

# PhD Handbook

Department of Linguistics  
University of Rochester

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# 1 Introduction

At Rochester, cross-disciplinary, collaborative research is strongly encouraged. The faculty in the Department of Linguistics are grounded in the traditional fields of formal linguistics, employing empirical methodologies to examine data and topics in syntax, semantics, pragmatics, phonetics, laboratory phonology, and morphology in collaboration with researchers across departments and programs. Our work incorporates contemporary issues and practices in language documentation, corpus linguistics, dialect variation and psycholinguistics. Much of our research is carried out in collaboration with faculty and students in related fields. Refer to [Graduate Studies Bulletin](#) for a thorough overview of fields of study, courses, and faculty at the University of Rochester (“the university”).

Linguistics is a core member of Rochester’s [Center for Language Sciences](#), which is an interdisciplinary center supporting research and training in natural language that brings together faculty and students with interests in spoken and signed languages across departments and programs. Many of our students have benefited from engaging in interdisciplinary work with other departments at the University of Rochester. These departments have included computer science, philosophy, biomedical engineering, brain and cognitive sciences, anthropology, and music theory at the Eastman School of Music. At Rochester, cross-disciplinary, collaborative work is the norm.

This Handbook contains information about requirements and expectations of the PhD program. For the most recent information and guidance please see the [Graduate Student Resources Hub](#).

## 2 Requirements and expectations

### 2.1 Learning outcomes

We expect PhD students in the Department of Linguistics to have gained the following outcomes:

- High proficiency in core knowledge in linguistics
- High proficiency in their area of specialization
- High proficiency in research and scholarship
- High proficiency in communication of research results (oral and written)

### 2.2 Departmental expectations

#### 2.2.1 Participation

Students are expected to be active participants in the department. This includes attending department events, such as colloquia and individual faculty lab meetings. This also includes an expectation to regularly attend our Department lab meeting ("Omnibus") and to present research at that meeting at least once a year. Graduate students are also expected to participate in the life of the department by taking an active role in the publication of our working papers, planning colloquia, social events, and other roles as may come up.

#### 2.2.2 External employment

Graduate students in the Department of Linguistics are financially supported by a stipend, which is intended to defray living expenses so that students can participate in full-time research and coursework. PhD students are expected to devote full time to their studies and to any required teaching, research, or training. External employment on top of these program expectations is permitted, but it is not recommended that students exceed 8-10 hours of external employment per week during the academic year (though more may be appropriate when classes are not in session). During the Summer months, students may seek full- or part-time

employment that is related to their program goals (e.g. internships or external research positions) in lieu of their normal departmental research expectations, while also maintaining their normal stipend. While receiving a stipend from the Department, students should notify their advisor of any outside employment. If there is evidence that academic or research performance has been adversely affected, students may be asked to discuss with their advisor and Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) whether their level of external employment is compatible with program expectations. In addition, international students should ensure that they are complying with any existing visa restrictions on employment.

## 2.3 Course requirements

PhD students are required to take at least eight foundational courses, listed below, and four elective courses (including one seminar or equivalent), for a total of twelve core courses, or 48 credit hours. Required coursework is generally expected to be completed in the first three years, and must be completed before advancement to candidacy. View the [linguistics curriculum page](#) for any updates to the curriculum. *Please note that course codes and titles may change.*

### Foundational courses (8 required)

LING 405: Intro to Historical Linguistics or LING 440: Language Variation and Change

LING 410: Intro to Language Sound Systems

LING 414: Statistical Methods in Linguistics

LING 425: Intro to Semantic Analysis

LING 460: Syntactic Theory I

LING 426: Morphology or LING 526: Morphological Theory

LING 589: Graduate Field Methods

LING 501: Research Methods in Linguistics

Notes:

1. The four required electives may include courses from the foundational courses listed above. E.g. if a student takes LING 440 as a foundational course, they may take LING 405 as an elective. At least one of the four electives should be a seminar or a similar research-oriented course.
2. Many advanced courses are offered either every other year or more occasionally. The courses offered in a particular semester are announced in the immediately prior semester.
3. Students may test out of a foundational course in exceptional circumstances. Students testing out of a course must still complete an equivalent or more advanced course in that subfield to satisfy the foundational requirement.

