



S.J. & Jessie E. Quinney
College of Agriculture & Natural Resources
UtahStateUniversity

MS/PhD in Nutrition and Food Sciences
Student Handbook
2025-2026

Department of Nutrition, Dietetics and Food Sciences

Welcome!

Dear Students,

Welcome to the Master of Sciences (MS) or Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Nutrition & Food Science at Utah State University. We hope your time here is productive and enjoyable.

One of the many things that makes our program stand out is the wide-ranging research interests of our faculty, and the diverse talented graduate students who come to work with them. We encourage you to take advantage of our uniquely flexible coursework requirements to come up with a plan of study that will help you achieve your research and career goals. Explore campus and take full advantage of the resources available to you during your graduate training at USU.

This handbook is meant to provide you with important policies specific to our department, program information, and links to university resources to guide you through the process of completing the MS/PhD program. **You are responsible for knowing the information included in this handbook and the School of Graduate Studies handbook,** <https://gradschool.usu.edu/handbooks/student-handbook> and ultimately responsible for meeting requirements and deadlines. Although we have made every effort to make this handbook accurate and comprehensive, please double check requirements and deadlines, and email tara.black@usu.edu if you find any typos, broken links, or inaccuracies. We look forward to working with you and assisting you while you achieve your educational goals. We hope you have a wonderful experience in our MS/PhD program at USU.

Best Regards,

Heidi Wengreen, PhD, RD
Department Head
Department of Nutrition, Dietetics and Food Sciences

Tara Black
Graduate Program Coordinator

School of Graduate Studies Handbook

<https://gradschool.usu.edu/handbooks/student-handbook>

The School of Graduate Handbook has the following information, please take time to look it over. Here's the list of information/policies you'll find there. *You're responsible for reading and understanding everything on this website along with the NDFS handbook.*

Graduate Student Rights & Responsibilities

Important information & Resources

Tuition Waivers, Assistantships, Health Insurance & Travel Funding

Research

Academics, Steps to Degree Completion & Graduation

How to Get Answers to Your Questions

One of the most important lessons you will learn in graduate school is how to find answers to questions. Here are the resources you should rely on to help answer different types of questions about graduate school:

| Type of Question | Resources to use (in this order): |
|--|---|
| NDFS program requirements, the annual review form, or the dissertation/thesis defense rubric | This handbook https://qanr.usu.edu/ndfs/resources The Graduate Program Coordinator (GPC) or your Major Professor |
| USU Graduate School requirements, other forms not mentioned above | The graduate school website: https://gradschool.usu.edu/current-students/ The GPC |
| Questions pertaining specifically to international students | International Graduate Student orientation https://www.usu.edu/orientation/international/graduate Office of global engagement https://globalengagement.usu.edu/ |
| What classes to register for, career advice, research advice | Your Major Professor Your Supervisory Committee Members |

| | |
|--|---|
| Problems registering for classes | Click the error link when registering, and it should take you to a ServiceNow form to fill out. This form will go to the appropriate people to help you or provide approval. The GPC |
| Reserving a conference room in the NFS building | The GPC The NDFS business assistant |
| Questions about payment or other paperwork related to your assistantship | The NDFS business assistant The NDFS business manager |
| Questions about assistantship expectations, hours, etc. | Your supervisor |

Teaching and Research Assistantships

Teaching or research assistantships may be available to help with the cost of your graduate studies. Discuss availability of research or teaching assistant positions with your major professor. The supervising professor for the assistantship will outline the position tasks responsibilities, hours, dates, and compensation. This compensation may include a stipend, funds to cover tuition, funds to cover fees, and/or funds to subsidize health insurance. A formal acceptance letter needs to be kept on file at the department. The major professor may establish additional expectations.

Please note that research activities for your thesis or dissertation may or may not be a part of a compensated research assistantship.

All teaching assistants and graduate instructors are required to participate in a training workshop sponsored by the School of Graduate Studies prior to beginning their assistantships, USU 7920. The workshop helps students gain the techniques and skills to be effective instructors in the University environment. When a teaching assistant workshop has been successfully completed, 1 credit will be added to the student's transcript. However, **this credit cannot be applied toward a graduate degree program**. Please note that international students may be required to complete IELI 7920, please confirm requirements with the [Office of Global Engagement](#).

In addition, all teaching assistants and graduate instructors are required to complete the canvas course [ETE Explore College Teaching](#) which will take about 1-2 hours of time. All students are encouraged to complete this short training, which explores topics like engagement and

feedback that can be applied to most careers. For a short time only, Tara will be providing an Aggie Ice Cream coupon to students who complete this course!

