USC Dornsife

Dana and David Dornsife
College of Letters, Arts and Sciences

Department of Economics
PhD Handbook

The USC Department of Economics is committed to providing each of our students a rigorous education.

Our PhD in Economics program aims to train students to produce original research in Economics, culminating in a dissertation. We recognize that our students are diverse and have different career aspirations. The faculty and staff seek to create a learning environment where our students can grow as researchers and can embrace the freedom to pursue careers in the academic, private, or public sectors.

This handbook explains the milestones students must reach in their progress through the USC PhD in Economics program, and outlines students' rights and responsibilities.

Table of Contents

Introduction

About the Department

The USC Department of Economics is a dynamic environment for research, teaching, and studying. Academic excellence is informed by taking economic research beyond traditional boundaries, often collaborating with other disciplines. Our research ranks among the Top 20 (#13) U.S. academic institutions and we are deeply committed to bringing creativity and critical thinking to some of the most pressing current challenges in society.

Our internationally recognized scholars interact with one of the most diverse student populations at any United States university. Distinguished faculty members are leaders in the areas of Econometrics, Experimental/Behavioral Economics, Development Economics, Urban/Environmental Economics, Microeconomics, and Macroeconomics. The doctoral program attracts multiple applications from around the globe and ultimately accepts 12-15 candidates per year. Upon graduation, these talented candidates are placed in academia, industry, and government.

Enthusiastic support from Economics alumni and friends adds immeasurably to the success of the Department. Members of the Economics Leadership Council and Women in Economics advocate on behalf of the department with peers and business colleagues, raising our visibility and enhancing our reputation. As mentors, they strengthen the student experience by sharing professional insights and career advice. And, they demonstrate their commitment to a USC Economics education with philanthropic support.

Mailing Address

USC Department of Economics
3620 South Vermont Ave.
KAP 300
Los Angeles, CA 90089-0253

Program Administrators

The following individuals are key personnel involved with the development of the USC PhD in Economics program.

Department Chair

Romain Ranciere
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Director of Doctoral Studies (DDS)

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PhD Program Advisor

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A complete directory of the faculty and staff who support the department can be found on the USC Department of Economics > People page.

Program Requirements

In this section, students will find an overview of requirements for the USC PhD in Economics degree. More comprehensive information on certain topics (e.g., Core Theory Examination, Second-Year Paper, etc.) can be found in the subsequent sections dedicated to those specific requirements.

Minimum Unit Requirements

Course Category	**Units**
First-Year (1Y)/Core	24
Elective	20
Seminar	6
Frontier Research/Reading Group	6
Dissertation	4
TOTAL	60

Overall Grade Point Average (GPA) Requirements

The USC Catalogue for the USC Graduate School states the following:

At no time should the overall GPA drop below 3.0. A minimum grade of C (2.0) is required in a course to receive graduate credit. Work graded C- or below is not acceptable for subject or unit credit toward any master's or doctoral program. An overall grade point average of at least 3.0 on all units attempted at USC while a graduate student is required for graduation, whether or not all such units are applied toward the degree. […] The university will not deviate from policies governing the calculation of the grade point average through inclusion or exclusion of course work.

In addition to the USC Graduate School requirement cited above, the Department requires a minimum GPA of 3.0 in all coursework applied to the 60 units of coursework for this degree.

Failing to meet the minimum GPA requirements may jeopardize a student's Teaching Assistantship, Research Assistantship, Fellowship, and/or status in the program.

Coursework Requirements

First-Year (1Y) Coursework

Incoming 1Y students must register in and successfully complete the designated First-Year/Core Coursework. This consists of a course each in Macroeconomics, Microeconomics, and Econometrics during both the Fall and Spring semesters.

Electives

Each student must complete twenty units of elective coursework. ECON and non-ECON courses may count toward the elective requirement. The Director of Doctoral Studies (DDS) must approve all elective course selections.

Seminars
All seminar courses are repeatable. Each student must complete six units from amongst the following courses:

Course Number	**Course Title**	**Units**
ECON-690	Seminar in Economic Theory	2
ECON-691	Seminar in Econometrics	2
ECON-692	Seminar in Economic Development	2
ECON-693	Seminar in Applied Economics and Public Policy	2
ECON-694	Seminar in Dynamic Economics	2
ECON-696	Empirical Microeconomics Seminar	2

Frontier Research Courses
Each semester, the Department offers multiple sections of the Frontier Research course, with each section focusing on a distinct field. Each student must complete this repeatable course three times:

Course Number	**Course Title**	**Units**
ECON-700	Research on Frontier Economics	2

Dissertation Courses
Each student must complete at least these two dissertation courses:

Course Number	**Course Title**	**Units**
ECON-794a	Doctoral Dissertation	2
ECON-794b	Doctoral Dissertation	2

Additional Requirements
Core Theory Examinations
Before beginning the third semester of graduate study, each student must pass a written examination in general economic theory including applications. A maximum of two attempts is allowed. Not taking the examination at a given due time is considered as failing the examination once. The core theory examination is offered twice every year during the summer session.

Advanced Fields of Study
Each student must complete two Advanced Fields of Study. The requirements for the successful completion of each Advanced Field are as follows:

1. A minimum grade of A- in each of two doctoral-level courses (course number > 600) relevant to that field
2. Satisfactory completion of one seminar relevant to that field

Both elective and seminar courses may contribute to students' Advanced Fields of Study. Courses taken outside the Department or USC may not count toward the completion of a field.

Second-Year (2Y) Empirical Paper
During the summer after the fourth semester of study, each student must submit an empirical paper using quantitative methods to the examination committee. The paper may use field, experimental or simulated data. In this paper, each student should demonstrate competence in using a computer programming language and software.

