

The University of Montana
Department of Economics
Graduate Student Handbook

Revised August 2011

I. INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Economics Department Master of Arts Program at The University of Montana. Completion of the program is good preparation for working as an economist for the government or private sector or for pursuing a Ph.D. Students who have completed our program have found a variety of opportunities available to them upon graduation. In recent years graduates have entered Ph.D. programs, found jobs with the Forest Service, with Montana state government, with private economic consulting firms, and as the Mayor of Missoula. Best of luck in your education, we hope that you can take advantage of what The University of Montana offers.

It is the responsibility of the student to know and understand the requirements for the Master of Arts degree. This handbook and your advisor are an aid in that process. However, this handbook is a complement, not a substitute, for the Graduate School requirements. If this handbook conflicts with Graduate School policy, the Graduate School policy takes precedent. Please report any errors in this handbook to your graduate advisor.

II. GRADUATE SCHOOL REQUIREMENTS

The Graduate School at The University of Montana has certain rules that apply to all M.A. students (and Ph.D. students) on campus. The requirements can be found on the [Graduate School website](#). This is an excellent site for you to investigate and will answer many of your questions.

The major requirements of which you should be aware are:

1. You must complete your degree requirements within 5 years of enrollment.
2. You must enroll for a minimum of 3 credits each semester, excluding summer, until you graduate. Students who graduate during the summer must register for a minimum of 3 credits that summer semester. You must file for a leave of absence if you are going to be away from the program, but the degree time limits still apply.
3. You must maintain a B average and no grade below C will be accepted toward any degree requirement.
4. The Master's degree requires 30 credits: 20 credits of coursework and 10 from your thesis.
5. Half of the *coursework* credits must be at the 500- or 600-level. Graduate research and thesis credits do not count as coursework.

6. A course must have a G or UG designation to count toward your degree.
7. Of the 30 credits, 20 must come from your department.
8. Your thesis committee needs to have a minimum of 3 members: 2 from the Economics Department, one from another department.
9. The Graduate School sets calendar deadlines for completion of a thesis within a particular term; you should check their website for the relevant [dates](#). A student needs to apply for graduation with the proper form at least one semester before completion.
10. There are specific rules on [transfer credits](#) and [residency](#). A maximum of 9 credit hours can be transferred into a graduate program.
11. Six credits of enrollment are required for financial aid and student payroll purposes. All students taking 4 credits (of traditional grade credit) are required to purchase student health insurance; however, graduate students enrolled in thesis credits may apply for a waiver. One credit is required to purchase student health services only. Teaching assistants are required to register for 9-15 credits and should register for at least 12 credits.
12. A student must have graduate status (level 02 status) to earn graduate credit. Graduate non-degree status means that students are taking courses to transfer into a graduate program or are working towards some sort of certification. These students do not qualify for financial aid. Graduate degree status students are working toward a Master of Arts degree.

III. COURSEWORK

When you begin the program, your advisor is the graduate advisor who advises all the pre-thesis Economics MA students. During the 2011-2012 academic year, this is Ranjan Shrestha, LA 411, 243-4497, ranjan.shrestha@mso.umt.edu. In general, the first year is devoted to coursework. Although it is not necessary to complete all of the required courses in the first year, we strongly recommend it. The department requires ECNS 511 Microeconomic Theory, ECNS 513 Macroeconomic Theory, ECNS 403 Introduction to Econometrics, ECNS 560 Advanced Econometrics, and six credits of electives as a minimum.

Typically, the second year is devoted to the thesis, with students scheduling their proposal defense in the Fall semester and defending their thesis in the Spring semester. Students are strongly recommended to continue attending ECNS 569 and often take an elective course to help maintain their sanity or to finish their required courses.

