



WHAT STARTS HERE CHANGES THE WORLD

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN



Doctoral Program Handbook

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Objective

The objective of the doctoral program of The University of Texas at Austin's School of Information is to prepare graduates to contribute to the field of information studies (broadly defined) through research and teaching. The doctoral program prepares future scholars for careers involving research and teaching, typically as tenure-stream faculty members at major research universities. The doctoral program provides students with research experience, familiarity with appropriate information studies theories and methods, and participation in an active research community.

A Community of Research

The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, an independent policy and research center, launched the Carnegie Initiative on the Doctorate, a "project to develop creative solutions and approaches for transforming doctoral programs." In the book that summarizes this five-year project, *The Formation of Scholars*, the authors assert:

The PhD is the monarch of the academic community. It is the very highest accomplishment that can be sought by students. It signals that its recipient is now ready, eligible, indeed obligated, to make the most dramatic shift in roles: from student to teacher, from apprentice to master, from novice or intern to independent scholar and leader. (p. x)

The requirements a student must fulfill to earn a PhD from the School of Information are a combination of those imposed by The University of Texas at Austin and those imposed by the School of Information. All have been thoughtfully considered and incorporated with the sole goal of helping shape the emerging scholar into a vital and valued member of the research community. The School of Information-specific requirements, in particular, have been chosen with an eye toward acknowledging the intellectual breadth that is our field, and at the same time instilling in the student a spirit of the pursuit of research and scholarship.

Good Standing

The student's committee and the School of Information's Graduate Studies Committee (GSC) will determine if the student is in good standing. The following criteria are established to evaluate whether or not a student is in "good standing" at any point in time in their process of degree completion. As such, these expectations are maxima and not minima; faster progress through these milestones is encouraged where appropriate but not required.

Years 1-2: Maintain GPA ≥ 3.0 at all times; have 36 hours of coursework completed by the end of year 2

Year 3: Successfully complete qualifying process.

Year 4: Successfully complete and defend dissertation proposal and enter candidacy.

Years 5-6: Successfully complete and defend dissertation; graduate.

Absent extenuating circumstances, students who fail to meet these criteria risk losing the opportunity to obtain funding and to complete the degree.

PhD Program Requirements of the School of Information

Requirements of the School of Information doctoral program include (but are not limited to):

- Thirty-nine hours of coursework beyond previously earned degrees
- Annual preparation and revision of a plan of study
- Annual reviews of progress
- Authoring of a qualifying research paper
- Completion of a qualifying written examination
- Completion of a qualifying oral examination based on the written examination
- At least two submissions of research to peer-reviewed journals or other publications
- Admission to candidacy
- Completion and defense of a dissertation proposal
- Completion and defense of a dissertation

Doctoral students are also expected to participate in the School's research life (e.g., regularly attend and participate in School of Information events, particularly research colloquium presentations, the open house, the doctoral research day, dissertation proposal defenses, and dissertation defenses) as well as the research life of the field (e.g., frequently publish in peer-reviewed venues and present at national and international conferences).

NOTE: Students are required to consult and keep current with the Graduate School Catalog regarding the Graduate School, its rules for doctoral study, forms for advancing to candidacy and defending dissertations, and other pertinent information.

Committee Structure

The School of Information will assign each incoming doctoral student a three-member initial committee consisting solely of members of the School of Information GSC. The committee is chaired by the student's initial committee chair. At any time the student, with the committee members' help and input, may change the make-up of their committee, choosing from among the School of Information faculty. Students may change any of the committee members, including the committee chair. If a student's research focus changes significantly during coursework it is reasonable to expect that the committee members might also change.

In advance of the qualifying procedure, the student will add a fourth committee member from outside of the School of Information (the "outside committee member"). Examples of appropriate fourth committee members include a faculty member in another unit at The University of Texas at Austin who is not a member of the School of Information's GSC, a faculty member at another university, or a researcher working in industry or government).

In applying for candidacy, the student will complete paperwork required by the Graduate School, including naming their final dissertation committee. This committee includes at least three School of Information GSC members and at least one outside committee member, with the option of adding additional committee members (from inside or outside the School of Information) as appropriate. Dissertation committees must be approved by the Graduate School, and dissertation committee members can be changed only by application to the Graduate School, so students should carefully consider their choice of members, in consultation with their committee chair. More information on committee composition is available in the Graduate School Catalog.

