

Henry B. Tippie College of Business

Department of
Accounting

Ph.D. Program Handbook

Updated Summer 2026

DEPARTMENT OF ACCOUNTING PH.D. PROGRAM

Mission

The mission of Iowa's Ph.D. program in Accounting is to train future scholars for placement in top-tier research universities. We develop our students to conduct the highest quality applied research, teach to standards of excellence, and provide professional service to the discipline. Graduates of our program are placed in tenure-track positions at accredited universities around the world, where they continue to engage in top-level scholarship, teaching, and service.

Admission Processes and Criteria

Admission into our program is highly competitive, with a goal of approximately two students admitted yearly. Selectivity rates are low because we are committed to educating, mentoring, and graduating each student we enroll. We do not admit students with the philosophy of “weeding out” students after they have been admitted. Instead we only admit students that we are confident will succeed. Our selection criteria include GMAT (or GRE), GPA, candidates’ statement of purpose, letters of recommendation, English proficiency, and faculty needs. We strongly consider whether candidates’ career goals and research interests are aligned with our program’s strengths.

Curriculum Milestones

This document is intended to help students and their advisors effectively manage student performance in the Ph.D. program and to set goals that will enable student success. Within this overarching purpose, a great deal of specific information is provided that should help students (and their advisors) monitor their progress in the program and set goals for the future.

The student’s progress in the Ph.D. program is monitored and evaluated in three main ways:

- (1) The director of graduate studies in Accounting (‘DGS’ or ‘PhD director’) and the student’s advisor keeps track of all completed course work in the student's plan of study;
- (2) The student completes major milestones (e.g., second-year paper, comprehensive examinations, proposal defense, and dissertation defense) that are evaluated by faculty committees;
- (3) Each student's overall progress (course work, assistantships, mentored research, and dissertation work) is reviewed by the Accounting PhD Committee annually.

These milestones correspond to the formal requirements toward earning a Ph.D. There may be a difference between fulfilling the requirements for earning a degree and preparing oneself to meet one’s career goals. To be competitive for positions at research universities, students must have significant involvement in multiple research projects that will result in

publication. Because students' goals are different, formal requirements for research projects are not promulgated here. Furthermore, although a student's advisor and the DGS can be sources of advice and input in terms of how to gain involvement in research projects, the impetus for such involvement rests with the student. Thus, while this document is meant to enhance students' management of their performance in the program, it is not a performance management process in and of itself. Students need to be proactive, and work closely with their advisors, to make sure that both formal and "unofficial" goals are met.

This document should be interpreted as outlining normal procedures for moving through and completing the program. However, a student may request to waive or modify a procedure if he or she feels there is compelling reason to do so. Waivers or modifications may be approved provided: (1) the case for the proposed deviation is presented in writing; and (2) the student's advisor, the department executive officer (DEO), and the Ph.D. coordinator all agree to the modification.

Major milestones in the Ph.D. program are as follows:

1. Satisfactory periodic student progress review conducted by PhD committee.
2. Completion of required and elective course work (normally during the first 2 to 3 years in the program) including all accounting PhD seminars completed. Grades in electives should be C or better and for the accounting PhD seminars B- or better.
3. 2nd-year research paper and presentation (normally during first half of 3rd year).
4. Comprehensive examinations (after completion of all accounting seminars and 2nd year paper requirement).
5. Accounting coursework and standalone teaching requirement.
6. Participation in Friday PwC seminars.
7. Oral defense of dissertation proposal (normally during 4th year).
8. Defense of completed dissertation (normally during Spring 5th year).

Except for the first milestone, which occurs annually, the steps are typically completed in the order listed, although elective course work may be taken at any point in the doctoral program. Specifications for each milestone are outlined in the following sections.

1. Periodic Review of Ph.D. Student Progress

The PhD committee will meet periodically (typically each Spring) to discuss the progress of all Ph.D. students. Prior to the meeting, each student will be responsible for providing the faculty with a summary of the prior year's activity, including courses taken, research projects, teaching assignments, and other relevant information.

The PhD committee will solicit feedback from other faculty including those that taught the student in an Accounting PhD seminar; those that supervised the student's TA and/or RA assignments, as well as the student's advisor if one has been chosen. During the meeting between the committee and the student, the student will be given feedback on performance with potential follow-up directly with the DGS. Typically, no written summary of the meeting is provided unless specifically requested by the student or PhD committee.

