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. Our program is designed to foster the growth of independent researchers and provide them with the skills and mentorship needed to succeed in academia, while also supporting those who pursue careers in the 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.

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Introduction

USC Graduate School

The mission of the USC Graduate School is to provide a distinguished educational experience at the graduate level for an outstanding and diverse student body, to support and celebrate graduate student achievements, and to lead in establishing and communicating policies, standards, and processes related to graduate education.

The PhD at USC

The Doctor of Philosophy at USC is a full-time program. It is a rigorous course of study that requires original research, professional maturity, sustained intellectual focus, and academic discipline. Students are expected to devote full-time study to this degree and not undertake employment or other time-consuming commitments during the academic year, from the end of August through mid-May.

USC Department of Economics

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
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Los Angeles, CA 90089-0253

PhD Handbook

Graduate student success is the result of a collaborative effort among students working at their highest levels, faculty dedicated to high-quality mentorship, and staff who coordinate and advise. One of the most important ingredients in this cooperative effort is a shared understanding about what is required and what resources and supports are available.

This document serves as a roadmap for PhD students. It offers a review of expectations for students and for the faculty and administrative staff who support them. The handbook provides three types of information: 1) guidance on program requirements, including university and departmental policies, resources, and expectations; 2) practical advice for common challenges at USC; and 3) information about relevant support services and professional development opportunities.

We hope that the handbook serves as a valuable resource for PhD success, providing students with the information to complete their programs while maintaining academic momentum and personal well-being. The handbook includes policies and practices noted in the university's catalogue, collective bargaining agreement, and other sources. It does not fully address the terms of the collective bargaining agreement, which is available for your reference on the USC Graduate School website.

Department & Program Administrators

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

Department Chair

Caroline Betts
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Director of Doctoral Studies (DDS)

Giorgio Coricelli
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Department Programs Manager

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Associate Director, Doctoral Program

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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.

Policies & Procedures

Enrollment Status

To be considered full-time, a doctoral student must be enrolled in at least six units of 500-level and above coursework each semester. Most students enroll in 12 units to make timely progress toward their degree; 16 units constitute the maximum load. Students wishing to carry more than 16 units must have prior permission from the degree-conferring unit; such permission will be granted only in exceptional circumstances.

Exceptions

1. Incoming 1Y students must register in and successfully complete the designated First-Year/Core Coursework. 1. A student who has completed all coursework for the doctoral degree will be considered full-time during the semester in which the student is preparing for the doctoral qualifying examination, provided the Appointment or Change of Qualifying Exam or Dissertation Committee form has been completed and submitted to the program and the student is enrolled in GRSC 800abz, Studies for the Qualifying Examination.

2. Doctoral students who have been advanced to candidacy, that is, who have completed all coursework and have passed the qualifying examination, will be considered full-time when enrolled in 794 Doctoral Dissertation.

F-1 and J-1 International Students

F-1 and J-1 international students on student visas who are not enrolled in either GRSC 800abz or 794 must be enrolled in at least six units or receive authorization from the Office of International Services to enroll in fewer than the minimum units. International students with questions about their registration should consult the Office of International Services.

Immigration regulations require F-1 and J-1 students' physical attendance for classes during each fall and spring semester of their program. If the summer term is the student's first or last semester at USC, then physical attendance for classes is also required.

No more than one online class (up to 3 units) per semester can be counted towards the full course of study for an F-1 or J-1 student. If you only need to be registered in one course to complete your degree program during your final term, it must be in-person.

794ab Doctoral Dissertation

794ab Doctoral Dissertation confers full-time enrollment status on students who have been admitted to candidacy. Students are expected to be enrolled in 2 units of 794 each semester, except summer sessions, for a minimum of two semesters, until all degree requirements are completed.
Students are expected to complete and defend their dissertation in less than five semesters of 794. No more than eight units of 794 will be applied toward the PhD degree.

Concurrent Enrollment

If a student is simultaneously enrolled elsewhere, they may not transfer credits to USC without advance permission from the dean of the school that hosts the USC degree program. Failure to obtain permission will invalidate coursework taken during periods of unauthorized concurrent enrollment.

Transfer of Credit

The Degree Progress Department in the Office of Academic Records and Registrar determines whether coursework taken elsewhere is available for transfer credit. The faculty of the student's degree program

determines whether such credit is applicable toward a specific graduate degree, subject to approval by the dean of the degree-conferring unit. The faculty will decide by the end of the second year.

Continuous Enrollment
Students are considered to be pursuing advanced degrees only when formally enrolled. PhD students must be enrolled at USC for fall and spring semesters each year until all degree requirements have been satisfactorily completed within the time limit.

Enrollment in graduate-level course work is necessary to meet the continuous enrollment requirement. Graduate students who fail to register are no longer considered to be enrolled in a graduate degree program. After an unauthorized absence, formal readmission is required. Students who have been granted an official leave of absence do not need to apply for readmission following the approved leave. However, students who fail to return at the conclusion of any form of leave without obtaining an approved extension violate the continuous enrollment policy.

A doctoral candidate who has passed the qualifying examination must enroll each fall and spring semester in 794 Doctoral Dissertation until the dissertation has been approved. Students are expected to complete and defend their dissertation in less than five semesters.

Some courses with no academic credit, including 794z, require payment of tuition.

Pass/No Pass & Audit Coursework

Graduate students may elect to enroll in courses on a pass/no pass basis with department or program approval. However, coursework taken on a pass/no pass basis cannot be applied toward a graduate degree. Students should consult their academic advisors before enrolling in any course on a pass/no pass basis.

The USC Dornsife School will not offer tuition remission for non-degree applicable courses. As such, USC PhD in Economics students should not enroll in courses for a pass/no pass grade option.

Incompletes

An incomplete (IN) is assigned when work is not completed because of a documented illness or another emergency occurring after the 12th week of the semester (or 12th week equivalent for any course scheduled for less than 15 weeks).

If a student receives an incomplete, the instructor will fill out the *Assignment of an Incomplete* (IN) and *Requirements for Completion* form, which will specify the work remaining to be done, the procedures for its completion, the grade in the course to date and the weight to be assigned to the work remaining to be done when computing the final grade.

