completing the overall Mentored Experience Requirement for their degree.

The Mentored Experience Requirement will be altered for the 2025-26 academic year and will be documented in the *Bulletin*. Some programs are piloting changes for the 2024-25 academic year and will independently communicate with their students regarding any changes.

Dissertation

As evidence of the mastery of a specific field of knowledge and of the capacity for original scholarly work, each candidate must complete a dissertation. Each PhD candidate will form a Research Advisory Committee (RAC) approved by their department/program and by their school's graduate program oversight body. The RAC will approve the subject and approach of the dissertation, which will be evidenced by the student's completion of the Title, Scope and Procedure requirement.

The RAC should consist of at least three full-time Washington University in St. Louis faculty members who are authorized to supervise PhD students and who have appropriate expertise in the proposed field of study. One of these faculty members must be the student's primary research advisor/mentor. Additional members, including external members with active research programs at outside institutions, may serve on the RAC subject to approval by the school's graduate program oversight body.

- For cross-school/interdisciplinary PhD programs, the approvals referenced above should be obtained from the graduate program oversight body of the school of the primary research advisor/mentor.
- For a PhD program offered in partnership with an external academic institution, one full-time faculty member of the partner institution who is authorized to supervise PhD students and who has appropriate expertise in the proposed field of study may serve on the RAC as part of the three-member minimum requirement.

A Title, Scope and Procedure form for the dissertation must be signed by the RAC members and by the program chair. Full-time students must submit the Title, Scope and Procedure form to the school registrar or the appropriate record custodian at least six months before the degree is expected to be conferred or before the beginning the fifth year of full-time enrollment, whichever is earlier. Students enrolled in a part-time PhD program must submit the Title, Scope and Procedure form to the school registrar or the appropriate record custodian at least six months before the degree is expected to be conferred or before the beginning of the sixth year of enrollment, whichever is earlier.

A Doctoral Dissertation Guide and a template that provides instructions regarding the format of the dissertation are available through the website of the Office of the Provost; both of these should be read carefully at every stage of dissertation preparation.

Each student is required to make the full text of the dissertation available to the committee members for their review at least one week before the dissertation defense. Most degree programs require two or more weeks for the review period; students should check their department/program's policies.

Dissertation Defense

Approval of the written dissertation by the Research Advisory Committee (RAC) is strongly recommended before the student can orally defend the dissertation. The doctoral dissertation committee that examines the student during the defense consists of at least five members. Normally, the members of the RAC also serve on the Doctoral Dissertation Committee. The dissertation committee is then additionally augmented to ensure that the following criteria are met:

1. Three of the five members (or a similar proportion of a larger committee) must be full-time Washington University in St. Louis faculty members or, for programs offered by Washington University in St. Louis-affiliated partners, full-time members of a Washington University in St. Louis-affiliated partner institution who are authorized to supervise PhD students and who have appropriate expertise in the proposed field of study. One of these three members must be the PhD student's primary thesis advisor, and one may be a member of the emeritus faculty.
2. All other committee members must be active in research/scholarship and have appropriate expertise in the proposed field of study whether at Washington University in St. Louis, at another university, in government, or in industry.
3. At least one of the five members must bring expertise outside of the student's field of study to the committee, as judged by the relevant school's graduate program oversight body.

The approval processes outlined under RAC in the Doctoral Council bylaws also apply to the doctoral dissertation committee, including approval of each dissertation committee by the host school's graduate program oversight body/bodies.

The student is responsible for making the full text of the dissertation accessible to their committee members for their review in advance of the defense according to program rules. Washington University in St. Louis community members and guests of the student who are interested in the subject of the dissertation are normally welcome to attend all or part of the defense but may ask questions only at the discretion of the committee chair. Although there is some variation among degree programs, the defense ordinarily focuses on the dissertation itself and its relation to the student's field of expertise.

Attendance by a minimum of four members of the Doctoral Dissertation Committee, including the committee chair and an outside member, is required for the defense to take place. This provision is designed to permit the student's defense to proceed in case of a situation that unexpectedly prevents one of the five members from attending. Students should not plan in advance to only have four members in attendance; if one of those four cannot attend, the defense must be rescheduled. The absence of all outside members or of the committee chair would necessitate rescheduling the defense.

Students, with the support of their Doctoral Dissertation Committee chair, may opt to hold their dissertation defense in-person or by utilizing a virtual or hybrid format.

