

# Ph.D. Program Handbook



School of International Service  
American University

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## Introduction

This publication serves as a comprehensive resource for students and faculty. The PhD Program Handbook delineates the policies, and procedures for earning a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in International Relations at American University's School of International Service (SIS). PhD students and faculty should refer to this Handbook for answers to questions they might have regarding PhD degree requirements and for information regarding SIS PhD Program procedures and practices.

[\*American University Graduate Academic Regulations\*](#) and the [\*American University Catalogue\*](#) establish the framework for this Handbook. American University regulations take precedence over the SIS PhD Program Handbook.

The information in this document is subject to change. If [\*American University Graduate Academic Regulations\*](#), the [\*American University Catalogue\*](#), or other American University or SIS documents and procedures change in ways that affect the SIS PhD Program Handbook, the University documents and procedures immediately supersede this Handbook. If there are changes to the SIS PhD program, the Handbook will be updated to reflect the new procedures. The Director of Doctoral Studies also reserves the right to make minor changes to the Handbook in order to make the description of existing procedures and practices clearer or to eliminate errors in the Handbook text.

The most recent version of the Handbook supersedes all previous versions. The SIS PhD website always has the most recent version of the SIS PhD Program Handbook, which can be found at [\*SIS PhD Program Details\*](#).

Please refer any questions, comments, or suggestions to the Director of Doctoral Studies or the Academic Advisor for the PhD program.

## Courses & Requirements

Students must complete a total of 39 credits, pass two comprehensive exams, demonstrate research competency in a modern foreign language, and successfully defend a dissertation in order to satisfy the program's requirements. Of the 39 credits, 27 are required core courses. The remaining 12 credits are comprised of a field concentration (9 credits), and one elective course (3 credits), all of which are selected in consultation with the Department PhD Point of Contact and the Director of Doctoral Studies.

Each student is required to develop a Program of Study in consultation with the Department PhD Point of Contact, Director of Doctoral Studies, and the Academic Advisor for the PhD program. The Program of Study is an individual plan that outlines core courses, concentration, and planned elective. A student's Program of Study also includes a timeline for completing the various degree requirements, including the comprehensive exams, the prospectus defense, and the defense of the dissertation.

Students must meet with the Department PhD Point of Contact at the start of their second semester to develop their Program of Study and, as necessary, to revise it. It is the student's responsibility to develop and revise their Program of Study.

## Core Courses

The SIS PhD program is structured around a set of eight core courses that are intended to provide students with a broad understanding of the debates within international relations scholarship and help students acquire the methodological skills needed to assess and produce advanced scholarship. Each course is worth a total of 3 credits. During the first year, all students take four core theory courses and two core methodology courses.

Students will take the following courses during the fall semester of their first year:

- SIS-801 Schools of Thought in International Relations
- SIS-802 Comparative and Regional Studies
- SIS-806 Quantitative Methods in International Relations

The following courses are taken during the spring semester of the first year:

- SIS-803 Advanced Seminar in International Relations
- SIS-804 Social Theory in Comparative and International Perspective
- SIS-807 Qualitative Methods in International Relations

During the second year, students complete two additional required courses: SIS-808 Politics and Policy Making in International Relations and SIS-810 Research Design. In addition to these required courses, students will complete 9 credits of coursework in their field concentration and one 3 credit elective.

In their third year of study, students take SIS-811 Dissertation Development Workshop and register for SIS-898 Doctoral Continuing Enrollment to maintain full-time enrollment.

## Qualifying Comprehensive Examination

At the end of the first year, students must take a qualifying comprehensive examination that includes both written and oral components. This exam requires students to demonstrate competency in theoretical, epistemological, and methodological issues in international relations, social theory, and comparative politics. These areas are addressed in the core seminars that students complete during their first year; however, the scope of the examination is not limited to topics covered in core seminars. The exam also requires students to draw connections between fields.

The qualifying examination is taken at the end of the spring semester. The Director of Doctoral Studies will inform students of the date for both written and oral exams at the beginning of the spring semester.

The student receives an overall grade that includes both the written and oral components of the qualifying exam. The possible results are ‘distinction’, ‘satisfactory’, or ‘unsatisfactory’.

A student who returns their written exam after the allotted time will automatically receive a grade of ‘unsatisfactory’. A student who receives an ‘unsatisfactory’ grade for the qualifying exam will, under normal circumstances, be allowed to retake the exam before the start of the subsequent fall semester. Any student who fails the exam a second time will be dismissed from the doctoral program.

The written qualifying exam will consist of multiple questions, each of which will be graded by two initial readers. If there is disagreement on the grade for any question, a third reader will be asked to grade that question. In this case, the majority decision will be the final result. The purpose of the oral exam is to allow the student to identify weaknesses in their own written answers and, as appropriate, correct or expand upon those answers. The oral exam will consist of at least three graders, plus the Director of Doctoral Studies. The overall exam results will be determined by majority decision.