One calendar year is allowed to complete an IN. [Individual academic units may have more stringent policies regarding these time limits, which should be delineated here.] If the IN is not completed within the designated time, the course is considered "lapsed," the grade is changed to an "IX" and will be calculated into the grade point average as 0 points. Courses offered on a Credit/No Credit basis or taken on a Pass/No Pass basis for which a mark of Incomplete is assigned will be lapsed with a mark of NC or NP and will not be calculated into the grade point average.

Completing the IN within the one-year period should be the student's highest priority. A student may petition the Committee on Academic Policies and Procedures (CAPP) for an extension of time for the completion of an IN. Extensions beyond the specified time limit are rarely approved if the student has enrolled in subsequent semesters.

In all cases, a petition for an extension of time to complete an IN must have departmental approval and include a statement from the instructor explaining what is needed to complete the course and why the instructor believes

the student should be given additional time for completion.

Audited Courses

Students who wish to audit a course at USC must register for the course on Web Registration and select the Audit grade option. Audited courses will not receive credit and will not appear on the USC transcript or grade report. However, tuition is charged, and students should check with their school or program to determine if auditing courses is an option. As noted in the USC Student Handbook, attending a course without being officially registered in it is prohibited.

The USC Dornsife School will not offer tuition remission for non-degree applicable courses. As such, USC PhD in Economics students should not enroll in courses for an audit grade option.

Time Limit for Degree Completion

Progress is measured from the beginning of the first course at USC applied toward a specified degree, and all requirements for that degree must be completed within a specified time. The university's time limit for completing the doctoral degree is eight years. For students who earned an applicable master's degree within the five years before admission to the doctoral program, the time limit for completing the doctoral degree is six years from the date of admission to the doctoral program. Approved leaves of absence (up to two years or four semesters) are not counted in the time allowed to complete degree requirements.

Extensions may be granted in extraordinary circumstances. If granted an extension, the Dean of the degree-conferring unit will allow registration for the specified extension period.

Leaves of Absence, Sick Days, and Bereavement

Students in good standing and making satisfactory progress toward a degree who must interrupt studies for compelling reasons may petition for a leave for a stated period, usually one semester. A leave must be requested before the drop-add deadline and approved by the dean of the degree program, the committee chair, and the department chair or program director. The request should include a plan for academic progress upon return. During the leave period, a student is not entitled to assistance from the faculty or use of university facilities.

If granted, the leave is recorded on the student's transcript, and the leave period is not counted in the time allowed to complete degree requirements. A leave of absence may be allowed for one semester at a time, up to a maximum of four semesters. Students who fail to apply for a leave of absence or for whom a leave has been denied (or has expired) are subject to policies governing continuous enrollment and readmission. International students should consult with the Office of International Services before considering a leave of absence.

Parental Leave for PhD Students

PhD students are eligible for a one-semester paid parental leave if they:

- Are pregnant or are the primary caregiver of their newborn child or adopted child under six years of age
- Have completed at least one semester in the PhD program and are making good progress
- Were admitted with a Multi-Year Funding Offer (MYFO) letter that includes a four or five-year "package" consisting of support through any combination of teaching assistantship, research assistantship, and fellowship.
- F-1 and J-1 international students must additionally qualify for a medical reduced course load (RCL) if they plan to remain in the U.S. while taking parental leave

Parental leave may be taken during the semester in which the child is born or adopted, or in the semester immediately following. A student on an approved parental leave will receive tuition, fees, and a stipend. The Graduate School provides the base stipend. Schools and programs provide the tuition, fees, and a top-off the base stipend to the level specified in the student's Multi-Year Funding Offer letter.

Students should enroll in GRSC 804 to ensure continued access to health insurance and the monthly stipend. While on parental leave, students are not eligible for federal financial aid. Students with loans should consult with the Office of Financial Aid before beginning parental leave. F-1 and J-1 international students should consult with the Office of International Services to discuss parental leave and ensure there are no unforeseen issues related to their visa status.

Students interested in taking parental leave should consult with the staff graduate advisor in their department or program. The program will submit a petition to the Graduate School and will be asked to provide a copy of the initial funding letter, a statement as the primary caregiver, and one of the following:

- Verification of pregnancy signed by a US doctor (available at USC Student Health Center), or
- Birth certificate for the infant child, or
- Statement of adoption from an adoption agency

Health Leaves for PhD Students
Health Leaves are administered by USC Campus Support and Intervention (CSI) in consultation with the student's program and the Graduate School, pursuant to the university's Student Health Leave of Absence Policy.
PhD students interested in a health leave should meet with a CSI health leave coordinator to develop an individualized health and academic plan. These plans are developed through an interactive process involving the Health Leave Coordinator, the student, the academic unit, and the Graduate School.

F-1 and J-1 international students are eligible to request a health leave. They must meet with an advisor in the Office of International Services (OIS) before finalizing plans for the health leave. Students can either return to their home country or, if a doctor recommends, remain in the U.S. for medical treatment. The student should request the health leave through a CSI health leave coordinator, who works with the student, their healthcare provider, and the Office of International Services (OIS) to determine the necessary steps to approve the leave request.

A paid health leave, including tuition, fees, and at least the minimum stipend, is available for one semester. A second semester covering tuition and fees may be available if necessary. The Vice Provost for Academic Programs must review and approve additional health leaves beyond two semesters.

Sick Days and Bereavement Leave
PhD students may use up to five days of sick leave per Academic Year due to illness or to care for a family member. Students may also have up to five days of bereavement leave per Academic Year for the loss of a family member.

Readmission

A PhD student who leaves the university without obtaining a formal leave of absence, or otherwise violates the continuous enrollment policy, is not automatically readmitted. A student wishing to apply for readmission to a graduate degree program must first obtain the recommendation of the department chair or program director and submit an Application for Readmission to the dean of the degree program.

If the student's cumulative GPA is below 3.0 or if readmission is sought after more than two years of an unapproved absence, the Application for Readmission must be sent to the Graduate School for approval.

The readmission approval process must be completed by the first day of classes for the term in which the resumption of graduate studies is sought. Approvals to be readmitted are based on the academic merits of the student's request and the likelihood of academic success and completion of the degree. If readmitted, the student will be subject to all of the current University Catalogue requirements for the degree in effect at the time of readmission. Individual exceptions to the Catalogue year require the approval of the dean of the degree

program. Students seeking readmission after an absence of more than 10 years may be required to reapply to the university.

