

# UConn Nursing PhD Program Handbook 2025-2026



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**UConn**  
SCHOOL OF NURSING

**PhD Program**  
**30 Years of Excellence**  
*From 1994 to Today*

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## Welcome to UConn!

Welcome to the UConn Community of Scholars! This Handbook serves as a reference for faculty and students in the PhD Program within the School of Nursing (SON) at the University of Connecticut (UConn). This Handbook supplements the Graduate School catalog.

Faculty and staff will communicate through messages sent to UConn email addresses or those distributed via the SON doctoral listserv.

For continuously updated information, please visit the [PhD Program website](#). The [Graduate School](#) and [Registrar's Office](#) websites also provide current information regarding university requirements, necessary forms, and documents. Helpful links can be found at the end of this Handbook.

This Handbook will be updated annually. Please note that after the student has an approved plan of study, Handbook changes impacting the curriculum or scholarly portfolio will not apply unless the student opts for the change.

The Major Advisor, faculty, and staff are always available to address any questions, concerns, or issues you may have.

Wishing you an enriching and successful journey during your PhD!

Warm regards,

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# ***PRAXIS*** Pledge

The **PRAXIS Pledge** is the guiding compass for behavior in the SON and UConn. All students are held responsible to and accountable for this pledge; adherence is expected and violations will be adjudicated.

**Professionalism** in behavior, presentation, and conduct

**Respectful** of the richness and diversity of others and of self

**Accountability** for my actions

**eXcellence** in scholarship, practice, teaching and service

**Integrity**, inquisitiveness, and innovation

**Service** to the profession and the community



## UConn SON PhD Program – History and Overview

The UConn School of Nursing (SON) PhD Program admitted its first class in August 1994, and the first student graduated in 1999. From the beginning, our focus was on developing and advancing our discipline's theoretical, conceptual, and empirical basis. We emphasize using contemporary research methods to develop new knowledge about health, nursing, and health care that addresses the pressing questions in nursing and healthcare.

Our goal is for full-time students to complete their degree in no more than four years, enabling them to conduct high-quality, timely research that addresses critical issues in nursing and health care, and to serve as nurse scientists and leaders in academic, clinical, and policy roles. Highly organized and motivated students have completed the program in three years. The UConn Graduate School requires that the program be finished within eight years of matriculation.

The UConn SON PhD program supports students in achieving their research and leadership aspirations through learning experiences that reflect current and future healthcare needs. Therefore, we provide many opportunities for nurses to have a broad range of experiences to grasp the depth and breadth of conducting nursing science in the real world and to obtain leadership skills to advance health.

PhD students complete course work in philosophy of science, nursing theory and qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods research approaches. They learn skills in grant writing and the responsible conduct of research. PhD students also complete six credits of Courses Supportive of the Dissertation (CSDA or cognates), which are included in their personalized Plans of Study (see below for more information).

Upon completion of course work and all prescribed experiences (e.g., general exam, publication, and dissertation), our graduates are prepared to:

1. Conduct rigorous synthesis and analysis of philosophical, theoretical, ethical, and empirical foundations of nursing and other disciplines.
2. Engage in independent research, including grant writing, to generate new knowledge using various research methods that consider individual, biological, political, social, and environmental health factors to advance nursing science and promote health for all.
3. Disseminate knowledge to students, trainees, and academic, lay, and professional audiences through oral and written communication to improve healthcare outcomes for all.
4. Assume leadership in academic, research, and scholarly roles in settings such as universities, and/or healthcare organizations, industry, government and research institutions.

## **Out of classroom learning experiences**

In addition, to classwork, PhD students are expected to be active members on SON faculty committees, attend faculty and student development sessions, participate in a variety of educational opportunities, and attend other seminars and learning activities beyond the required course work. Through these socialization activities, students are immersed and supported to forge long-lasting relationships and networks that optimize and enrich their research and leadership trajectories.

## **Research and teaching experiences**

We expect students to seek hands-on research and teaching opportunities in their areas of expertise, while completing their programs of study and receiving formative feedback from expert scholars. These experiences will strengthen students' portfolios and assure successful transition to future careers.

## **I. PhD Advisory Committee**

An Advisory Committee will collectively mentor doctoral students throughout coursework, the general exam, dissertation development, final defense, manuscript preparation, and graduation. The role of the Advisory Committee is to guide professional development and critique the students' work as it progresses.

Members must be carefully and deliberately selected, with consideration of the methodological, theoretical/conceptual, and content expertise and dynamic interactions among the committee members. Students should select the committee members with guidance from their Major Advisor and Director of the PhD Program.

### **A. Advisory Committee Composition**

All students must have a Major Advisor (MA). The MA is a SON faculty member with a UConn Graduate School Appointment. The MA is assigned at the time of admission to the PhD Program based on the fit of the advisor's expertise with the student's research interests and/or research methods. The student's research interests should be consistent with the MA's active areas of research. This can be methodological or content-based (e.g., conceptual ideas, theory, health care problem to be addressed).

Advisory committees consist of three faculty members (one Major Advisor and two Associate Advisors). The MA guides the student to invite the Associate Advisors. Configuration of the Advisory Committee must be complete by the end of the first year or upon completion of 12 credits, whichever comes first, consistent with Graduate School policy.

At least one Associate Advisor must be a member of the UConn faculty with a Graduate

School appointment, and the third may be a non-UConn faculty member. The student selects Associate Advisors with the guidance of the MA. For the General Exam and the Dissertation, the PhD Program Director will assign two external readers with relevant expertise. The PhD Program Director will approve the committee.

The Advisory Committee must meet regularly to guide the student's work. The communication and coordination of the Advisory Committee rests with the PhD student, who will schedule meetings on a regular basis. Meetings can be in person, by phone, or through electronic means. Regular meetings (i.e., at least monthly with the MA and once per semester with the entire committee) can best help assure continued progression in the PhD program early in students' progression. Meetings will need to be more frequent during the dissertation phase.

All members must have terminal degrees in their respective fields. Associate Advisors from outside the University must meet the criteria for graduate faculty status. Associate Advisors from outside the University must submit up-to-date CVs to the PhD Program Director and Registrar's Office for approval. More information about the UConn graduate degree program advisory system is on the Graduate School website.