Third-Year (3Y) Research Paper & Presentation
During the summer after the sixth semester of study, each student must submit and present a research paper to a committee of faculty. The paper must be of publishable quality.

Qualifying Exam (Q-Exam/QE)
Upon successful completion of course requirements, the 2Y & 3Y paper requirements, and the core theory examination, each student stands for a qualifying examination that focuses on the presentation and defense of the written dissertation proposal. After passing the qualifying examination, a student is admitted to candidacy for the PhD degree. This examination must be taken no later than the end of the eighth semester of study.

Associated Coursework Policies

Graduate Transfer Coursework
Note that waivers to the course requirements based on equivalent work at another university may be made upon petition to the DDS, up to a maximum of 12 units. Course equivalence is subject to review and approval by the Department. Waivers for any other reason require the approval of the appropriate Department leadership committee.

Directed Research & Research Courses
Note that students may not take more than four units of ECON-590 and/or ECON-790 in a given semester.

Incoming Students

Math & Programming Camp

Each summer, the Department will host a Math & Programming Camp (often abbreviated as Math Camp) for incoming USC PhD in Economics students. The purpose of this course is to evaluate and assess everyone's individual math skills upon beginning their doctoral studies and to act as a refresher of sorts to help prepare new students for doctoral level economics coursework.

Format & Materials

The camp will involve both guided independent review and lecture components. It will help incoming students review multivariable calculus, linear algebra, constrained optimization, probability, and statistics, among other topics.

The Math Camp syllabus, preparatory materials, and any additional meeting information will be distributed by the instructor towards the beginning of June. No textbook purchases will be expected. Reference materials will be provided via Blackboard.

Schedule

Students should expect all meetings to be conducted in-person on the USC campus, typically during the two weeks immediately preceding the Fall semester. The group will meet on each weekday for approximately three hours.

Grading

Attendance will be expected. While the Math Camp classes are not formal courses subject to registration, they will be graded. The instructor will provide their assessments of all student performances to the PhD Program Advisor and the DDS.

Action Items for New Students

Admission Tasks

Following formal admission to the program, newly admitted students should complete the appropriate steps necessary to enroll at the University:

- Checklist for U.S. Students
- Checklist for International Students

Employee Onboarding & Payroll Tasks

Prior to the start of the semester, students should set up the following services:

- Update Personal Information
- Set Up Direct Deposit (stipend delivery)
- Set Up Electronic W-2 Delivery (tax forms)

Advisement & Registration Tasks

Students must activate their USC NetID and USC email address as soon as possible. Personal email addresses or email addresses from prior institutions will not be used for formal correspondence.

Active students must not unsubscribe from the USC Department of Economics mailing list(s); important information regarding required action items, advisement, and opportunities will be distributed this way.

Towards the end of the summer, students will receive 1Y course registration instructions from the PhD Program Advisor. Students will also receive guidance on how to check and resolve student account holds. These may include financial holds, registration restrictions, foreign language holds, etc. It is each student's responsibility to resolve registration holds and carry out registration transactions in an appropriate and timely manner. Failure to do so may result in delayed stipend delivery.

Conflict & Resolution Support

We strive to create a learning environment where each student achieves their full potential. Students will interact other students, faculty, and staff in many capacities—as students, TAs, Ras, dissertation writers, and (in some cases) co-authors. If at any time, a PhD student faces a situation that requires mediation, the DDS and the PhD Program Advisor should be immediately notified, and they will work to resolve the potential conflict fairly and with transparency.

Emotional & Mental Support

The Department aims to train the next generation of leading economists. However, part of this involves helping our students to have fulfilling lives and emotionally satisfying early careers. We recognize that economics is a competitive and stressful field. We want each of our students to know that there is no stigma associated with seeking mental health counseling. Students are welcome to approach any faculty or staff member for advice, particularly the PhD Program Advisor and the DDS.

Additionally, students are encouraged to familiarize themselves with and take advantage of the University's many resources to facilitate a healthy work-life balance:

- USC Campus Support & Intervention
    - Academics
    - Basic Needs
    - Crisis & Safety
    - Health Leave of Absence (HLOA)
    - Trojans Care 4 Trojans (TC4T) (anonymous reporting)
- USC Leave of Absence
- USC Office of Religious & Spiritual Life
- USC Student Health
    - Counseling & Mental Health Services
    - Sex & Health
    - Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention and Services

Program Advisement

In this section, students will find resources to help doctoral students establish best practices for successful degree progress. Additionally, students will find information on mandatory advisement and common restrictions/holds.

Advisement Resources

USC Resources

The USC Office of Academic Records & Registrar retains a lot of useful information about policies, tools, and terms used across the University:

- USC Glossary
- USC Web Registration (WebReg)
- Domestic & International Degree Verification
- Graduate Degree FAQs

USC PhD in Economics Program Resources

Below is a repository of reference materials and advisement forms specific to the USC PhD in Economics program, courtesy of the PhD Program Advisor:

- Five-Year Plan
- Requirements Chart
- Advisement Form: Pre-QE (DocuSign Powerform)
- Advisement Form: Pre-QE (sample)
- D-Clearance Request Form
- Graduate Course Syllabi
- Graduate Course Syllabi Submission Form (submit recent syllabi here)
- QE Committee Form (DocuSign Powerform)
- QE Remote Participation Memo (template)
- Advisement Form: Job Market (DocuSign Powerform)

Mandatory Advisement

Advisement for Pre-QE Students

Students who have not yet completed their Qualifying Exam (Q-Exam/QE) are considered students who have not yet advanced to candidacy. Every semester, these students must meet with the DDS and/or PhD Program Advisor to determine the courses that will be most appropriate for their studies.