## 2.4 Qualifying papers and advancing to candidacy

### 2.4.1 Requirements

Each student is required to complete two Qualifying Papers (QPs) – the first in the second year, the second in the third year. A QP is a paper of (near) publishable quality of a length that is appropriate for the area of specialization. Students may base the QP either partly or wholly on a paper that was written for a course. In line with the interdisciplinary emphasis of the program, the two QPs are expected to reflect breadth by, e.g., engaging with different specializations and/or research methodologies.

### 2.4.2 Committee and QP plan

Each QP has a committee consisting of at least a primary QP advisor and a secondary QP advisor. The advisors must be faculty members in the Department of Linguistics. The second QP must have a committee of at least three members, at least two of whom are faculty members in the Department of Linguistics. In consultation with their primary advisor, students may add an additional QP committee member who has relevant outside experience.

At the end of their first year for QP1 and second year for QP2, students submit their *QP Plan* – a short document consisting of i) a one-paragraph description of their intended QP project/area and ii) a list of 2 or 3 preferred committee members for the QP. The QP Plan should be submitted by the student to their program advisor and the DGS by **April 15**. Using this input, the department will assign QP committees shortly after the end of the academic year. The students' preferences will be taken into account, but these will be balanced against faculty expertise and faculty committee loads.

### 2.4.3 QP proposal

Students are expected to submit a *QP Proposal* for each of their QPs by **September 15** of the respective academic year (year 2 for QP1, year 3 for QP2). The proposal is between 1-2 pages long plus a bibliography, and should be submitted to the student's program advisor and QP committee.

**Note:** *The QP proposal is not the same thing as the QP plan.*

### 2.4.4 Timeline and defense

Students work with their research advisors on developing a concrete timeline for each qualifying paper. The final draft must be submitted at least 1 week before the QP defense, which takes place in a closed meeting with the committee. The second QP is the qualifying exam that advances students to candidacy. This defense needs to be scheduled in advance with your committee members, and both the Department Manager and the DGS notified, at least three weeks in advance of the defense. Both QP defenses are comprised of a 30 minute presentation followed by 60 minute period during which the committee first poses questions and then proceeds with a closed discussion to determine the outcome. The committee will assign one of these outcomes:

- Pass
- Minor revisions  
Expected timeline for completion: Within one month of the defense
- Major revisions  
Expected timeline for completion: Within three months of the defense
- Fail

Minor revisions need only be approved by the primary QP advisor. Major revisions require approval by all QP committee members. The typical result of a failed QP is separation from the program. Students may petition their QP committee within a month of the failed defense to rewrite and redefend a new QP.

### 2.4.5 Advancing to candidacy

The second qualifying paper is a university requirement for formal entry into PhD candidacy; in other words, QP2 is the department's Qualifying Exam. Students must also complete all required coursework before advancing to candidacy.

## 2.5 PhD dissertation

### 2.5.1 Thesis committee

In the Fall semester of their fourth year, the student assembles a thesis committee, which ultimately consists of at least four members. The student should choose the first three committee members in the Fall. Closer to the defense, the student should choose a faculty member external to the department to serve as the Chair of the committee. Typically all members of the thesis committee must be tenured or tenure-track faculty; however, it is possible to petition GEPA to allow a Visiting Assistant Professor (VAP) to serve as a member of the committee. The following requirements hold, according to the [University's requirements](#):

- At minimum, two of the committee members must be full-time tenure-track/tenured faculty with primary affiliations in the Department of Linguistics. At least one of these will be the primary advisor for the dissertation.
- At minimum, there must be one committee member who is external to the Department of Linguistics (either at the University of Rochester or at another accredited university).
- The chair of the committee must be a tenure-track/tenured University of Rochester faculty member from outside of the Department of Linguistics.

