# DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN ECOLOGY AND EVOLUTIONARY BIOLOGY

The program involves intense laboratory or field-conducted research, coupled with rigorous scholarly contemplation of ecological, evolutionary and genetic/genomic principles.

## Program Requirements

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### Student's Advisory Committee

After receiving admission to graduate studies, students will consult with the graduate program concerning selection of a chair and members (if applicable) for an advisory committee representative of the student's field(s) of study and research.

A Doctor of Philosophy degree student's advisory committee will consist of no fewer than four members, where the chair or co-chair must be from the student's major department (or intercollegiate faculty, if applicable). For all doctoral degrees, at least one or more of the members must have a primary appointment with an academic unit external to the student's major department. The external member for a student in an interdisciplinary degree program must be from an academic unit different from the chair of the student's advisory committee. The chair, in consultation with the student, will select the remainder of the advisory committee. The student will interview each prospective committee member to determine a willingness to serve.

Only members of the Graduate Committee Faculty located on Texas A&M University campuses may serve as chair of a student's advisory committee. Other members of the Graduate Committee Faculty – including those located off-campus or outside the university (if permitted by program, department, and college/school policy) – may serve as a co-chair or member, but not as chair.

The advisory committee as a group – and as individual members – are responsible for advising students on academic matters. These duties include the responsibility for approving a student's proposed degree plan; research proposal (if applicable); thesis, dissertation, or record of study (if applicable); and conducting examinations (if required). The advisory committee members' approval of a degree plan indicates their willingness to accept the responsibility for guiding and directing a student's entire academic program and for initiating all academic actions concerning a student. Additionally, in cases of academic deficiency, the advisory committee is responsible for initiating recommendations to the academic unit and the Graduate and Professional School.

The chair of an advisory committee, who usually has immediate supervision of a student's degree program, has the responsibility for calling meetings at any time considered desirable.

If the chair of a student's advisory committee is unavailable for an extended period of time in any academic period during which the student is involved in activities relating to an internship, thesis, or professional paper – and is registered for courses such as 684 (Professional Internship), 691 (Research), 692 (Professional Study) or 693 (Professional

Study) – the Department Head or interdisciplinary degree Program Chair (if applicable) may appoint an alternate advisory committee chair during the interim period.

If a student's advisory committee chair is on an approved leave of absence – and the student wants the chair to continue to serve in this role – a written request must be submitted by the Department Head, or interdisciplinary degree Program Chair (if applicable), to the Associate Provost and Dean of the Graduate and Professional School, for the faculty member who is on an approved leave of absence to be allowed to continue serving as chair of the advisory committee – without a co-chair – for up to one year. The request must confirm that the faculty member is able to engage in the required duties as chair during the leave of absence. Extensions beyond the one-year period (if necessary) may be granted with additional approval of the Associate Provost and Dean of the Graduate and Professional School.

If a student's advisory committee chair voluntarily separates from the university, and the student is nearing completion of the degree, the chair may continue to serve in this role – at the student's request – for up to one year. Two options are available:

1. The chair may continue, with a co-chair, without additional approval by the Graduate and Professional School. The student must select a current member of the Graduate Committee Faculty – from the student's academic program and located near the Texas A&M University campus site – to serve as co-chair of the advisory committee.
2. The chair may continue, without a co-chair, with approval by the Graduate and Professional School. A written request must be submitted through the Graduate Committee Faculty Office to the Associate Provost and Dean of the Graduate and Professional School by the Department Head or interdisciplinary degree Program Chair to allow the faculty member to continue as chair, without a co-chair, of the advisory committee.

For both options, extensions beyond the one-year period (if necessary) may be granted with approval of the Associate Provost and Dean of the Graduate and Professional School.

Although individual members may be replaced by petition for valid reasons, all members of a student's advisory committee cannot resign *en masse.*

## Degree Plan

Upon commencement of graduate studies, an advisory committee will evaluate the student's previous education and outline a program of study and/or research topics(s) based upon the student's degree objectives. Graduate students, in consultation with the advisory committee, will then develop a degree plan which includes those courses to be applied toward a particular degree and formally establish the advisory committee.

The degree plan must be created, submitted, and approved through the online Document Processing Submission System (https://ogsdpss.tamu.edu/) (DPSS). The degree plan must be submitted prior to the deadline imposed by the student's college or school and approved by the Graduate and Professional School no later than 90 days prior to the last day for completion of a Final Examination. Students must select the appropriate program option(s) when submitting a proposed degree plan.