## **B. Committee Roles and Responsibilities**

### **1. Student**

- a. Initiate regularly scheduled advisory meetings.
- b. Schedule an advising appointment with the MA before registering for coursework each semester.
- c. Meet regularly with the MA to review the student's course of study.
- d. Address recommendations of the advisory committee in a timely manner.
- e. Seek assistance when progression issues occur.
- f. Be proactive in seeking guidance when diverse sources of feedback exist, and decision-making is needed for future progress. Ask questions!
- g. Collaborate with the MA to develop a timeline for completion of the dissertation and adhere, as much as possible to the timeline.

### **2. Major Advisor (MA) Roles and Responsibilities**

The PhD Admissions & Progressions Committee works with faculty to determine the best match for the student at the time of admission based on areas of common research interests, methods, and faculty experts.

- a. File doctoral advisement notes in the student record at least twice yearly.
- b. Provide guidance and feedback on drafting and updating the student's biosketch. Please see resources at the end of this document for more information. This should be submitted annually by email to the PhD Program Coordinator.
- c. Meet regularly with the student advisement committee to ensure the student's progression in the program. Any member of the advisement

committee can ask for a meeting; however, it is the student is responsible for scheduling the meeting time and location at times and places acceptable to all parties.

- d. Assist the student to develop a reasonable timeline for completion of the dissertation activities and support to ensure time completion of the plan of study.

### **3. Roles of Associate Advisors (AA)**

- a. Assist with developing the student's plan of study to meet PhD Program requirements.
- b. Provide subject matter or methodological expertise to diversify perspectives.

### **4. Roles of Reviewers/Readers**

- a. Every general exam and dissertation committee must have at least two external reviewers/readers.
- b. Reviewers/readers must hold terminal degrees in areas complementary to the student's program of study.
- c. Non-UConn committee members must provide CVs to the UConn Graduate School before serving.
- d. Serve as final checks and balance as committee members have helped design and implement the study.
- e. Be approved to serve on the committee by the PhD Program Director
- f. Critique the student's product and contribute to the deliberations, but do not vote on the outcome of the general exam or dissertation defense.

### **5. Change of Major Advisor**

It may be necessary to change a MA (e.g., if students have substantive changes in research directions or if a faculty member leaves the university).

- a. Requests to change a MA must be submitted to the PhD Admissions and Progression Committee via the PhD Program Director. The committee will review the request and decide to change the advisor or guide the student in different directions if appropriate. Discussions will be held with all parties before a decision is made.
- b. If a change is approved, a Change in Major Advisor Form must be completed by the student, signed by the original and new advisor, and submitted to the PhD Program Director AND the Registrar's Office.

### **6. Change in Associate Advisor**

The Advisory Committee, with the student, makes the decision to change associate advisors as needed. The process for this is below:

- a. Student notifies the Program Coordinator of the change. The Program Coordinator will update the files.
- b. If the new Associate Advisor is outside UConn, an updated CV must be



submitted to the PhD Director and Registrar's Office. This may be sent by email to the registrar (registrar@uconn.edu) and PhD Program Director noting the student's name and who the new person is replacing on the committee.

### **C. Communication with the Advisory Committee**

UConn email is the only email used, and materials circulated through that format are official documents. The times for communication vary based on whether they occur during the academic year or the summer. Although students continue toward program milestones throughout the year, Major Advisor and committee member appointments vary between 9-month, 10-month, 11-month, or 12-month appointments. These schedules must be considered when interacting with the faculty.

#### **1. Academic Year**

- a. School of Nursing email communications between students and faculty generally will be acknowledged within two business days following receipt of message.
- b. Advisors are expected to provide students with feedback on chapter/project drafts, IRB applications, etc., within two weeks of receipt.

#### **2. Summer**

- a. General Exams, dissertation proposal reviews, and/or dissertation defenses are not routinely held between May 23rd and August 22nd.
- b. Summer schedules differ, and timelines must be discussed before the end of each semester so that student progression can continue without impeding faculty scholarship and summer activities.
- c. MAs should notify students of plans and develop timelines for communication during the summer months.

## II. PhD Program Requirements and Milestones

### A. Curriculum & Plan of Study

The program of study sequence for required courses is prescribed, yet individualized. (See the UConn SON PhD Program website for current recommended course sequencing).

1. An official individualized Plan of Study must be completed by the student and signed by the student's three-person Advisory Committee prior to the completion of the first year of study or the completion of 12 credits, whichever comes first. Submission at this point in the student's progression in the program is consistent with the Graduate School policy. Timely preparation and submission of the plan of study facilitates course offering decisions and serves as a contract between the student and UConn.
2. Students are responsible for submitting the executed form to the PhD Program Director (CC: Program Coordinator). The PhD Program Coordinator will submit the form to the Registrar's Office, and an electronic copy will be uploaded to the student's electronic file on the PhD program computer network.
3. Students may make changes to the plan of study, and these must be approved by the Advisory Committee. Substituting one CSDA (Course Supportive of the Dissertation Area, also referred to as "Related Areas of Knowledge" or simply "cognate") for another course requires approval and a change of plan of study submission, whereas a change in the timing of the semester in which the course occurs does not require a change in the plan of study.
4. Each spring, students will submit updated progress reports and electronic NIH NCBI Biosketches to the PhD Admissions & Progress Committee via the Program Coordinator (**due May 1**). Biosketches must follow the NIH NCBI guidelines (see Resources at the end of this document). These files will be saved to the School's electronic files and will also be included in the student's Scholarly Portfolio.
5. Students must take cognates in addition to required nursing courses to prepare for the dissertation. These may include relevant content or specialized methods or both. If the student changes the topic or methods for the dissertation after completing coursework, they may need to take additional cognates to support its successful completion.
6. Enrollment in GRAD 6950 (15 credits total) is required for graduation.
7. After students register for dissertation credits, they must participate in the dissertation seminar each semester until the dissertation is complete.