Coursework

Each student will complete at least 39 graduate hours while enrolled in the School of Information doctoral program prior to entering candidacy. Students will typically take two to three years to complete this coursework as well as the qualifying procedure. To count toward a PhD, all coursework must be no more than six years old when the doctoral student is admitted to candidacy.

The table below shows the minimum required coursework. Students may take, or be required by their committees to take, additional courses.

Courses	Number of graduate credit hours
Doctoral core: INF 391D.10, Survey of Information Studies INF 391D.11, The Research Enterprise INF 391D.12 Disciplinary Foundations for Information Studies	3 3 3
Research methods courses	9
Electives (within and/or beyond the School of Information)	21
Minimum total prior to entering candidacy	39

Doctoral Core

All students must take “Survey of Information Studies”, “The Research Enterprise” and “Disciplinary Foundations for Information Studies” in their first two academic years in the program.

Research Methods Courses

Each student must take a minimum of nine credit hours of graduate-level research methods courses beyond the doctoral core:

- One graduate-level course in qualitative methods – 3 credit hours
- One graduate-level course in quantitative methods –3 credit hours

- One further graduate-level course germane to building skills to undertake research – 3 credit hours.

All course choices should be discussed with the student’s committee chair, consulting other committee members as appropriate. Prior to enrolling in the course, students must obtain approval from their committee chair, who will confirm the appropriateness of such courses for fulfilling the research methods requirement. Research methods courses may be offered and taken within or outside of the School of Information, either as classroom-based courses (e.g., Advanced Topics in Research Methods, Methodologies, and Design, INF 391F) or individually organized courses (such as Directed Readings, INF 391D.06 or Directed Research, INF 391D.07). The third methods course (beyond the qualitative and quantitative methods courses) can include advanced qualitative or quantitative methods, or coursework in skills necessary to undertake the anticipated dissertation research, including foreign languages, computer programming languages, policy analysis, information systems design, or skills in particular areas, such as chemistry or neuroscience.

Electives

The remaining 21 hours of coursework may be completed within the School of Information and/or outside the School of Information. All course choices should be discussed with the student’s committee chair, consulting other committee members as appropriate.

Students are particularly encouraged to take the following courses:

- Advanced Topics in Information Studies (INF 391E), (aka “Topical Seminar”) which may be repeated when the individual course topics differ.
- Directed Research (INF 391D.07) in which students work closely with a faculty member, individually or in small groups, to contribute to original research, either in an apprenticeship mode as part of the faculty member’s research agenda or as a student-driven research project.
- Directed Readings (INF 391D.06), in which students work closely with a faculty member, individually or in small groups, to complete an in-depth examination of the primary research and theory literature of the field in preparation for their qualifying examinations.
- Supervised Teaching in Information Studies (INF 398T) (aka “the pedagogy course”), and teaching internships in which students work closely with a faculty member to develop, design, and support implementation of a course plan.
- Doctoral Writing Seminar (INF 391G), which provides an opportunity for students to improve their academic writing in a writing studio with instructor and peer critique.

Plan of Study

Each doctoral student must produce a formal document identified as the plan of study prior to their first annual review. The plan of study is to be updated each year prior to the student’s annual review.

The plan of study consists of the following seven components:

1. The student’s CV
2. One to three paragraph summary of degree progress, including participation in research, teaching, and service
3. One paragraph academic plan, including research, teaching, and service, for the next year
4. One paragraph description of career goals
5. Table of coursework (format is provided below)
6. Bullet point list of requested input from the committee
7. An appendix with 2-5 recent major outputs (e.g., publications, course papers, etc.)

First year students in their first annual review should include all components but mark heading 2 as “not applicable”.

Coursework listing:

Students should list all the courses they have taken, are currently taking, and those they intend to take to satisfy their requirements for coursework. The format is provided below:

Course Description	Credit hours	Grade	Doctoral Core?	Methods?	Elective?
[Semester]					
[Course Number], [Course Title] Instructor: [Instructor], [Instructor’s Academic Unit]					
[Course Number], [Course Title] Instructor: [Instructor], [Instructor’s Academic Unit]					
[Semester]					
[Course Number], [Course Title] Instructor: [Instructor], [Instructor’s Academic Unit]					

Annual Review

Early in the fall semester of every academic year, each doctoral committee will review the performance of each doctoral student and summarize the student’s progress in a letter reviewed by the GSC at the doctoral student review meeting. The most important criterion in each annual review is satisfactory progress toward degree completion. The annual review is also intended to help the student plan for the upcoming academic year(s).