## Field Concentration

In consultation with the Director of Doctoral Studies, students must affiliate with a department at SIS to guide the development of their field concentration during their first year of study. Each field concentration requires students to successfully complete three courses and a comprehensive field examination during the second year.

Students will work with the Department PhD Point of Contact to identify relevant faculty mentors, select concentration coursework, and plan their field comprehensive examination. The SIS departments include:

- Environment, Development, and Health
- Foreign Policy and Global Security
- Global Inquiry
- Peace, Human Rights, and Cultural Relations
- Politics, Governance, and Economics

Normally, the name of the department will serve as the title of the field concentration. Students intending to define a more specific title for their field concentration on a topic that is clearly within the scope of the department may secure written approval from the Department PhD Point of Contact for their selected field title as part of developing their Plan of Study. This approval must be conveyed to the Director of Doctoral Studies and PhD Academic Advisor prior to the start of the second year. Students may also construct

a concentration of their own with the approval of the Director of Doctoral Studies (see below).

## Field Comprehensive Examination

By the end of the second year of study, students must complete a comprehensive field examination that includes both written and oral components.

The field examination is a paper in which students must demonstrate knowledge of scholarly literature related to a research question approved by their Department PhD Point of Contact. The literature review should not be too broad or limited to a narrow empirical issue, but must situate the question within the theoretical, epistemological, and methodological literature in their chosen field of concentration.

In their third semester, students are responsible for forming an Examination Committee and submitting an approved research question and reading list, constructed with and approved by their Department PhD Point of Contact, to the Director of Doctoral Studies no later than October 15. It is the responsibility of the student and the examination committee to agree upon the paper submission date and dates for oral components, which will occur towards the end of the spring semester in their second year in the program.

The Examination Committee is composed of three faculty members and includes (i) the Department PhD Point of Contact or a faculty member appointed by the Department PhD Point of Contact who serves as the chair of the committee and is responsible for approving the question, consulting with the student, and providing feedback on drafts, (ii) a second reader selected by the student, and is responsible for consulting with the student and providing feedback on drafts. and (iii) a third reader, who is a member of the SIS PhD Committee and selected by the Director of Doctoral Studies. The third reader is responsible for only evaluating the final submitted paper. They may consult with the student but may not review drafts of the paper prior to its submission.

All three members of the Examination Committee are responsible for grading the written and oral components. Each committee member makes an independent determination of whether the written paper is 'unsatisfactory', 'satisfactory', or 'distinction'. The faculty may not provide the results of their assessment to the student prior to the oral component.

The procedures for grading the oral field examinations are the same as those outlined above for the qualifying examination, with the exception that the Director of Doctoral Studies does not participate in the oral field examinations. The final grade of the exam is determined by a majority vote in the committee. An 'unsatisfactory' is not considered a passing grade.

A student who receives a grade of 'unsatisfactory' on their first attempt at the field examination will be given an opportunity to revise and resubmit. The revised paper must be resubmitted and have passed the oral examination before the start of the subsequent fall semester. Any student who fails the exam a second time will be dismissed from the doctoral program.

## Field Concentration and Examination in another School or College at American University

A student may pursue a field of concentration in another School or College at American University with the approval of the Director of Doctoral Studies and the Dean or Dean's Designee at the School/College. In such cases the exam policies and procedures are established by the other School/College and the student is expected to adhere to those requirements.

## Self-Constructed Field Concentration and Examination

Students have the option of constructing a field concentration and exam that is tailored to their interests. Interested students must consult with the Director of Doctoral Studies during their second semester of study to receive a preliminary assessment of whether the scope and content of the proposed field concentration is appropriate. If a student chooses to self-construct a field concentration, it is their responsibility to identify and confirm two AU faculty members to develop the concentration, required courses, and serve as chair and second member of the examination committee. A third reader, who is a member of the SIS PhD Committee will be selected by the Director of Doctoral Studies. The comprehensive examination paper and oral examination should conform to the process described above.

For a self-constructed concentration to be considered, the student must submit to the Director of Doctoral Studies the following information in the form of a memorandum before the start of their second year:

1. The title of the examination field.
2. The intellectual rationale for the independent field of study (written in prose and not to exceed one page, single spaced).
3. A list of relevant courses associated with the subject matter of the exam.
4. A statement acknowledging that the exam format will conform to the rules for the SIS field concentration exams.
5. The name of the faculty who will serve as a chair and the other faculty who will serve as committee member.
6. The signatures of each faculty member attesting to their approval of the self-constructed field and exam.

## Elective Course

In addition to the core courses and field concentration, students are also required to take one elective course, selected in consultation with the Director of Doctoral Studies. Normally, this course is used to enhance knowledge related to the student's field of interest or for advanced methods training.



## Transfer Credits

Students are not permitted to transfer credits into the PhD program.

## Language Requirement (also known as the Tool of Research)

Each PhD student is required to demonstrate intermediate reading proficiency in a modern foreign language. This can be done through coursework or by passing a language proficiency exam. Please consult the SIS [graduate advising website](#) for more detailed information.