8. After the student has completed 15 dissertation credits (GRAD 6950), they should register for GRAD 6999 instead of registering for more dissertation credits. Students must be registered for graduate coursework each semester. Participation in the dissertation seminar is required during this time.

## **B. Progression and Degree Requirement**

The PhD Admissions and Progression Committee monitors student progress through the program and provides recommendations to the PhD Program Director regarding student progress and any appeals and grievances initiated by School of Nursing students regarding grades received and dismissals from the PhD Program.

- PhD students are required to complete the degree within 8 years of the date of matriculation with a minimum grade point average (GPA) of 3.0. Failure to complete the work within the specified time limit or failure to maintain registration will require re-evaluation of the entire program and may result in a notice of termination.
- Students must maintain a grade of at least a B (83 or higher) in all courses. A grade of less than a B in a repeated course (one NURS course may be repeated) will result in dismissal from the PhD program.
- Total course work consists of 52 credits for post MS students and X credits for post BS students.
- Completion of the General Examination in the semester following completion of 75% of content coursework.
- As indicated in the [Graduate Handbook](#): A graduate student's progress in a degree program must be monitored regularly by the student's advisory committee. If at any time a student's academic performance, progress in a graduate degree program, or professional development and/or suitability is judged by the advisory committee to be unsatisfactory to the degree that dismissal is warranted, the advisory committee must submit its written recommendation that the student be dismissed on such grounds. A student may be dismissed for failure to satisfy any requirement of the student's graduate degree program, including failure to maintain adequate academic progress.
- Dissertation Proposal
- Dissertation and Final Oral Defense of Dissertation
- Yearly Submission of Annual Progress Review to Major Advisor

- PhD Portfolio (see IV. PhD Portfolio)

### **C. The General Exam** (***MUST** be completed within four years of matriculation*)

The goal of General Exam is to assess student's readiness for PhD candidacy. The purpose of the exam is to assess the student's:

- Mastery of curriculum content
  - Breadth of knowledge – theory, qualitative methods, and quantitative methods
  - Depth of knowledge in a specific topic area that may be the foundation for their dissertation research
- Critical thinking skills
- Ability to synthesize relevant theoretical and scientific literature
- Written and oral communication

The General Exam is a two-part process (written exam and oral defense); both parts must be passed. Per Graduate School policy, the General Exam may be completed only after 75% of the program content coursework, exclusive of GRAD 6950, has been completed. It must be completed no more than four years after matriculation and prior to approval of the dissertation proposal. Students are expected to complete the General Exam in the semester after they have completed 75% of the program coursework (e.g., Spring semester of the second year for full-time students in the Post-Masters to PhD program). Part time students must complete the General Exam immediately after completing 75% of the program coursework.

#### **General Exam Committee:**

Consistent with the rules of the Office of the Registrar, the General Exam Committee must have at least five faculty members, including the student's advisory committee. The General Exam Committee will include the student's Major Advisor, two Associate Advisors, and two graduate faculty members with appointments in the School of Nursing assigned by the Director of the PhD Program. The PhD Program Director must approve the committee before the student begins the exam.

After the General Exam Committee is approved, the Major Advisor will coordinate the committee members to write the exam questions. The Major Advisor and the two Associate Advisors will each draft one question or collaboratively for three questions total with explicit evaluation criteria (see Rating Form: Written Component of the General Exam). The group will coordinate this to ensure that there is no overlap or redundancy and to assure that the questions adequately address the student's primary area of study, curriculum content, and research methods. All General Exam Committee members will review and edit the exam questions for rigor, clarity, and minimal content overlap. The PhD Program Director will review and approve all exam questions to ensure rigor and equity of the experience across students.

Exam questions should be finalized within 2 weeks of committee approval and forwarded to the student for the exam's written component.

### **The Written Component:**

The General Exam will consist of three questions. After the General Exam Committee and PhD Program Director approve the questions, the Major Advisor will share the questions with the student, who will have four weeks to answer the questions in writing. The response to each question should be no more than 10 double-spaced pages, excluding references. Once the General Exam commences, the student may not seek help from others (e.g., committee members, peers, faculty, consultants). Students may not use AI (Artificial Intelligence) to answer exam questions and will sign a form to indicate that they have complied with this directive. Students will have four weeks to independently complete the written component. They will submit the completed exam to their Major Advisor, who will distribute responses to the committee for review. If students do not submit their exam to their Major Advisor by the due date or if there is evidence of assistance from others or use of AI to answer questions, they will fail the General Exam.

**Evaluation.** Committee members will evaluate the responses to all three exam questions. Each committee member will evaluate all the student's responses to the exam questions using the *Rating Form: Written Component of the General Exam* (see below). Each committee member will rate each response as Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory and provide an overall evaluation of Pass, Conditional Pass, or Fail. Committee members are expected to provide their evaluations to the student's Major Advisor within two weeks of receiving the Written Component. The Major Advisor will aggregate the committee members' overall evaluations and determine the committee's decision on the Written Component. The Major Advisor will report the committee's decision on the Written Component to the student and committee. Outcomes for the Written Component include:

- **Pass:** A student must receive the majority pass ratings from committee members (i.e., no more than one fail rating). The student will schedule the Oral Component of the General Exam.
- **Conditional Pass:** A student may receive no more than one Fail rating and less than majority Pass ratings from committee members. The student will have one week to revise the written document based on feedback from the committee. The committee will score the revised document according to the procedures outlined above.

If the revised document receives a Pass from the committee, the student will proceed to schedule the Oral Component of the General Exam. If the revised document does not receive a Pass from the committee, the student will Fail the General Exam. The student can request one opportunity from the Dean to retake the General Exam, starting the process from the beginning with new exam questions.

- **Fail:** A student receives two or more Fail ratings from committee members. The student will have one opportunity to retake the Written Component. The student will start the

General Exam process from the beginning with new exam questions. The student must retake the Written Component within a time limit approved by the PhD Program Director and Major Advisor.