Academic Probation: Although most students complete program requirements successfully, it is important to note that continuation in the Ph.D. program is contingent on satisfactory academic progress. As stated in the Graduate College manual, “A doctoral student on regular status shall be placed on probation if, after completing 8 hours of graduate work, the student's cumulative grade-point average on graduate work done at the University of Iowa falls below 3.00. If, after completing 8 more semester hours (s.h.) of graduate work at this university, the student's cumulative grade-point average remains below the required level, the student shall be dropped from the program and denied permission to reregister unless the student applies and is accepted for a nondoctoral degree or certificate program. If, after completing the second 8 semester hours, the cumulative grade-point average is at least 3.00, the student is returned to good standing.”

Failure to Make Progress: Grades are one way that academic progress is assessed; however, faculty assessments of the student's overall performance in the program (including research and teaching assistantships), as well as the passing of other milestones, are also considered. In cases where the overall faculty assessment is that the student is failing to make adequate progress, the issues will be outlined in the performance assessment and shared with the student, either in the annual review or directly by the DGS. Should there be concerns with progress, recommendations for improvement will be provided and specific goals will be specified that need to be met for continuation in the Ph.D. program. In some cases, the performance assessment may advise the student to begin considering other options so that performance does not improve sufficiently to justify continuation in the program.

Continued financial aid is contingent on acceptable progress in the academic program as well as on acceptable performance in previous research and/or teaching assistantships. It is possible that a student may be permitted to continue to take classes in the program, but be denied additional funding, based on faculty assessments of the student's previous RA or TA performance.

2. Completion of Required and Elective Course Work

Completion of the doctoral program requires a total of 72 s.h. of credit. Required course work is normally completed during the first three years of a student's academic program, primarily during years 1 and 2. The following courses are required for all students:

Required Accounting Seminars

ACCT:7901	Accounting Topics 1: Capital Markets Research I (3 s.h.)
ACCT:7902	Accounting Topics 2: Capital Markets Research II (3 s.h.)
ACCT:7903	Accounting Topics 3: Experimental/Research Design (3 s.h.)
ACCT:7904	Accounting Topics 4: Tax (3 s.h.)
ACCT:7850	Seminar in Accounting Research (1 s.h. each semester)

Additional courses are tailored to the student's needs and interests and must be approved by the student's advisor. For example, students we admit that conduct capital markets-based research in tax and financial accounting, will typically take courses in Microeconomics, Econometrics, Finance, Statistics, and possibly computer programming.

Because elective courses are taken in other departments, the course offerings can change from year to year. The DGS and student's advisor can help determine the appropriate course of study for each student.

During all years in the program, students will be continuously enrolled in Seminar in Accounting Research (ACCT: 7850). The purpose of this seminar is to prepare students to ask questions and participate in the weekly PwC accounting seminar, where internal and external speakers present their research.

In addition to the courses described above and any electives taken, students will typically take a minimum number of thesis hours (ACCT: 7975). For many students, these may include credits transferred in from other institutions or programs if they have been approved by the Director of Graduate Studies, the student's advisor, and the Graduate College. Students are encouraged to work closely with the college's coordinator of the Ph.D. program (currently Kendra Everest) to ensure that they accumulate the 72 s.h. required for graduation.

3. Completion and Presentation of 2nd-Year Paper

The purpose of the 2nd-year paper is to give students experience in writing a full-length paper that is of high enough quality to be submitted to a major academic conference or journal. There are two models that are typically followed for the paper:

1. Write an empirical-based (archival, experimental, or theoretical) academic paper based on existing research idea given by a faculty member. In this case, the student would be responsible for executing the research and the initial write-up of the paper. Faculty members can be listed as co-authors on the second-year paper, if the student has taken the first attempt at writing the paper and has been responsible for the initial data analysis.
2. The student can propose a research idea to a faculty member, and then design and execute the research under the faculty member's supervision. Because this is the student's own idea, it may or may not be co-authored with the faculty member.

It is the student's responsibility to identify and approach a faculty member with a potential second-year paper topic. If the student is unsuccessful finding a faculty mentor for the paper, she/he should speak to the DGS to discuss possibilities for the paper.