A student may not be readmitted into a terminated program of study. The student must either be subject to retroactive enrollment or admission to the new program of study with the corresponding catalog requirements.

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

The minimum number of units for a doctoral degree is 60, including at least four units of 794ab Doctoral Dissertation. At least 24 units must be completed at USC (excluding Doctoral Dissertation 794).

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
The department or program will administer the Core Theory Examinations before the student completes 24 units. Before beginning the third semester of graduate study, each student must pass a written examination in general economic theory including applications. A maximum of three 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.

Students must pass this procedure to continue in the PhD program. If students fail the screening procedure, they will be dismissed from the PhD program without a written warning. Students who fail the screening examination are entitled to appeal pursuant to the Academic Dismissal Appeal procedure.

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 the Core Exams, coursework requirements, and the 2Y & 3Y paper requirements, each student stands for a Qualifying Examination (QE) that focuses on the presentation and defense of the written dissertation proposal. After passing the QE, a student is admitted to candidacy for the PhD degree. This QE 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 2-3 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 Associate Director 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 Associate Director. 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.

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity depends on our collective commitment as a university community. Reporting academic integrity issues helps reinforce academic standards and preserves the value of USC degrees. If faculty suspect academic misconduct on any work that a student submits (in final or draft form), they are required to submit a report to the Office of Academic Integrity (OAI).
Information about the university's academic integrity policies is available in the USC Student Handbook and from the Office of Academic Integrity.

Because PhD students have already earned a bachelor's degree and are enrolled in advanced academic training, they are held to a higher standard of integrity in all academic work. This standard reflects the heightened ethical expectations of advanced scholarship, the student's potential role as a mentor and instructor to others, and the impact of their conduct on the broader research and academic community.

OAI is responsible for investigating and adjudicating academic integrity violations. If OAI determines, by a preponderance of the evidence, that a PhD student has committed an academic integrity violation, there is a presumption that dismissal from the academic program without conferral of the degree is the appropriate outcome. This presumption applies regardless of whether the violation occurred in coursework, research, examinations, or instructional settings.

In such cases, doctoral students are not entitled to a Review Panel under the general disciplinary process. Instead, the findings and determination of responsibility will be referred directly to the student's academic program. The program will issue a decision letter that includes outcomes and any additional information relevant to the student's academic standing. No prior written warning is required to support dismissal under this policy. The program's decision will be provided to OAI for record-keeping, and a transcript notation indicating program dismissal for academic integrity reasons will be entered.

PhD students may not appeal the findings or sanctions through the general academic integrity appeal process. Instead, their sole opportunity to challenge the finding or rebut the presumption of dismissal is through the Academic Dismissal Appeal process described in the Student Handbook.
PhD students are expected to familiarize themselves with the full list of academic integrity standards and examples of violations outlined in the USC Student Handbook, including but not limited to plagiarism, cheating, unauthorized collaboration, falsification, misrepresentation, and misuse of instructional materials. Ignorance of policy or lack of intent is not a valid defense.

In cases where a student has registered for a course on a Pass/No Pass (P/NP) basis and an academic integrity violation has occurred, a penalty letter grade will be assigned when a grading option exists. A Pass or No Pass determination is only issued in these circumstances when a letter grade cannot be issued. A student may not withdraw from a course in which they committed or were accused of committing an academic integrity violation.

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 Associate Director 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 Associate Director 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

Satisfactory Progress, Academic Warning, and Dismissal

Students are expected to maintain satisfactory progress towards their degree. If a student has a question or concern about their progress, they should consult with their Primary Faculty Advisor (PFA), the Associate Director, and/or the DDS.

If a student fails to make satisfactory progress, the Department Chair, Associate Director, DDS, or school/college dean will notify them in writing. Written letters should a) explain how the student is falling short of the satisfactory progress standard and b) include specific benchmarks describing how the student can succeed in the program within a reasonable timeframe. Warning letters are sent as early as possible so the student can take advantage of the recommended actions.

Students who do not meet the established benchmarks may be dismissed.

Academic Dismissal Appeal

The USC Student Handbook includes information on how to appeal a dismissal. The Graduate School Dismissal Appeal provides the final consideration of a student's dismissal from a graduate program when the dean of the relevant school has upheld the dismissal. This does not include students who have not met the conditions for continuing registration or those who have violated the Student Code of Conduct. The Graduate School will schedule the appeal once the student provides written verification of dismissal and states in writing that they want to proceed with the appeal within 30 days of the dismissal. For more information, please visit the Graduate School website.

Advisement & Resources

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.

USC Office of Academic Records & Registrar

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 Associate Director:

- Five-Year Plan
- Requirements Chart
- Advisement Form: Pre-QE (DocuSign Powerform)
- Advisement Form: Pre-QE (sample)
- D-Clearance Request Form (Google Form)
- Graduate Course Syllabi
- Graduate Course Syllabi Submission Form (submit recent syllabi here)
- QE Committee Form (DocuSign Powerform)
- QE Remote Participation Memo (template)
- Dissertation Committee Form (DocuSign Powerform)
- ECON-794 Meeting Records Form (fillable)
- ECON-794 Meeting Records Submission Form (Google Form)
- 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 Associate Director to determine the courses that will be most appropriate for their studies.

Students will receive comprehensive instructions and resources from the Associate Director 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 Associate Director
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 they have already 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 Associate Director to review
    b. The DDS and/or Associate Director provide feedback and write in required changes in the Comments section as needed
4. After the meeting:
    a. The DDS and/or Associate Director 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 Associate Director reviews all D-Clearance requests and Advisement Forms
    d. The Associate Director 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 Associate Director 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 Associate Director immediately
  - If you still see any of the above on your bill after week 2 of any given semester, contact the Associate Director 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
  - 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 Associate Director immediately
  - If you still see any of the above on your bill after week 2 of any given semester, contact the Associate Director immediately
- Why am I seeing partial tuition charges remaining on my bill?
  - Are you enrolled in >12 units?
    - Your funding package covers full-time enrollment, which is 12 units for doctoral students. There are only a few exceptions to this (e.g., ALI courses, 2Y students on Advanced Fellowship in the Fall, 2Y students in the Spring, etc.)
    - If you believe an exception may apply, contact the Associate Director immediately. In your email, include the course information (course number, section number, units) that is creating the overage
  - Are you enrolled in non-Dornsife courses?
    - Your funding package only covers standard/Dornsife tuition. Some USC schools (e.g., Viterbi, Marshall, Gould, etc.) may charge lab fees and/or higher tuition rates than the standard/Dornsife tuition fees
    - If you have received permission from the DDS to take and apply a non-Dornsife course to your degree, forward proof of this to the Associate Director immediately. In your email, include the course information (course number, section number, units) that is creating the overage
- 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

Resources for International Students

The Office of International Services (OIS) supports F-1 and J-1 international students, helping them maintain immigration status, navigate complex immigration regulations, and succeed academically and personally. Key services include immigration advising, travel advising, and guidance on employment rules, such as on-campus work, CPT, and OPT.