### **The Oral Component:**

The student will schedule a two-hour meeting with the committee for the defense of the Written Component. The committee will interview the student regarding the contents of the Written Component and the ability to apply curriculum content (e.g., philosophy, theory, other substance related to the research question qualitative methods, quantitative methods, mixed methods) within the context of the student's stated area of expertise. The process for the oral component of the general exam is as follows:

After receiving a Pass on the Written Component, the student schedules the Oral Component of the general exam. The Oral Component should be held between August 23 and May 22 because most faculty are on academic year contracts. However, it can be held during the summer, with prior approval from the Director of the PhD Program and all members of the student's General Exam committee.

The committee will ask questions assessing the student's breadth and depth of knowledge related to the written document's content and application of curriculum materials to it. In addition, it provides the student with the opportunity with skills related to listening and responding that will be required in the final dissertation defense. While additional questions may be posed during the course of the exam as needed, members should submit their questions to the Major Advisor 5 days prior to the Oral Component to assure that all major areas are covered. Questions should relate to content in courses completed to this point.

The oral component is only open to the student, their General Exam Committee, and the Director of the PhD Program.

At the conclusion of the discussion, the student will be excused, and the committee will discuss their evaluations of the Oral and Written Component. Each committee member will provide an overall evaluation of Pass or Fail. The Major Advisor will aggregate the committee members' overall evaluations and determine the committee's decision for the overall exam. The student will attend the meeting, and the Major Advisor will inform the student of the committee's decision. Outcomes for the Oral Component include:

- **Pass:** A student may receive no more than one Fail rating from committee members. After passing the Oral Component, the student has completed their General Exam requirement.
- **Fail:** A student receives two or more Fail ratings from committee members. The student will have one opportunity to retake the Oral Component within 4 weeks of the original defense. The students will revise their presentation or better prepare for the oral defense, based on feedback from the committee.
  - If the revised Oral Component receives a Pass from the committee, the student has completed their General Exam requirement.

- If the revised Oral Component does not receive a Pass from the committee, the student will Fail the General Exam.

**Deadlines:** If a student does not meet stated deadlines for the Written or Oral Components of the General Exam, they will receive a grade of Fail. A student may request an extension of deadlines from the Director of the PhD Program and the General Exam Committee if there are extenuating circumstances.

**Retaking the Exam:** If a student Fails the General Exam, they have only one opportunity to retake it, starting the process from the beginning with new exam questions. In some cases, as noted above, the student must petition the Dean to retake the General Exam. The timeframe for retaking the General Exam must be approved by the PhD Program Director and Major Advisor.

**Report on the General Exam:** The Report on the General Exam is used as the basis for the oral defense for faculty comments and approval signatures. The PhD Program Director will submit the executed Report on the General Exam to the Registrar's office, and a copy will be saved in the student's file. If the student has completed their masters' coursework and should have their master's degree conferred, a letter requesting this action from the MA should be included in the paperwork submission for the General Exam.

After the student passes the general exam, if their cognate courses are complete and their proposal has been accepted by the Graduate School, they advance to PhD candidacy, at which point they may proceed to the PhD degree dissertation phase.

Rating Form: Written Component of the General Exam	
Please indicate whether the student satisfactorily demonstrated the following skills in the Written Component of their General Exam. Examples of factors to consider under each criterion are provided.	
Rating Area	Evaluation
	Satisfactory      Unsatisfactory
<b>Mastery of Curriculum Content</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrates appropriate understanding of research methods, data analysis, theory, or philosophy.</li> </ul>	
<b>Breadth of Knowledge</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Synthesizes and evaluates literature across areas of study or disciplines as appropriate to the topic.</li> <li>• Incorporates multiple methods or data analysis techniques.</li> </ul>	
<b>Depth of Knowledge</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrates expertise in the content area.</li> <li>• Demonstrates ability to synthesize content and expand and extend it to their own area of interest.</li> <li>• Supports proposed approach to the research based on synthesis and evaluation of the literature.</li> <li>• Describes appropriate and timely research methods to address the research question (s).</li> </ul>	
<b>Critical Thinking</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrates ability to critically analyze the literature related to the research topic.</li> <li>• Identifies strengths and limitations</li> </ul>	



and proposes alternative strategies as appropriate.	
<b>Synthesis of Literature</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cites and integrates appropriate literature.</li> <li>• Supports conclusions with evidence.</li> </ul>	
<b>Written Communication</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presents information in a logical and well-organized manner.</li> <li>• Uses appropriate grammar and sentence structure.</li> <li>• Formats the document and references using standard approaches and adheres to page guidelines.</li> </ul>	
<b>Overall Evaluation</b>  *Reviewers may weigh the rating areas differently in determining their overall evaluation	Pass      Conditional Pass      Fail
Notes in support of overall decision (required if failing) -- may continue reverse-side:	

## Scoring Rubric for Evaluating the Oral Portion of the PhD General Exam

Name of Reviewer:

Name of Doctoral Student:

Date:

For each criterion, place a mark next to the determination (i.e., below or meets expectations) that is consistent with performance and explain in the comment box any determination of “Below.”

Criterion and Description	Determination and Comment	
<b>Competence</b> Relevant to their topic, the student is able to explain and to apply key concepts and other priorities about research methods, data analysis, theory, and philosophy based on required PhD coursework.	___ Below	___ Meets
	Comment:	
<b>Critical Thinking</b> Through responses, the student is able to reflect critically on the written exam in response to diverse questions from the committee.	___ Below	___ Meets
	Comment:	
<b>Communication</b> The student is able describe information in a clear, concise, and organized manner. The student speaks in complete sentences.	___ Below	___ Meets
	Comment:	
<b>Comportment</b> Through facial expressions and comments, student respects others’ views, even if different from their own. Student frames differences in non-judgmental ways, seeks to understand differences, and remains open to alternative perspectives.	___ Below	___ Meets
	Comment:	
<b>Overall Evaluation</b> The reviewer’s overall evaluation rating based on consideration of all criteria weighted as the reviewer sees fit.	___ Fail	___ Pass

## **D. Dissertation and Defense Procedures**

After successfully passing their general exam and meeting course requirements, students may propose their dissertation, which generally occurs in the fall semester of the third year for full-time students in the Post-Masters to PhD program. The dissertation entails a written document and an oral defense. The oral defense is generally held in the spring semester of the fourth year for full-time students in the Post-Masters to PhD program. Dissertation proposals and dissertation defenses are typically not conducted between May 23<sup>rd</sup> and August 22<sup>nd</sup> due to faculty work schedules.