Students will receive comprehensive instructions and resources from the PhD Program Advisor before each semester's mandatory advisement season. For Spring registration, such meetings will usually occur in October of the preceding semester. For Fall registration, such meetings will usually occur in April of the preceding semester.

The overall process can be found below:

1. Students schedule a meeting with the DDS and/or PhD Program Advisor via Appointlet

2. To prepare for the meeting:
    a. Students review the Requirements Chart, Five-Year Plan, and the USC Schedule of Classes
    b. Students fill out the Advisement Form: Pre-QE via DocuSign. Students must include information on (i) courses that have already been taken and (ii) courses they plan to take next semester
    c. Students sign the Advisement Form
3. During the meeting:
    a. Students present the Advisement Form for the DDS and/or PhD Program Advisor to review
    b. The DDS and/or PhD Program Advisor provide feedback and write in required changes in the Comments section as needed
4. After the meeting:
    a. The DDS and/or PhD Program Advisor sign the Advisement Form
    b. Students complete a D-Clearance Request Form in line with the course plan on their recently approved Advisement Form
    c. The PhD Program Advisor reviews all D-Clearance requests and Advisement Forms
    d. The PhD Program Advisor grants D-Clearance as appropriate
    e. Students register for approved courses via WebReg

Registration Resources

Tools & Terms

Students should be familiar with the following:

- USC Schedule of Classes: Registration Calendar
- Tuition & Fees
- The difference between "prerequisite" and "corequisite" courses
- The difference between "D" and "R" courses, and which courses require D-clearance
- The importance of maintaining full-time enrollment status
- How to check student bills and USC ePay Accounts
    - Students should do so regularly, especially in the weeks leading up to the start of each semester
    - If students see something strange, they should contact the PhD Program Advisor immediately

Common Registration Holds

Some students may have University restrictions/holds on their account that may prevent them from registering for courses. Below are some common restrictions/holds that students must clear:

FAQs

- What is "Tuition Refund Insurance" (TRI)?
    - By default, WebReg will enroll students in TRI at the time of registration. This will result in a charge equal to approximately .28 of 1 percent of tuition and mandatory fees, which will be added automatically to a student account
- Why do I have to pay for TRI?
    - Trick question—there is no need for USC PhD in Economics students to pay for this!
    - Always opt out of TRI

- I will be on a *graduate fellowship*. Why am I seeing charges for tuition, health insurance, etc.?
    - For doctoral students on a fellowship, the USC Graduate School normally pays for tuition, health insurance, dental insurance, and fees. However, it may take a week or so after you register for the funding to show up on your account
    - If more than a week has passed since you last made a WebReg transaction (add/drop course) and you still see any of the above on your bill, contact the PhD Program Advisor immediately
    - If you still see any of the above on your bill after week 2 of any given semester, contact the PhD Program Advisor immediately
- I will be on a *graduate assistantship (TAship/RAship)*. Why am I seeing charges for tuition, health insurance, etc.?
    - For doctoral students on a graduate assistantship, the USC Dornsife College of Letters, Arts, and Sciences normally pays for tuition, health insurance, dental insurance, and fees. However, it may take a week or so after you register for the funding to show up on your account
    - <u>Norman Topping and Grad Programming fees are your responsibility to pay</u>. If these two items are on your bill, pay as soon as possible to avoid late fees
    - If more than a week has passed since you last made a WebReg transaction (add/drop course) and you still see any of the above on your bill, contact the PhD Program Advisor immediately
    - If you still see any of the above on your bill after week 2 of any given semester, contact the PhD Program Advisor immediately
- Why am I seeing partial tuition charges remaining on my bill?
    - Are you a 1Y, 3Y, or 4Y enrolled in >12 units?
        - Your funding package covers full-time enrollment, which is 12 units for doctoral students
        - Additional tuition fees are your responsibility
    - Are you a 2Y student enrolled in >12 units?
        - Your funding package covers full-time enrollment, which is 12 units for doctoral students
        - Inform the PhD Program Advisor that you are a 2Y student seeing a partial tuition charge. In your email, include the course information (course number, section number, units) that is creating the overage
    - Are you enrolled in non-Dornsife courses?
        - Some USC schools (e.g., Viterbi, Marshall, Gould, etc.) may charge lab fees and/or higher tuition rates than the standard/Dornsife tuition fees
        - Your funding package only covers standard/Dornsife tuition. Additional tuition fees are your responsibility
- Can I enroll in dance, self-defense, or other PHED classes?
    - No, tuition awards may not be used for courses outside of a student’s area of study
- Can I take classes for Audit or Pass/No Pass (P/NP)?
    - No, doctoral students may only enroll in degree-applicable courses
    - Courses to be applied to a doctoral student’s degree require the “Letter Grade” or “Credit/No Credit” grade options
    - Courses taken with “Audit” and “P/NP” grade options are not permitted

First-Year (1Y) Students

1Y Coursework

Incoming 1Y students must register in and successfully complete the designated First-Year/Core Coursework. This comes out to three courses each semester, equaling 24 units total. Below is the first year sequence:

Course Number	Course Title	Semester	Units
ECON-601	Microeconomic Theory I	Fall	4
ECON-602	Macroeconomic Theory I	Fall	4
ECON-611	Probability and Statistics for Economists	Fall	4
ECON-603	Microeconomic Theory II	Spring	4
ECON-605	Macroeconomic Theory II	Spring	4
ECON-609	Econometric Methods	Spring	4
	TOTAL UNITS FROM FIRST-YEAR COURSEWORK		**24**

Core Theory Examination (Core Exams)

Students must pass both Micro and Macro sections of the exam to pass the Core Theory Examination (often abbreviated as Core Exams) as a whole. Students who fail a section during the first round of Core Exams in June are required to retake it during the second round of Core Exams in August of the same year. If a student passes one section but not the other, the student is only required to retake the section they did not pass.

