

Graduate Handbook:

**Guidelines for Master of
Science and PhD Students
in the Department of
Nutritional Sciences**

Welcome to the Department of Nutritional Sciences at the University of Connecticut.

This handbook is meant to be a supplement for, and not a replacement of, the Graduate School Catalog <http://catalog.grad.uconn.edu/>. The specifics outlined here are based on guidelines developed by the graduate faculty of Nutritional Sciences to help you through the graduate degree process. Ultimately, this is a guide to our graduate program; the requirements of the Graduate School Catalog and your individual advisory committee determine the final requirements for successful completion of the degree.

Graduate Program descriptions:

The Department offers **Master of Science (MS)** and **Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)** degrees in Nutritional Sciences. Requirements for completion of the MS are on pages 4-6 and for the PhD on pages 7-12.

Choosing a major advisor before joining the Nutritional Sciences Graduate Program:

A student **needs a major advisor** before being accepted into the Graduate Program; choice of a student's major advisor is reached by mutual consent between the student and the advisor at the time of admission to the program. Your major advisor will oversee the research project, writing your thesis/dissertation, and course selection and in consultation with you and your advisory committee.

Graduate faculty in the department

Christopher Blesso, PhD*, Rhonda Brownbill, PhD, RD, Ock Chun, PhD, MPH*, Maria Luz Fernandez, PhD*, Hedley Freake, PhD, Alison Kohan, PhD*, Sung Koo, PhD, Ji-Young Lee, PhD*, Yangchao Luo, PhD*, Amy Mobley, PhD, RD*, Stacey Mobley, PhD, RD, Young-Ki Park, PhD*, Michael Puglisi, PhD, RD*, Nancy Rodriguez, PhD, RD*

*Can serve as major advisors for PhD students

All faculty members can serve as major advisors for MS students

You can find specifics regarding research interests of the faculty in our Departmental web site <http://www.cag.uconn.edu/nutsci/nutsci/faculty.html>

Graduate Program advisory committee

The UConn Graduate Catalog states, "Degree programs are planned by the advisory committee after consultation with the student." Your input is very important in planning the degree program and graduate research. In practice, you should meet with your committee approximately 1 year into your program for MS and 1-2 years into your program for PhD, and once per year afterwards. In addition to consulting on appropriate course work, the advisory committee plays an important role in the design, execution, and management of your graduate thesis or Doctoral dissertation research. You should feel free to call upon members of your advisory committee for help at any time.

Forming an advisory committee:

Typically, the advisory committee will be formed at the end of your first year of study, at which time the Plan of Study should be filed.

- Masters' advisory committee composition: 3 faculty members with at least 2 from Nutritional Sciences Department
- Ph.D. advisory committee composition: at least 3 faculty members; 2 must be from Nutritional Sciences department, and 1 must be from outside of our department (either from another department at the University, or from outside the University).

The advisory committee members must be graduate faculty. Each committee member is selected in consultation with your major advisor on basis of the expertise they provide in your thesis/dissertation area. If a faculty member to be appointed is not yet on the Graduate Faculty or a special advisor from outside the University is required, the major advisor can request an appointment from the UConn Graduate School for this individual.

Change of major advisor

In almost all cases, students remain with the major advisor selected upon entry into the program. However, under some circumstances, a change in major advisor may become warranted. These would include the advisor leaving the University or becoming seriously ill for an extended period, a lack of funds available to support the student, the student changing research interests or other life circumstances. Usually, the student then identifies a faculty member who is willing to become the new major advisor. The graduate program committee will assist the student in finding a new project or advisor. Generally, reassignment of a student should take place within six weeks, in order to maintain graduate student status. When a new advisor is found, a "Notification of Change of Major Advisor" must be filed with the Graduate Records Office.

Changes in advisory committee members: These changes are entirely the decision of you and your major advisor. Additional details on the advisory systems are given in the Graduate School Catalog.