After writing the paper, the student is required to present it to the full faculty and other PhD students in the PwC seminar or during a separately scheduled time. The PhD committee will meet following the second-year paper presentation to assess the acceptability of the paper and presentation for the purposes of meeting this requirement.

A suggested timeline for completing the 2nd year paper is as follows:

Summer of year 1	Identification of topic and potential faculty advisor
Fall/Spring Year 2	Work on conducting research and writing paper

Summer Year 2/ Fall Year 3 Present paper to the full faculty/students

4. Passing of Comprehensive Examinations

The comprehensive exam is scheduled by the DGS once the student cohort is expected to have completed the required Accounting seminars and 2nd-year paper requirement. Often it is completed in the winter break during the third year of the program, or the summer after year three. It is intended to evaluate a candidate's mastery of the subject at or near the end of the candidate's formal preparation and prior to the completion of the dissertation.

The closed-book portion of the exam is administered on campus over one day (7.5 hours), with a one-hour break for lunch. It is typical that students will take the exam with their cohort of students who were admitted to the program at a common time. Each student will take the same exam with questions that cover the Accounting seminars taken, and the student's declared area of expertise (tax, audit, managerial, financial). The morning portion of the exam will ask questions based on the Accounting seminars outside the student's declared area of expertise. The afternoon portion of the exam will ask questions related to the student's declared area of expertise. The PhD Director will provide details on the exam and guidelines for studying to all students as the exam approaches.

The open-book portion of the exam consists of a referee report for a paper chosen by a faculty member in the student's declared area of expertise. The student will be given 48 hours to prepare a response memo outlining concerns with the paper and providing recommendations, in the format of referee reports provided for professional journals. The student will also provide a brief letter to the editor indicating the recommendation for publication (reject, revise & resubmit, accept).

Students are expected to produce their answers in word-processed format. Students will be provided a room, a computer, and a storage device. Upon completion of the exam, the storage device with the saved file should be given to the person administering the exam. Students with disabilities who need alternative arrangements should see the Ph.D. director for any necessary accommodations.

The written comprehensive exam answers (both closed-book and open-book portions) will be graded by at least three faculty members from the department. Normally these faculty members are the same individuals who have taught the Ph.D. seminars, but other faculty with appropriate research expertise may be asked to serve on the examination committee. The faculty members will grade questions using a scale from 0-3 including fractional points where 0=Fail, 1=Low Pass, 2=Pass and 3=High Pass. Scores for each question will be averaged across the graders.

Outcomes of the comprehensive exams also follow the Graduate College Guidelines for Comprehensive Exams. Possible outcomes are Satisfactory (Pass); Satisfactory (Pass) with reservations; or Unsatisfactory (Fail). If the average score across all questions on the examination (AM and PM) are below 1, this will be determined to be unsatisfactory, and this will be considered a failing grade. If the average score on a section (AM, PM or Review) is below 2, this will be considered *Satisfactory (Pass) with reservations*.

In the event the exam is determined to be *Satisfactory (Pass) with reservations*, the student will be required to complete additional requirements to be discussed with the DGS. This often involves retaking one or more questions on the exam in a take-home setting, doing another referee report, etc. The student must successfully meet these conditions to be advanced to PhD candidacy. In the event the exam is determined to be *Unsatisfactory (Fail)*, consistent with the policy of the Graduate College, the PhD Committee may grant permission to attempt a reexamination not sooner than four months after the first examination if the student is otherwise making good progress in the other milestones towards the PhD. Only one retake is permitted. Failure on two examinations will result in dismissal from the program.

Students are advanced to Ph.D. candidacy when they successfully complete the Comprehensive Exam, 2nd year paper, and all required course work.

5. Accounting Coursework and Standalone Teaching Requirement

The goal of the Ph.D. program is to prepare students for careers as well-rounded academics. Thus, we require that students not only prepare themselves by taking coursework and performing research, but also by teaching one standalone class during their time at the university. This requirement may be waived if the student can provide evidence (for example, through satisfactory teaching evaluations) of prior equivalent teaching experience, or for other good cause, by the Ph.D. committee.

To prepare for this requirement, students should have taken coursework prior to enrolling equivalent to (at least) an intermediate accounting sequence (for example, the accounting course sequence through ACC 3200 at the University of Iowa). In assessing whether this requirement has been satisfied, the Ph.D. committee may assess SPOT evaluations or direct observations of teaching to ensure that department teaching goals are being met.