## Prospectus Defense

Each PhD student must write and defend a dissertation prospectus that must be approved by the student's Dissertation Committee and by the Director of Doctoral Studies. The prospectus provides a justification for the dissertation research, reviews relevant literature, identifies relevant theoretical, epistemological, and methodological issues, and provides a detailed research plan, including a timetable for completion of the work. More details on the prospectus and prospectus defense are provided below.

## Advancement to Candidacy

Students are expected to advance to candidacy in their third year. A student advances to candidacy when they have completed all coursework, passed both the qualifying and field comprehensive examinations, satisfied the Tool of Research requirement, completed the necessary Responsible Conduct of Research Training, and successfully defended their prospectus. This is also known as "All But Dissertation" status (ABD). To advance to candidacy, a student must satisfy all of these requirements, including any revisions required after the prospectus defense, no later than two weeks prior to the start of any semester. Upon advancement to candidacy, PhD students may apply for the M.Phil. in International Relations to be granted *en passant*.

## Dissertation Credits

Upon successful advancement to candidacy, a student will register each semester for 9 credits of SIS-899 (dissertation credit). Each student will continue to register for this course during the fall and spring semesters until they successfully defend their dissertation, are approved for temporary leave, or are dismissed from the university. Even though SIS-899 is the equivalent of 9 credits, the tuition charge is the equivalent of 1 credit. In other words, each semester students pay for one credit hour of tuition to maintain their status as full-time students by being enrolled in 9 credits.

## Dissertation

Writing a dissertation is the cornerstone of the doctoral program. There are five phases of this process: assembling a dissertation committee, defending the prospectus, researching the dissertation, writing the dissertation, and defending the dissertation. The student is responsible for coordinating and completing each phase.

A dissertation must advance scholarly knowledge and can be written in book or article form. Both types of dissertations must be single authored. A book-type dissertation is a project in which individual chapters build upon each other to pursue a thesis that advances knowledge. An article-type dissertation involves three or more stand-alone projects, each of which has a distinct thesis, and which collectively involve a common theme.

### **Assembling a Dissertation Committee**

Each student is responsible for initiating the construction of their dissertation committee. The committee must conform to the following university requirements:

- All committee members must have received an appropriate terminal degree from an accredited institution.
- A committee must consist of at least three members, including an agreed upon chair.
- The committee chair must be a tenured faculty member in the School of International Service. Tenure-line faculty who have not yet received tenure may be appointed as co-chairs but must serve with a tenured faculty member.
- Two of the committee members must be full time tenure-line faculty from American University.
- Adjunct faculty, term faculty, and faculty from other universities and emeritus faculty may not chair a dissertation committee but may serve on it. A dissertation committee chair who retires or leaves American University before the dissertation is complete may petition the the Office of Graduate and Professional Studies to remain on the committee as chair, as a co-chair, or as a member.
- The committee must be approved by the SIS Director of Doctoral Studies.
- At the time of the dissertation defense, an outside reader will join the committee in order to review the dissertation. This outside reader serves in an advisory role the purpose of which is to determine if the dissertation meets general standards in the field but not necessarily to critique the work in detail. This outside member must have the appropriate terminal degree, be an expert in the subject matter of the dissertation but have no direct association with the student. This outside member is selected by the chair of the dissertation committee and should come from outside of SIS.

A student may also have one or more committee members from outside the University. If a student chooses to have a committee member from outside the university, the student is solely responsible for making arrangements for the external members to be present physically or virtually for the prospectus and dissertation defenses and for collecting the necessary signatures once the dissertation has been successfully defended.

The process of getting approval for a dissertation committee is outlined on the American University Dissertation Committee Approval Form, available at [Graduate Studies Advancement to Candidacy](#).

The student must obtain the signatures of all committee members, provide an abstract of the dissertation topic, and explain the qualifications of each committee member and their ability to contribute to the student's dissertation. The student must submit this material to the SIS Director of Doctoral Studies for approval.

## Changes to the Committee

A student may change the composition of a dissertation committee at any time. All changes must be approved first by the SIS Director of Doctoral Studies and then the University's Office of Graduate and Professional Studies. The necessary form is available from the Academic Advisor for the PhD program as well as at [Graduate Studies Advancement to Candidacy](#).

## Departure of Faculty

Should an American University faculty member serving on a committee resign their position at the University, the School permits them to remain as a standing committee member for the duration of the dissertation process. The faculty member may also continue to chair the committee, if they had been serving in that capacity, with the approval of the University's Office of Graduate and Professional Studies. Should the faculty member remove themselves from the committee, it is the student's responsibility to identify and confirm a new member if necessary.

## Writing the Dissertation Prospectus

The dissertation prospectus is intended to explain and justify a topic of study. The prospectus should be 5,000-7,000 words. The prospectus should address the following, with respect to either the overall project in the case of a book-type dissertation, or each individual article in the case of the 3-article dissertation:

- What is the question the dissertation is to address?
- What do we know about this issue now (i.e., the state of the literature)?
- How am I going to investigate it (i.e., methodology and forms of evidence)?
- What is my dissertation going to contribute to the field?