The committee is formed by the student and their program advisor. The committee is approved by the department in a majority vote no later than **September 30**. The DGS will communicate the decision to the student and their advisor by the end of the following week.

**Note:** Once the committee is formed, if the program advisor is not the thesis advisor, then the thesis advisor takes over as the student's primary advisor.

### 2.5.2 Dissertation proposal

Students must prepare a dissertation proposal (min. 15 pages single spaced) including an appropriate bibliography. The proposal will be presented by the student in a private meeting with the committee at the end of the Fall semester of the student's fourth year. If the committee determines that the proposal needs more work, another deadline will be set up for later that year.

### 2.5.3 Dissertation defense

A PhD dissertation must be presented in a public defense, following the submission of a (near)-final draft of the dissertation to the committee. The defense is scheduled by the committee and the student as an open departmental event, normally taking place in the last few weeks of the student's fifth year. The student should consult with the Department Manager and DGS at least 6 months in advance of a planned defense to ensure all the appropriate administrative deadlines are met. The student may invite guests to the public defense, but numbers should be checked with the department ahead of time to ensure adequate space. After the defense, the committee confers and assigns one of these outcomes:

- Pass
- Minor revisions  
Expected timeline for completion: Within three months of the defense
- Major revisions  
Expected timeline for completion: Within six months of the defense
- Fail

Minor revisions need only be approved by the primary dissertation advisor. Major revisions require approval by the entire thesis committee (excluding the chair). A fail means that the student does not receive the PhD degree. As long as they have completed all requirements for the master's degree they may receive a master's degree.

**Publication** After all required corrections have been made, the student uploads the final copy of the dissertation to ProQuest, following the [university procedures](#).

**Resources** Consult the [UR Dissertation Manual](#) for useful information about the procedures and format of the dissertation. There is also a lot of useful information on the Graduate Education resource page for [PhD Students](#) and the Department's [Graduate Student Resources Hub](#).

## 2.6 Summary of program requirements

Requirement	Completion
1. Twelve courses	Years 1-3
2. QP 1	Year 2
3. QP 2	Year 3
4. Two TA-ships	Years 2-4 (see §5)
5. PhD thesis proposal	Beginning of Year 4
6. Dissertation & defense	Years 4-5

## 3 Timeline and progress evaluation

### 3.1 Program length

The PhD in Linguistics is a 90-credit program designed to be completed in five years. Following the completion of 48 credit hours of foundational coursework, the remaining 42 credit hours can be any mixture of elective courses and/or research credits; see Table 1 for a sample schedule for years 1-3. Note that it is generally expected that students complete 90 credits in the first four years, and register for 999 in their last two semesters to maintain full-time status. Additional registration guidance can be found on [GEPA's website](#), which includes general guidance on registration.

YEAR 1	Fall	Spring
	LING Foundation LING Foundation LING Elective	LING 501 Methods LING Foundation LING Foundation
YEAR 2	Fall	Spring
	LING Foundation LING Elective Qualifying Paper 1 TA	LING Foundation LING Elective QP 1 (cont.)
YEAR 3	Fall	Spring
	LING Foundation Qualifying Paper 2	LING Elective QP 2 (cont.) TA

Table 1: Sample schedule

### 3.2 Evaluations and feedback

Students complete self-evaluations in the Spring semester of each year, which gives them an opportunity to reflect upon their progress and their strengths and weaknesses, and also to consider their future directions and needs.

After receiving self-evaluations, the faculty meet to discuss students' performance in coursework, their progression in completing the Program of Study, and current and future research activity. Students then receive a letter from the DGS.

### 3.3 Academic probation

Students should refer to the Graduate Handbook for University policies on criteria for [satisfactory academic progress](#). Minimum grades for courses or research work carrying graduate credit are C or S. However, a student can get credit for only one C during the course of their graduate studies.

#### 3.3.1 Getting placed on academic probation

A student will be considered to have an unsatisfactory record and will be automatically placed on academic probation if the student receives a grade of C or lower in a course.