Coursework included on the degree plan is subject to the requirements and restrictions detailed in the Credit Requirements and Limitations on Credits and Coursework sections in each degree program page, or as required by the student's advisory committee and/or academic unit. Coursework included on the degree plan may not satisfy requirements for more than one degree, except for approved combination degree programs.

Changes to an approved degree plan, if deemed necessary by the advisory committee, may be made through a petition to the Graduate and Professional School. No changes can be made to a degree plan once a student's Final Examination Request or Final Examination Exemption Request is approved by the Graduate and Professional School.

Degree program time limits apply to courses listed on a degree plan. For additional information, students should check the Time Limits section under Additional Requirements.

## Credit Requirements

All graduate students must complete sufficient semester credit hours to satisfy their degree requirements.

Students who have completed a master's degree are required to complete a minimum of 64 semester credit hours for the Doctor of Philosophy in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology. Students who have completed a DDS/DMD, DVM or MD at an accredited academic institution within the United States are also required to complete a minimum of 64 hours. Students enrolled in an approved combination program which includes a doctoral degree, and in which the doctoral degree will be awarded at the same time as another advanced degree, must complete a minimum of 64 hours. Students enrolled in a master's degree and a doctoral degree simultaneously must have their master's degree awarded before they are eligible to complete a 64-hour doctoral degree.

Students who have completed a baccalaureate degree, but have not completed another advanced degree, must complete a minimum of 96 hours. Completion of a DDS/DMD, DVM or MD degree at an international institution are also required to complete a minimum of 96 hours.

Coursework may be completed in one or a combination of academic units. Ordinarily, students will devote the major portion of their time on work in one or two closely related fields of study; but other work may be required in supporting areas of interest.

## Limitations on Credits and Coursework

Credit hour requirements for all graduate degrees at Texas A&M University are subject to the following limitations:

1. To receive a graduate degree, students must earn one-third or more of the credit through the institution's own direct instruction. These limitations also apply to joint degree programs.
2. Transfer credits may be used to meet the credit hour requirements under the following limitations:
   a. The maximum number of credit hours which may be considered for transfer credit is the greater of 12 credit hours or one-third (1/3) of the total hours of a degree plan.
   b. Graduate and/or upper-level undergraduate courses (400-level only) taken in residence at an accredited United States or international institution (recognized by the Office of Admissions), with a final grade of B or greater, may be considered for transfer credit if – at the time the courses were completed – the courses would be accepted for credit toward a similar degree for a student in degree-seeking status at the host institution.
   c. An official transcript from the institution at which the transfer coursework was taken must be sent directly to the Office of Admissions. Coursework credit submitted for transfer from any

institution must be shown in semester credit hours or equated to semester credit hours.

d. Up to 1 hour of credit may be obtained for each five-day week of coursework for graduate courses of three weeks' duration or less taken at other institutions. Each week of coursework must include at least 15 contact hours.
e. Grades for courses completed at other institutions are not included in computing the GPA.
f. Coursework in which no formal grades were given, or in which grades other than A or B were earned (for example, CR, P, S, U, H, etc.), is not accepted for transfer credit.
g. Courses completed at Texas A&M University and appearing on the degree plan with grades of D, F or U may not be absolved by transfer work.
h. Except for officially approved cooperative doctoral programs, credit for thesis or dissertation research – or the equivalent – is not transferrable.
i. Courses used toward a degree at another institution may not be applied for transferred graduate credit.
j. Courses used toward a certificate, but not applied to an awarded degree, may be considered for transfer. If the course to be transferred was taken for a certificate or prior to the conferral of a degree at the transfer institution, a letter from the registrar at that institution stating that the course was not applied for credit toward the degree must be submitted to the Graduate and Professional School.
k. Credit for internship coursework in any form, or taken by extension, is not transferable.
l. Courses for which transfer credits are sought must be approved by the student's advisory committee and the Graduate and Professional School.
m. A student who has earned 12 credit hours of graduate credit in residence at Texas A&M University may be authorized to transfer courses in excess of the limits upon the advice of the advisory committee and with the approval of the Graduate and Professional School.

3. The maximum number of credit hours taken in post-baccalaureate non-degree (G6) classification at Texas A&M University which may be considered for application to the degree plan is 12.
4. Only grades of A, B, C and S are acceptable for graduate credit.
5. Graduate courses on a degree plan may not be taken on an S/U basis except for 681 (Seminar), 684 (Professional Internship), 690 (Theory of Research), 691 (Research), 692 (Professional Study), 693 (Professional Study), 695 (Frontiers in Research), 697 (Methods), 791 (Doctoral Capstone) or SOPH 680 (Public Health Capstone).
6. Approval to enroll in any professional course should be obtained from the Department Head or interdisciplinary degree Program Chair (if applicable) in which the course will be offered before including such a course on a degree plan.
7. No more than 50 percent of the non-research coursework required for an in-person degree program may be completed through distance education courses.
8. No graduate credit may be obtained by continuing education, correspondence study, extension, or for any course of fewer than three weeks duration.