The prospectus for a book-type dissertation must clearly answer these questions for the overall project. The prospectus for article-type dissertations must do so for each individual article and articulate the overarching theme that connects the articles.

The prospectus should also contain the following:

- An appendix that includes a timeline detailing a schedule for completion of the dissertation.
- A bibliography that contains relevant works.
- A 150 word or less summary of the main topic of the dissertation. This will be used in the public announcement of the defense.

The committee's job is to ensure that the prospectus meets all requirements in terms of length, content, and format.

## The Prospectus Defense

The purpose of the prospectus defense is twofold: 1) It is an assessment of a student's readiness to proceed with the research portion of the dissertation, 2) it is an opportunity for the dissertation committee and the Director of Doctoral Studies to provide the student with constructive advice in a collective format regarding the project. Under normal circumstances, students must successfully defend a prospectus during their third year to remain in good academic standing.

The dissertation committee and the Director of Doctoral Studies must approve the prospectus. When all members of the dissertation committee have approved the prospectus, the student will then submit it to the Director of Doctoral Studies at least three weeks prior to the proposed date of the prospectus defense. The Director of Doctoral Studies will have one week to read the prospectus and consult with the committee chair to determine whether the student is ready to move forward with the defense.

If it is determined that the prospectus needs further revisions, the committee chair and Director of Doctoral Studies will discuss with the student what issues must be addressed. At this time, the committee chair and the Director of Doctoral Studies, in consultation with the student, will also determine a course of action for moving forward. A new one-week period of reading and consultation, as described above, will commence when the student submits a revised draft of the prospectus.

Upon receiving approval to proceed with the defense, the student is responsible for finding a time during which the examiners can all attend the defense. The student is also responsible for working with the PhD Program Coordinator to reserve a room and appropriate AV support as necessary for the defense.

Once the time and place have been confirmed, the student must inform the Director of Doctoral Studies at least two weeks prior to the proposed defense date so that an announcement can go out to the academic community.

The prospectus examination committee consists of the student's dissertation committee and the Director of Doctoral Studies, who also serves as the Chair of the prospectus examination committee.

The prospectus defense is open to the academic community at large. Students are welcome to invite individuals to attend. If the student has selected a committee member from outside the university, the student must arrange for that person to attend or to be present virtually. The student should inform all members of the prospectus examination committee when such measures are necessary and consider this when scheduling the defense.

The prospectus defense and evaluation will last approximately two hours. The format of the prospectus defense is:

1. The student is given 15 minutes to present a brief summary of the prospectus. The student should construct the presentation assuming the committee has already read the prospectus.
2. Each member of the prospectus examination committee will be given 15 minutes to question the student about the proposed research (other committee members may ask questions during another member's time – for example, to clarify a question or ask something that is relevant to the issue at hand).
3. A final 10 minutes will be given for questions from other academic community members attending.
4. The student and others in attendance will be asked to leave the room while the members of the prospectus examination committee discuss the merits of the prospectus defense. A consensus decision determines the result of the defense.
5. Normally, within 30 minutes the student will return to the room so that the Director of Doctoral Studies can inform them of the defense outcome.

The possible outcomes of the prospectus defense are:

- **Pass** – the student may proceed with the proposed research.
- **Provisional Pass** – the student will be given specific areas of the prospectus that must be addressed before the research can proceed. The examining committee will also determine by whom the revisions must be approved for the results of the defense to be changed to Pass.
- **Fail** – the student will be informed of the specific deficiencies of the prospectus so that they may move forward with developing another draft, and the process can be initiated again. A second failed attempt will result in dismissal from the program.

Only a “Pass” is recorded on the transcript; provisional passes and failures are not recorded.

A student is expected to update their dissertation design as the project evolves. Under most circumstances, the student should simply keep the dissertation committee informed of these developments. The dissertation committee chair may request a new proposal if the research question, method, or subject matter changes so substantially that it can only be considered a different research project. There will be no new prospectus defense in such instances. The dissertation committee is responsible for ensuring the new proposal's content, scope and method are appropriate for a PhD dissertation.

## Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR)

Students are responsible for knowing and adhering to American University's policies on the responsible conduct of research. All students are required to complete Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) training. Documentation of this must be presented to the Director of Doctoral Studies and the PhD Academic Advisor prior to formation of the dissertation committee.

The required RCR certification can be obtained by taking the online course for the social and behavioral sciences developed by the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI). More information about this training, including how to register, can be found at [\*Graduate Studies Advancement to Candidacy\*](#).

## Human Subjects Research

Any American University student who plans to conduct research that involves human subjects must have their research program cleared by the American University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB). Information about guidelines and procedures can be found at the [\*IRB website\*](#). Students cannot begin their dissertation work without the appropriate IRB training, research assurances, or determination of exemption. The student must submit proof of IRB approval, or exemption, to their dissertation chair prior to any fieldwork and as soon as possible after the prospectus defense. Students who begin fieldwork without submitting this IRB certification will be dismissed from the University.