**Note:** Students who receive their first and only C (or lower) grade in their final semester are not subject to academic probation. However, if the grade is not a pass, the student must ensure that they still have enough credits to graduate.

#### 3.3.2 Consequences of academic probation

A student on academic probation cannot be awarded a graduate degree. Students in extenuating circumstances may appeal to the Director of Graduate Studies (Department of Linguistics) and the Dean of Graduate Studies (SAS).

If a student receives a grade below B in two courses while on academic probation, the student is subject to removal from the program. In such a case, the student must petition the Dean of Graduate Studies to remain in the program. This petition must be approved by the Department Chair, and it must include a discussion of the reason for the poor performance and a plan for improved academic performance.

#### 3.3.3 Removal from academic probation

A student will be removed from academic probation if the student completes 12 semester hours of graduate credits with no grade lower than B-.

### 3.4 Remote study

Our PhD program relies heavily on collaborative research and study. Being physically present is important to foster this collaboration; however, if for any reason a student would like to complete their program remotely, the following department procedure applies. Remote study may only be done after completing all coursework and both QPs.

- The student must receive approval from their advisor to petition the department to study remotely. (can be informal/orally)
- The student can then formally petition the faculty to study remotely for a period of one year by sending the DGS and department manager an email with the petition.
- The DGS/DM present the petition for a faculty vote at the following faculty meeting in a closed session.
- The petition may be renewed on an annual basis, based on satisfactory progress.



### 3.5 Exiting the program

For a variety of reasons both professional and personal, some students may find that the Linguistics PhD program does not in the end provide the best fit for them. The department understands that in such circumstances students may decide to leave the program. The department is available to support students in their efforts to transition to a new phase of their career, and students are encouraged to speak with the DGS as early as possible on this matter.

Students who complete the second QP are encouraged to complete the administrative steps necessary to receive an M.A. degree before leaving the program; in this way, they have a credential to show for their time at the University of Rochester. Students must maintain enrollment at the time in which they receive the M.A. degree.

## 4 Advising

### 4.1 Director of Graduate Studies

The DGS oversees the components of the graduate program and serves as a resource to students on administrative issues concerning their curricular and program requirements. For other issues, students can contact the Department Manager.

### 4.2 Advisors

Each student is assigned a faculty **program advisor** when they enter the program. Students work with their advisor on course selection to develop a PoS.

Students are encouraged/expected to meet with other faculty members during the first year in order to learn more about the department's research and determine future research advisors. At the end of the first year, students propose committee members who will supervise their first QP. At the end of their second year, students propose committee members for their second QP. The student should continue meeting with their program advisor as needed throughout the initial part of the program.

In their fourth year, at the latest, students are expected to form a thesis committee; see §2.5.1. Once the thesis committee has been formed, the primary thesis advisor takes over as the student's advisor.

### 4.3 Program of study

Each student is expected to develop a Program of Study (PoS) in consultation with their program advisor. The PoS is a document that lays out which courses the student will take in which years of the program. In general, the PoS should be updated by the end of each academic year, if necessary. It is not required to present a 5 year plan on the first PoS although it may be helpful for the advisor and student's internal deliberations to develop such a plan.

### 4.4 Advising concerns

Any issues relating to advising should be discussed with the Department Manager, DGS, or Department Chair, depending on the nature of the issue.

## 5 Teaching

Students are required to serve as a teaching assistant (TA) for at least two courses during their time in the program. Occasionally students may serve as the sole instructor for a course. If both TA-ships have been satisfied the student may be eligible for compensation for this course. If the course is a 200/400 level course, then in most cases students should have taken the course before they TA or teach that course.

## 5.1 TA responsibilities

TAs are responsible for working with the course instructor and fulfilling their responsibilities for that particular course. These may include: 1) regularly attending the course; 2) holding regular office hours; 3) grading papers or exams; 4) ad hoc meetings with the instructor and/or students.

## 5.2 Teaching load

Students will not be required to TA/teach more than two semesters. Any requests for additional teaching assignments will be addressed by the Director of Graduate Studies.