Given our resources, ECNS 511 and ECNS 403 are offered in the Fall while ECNS 513 and ECNS 560 are offered in the Spring. This means the standard program looks like this:

Year One			
Fall		Spring	
ECNS 511 Microtheory	(3)	ECNS 513 Macrotheory	(3)
ECNS 403 Intro to Econometrics	(4)	ECNS 560 Advanced Econometrics	(4)
Elective	(3)	Elective	(3)
Year Two			
Fall		Spring	
ECNS 599 Thesis		ECNS 599 Thesis	
Proposal Defense		Thesis Defense	

The graduate advisor must approve each elective course. Students often take courses in Economics, Mathematics, Geography or Forestry.

ECNS 511 Microtheory and ECNS 513 Macrotheory are considered the core courses and students must earn a B in each course to remain in the program. A student who earns a grade below a B must petition the Departmental Graduate Committee to stay in the program. The graduate committee may reject the petition, ending the program for the student, or may require the student to re-enroll in the course or may choose some other action.

Occasionally, students enter the program having taken one or more of the required economics courses as an undergraduate. In this case the student and the graduate advisor will choose a suitable substitution. Keep in mind the Graduate School requirements regarding [500- and 600-level](#) credits and credits within the department.

Provisionally admitted students often lack a course in Calculus, Intermediate Microeconomics or Intermediate Macroeconomics. This deficiency should be remedied during the first semester the student is enrolled in the graduate program. At the time of provisional admission, the Department may specify a grade requirement for the student in provisional courses, otherwise the student must earn a B or better in these courses. Students who do not earn the required grade may petition the Departmental Graduate Committee. Be aware that ECNS 301, ECNS 302, M 162, M 171, and M 172 do not carry graduate credit for Economics graduate students and will **not** count toward the degree.

Students considering Ph.D. programs should take as many extra [mathematics courses](#) as possible.

The Department will not tolerate cheating or plagiarism. Students are expected to follow The University of Montana [student conduct code](#).

IV. THE THESIS

The thesis is a research paper written on an economic topic of interest to the student. During your first year, investigate some topics that interest you, talk with faculty about your ideas and keep your ears open for suggestions by faculty. Find out what research faculty are pursuing because there is often a related hypothesis that they don't have time to investigate. A good way to get a picture of the scope of a thesis is to look at completed theses which are kept in the Economics Department office and in the Mansfield Library.

At the beginning of your second year, or earlier if appropriate, file the [Application for Graduation Form](#). When you have found a suitable topic that interests you and have found a faculty member who is willing to chair your thesis committee, you are ready to begin your thesis. Thesis credits taken prior to this have been used to explore possible topics. The chair of your thesis committee becomes your primary advisor. In consultation with your committee chair, put together your thesis committee that consists of at least one other department member and one other faculty member outside of the Department of Economics. Ask Stacia to submit electronically your graduate committee appointment form.

Different advisors require thesis proposals in different forms; ask your advisor how they want you to present your thesis proposal. With the approval of your advisor, circulate your thesis proposal among your committee members and schedule a date to defend your proposal with the entire committee present. For normal progress in the program, the proposal defense should be completed in the Fall semester of your second year. When your committee accepts your proposal, work like crazy on your thesis. You need to accumulate at least 10 credits of ECNS 599 Thesis. Your committee chair is your primary thesis resource, but committee members and other department members can be used as resources. Remember, however, it is your research project. If you use a survey be sure to get [Institutional Review Board approval](#) before you begin surveying. You will receive a grade of N for ECNS 599 until the thesis is successfully defended, at which time the Graduate School will change your grade to a P. If the courses you count toward your degree change, be sure to file the [Graduation Application Amendment Form](#).

When your committee chair and committee feel your thesis is defensible you may set up a defense date. At least a week before the defense, provide your advisor with an electronic copy of your thesis and tell your advisor to send it on to the Graduate School. The defense is an oral presentation of your thesis results followed by questions related to the thesis or coursework you have had.

