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

The following handbook has been carefully prepared by Maria Luz Fernandez, PhD, the Graduate Program Coordinator as a guide to provide assistance for the successful completion of your graduate program, Master’s or PhD.

This handbook is meant to be a supplement for and not a replacement for the Graduate School Catalog (http://catalog.grad.uconn.edu/). Thus, the student needs to carefully read and reference that document in addition to this one. The specifics outlined here are mostly the summations of the guidelines developed by the graduate faculty of Nutritional Sciences to help the student through the graduate degree process. The student must understand that the individual advisory committee has the sole responsibility on these matters, as long as procedures conform to the Graduate School Regulations outlined in the Graduate School Catalog. However, it is the expressed opinion of the Nutritional Sciences Faculty that adherence to the procedures outlined herein will ensure quality and encourage uniformity and fairness at all stages of the process.

Graduate Program Descriptions
The Department offers Master of Science and Doctor of Philosophy degrees in Nutritional Sciences. Students elect to emphasize one of three overlapping areas in human nutrition: Molecular Biology, Metabolism and Community Nutrition. Each emphasis area is interdisciplinary in approach and is supported by a broad range of local, national, and international collaborations. Collaborative programs for interdisciplinary research and study exist with other departments and university units including the Department of Kinesiology, the Division of Biological Sciences and the Biotechnology Center, the Medical Anthropology Program, The CHIP Center, the School of Pharmacy, the Departments of Animal Science, Pathobiology, and Agricultural and Resource Economics in CANR and the University of Connecticut Health Center at Farmington, as well as area hospitals.

The Master’s program usually requires a thesis and the PhD program a dissertation. In addition, the completion of a core set of graduate courses and appropriate examinations are required for both Masters’ and Doctorate programs.

Choice of a student’s major advisor is reached by mutual consent between the student and the advisor generally at the time of admission to the program and should be made with careful consideration. A student needs to have a major advisor before being accepted into the Graduate Program. The student and major advisor will determine an appropriate research project, in consultation with the other members of the student’s advisory committee. The major advisor will advise on the performance of the research project. It is expected that the student will develop independence in the design and execution of the project.
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 can serve as major advisors for MS students

You can find specifics regarding research interests of the faculty in our Departmental website.

The Advisory System
The advisory committee is composed of three faculty members for Masters’ students and at least three faculty members for PhD. students. Two of those faculty members must be from the Department or field of study. The advisory committee members must be graduate faculty. It is Department policy that one of the PhD. Committee members should be from outside the Department (either from another department at the University, or from outside the University). Each committee member should be carefully selected based on their particular expertise. 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 must request an appointment from the Graduate School for this individual. A short explanatory memo and a vita are sufficient. Typically, the advisory committee will be formed at the end of the student’s first year of study, at which time the Plan of Study should be filed. For the Ph.D. student, the advisory committee is supplemented with additional faculty for a total of at least five, to constitute the committee for administering the general exam.

The graduate catalog states “degree programs are planned by the advisory committee after consultation with the student”. In practice, the student’s input is very important in planning the degree program. In addition to consulting on appropriate course work, the advisory committee should play an important role in the design and execution of the student’s research and in overseeing the writing of the Master’s thesis or Doctoral dissertation. In order to fully use the committee’s skills, the student and committee should consult frequently. The student should feel free to call upon members of his/her advisory committee for help at any time. Sometimes it may also be necessary to consult others, outside the advisory committee.
Change of 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, 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 make every effort to 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. Advisory Committee Members: Changes in advisory committee membership are entirely the decision of the major advisor and student. Additional details on the advisory systems are given in the Graduate School Catalog.

Plagiarism
Plagiarism appears to be a more common problem these days among graduate students. In order to avoid this situation, students need to understand the meaning of plagiarism plus the consequences a student has to face when plagiarism has been committed. Consequences and disciplinary actions can be found in the Graduate School Student’s catalog.

Definition: Plagiarism is defined in dictionaries as the "wrongful appropriation," "close imitation," or "purloining and publication" of another author’s "language, thoughts, feelings, ideas, or expressions," and the representation of them as one's own original work.