Graduate Program code of conduct

- **Policy against Discrimination, Harassment and Inappropriate Romantic Relationships**—Information is available at <http://policy.uconn.edu/?p=2884>.)
- **Sexual Assault Reporting Policy**—Information available at <http://sexualviolence.uconn.edu/>
- **Students with Disabilities**—Detailed information regarding the accommodations process is available at www.csd.uconn.edu.
- **Academic Integrity Statement**—The Nutritional Sciences Graduate Program expects all students to act in accordance with the Guidelines for Academic Integrity at the University of Connecticut. Additionally, consult UConn's guidelines for academic integrity and plagiarism: <http://community.uconn.edu/the-student-code/>

MASTER'S PROGRAM

Course requirements:

Pre-requisites: The pre-requisites for admission to the program are:

- a. Physiology
- b. Biochemistry
- c. Basic Nutrition

Students are sometimes admitted who do not meet one or two of the course requirements. In that event, students needs to make up the course deficits in the first semester and should not use these courses towards the Plan of Study.

There are 2 options for the Master of Science Program: **Plan A** (thesis option) and **plan B** (non-thesis option). For both options a minimum of 30 credits are required.

Required courses for both options: NUSC 5100, NUSC 5200, NUSC 5300, NUSC 5394, 3 credits of statistics, 1 credit of GRAD 5910 (Responsible Conduct in Research), and 3 additional graduate credits in the department of Nutritional Sciences.

For **plan A:** 9 credits of thesis research are required to complete the 30 credits; for **plan B:** 9 additional credits in course work are required to complete the 30 credits

Examinations:

Students earning the Master of Science degree are required to complete 2 examinations:

1. Part I is a written general knowledge examination.

Written Exam

The general knowledge exam is generally taken after the second or the third semester of study and is offered as needed. It is a **closed book exam**, which takes from two to four hours to complete. The major advisor must notify the graduate program coordinator of eligible students at least one month before the scheduled exam dates. Thus the responsibility for planning when this exam will be taken lies with both you and your major advisor. You **will not pass the exam** if there is any evidence that books, articles or class notes were used to answer the exam.

Type of questions: The examination contains two types of questions:

- **General nutrition questions:** The first part of the exam contains questions on general nutrition knowledge fundamental to all advanced degree programs in nutrition. For this section, you must demonstrate the theoretical and practical knowledge expected of our graduating students. You will be given ten questions from which seven must be answered. The questions are common to all examinations administered at that time and are drawn from a pool of questions submitted by the faculty. Copies of old exams are available from the graduate program coordinator for review. The graduate committee evaluates your performance on these questions.

- **Area of specialization questions:** The second part contains three questions developed by the advisory committee in your area of specialization, such as molecular nutrition, community nutrition, food science, nutritional biochemistry, etc. You must answer all three questions.

Criteria for Passing

Exams are graded and results are available within four weeks of the test date. 70% is the passing grade for the general knowledge section of the exam. All questions in the area of specialization section must be answered with a grade of 70% or better. The results are communicated through the major advisor to you and all issues related to **reexamination, if necessary, are under the direction of your advisory committee.** If you do not pass any section of the exam, your advisory committee will evaluate the most appropriate vehicle for correcting deficits. For the general knowledge section, the advisory committee usually recommends that you take additional undergraduate or graduate courses or develop a course of self-study, which will allow you to retake the exam at the next scheduled opportunity. If you do not pass the area of specialization, the advisory committee usually elects to reexamine you in a written format with the next exam or provide an oral or written exam within one month but not less than one week after grading of the original exam. Students retaking the general knowledge section do not have to retake the area of specialization section if they have already passed it. Failure of the general knowledge examination for the second time results in dismissal from the program.

2. Part II is an oral presentation and defense of the thesis research.

Oral defense of the thesis or project

Upon completion of the thesis project **and the approval of the entire advisory committee**, you may schedule your oral defense (which is equivalent to the oral exam). The presentation notice will then be posted in the department at least one week prior to the oral defense. Faculty and students in the Department should also be notified via email one week prior the exam date. This communication can be made by the major advisor, the graduate program coordinator or the departmental secretary.

The major advisor acts as the moderator for the presentation. The general format is a presentation of approximately 45 minutes, followed by an open question period and then a more intensive questioning by members of the advisory committee. You will then be asked to leave the room while deliberations are made among your committee members to determine two things: 1) whether you have passed the oral exam and 2) edits that are needed to have a final acceptable thesis.