With expertise in F-1 & J-1 immigration regulations, OIS advisors collaborate with government agencies and university departments to ensure students comply with their visa requirements while at USC.
For more information, please visit the OIS website at ois.usc.edu.

OIS advisors are available for one-on-one meetings daily via Zoom - no appointment is necessary:

- Mondays, Wednesdays, & Fridays: 1 PM-3 PM
- Tuesdays & Thursdays: 10 AM-12 PM
- J-1 advisors are available Tuesdays, Wednesdays, & Thursdays

Lactation Support

PhD students have access to spaces for expressing and storing breast milk. Rooms on the UPC and HSC campus are listed here.

American Language Institute

Many international students are from countries where English is not spoken as a native language. The American Language Institute (ALI) provides classes and other resources to assist international undergraduate and graduate students in improving their English and adapting to an American university program. Before they can be cleared to begin teaching at USC, all international Teaching Assistants are required to take part in a training program run by ALI.

Center for Excellence in Teaching

The Center for Excellence in Teaching (CET) is the university's think tank for innovative teaching. As a faculty-led initiative, CET draws upon the talents of experienced faculty to promote a commitment to excellence in teaching, learning, and scholarship. CET provides training and resources to improve teaching at USC, including supporting faculty and Teaching Assistants as they devise new courses and develop enriching out-of-class activities. CET offers seminars and lectures throughout the semester on a variety of topics and provides a training session at the beginning of each semester for Teaching Assistants.

Library Resources

Accessibility Training for Teaching Assistants at USC
Organized and developed by a collaboration between the Undergraduate Student Government (USG), Graduate Student Government (GSG), and USC Libraries as a resource for accessibility training for teaching assistants.

Accommodations

The University provides reasonable accommodations to PhD students who are disabled or become disabled and need reasonable accommodations to perform the essential functions of their job. More information is available from USC's Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS).

Other Support

Campus Support and Intervention (CSI)
CSI connects with members of the USC community when they need support in achieving their academic, professional, and personal goals.
(213) 740-0411
uscsupport@usc.edu

USC Kortschak Center for Learning and Creativity

KCLC offers outreach, programming, and individual coaching services to USC students and departments to promote a campus-wide understanding of learning differences and their potential to facilitate creativity and academic excellence.
(213) 740-7884
kortschakcenter@usc.edu

Office of the Ombuds
Available to faculty, staff, and students experiencing University-related concerns, conflicts, or challenging situations.
(213) 821-9556 (University Park Campus)
upcombuds@usc.edu
(323) 442-0341 (Health Sciences Campus)
hscombuds@usc.edu

Counseling and Mental Health
Provides counseling and support for all students.
(213) 740-9355 (WELL)

Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS)
Provides support services for individuals with disabilities.
(213) 740-0776 (University Park Campus)
(323) 442-1000 (Health Sciences Campus)
osasfrontdesk@usc.edu

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. If a student passes one section but not the other, the student is only required to retake the section they did not pass.

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. Students who fail a section again in August may choose to (i) complete the remaining required courses in the Fall to graduate with an MS in Economics or to (ii) be given a third and final attempt the following June. Students who choose the latter option are responsible for balancing appropriate 2Y course registration with preparation for their final attempt at the Core Exams, though they may request an extension for the 2Y Paper requirement. Students may refer to the 2Y Paper section of the PhD Handbook for more information.

Core Exam Boot Camp

To provide supplemental assistance for students preparing for the Core Exams, the Associate Director 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 Associate Director 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: 9:30 AM – 3:30 PM, Monday
- Macro: 9:30 AM – 3:30 PM, Wednesday

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

- Micro: 9:30 AM – 3:30 PM, Monday
- Macro: 9:30 AM – 3:30 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. Students can expect to receive the results from the Associate Director ~3 weeks after the exam concludes.

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 Associate Director.

Second-Year (2Y) Students

2Y Funding

Once the June Core Exam results have been announced, students will receive information from the Associate Director regarding the funding options available to rising 2Y students. Students will be expected to communicate their preferred funding option to the Associate Director 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 Associate Director 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 who are preparing for their third and final attempt of the Core Exams may request an extension, such that their 2Y Paper will be due by the end of Spring Recess instead. Students will receive instructions on how/where to submit the 2Y Paper from the Associate Director.

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 Associate Director.

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 Associate Director.

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 Associate Director 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 Associate Director 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 who are preparing for their third and final attempt of the Core Exams will not receive an extension on this requirement. Students will receive instructions on how/where to submit the 3Y Paper from the Associate Director.

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 Associate Director 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 Associate Director.

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 Qualifying Examinations 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.

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 Associate Director 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 Associate Director 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 Associate Director 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 Qualifying Examinations 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 Associate Director.

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 Associate Director.

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 their 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 Associate Director in advance. This information will be used to populate the JMC webpage. The Department typically launches the 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.

Post-Graduation

Accessing Your Dissertation

The dissertation manuscript will be available for search and download from the USC Digital Library shortly after completing all of the steps in the Thesis Center, or after any requested restriction expires.

Official Transcripts and Diploma

The Registrar's Office oversees the distribution of university diplomas and transcripts, in compliance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Most diplomas are mailed to the permanent address on record six to eight weeks after a degree is conferred. More information is available on their website.

Academic Calendar

Holidays

PhD students with graduate assistantship (GA) appointments will observe the academic holiday schedule. If a student serving as a GA is unable to observe a holiday due to the obligations of their appointment, they will be provided with an alternative day off instead of the missed holiday during the same semester, with the advance agreement of their designated PFA and, as needed, the DDS and/or Associate Director.