There are essentially two types of plagiarism: intentional and unintentional. Intentional plagiarism can be obvious, such as turning in someone else's work as your own or copying text verbatim without citing the source. In these cases the writer knowingly tries to take the easy way out. There may be times, however, when you think you’re using source material appropriately but you are actually plagiarizing without this being your intention. While this form of academic dishonesty is unintentional, it is still unacceptable and will result in disciplinary action. When you are unsure regarding plagiarism while doing your written exams or preparing a term paper, please talk to your major advisor or the graduate program coordinator to clarify these issues.

MASTER’S PROGRAM

Courses
Pre-requisites: The pre-requisites for admission to the program are Physiology, Biochemistry and 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’s Program: Plan A (thesis option) and plan B (no thesis option). All MS students are required to take a minimum of 30 credits.
Core Courses: For master’s students, 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 constitute the core requirements. A minimum of 21 course credits is required for the thesis option, in addition to 9 thesis credits.

Examinations
Students earning the Master of Science degree are required to complete an examination process that consists of two parts. Part I is a written general knowledge examination. Part II is an oral presentation and defense of the thesis research.

Written General Knowledge Exam
The general knowledge exam is generally taken after the second or the third semester of study and is offered on the Friday before classes start in January and on the third Friday of May. It is a closed book exam that usually takes from two to four hours to complete. The major advisor must notify the graduate committee 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 the student and the major advisor. Students 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. The expectation for this section is that the student demonstrates the theoretical and practical knowledge expected of our graduating seniors. The student is given ten questions from which seven must be answered. The questions are common to all examinations administered 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 program coordinator and the other members of the graduate committee evaluate the student’s performance on these questions.

Area of Specialization Questions: The second part contains three questions developed by the advisory committee in the student’s area of specialization, such as molecular biology, community nutrition, food science, nutritional biochemistry, etc. The student must answer all of these questions.

Criteria for Passing
Exams are graded and results 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 the student and all issues related to reexamination, if necessary, is under the direction of the student’s advisory committee. If the student does not pass any section of the exam, the student’s advisory
committee will evaluate the most appropriate vehicle for correcting deficits. For the general knowledge section, the advisory committee usually recommends that the student take additional undergraduate or graduate courses or develop a course of self-study, which will allow the student to retake the exam at the next scheduled opportunity. If the student does not pass the area of specialization, the advisory committee usually elects to reexamine the student 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.

**Oral Defense of the Thesis or Project**

Upon completion of the Thesis project and the approval of the entire advisory committee, a student may schedule his/her oral defense. The presentation notice will then be posted in the department at least one week before the oral exam, sent to all graduate faculty, and graduate students. Seven days before the scheduled defense, a final copy of the thesis or project must be available for review by the graduate faculty. If the thesis or project is not available, the major advisor must cancel the presentation.

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 faculty, and finally, the advisory committee. The student is then asked to leave the room while a decision on the acceptance of the thesis or project is made and also regarding the knowledge of the student. The committee has several choices

**Pass:** The thesis or project as written is entirely acceptable. This decision must be unanimous. All forms are signed by the major advisor and associate members of the committee.

**Revisions:** Verification of slight revisions is left to the major advisor and no further consultation with the advisory committee is necessary. All forms are signed by associate members and by the major advisor when revisions are made. If more thorough revisions are needed, all committee members need revise the thesis before they sign the forms.

**Deferral:** Defense of some part of the thesis is necessary. This defense is usually done only with the advisory committee.
Checklist for Master’s Degree (Completed in coordination with the major advisor).

