



PhD Handbook  
Regional Planning  
2010-2011

## Coursework and Timing

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General steps and minimum/recommended timing of RP PhD Program:

Coursework:	2 -- 3 semesters
Proposal drafting and reading for comprehensive exams:	1 semester
Take comprehensive exams, final proposal approval:	1 semester (can be combined with proposal drafting semester above)
Dissertation research and writing:	1.5 – 3 calendar years

General time to complete: for very focused students who have moderate assistantship obligations, three to four years is quite feasible. Students who must work more, have more trouble focusing their research, or experience life transitions during their studies may take more like 6 years. The total university-allotted time to complete the degree (known as the Statute of Limitations) is four calendar years for those with a Master's degree in planning, and six years for those with degrees in other fields. Extensions to this may be granted if the student is making clear academic progress, but requests for more than one extension will require clear demonstration of unusual challenges and a feasible plan for quick completion.

The University requires all doctoral candidates to have a minimum of one year of full-time residence (two consecutive semesters); after that students may chose to go part-time, but this does not change the statute of limitations described above. A typical full time course-load tends to be around 9 credits for students who are also working as TAs or RAs. Note also that dissertation credits (18 required) can be taken at any point during the coursework to bring a student's total credits up to 16 maximum per spring or summer semester (without an overload).

Students should establish a record of strong research methods. Those undertaking a newer research approach should take two courses in that method, those building on existing expertise at least one. Committee members and the GPD are available to advise on appropriate courses.

Preparation for comprehensive exams can coincide with the proposal drafting where the research plan is very clear early on. For almost all students, there is significant overlap and iteration in the proposal development and the preparations for the comprehensive exams.

Students take a total of 60 credits. Of these, 12 will be waived for those with a master's degree from a related but non-PAB accredited institution. 17 credits will be waived for those with a PAB accredited master's degree. Students register for 18 credits of dissertation coursework, which is for independent work on their research. Thus, most students will take 25 to 30 active course credits.

Students who anticipated a career in academics may choose to access optional programs through the Center for Teaching or enroll in a course in pedagogy (noted below) to develop appropriate teaching skills.

**Required courses** are as follows.

Required courses	Recommended Timing
RP 651 – Planning History and Theory	Fall, first year
RP 891 – Seminar in Advanced Planning Theory	Spring, first year
RP 691F – Research Methods	Spring, first or second year
RP 892D – PhD workshop (1 credit)	any semester
3 Elective courses with RP designation	various semesters
1 or 2 courses in advanced methods	Spring, first year or Fall, 2 <sup>nd</sup> year
RP 899 – Dissertation credits (18 credits)	Spread across semesters
Recommended: EDUC595K: Introduction to College Teaching.	

Students may wish to explore the various certificate programs the University offers. These include certificates in Public History, Feminist Studies, and Latin America, among others. The certificate courses can be used to fill non-RP electives.

### **Roles of the Student, GPD, Comprehensive Exam Committee, and Dissertation Committee**

PhD studies work best for students who are self-directed in their learning and motivated to research and write. Much of initiative for meetings, topics, funding, etc., will need to come from the students. The faculty are responsible for mentoring the students with whom they have an advising relationship, and generally keep an open door for conversations with PhDs about research or other program issues.

The student should at the outset of their studies establish strong relationships with their likely dissertation advisors by whenever possible taking their courses. Initial advising will be done by the Graduate Program Director (GPD). Over time, advising responsibilities will shift from the GPD to the examining and then the dissertation committees, but the GPD is available to discuss issues wherever the student is in their matriculation. Generally:

- During coursework: the GPD will identify the minimum course requirements students must achieve. Selection of courses outside the PhD core, and particularly courses the student anticipates will fulfill methods requirements, should be undertaken in concert with the advice of both the GPD and the likely dissertation chair.
- Comprehensive exams: Prior to beginning the comprehensive exams, the student prepares a list of courses completed and grades achieved on the attached form,

- Dissertation research: the dissertation chair with advice from other committee members is the student's primary advisor regarding content and method of the dissertation. The committee will indicate to the student when they think the student is ready to schedule their oral dissertation defense. The student will coordinate the time for the oral defense with the committee and the GPD. Those in attendance at the defense include the committee, any other faculty who wish to attend, and friends of the student, but only the committee votes on whether the student has passed.
- The student should check with university requirements regarding forms, timing, statute of limitations, etc. For instance, the final approved proposal must have the signature of all committee members as well as the GPD, and must be officially filed with the Graduate School.

