The Doctor of Philosophy Degree (PhD)

The Doctor of Philosophy degree is awarded to candidates who provide evidence of high scholastic attainment and research ability in their major field. Specific degree requirements are administered by a committee in charge of the degree program. It is the responsibility of the chair of this committee to certify to the College of Science the completion of each requirement for each candidate.

Residence Requirement
A Doctor of Philosophy degree student must spend the equivalent of at least one academic year in residence at the university as a full-time graduate student. The committee of each degree program specifies the method by which the residence requirement is satisfied.

Qualifying Exam
In programs where a qualifying exam is required, students must complete this requirement within the time limit set by the program of study.

Comprehensive Examination
Degree programs may require a comprehensive examination. Generally, students are expected to complete all of the required degree course work prior to taking the comprehensive examination. Students must complete this requirement within the time limit set by the program of study, usually within one term of completing the required course work.

Doctoral Degree Candidacy
PhD degree candidacy is established when students have completed all departmental and university requirements for candidacy. These requirements vary by department and include completing the minimum number of graduate semester hours required of doctoral students by the department (this may include an earned master’s degree accepted by the department) and passing a qualifying examination and/or a comprehensive examination. Once students reach doctoral degree candidacy they will be certified, in writing, by the college. Registration in course work is not permitted once a student reaches candidacy.

Continuity of Registration
For each of the first two semesters that a doctoral candidate has established candidacy, the student must register for Dissertation. For each semester beyond the two Dissertation registrations, the student must register for Doctoral Dissertation Continuation until the dissertation is approved by the College of Science. During the terms when a student is registered for Doctoral Dissertation or Dissertation Continuation, course work is not permitted as the course requirements for the degree have already been met. If the academic program requires enrollment in seminars or courses in addition to Dissertation or Dissertation Continuation, the department’s graduate coordinator will make a recommendation to the College of Science for approval. Approval must happen prior to registration. Students must be registered for Dissertation or Dissertation Continuation during the semester in which they take the final oral examination (including the full summer semester if that is when defense occurs). Any student who does not attend Northeastern University for a period of one year may be required to apply for readmission.

Dissertation
Each doctoral student must complete a dissertation that embodies the results of extended research and makes an original contribution to the field. This work should give evidence of the candidate’s ability to carry out investigation and interpret in a logical manner the results of the research. The method of approval of the dissertation is established by the committee in charge of the degree program. The chair of the dissertation committee must be a full-time member of the faculty of Northeastern University. In addition, the chair of the dissertation committee must hold a doctoral degree. Typically, only one external committee member is allowed.

Final Oral Examination
The final oral examination will be on the subject matter of the doctoral dissertation and on important developments in the field of the dissertation. Other fields may be included if recommended by the examining committee. This examination will be taken after completion of all other degree requirements and must be held at least two weeks prior to the Commencement at which the PhD is awarded. The oral exam must take place on campus in the presence of the chair/advisor and other dissertation committee members. The dissertation defense must be publicly announced prior to the defense and the opportunity given for other students, staff, and faculty to attend.

Interdisciplinary Doctoral Programs
Some graduate students may wish to pursue doctoral programs that involve substantial work in two or more departments. To meet this need, an interdisciplinary program may be established that corresponds in scope and depth to doctoral standards but does not agree exactly with the individual departmental regulations. Consult this graduate catalog for policies and guidelines pertaining to this doctoral option.