Some academic units may have additional or more restrictive requirements.

The foregoing limitations apply to all graduate programs. Exceptions will be permitted only in unusual cases, when petitioned through the student's advisory committee, and approved by the Graduate and Professional School.

Credit hour requirements for all doctoral degrees are subject to the following additional limitations:

1. A student pursuing a doctoral degree must enroll in an appropriate amount of 691 (Research) credit hours.
2. A maximum of 9 credit hours of advanced undergraduate courses (400-level only) may be considered for application to a doctoral degree plan.

Some academic units may have additional or more restrictive requirements.

Exceptions will be permitted only in unusual cases, when petitioned through the student's advisory committee, and approved by the Graduate and Professional School.

## Preliminary Examination

Candidates for all doctoral degrees at Texas A&M University must pass a Preliminary Examination.

The objective of a Preliminary Examination is to evaluate the following qualifications:

1. Mastery of the subject matter in all program fields.
2. Adequate knowledge of the literature in these fields and an ability to carry out bibliographical research.
3. An understanding of the research problem and appropriate methodological approaches.

A Preliminary Examination may be administered by an advisory or other committee designated by the academic unit (herein referred to as an "examination committee").

Credit for Preliminary Examination is not transferable in cases where a student changes degree programs after passing an examination.

A doctoral student's graduate degree program and/or advisory committee may require additional qualifying, cumulative, or other types of examinations at any time deemed desirable. These examinations are entirely at the discretion of the academic unit and/or the student's advisory committee.

### Eligibility

Students are eligible to schedule the Preliminary Examination in the Academic Requirements Completion System (ARCS) if they meet the following qualifications:

- An approved degree plan on file with the Graduate and Professional School prior to any component of the Preliminary Examination.
- No pending requests in the Document Processing Submission System (DPSS).
- A cumulative and degree plan GPA of at least 3.00.
- Registration at Texas A&M University with a minimum of one (1) semester credit hour in the Fall, Spring, or Summer term during which any component of a Preliminary Examination is held. If the entire examination is held between semesters, then the student must have been registered for the term immediately preceding the Preliminary Examination.

- At the end of the semester in which at least the first component of the Preliminary Examination is given, there are no more than six (6) semester credit hours of coursework remaining on an approved degree plan (except 681, 684, 690, 691, 692, 693, 695, 697, 791 or other graduate courses specifically designated as S/U in the Graduate and Professional Catalog). Please note: the head of the student's academic unit has the authority to approve a waiver of this requirement.

### Scheduling

Preliminary Examinations shall be given no earlier than a date at which a doctoral student is within six (6) credit hours of completing formal coursework on an approved degree plan (except 681, 684, 690, 691, 692, 693, 695, 697, 791 or other graduate courses specifically designated as S/U in the Graduate and Professional Catalog).

A student should schedule and complete a Preliminary Examination no later than the end of the semester following the completion of formal coursework on an approved degree plan.

Doctoral students who meet the eligibility requirements must submit a Preliminary Examination Request *via* ARCS.

### Format

The student's academic unit and/or examination committee shall determine the Preliminary Examination's format and communicate it to the student in advance of the examination. The Preliminary Examination may consist of a written component, oral component, or combination of both.

If an academic unit requires students to take a written component as part of their Preliminary Examination, the faculty must:

1. Offer the examination at least once every six months and be announced at least thirty (30) days prior to the scheduled examination date.
2. Assume responsibility for marking the examination as satisfactory or unsatisfactory – or otherwise graded – and stating specific reasons for an unsatisfactory mark.
3. Forward the marked examination to the student's advisory committee chair within one week following administration of the examination.

If a written component precedes an oral component of a Preliminary Examination, the examination committee chair is responsible for making all written examinations available to all members of the examination committee.

Only one examination committee substitution is allowed – with prior approval of the Graduate and Professional School – to provide an evaluation decision for a student's Preliminary Examination. The examination committee chair may not be replaced by a substitute. If the substitution is for the sole External Member of the examination committee – with an appointment to an academic unit other than the student's (or advisory committee chair, for interdisciplinary degree programs) – then the substitute must also be external to the student's (or chair's) academic unit. In extenuating circumstances, with approval of the Graduate and Professional School, an exception to this requirement may be granted.