The Comprehensive Exam committee: This includes three faculty members, which must include two members from the LARP department. Examinations in planning theory & history must be by an appointed RP faculty. Almost always, the anticipated chair of the dissertation will be among the comprehensive examiners, but otherwise members can be on the exams but not on the dissertation, and vice versa. It is often most efficient, however, for the comprehensive exam committee and the dissertation committee to be the same.

The Dissertation Committee: Dissertation committees consist of a minimum of three members, with the chair and one other member coming from LARP faculty who are appointed to the graduate college, plus a member from outside the department. A dissertation supervisor is generally identified by the end of the first semester in residence, and a committee by the end of the second or third semester. One committee member, preferably the chair, must be an appointed member of the Regional Planning faculty. Committee members are formally appointed by the Dean of the Graduate School after submission of an acceptable research proposal, generally in the fourth semester.

### **Comprehensive Exams**

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During their last semester of coursework as they plan their exams, the student should make an appointment with the GPD to review the list of courses taken (see course record below) so that the GPD confirms that all coursework requirements have been met.

Students must take three comprehensive field exams at the conclusion of their coursework, prior to attaining the 'doctoral candidate' all-but-dissertation status. The three areas are:

- Planning Theory and History: this exam must be given by an appointed member of the RP faculty
- Substantive Area: the primary area of research
- Method: philosophical as well as pragmatic concerns regarding the research approach.

The general focus area of each exam is determined by the student and the examiner together, but in all cases must be demonstrably relevant to the central concerns of the field of urban and regional planning. Thus, the examination answers must include reference to core planning literature, and should explore the connections between the typical fields of planning and the topic at hand.

Prior to approval to sit for their exams, the students develop reading lists for the three areas that reflect their particular interests and research plans. The examining faculty member should approve the list prior to giving permission to begin the exams, but the examiner's questions may still require that the student go beyond the readings in the list.

Also prior to the undertaking comprehensive examinations, the student develops a draft dissertation proposal that is close to what they expect their final proposal to be. The committee must be satisfied that the draft is sufficiently developed to provide meaningful guidance on the topics of the examinations, and a relatively speedy oral proposal defense after the examinations.

The exact format of the comprehensive exam is determined collaboratively by the student and each examiner, and the committee as a whole if relevant, and approved by the GPD. Two major formats are typical:

- The single-day, in-class exam where the student brings only their notes--no original texts--and answers the questions to the best of their memory of the literature in relatively short essays completed during the exam hours. Or,
- The take-home exams, which may stretch across three weeks. In this format the student receives her/his questions usually on a Monday, and returns a completed essay either three or five days later.

Expectations regarding the length and polish of the exam answers will naturally vary based on the type of exam taken, but in all cases the answers must demonstrate mastery of the literature in the topic, the ability to think originally and critically about the field, and the ability to effectively organize and communicate those findings.

**Oral examination:** Shortly after completion of the written exams, the student must submit a final dissertation proposal to their committee. The student then takes the oral examination in which examining committee members question the student on any remaining issues not well covered in the written exams, as well as any other questions the committee may have for the student. It is at this point that the examination committee

determines whether the student has passed, failed, or needs to revise any portion of their examinations. Student may pass, fail, or be asked to undertake revisions to their written or oral work before a second defense. At a second defense, they will either pass or fail. Committees may choose to combine the dissertation defense with the comprehensive oral examination, or hold them separately. If they are combined, all members of the examination as well as of the dissertation committee must attend the defense.