A Summary of the Thesis Process

1. The [Application for Graduation Form](#) is usually filed at the very start of the second year. Deadline: One semester before degree awarded. Pay fee. The [procedures](#) for completing and filing this form are available on the Graduate School website under the [Graduation Resources page](#).
2. Student has idea, develops idea with faculty consultation, approaches faculty about chairing committee (first or second year). Student and chair form committee by getting other faculty to

agree to serve. Notify Stacia of your committee members and ask **her** to submit the **Graduate Committee Appointment Form electronically** to the Graduate School.

3. Proposal Defense

Student receives approval from committee for the proposal. Normal progress in the program requires the proposal defense to be completed by the end of the Fall semester of the second year. A student may petition with the consent of the advisor to have the proposal defense extended to the Spring semester, but must schedule it by the end of the second year in order to remain in the program. A student who fails to do so can petition the Departmental Graduate Committee to stay in the program. The graduate committee may reject the petition, ending the program for the student.

4. Student works primarily with Chair to write the thesis.

- a. Students must maintain a minimum of 3 credits per semester to ensure continuous registration; otherwise submit **request for leave of absence form**.
- b. Read and follow the instructions for formatting and layout on the Graduate School web page for **Graduation Resources**.
- c. If changes to degree application are necessary submit the **Graduation Application Amendment Form**.

5. When Chair feels the thesis is defensible:

- a. the **student** distributes the thesis to the committee
- b. if committee feels the thesis is defensible then:
 - 1) student and committee chair schedule the defense
 - 2) student delivers an **electronic copy of the defensible draft** of the thesis to his/her advisor who sends it on to the Graduate School; Graduate School e-mails comments and required formatting changes to the candidate and the advisor before the defense (**Step 1**)

6. Defense

The oral defense of the thesis must occur before the semester **deadline** set by the Graduate School. The thesis oral defense consists of three parts. The first part is an oral presentation of the thesis by the student. The second part is a question and answer period focusing on the thesis and related issues. The third part is a private meeting among committee members in order to evaluate the thesis and defense. All the committee members must agree that the student's performance was satisfactory in order to pass. In case of failure, one repeat examination is permitted.

Often the student passes the defense subject to making some minor changes. The committee chair supervises these changes.

7. Completion

Once the defense is successful and any minor changes have been made, the **student follows the instructions (Step 2)** for preparation and the advisor submits the thesis found under Graduation Resources.

There are three items that must be submitted for completion (**Step 3**):

- a) **completion document** which is a copy of your **Application for Graduation Form** signed by your thesis advisor; a **copy** of which should also be left with Stacia in the department
- b) **Certificate of Approval Form**
- c) **final version of your electronic document** must be submitted by your advisor to the Graduate School AND you submit your document electronically to the Mansfield Library (**Step 4**)

V. TEACHING ASSISTANTSHIPS

The Department of Economics has a limited number of teaching assistantships which it awards each year. In exchange for a tuition waiver and compensation (in 2011-2012 it was approximately \$9,000 per academic year), the student agrees to work as a teaching assistant 20 hours per week during the semester. In addition, the Department must deem class performance and TA performance by the student satisfactory or the teaching assistantship can be revoked. Teaching assistants should register for 11-15 credits per semester.

Generally a TA is assigned to one or more classes associated with a faculty member. The faculty member may require the TA to attend one of the classes. In addition, the TA is expected to hold 10 office hours per week. Teaching Assistants generally share an office to which they are given a key.

Any current graduate student or applicant may apply for a teaching assistantship. The Graduate Committee will rank the applicants and select the students who will receive assistantships. In general M.A.-degree students who have completed two years will not receive assistantships. Almost all assistantship awards are made for the academic year, hence there is very limited opportunity to begin an assistantship spring semester. Student performance as a teaching assistant will be evaluated every term and may be reviewed and evaluated at any other time at the discretion of the faculty. Poor performance as an assistant or failing to make normal progress in the program can result in the assistantship being revoked at any time. Priority in financial aid is given to students who have never received aid or those who have excelled in past assistantship duties.

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Please reports any errors or omissions to [Stacia Graham](#)