### Grading

Regardless of format, students will receive an overall Preliminary Examination result of pass or fail. The academic unit will determine how the overall pass or fail result is determined based on the examination structure and internal academic unit procedures.

A positive evaluation of the Preliminary Examination by all examination committee members – with at most one dissension – is required to pass a student on the examination. Preliminary Examination results must be reported to the Graduate and Professional School *via* ARCS within ten (10) working days following completion of the examination.

### Failures and Retakes

#### First Failure

In accordance with Student Rule 12.5 (https://student-rules.tamu.edu/rule12/), the student's graduate program or advisory committee should make a recommendation to the student regarding scholastic deficiency for a failure of the Preliminary Examination. Upon approval – by a student's examination committee (with no more than one member dissenting), the academic unit, and the Graduate and Professional School – a student who failed a Preliminary Examination *may* be given one re-examination.

#### Retake of Failed Preliminary Examination

The examination committee must agree upon – and communicate to the student, in writing – an adequate time frame from the first failed Preliminary Examination (normally six months) to retest, as well as a detailed explanation to address inadequacies emerging from the examination.

The student and examination committee should jointly negotiate a mutually acceptable date for a retake of the Preliminary Examination. When providing feedback on inadequacies, the committee should clearly document expected improvements that the student must be able to exhibit for a retake of the examination.

The examination committee will document and communicate the time frame and feedback within ten (10) working days of the first Preliminary Examination failure.

#### Second Failure

Upon a second failure of the Preliminary Examination, students are no longer eligible to continue pursuit of a doctoral degree in that program/major. In accordance with Student Rule 12.5.3 (https://student-rules.tamu.edu/rule12/) and/or 12.5.4 (https://student-rules.tamu.edu/rule12/), the student will be notified of the action being taken by the academic unit as a result of the second examination failure.

### Expiration

For restrictions on Preliminary Examination validity, please see the Time Limits section under Additional Requirements.

## Research Proposal

Candidates for all doctoral degrees must submit a Research Proposal.

The general field of research to be used for a dissertation should be agreed on by the student and the advisory committee as a basis for selecting the proper courses to support the proposed research. Once the research project can be outlined in reasonable detail, the Research Proposal should be completed.

Compliance issues must be addressed before completion of a Research Proposal if a graduate student is performing research involving human subjects, animals, infectious biohazards, or recombinant DNA. Students engaged in these types of research should check with the Office of Research Compliance and Biosafety to address questions about all research compliance responsibilities before the proposal is submitted

to the Graduate and Professional School. Additional information may be obtained at the Office of Research Compliance and Biosafety website (https://vpr.tamu.edu/research-compliance-and-biosafety/).

The Research Proposal should be finalized at a meeting of the student's advisory committee, at which time the feasibility of the proposed research and the adequacy of available facilities should be reviewed. Once completed, the Research Proposal must be submitted to the Graduate and Professional School *via* the Academic Requirements Completion System (ARCS).

For doctoral degrees, a Research Proposal should be submitted to the Graduate and Professional School *via* ARCS according to guidelines and deadlines set by the individual academic unit or program as soon as possible following the completion of formal coursework on an approved degree plan, but no later than 20 working days prior to the submission of the Final Examination Request.

Doctoral students must have an approved Research Proposal to be admitted to candidacy.

## Admission to Candidacy

Candidates for all doctoral degrees must be admitted to candidacy. Students are eligible for admission to candidacy if they meet the following qualification:

1. Complete all formal coursework on the degree plan (with the exception of any remaining 681, 684, 690, 691, 692, 791 or other graduate courses specifically designated as S/U in the Graduate and Professional Catalog).
2. Achieve a cumulative and a degree plan GPA of at least 3.00, with no grade lower than C in any course on the degree plan.
3. Pass a Preliminary Examination.
4. Have an approved Research Proposal.
5. Meet the Residence Requirements.

A Final Examination will not be authorized for any doctoral student who has not been admitted to candidacy.

## Final Examination

Candidates for all doctoral degrees must pass a Final Examination by deadlines announced through the Graduate and Professional School Dates and Deadlines Calendar (https://grad.tamu.edu/knowledge-center/dates-and-deadlines/dates-and-deadlines).