Annual Review meetings will be held in the 3rd, 4th, and 5th weeks of Fall semester and the doctoral student review meeting will be held in the 6th week of Fall semester. The director of doctoral studies will contact students and faculty at the start of Fall semester to indicate how meetings will be scheduled.

The meeting will consist of the following steps:

1. The student will provide an overview of their progress toward the degree, including coursework, comprehensive qualifying procedure, dissertation topic, other research, teaching, and service.
2. The committee members will ask questions about the student's progress.
3. The student will ask questions of the committee, who will provide feedback.
4. The student will be asked to leave the room so that the committee can discuss the outcome and next steps from the meeting.
5. Finally, the committee chair will welcome the student back in the room to learn the preliminary outcome of the review (note, this is not the final outcome; see below).

The letter should be drafted by the committee chair and then circulated to the entire committee for feedback; the final outcome and letter should satisfy all committee members.

The letter should be submitted to the director of doctoral studies prior to the Graduate Studies Committee's (GSC) doctoral student review meeting. The letter must be shared with the student only *after* the doctoral student review meeting, to allow for input from the entire GSC prior to determination of the outcome of the review.

Following the conclusion of the doctoral student review meeting, the final letter (including any updates) will be sent by the committee chair to the student, with copies to the director of doctoral studies and the graduate coordinator (who will place a copy of the student's letter in the student's official file).

If any student's progress is deemed unsatisfactory, the committee will recommend particular means to address the committee's concerns. The committee may also recommend to the GSC that the student's doctoral study be terminated. If so, the GSC will vote on the recommendation (typically at the annual doctoral student review meeting). If the vote supports termination of the student's program, then the GSC, through the graduate advisor, will make a formal recommendation to the Graduate School to terminate the student's doctoral study. The student may appeal any such decision.

Qualifying Procedure

A student can proceed to the qualifying procedure if their committee is satisfied that the student has met all requirements identified by the committee based on the student's plan of study and annual reviews, and has added a fourth, outside member to their committee. The doctoral comprehensive qualifying procedure at the School of Information consists of a qualifying paper, a written examination, and an oral examination

Qualifying Paper

The qualifying paper consists of a review of the literature related to a research area of importance to the field of information studies and closely related to the student's planned dissertation research. The topic of the paper should be selected in consultation with the

committee chair and committee. The qualifying paper is ordinarily 7,500-10,000 words in length.

The qualifying research paper is intended to demonstrate the student's wide familiarity with the literature in one or more areas of information studies (and possibly also related fields), an understanding of the broad themes and issues presented in the literature, and a command of the strengths and weaknesses of the major works and how these works fit together. Much more than an annotated bibliography, the qualifying paper is a work of analysis and synthesis, not merely a listing and description of published works. It should be authoritative and accessible, so that a reader unfamiliar with the field of study could gain a good overview of recent trends and significant developments from reading this review alone. The qualifying paper will demonstrate a breadth of knowledge, unlike a research paper, which is typically focused narrowly on a specific research question. With minor adjustments, such a paper is likely to provide a publication opportunity in that it provides an original, substantive analysis of the research and theory in a critical research arena. The student should work closely with their committee chair in identifying a research topic and conducting the necessary review. Developing the qualifying paper will be a process of negotiation between the student, the committee chair, and potentially other committee members. The paper will be evaluated by the student's committee, and will be discussed during the qualifying oral exam.

Qualifying Written Examination

Once the student's committee has formally accepted the qualifying paper, the student and his or her committee chair will coordinate with committee members to schedule the written portion of the qualifying exams. The written part of the qualifying exams consists of four questions, one submitted by each of the student's three School of Information committee members and one by the student's external committee member. The questions may, but do not necessarily need to, address issues raised in the qualifying paper. The questions should be chosen to ensure that the student has sufficient expertise in their field and closely related fields to successfully undertake dissertation research.

Unless there are special circumstances, the committee chair will send the student the four questions on a Monday morning by 9:00 AM and answers must be submitted to the committee by 5:00 PM that Friday. The student may work anywhere. Each response is ordinarily 2,500 – 3,000 words long. The bibliography is not included in the word count. As a take-home examination, students are required to follow all aspects of The University of Texas at Austin's Student Honor Code, including its standard of Academic Integrity.