6. Participation in Friday (PwC) Seminars

Our Friday PwC seminars invite external and internal speakers to present their research in a 75-minute active forum. It is expected that students will attend these Friday sessions (currently scheduled from 1:30-2:45pm) unless they are otherwise committed. Strict attendance is not taken, but repeated absences are unacceptable. Students are expected to participate in these seminars regularly by asking questions of the speakers.

7. Successful Oral Defense of Dissertation Proposal

Following the completion of course work and comprehensive exams, the major remaining hurdles involve proposing, conducting, and defending the dissertation. The oral defense of the dissertation proposal is conducted at the point where the candidate has: (a) completed all course work, (b) passed the comprehensive exam, (c) passed the 2nd-year paper, (d) convened a dissertation committee and obtained their feedback on their proposed dissertation idea, including the proposed research model, and (e) submitted a formal written dissertation

proposal to the committee. Successful completion of the proposal defense will mean that the dissertation committee has approved the student's proposal and plan for the dissertation.

With respect to part (d), students must convene a committee of at least five faculty members willing to serve on the dissertation committee. At least four of the faculty members must be tenure-track faculty members of the University of Iowa. At least two of the faculty members must be from the Accounting department (defined as faculty members who hold any appointment in Accounting). The student, with the support of the department, may request the dean's permission to replace one of the five members of the graduate faculty with a recognized scholar of professorial rank from another academic institution. Also, a voting member may be added at the discretion of the Graduate College Dean.

The student should submit a document to the dissertation committee at least 2 weeks prior to the scheduled dissertation proposal date. In many cases, the proposal will include initial data analyses or pilot studies. In addition, the DGS will provide deadline dates if the student intends to apply for Graduate College dissertation fellowships (e.g. a Ballard-Seashore Fellowship).

Advance approval of the Ph.D. director is needed to conduct the oral defense of the proposal. The student and Ph.D. director will work to find a time for the exam and confirm that all five committee members can attend at that time. It is acceptable for committee members to join remotely by Zoom.

The dissertation chair is responsible for completing the Report on Oral Proposal Defense, initialed by all committee members, and notifying the student of the outcome. Possible outcomes are Satisfactory, Satisfactory with Reservations, or Unsatisfactory. Two Unsatisfactory votes among the five members will make the committee report Unsatisfactory. In the event of a report with two or more votes of Satisfactory with Reservations, the exact stipulations of the committee should be recorded. In the case of an Unsatisfactory examination, the committee may grant the candidate permission to present him or herself for reexamination. The examination may be repeated only once, at the option of the department.

The accounting faculty has a policy of generally not writing letters of recommendation for students who have not had their dissertation proposal fully approved (except for minor reservations) by their dissertation committee. Unless the proposal is defended, we also will normally not provide funding for travel to conferences for the purpose of job search. In short, this means that a successful job search requires students to have dissertation proposals defended by end September of their final year. ***For best consideration and to ensure sufficient time to address committee members' concerns and suggestions, it is strongly recommended that students strive to defend their proposal by June of the year preceding graduation (typically fourth year).***

Experience has shown that students may underestimate the time it takes to work through dissertation revisions. Most dissertation proposals require several revisions before they are ready to go to the full committee. Faculty also need some time to review drafts and provide feedback. Faculty will generally need at least two weeks to respond to a draft and provide feedback. Students generally need at least 2-3 weeks to respond adequately to feedback.

The student is required to register each Fall and Spring semester after passing the dissertation proposal defense (called the comprehensive exam in the *Graduate College Handbook*) until the degree is awarded. If a student fails to register, he or she may not be readmitted to candidacy until the student submits an application, and that application is approved by the student's advisor, the DEO, and the Graduate College dean.

8. Successful Dissertation Defense

Early in the semester in which a student intends to defend the dissertation, the following documents should be obtained: (1) Ph.D. Final Examination (Thesis Defense) and Graduation Procedures, from the Graduate College; and (2) Report of Examination: Advanced Degree, which the departmental secretary provides. The dissertation committee of at least five faculty members must include a chairperson and is normally the same committee as the Dissertation Proposal Committee. Following the examination, the committee will complete and submit the Report of Final Examination: Advanced Degree form. Dissertation defenses are open to all members of the department as well as to the general public. More detailed procedures for final dissertation examinations can be found in the rules and regulations of the Graduate College.