Core Exam Boot Camp

To provide supplemental assistance for students preparing for the Core Exams, the PhD Program Advisor will arrange a boot camp series. The Core Exam Boot Camp will be led by more advanced USC PhD in Economics students who have performed exceptionally well in the areas to be tested on the exams.

The Boot Camp Instructors will coordinate with the PhD Program Advisor to provide past exam questions to be used as practice exams. Students attending the boot camp will be expected to prepare drafts of answers for these practice exams. Instructors will review and grade each student’s answers, and then provide feedback as appropriate.

Schedule

The first round of the Core Theory Examination is given during the second week of June:

- Micro: 10:00 AM – 4:00 PM, Monday
- Macro: 10:00 AM – 4:00 PM, Wednesday

The second round of the Core Theory Examination is given during the second week of August:

- Micro: 10:00 AM – 4:00 PM, Monday
- Macro: 10:00 AM – 4:00 PM, Wednesday

Grading

Each student will be assigned an examination ID number in order to be anonymous to the faculty who are grading. Each faculty on the Core Examination Committee grades independently, and then discuss the results afterwards. Students remain anonymous to the committee members until after the results are announced.

1Y Faculty Mentorship Program

To facilitate early student-faculty relationships, students will be assigned a different faculty mentor in the Fall and Spring semesters of the first year. These student-faculty groups will meet regularly, often in an informal capacity (e.g., coffee, lunch, etc.). Students should ask questions and share experiences freely during these meetings.

For questions/concerns regarding the faculty mentorship program, students are welcome to reach out to the PhD Program Advisor.

Second-Year (2Y) Students

2Y Funding

Once the June Core Exam results have been announced, students will receive information from the PhD Program Advisor regarding the funding options available to rising 2Y students. Students will be expected to communicate their preferred funding option to the PhD Program Advisor in a timely manner.

Students Who Pass the June Core Exams
These students have two 2Y funding options:

- **Option 1 (standard):** Graduate Assistantship (TA/RA)
    - Fall
        - Student may enroll in 6-12 units (in addition to ECON-593x)
        - ECON-593x is required for all first-time TAs
    - Spring
        - Student may enroll in 6-16 units
- **Option 2:** Advanced Fellowship
    - Fall
        - Student may enroll in 6-16 units
    - Spring
        - Student may enroll in 6-16 units

The USC Graduate School does not encourage Option 2; the Advanced Fellowship is almost always reserved for use in the student's final year.

Carefully weigh the advantages and disadvantages of each option.

If a student chooses to use their Advanced Fellowship in your 2Y instead of the 5Y, that student would be able to take more coursework in Fall of the 2Y, while not having to perform TA/RA duties in either semester. However, in that student's 5Y, they would then simultaneously be on the job market (applying, interviewing, attending flyouts) and be responsible for TA/RA duties.

Consider the ways in which a student's attention and time can be divided, and how this may inhibit their performance in coursework, TA/RA duties, or job market activities.

Students Who Do Not Pass the June Core Exams
These students have only one 2Y funding option:

- **Option 1 (standard):** Graduate Assistantship (TA/RA)
    - Fall
        - Student may enroll in 6-12 units (in addition to ECON-593x)
        - ECON-593x is required for all first-time TAs
    - Spring
        - Student may enroll in 6-16 units

2Y Coursework

Prior to beginning the 2Y of the program, students will be required to meet with the DDS and/or the PhD Program Advisor to discuss their performance over the previous year and expectations for the coming year.

Students can begin taking courses and seminars towards their Advanced Fields of Study. Students may begin informally attending Frontier Research/Reading Group courses, simply to ascertain which section will become their "home" in future years.

Students should refer to the Program Advisement section of the PhD Handbook for information pertaining to the full Mandatory Advisement process and how to make course selection decisions beyond the 1Y.

Be careful. Up to "x" units does not mean you have to take "x" units. Recall that a doctoral student is considered a full-time student when they are registered in at least six units. While students may enroll in more, they should keep in mind when the registration deadlines (e.g., add/drop dates) will be. Late course withdrawals can adversely affect a student's GPA and overall degree progress.

2Y Empirical Paper

During the summer after the fourth semester of study, students must submit a solo-authored empirical paper using quantitative methods. The paper (often abbreviated as the 2Y Paper) may use field, experimental or simulated data. In the 2Y Paper, the student should demonstrate competence in using a computer programming language and software.

The 2Y Paper will be due on the first day of Fall semester following the student's fourth semester of study. Students will receive instructions on how/where to submit the 2Y Paper from the PhD Program Advisor.

All 2Y Papers will be assessed and evaluated by the Empirical Research Paper Committee. Each year, the Department will select a recipient for the "Outstanding Second-Year Paper" award. The award recipient will receive summer research funding in the following Summer.

2Y Faculty Mentorship Program

To facilitate early student-faculty relationships, students will be assigned a different faculty mentor in the Fall and Spring semesters of the second year. The faculty mentors from a student's 1Y experience should be different from the faculty mentors from a student's 2Y experience. These student-faculty groups will meet regularly, often in an informal format (e.g., coffee, lunch, etc.). Students should ask questions and share experiences freely during these meetings. For questions/concerns, students are welcome to reach out to the PhD Program Advisor.

Primary Faculty Advisors (PFAs)

During this year, students should be thinking about which faculty member(s) to approach for continued faculty advisorship beyond the 1Y-2Y Faculty Mentorship Programs.

Note that a PFA is not the same as an Academic Advisor or Staff Graduate Advisor. When reviewing policies and procedures inside and outside of the Department, any references to the latter two titles will indicate that you require support from the PhD Program Advisor.