If the Committee decides that you have passed the exam, all Committee members will sign the form that indicates that both the written and the oral exam have been passed.

The Committee also needs to sign the approval page of the thesis and this normally occurs after all edits and proposed modifications have been made by the student.

Checklist for Master of Science Degree (Completed in coordination with the major advisor).

It is usually assumed that a student who enters the program with all pre-requisites will complete the MS degree in two years.

First Year:

___ DESIGNATION OF AN ADVISORY COMMITTEE.

___ SUBMISSION AND APPROVAL OF A PLAN OF STUDY AFTER 18 CREDITS HAVE BEEN COMPLETED.

___ COMMITTEE APPROVAL OF A THESIS OR PROJECT TOPIC*

___ WRITTEN EXAMINATION

___ COMMITTEE APPROVAL OF COMPLETED THESIS OR PROJECT*

___ SCHEDULING OF FINAL ORAL EXAMINATION.

___ SUBMISSION OF FINAL EXAMINATION FORMS TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL.

___ SUBMISSION OF ELECTRONIC COPY OF THE THESIS TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL AND A BOUND COPY TO EACH MEMBER OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE*

*For Master's students in Plan A (thesis option) only

DOCTORAL PROGRAM

The PhD program is based on a research dissertation and consists of four major parts:

1. **Courses (Plan of Study):** 30 or more credits of advanced course work, beyond the baccalaureate or 15 credits beyond the Master of Science degree; these courses are selected with advisory committee's approval. A Plan of Study outlining the courses to be taken must be submitted to the Graduate School for approval no later than when 18 credits have been completed. Students are required to have a competent reading knowledge of at least one foreign language or at least six credits of advanced course work in a related or supporting area in addition to the credit requirements stated above.
2. **Departmental Seminar**
3. **General Pre-doctoral Exams.** Each student shall take a General Examination at or near the end of the course work program.
4. **Dissertation Proposal (formerly Prospectus).** Students have to file a Dissertation Proposal of the proposed research to the Graduate School. This proposal has to be approved and signed by all advisory committee members and by either the Program Coordinator or the Department Head. When a student has passed both the General Pre-doctoral Examination and has defended an approved Dissertation Proposal, they are advanced to doctoral candidacy status.
5. **Dissertation Defense.** Upon completion of the dissertation research and the writing of the dissertation, the candidate presents and defends the research before faculty and students.

1. Plan of Study

A Plan of Study must be filed by all graduate students (usually after the first year). In order to complete a Plan of Study, you must know your research area, select your advisory committee, and make an outline of your course work. Plan of Study forms are available on line or from the Graduate School. Approval must be obtained **prior to** the completion of the general examination.

Courses listed in the Plan of Study:

- 1) Should meet core requirements for the Nutritional Sciences graduate program: NUSC 5100, NUSC 5200, 5300, 2 credits of NUSC 5394, 6 credits of Statistics, GRAD 5910 Responsible Conduct of Research and a *minimum* of 6 additional credits of courses offered by the Nutritional Sciences department plus 15 credits of research for the dissertation (GRAD 6950).
- 2) Graduate courses offered by the Department of Nutritional Sciences: **NUSC 5100:** Concepts of Nutrition, **NUSC 5200:** Macronutrient Metabolism, **NUSC 5300:** Vitamins and Minerals, **NUSC 5312:** Assessment of Nutritional Status, **NUSC 5314:** Nutrition for Healthy Communities, **NUSC 5390:** Field Work in Community Nutrition, **NUSC 5398:** Special Topics in Nutrition, **NUSC 5394:** Seminar, **NUSC 5399:** Independent Study, **NUSC 5500:** Food Colloids and Nanotechnology, **NUSC 6311:** Regulation of Food Intake and Energy Balance. **NUSC 6313:** Nutrition and Gene Expression, **NUSC 6315:** Lipid Metabolism in Health and Disease, **NUSC 6317:** Nutrition Epidemiology, **NUSC 6319:** Research Design and Methods.
- 3) Should include courses drawn from other departments in the University

- 4) Should include six credits **either** for the Foreign Language or Related Area Requirement.
- 5) Should be consistent with the student's objectives and related to the field of nutrition, and
- 6) Should be selected with the approval of the advisory committee.