## **Dissertation Process**

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**Dissertation Proposals:** Prior to undertaking their comprehensive exams, the student will have prepared a draft dissertation proposal. The final dissertation proposal should be completed within one to three months after the passing the oral examination. The proposal must be approved by the committee and the GPD, with a copy sent to the Graduate School, and must be completed at least seven months prior to the dissertation defense.

The dissertation proposal can be thought of as a ‘hand shake’ contract between the committee and the student, in which the student identifies what steps she/he will take to achieve the specified goals. Significant movement by the student off the approved proposal should be very carefully discussed by the committee and approved; significant variances between the process and content identified in the proposal and the final dissertation that have not been approved by the committee can significantly slow the student’s graduation. Similarly, if a committee member requests significant work beyond that identified in the proposal, the committee as a whole should carefully discuss the need for the change and its appropriate form. Proposals must be of a sufficient length and specificity that the committee is very clear regarding what the student intends to do. A typical table of contents for a proposal is attached, but proposals will vary in style to meet the needs of the research.

Students must undertake a public defense of the dissertation proposal. As noted above, this can be combined with the comprehensive examination defense or held separately—the student’s committee will decide.

## **Dissertation**

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The rules and regulations of the Graduate School will govern the format and procedures for the dissertation. Dissertations must represent a substantial contribution to new knowledge in the field of urban and regional planning. While some dissertations may include policy recommendations for a case study site, all dissertations must result in generalizable knowledge that will inform future scholarship in that general area. Further, all dissertations must be based on an appropriate and explicitly identified theoretical foundation or interpretive paradigm. The best dissertations will likely provide both empirical knowledge and also contribute to better theory or models.

Generally, there are two types of acceptable dissertations:

- Traditional single-topic dissertation: this is generally a book-length investigation of a particular research question.

- One field, multiple investigations: in this model the student selects a general area of inquiry, and then undertakes usually three different investigations into important research questions in that field. These must be substantially different from one another, so that for instance data sets at different scales are used; or one investigation is theoretical, two are empirical regarding different but related phenomena; or different research questions are posed at three different sites with substantial data for each. In all cases, the different investigations must be closely linked to form a coherent intellectual whole. This wholeness is demonstrated by a shared introductory chapter that clearly and broadly places the investigations into the existing scholarship on the general topic, and a concluding chapter that identifies the intersecting findings of the investigations and their importance to policy or scholarship. The chapters within the body of the document should stand each on their own as coherent articles including literature review, methods, and findings, in a format that would be readily submittable to a scholarly planning or related journal. When students submit these to journals, it is acceptable for there other authors who were committee members, but the student's name should be first. This should be reflectively of the distribution of work, with the majority of the ideas and work coming from the student, and direction and editing coming from the faculty members.

In all cases, the content of the dissertation should be a result of new research and theory building undertaken during doctoral studies in the program.

**Dissertation Defense:** Once the committee chair believes that the student has rigorously and effectively completed the research outlined in the dissertation proposal, she or he will give permission for the student to schedule a defense of the dissertation. The GPD will be consulted regarding scheduling the defense, and will likely attend it.

- The defense is a public presentation, and the student must advertise the time and place of it one month in advance, and fill in forms for the Graduate School; see the current Graduate School requirements for details.

The student gives a presentation of the key questions, methods and findings of the dissertation, and answer questions that the committee poses regarding the research. Time allowing, the committee may allow the doctoral candidate to take questions from the audience. After the defense and the questions and answers, the committee will meet to determine what further work is required to achieve a fully acceptable, preferably excellent, dissertation. Extremely rarely, a student could fail the defense; very rarely are students told that the dissertation is ready for signing. Typically, committee members identify a set of revisions that are needed, and sign their approval subject to those revisions.

After the defense, the student completes the revisions, achieves signatures, and turns in the dissertation to the Graduate College. Note that formatting requirements of the graduate college reign, so it is best to follow these format guidelines from the start. Once the graduate school has accepted the dissertation and all fees etc. are paid, the student is ready to graduate. All committee members should be given bound copies of the final approved dissertation, and the department also gets a bound hardback copy.