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

Dissertation

A dissertation is an original contribution to knowledge in the field and a demonstration that the PhD candidate has sufficiently mastered the field to pursue independent research and scholarship. A dissertation represents the individual candidate's research and writing. In fields where collaborative research has become the norm, the candidate is the sole author of the dissertation. When a paper included in a three-paper dissertation has co-authors, the dissertation candidate must specify their contributions to the research and delineate the contributions of their colleagues. Please see the Co-Authorship section of the PhD Handbook for more information.

Dissertations are required to be written in English. Exceptions require the approval of the Vice Provost for Academic Programs or their designee before beginning the work. The exceptions will be granted only when there is scholarly justification

Dissertation Committee

The dissertation committee is appointed as soon as possible after the qualifying examination has been passed and a dissertation topic approved. The committee must be appointed at least one month before the dissertation defense. The Appointment or Change of Dissertation Committee form, available on the Graduate School website, establishes the dissertation committee. The form requires the signatures of each committee member, the department chair or program director, and the dean or dean's designee. The completed form is filed in the student's home department or program, and a signed copy is provided to the student. As with the QE Committee Form, please use the program-specific Docusign Powerform for the Dissertation Committee Form to easily collect digital signatures. This can be found in the Advisement Resources section of the PhD Handbook.

The dissertation committee is composed of at least three and no more than five members. The committee chair must have an appointment in the student's program. All committees must have a majority of members from the student's home program. 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.

Outside, External, and Emeritus Members

PhD students may take advantage of the full array of faculty expertise available at USC. This includes the expertise of tenured, tenure-track, and RTPC (i.e., research, teaching, practitioner, clinical) faculty. A USC faculty member from outside the student's home program is referred to as an "outside member." The committee may also include a faculty member from an institution other than USC, referred to as an "external member."

Any faculty member – external, outside, or from the student's home program – who serves on PhD dissertation and qualifying exam committees must have a professional profile that demonstrates academic impact on the field in significant, measurable ways. The judgment about these qualifications will be made using the following guide:

- For faculty within the student's home program at USC and external faculty members (who are professors at universities other than USC), the dean, or dean's designee, of the school that houses the student's PhD program will assess a professor's qualification to serve
- For outside faculty (who are professors outside the student's program but internal to USC), the judgment of qualification to serve will be made by the dean or dean's designee of the school/college of the outside faculty member's primary appointment.

In both cases, the CV of the external member must be uploaded to the Thesis Center along with the appointment of committee form, and will become part of the official record. Judgments of demonstrated impact will be based

on evidence: for example, peer-reviewed publications in major journals and presses, grant funding, and exceptionally influential practice in a given field, taking into account the person's total career, current stage of career, and any changes in performance in a more recent period.

Faculty who are evaluated based on criteria other than those noted above will not normally be considered appropriate members of PhD and QE committees, except with the explicit permission of the Vice Provost for Academic Programs acting on the advice of the school dean.

Emeriti faculty appointed to a QE committee when they were full-time faculty at USC may continue to serve on the dissertation committee as "internal" committee members until the student has graduated. Similarly, a former USC faculty member who was appointed to the QE committee while they were a full-time faculty member may continue to serve on the dissertation committee as an internal committee member until the student graduates.

Dissertation Defense

While the oral examination is open to the general university community, only the members of the dissertation committee have the authority to recommend acceptance of the dissertation. Their recommendation must be unanimous. For the dissertation defense, some committee members may participate remotely. The committee chair and the student must be present in person, unless the relevant dean and the Vice Provost for Academic Programs provide express written permission for remote participation. Students seeking an exception for remote participation must contact the Associate Director immediately.

Final Approval of the Dissertation

After the dissertation defense has been completed, and the committee determines that no further edits or revisions are required of the dissertation manuscript, each member of the committee electronically certifies on the *Approval to Submit Defended and Final Copy of Doctoral Dissertation* that: (1) the defense was appropriately rigorous; (2) the student's dissertation makes an original and substantial contribution to its field of study; and (3) the defense process was fair and in keeping with USC's academic and ethical standards. This includes adherence to departmental formatting requirements. No changes can be made to the manuscript's content after the *Approval to Submit f*orm is complete. The *Approval to Submit* form is electronically available through Thesis Center, the Graduate School's online thesis and dissertation processing system.

The dissertation committee must unanimously agree for the student to pass the defense.

Dissertation Submission

Doctoral dissertation manuscripts must be submitted to the Thesis Center on the Graduate School website. At the time of submission, all manuscripts should be formatted and edited according to the style determined by the student's department or program. Students have three months from the date the committee chair signs the electronic *Approval to Submit* form to complete any required formatting corrections in the Thesis Center. After the Graduate School has approved the dissertation manuscript, a copy is sent to the USC Libraries. All dissertations will be made available digitally via the USC Libraries

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Completing the Dissertation

The Graduate School provides a schedule for completing the dissertation on its website. Students must submit complete documentation and finish all corrections to the manuscript before the degree can be conferred. Upon completing all requirements, the official USC transcript will serve as evidence of the degree until the student receives their diploma.

Financial Support

Graduate Assistant (GA)

GA is an overarching term used to describe Teaching Assistants (TA), Research Assistants (RA), and Graduate Assistant Lecturers (AL). GA appointments include tuition, fees, and a stipend at or exceeding the university's minimum rate. A 50% GA appointment requires an average of 20 hours per week, which is considered "full-time" for a graduate student, as the remaining 20 hours per week should be dedicated to coursework and scholarship leading to the degree. A 33% GA appointment requires an average of 13 hours per week, while a 25% appointment requires an average of 10 hours per week.

GA appointments are confirmed through an official offer letter generated via the university's TARA system or the Dornsife Student Database. The offer letter should be sent to the student at the beginning of the academic year or the start of a semester. These letters must use the standard Graduate School-approved template and detail the length of the appointment, the time commitment, the department's expectations, and benefits. Ideally, the offer letter should include the total stipend the student will receive, including top-offs. The student should sign the letter, which will be shared with the appropriate financial staff and archived by the department or program.

The university requires TAs, RAs, and ALs to be enrolled in a minimum of 6 units every semester or in equivalent full-time courses such as GRSC 800abz or Dissertation 794.