## 5.3 TA selection

TA assignments are made by the faculty at the end of the academic year for the following academic year and will be communicated to students shortly after the decision has been made.

## 5.4 TA eligibility

In order to be eligible to teach or TA, students should be in good academic standing (i.e. not on academic probation).

## 5.5 TA training

The Teaching Center is a resource available to all students. Students are encouraged to take advantage of training that is offered through their programs, and the DGS will make every effort to communicate these opportunities to students. Additional resources are offered on their website: [Teaching Center](#).

## 5.6 TA evaluation

TAs will be formally evaluated by students in the course evaluations. They will also be evaluated by the instructor for that course, informally, and, if requested by the student TA, in a formal letter. If a student is serving as the sole instructor for a course, they may request to have a faculty member visit the course and write an evaluation, which will be included in their file. Any concerns about responsibilities and evaluation should be communicated with the instructor first, and then the Director of Graduate Studies if necessary.

# 6 University requirements and expectations

All students must adhere to school and university requirements for the degree, as outlined [here](#).

## 6.1 Registration

A full-time graduate student is defined as a student who registers for at least 9 credits for the semester. Students are not required to maintain full-time status in order to complete the program; however, a lapse in full-time status may impact (i) eligibility for health insurance, (ii) the continuance of student loans, and (iii) visa status for international students.

Graduate students must register for 400 or 500 level courses. If it is recommended by the advisor that they take a 100 or 200 level course, they need to audit or sit-in on this course and get appropriate approvals to do so; see §6.4. Students cannot count 100 or 200 level courses toward their degree credits.

**Note:** Registration must be completed within two weeks from the first day of classes, or a late registration fee will be charged.

## 6.2 Continuation of status

Matriculated graduate students must maintain continuous registration (Fall and Spring) until they are awarded a degree, withdraw from the degree program, or are dropped from the degree program by the university. Students maintain continuous registration by registering for credit-bearing courses or for place-holder courses. These requirements are outlined on the [Graduate Student Resources Hub](#).

**Note:** Certain enrollment statuses may not meet eligibility requirements for international student visas, university funding, health insurance, or federal financial aid. For further information on maintaining full-time status please see [Regulations and University Policies Concerning Graduate Studies](#)

## 6.3 Dropping courses

Dropping credit hours after the seventh week of a semester or retroactively after the conclusion of the semester is not permitted if the change affects the student's time status (i.e., if full-time status changes to part-time status) for that particular semester. That is, if a student drops a class another class must be taken as a replacement, or the student may lose full-time status.

## 6.4 Taking additional classes not for credit

### 6.4.1 Auditing a class

Auditing a course within Arts & Sciences is permitted for full-time and part-time graduate students when suggested by the faculty advisor and approved by the course instructor.

The audited course will appear on the student's transcript provided the student attends throughout the course. Auditing a course is worth zero credits and a grade is not issued. Students who do wish to receive credit for such a course may do so by i) changing the registration in the office of the graduate registrar prior to the end of the sixth full week of classes in a given semester, and ii) paying the required tuition for the course. Note that once a course has been audited, it cannot be repeated for credit without prior approval of the Dean of Graduate Studies.

**Note:** There is a fee to audit a course that is not covered by tuition scholarships.

### 6.4.2 Audit waivers

SAS GEPA policy is that, "Students may, in special circumstances, petition the SAS Dean of Graduate Education for a waiver of the audit fee. The petition to cover the audit fee must be submitted before the end of the add/drop period via the [Audit Fee Waiver Request Form](#), which must be signed by the student's program advisor and the course instructor. Note that the petition will not be approved without a clear rationale for why the student cannot (i) take the class for credit as part of their existing tuition waiver and (ii) why that class is beneficial for their program of study."

The university discourages entirely unofficial attendance ("sitting in"). Therefore, if a student wishes to sit in on a class they should first ask for permission of the course instructor and then submit an audit waiver request as per the policy above.