## Dissertation Fieldwork

Students are encouraged to do dissertation fieldwork in whatever site is appropriate and safe for the dissertation's completion. Students must be registered with American University for any fall or spring semester in which they may be undertaking fieldwork and before travelling abroad to conduct fieldwork must also complete the University Travel Approval paperwork (available at [\*University Finance, Global Safety\*](#)). Before leaving the country, non-U.S. citizens must also check with International Student and Scholar Services about additional requirements.

## Dissertation Format

The University has a detailed set of requirements for formatting and submitting a dissertation. Many aspects of this are necessary to meet the specifications set out by University Microfilms International (UMI), the organization that indexes and distributes all dissertations in the United States. The University can only accept dissertations that are properly formatted and submitted by the deadlines published in the academic calendar. The American University Library maintains a website with approved formatting requirements: [\*ETD Guide\*](#).

## The Dissertation Defense

Once the student has completed their research and written the dissertation, it must be submitted to the student's dissertation committee and the outside reader for review. The final draft of the dissertation must be submitted to the committee and outside reader at least five weeks before the proposed dissertation defense date. The committee and outside reader will have three weeks to read the dissertation. Within that three-week period, the committee chair, after consulting with the other committee members and considering the assessment of the outside reader, will inform the student if the dissertation is ready to move forward to defense. If revisions need to be made, the student will be provided with a detailed description of what must be addressed. If the committee clears the student to move forward, the date for the defense may be finalized.

As with the prospectus defense, the student must find a time when the dissertation committee members are all available and arrange a room for the defense of the dissertation. All committee members must participate in the defense, including members from outside American University. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that all members are in attendance, either in person or virtually. Except in extraordinary circumstances, and with the permission of the Director of Doctoral Studies, the student must be present in-person at the defense of their dissertation.

Once the date, time, and location of the defense have been finalized, the student must notify the Director of Doctoral Studies at least two weeks before the defense is to take place. The Director of Doctoral Studies will make a public announcement of the defense. The student must also provide a 300-word summary of the dissertation topic and its main findings used in the public announcement of the defense.

The procedure of the dissertation defense is as follows:

1. The student is given 20 minutes to present a summary of the dissertation findings.
2. Each committee member has 15 minutes to question the student about the dissertation (other committee members may ask questions specifically relevant to the issue at hand during this time). Other members of the academic community in attendance have 10 minutes to ask questions.

3. The student and others in attendance must leave the room while the committee members discuss the merits of the dissertation. A consensus decision determines the result of the defense.
4. Normally, within 30 minutes the student is asked to return to the room so that the committee chair can inform the student of the outcome of the defense.

The possible outcomes, outlined below, apply to either the entire project as outlined in a book-type dissertation, or to the individual chapters and overall connection between them, in the case of an article-type dissertation. The possible outcomes are:

- Distinction – the dissertation presents a contribution to knowledge that is significantly beyond that normally expected and is approved for submission pending any final adjustments. ‘Distinction’ is reserved for the top 1-3% of dissertations awarded over a ten-year period.
  - Committee members who believe a dissertation is a candidate for the award of ‘distinction’ will email the Director of Doctoral Studies prior to the dissertation defense. Each member will submit their recommendation independently and confidentially to the Director of Doctoral Studies. After the dissertation defense, the Director of Doctoral Studies will contact each member of the committee individually and confidentially to see if they wish to change their initial recommendation. ‘Distinction’ is awarded in cases where all committee members agree it is deserved.
- Pass – the dissertation is approved for submission pending any final adjustments.
- Provisional Pass – the student will be given specific areas of the dissertation that must be addressed before the dissertation is passed. Revisions may have to be submitted to the entire committee or only to the committee chair. The student will be informed of the follow-up process at the time of the defense.
- Fail – the student will be told of the dissertation's specific deficiencies. The student may petition the dissertation committee chair and the dissertation committee for one more opportunity to defend a revised dissertation.

A successful defense (‘distinction’ or ‘pass’) will be noted on the student’s transcript; provisional passes and failures will not.

Once a dissertation receives a grade of ‘distinction’ or ‘pass’, the dissertation committee will sign the Defense Examination Report, which is provided to the dissertation committee chair by the SIS Director of Doctoral Studies. All members of the dissertation committee must sign this report and the committee chair must return it to the SIS Director of Doctoral Studies, along with the assessment of the outside reader. The outside reader may either sign the dissertation title page or provide their assessment in writing on the official



letterhead of their university or organization. The student must also provide two copies of the properly formatted title page of the dissertation for signature by all members of the dissertation committee. Both copies of the dissertation title page must be submitted to the Academic Advisor for the PhD program. The student will also need to submit the final dissertation; for more information on submitting the dissertation to the University see: [ETD Index](#).