It is usually assumed that a student who enters the program with all pre-requisites completed 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

Second Year:
___GENERAL KNOWLEDGE 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.
DOCTORAL PROGRAM
The Ph.D. program is based on a research dissertation and consists of four major parts:

1. **Plan of Study** 30 or more credits of advanced course work, beyond the baccalaureate or at least 15 credits beyond the Master’s degree selected with Advisory Committee approval. A Plan of Study outlining the courses to be taken must be submitted to the Executive Committee of the Graduate School for approval after 18 credits are completed. Students are required to have a competent reading knowledge of at least one foreign language or at least six credits of advanced committee course work in a related or supporting area in addition to the credit requirement 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 graduate committee members, has to be approved by an external evaluator and needs to be signed by the Department Head. When a student has passed both the General Preliminary Examination and has defended an approved Dissertation Proposal, they are advanced to doctoral candidacy status.

5. **Dissertation Defense.** Upon completion of the dissertation research 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, to be filled out in triplicate, 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 6313:** Nutrition and Gene Expression, **NUSC 6315** Lipid Metabolism in Health and Disease, **NUSC 6317** Nutrition Epidemiology.

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 5 courses that are offered as Special Topics *Inflammation, Diets and Chronic Disease, Regulation of Food Intake and Energy, Nanotechnology for Food, Nutrition and Health, Obesity Assessment, Prevention and treatment through the Lifecycle. Molecular Techniques and Instrumentation.*

**The Foreign Language**
Competent reading knowledge of a foreign language relevant to the area of study is required. For a special language to be considered appropriate, a significant body of literature in the field of nutritional sciences should be written in this language. One of several methods can be used to establish evidence of reading competence, including an exam or six credits of study. Refer to the Graduate School Catalog for complete descriptions of the methods used to establish evidence of reading competence in an approved language. Foreign students whose first language is not English will often meet this language requirement. Consult the graduate catalog for details on which language is accepted and meets the requirement.

**Related or Supporting Area of Study**
In lieu of the language requirement, six credits (minimum) of advanced work in a related or supporting area may be completed. The selected courses are to comprise a coherent unit of advanced work outside the nutrition field, and typically outside the Department. These courses are to be approved by the Advisory Committee as part of the Plan of Study. Ordinarily, the courses should be taken at the University of Connecticut.

**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 take this presentation seriously by doing a thorough review of the existing literature and present major findings on a specific topic. One example format that can be used is 1) give an introduction of 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 the student’s responsibility, in consultation with the major advisor, to schedule this seminar with the departmental seminar coordinator, currently **Dr. Ock Chun.** Dates are assigned in the summer of each year for the following academic year. The title of the seminar needs to be given to the coordinator at least two weeks before the scheduled time. Under ordinary circumstances a maximum of one student seminar per month should be scheduled. If all dates are taken and there are still students who need to schedule a seminar, additional dates will be added.

**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 and have the prospectus approved 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 the major advisor in consultation with the student’s 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 a written open-book examination and is comprised of a *minimum* of three questions. Before initiating the examination, the advisory committee will meet and agree on the general areas to be examined. The advisor then will inform the student of the results of the committee’s meeting and the guidelines to be followed during the examination. The Ph.D. qualifying examination will require the student to identify and integrate information from the literature. The student must understand the importance of citing sources of information and ideas taken from the literature. Plagiarism of the literature is unacceptable and will result in failing the question and could lead to dismissal from the program.

All the questions in Part I of the Qualifying Examination do not have to be formulated before the first question is given to the student. Each question, however, must be reviewed and agreed upon by all members of the student’s advisory committee. Usually one question is directly related to the student’s research area, a second question is in a supporting area, and the third question is in an area not directly related to the student’s research. The student is given a fixed amount of time, usually one week, 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 questions in their areas of expertise. 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. If the answer to the original question is not satisfactory, the student may be asked by the examining committee to rewrite the question or respond to an additional question. The student is allowed only one rewrite or response to an additional question to secure a pass on the original question.

The decision to pass the student on the Ph.D. 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:

**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.)

**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.

**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.

**b. Oral Exam**

The oral exam will be taken after the student has passed the written exam. It is recommended that the oral examination takes place soon afterwards and in a period of time no longer than 6 months after the student has finished the written exam. The examination committee as indicated above consists of 5 faculty members.