### 6.4.3 Grades

Grades for graduate students are reported on one of two systems:

1. A (excellent), A-, B+, B (good), B-, C (poor), and E (failure)
2. S (satisfactory), E (failure)

The grade S may not be used for any student in a class in which the other students are graded on the A-E scale. Students who receive a C, E or two B-'s in courses or in research credits are automatically placed on probation; see [§3.3](#).

The notation of I (incomplete) is an option providing a student with additional time to complete unfinished work. It may only be used in conjunction with a Contract for Notation of Incomplete between the student and the instructor describing precisely what additional work must be completed by the student to enable the instructor to assign a final course grade and when this additional work must be completed. The Contract for Notation of Incomplete must be submitted to the GEPA office to be kept on file.

## 6.5 Emergency or temporary closings and other changes in class schedules and University operations.

The University plans to commence and conclude classes on the dates indicated in the academic calendars. But unforeseen circumstances or events may occur that require the University to temporarily close or otherwise make adjustments to its student life, residential housing, class schedules and format, method and location of instruction, educational activities, and operations because of reasons beyond the University's control. For example, such circumstances or events may include but are not limited to inclement weather, the onset of public health crises, being subject to government order(s), significant safety or security concerns, faculty illness, strikes, labor disturbances, sabotage, terrorism, war, riot, civil unrest, fire, flood, earthquake, acts of God, malfunction of University equipment (including computers), cyberattacks, unavailability of particular University facilities occasioned by damage to the premises, repairs or other causes, as well as disruption/unavailability of utilities, labor, energy, materials, transportation, electricity, security, or the internet. If any of these or other unforeseen circumstances or events outside of the University's control occur, the University will respond as necessary and appropriate, and it assumes no liability for any interruption or adjustments made to student life, residential housing, class schedules and format, method and location of instruction, educational activities, and operations caused by these or other unforeseen circumstances or events. And the University shall not be responsible for the refund of any tuition or fees in the event of any such unforeseen circumstances or events, except as may otherwise be expressly provided in the University's Leave of Absence and Withdrawal Policy or its published tuition refund schedule [Payments and Refunds - Office of the Bursar \(rochester.edu\)](#)

## 7 Community values

### 7.1 University values

As a community, the University of Rochester aims to set the highest standards for how we treat each other to ensure our community is welcoming to all and is a place where all can thrive. Students are expected to be familiar with the University's [Vision and Values](#) statement.

### 7.2 Code of conduct

The Department of Linguistics encourages the free exchange of information and ideas, with the aim of promoting dialogue and providing a platform for the dissemination of knowledge. Disagreement and argumentation are welcome and important to discourse but must be done within the contingent rules of respectful behavior, which include, but are not limited to, tolerance of differences, reason and open-mindedness.

### 7.3 Unethical conduct

Students are expected to meet the ethical standards outlined in the document Regulations and University Policies Concerning Graduate Study, which can be found [here](#). This document briefly overviews university rules and regulations in the section titled "Standards of Student Conduct" and includes rules for academic honesty, as well as due process in reviews considering disciplinary action. Unethical conduct of any kind, including academic dishonesty or misconduct involving scientific or professional behavior, will be grounds for disciplinary action.

## 7.4 Use of Department and University equipment

The research labs and computers and equipment in the labs are the property of the Department of Linguistics and the University of Rochester.

- Any computers or equipment in the labs—including audio and video recorders, microphones, headphones, cables and adapters—are *shared resources* and are offered to those working in the labs on research projects or are offered by a faculty member to those working under their research supervision.
- For any portable equipment—including digital recorders—students who take this equipment out of the labs are taking full responsibility for the borrowed equipment in their possession. This includes paying for repair or replacement if the equipment is damaged while in the student's possession.
- Students are required to adhere to all equipment usage instructions given to them by the responsible faculty member(s). Those who do not adhere to instructions will lose the privilege of using the equipment.
- Any equipment purchased or reimbursed from Department funds is the property of the Department of Linguistics. Equipment should be returned no later than completion of the degree program.