Graduate assistants must be full-time (except for summers), matriculated students. For students employed as graduate assistants, full-time status is based on the full-time equivalent or FTE. A 0.25 to 0.374 FTE requires a student to enroll for at least 9 graduate-level credits; a 0.375 to 0.50 FTE requires a student to enroll for at least 6 graduate-level credits.

Assistantship Policy on Additional Employment

Students will need to fill out the [Plus 20](#) form in [ServiceNow](#) to work on campus more than the 20 hours over their 0.5 FTE assistantship. Forms will only be approved for students with a 3.0 GPA or higher. The form must be submitted each semester. If students have jobs off campus then the Plus 20 is not required. The form with route through Graduate Studies, the Department Head, and then the Vice Provost for Graduate Studies.

Program Learning Objectives

As a result of successfully completing the requirements towards the NDFS MS or PhD degree, students shall:

Demonstrate mastery of subject material in their field of study, broadly defined.

Produce an original significant contribute to knowledge (MS)/body of research (PhD) conducted during their program.

Write in a clear, convincing, and organized manner.

Present in a confident, organized, and engaging manner.

Defend decisions and conclusions by providing accurate, clear, and insightful evidence and answers to questions.

Conduct scholarly activities in an ethical manner.

Registration Requirements

Once admitted, students are required to maintain full-time enrollment by meeting one of the following criteria:

Registered for 9 or more graduate credits

-or-

Registered for at least 6 credits per semester if receiving an assistantship or fellowship from Utah State University for 20 hours/week or more.

-or-

Registered for at least 1 graduate credits during the semester of the final thesis/dissertation defense. International students must register for 3 credits during their final defense semester and also fill out a "Full-Time at 3 Credit" form on ServiceNow.

Required Orientation Courses:

<https://www.usu.edu/equity/trainings/student-prevention>

<https://www.usu.edu/equity/trainings/employee-prevention>

<https://research.usu.edu/compliance/responsible-conduct-of-research/>

<https://gradschool.usu.edu/trainings/teaching-assistant-training>

<https://research.usu.edu/ehs/lab-safety>

Required Course List

The NDFS department is home to faculty with a wide variety of research interests. Because of this, we attract students with equally diverse research interests and career goals. To make sure students are able to obtain the training required to meet their research and career goals, we have a very flexible set of required courses.

Because of this, preparing your plan of study (see below) is very important. Work carefully with your Major Advisor and Supervisory committee to choose graduate courses that will prepare you with the knowledge and skills you need to succeed.

For the MS degree, 30 total credits are required. For the PhD degree, 70 total credits are required from Bachelor's degree (PhD₇₀) and 48 total credits from Master's degree (PhD₄₈).

The following courses are required.

*The first 2 credits of NDFS 7800 should be taken in semester 1 (1 credit) and semester 2 (2 credits).

| Course Category | Number of required credits | | | Course Options |
|--|----------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|---|
| | MS | PhD ₄₈ | PhD ₇₀ | |
| NDFS Graduate courses | 5 | 10 | 10 | See Appendix A |
| Biochemistry | 3 | 3 | 3 | Biochemistry (CHEM 5700, NDFS 6410, or any other biochemistry-based course suggested by the committee) |
| Statistics | 3 | 6 | 6 | Statistics (STAT 5100, STAT 5120, STAT 5200, STAT 5600, PSY 7610, PSY 7780, <u>or any other statistics course approved by the student's committee</u>) |
| NDFS Graduate Seminar* | 2 | 2 | 2 | NDFS 7800 |
| Teaching or Occupational Experience | 0 | 2 | 2 | NDFS 6910 or NDFS 5250 |
| Other Graduate Courses | 5-11 | 8-13 | 18-27 | Any USU courses approved for graduate studies, See Appendix A and B |
| Research | 6-12 | 12-17 | 18-27 | MS: NDFS 6970 PhD: NDFS 7970 |

Please note:

International students with a .5 assistantship must take at least 3 credits of in-person courses and then may take up to 3 credits of an online course. Once they have that ratio, they may take additional online or in-person courses during that semester. International students that do not have a .5 assistantship may only take up to 3 credits of online courses per semester.