Third-Year (3Y) Students

3Y Funding
Almost all students in the 3Y will be on Graduate Assistantships (TA/RA). Please see the Graduate Assistantships section of the PhD Handbook for more information.

3Y Coursework
Prior to beginning the 3Y of the program, students will be required to meet with the DDS and/or the PhD Program Advisor to discuss their performance over the previous year and expectations for the coming year.

Students should begin formally enrolling in Frontier Research/Reading Group courses, engaging in research, and preparing for their Qualifying Exam. Most, if not all, coursework requirements should be completed by the end of this academic year. 3Y students who have <6 units of remaining required coursework should contact the PhD Program Advisor for specific guidance with regard to course planning and registration. Students should refer to the Program Advisement section of the PhD Handbook for information pertaining to the full Mandatory Advisement process and how to make course selection decisions beyond the 1Y.

If a student has completed all required coursework and is not ready to take the QE, then the student may register for GRSC-800a/b/z: Studies for the Qualifying Examination (0 units). Students may only enroll in GRSC-800 a maximum of three times. The 0-unit course is not degree-applicable, but confers full-time enrollment status.

3Y Research Paper & Presentation
During the summer after the sixth semester of study, students must submit a research paper. The paper (often abbreviated as the 3Y Paper) must be of publishable quality. The 3Y Paper may be a solo-authored paper or a co-authored paper. All co-authored papers are subject to the Co-Authorship Policies addressed in a separate section of the PhD Handbook.

The 3Y Paper will be due on the first day of Fall semester following the student's sixth semester of study. Students will receive instructions on how/where to submit the 3Y Paper from the PhD Program Advisor.

All 3Y Papers will be assessed and evaluated by the Research Paper Committee. Additionally, each student is required to present their 3Y Paper to the Research Paper Committee members, other faculty, and other graduate students towards the beginning of the Fall semester. Please refer to the PhD Program Advisor for the schedule and format.

Each year, the Department will select a recipient for the "Outstanding Third-Year Paper" award. The award recipient will receive summer research funding in the following Summer.

Primary Faculty Advisors (PFAs)
By the 3Y, students should have a designated Primary Faculty Advisor (PFA). Though students often have multiple faculty advisors, there should be one PFA. A student's PFA will typically (though not always) end up acting as their Qualifying Exam Committee Chair.

Note that a PFA is not the same as an Academic Advisor or Staff Graduate Advisor. When reviewing policies and procedures inside and outside of the Department, any references to the latter two titles will indicate that you require support from the PhD Program Advisor.

Qualifying Exam (Q-Exam/QE) Committee
3Y students should also be taking steps to form a Qualifying Exam (often abbreviated as Q-Exam/QE)

Committee. The QE Committee must be comprised of at least five members, and is subject to many policies at various levels—University; USC Graduate School; USC Dornsife College of Letters, Arts, and Sciences; and Departmental. Please see the designated QE section of the PhD Handbook for more information.

Preparing for the QE

The Qualifying Exam is a major milestone in the PhD process. The QE is designed to test each student's fitness to undertake independent research, and helps each student demonstrate their ability to pursue their dissertation. Prior to taking the QE, the student must have met all of the University's and program's requirements for the PhD degree. USC PhD in Economics students should complete their QE prior to the end of their seventh semester of study.

To plan efficiently, students should meet with their PFA regularly and determine their QE Committee prior to the end of their sixth semester of study. Comprehensive information about the QE and instructions for QE Committee Appointment can be found in the QE section of the PhD Handbook.

Fourth-Year (4Y) Students

The 4Y of the program is dedicated to taking and passing the QE. Each student should be meeting with their PFA regularly. If they have not yet done so, students should formalize their respective QE Committees. Best practice would be to meet with their QE Committee Chair to discuss what the expectations and requirements will be for their individual exam.

4Y Funding

Almost all students in the 4Y will be on Graduate Assistantships (TA/RA). Please see the Graduate Assistantships section of the PhD Handbook for more information.

4Y Coursework

Prior to beginning the 4Y of the program, students will be required to meet with the DDS and/or the PhD Program Advisor to discuss their performance over the previous year and expectations for the coming year.

Students should have completed most, if not all, coursework requirements by this stage. 4Y students who wish to enroll in <6 units should contact the PhD Program Advisor for further consultation and assistance. Students should refer to the Program Advisement section of the PhD Handbook for information pertaining to the full Mandatory Advisement process and how to make course selection decisions beyond the 1Y.

If a student has completed all required coursework and is still not ready to take the QE, then the student may register for GRSC-800a/b/z: Studies for the Qualifying Examination (0 units). Students may only enroll in GRSC-800 a maximum of three times. The 0-unit course is not degree-applicable, but confers full-time enrollment status.

After completing the QE, students will receive permission from the PhD Program Advisor to enroll in ECON-794a/b: Doctoral Dissertation (2 units). More information about ECON-794 can be found in the Program Requirements section of the PhD Handbook.

Successfully Completing the QE

Again, the Qualifying Exam is a major milestone in the PhD process. The QE is designed to test each student's fitness to undertake independent research, and helps each student demonstrate their ability to pursue their dissertation. Prior to taking the QE, the student must have met all of the University's and program's requirements for the PhD degree.

USC PhD in Economics students should complete their QE prior to the end of their seventh semester of study. Comprehensive information about the QE and instructions for QE Committee Appointment can be found in the QE section of the PhD Handbook.

Preparing for the Job Market

As students complete their qualifying examinations and begin research, they should also be actively turning their thoughts to the impending job market. Students seeking to go on the market in the 5Y should complete their Job Market Paper (JMP), create a personal webpage (academic/professional), and submit an Advisement Form: Job Market in the summer leading up to their final year. A DocuSign Powerform for the Advisement Form: Job Market can be found in the Program Advisement section of the PhD Handbook.