All doctoral dissertations and master's theses must be submitted to the Graduate College in electronic format. (See "Electronic Theses and Dissertations" for help with the submission of your ETD to UMI/ProQuest.) Please reference the *Graduate College Manual of Rules and Regulations* (sections X.H. and XII.M.) to review the revised submission text.

Academic Advisor and Student Expectations

Each student will be appointed a faculty mentor by the end of Year 1, and typically by the end of the fall term. The academic advisor does not necessarily need to be the student's 2nd-year paper and/or dissertation chair (but it can be). Students may ask to be assigned to any faculty member in the department; it might be a faculty member they are working with on their mentored projects, but it does not have to be that professor. Keep in mind that some faculty may turn down requests to be mentor if they are already advising several students or feel they have a heavy workload at that time. Students may choose faculty other than their assigned mentor to work with on their 2nd-year paper or as a dissertation advisor. This might occur as students' research interests solidify and better mesh with another faculty member's research interests.

The faculty mentor's primary responsibilities are to periodically meet with the student advisee to discuss progress and develop goals for the academic year. This should address curriculum milestones, research activity, teaching activity and skill development. This is not formally scheduled but should occur at least once a semester. Mentors can discuss, among any other relevant issues, their progress towards goals and what help they need to achieve goals. Recommended meeting dates are in early September, late January, and April. Other topics include providing advice to advisees as they consider taking on new research projects and what directions to go with existing projects.

The student's primary responsibilities are to meet with the mentor as needed to develop strategies and timelines to ensure she/he is progressing adequately; A student should seek her/his mentor's input before agreeing to any new research projects (whether with other faculty or fellow students). The mentor can also help decide what is and is not a good use of each student's time, and/or help support you if the student wants to say "no" to a new project. The mentor should be aware of all the research projects you are involved in. Seek your mentor's help or guidance as needed throughout the semester, whether it be for concerns related to courses, research projects, teaching, or fellow students. The goal is to help each student succeed in the program, so talk to your faculty mentor when you need help with something.

Funding

We commit to funding each student who is making satisfactory progress toward the completion of their degree for five years. This funding is typically through TA and RA support (with designated work responsibilities) or fellowship money (with no work-related requirements attached). We work diligently to secure fellowship funding for students whenever possible. These include, but are not limited to, the following fellowships from the Graduate College: Recruitment Fellowships, Dean's Fellowships for Minority Students, Post-comprehensive exam fellowships, Ballard-Seashore Dissertation Year Fellowships, and Summer Dissertation Grants. Additional external funding is sometimes available in the form of external fellowships.

TA assignments can take several forms. This can include being a TA responsible for teaching and delivery of material in ACCT:2100 and ACCT:2200; being a TA that conducts discussion sections and assists faculty members in upper level and graduate courses; or teaching online courses. This list is not exhaustive.

Ph.D. Student Travel & Research Budget

To further support our students' learning and research (as resources are available), the department may provide travel funding as outlined in the offer of admission. Most commonly, this will be funding annually starting in Year two, and contingent on adequate progression in the program.

This funding can be applied to transportation, registration, and lodging costs. If students wish to attend additional conferences or seminars that require travel, they can be funded through faculty research budgets or apply for Graduate Student Conference Travel Awards available elsewhere on campus.

The DGS may at her/his discretion approve additional travel funding for research presentations and discussions at professional conferences.

Sample Course Schedule 1:

Accounting PhD Sample Program Template: Financial/Tax Archival Research

Fall—Year 1

Course Number	Course Title	Sem. Hrs.
ACCT:7901/3	Seminar in Selected Accounting Topics – Experimental/Research Design	3
ECON:5805	Economics Statistics*	3
ECON:5005	Microeconomics*	3
ACCT:7850	Seminar in Accounting Research	1

* Prerequisites are one year of calculus and one semester of linear algebra.

Spring—Year 1

Course Number	Course Title	Sem. Hrs.
ACCT:7902/4	Seminar in Selected Accounting Topics – Tax	3
ECON:5815	Econometrics	3
FIN:7110	Finance Theory I	3
ACCT:7850	Seminar in Accounting Research	1

Summer—Year 1: Work on research paper with faculty member.