### **1. Dissertation Format:**

There are two options for the dissertation document format. An approved proposal is required for either format.

#### **Five Chapter Dissertation**

The five-chapter dissertation includes a report of a single study (Chapter 1. Overview of Problem; Chapter 2. Review of Literature; Chapter 3. Study Methods; Chapter 4. Results; Chapter 5. Discussion/Application and Conclusions).

#### **Manuscript Dissertation**

The manuscript style dissertation includes five chapters with the same first (Overview of Problem) and the last (Discussion/application and Conclusions) chapters as the five-chapter dissertation. The other three chapters consist of manuscripts that have been or will be submitted for publication. At least one of these manuscripts **must be** the primary research report of the dissertation study.

The student and the Advisory Committee will determine the contents of the three manuscripts. Dissertation manuscripts may include one or more research reports, an integrative or systematic review/synthesis paper, or a methods paper. The MA and the Advisory committee collaborate with students on determining authorship. The student must be first author on all three papers, as these papers should reflect the students' major contribution to these works. These documents should be consistent with the overall direction of the dissertation research and not represent disparate topics.

Authorship will be determined based on the ICMJE (International Committee of Medical Journal Editors) Standards (see Resources for link) based on the contributions of each author. Authors can include non-members of the Advisory Committee, as appropriate, given their contributions toward the manuscript. Students should seek guidance from their MAs regarding decisions about authorship.

If the manuscript is already published at the time of the defense, the student may need to request a copyright transfer to include the work(s) in the dissertation. It is advisable that the student begin obtaining copyright transfer early in the final dissertation process, if not retained before publishing the manuscript.

## **2. Dissertation Proposal Guidelines**

These guidelines pertain to dissertation proposal documents, in which students briefly summarize the significance of the problem under study, the gap that the dissertation aims to address, and substantially detail study procedures. The dissertation proposal is an opportunity for the committee to review and provide feedback on important aspects of the study design and study procedures.

Students work with their Major Advisor to identify the dissertation proposal format most suitable for their dissertation work 1) Five Chapter Dissertation; and 2) Manuscript Dissertation. The dissertation proposal should sufficiently address study procedures. Documents that are essential to study procedures (e.g., interview guides, surveys, data collection tools, etc.) should be included in the proposal as appendices. The dissertation proposal is not to exceed 30 double-spaced pages (excluding tables, figures, appendices, and references).

The **Five Chapter Dissertation Proposal** should include the following:

- A. Title
- B. Chapter 1. Overview of Problem (1-2 pages)
- C. Chapter 2. Summary of the Review of Literature (10-15 pages)
- D. Chapter 3. Study Methods (10 – for next-15 pages)
  - a. Conceptual or thematic structure for the study
  - b. Research questions or hypotheses
  - c. Study design, population, sampling
  - d. Planned data collection & data analysis
- E. Protection of human subjects (1-2 pages)
- F. Timeline & funding sources (1 page)
- G. References
- H. Appendices - Documents that are essential to study procedures (e.g., interview guides, surveys, data collection tools, etc.) should be included in the proposal as appendices.

The **Manuscript Dissertation Proposal** should include the following:

- A. Title
- B. Chapter 1. Overview of problem and introduction to three manuscripts (2-3 pages)
  - a. Conceptual or thematic structure for manuscripts (Figure)
- C. Chapter 2. Manuscript 1 (5-6 pages)
  - a. Research questions or hypotheses
  - b. Study design, population, sampling
  - c. Data collection & data analysis
- D. Chapter 3. Manuscript 2 (5-6 pages)
  - a. Research questions or hypotheses
  - b. Study design, population, sampling
  - c. Data collection & data analysis
- E. Chapter 4. Manuscript 3 (6-7 pages)
  - a. Research questions or hypotheses
  - b. Study design, population, sampling
  - c. Data collection & data analysis
- F. Protection of human subjects (1-2 pages)
- G. Timeline & funding sources (1-page)
- H. References
- I. Appendices - Documents that are essential to study procedures (e.g., interview guides, surveys, data collection tools, etc.) should be included in the proposal as appendices.

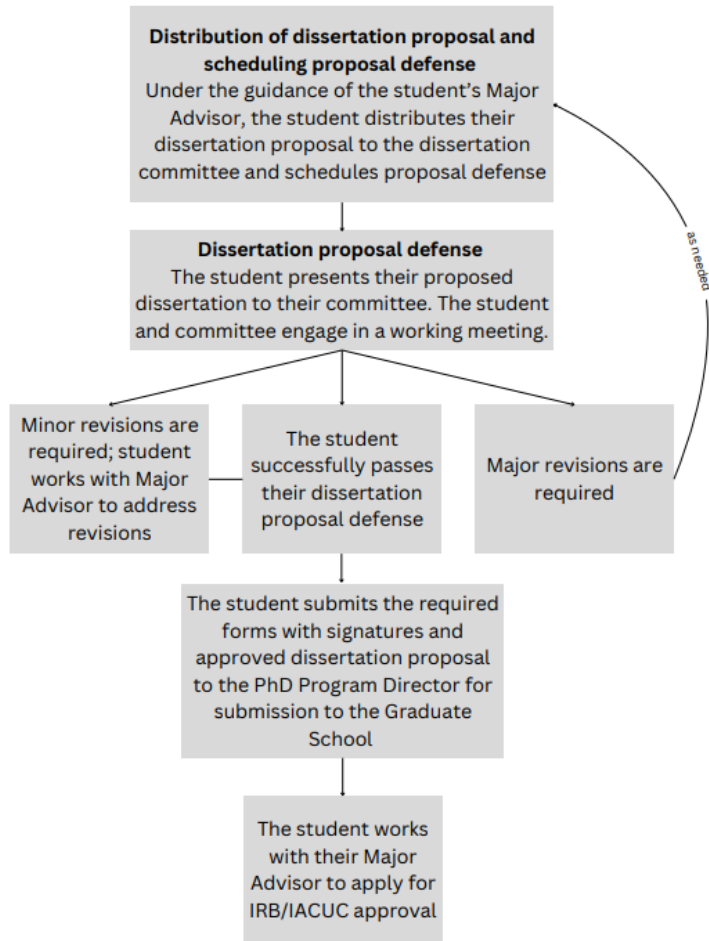
\*Note. Suggested page lengths.