During the oral exam, the student 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 should not last more than 2 hours. All 5 members of the examination committee will ask questions and will vote at the end whether the student has: 1) passed 2) conditionally passed (the student will have to do additional work in agreement with the examination committee) or 3) failed.

If the student fails the oral exam, he/she will have one more chance to pass this exam in the next 6 months. If a student fails the oral exam a second time, he/she no longer can continue in the PhD program.

Once the student has successfully passed both the written and oral exams, he/she may proceed to the defense of his/her PhD prospectus at the discretion of the major advisor and the examination committee.
4. **Dissertation Proposal**

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

Criteria for Proposals:

**Defendable proposal**

a. The proposal describes reasonable hypothesis(es), an experimental design and methods which are appropriate, and from which rational conclusions can be drawn.
b. There is adequate integration of the research objectives with information present in the literature on the subject.
c. The prospectus is focused, organized, and logical.
d. The writing is clear and concise.

**Unacceptable proposal**

a. There is a problem with either the hypothesis(es) (e.g. not testable) experimental design, methods, or conclusions to be drawn.
b. There is poor understanding of the research area in which the individual project is based.
c. The most appropriate references are not included.
d. There is no integration of the research objectives with information present in the literature.
e. The proposal is not focused, is poorly organized and does not follow a logical progression.
f. The proposal is poorly written (unclear, poor spelling, poor sentence structure, etc.)

**Fail**

a. The student cannot justify the research project based on its scientific merit.
b. There is a poor understanding of the research area in which the individual project is based.
c. There is an inability to integrate the research objectives with the literature on the subject.
d. The student does not recognize the limitations of the experimental approach and methods to be used in the proposed study.

The final approved prospectus by the students’ advisory committee is then sent to an external reviewer for evaluation. A special form obtained from the Graduate Records Office is attached to the front of the prospectus. All members of the advisory committee must sign this form. The proposal must be defended at least six months prior to filing the dissertation with the Graduate Records Office.

The oral proposal defense occurs after the proposal has been approved by an external reviewer and by all 5 faculty members (including the student’s Advisory Committee and the readers). 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, and finally to the advisory committee. Students and faculty should allow between 2 to 3 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. The student only fails the examination if in the opinion of the advisory committee, he or she, does not meet the minimum requirements for a defendable proposal, outlined above, and does not demonstrate an independent understanding of the research during the oral defense. If the student fails a second time, the advisory committee will ask the student to resign from the doctoral program.

5. Dissertation Defense

As described in the graduate catalogue, the final examination (dissertation presentation) shall be oral and under the jurisdiction of the advisory committee. In the Department of Nutritional Sciences, this phase is a celebration of the accomplishments of the student and the research team they work with. It is usually a very professional presentation of the work and is not meant to be another rigorous exam. All content issues related to the dissertation must be resolved by the committee before the presentation. Expectations of the student by the committee after the presentation should only be of an editorial nature. Thus, a presentation date can only be scheduled when the dissertation is ready and in its final form, i.e. the dissertation must have been read and approved completely by the entire advisory committee and all required changes except for editorial changes and reference verification made and reviewed. The student must give committee members three weeks to review each draft of the dissertation and is cautioned not to pressure committee members to schedule a defense date until final approval is received from all members. To schedule a dissertation defense, the student must complete the following three weeks before the proposed date:

1) Obtain written clearance from the graduate school that all requirements have been met.
2) Schedule a room for final defense and reserve audio-visual equipment needed.
3) With major advisor, complete the required scheduling forms from the Graduate School (these forms require the signatures of all committee members, so plan accordingly).
4) Deliver a signed copy of the form to the Graduate School and the UCONN Advance Office so that the notice of the presentation can be made to the University community, and provide and abstract and presentation notice in typed and electronic form.

If all forms are in order, the notice of the presentation will be distributed both electronically and in print and posted on the Department’s website.

One week before the scheduled presentation, a copy of the completed dissertation should be placed in the main office. 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 the student 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 TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, PLUS DO THE PHD SURVEY ON LINE

-BOUND COPY TO EACH MEMBER OF THE COMMITTEE.