There are currently 2 courses that are offered as Special Topics:

1. Obesity Assessment, Prevention, and Treatment through the Lifecycle
2. Molecular Techniques and Instrumentation

2. Departmental Seminar

During the third or fourth semester of study, all PhD students must present a departmental seminar on a topic close to their area of research. Students should undertake a thorough review of the existing literature and present major findings on a specific topic. An example format that can be used is 1) give an introduction to the topic, 2) discuss the findings of two major papers (controversial data are encouraged) 3) summary and conclusions and 4) future research in this area. Inclusion of preliminary data from your dissertation or reference to your current work is not appropriate for this presentation.

It is your responsibility, in consultation with your major advisor, to schedule this seminar with the departmental seminar coordinator. The title of the seminar needs to be given to the coordinator at the beginning of the semester.

3 Pre-Doctoral Exams

The pre-doctoral exams have two components: 1) written and 2) oral. These examinations take place before the defense of the PhD prospectus. PhD students have to pass both exams to be considered PhD candidates. For both the oral and the written parts of this exam, 5 faculty members are required. Since the advisory committee of the students consists of 3-5 faculty members, the rest of the examination committee should be appointed by your major advisor in consultation with your advisory committee. It is preferred that the rest of the examination committee is composed of members from the Nutritional Sciences Department or from faculty who hold a joint appointment.

a. Written Exam

This examination is open-book, normally comprised of three questions to be answered over the period of several weeks of intensive reading and writing. The three questions will be created by the advisory committee members. The PhD qualifying examination will require the student to identify and integrate information from the literature.

Usually the first question is directly related to the student's research area (and comes from the major advisor), the second question is in a supporting area (provided by an advisory committee member), and the third question is in an area not directly related to the student's research (also provided by an advisory committee member). The student is given a fixed amount of time, between one to two weeks, to complete a question. The major advisor will provide a preliminary critique of the student's answer to the first question prior to the student receiving the second question.

Answers to the questions will be evaluated by no fewer than five faculty members. The advisory committee will evaluate all the answers and additional faculty readers will be asked to evaluate answers to make up the total of five faculty members reading the questions. The faculty is asked to complete their evaluation of the question within **two weeks** of receiving it. The final decision regarding the passing or failing of a question shall be made by the advisory committee, considering the comments of all readers.

The decision to pass you on the PhD general examination Part I will be based on all the questions. A student failing more than one question will be asked to leave the PhD Program. A general guideline for evaluation of answers is provided below:

Pass

Acceptable Answer

- a. There is an integrated analysis of the information presented
- b. The major point of the question is understood and addressed properly
- c. All of the major aspects of the question are covered
- d. Most of the important references are included
- e. The answer follows an orderly logical progression
- f. The writing is clear and concise.

Rewrite

Potentially Acceptable Answer

- a. The major point of the question is understood, and an attempt is made to address it
- b. One or two major areas, which should be addressed in the response, are not covered.
- c. Some significant references are not included
- d. The answer is flawed in its logical progression
- e. The answer does not include a well-integrated analysis of the topic
- f. The writing needs improvement

Fail

- a. The major point of the question is not understood and, therefore, not addressed
- b. The most appropriate references are not included.
- c. The answer does not follow an orderly, logical progression.
- d. There is no integration of the information presented.
- e. The answer is poorly written (unclear, poor sentence structure, poor spelling, etc.)

b. Oral Exam

The oral exam will be taken once you have passed the written exam. It is recommended that the oral examination takes place soon afterwards and within six months after you have finished the written exam. The examination committee as indicated above consists of five faculty members.

During the oral exam you will be asked questions that cover multiple areas of nutrient metabolism, physiology and other nutrition related topics that the advisory committee finds

pertinent. The exam lasts an average of 2 hours. All five members of the examination committee will ask questions and will vote at the end whether the student has: passed, conditionally passed (the student will have to do additional work in agreement with the examination committee), or failed.

If you fail the oral exam, you will have one more chance to retake this exam in the next six months. If you fail the oral exam a second time, you can no longer continue in the PhD program.