## The Graduation Process

To graduate, the student must complete all graduation paperwork and arrange for the deposit of the correctly formatted dissertation by the final university deadline for that semester. The student must also have applied to graduate at the beginning of the semester in which they are defending. Students can apply to graduate through the [MyAU](#) portal.

Once the committee has approved the dissertation with any final revisions, the student must complete the remaining stages of the submission process. It is the student's responsibility to format the dissertation to meet all American University requirements. Please consult the Guide to Electronic Theses & Dissertations for more details on formatting requirements and the submission process. The guide can be found at [ETD Index](#).

In preparation for the final submission of the dissertation, students must have their dissertation title page signed by each member of the committee. They must then submit two copies to the Academic Advisor for the PhD program, who coordinates acquiring the Dean's signature. They should submit the title page to the Academic Advisor at least 3 days prior to the final university deadline for dissertation submission. The Graduate Advising Office will keep a copy of the title page for the student's file. The student should keep a copy of the signed dissertation title page as receipt for completing the submission process.

Students must also complete the [Survey of Earned Doctorates](#).

## Registration and Academic Progress Requirements

### Maintaining Satisfactory Academic Progress

Students are expected to make satisfactory academic progress toward the completion of the PhD degree. The Director of Doctoral Studies will annually assess the progress of each student and notify the student of their progress in writing.

Prior to the prospectus defense, the Director of Doctoral Studies will assess the progress of all active students using the criteria established in the [American University Graduate Academic Regulations](#) and in consultation with the Academic Advisor for the PhD program and relevant faculty members. Upon advancement to candidacy, this consultation will include the student's committee chair.

Failure to maintain satisfactory progress toward completing the degree is sufficient grounds for dismissal from the program. The Director of Doctoral Studies will consult with the student's committee chair and other relevant faculty before making such a decision. If a student is dismissed, they will be advised regarding any options for appealing the decision.

## Maintaining Matriculation

Students must register as full-time students each fall and spring semester until they have successfully defended their dissertation. This can be achieved by registering for courses, SIS-898 (Doctoral Continuing Enrollment) alone or in combination with other coursework, or SIS-899 (Dissertation Credit). International students may also be required to enroll full-time in the summer if they are planning to defend their dissertation that summer and should consult with ISSS.

Both SIS-898 and SIS-899 are graded as 'satisfactory progress' (SP) or 'unsatisfactory progress' (UP). Neither of these distinctions affects the student's GPA. A grade of UP means progress is not as expected, but does not automatically, or necessarily, lead to dismissal from the program. A grade of UP for any given semester, however, cannot be converted to a grade of SP once the grade is submitted.

Students who have completed their required courses but have not yet advanced to candidacy may register for SIS-898 (Doctoral Continuing Enrollment), with the approval of the Director of Doctoral Studies. SIS-898 is a 1-9 credit course that can be repeated once. The Director of Doctoral Studies is responsible for assessing student performance as either SP or UP. Tuition for SIS-898 is assessed at the 1 credit rate.

Students who have advanced to candidacy (ABD) register for 9 credits of SIS-899 (Dissertation Credit) each semester. Each semester the 9 credits of SIS-899 will be priced at the equivalent of 1 graduate credit hour. Students who no longer have tuition assistance must pay for this credit. Progress toward completion of SIS-899 is determined each semester by the student's dissertation chair.

## Independent Studies

With the approval of the Director of Doctoral Studies, students making satisfactory academic progress may register for an independent study. Before registration, the student and the supervising faculty member must agree upon and document the title, objective, scope, credit value (1 to 6 credit hours), and the method of evaluation for the independent study. Students may not register for more than 9 Independent Study credit hours during their degree program.

## Temporary Leaves

Students may request temporary leave for general, medical, or military reasons. Information on each type of leave, its implications, limitations, and the required deadlines, is available in the [American University Graduate Academic Regulations](#). Temporary leave will not be granted for the sole purpose of extending time to the degree.

Requests for temporary leave must be submitted to the Director of Doctoral Studies and the SIS Associate Dean for Graduate Studies and must include a statement that the student will undertake no academic work during the period of leave. No university facilities may be used, nor faculty consulted, during a leave of absence.

The implications of taking temporary leave on a student's SIS-supplied funding are up to the discretion of the Associate Dean, in consultation with the Director of Doctoral Studies, and require the approval of the Vice Provost for Research and Graduate Education. After being informed of the Associate Dean's decision regarding funding, the student will be given an opportunity to withdraw their request for leave.

## Grade Point Average (GPA)

At a minimum, graduate students at AU must maintain at least a 3.0 GPA to remain in Good Academic Standing. A student falling below 3.0 GPA will be placed on Academic Probation and is subject to dismissal per [American University Graduate Academic Regulations](#). Yet, SIS doctoral students are expected to perform better than the minimum required by the university. Failure to maintain a 3.5 GPA or higher will typically result in an 'unsatisfactory' Progress Report. Students receiving more than one 'unsatisfactory' Progress Report may be subject to dismissal.