Fellowships

Fellowships provide financial support to PhD students pursuing their degrees. A fellowship is equivalent to a 50% appointment as a Graduate Assistant and includes tuition, fees, and a stipend at or exceeding the university's minimum rate.

PhD students with a fellowship are expected to commit 20 hours per week to their research. PhD students receiving fellowships may not undertake employment or other time-consuming commitments during the academic year from mid-August through mid-May. The Vice Provost for Academic Programs will review exceptions to this policy through the Graduate School's Petition system. Students on fellowships may not receive funding as GAs simultaneously.

Tuition Benefits

A 50% TA, RA, or AL appointment and a fellowship include tuition remission up to 12 units per semester and six units of tuition remission for the summer following the fellowship.

A 33% TA, RA, or AL appointment includes tuition remission up to 10 units per semester of the appointment and five units of tuition remission for the summer following the assignment.

A 25% TA, RA, or AL appointment includes tuition remission up to 8 units per semester of the appointment and four units of tuition remission for the summer following the assignment.

TAs, RAs, and ALs who wish to use tuition units for coursework outside their home program must obtain written approval from their faculty advisor, program director, and the dean of the school. If students do not have prior authorization, they may be responsible for covering the cost of these units. The tuition allowance is non-transferable from semester to semester and will be applied to the student's account in the amount appropriate for the courses they take.

Tuition Refund Insurance

Students should opt out of Tuition Refund Insurance when their tuition is being covered as part of an assistantship or fellowship. If a student has already accepted Tuition Refund Insurance but would like to decline it, they can do so here.

Stipend Distribution

The first stipend of the academic year will generally be available in August. To receive the stipend, students must be registered for classes well in advance of the start of the fall semester. Students are encouraged to work closely with the staff in their programs to ensure their stipend is processed appropriately.
Students switching from Graduate Assistant appointments to a fellowship or vice versa should be aware that the stipend schedules and distributions are different. However, they should still receive the university's mandatory stipend for the academic year.

Stipends are processed through Payroll. Students are highly encouraged to sign up for direct deposit through Workday. Instructions on how to sign up for direct deposit can be found here. Students who do not sign up for direct deposit will have their stipends mailed to the current address listed in myUSC. International students must also have an up-to-date Glacier account to receive their fellowship stipend.

Stipends are not processed on the same day every month. Students on fellowship should expect the stipend early in the month, while students receiving stipends for GA appointments will receive the stipend towards the end of the month.

Stipends are not considered late until after the 26th of the month.

Summer Support

During the summer semester (mid-May through mid-August), students receiving support as Graduate Assistants (RA, TA, and ALs) with a 50% appointment and PhD students with fellowships may work additional hours beyond the 20-hour maximum, up to an average of 40 hours per week in other on-campus or off-campus roles.

Students who have received offers of full-time employment off-campus during the summer semester may not simultaneously hold positions as Graduate Assistants or PhD Fellows.

Students who wish to decline summer support from USC in favor of full-time off-campus employment or internships will be asked to confirm their decision in writing. This information will be archived in the student's Advise USC file. International students should review the Office of International Services website for information about Curricular Practical Training (CPT). Alternately, visit the USC Economics – Doctoral – Registration page for the program-specific procedure for pursuing CPT.

Students who serve as TAs, RAs, and ALs during the summer receive a stipend and tuition remission proportional to the appointment. The health center fee will also be provided, and the student will have access from the first day of the appointment until the end of the summer. (The spring coverage period for the USC student health insurance includes January through the end of the summer as well.)

Students who are invited to campus for any other sponsored academic purpose, such as a professional development institute, receive access to the student health center from the first day of the academic event until the end of the summer.

Mandatory Fees, Health, and Dental Insurance

Graduate Assistant appointments and fellowships include tuition, a stipend at the university's minimum rate or higher, health and dental insurance, access to the student health center, the Student Programming Fee, Norman H. Topping Student Aid Fund Fee, and the Transportation Fee.

Students who will not be in Los Angeles for the fall and/or spring semester should contact the health insurance office to see if they need to register for satellite health insurance. Students can visit the Student Health website

for more information about student health insurance.

Parking and Transit Benefits

PhD students may participate in USC's Student U-Pass program. USC offers PhD students a limited number of permits for 2 or 3 days a week (partial week permits). These passes are available on a first-come, first-served basis. Permits are subject to availability at either UPC (150 campus permits total) - Shrine, Figueroa, and Grand, or HSC (50 campus permits total) - Valley and Lot 71.

External Fellowships

PhD students are encouraged to seek external fellowships and support that encourage intellectual independence and enhance a student's record. The USC Graduate School provides a variety of resources to support PhD students seeking funding, including information sessions, boot camps, and proposal review workshops. Students who receive one of several designated national awards may be eligible for stipend top-offs from the Graduate School.

PhD students applying for external fellowships that are "institutionally limited," meaning that there is a limit placed on the number of students who can apply, or whose applications require the approval of a university official, should contact the Graduate School well in advance of any deadlines.

USC Department of Economics Awards

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. The Department has limited funding available to assist PhD students who are invited to present research papers at conferences or to participate in selective boot-camps/workshops. Only 2Y+ students who have passed their Core Exams may apply. Conference invitations must be to give a presentation, not to participate as a regular attendee. Bootcamp/workshop/summer school invitations must be the result of a competitive selection process.

Please note the following maximum reimbursable rates for grant funding towards pre-approved conference/workshop travel expenses (eff. AY2025-26):

- Domestic: $600
- International: $800

Students must apply for funding before the conference or workshop takes place. This pre-approval and the reimbursable maximum rates are at the discretion of program and department leadership. As of July 2025, additional pre-approval from the supervising Dean or designee is also required. Please refer to the USC Economics – Doctoral – Financial Support page for instructions on how to approach such funding requests.

Given the growing number of programs and activities taking place outside of the United States, the Student Travel Abroad – Destination Restrictions and Crisis Management page outlines the responsibilities of students,

faculty and staff engaged in the process of organizing and managing student travel abroad. The policy also covers the decision-making process on appropriate destinations for University-related activities and provides guidance on how to respond to emergencies that might occur abroad.