Dissenting Vote(s) at a Dissertation

Faculty members of the Doctoral Dissertation Committee normally will examine the PhD candidate and vote on whether to approve the dissertation. In the vast majority of cases, these votes are unanimously for approval. In the rare case that there are faculty concerns that cannot be resolved through subsequent revisions and which therefore result in dissenting (negative) vote(s), the committee chair will refer the case to the Vice Provost for Graduate Education for resolution.

In the case of a single dissenting vote, the committee chair and the dissenting voter will be asked to explain the reasons for the dissent in a letter to the Vice Provost for Graduate Education. After consulting with these and other members of the committee, the Vice Provost for Graduate Education may then decide to accept the majority opinion and approve the dissertation, or they may seek the opinion of an additional reader. After considering this additional evidence, the Vice Provost for Graduate Education may approve or decline to approve the dissertation.

In the case of two or more dissenting votes, the committee chair and the dissenting voters will again be asked to explain the reasons for the dissent. The Vice Provost for Graduate Education may then decide to decline to approve the dissertation. Alternatively, they may ask the department or graduate program to name a Resolution Committee, consisting of three tenured or tenure-track professors at Washington University in St. Louis or elsewhere who did not serve on the original committee, to reexamine the dissertation and the candidate. A unanimous positive recommendation from this committee will be required in order for the Vice Provost for Graduate Education to approve the dissertation. Failure of a department or graduate program to identify three faculty members to serve on this Resolution Committee will be tantamount to a rejection of the dissertation.

Dissertation Submission

After the successful defense of their dissertation, the student must submit an electronic copy of the dissertation online to the university by the established deadline for their graduation term. Dissertations must be submitted no later than three months after the oral defense of the dissertation. Petitions for an extension to the three-month limit may be submitted to the Director of Graduate Studies for consideration and approval. The submission website requires students to choose from among publishing and copyrighting services offered by ProQuest ETD Administrator, but the university permits students to make whichever choices they prefer. Students are asked to submit the Survey of Earned Doctorates separately. The degree program is responsible for delivering the final approval form, signed by the committee members at the defense and then by the department/program chair or director, to the school registrar or the appropriate record custodian. Students who complete all degree requirements and defend their dissertations successfully have not completed their PhD requirements; they finish earning their degree only when their dissertation submission has been accepted by their school of record.

Degree Candidacy Extension (DCE)

Degree Candidacy Extension (DCE) refers to a non-enrolled status available, under exceptional circumstances, to full-time PhD students who have completed all PhD degree requirements with the exception of the dissertation.

Extended degree candidates are not registered for any courses, have no enrollment status, and are ineligible for financial awards or support, benefits, and resources available to enrolled Washington University in St. Louis students. Once a student enters DCE, they may not register or enroll with Washington University in St. Louis as a student in their intended degree program in a future term.

DCE status may be assigned to full-time students in a variety of situations, including but not limited to the following:

- PhD students who do not complete their dissertation after exhausting the time allowable for PhD enrollment status due to circumstances beyond their control (see Time Limit for PhD Enrollment Eligibility earlier on this page);
- PhD students who secure full-time employment prior to the completion of their dissertation and who have established a timeline for the completion of the dissertation requirement; and
- PhD students who have exhausted their university financial support period as defined by their school or program prior to the completion of their dissertation and who have established a timeline for the completion of the dissertation requirement.

DCE status may be inappropriate for international students dependent on a U.S. visa, and such students may not be eligible for this status. International students should always consult with an OISS advisor prior to making an enrollment status change. In addition, students admitted as part-time PhD students are not eligible for DCE status.

DCE status is not the rule. Rather, it is assigned as an exception. Students must obtain the recommendation of their department/program leadership and petition the Vice Dean for Graduate Education (or equivalent) within their school to request to enter DCE status. If the petition is successful, the DCE status is conferred for the period of one year, after which an additional petition should be made and approved. Students seeking to remain in DCE status are obligated to provide a written report on their dissertation's progress annually to their department to secure their approval for subsequent petitions. Individual departments may require additional checkpoints to ensure progression. Students may remain a PhD candidate in this status for a maximum of three calendar years.

If three calendar years pass from the first semester in which a student was placed on DCE and the student has not successfully completed all degree requirements, then that student has officially forfeited their eligibility to earn the PhD degree. Under these circumstances, the student may petition the Vice Provost of Graduate Education with the support of their department chair and school vice dean to be allowed to complete the degree outside of the three-year extension period. The petition will include a timeline for completion. The Vice Provost of Graduate Education reserves the right to deny any such request.