### **Dissertation Proposal Defense**

During the dissertation proposal defense, students provide a brief (15-20 minute) presentation on their proposed dissertation work to their dissertation committee. After the student's presentation, the student and dissertation committee engage in a working meeting to discuss the dissertation study design and study procedures. The working meeting may result in important revisions to the proposed dissertation, which may or may not require an additional dissertation proposal defense. See **Dissertation**

## Proposal Defense Flowchart.

Dissertation Proposal Defense Flowchart



### 3. Dissertation Proposal Process Roles and Responsibilities

#### Student Role

The student is responsible for:

- Preparing the proposal according to the Dissertation Specifications listed on the Registrar's Steps to a Successful Graduation webpage (see Resources for link).
- Distributing their dissertation proposal to dissertation committee under the guidance of their Major Advisor.
- Scheduling the dissertation proposal meeting.

- d. Gathering all signatures on the relevant forms (see below). The student should request assistance from their MA and the PhD Program Director.
- e. Obtaining current CVs for non-UConn Associate advisors/readers and submitting them with the dissertation proposal paperwork to the PhD Program Director.
- f. Submitting the completed and signed Graduate School forms to the PhD Program Director. Students may request assistance from the PhD Program Coordinator for document submission. Copies of submitted Proposal paperwork will also be saved to the student's file on the SON file server.

### **Required documentation**

The student provides the MA with the following documents:

- a. **The Proposal** (a well-labeled electronic file is acceptable; please ask the MA for their preferences). The Dissertation Proposal for the Doctoral Degree form should not be signed by all committee members until the entire proposal process is completed.
- b. **IRB/IACUC Approval** document(s). The approval documents must be current. If UConn IRB is not the IRB of record, a copy of the approval document from the IRB of record AND acceptance document from UConn IRB acknowledging non-UConn said IRB of Record. The faculty advisory must be listed as the Principal Investigator on these materials per IRB Regulations.

### **Major Advisor Role and Responsibilities**

- a. Recommend readers to the PhD Program Director for approval.
- b. Work with the student to ensure that the copies of the CVs of non-UConn members of the Advisory Committee are submitted to the PhD Program Director at the time the proposal is submitted.
- c. The readers will use the Doctoral Proposal Review Cover Sheet to provide their feedback to the student.

### **PhD Program Director Role and Responsibilities**

- a. Approve readers
- b. Receive final version of the proposal and store it in student's file

## **4. IRB/IACUC (Animal Use and Care)**

The approval documents must be current. If UConn IRB is not the IRB of record, a copy of the approval document from the IRB of record AND acceptance document from UConn IRB acknowledging non-UConn said IRB of Record. The faculty advisory must be listed as the Principal Investigator on these materials per IRB Regulations. Research cannot proceed until IRB approval or exemption has been obtained (see [OVPR](#) for guidance).

## **5. Submission of Proposal to Registrar's Office**

After the reviewers'/readers' and IRB/IACUC approvals, the student provides an electronic copy of the final proposal, IRB approval form(s) and Dissertation Proposal Approval Form to the PhD Program Coordinator who will send the package of information to the Registrar. Copies of all submitted paperwork will be saved in the student's electronic file.

## **6. Advancement to Candidacy**

To advance to candidacy the student must:

- a. Pass the General Examination (Written and Oral).
- b. Receive approval from the Graduate School for successfully defending the dissertation proposal.
- c. Students may *not* use the initials PhD(c), these credentials are inappropriate and not recognized by the School of Nursing or the University. Students may sign their names with their credentials and then use the words "PhD Candidate," if desired.

## **7. Completing the Dissertation**

Manuscripts/chapters may be submitted in the format required for the planned journal for submission rather than APA format. These decisions will be made collaboratively between the students and their advisors.

### **Student role**

The student will keep the Advisory Committee apprised of progress with data collection and writing. The student should discuss whether the MA prefers to receive all chapters together or each component separately. The student needs to address the feedback from the Advisory Committee members in a timely manner, while carefully addressing all the committee recommendations. The student is responsible for the final product.

### **Major Advisor Role**

The MA supervises the implementation of the research and the writing of the dissertation, including guiding student interactions with and seeking approval from AAs. The MA is the standard bearer for quality.

## **8. Defense of the Dissertation**

- a. Dissertation defenses are typically scheduled during the Academic Year dates of August 23<sup>rd</sup> through May 22<sup>nd</sup>. The student works with the MA to determine the best date and time and is responsible for arranging this with the Advisory Committee members.
- b. The dissertation defense is a two-hour oral examination under the authority of the Advisory Committee. The purpose is to demonstrate mastery of the subject matter and methods as presented in the dissertation. The student must allow



at least two weeks for the Advisory Committee and readers to review the complete document. Students will not be permitted to proceed to the dissertation defense until the entire written document is complete and deemed ready for defense by the Advisory Committee and readers.