To incentivize students to complete the aforementioned action items in a timely manner, students who successfully meet the Department's August 15 deadline will receive additional support. Students may inquire about these incentives by contacting the PhD Program Advisor.

Fifth-Year (5Y) Students

The 5Y of the program is dedicated to completing the JMP, going through the job market or placement process, and defending/submitting the dissertation.

5Y Funding

Most students in the 5Y will be on Advanced Fellowship, which is designated for students in their final year.

Doctoral Dissertation

The dissertation is the end-point of the program. It usually consists of three original papers, though a student's Dissertation Committee may approve a different format. Each paper (or "chapter") in the dissertation must constitute a substantive contribution to the student's area of research. Most dissertations will have one primary chapter, which the student believes to be their best work. For students who apply for academic jobs, this primary chapter will be their JMP, which they will present to potential employers and the academic community at large.

A student's 2Y and 3Y Papers may form the basis of chapters in a student's dissertation if the student's Dissertation Committee believes they meet the required standards.

Job Market & Placements

The USC Department of Economics has a resourceful job placement program. Every year, we help to place students in both academic and private sector jobs. Students seeking to go on the market in the Fall should complete the required action items in a timely manner as communicated by the PhD Program Advisor.

In preparing for the job market, JMCs are expected to establish an online professional presence. In other words, prospective JMCs should create a professional website where they will showcase their research interests and field specializations. JMCs should also have your CV accessible on the website and include detailed information about their JMP. JMCs will be asked to submit an appropriate headshot, the link to their personal webpage, their fields of study, etc. to the PhD Program Advisor in advance. This information will be used to populate the JMC webpage. The Department typically launches our Job Market Candidates (JMC) webpage in mid-October.

Students will apply to jobs throughout the Fall semester. The Placements Committee will arrange for mock interviews, which students should plan to participate in at the end of November/early December. Students will then attend the American Economic Association (AEA) conference in early January to interview for positions.

Additional Financial Support

USC Department of Economics

Departmental Awards

The Department has created many opportunities to recognize outstanding effort from our doctoral students. Some such examples are as follows:

- Outstanding TA Award
- Outstanding 2Y Paper Award
- Outstanding 3Y Paper Award
- Summer Research Award

Conference & Workshop Support

Students who are invited to present at conferences or participate in workshops following competitive selection processes may be eligible to receive financial support from the Department to assist with the costs of attendance. Review and approval are subject to consideration on a case-by-case basis by the PhD Program Advisor and the Office Manager.

Other Sources of Support

Fellowships & Graduate Assistantships

There are many avenues of financial support located outside the Department, including the following:

- Endowed Fellowships facilitated by the Provost's office
- Additional Final-Year Fellowships facilitated by the USC Graduate School
- CESR (Center for Economic and Social Research)
- USC Schaeffer Center for Health Policy & Economics
- INET (Institute for New Economic Thinking)

Students are encouraged to seek out RAships from CESR, the Schaeffer Center, and INET as additional opportunities for financial support and professional development.

USC Graduate Student Government Resources

The USC Graduate Student Government (GSG) has collected various helpful resources (many of which are free) for graduate students:

- Trojan Food Pantry
- Disabled Access to Road Transportation
- Ask Ari
- Free HIV testing
- New York Times subscription
- New York Times Games subscription
- Legal services

Additionally, GSG also offers several funded assistance programs:

- Emergency Fund Program
- Childcare Subsidy Grants Program
- Professional Development Fund

External Support

First and foremost, students must receive approval from the DDS prior to planning and submitting a co-authored paper that attempts to satisfy program or degree requirements.

Co-Authorship Policies

Students will often collaborate with other students or faculty during their time in the USC PhD in Economics program. They may be allowed to submit co-authored papers to fulfill certain degree requirements, subject to the following regulations.

All Co-Authored Papers

First and foremost, students must receive approval from the DDS prior to planning and submitting a co-authored paper that attempts to satisfy program or degree requirements.

2Y Empirical Paper

Students may not submit co-authored papers to satisfy the 2Y Paper requirement. Only solo-authored papers will be accepted.

3Y Research Paper

Students may solicit approval to submit a co-authored paper to satisfy the 3Y Paper requirement. Please see below for additional policy stipulations that apply:

- A student may submit a co-authored 3Y Paper if the co-author is one of the following:
  - PhD student at USC
  - PhD student at another accredited institution
  - Professor at USC
  - DDS-approved scholar who recently completed their doctoral degree (e.g., recent alum of the USC PhD in Economics program who was working with a 3Y student prior to graduation)
- If the co-author (or co-authors, if more than one) is another USC PhD in Economics student:
  - Two 3Y students may not submit the same paper to fulfill this requirement
  - If a team of students works on more than one paper together, each member of the team may submit a different paper to fulfill this requirement
- All 3Y students intending to submit a co-authored paper must provide a Cover Letter that includes the following:
  - Clear description of their individual contribution to the co-authored paper
  - Clear description of their co-author's contribution to the co-authored paper
  - Their co-author's CV

Dissertation: Primary Chapter

Students may solicit approval to submit a co-authored paper as the primary chapter of their dissertation manuscript. Please see below for additional policy stipulations that apply:

- A student may submit a co-authored paper if the co-author is one of the following:
  - PhD student at USC
  - PhD student at another accredited institution
  - DDS-approved scholar who recently completed their doctoral degree (e.g., recent alum of the USC PhD in Economics program who was working with a 3Y student prior to graduation)
- If the co-author (or co-authors, if more than one) is another doctoral student:

    - Two students may not submit the same paper as the primary chapter of their respective dissertation
    - If a team of students works on more than one paper together, each member of the team may submit a different paper as the primary chapter of their respective dissertation
    - A co-authored paper that constitutes the primary chapter of one student's dissertation may be submitted as a non-primary chapter of the co-author's dissertation
- All students intending to submit a co-authored paper as the primary chapter of their dissertation must provide a Cover Letter that includes the following:
    - Clear description of their individual contribution to the co-authored paper
    - Clear description of their co-author's contribution to the co-authored paper
    - Their co-author's CV

Dissertation: Other (Non-Primary) Chapters

Students may solicit approval to submit a co-authored paper as another (non-primary) chapter of their dissertation manuscript. Please see below for additional policy stipulations that apply:

- A student may submit a co-authored paper if the co-author is one of the following:
    - PhD student at USC
    - PhD student at another accredited institution
    - Professor at USC
    - DDS-approved scholar who recently completed their doctoral degree (e.g., recent alum of the USC PhD in Economics program who was working with a 3Y student prior to graduation)
- All students intending to submit a co-authored paper as another (non-primary) chapter of their dissertation must provide a Cover Letter that includes the following:
    - Clear description of their individual contribution to the co-authored paper
    - Clear description of their co-author's contribution to the co-authored paper
    - Their co-author's CV

Graduate Assistantships

Teaching Assistantships (TAships)

Almost all program students will work as a Teaching Assistant (TA) for undergraduate and/or graduate courses. This experience will benefit doctoral students in several ways. They will have the opportunity to work closely with the Department's faculty, improve as public speakers, develop critical thinking and conflict resolution skills, and become proficient in explaining economic reasoning. A good TA works closely with the Professor to be prepared each week for class and to be responsive and respectful towards our undergraduate and graduate students. Such gracious professionalism is a useful skill that will our students in their subsequent careers.

Duties & Responsibilities

A TA's duties will include a number of activities pertinent to the instruction and management of the assigned course(s). These responsibilities will be determined by the supervising faculty member and may include the following:

- Reading course texts and materials
- Assisting during lectures
- Leading discussion sections or lab meetings
- Guiding and monitoring lab exercises
- Prepare or photocopy course materials
- Organize and maintain audio/visual materials
- Procure and operate audio/visual equipment
- Grading course assignments and exams

TAs are expected to:

- Attend lectures
- Hold regular office hours
- Proctor quizzes and exams
- Respond to student concerns in a responsible manner
- Act as a liaison between the instructor and the students

Workload

The standard assistantship award (50%) stipulates that teaching responsibilities occupy 50% of a graduate student's total effort, allowing for the remaining 50% to be dedicated to the student's individual academic pursuits. The duties of a TA should not exceed, on average, 20 hours per week. The time devoted to the assistantship may vary from day to day and week to week, given the fluctuation of demands during the various periods of the semester, but the total workload for the semester should not exceed the cumulative average.

Furthermore, a TA should never work more than 8 hours a day or more than 40 hours a week, and deviations to the 20-hour standard should be kept to a minimum. If a student finds that they are consistently working more than 20 hours a week, they should consult with the supervising faculty or seek advice from the Department on how to manage TA commitments more effectively or, if appropriate, to adjust the workload.

<u>Additional employment is not allowed</u> for TAs, given the demands of full-time study, unless that work is

directly related to a student's academic development. Exceptions can be made with approval of the Department Chair, Deans, USC Graduate School, and Provost. In general, whether from outside employment or assistantship duties, the workload should be kept to 50% of the graduate student's total effort. In summer, however, there is no restriction on employment.

Compensation
Compensation for TAs consists of a stipend, tuition remission, health insurance, and dental insurance. In addition, TAs may be entitled to USC Bookstore and USC Pharmacy discounts. At the beginning of each semester, students may ask their home department for a TA sticker to place on their USCard to receive these discounts.

Course Assignments
Students who have been offered a TAship will receive instructions from the Office Manager on how to communicate their course preferences prior to the start of each semester. While the Department will do its best to accommodate, individual course preferences are not guaranteed.

Faculty Responsibilities to TAs
At the beginning of each semester, the supervising faculty member must outline for the TA the scope and nature of their responsibilities. Included in this exchange should also be a discussion of the overall objectives of the course and section, methods and standards for assessing student performance, and the protocol for addressing any problems or issues (such as cheating or grade conflicts) that might arise during the semester.

Though faculty may offer additional professional development opportunities for their TAs (e.g., an occasional lecture), such opportunities should be regarded as optional, not obligatory. Note that the responsibilities of the TA do not include tasks typically assigned to the instructor (e.g., creating course syllabi, lecturing the primary course material, providing grading standards, or bearing ultimate responsibility for the content and grading of examinations). If a TA is asked to give a lecture, the primary instructor should also be present.

Before the semester begins, the instructor must also specify the criteria that will be used for the evaluation of the TA's performance in the course. Following the completion of the course, the supervising faculty member will evaluate the TA, and their evaluation will become a permanent part of the TA's file in the Department.

TA Training & Support
All departments must facilitate training for new TAs that will prepare them for their teaching responsibilities.

Dornsife will offer a two-day TA Orientation session in August and December every year for incoming TAs. During these sessions, TAs will be introduced to outstanding faculty and experienced TAs, who will offer advice on how best to confront the many challenges of teaching at USC. Hands-on workshops and lab sessions on relevant technology will provide the new TAs with tangible tools for meeting these challenges.

New TAs must also enroll in ECON-593x: Practicum in Teaching the Liberal Arts (2 units) in the Fall semester of their first year performing as a TA. It is not offered in the Spring semester—plan accordingly. This 2-unit course will not be deducted from the twelve units per semester you are afforded by Dornsife's tuition remission, and is not degree-applicable.