All members of the committee read and evaluate all four responses. The committee must agree that all four responses are of sufficient quality for the student to proceed to the qualifying oral examination. Unless there are special circumstances, these determinations are to be provided to the student by their committee chair within two weeks of written exam submission.

Qualifying Oral Examination

The oral examination of the qualifying procedure is held within two weeks of written notification from the student's committee to the student's committee chair. The goal is to assess students' ability to engage in structured intellectual dialogue, expand upon their written responses as requested by the committee members, and receive the guidance of their committee members. Students should discuss the organization of their oral examination with their committee chair. For example, a student's committee chair may request a formal presentation of the student's written exam responses.

Students may invite one School of Information doctoral student to serve as a recorder for the qualifying oral exam, but that person will serve only as an observer and note taker and cannot participate in the proceedings. Otherwise, the oral examination is private, including only the student and committee members.

The full committee must be satisfied that the student has passed the qualifying examination and is ready to proceed to the dissertation proposal. If a student does not pass any element of the qualifying procedure, the student may attempt the procedure one more time. A second failure will result in termination of the student's doctoral program.

Publications

Prior to entering candidacy, doctoral students must have at least two submissions of research to peer-reviewed journals or other scholarly publications such as conference proceedings and books.

Entrance into Candidacy

Candidacy is a designation controlled by the UT Graduate School. The student must formally apply to the Graduate School for admission to Candidacy, as such the student is responsible for ascertaining the procedures required by the Graduate School at the time of their application and ensuring that they are followed. One element of the procedure is recommendation for Candidacy by the School of Information GSC. Entrance into candidacy may occur prior to or immediately following the successful dissertation proposal defense; as noted above, both must be completed by the end of year 4 to remain in good standing.

The School of Information GSC, represented by the School of Information members of their committee, will recommend a student for candidacy once the student has completed the qualifying procedure and identified their entire dissertation committee.

Once a student is approved for candidacy by the Graduate School, the student's enrollment requirements are governed by Graduate School policies. Following Graduate School rules, candidates are required to enroll in Dissertation Readings (INF X99R, the X signifying that the course may be taken for three, six, or nine credit hours) in their first semester of candidacy, and Dissertation Writing (INF X99W) in all subsequent semesters.

Two years after admission to candidacy, the graduate school will ask the GSC whether to extend the student's candidacy. The GSC may recommend that the student's candidacy be extended for one year or that the candidacy be terminated for lack of satisfactory academic

progress. Recommendations are forwarded to the graduate dean for approval. Extensions are uncommon and extensions beyond one additional year very uncommon.

Proposal and Dissertation Defenses

Students must publicly present and defend a proposal for a dissertation and, once the dissertation is complete, they must publicly present and defend the completed dissertation. The procedures for the two defenses are similar; they are described below together, with notes indicating anything specific to proposal or dissertation defenses.

While the rules for the dissertation proposal are determined within the School of Information, the Graduate School has specific deadlines each semester by which dissertation defenses and formal Doctoral Graduate Applications must be filed. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that a dissertation defense is scheduled early enough to meet these deadlines and to undertake any revisions prior to these deadlines.

The Doctoral Committee has prepared a separate guide to defenses and scheduling for committee chairs and committee. Faculty should contact the director of doctoral studies for that document to understand their role and what they and their student needs to do at each step of the defense process. Students may wish to confirm with their chair that the chair has reviewed this document.

Preparation and Scheduling

This procedure applies for both proposal and dissertation defenses. In addition, for dissertation defenses, the student must review and follow the graduate school procedures, which are currently linked here:

<https://gradschool.utexas.edu/academics/theses-and-dissertations/doctoral-candidacy/oral-examinations>

At the **start of semester** in which the student plans to defend, the student must:

1. Discuss their plans with your committee chair.
2. Poll their committee for possible two-hour times (“placeholder” dates), avoiding the last three weeks of the semester and preferring Fridays 12-3 p.m., a time slot that the School of Information GSC has reserved for student events. In other words, most School of Information GSC members should be free for a Friday meeting during the 12-3 slot if given a selection of three or more dates. However, this slot may not work for your external committee member(s). Also, check your committee members’ teaching schedule online to avoid including obvious conflicting times.
3. Over the first month of the semester, narrow down the list of possible times to a single placeholder time and book a room. During the semester students should keep in touch with their committee to ensure they can still make the placeholder time. Students should not announce or place their defense in the calendar until their committee chair and committee have all approved the document (see below).