Fall--Year 2

Course Number	Course Title	Sem. Hrs.
ECON:5855	Applied Econometrics	3
FIN:7120	Seminar in Corporate Finance	3
ACCT:7903/1	Seminar in Selected Accounting Topics*	3
ACCT:7850	Seminar in Accounting Research	1

Spring—Year 2

Course Number	Course Title	Sem. Hrs.
FIN:7140	Advanced Empirical Finance	3
ACCT:7904/2	Seminar in Selected Accounting Topics*	3
ACCT:7850	Seminar in Accounting Research	1

Summer—Year 2:

Continue work on second-year research paper. Summer writing course possible.
Study and take Accounting Comprehensive Exam.

Accounting PhD Sample Program (continued)

Fall—Year 3

Course Number	Course Title	Sem. Hrs.
	Electives – work on dissertation	3
ACCT:7850	Seminar in Accounting Research	1

Spring—Year 3

Course Number	Course Title	Sem. Hrs.
	Electives – work on dissertation	
ACCT:7900	Seminar in Selected Accounting Topics*	3
ACCT:7850	Seminar in Accounting Research	1

Fall—Year 4—begin work on dissertation topic

Course Number	Course Title	Sem. Hrs.
ACCT:7850	Seminar in Accounting Research	1

Spring—Year 4

Course Number	Course Title	Sem. Hrs.
	Dissertation proposal defense	
ACCT:7850	Seminar in Accounting Research	1

Summer--Year 4—Work on dissertation

Fall—Year 5

Course Number	Course Title	Sem. Hrs.
	Complete working paper from dissertation to use in job market applications.	
ACCT:7850	Seminar in Accounting Research	1

Spring—Year 5—Job interviews

Sample Course Schedule 2:

Accounting PhD Sample Program Template: Experimental Research

Fall—Year 1

Course Number	Course Title	Sem. Hrs.
ACCT:7901/3	Seminar in Selected Accounting Topics – Experimental/Research Design	3
MGT:7900	Behavioral Research Methods	3
STAT:4143	Introduction to Statistical Methods	3
ACCT:7850	Seminar in Accounting Research	1

Spring—Year 1

Course Number	Course Title	Sem. Hrs.
ACCT:7902/4	Seminar in Selected Accounting Topics – Tax	3
MGMT: 7140	Meta Analysis Behavioral S.S.	3
STAT:6513	Intermediate Statistical Methods	3
PSY:2501	Introduction to Social Psychology	3
ACCT:7850	Seminar in Accounting Research	1

Summer—Year 1: Work on research paper with faculty member.

Fall--Year 2

Course Number	Course Title	Sem. Hrs.
PSY:6590	Judgment and Decision Making	3
STAT:6516	Design of Experiments	3
ACCT:7903/1	Seminar in Selected Accounting Topics	3
ACCT:7850	Seminar in Accounting Research	1

Spring—Year 2

Course Number	Course Title	Sem. Hrs.
BIOS:5130	Applied Categorical Data Analysis	3
ACCT:7904/2	Seminar in Selected Accounting Topics	3
ACCT:7850	Seminar in Accounting Research	1

Summer—Year 2:

Continue work on second-year research paper. Summer writing course possible.
Study and take Accounting Comprehensive Exam.

Accounting PhD Sample Program (continued)

Fall—Year 3

Course Number	Course Title	Sem. Hrs.
	Electives – work on dissertation	3
ACCT:7850	Seminar in Accounting Research	1

Spring—Year 3

Course Number	Course Title	Sem. Hrs.
	Electives – work on dissertation	
ACCT:7850	Seminar in Accounting Research	1

Fall—Year 4—begin work on dissertation topic

Course Number	Course Title	Sem. Hrs.
ACCT:7850	Seminar in Accounting Research	1

Spring—Year 4

Course Number	Course Title	Sem. Hrs.
	Dissertation proposal defense	
ACCT:7850	Seminar in Accounting Research	1

Summer--Year 4—Work on dissertation

Fall—Year 5

Course Number	Course Title	Sem. Hrs.
	Complete working paper from dissertation to use in job market applications.	
ACCT:7850	Seminar in Accounting Research	1

Spring—Year 5—Job interviews