This category of travel includes USC PhD in Economics students performing research, attending conferences, or any other University-related activity. Such students are required to work with the Associate Director to complete the Independent Student Travel Registration to ensure they are compliant with USC policy for Student Travel Abroad. All students are required to share information, sign travel release forms, and secure University-sponsored travel health insurance and International SOS coverage prior to travel through this process.

All students traveling on University-related activities must enroll in the USC-sponsored Overseas Travel Health Insurance Plan and International SOS coverage for the duration of their time abroad. The insurance enrollment process is overseen by Global Initiatives upon students' completion of pre-departure requirements.

For questions regarding Student Travel Abroad, please contact stabroad@usc.edu.
For questions regarding agreements, please contact sgireview@usc.edu.

Other Sources of Support

Additional 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

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

Child Care Fund

A childcare subsidy of up to $1,800 is available per semester for each child under the age of six. The subsidy is considered taxable income and is subject to reporting on the appropriate forms. The student is solely responsible and liable for any tax liability resulting from the subsidy provided to the student or their dependent.

If a student has a loan, particularly Direct Loans, the Child Care grants could reduce the student's loan eligibility. Students should contact the Financial Aid Office to confirm.

International students should note the following:

- To remain eligible for this grant, students must maintain valid F-1 or J-1 status, and their dependents must maintain F-2 or J-2 status.
- This grant cannot be used as proof of funding for bringing dependents (spouse and/or children) to the U.S. under F-2 or J-2 status. Information regarding proof of funding for dependents is available on the Office of International Services website.
- J-1 students who receive this grant must request a new DS-2019 with updated funding information by submitting a Financial Update Request through the Trojan International Portal. Once processed, a new DS-2019 will be issued.
- Students in F-1 status on post-completion Optional Practical Training (OPT) or STEM OPT Extension, as well as J-1 students on post-completion Academic Training, are not eligible to apply for or receive this grant.

Child Care Fund Eligibility Criteria
The student must be a graduate student worker in the union bargaining unit in the semester in which the provider expense was incurred. Applicants must furnish supporting documentation as reasonably requested by USC. Eligible childcare providers include:

- A licensed childcare center
- A licensed family childcare provider
- A licensed after-school program
- A daytime summer camp program
- An in-home provider with a Social Security or Tax I.D. number. An in-home provider cannot be a spouse, relative, child under age 19, or anyone who lives in the same household as the student. Nannies and nanny shares are covered if the caregiver has a valid Social Security number or Tax ID Number.

Funds are not available for overnight camp, team registration fees, extracurricular activities, or club sports. The program's primary intent must be to provide childcare while the parent is working. Summer programs can be considered a childcare program if they meet the requirements above.

Applications are processed in the order received. Applications will not be accepted or processed when funds for the academic year have been exhausted. More information is available on the Graduate School Website.

Short Term Hardship Grant

Short-term hardship grants are available to students with dependents. Grants are subject to a cap of $2,500 per graduate student worker per semester. Grants may not be used for expenses that are covered by another fund or account. The grant is taxable income and is therefore subject to taxation and reporting on the appropriate forms. The student is solely responsible and liable for any tax liability resulting from the grant.

Eligibility
The student must be a graduate student worker in the bargaining unit in the semester in which the provider expense was incurred. The student must have a dependent, and they must furnish supporting documentation as reasonably requested by USC.

Hardships may include, but are not limited to, events resulting from a sudden or unexpected illness, imminent loss of housing, loss of property due to natural disaster, or medical, dental, and vision expenditures not covered by any other source.

If the dependent is covered by a health insurance plan, unanticipated emergency or short-term out-of-pocket expenses are not covered by the insurance plan. If the dependent is not covered by a health insurance plan, unanticipated emergency or short-term out-of-pocket medical expenses incurred by the Graduate Student Worker.

Applications are processed in the order received. Applications will not be accepted or processed when funds for the academic year have been exhausted. More information is available on the Graduate School Website.

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

Collective Bargaining Agreement
Graduate students at USC are represented by the Graduate Student Workers Organizing Committee-UAW Local 872. All graduate students enrolled at USC who are employed as Teaching Assistants, Assistant Lecturers, Research Assistants, or internally-funded Fellows in STEM programs are considered part of the union. The Collective Bargaining Agreement is available on the Graduate School website.

Graduate Assistantships

Eligibility

To be eligible to serve as a Teaching Assistant (TA), Research Assistant (RA), or Graduate Assistant Lecturer (AL), students must:

- have been admitted to a graduate degree program with regular graduate standing
- be enrolled full-time
- be in good academic standing with a GPA of no lower than 3.0
- be verified by their home program to be making satisfactory academic progress toward the degree
- have met the university's standards for proficiency in the English language

The university requires TAs, RAs, and ALs to be enrolled in a minimum of 6 units every semester or in full-time equivalent courses such as GRSC 800abz or Dissertation 794.

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

Expected Effort
A graduate student's first responsibility is to their doctoral research and studies. For this reason, GA awards cannot exceed 20 hours per week for a 50% appointment or 10 hours per week for a 25% appointment, averaged over a semester. Students receiving a 50% GA appointment may not undertake employment or other time-consuming commitments during the academic year from mid-August through mid-May. Students receiving a 25% GA appointment during the academic year may be eligible for part-time, off-campus employment.

F-1 and J-1 International students with a 25% GA appointment may be eligible for part-time Curricular Practical Training (CPT), if they meet the CPT eligibility requirements, and if academic department signs off on the CPT request. The Vice Provost for Academic Programs reviews exceptions to this policy through the Graduate School's Petition system.

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.

Additional employment is not allowed 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 Associate Director 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 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 Programs Manager to solicit the Department's approval for the appointment. The Programs 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 Associate Director and student must be Cc'd.

Health Insurance & Health Center Access

The Engemann Student Health Center website provides information about the USC health insurance, on-campus medical services, student counseling services, and wellness. Students can also make appointments through the website. The Engemann Student Health Center is used primarily by students based at UPC.

The Eric Cohen Student Health Center website provides information about the USC health insurance, on-campus medical services, student counseling services, and wellness. Students can also make appointments through the website. The Eric Cohen Student Health Center is used primarily by students based at HSC.