- The examination must be held before the last day to submit paperwork for the semester the degree is to be conferred.
- c. An invitation to the defense will be sent to all committee members and other SON faculty members at the request of the PhD Program Director. The invitation will be sent to the SON DNP-PHD Listserv two weeks prior to the defense. The defense is open to the UCONN community. No fewer than five members of the faculty, including all members of the candidate's advisory committee and readers, shall participate in the final examination unless written approval for a smaller number is secured in advance from the Dean of the Graduate School.
- d. If students would like to invite family and/or friends to attend the defense, they should obtain advice from their MAs.
- e. MAs guide doctoral students in preparing for the final defense. Students will provide a 30-35 minute presentation of their dissertation work, followed by questions from and discussion with the Dissertation Committee. Family and friends will be recused during the question and discussion period.
- f. Decisions about the outcome of the defense (pass, conditionally pass, fail) rest solely with the Advisory Committee who will account for the feedback of other participating faculty members and experts. The vote of the Advisory Committee must be unanimous. The MA shall communicate the results to the student immediately after the examination and send the official report on the examination to the PhD Program Director.
  - A determination of **"pass"** means that no additional changes are needed, and the dissertation is accepted as presented orally in writing.
  - A **"conditional pass"** indicates that changes are needed, but that the dissertation will be acceptable if these changes are needed. These changes may be editorial or substantive (e.g., correctable flaws in reporting of methods or descriptions/analysis) in nature.
  - A determination of **"fail"** indicates that there are serious and inaccurate flaws in the methods, or verbal or written reports and that significant effort must be taken to conduct new work or make significant changes. Determinations of "fail" are rare and can be avoided with careful collaboration and attention to the Advisory Committee feedback prior to the defense.
- g. The student initiates the Dissertation Approval Page, a webform that is routed to the committee after the dissertation defense for their approvals. Please note that the online workflow will require the student to upload the last version of the dissertation as a part of the approval process.
- h. After completing the defense, the student must submit all remaining paperwork to Registrar's Office and Open Commons no less than 10 business

days prior to the deadline.

#### 9. Timelines for Planning the Defense and Submission of Final Product

The last day for finishing everything (thereby fulfilling degree requirements) is the last day of classes in the fall and spring terms and August 24th for summer degree conferral. Therefore, a timeline should be planned to account for this.

- a. At the start of the semester in which the student plans to defend, they should review the Steps to a Successful Graduation page on the Registrar's website (see Resources for link).
- b. The defense needs to be scheduled no later than 10 days prior to the last day for submission – the final day for paperwork submission is posted on Academic Calendar (see Resources for link) on the Registrar's website. Defenses are typically scheduled between August 23<sup>rd</sup> and May 22<sup>nd</sup>.
- c. Set the defense date with the dissertation committee as early as possible. It is the student's responsibility to coordinate advisory committee schedules for the defense date. Notify the PhD Program Coordinator of the tentative date and confirm it when the date is finally set. The PhD Program Coordinator will reserve a room and technology resources.
- d. Follow steps to submit the dissertation exactly as described in the Steps to a Successful Graduation/ Doctoral degree- found on the Graduate School website and review the steps with your MA.
- e. After the Advisory Committee approves the dissertation, the MA may schedule a committee meeting to verify that the student is ready for defense **before** going to the outside readers. If so, this must be part of the schedule at the beginning of the semester. The student must deliver the final copy to the committee.
- f. **Two weeks prior to the defense\*** the student must:
  - Submit the announcement to the Thesis and Dissertation Defense Calendar.
  - Provide the PhD Program Coordinator the following:
    - i. Legal Name
    - ii. Phone Number
    - iii. Student ID and NetID
    - iv. Title of Dissertation/Project
    - v. Names of all participating Faculty/Mentors
    - vi.

**\*You should always refer to the Steps to a Successful Graduation/ Doctoral degree- found on the Graduate School website for exact time frames.**

#### 10. After the Defense:

Students have 10 days to make any corrections and to submit the final copy of the dissertation to Open Commons. If the dissertation does not follow guidelines exactly, it will be rejected. Be sure it meets the Graduate School requirements prior to submission.

After submitting the dissertation, consider whether to “embargo” it. Embargoing means that it will not be publicly disseminated. This allows for the student to publish the results, preferably as one to two manuscripts within one to two years of the dissertation defense.

The IRB protocol must be closed, and final reports must be filed, if no other research activities will be conducted. These might be related to the agency where the project was completed, to the funding agency and/or the IRB. All reports must be completed as you are leaving the University. Data analysis might continue (IRB approval is needed for additional analysis), but all other work should be complete.

Attend the School of Nursing Convocation and the University PhD Commencement to celebrate your success!

### **III. Applications for Grant Funding to Support Research**

Students are expected to submit at least one grant application as part of their portfolios for PhD study, and it is desirable to obtain funding for research. If planning to apply for funding, please contact the MA and the Senior Associate Dean for Research and Scholarship early in the process.

All funding requests (grants, scholarships, fellowships) must be submitted through the School of Nursing Research Office. Please initiate the form listed on the School of Nursing Research Website. Please note that these applications should be submitted well before the funding deadlines to allow enough time to prepare the budget and review the proposal. Moving an application for funding through the University takes time; therefore, it is important to work with the MA PhD Program Director and Coordinator early and throughout the dissertation proposal process. Please ask for this support.

Funding awarded directly to the student and not to the school is considered taxable income by federal and state law. It is strongly recommended that all submissions for external funding be submitted through the SON. Please initiate this process by completing the application on the School of Nursing Research website (see Resources for link).

### **IV. PhD Portfolio**

A portfolio of student work is required for program completion, and the student must work with their MA, the PhD Program Director, and PhD Program Coordinator to make sure all required elements are completed. Planning and developing a portfolio should begin early in studies, and it must include the following:

- Latest curriculum vitae and NIH Biosketch
- At least one published paper and one poster or podium presentation at an external meeting

- **The paper must a full-length manuscript published in a peer-reviewed journal with submission pre-approval by the MA.**
- **This paper may be one of the manuscripts in a three-paper Dissertation, noting the need for copyright transfer explained above.**
- A copy of a grant application submitted for review by an external organization or foundation, preferably the NIH, NSF, or a national or international foundation. The student must lead (as PI or similar role) the proposal, which must relate to the dissertation topic. Other pursue grants, scholarships, or other funding mechanisms to support effort (e.g., tuition, stipend) may be supported. It is advisable to submit as many as possible as there is no guarantee that they will be funded.

The development of the portfolio should be planned at the beginning of the program and may be completed as part of coursework throughout the program. The portfolio can be used as marketing materials to assist in seeking future positions. The Scholarly Portfolio contents will be approved by the student's advisory committee and contents maintained in the SON electronic files. The format for the portfolio is individualized to student needs. It may be both in print and electronic formats and should also include information on teaching or research experiences that obtained during study.