Research Assistantships (RAships)
Many students will have the opportunity to work as Research Assistants (RAs) for one or more faculty members. While every research collaboration differs, such experiences can be a crucial part of maturing into independent scholars. USC PhD in Economics students may be eligible for RAships both inside and outside of the Department, though all RAship appointments are subject to review and approval by the home department.

Students who are offered an RAship must communicate this immediately with the Office Manager to solicit the Department's approval for the appointment. The Office Manager should receive a notification of an RAship offer in writing via email several months prior to the start of the semester in which the student intends to begin their RA duties. The email must come from the supervising faculty member, and the PhD Program Advisor and student must be Cc'd.

Qualifying Examinations

The Qualifying Examination (often abbreviated as Q-Exam or QE) is a major milestone in the PhD process. The QE helps to demonstrate each student's ability to pursue their dissertation and register for dissertation courses. Successful completion of the QE is indicative of the student's completion of all required coursework and of their advancement to doctoral candidacy.

USC PhD in Economics students should complete their QE prior to the end of their seventh semester of study. Early completion of this requirement will facilitate an earlier transition to the dissertation stage, also known as the All But Dissertation (ABD) stage. Students who fail to complete their QE prior to the end of their eighth semester of study may receive a Letter of Academic Warning.

Students will receive detailed information about current Departmental guidelines, QE timelines, a DocuSign Powerform for the QE Committee form, and additional resources from the PhD Program Advisor.

All action items should be addressed in a timely manner to ensure that students remain in good standing with the program.

Before the QE

Formalize the Appointment of the QE Committee

To become familiar with associated policies, students should review the following excerpts from the USC Catalogue:

> **The Graduate School**
>
> **Qualifying Exam Committee**
>
> The qualifying exam committee is composed of five members. The committee chair and at least two additional members must have an appointment in the student's program.
>
> Because the goal of USC PhD programs is to create scholars who will shape their fields in a wide range of settings, the university encourages PhD students to take advantage of the full array of faculty expertise available at USC. This includes the expertise of tenured, tenure track and RTPC (research, teaching, practice, clinical) faculty. A USC faculty member from outside the student's home program is called an "outside member." The committee may also include a faculty member from an institution other than USC, called an "external member."
>
> **USC Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences**
>
> **Graduate Studies in Letters, Arts and Sciences**
>
> In addition to the composition of committees outlined by The Graduate School, USC Dornsife requires that all PhD qualifying exam and dissertation committees contain an outside member. An outside member is considered to be faculty outside the student's program but internal to USC.

Each student must submit a valid Appointment or Change of Qualifying Exam Committee Form (often abbreviated as QE Committee Form) to the Department prior to scheduling the QE. Students can access the QE Committee Form on the USC Graduate School > Guidelines & Forms website. Alternately, students may find a DocuSign Powerform to easily solicit e-signatures in the Program Advisement section of the PhD Handbook. The student is responsible for soliciting all QE Committee members' signatures. In either case, the student should contact the PhD Program Advisor to solicit the final signatures from the Department Chair and the Dean. Each student is responsible for submitting their QE Committee Form to the PhD Program Advisor according to the Department's timeline.

The composition of the QE Committee may be changed even after it has been formalized. Students seeking to do so should contact the PhD Program Advisor for assistance.

Discuss the QE Requirements
There is no single format for how the QE is supposed to be administered. The process is highly individualized and is between each student and their QE Committee. As such, students should meet with their QE Committee Chair well in advance (as soon as they decide who the Chair will be) to discuss the QE Committee's expectations for the exam and what the student should prepare. As an example, the exam presentation could be organized in PowerPoint or any other method that the QE Committee deems acceptable. There is no set length of time for the exam, but it is typically between 45 – 60 minutes.

Determine the QE Modality & Location
The modality of the QE must be determined in advance. Students and their QE Committees may conduct theQE fully in-person or fully remotely. Students should not attempt a hybrid QE.

If proceeding with an in-person QE, the Department can assist the student with reserving an appropriate room in which to host the exam.

If proceeding with a remote QE, students must submit a Remote Participation Memo verifying all QE details to the PhD Program Advisor. A template of the memo may be requested from the PhD Program Advisor, though it can also be found in the Program Advisement section of the PhD Handbook. The remote QE should be hosted via Zoom (or similar platform) by the QE Committee Chair. Each student is responsible for notifying the PhD Program Advisor of the modality and time of their QE according to the Department's timeline.

Schedule the QE
The date and time of the QE must be determined in advance. Regardless of modality, the QE must occur during normal business hours. It may not be scheduled on weekends. It may not be scheduled on holidays. Students may find it helpful to use an online polling tool (e.g., Doodle) to solicit the availability of all participants. Each student is responsible for notifying the PhD Program Advisor of the date and time of their QE according to the Department's timeline.

Confirm the QE Report
The QE Report is a document that must be signed by all QE Committee members immediately after the conclusion of the QE in order to (as you may guess) report the results.

Once students have completed all required components of the QE preparation process, the PhD Program Advisor will work with the USC Graduate School to generate a QE Report. The QE Report will be scheduled for delivery to the QE Committee via DocuSign on the morning of each student's QE. Students can expect to receive confirmation via email from the PhD Program Advisor once a QE Report has successfully been generated.

The Day of the QE
Each student will meet with their QE Committee and undertake the exam. After the exam concludes, the student should remind their QE Committee that all members must sign the QE Report that same day. Once all members' signatures have been collected, the PhD Program Advisor will solicit the final signatures from the Department Chair and the Dean, and relay the results to the USC Graduate School.

The QE Report will ultimately be uploaded to the student's record by the USC Graduate School. After this point, the student will be considered a doctoral candidate and will receive instructions from the PhD Program Advisor to register for Dissertation Courses (ECON-794).