Once you have successfully passed both the written and oral exams, you may proceed to the defense of your PhD prospectus at the discretion of the major advisor and the examination committee.

Master of Science Degree in Transit

This Master's degree is awarded when a Ph.D. student wishes to be awarded a master's degree prior to completing their Ph.D Program. The Master's degree in Nutritional Sciences may be awarded to a PhD student who has already passed the written and oral pre-doctoral exams. This decision is generally made by the major advisor in consultation with the PhD candidate. The major advisor needs to request this in writing on the form "Report for the General Examination for the Doctoral Degree". The major advisor needs to write under "Comments" that the Master of Science degree should be awarded to this PhD candidate.

4. Dissertation Proposal

The dissertation proposal defense should be completed the semester after the completion of the written examination and normally no later than the end of the third year of full time study.

The oral proposal defense occurs after the proposal has been approved by five faculty members (including the student's Advisory Committee and reviewers when needed). The proposal defense is open to all faculty members and at least five must be present. The major advisor acts as the moderator for the defense. The general format is a presentation of a maximum of 45 minutes, followed by an open question period, and then a more intensive examination process restricted to the members of the graduate faculty. Students and faculty should allow two to three hours for this exam. It is expected that revisions and new perspectives will result from the examination. These revisions should not be construed as failure but simply as the process of science. You only fail the examination if in the opinion of the advisory committee, you do not meet the minimum requirements for a defensible proposal, outlined above, and do not demonstrate an independent understanding of the research during the oral defense. If you fail a second time, the advisory committee will ask you to resign from the doctoral program.

5. Dissertation Defense

The final examination (dissertation presentation) shall be oral and under the jurisdiction of the advisory committee. All content issues related to the dissertation must be resolved by

the committee before the presentation. Thus, a presentation date can only be scheduled when the dissertation is ready and **in its nearly final form**. You must give committee members 2 weeks to review the final draft of the dissertation and may not schedule a defense date until final approval is received from all members. To schedule a dissertation defense, you must complete the following:

- 1) Obtain written clearance from the graduate school that all requirements have been met
- 2) Schedule a room for the final defense and reserve audio-visual equipment as needed.
- 3) Send a draft copy of your dissertation to the Graduate School and to your advisory Committee **2 weeks prior** to the oral defense. The sending of this email indicates that your Committee has read and approved the draft copy.
- 4) Send official notification to the Graduate School at least one week before so that notice of the presentation can be made to the University community.
- 5) Provide an abstract and presentation notice in electronic form to the department 1 week before the defense. This announcement can be made by the major advisor, the graduate program coordinator or the secretary.

The procedure for moderation and criteria for passing the presentation are the same as with the prospectus defense. Immediately following the examination, the major advisor must discuss the results with you and send the official report on the examination to the Graduate Records Office.

Checklist for PhD Degree (Completed in coordination with Major Advisor).

- ___ SELECTION OF AN ADVISORY COMMITTEE.
- ___ PLAN OF STUDY (SUBMITTED AFTER COMPLETING 18 CREDITS).
- ___ DEPARTMENTAL SEMINAR
- ___ QUALIFYING WRITTEN EXAMINATION
- ___ QUALIFYING ORAL EXAMINATION
- ___ DISSERTATION PROPOSAL SUBMITTED TO ADVISORY COMMITTEE AND READERS AND EXTERNAL REVIEWER
- ___ DISSERTATION PROPOSAL DEFENSE
- ___ APPROVAL OF WRITTEN DISSERTATION BY COMMITTEE MEMBERS ELECTRONICALLY
- ___ SUBMISSION OF DISSERTATION DEFENSE ANNOUNCEMENT TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL.
- ___ DISSERTATION DEFENSE
- ___ FINAL CORRECTIONS OF DISSERTATION
- ___ APPLICATION FOR DEGREE
- ___ SUBMISSION OF ONE ELECTRONIC COPY OF THE DISSERTATION TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
- ___ COMPLETE PHD SURVEY ON LINE
- ___ BOUND COPY OF DISSERTATION TO EACH MEMBER OF THE COMMITTEE.