## Incompletes

The instructor of record may assign an "Incomplete" status for a grade when extenuating circumstances prevent a student, who has otherwise completed most of the work in the course, from completing all work during the stated instructional period.

Students on Academic Probation may not receive an "Incomplete." For AU rules on Incompletes, see the [American University Graduate Academic Regulations](#).

Students who receive an "Incomplete" must finish the remaining work for the course before the end of the following semester. Students who do not do so will receive the default grade automatically. The SIS Associate Dean for Graduate Education, with the concurrence of the instructor, may grant extensions beyond the agreed deadline, but only in extraordinary circumstances.

## Time to Completion

American University's Academic Regulations require that all work for the doctorate must be completed within nine years from the date of first enrollment as a doctoral student. Under compelling circumstances, a student may petition for up to 3 one-year extensions of candidacy. After this, no additional extensions will be granted. Extensions must be approved by the Director of Doctoral Studies, Associate Dean for Graduate Education of the School of International Service, and AU Dean of Graduate Studies or Designee.

Additionally, because degree requirements and current knowledge in the field may have changed significantly, courses completed more than nine years prior to degree cannot be used to fulfill degree requirements. Exceptions are allowed if the Director of Doctoral Studies can justify that the content of these courses aligns with current knowledge and practices and the SIS Associate Dean of Graduate Education approves. Copies of the written justifications and approvals must be shared with the Registrar.

## **Funding**

Students have several ways to receive funding throughout their studies.

### **Dean's Fellowship**

Normally, those admitted to the SIS PhD program as full-time students, who maintain satisfactory academic progress toward completing the degree, are granted a Dean's Fellowship in each of their first four years of study. A student may opt to waive this financial assistance.

The SIS Dean's Fellowship provides full tuition remission for graduate course work to meet the PhD program requirements in accordance with the Program of Study.

The Dean's Fellowship also includes a stipend. The stipend is paid to the student in bi-monthly increments during the academic year. Students work directly for a member of the SIS faculty as a Research Assistant or a Teaching Assistant for a maximum of 20 hours per week, during the fall and spring semesters (15 weeks per semester; 30 weeks for the year). With the permission of the Director of Doctoral Studies and the relevant SIS faculty member, after their first year in the program, a student may instead work during the summer and either the fall or spring semester. Students may opt out of the work requirement only with the approval of the Director of Doctoral Studies and the SIS Associate Dean for Graduate Education. Students choosing to do so will forego the stipend and only receive tuition remission unless extenuating circumstances exist (e.g., significant documented health issues).

### **Assistantship Assignments**

The Director of Doctoral Studies and Faculty Affairs Coordinator work together to arrange assignments of incoming students to faculty. They will endeavor to recommend

assignment of each student to a faculty member whose work is linked as closely as possible to that of the student.

Only members of the full-time permanent faculty are eligible to receive a doctoral assistant. A faculty member who is on leave may not be assigned a new doctoral assistant but may continue working with an assistant who has already been assigned.

Assistantship responsibilities may include teaching, research and, on a limited basis, administrative support. As part of their assistantship assignment, students are not permitted to work more than 20 hours per week.

## Changes in Assistantship Assignments

If a student wishes to change their assistantship assignment, they must discuss this with the Director of Doctoral Studies. The Director of Doctoral Studies will recommend possible changes after consulting with both the current and proposed future faculty supervisor. If a student finds that an issue arises regarding the nature of an assignment, working conditions, or the working relationship that needs to be addressed, the student should speak with the Director of Doctoral Studies as soon as possible.

## Travel Reimbursement Funds

SIS provides the PhD program with funds to finance up to \$600 of the cost students incur when traveling to conferences to present scholarly papers. All students are eligible, but funds are limited and allocated first come, first served, and require the Director of Doctoral Studies' approval.

To be eligible, the student must have had a paper accepted for presentation at an academic conference or workshop. Those interested in receiving travel funds should apply for approval to the Director of Doctoral Studies by submitting the following information:

- The conference that they will be attending including the location and dates of the conference, the title and abstract of the paper that they will be presenting.
- Confirmation that the student has been accepted to present at the conference.

Please note that approval must be obtained in advance. Payment is determined by the fiscal year during which the expenses were incurred. The AU fiscal year ends on June 30. Thus, for example, travel to conferences on April 1 and July 1 of the same calendar year is reimbursed from funds for two different fiscal years.

To receive reimbursement for travel funds, the student must submit the necessary information about expenses to the PhD Program Coordinator, along with a conference program or link to a conference program listing the student as a presenter.

SIS also provides the PhD program with funding to finance up to \$600 each for a limited number of faculty and PhD students to present joint research at an academic conference. The application and reimbursement processes are the same as those outlined above.

## Methods Training Grants

SIS also provides funding for two students to attend the Institute for Qualitative and Multi-Method Research at Syracuse University, and for two students to attend the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research at the University of Michigan. In both cases SIS pays the tuition for these summer opportunities. SIS will also contribute up to \$2,500 for one additional student to attend methods training that is appropriate for their research and otherwise not offered at American University. Details for each of these opportunities will be made available during the fall semester. Students are responsible for understanding the tax implications of these grants.