Qualifying Examinations

The Qualifying Examination (often abbreviated as Q-Exam or QE) is a major milestone in the PhD process. is designed to assess a student's readiness to undertake independent research for their dissertation. Before taking the qualifying examination, the student must have met all of the university's and program's requirements for the PhD degree, except the dissertation. The student must have a GPA of at least 3.0 on all USC coursework available for graduate credit and the approval of their QE Committee to proceed to the exam. Successful completion of the QE is indicative of the student's completion of all required regular 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 Associate Director.

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 of Qualifying Exam Committee Form (often abbreviated as QE Committee Form) to the Department prior to scheduling the QE. The original blank QE Committee Form can be found on the USC Graduate School > Guidelines & Forms website. However, USC PhD in Economics students should use the DocuSign Powerform for their program-specific QE Committee Form, in the Program Advisement section of this PhD Handbook, to easily solicit e-signatures. The student need only enter the name

and email addresses of their QE Committee members to initiate the form. DocuSign will automatically route the QE Committee Form to the Associate Director to solicit the final signatures from the Department Chair and the Dean. Each student is responsible for submitting their QE Committee Form to the Associate Director 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 Associate Director of the Doctoral Program for assistance. Modifications made without the prior approval of the dean of the degree program are not recognized and may invalidate the examination.

A student may not change committee members after failing the QE the first time. The same faculty must reexamine the student on the same subject matter. If a faculty member is unable to serve on the committee, the Dean of the degree program must be notified in writing in advance of the rescheduled exam to approve the change. The faculty replacement must be approved by the dean of the degree program, and the student must file a change of committee form well in advance of the exam.

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.

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 Associate Director of the date and time of their QE at least two weeks in advance.

Determine the QE Modality & Location
The examinations must be scheduled when it is possible for all committee members, including the outside member, to participate. All QE Committee members may participate remotely.

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 Associate Director. A template of the memo is 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.

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 action items above pertaining to the QE preparation process, the Associate Director 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 Associate Director 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.

QE Outcomes
There are three possible results of a QE:

1. **Pass,** and proceed to candidacy based on a favorable vote by a majority of committee members.

2. **Fail,** with the option to retake either specific sections of the exam or the whole exam, at the discretion of a majority of the committee. The student should not be required to repeat parts of the qualifying examination passed on the first administration. The retaking of a failed qualifying examination or any portion of a qualifying exam must occur between one and six months from the date of the first examination. If not otherwise enrolled, the student must be enrolled in GRSC 800abz *Studies for the Qualifying Examination* in the term in which any portion of the exam is repeated.

3. **Fail,** resulting in dismissal from the program. If a majority of the committee concludes that the written portion of the exam is so weak that the oral portion cannot compensate for it, the student does not proceed to the oral portion, and the exam is failed. The committee may provide the option of a retake, but is not required to do so. If a majority of the committee determines that a retake is not warranted, the student will be dismissed from the program.

A student may not take the QE more than twice and must be appropriately enrolled at USC during the semester in which any such examination is taken or retaken. A student who fails the QE a second time will be dismissed from the degree program at the end of the semester in which the second examination was taken. No exceptions are permitted.

After the QE

QE Report
Upon the successful conclusion of the qualifying exam, the committee will certify on the QE Report that: (1) the exam was appropriately rigorous; (2) the student's performance on the exam was at the doctoral level; and (3) the entire qualifying examination process was fair and in keeping with USC's academic and ethical standards.

Once all members' signatures have been collected, the Associate Director 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.

Advancement to Candidacy
Graduate students are officially advanced to candidacy for the PhD degree when they have completed the residency requirement and passed the QE. Doctoral candidates will receive instructions from the Associate Director to register for Dissertation Courses (ECON-794).

Application for the PhD
After advancing to candidacy, students must contact the Associate Director to initiate an online degree check that will be transmitted to the Degree Progress Department. Degree Progress counselors will prepare a Degree Audit Report (STARS Report) listing any remaining requirements. Programs must apply all appropriate courses in the Student Information System for the degree to be conferred.

Tax Information

Taxable Income and Withholding

General tax information for PhD students is available on the Student Financial Services website. USC staff cannot provide tax advice. We strongly advise students to contact the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) or consult with a tax professional for tax-related questions.

International Student Considerations

International students may wish to consult the Office of International Services (OIS) website, which offers general information about tax exemptions, tax-related forms, and access to Sprintax, a tax preparation software. OIS cannot advise on tax-related issues. Students should consult with a qualified tax professional for individual assistance.

Graduate Students Supported by Fellowships

The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) provides information regarding the tax treatment of fellowship awards. The IRS also provides information regarding the 1098-T form. Some education-related items that are included in your fellowship may not be taxable, for example, tuition remission. Other items, such as living expenses including room and board, transportation, and entertainment, are generally considered taxable.

While receiving a fellowship, domestic students will not receive a W-2 form. However, according to the IRS, you must report all taxable amounts, whether or not you received a Form W-2. If you have taxable income from your fellowship, you may need to make estimated tax payments. For more information, see Pub. 505, Tax Withholding and Estimated Tax, and the IRS help on estimated taxes.

International students (non-resident aliens for tax purposes) on fellowship receive their stipends through University Payroll Services. The stipend may be treated as taxable income by the IRS. Therefore, the university may be obligated to withhold income taxes. The amount of this tax withholding depends on the individual's circumstances, including their total stipend and the status of the tax treaty between their home country and the United States. Tuition remission provided to an international student on fellowship is not taxable.

Graduate Students Supported by Graduate Assistantships

The stipends provided via the University Payroll Services to domestic and international students who are serving as TA's, RA's, and AL's are treated as taxable income by the Internal Revenue Service. Therefore, the university may be obligated to report the income and withhold income taxes. The amount of this tax withholding depends on the individual circumstances of the student, including the total stipend, the instructions provided by the student on Form W-4, and, if an international student, the status of the tax treaty between their home country and the United States, as well as Form 8233. Tuition remission provided to a TA, RA, or AL is not reportable or taxable.

Students Hired as Graduate Student Workers (Hourly)

The payment that domestic and international students receive as hourly graduate student workers is treated as taxable income by the Internal Revenue Service. The amount of this tax withholding depends upon the individual circumstances of the student, including the total amount paid per pay period, the instructions provided by the student on Form W-4, and, if an international student, the status of the tax treaty of their tax residence country and the completion of IRS Form 8233.