Course Record – PhD Regional Planning

\* To be turned into GPD prior to Scheduling Comps!

Name	Matriculation and Statute of Limitations dates
Total credits:	60
Dissertation credits:	18
Advance standing: <sup>1</sup>	_____
Total required credits from courses:	
Previous degree:	

Required courses	Recommended Timing
RP 651 – Planning History and Theory	Fall, first year
RP 891 – Seminar in Advanced Planning Theory	Spring, first year
RP 691F – Research Methods	Spring, first or second year
RP 892D – PhD workshop (1 credit)	any semester
3 Elective courses in RP	various semesters
1 or 2 courses in advanced methods	Spring, first year or Fall, 2 <sup>nd</sup> year

Fall 1 <sup>st</sup> Year	Credits
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

<sup>1</sup> Maximum 17 for PAB degree, 12 for other majors/non-accredited programs

Spring 1<sup>st</sup> Year

Credits

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Fall 2nd Year

Credits

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Spring 2nd Year

Credits

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Total Course Credits:

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Notes:

## Typical Proposal and Dissertation Table of Contents: One-topic Dissertation

Note that the proposal and dissertation tend to follow a similar pattern, with the proposal being shorter. Chapters can change, arrangement can change, but dissertation must include these elements.

- I. Introduction
  - a. Overview of research problem in connection to existing literature
  - b. Brief explanation of case study or data sets
  - c. Brief explanation of methods to be used
  - d. Brief explanation of contribution the dissertation will make to new knowledge
- II. Literature Review and Research Question
  - a. Describes the major literature(s) within which the dissertation operates
    - i. Theoretical frame
    - ii. Substantive literature
  - b. Explains where there are gaps the dissertation will address
  - c. Justifies approach taken in rest of the dissertation
  - d. Full statement of Research Question/objectives
- III. Research Method
  - a. Philosophical/procedural issues that method must address, based on literature in the field
  - b. Steps (to be) taken, data to be used
  - c. How results will be analyzed into findings
  - d. Limitations of study
  - e. Case study description (may instead go in Ch II or IV)
- IV. Findings
  - a. Will likely include both empirical findings from research, and reflections on how these findings change/improve the existing theory within which the dissertation worked
- V. Conclusions/Contributions to Knowledge
  - a. You may be able to be more speculative/policy oriented in this chapter, depending on the topic and your committee
  - b. Likely will also indicate directions for research in the future
- VI. Sources/Bibliography
- VII. Appendices – lengthy data reports, matrices used for analysis, etc.

## Typical Proposal and Dissertation Table of Contents: Multi-topic Dissertation

- VIII. Introduction
  - a. Overview of research problem in connection to existing literature
  - b. Explanation of how chapters/articles below fit together
  - c. Brief explanation of contribution the dissertation will make to new knowledge
- IX. Literature Review and Research Question
  - a. Describes the major literature(s) within which the dissertation operates
    - i. Theoretical frame
    - ii. Substantive literature
      - note that while you will also present literature in each of the articles, it will be helpful to do a broader review here that places all the next articles into context and demonstrates their connections
  - b. Explains where there are gaps the dissertation will address
  - c. Justifies approach taken in rest of the dissertation
  - d. Full statement of Research Question/objectives
- X. Article 1
  - a. Research Question
  - b. Literature Review
  - c. Research Method
  - d. Findings
  - e. Conclusions/Contributions to Knowledge
  - f. Sources/Bibliography
- XI. Article 2
  - a. Research Question
  - b. Literature Review
  - c. Research Method
  - d. Findings
  - e. Conclusions/Contributions to Knowledge
  - f. Sources/Bibliography
- XII. Article 3
  - a. Research Question
  - b. Literature Review
  - c. Research Method
  - d. Findings
  - e. Conclusions/Contributions to Knowledge
  - f. Sources/Bibliography
- XIII. Summary
  - a. how three articles fit together
  - b. their contributions to knowledge
  - c. future directions
- XIV. Appendices – lengthy data reports, matrices used for analysis, etc.