At least full four (4) weeks prior to the proposed date the student must:

1. Circulate a final draft to their committee for their approval.
2. Ask their committee chair to poll committee members for their approval of the defense.
3. Work with committee members to find a time and room to hold the defense (ideally one of the placeholder times).
4. For dissertation defenses, students must obtain the graduate school's "Request for Final Oral Examination" form ("the pink form") and plan for their committee members to sign it.

At least **a full two (2) weeks prior** to the proposed date the student must:

1. Have approval from committee chair and committee.
2. Have a time and place agreed to by the committee chair and committee.
3. For dissertation defenses, have submitted the signed "Request for Final Oral Examination" form to the graduate school.
4. Have placed a printed copy of the proposal or dissertation in the tray in the workroom.
5. Have placed an electronic copy on UT Box and have a working link for people to download the PDF. There is no particular place the file must be, but it must be accessible for the email announcement below.
6. Draft an announcement email with:
 - a. Title and Abstract
 - b. A link to the PDF file of the proposal or dissertation.
 - c. Date, time, and location of defense
 - d. Names of committee members
7. Ensure that their committee chair sends that announcement email to these lists. If the committee chair cannot send to the list the student must subscribe and forward their committee chair's announcement email. See <https://www.ischool.utexas.edu/people/email-lists>
 - a. si-gsc (all faculty)
 - b. si-phd (all doctoral students)
 - c. the-insider (the school at large)
 - d. ischool-colloq (those interested in School of Information research events)
8. Ensure that the event is added to the School of Information research calendar by forwarding the announcement email to reception@ischool.utexas.edu

Procedures for Defenses

The defense is chaired by the committee chair and follows this procedure:

1. The committee chair welcomes the doctoral community, describes the procedure and introduces the student and committee members.
2. The student presents their proposal or dissertation. Unless there are special circumstances, this presentation will be 20 minutes for proposals and 30 minutes for dissertations. Note that, in both cases, the defense will not exceed two hours total.

3. The committee chair opens the floor to questions from any non-committee member of the audience (up to 20 minutes).
4. The committee chair closes the floor to questions and invites the committee members (including the committee chair) to discuss the presentation with the student, typically asking questions in turn. Committee members may invite members of the audience to contribute during this period, otherwise the discussion remains between the committee and the student (as required, typically 45-60 minutes).
5. The committee chair calls the committee into closed session; only committee members and members of the GSC remain in the room, all others are asked to leave. The student retires to a prearranged location and waits for the committee chair to call them back. The committee then proceeds to evaluate the defense. The closed session ends when the committee has reached consensus (as required, typically up to 30 minutes).
6. The committee chair invites the student back to the room to communicate the result of the defense and discuss the committee evaluation (as required, typically 10 minutes). Students may invite one School of Information doctoral student to serve as a recorder for this portion of the defense, but that individual will only serve as an observer and note taker and cannot participate in the proceedings. Otherwise, this discussion is private, including only the student, committee members, and any GSC members who elect to stay.
7. The committee will complete all paperwork required by the Graduate School (note: students need to obtain any required paperwork prior to the defense).

Following the Defense

Within a week of the defense, the committee chair writes a letter to the student, conveying the result of the defense and summarizing the consensus requirements and advice of the committee. These requirements typically include specific revisions that are to be made to the document and a time-frame for those revisions. This letter is sent to the student, copying the graduate coordinator who will add the letter to the student's file.

If the committee has requested changes, the student must reply within two weeks of receiving the letter from their committee chair (or prior to the relevant deadlines for submission of the dissertation to the Graduate School, whichever comes sooner). The student's response letter should address each point from the committee's letter, describe the changes made (or remaining to be made), show how the changes meet (or will meet) the revision requirements. The response letter is sent from the student to the committee chair, copying the graduate coordinator, who will add the letter to the student's file.

Submission of Dissertations to the Graduate School

In the case of a completed, successful dissertation defense, the student then prepares the completed dissertation for review by the Graduate School, ensuring that they follow all formal Graduate School requirements, including formatting requirements.

References

Walker, G. E., Golde, C. M., Jones, L., Bueschel, A. C., & Hutchings, P. (2008). *The Formation of Scholars*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.