## Summer Research Awards

Each summer SIS provides up to \$41,000 in funding for research awards for PhD students. This funding is intended to help expedite completion of the dissertation or dissertation prospectus. There are two different competitions, one for students who are ABD, and one for those who are not yet ABD. Preference will be given to applications that clearly articulate a research project and link that project to progress on either the dissertation or prospectus. Students may apply for research funding of up to \$4,000, though amounts awarded might be lower than those requested. Stipend recipients will be selected by a panel of three faculty members (for each competition). More information will be distributed about the competition each spring semester.

## Additional Information

### Teaching

Beyond opportunities to serve as a teaching assistant as a part of the Dean's fellowship, students may seek opportunities to allow them to gain more classroom experience. Students who have advanced to candidacy are eligible to request a teaching assignment. Students should notify the Director of Doctoral Studies of their interest.

The Director of Doctoral Studies will notify interested and eligible students of any possible teaching opportunities and of a deadline for expressing interest. If more than one student expresses an interest, the Associate Dean will select in consultation with the Director of Doctoral Studies and the students' dissertation committee chair. Students who have not yet achieved ABD status are only granted permission to teach their own course under exceptional circumstances and if a special teaching need is identified by SIS that would be best filled by a particular PhD student. In such a case, if it is determined that no ABD student is able or willing to fill a teaching opening, the

Associate Dean will solicit suggestions from the faculty directly involved in filling the teaching slot. In other words, for students who have not reached ABD status, a faculty member must nominate them to teach for consideration. In most instances, this would be a departmental Director of Graduate Studies or a faculty member responsible for filling many sections of a single class. If a student who is not yet ABD is suggested, the name is forwarded to the Director of Doctoral Studies and to the student's dissertation Chair. If the student does not yet have a dissertation Chair, the student's faculty supervisor for their research assistantship may serve as a substitute. Permission to teach is only granted when the Director of Doctoral Studies and the student's dissertation committee chair believe the teaching assignment will not interfere with the student's progress toward completing the degree.

## Ph.D. Website/Electronic Resources

The School of International Service maintains a website for doctoral students, [SIS PhD](#), that contains several pieces of useful information, including the latest version of the PhD Handbook. All questions or comments regarding the website should be directed to the PhD Program Coordinator.

Students may also reference the internal SIS PhD Student [Sharepoint](#) website.

When emailing students, American University, SIS, the Director of Doctoral Studies, and the Academic Advisor for the PhD program will all utilize a student's official AU email address. It is important that students either check this address routinely or have it forward to an email address that is checked frequently.

## Academic Advising

The Academic Advisor for the PhD Program works with the students and the Director of Doctoral Studies to administer the program. They coordinate matters with students pertaining to registration, and graduation, and serve as a resource to students on various related issues. The Academic Advisor is responsible for ensuring that incoming doctoral students are registered and has a role in processing some types of registrations. They will file documentation regarding the completion of degree requirements (e.g., comprehensive examination completion, etc.) with the Office of the Registrar.

Contact information for the Academic Advisor for the PhD program, including links to schedule a meeting, can be found on the [SIS Graduate Advising website](#).

## Academic Integrity

All students are expected to be familiar with and abide by American University policies on academic conduct and plagiarism as outlined in the [Academic Integrity Code](#).

## Links



American University Graduate Academic Regulations - <https://www.american.edu/provost/ogps/graduate-studies/current-graduate-academic-regulations.cfm>

American University Catalogue - [https://www.american.edu/provost/registrar/university\\_catalog.cfm](https://www.american.edu/provost/registrar/university_catalog.cfm)

SIS PhD Program Details - <http://www.american.edu/sis/phd/program-details.cfm>

Graduate Advising Website, Language Requirement - <https://www.american.edu/sis/gradadvising/registration-requirements-forms.cfm#language-proficiency>

IRB Website - <http://www.american.edu/irb>

University Finance, Global Safety - <https://www.american.edu/finance/risk/globalsafety.cfm>

ETD Guide - <http://www.american.edu/provost/grad/etd/guide.cfm>

ETD Index - <https://www.american.edu/provost/ogps/graduate-studies/etd/index.cfm>

MyAU - <myau.american.edu>

Survey of Earned Doctorates - <https://sed-nces.org/>

SIS PhD - <http://www.american.edu/sis/phd>

SIS PhD Student Sharepoint - <https://american0.sharepoint.com/:u:/r/sites/SISPHDProgram/SitePages/DepartmentHome.aspx?csf=1&web=1&share=EdC5Fz-t--hIqDWL0gVijTUBxbfy5PXR5xk7pUJzvPhJiA&e=hM2ZGh>

SIS Graduate Advising Website - <http://www.american.edu/sis/gradadvising>

Academic Integrity Code - <http://www.american.edu/academics/integrity/code.cfm>