## V. Resources and Opportunities for Students

### 1. Teaching Opportunities

To best prepare for careers in academia, it is best to gain teaching experience while a PhD student. A graduate assistant position may include teaching a course or co-teaching a course with a faculty member.

There are also options to present guest lectures or teach a class or classes in courses at the undergraduate and graduate levels throughout. The MA, advisory committee can assist in finding potential teaching opportunities.

The School of Nursing offers a Health Professions Education Certificate program to prepare for careers in academic teaching. This nine-credit sequence of three courses (NURS 5700, 5710 and 5720) is offered online and can be started in any semester. These courses may be used as cognates (courses supportive of the dissertation) depending on the research focus.

The Graduate School offers a [Graduate Certificate in College Instruction](#). These courses cannot be used as courses supporting a dissertation per Graduate School policy.

### 2. Financial Support

There are resources available to support the financial cost of the PhD program. A few of these are listed below:

- a. **Graduate Assistantship** (<https://grad.uconn.edu/assistantships/>) positions provide

tuition, salary support, and health insurance. They may be supported by the SON, other units at UCONN, or faculty research grants. Students are required commit a set number of hours per week to work on research or teaching activities

- b. **Nurse Faculty Loan Program (NFLP)** is a US federal loan program designed as both a recruitment device to doctoral programs and a retention strategy in academia. The program provides tuition and fees AND reasonable costs of attendance (such as books, computer, research supplies) for up to five years. Upon employment in academia, loans are forgiven 20% for the first year, 20% for each of the second and third years and 25% the fourth year; all consecutive but not necessarily at the same institution. The remaining 15% balance is amortized over ten years at the prevailing federal interest rate.
- c. The National Institutes of Health supports research training opportunities for U.S. citizens. These are mentored opportunities and support tuition, some expenses, and a stipend. The candidate must have a mentor with a history of NIH-funded research.
- d. Other funding opportunities and scholarships may be available through professional organizations. Please refer to the SON website and to the emails circulated by the PhD Program Director and Coordinator for updates on these opportunities.

### **3. International Students**

#### **a. New Student Check-In**

All new International Students must complete Check-In online through the ISSS Portal on the ISSS website prior to the first day of classes. The link to Check-In instructions is on the ISSS homepage. New international students can use the computers at ISSS to scan immigration documents, print their I-94 and fill out their online check-in forms. Please check with the ISSS office about current verification procedures.

#### **b. International Graduate Student Orientation**

Storrs campus international Graduate Students are required to attend International Graduate Orientation. Please visit the ISSS website for more information on fees and registration.

The orientation schedule is available online and is subject to updates. Regional campus international graduate students are required to attend an ISSS session on the visa regulations as part of the academic program's orientation for international students, or through a separate session facilitated by ISSS when the program does not offer a specific international student orientation.

### **4. Leave of Absence Policy**

For the leave of absence and withdrawal policies for the Graduate School, please review information on the Graduate School website.

## Practices for Document Approvals and Submission to the Graduate School Registrar

### 1. Email Approvals

Attach completed document in an email to Advisory Committee as a whole, cc: [jenn.horan@uconn.edu](mailto:jenn.horan@uconn.edu) and request committee “reply all” with their approval. Approval emails must come from advisor’s university email (UConn or the UConn Health Center) stating their approval of the document(s). External advisors should reply to all from their university or company email.

### 2. Electronic Approvals

Attach completed document in an email to advisory committee as a whole, cc: [jenn.horan@uconn.edu](mailto:jenn.horan@uconn.edu). Electronic signatures can be via DocuSign or Adobe Verified Signature. Approvals typed with a Microsoft font should be accompanied by a reply all email noting that advisor’s approval. **Wet ink** signed documents should be scanned & emailed to [jenn.horan@uconn.edu](mailto:jenn.horan@uconn.edu).

All members of a student’s advisory committee must provide original signature sin one of the above ways.

**\*\*No hard copies should be submitted to the Registrar’s Office\*\***

The PhD Program Coordinator may assist students with digital approvals and signatures and submission to the Registrar’s office.

## Resources

### **UConn School of Nursing**

**UConn Nursing PhD Program Information:**

<https://phd.nursing.uconn.edu/>

**UConn Nursing PhD Program Curriculum & Plans of Study**

[Nursing PhD Programs | Nursing PhD Program \(uconn.edu\)](#)

**SON Doctoral Student Listserv:** [DNP\\_PHDNURS-L@listserv.uconn.edu](mailto:DNP_PHDNURS-L@listserv.uconn.edu)

### **The Graduate School and Academics**

**The Graduate School**

<https://grad.uconn.edu/>

**The Graduate School Catalog**

<https://gradcatalog.uconn.edu/>

**The Graduate School's Formatting Guidelines**

<https://registrar.uconn.edu/graduation/doctoral-degrees/>

**Steps to a Successful Graduation**

<https://registrar.uconn.edu/graduation>

**Academic Calendar**

<https://registrar.uconn.edu/academic-calendar/>

**Registrar Forms**

<https://registrar.uconn.edu/forms/>

### **University Resources**

**NetID and Information Technology**

<https://netid.uconn.edu/>

[Home | Information Technology Services \(uconn.edu\)](#)

**Writing Resources**

<https://writingcenter.uconn.edu/overview-of-grad-support/>

**Insurance**

<https://grad.uconn.edu/student-life/grad-student-resources/ga-resources/overview-for-graduate-students/>

**Information for International Students**

<https://isss.uconn.edu>

### **Research & Scholarship**

**Creating an NIH-format Biosketch**

<https://grants.nih.gov/grants/forms/biosketch.htm>

**School of Nursing Research and Innovation Office and Grant Procedures**

<https://nursing.uconn.edu/research-innovation/>

**Authorship Guidelines**

<https://www.icmje.org/recommendations/browse/roles-and-responsibilities/defining-the-role-of-authors-and-contributors.html>

**Human Subjects Research Guidelines**

<https://ovpr.uconn.edu/services/rics/irb/>

**Animal Care and Use Guidelines**

<https://ovpr.uconn.edu/services/rics/animal/iacuc/>

**Training in Human Subjects Research**

<https://ovpr.uchc.edu/services/rics/hspp/citi-instructions/>