### Eligibility

For doctoral degree students, eligibility to schedule a Final Examination requires that

- the dissertation or record of study is available in substantially final form to all members of a student's advisory committee, and all members have had adequate time to review the manuscript;
- the student's cumulative and degree plan GPA must be at least 3.00;
- no unabsolved grades of D, F or U for any course may be listed on a degree plan (to absolve a deficient grade, the student must repeat the course at Texas A&M University and achieve a grade of C or better);
- the student must register for any remaining hours of 681, 684, 690, 691, 692, 791 or other graduate courses specifically designated as S/U in the Graduate and Professional Catalog during the semester of the Final Examination; and
- the student must be admitted to candidacy (please refer to the Admission to Candidacy (https://catalog.tamu.edu/graduate/academic-expectations-general-degree-requirements/#degreerequirementstext) section of the Graduate and Professional Catalog for requirements).

A doctoral student is allowed only one opportunity to take the Final Examination.

### Scheduling

The Final Examination request must be submitted to the Graduate and Professional School *via* the Academic Requirements Completion System (ARCS) a minimum of ten (10) working days in advance of the requested examination date, or the deadline listed on the Graduate and Professional School Dates and Deadlines Calendar (https://grad.tamu.edu/knowledge-center/dates-and-deadlines/dates-and-deadlines) – whichever comes first. Any changes to the Degree Plan must be approved by the Graduate and Professional School prior to submission of the request.

Any cancellations will be notated in ARCS.

### Format

The Final Examination shall be conducted by the student's advisory committee as approved on a graduate degree plan, and the format shall be determined by the student's academic unit and/or advisory committee and communicated to the student in advance of the examination. The Final Examination may consist of a written component, oral component, or combination of both.

The examination may cover the broad field of the candidate's training and closely related topics. For doctoral students, it is presumed that the major portion of the time will be devoted to the dissertation.

Only one committee member substitution is allowed – with prior approval of the Graduate and Professional School – to provide an evaluation decision for a student's Final Examination. The advisory committee Chair may not be replaced by a substitute. If the degree program requires the advisory committee to include at least one External Member, and the substitution is for the sole external member of the advisory committee, then the substitute must also be external to the student's (or chair's, for interdisciplinary degree programs) academic unit. In extenuating circumstances, with approval of the Graduate and Professional School, an exception to this requirement may be granted.

Persons other than members of the advisory committee may – with mutual consent of the candidate and the advisory committee chair – attend Final Examinations. Upon completion of a candidate's questioning, all visitors must excuse themselves from the proceedings.

### Grading

A positive evaluation of the Final Examination by the members of a student's advisory committee – with at most one dissension – is required to pass a student on the examination. If the chair is the sole member of the student's advisory committee, a positive vote is required to pass a student on the Final Examination. Academic units may have stricter requirements provided there is consistency in all degree programs within a given department or interdisciplinary degree program.

Final Examination results must be reported to the Graduate and Professional School *via* ARCS within ten (10) working days of completion of the examination.

### Expiration

For restrictions on Final Examination validity, please see the Time Limits section under Additional Requirements.

## Dissertation

Candidates for all Doctor of Philosophy degrees must complete an acceptable dissertation.

A doctoral dissertation, which must be a candidate's original work, demonstrates the ability to perform independent research. Whereas acceptance of the dissertation is based primarily on its scholarly merit, it must also exhibit creditable literary workmanship.

Manuscript formatting must be acceptable to the Graduate and Professional School as outlined in the *Guidelines for Theses, Dissertations, and Records of Study*.

After a successful Final Examination/defense, and approval of the student's advisory committee and the Department Head (or interdisciplinary degree Program Chair, if applicable), the student must submit the manuscript in electronic format as a single PDF file to the Thesis and Dissertation Submission System (https://etd.tamu.edu/) (Vireo).

A manuscript determined by the Graduate and Professional School to require corrections will be returned to the student. The student must make all necessary corrections and resubmit a revised version of the manuscript, which will be re-reviewed. All original submittal deadlines must be met during the resubmittal process to clear for graduation.

Additionally, a Written Thesis/Dissertation Approval Form must be submitted through the Academic Requirements Completion System (ARCS). Both the PDF file of the manuscript in Vireo, and the completed ARCS approval form, must be received by the Graduate and Professional School by the deadlines announced each semester or summer term in the Graduate and Professional School Dates and Deadlines Calendar (https://grad.tamu.edu/knowledge-center/dates-and-deadlines/dates-and-deadlines). Please see the Time Limits section in the Graduate and Professional Catalog.

Each student who submits a manuscript for review is assessed a one-time thesis/dissertation/record of study processing fee through Student Business Services for the review services provided. After commencement, manuscripts are digitally stored and made available through the Texas A&M Libraries.