Mentorship Agreement Form

The faculty advisor and student need to meet within the first 2 months of their first semester to compose a Mentorship Agreement form. This form goes over expectations from both the faculty advisor and student to go over educational objectives, both mentor and student responsibilities and a communication plan. The form will be signed by the faculty and student and copies will be given to each one along with a copy to the GPC. The form is found on the

[NDFS Graduate Students Canvas page.](#)

<https://qanr.usu.edu/ndfs/resources>

Establishing a Supervisory Committee

A supervisory committee must be selected by the student in conjunction with his or her major professor **during the student's first semester** as an NDFS graduate student. The major professor serves as the chair of the supervisory committee. A minimum of three members (at least two from the department) including the major professor are required for the MS program, with one member being designated as an Outside Member. The Outside Member should be someone from outside the area of emphasis of the thesis or dissertation. The Outside Member may be someone from within or outside the student's department. A minimum of five members (at least one from outside the department) including the major professor are required for the PhD program.

The Supervisory Committee Approval Form needs to be submitted **by the end of the second semester** for MS students and **by the end of the third semester** for PhD students. It is the student's responsibility to meet with the proposed committee members to make certain they are able and willing to serve. The Supervisory Committee Approval Form is completed in [ServiceNow](#).

Annual Review

The annual review is your chance to check in with your committee. It is a time to ask questions, get feedback on your progress, and advice on how to move forward towards your degree. It is

essential to have regular check-ins with your committee to make sure everyone is on the same page about your progress in coursework and your research. This annual meeting may also include additional business, for example approving a plan of study.

Find a time that your committee can meet and, schedule a room for the meeting with our GPC.

At least two weeks before your meeting, email your committee members a piece of writing.

This may be your written plan of work for the coming year, a planned project description, your thesis/dissertation proposal, etc. as applicable. The exact form of this writing can be at the discretion of the student and their major advisor. It should help the committee evaluate the student's progress on their degree as well as their ability to communicate in writing.

Please **bring a copy of the annual review form**, titled "Annual Review Form" found on the [NDFS resource website](#). Please fill in as much of the form as you are able. The rest of the form will be filled out by the major professor. The form will address student progress toward degree completion and include recommendations given by the committee. The form will be reviewed by the student, the major professor, and all members of the supervisory committee. A copy of the form will be placed in the student's file in the department.

At this meeting, **the student will present** on their plan of study for the coming year and summarize their work from the past year (if applicable). This presentation should highlight progress the student has made towards mastery of the program learning outcomes (see earlier in this handbook). The first year's meeting may focus primarily on setting expectations, getting feedback on plan of study, student goals, etc. The student may also present on other topics, such as their thesis/dissertation proposal.

Program of Study

Students should register for their first semester based on advice from their major professor. Students should then prepare a Program of Study in conjunction with their major professor. The Program of Study should ensure fulfillment of the minimum requirements for all NDFS graduate students (shown below) and include other courses providing the background necessary to conduct their research. The School of Graduate Studies considers the Program of Study a contract between you, your committee, and the School of Graduate Studies outlining which courses you will take to meet the School of Graduate Studies requirements and complete your degree program.

Students need to schedule a meeting with their supervisory committee to discuss the proposed Program of Study. A document detailing the proposed program of study (i.e. a list of classes to be taken each semester) should be given to each committee member **2 weeks** prior

to the committee meeting. Note that you can ask your committee for advice about what courses to take prior to putting together this plan or calling this meeting.

The purpose of the committee meeting is to secure the supervisory committee's approval of the Program of Study. The committee will determine any deficiencies in core BS competencies or academic background. Students in the NDFS graduate program should have already taken undergraduate general chemistry, organic chemistry, biochemistry, algebra, and statistics. Although these courses may be taken as part of the graduate program, they will not be counted as graduate credit in the Program of Study.

The supervisory committee is responsible for ensuring NDFS graduate students have (or obtain during their program of study) the expected core competencies of NDFS bachelor's degree graduates. This can be based upon transcripts of courses from prior studies, passing courses listed in the program of study (with a minimum grade of B), or by administering a written or oral examination.

The committee will also determine that the courses included in the Program of Study meet the minimum requirements for obtaining an MS or PhD in Nutrition and Food Sciences (as shown below).

Students will submit their program of study to our GPC using the excel file (POS template NDFS, which can be found on our [NDFS Graduate Students Canvas page.](#)) or they may complete it in DegreeWorks. The GPC will use that to either add the student's POS in DegreeWorks or to double-check their submission before submitting their program of study to the graduate school and have it circulated for approval through ServiceNow. You should submit the Program of Study by the end of your second semester, if you're a MS student or after your 3rd semester if you're a PhD student--after your supervisory committee approval form has been submitted and approved.

Registration for all subsequent semesters should be based on the approved Program of Study. Changes to the Program of Study require electronic revision form to be sent to the GPC then forwarded to the Graduate School. The student may register for courses not listed on the Program of Study with approval of his or her major professor (especially if the student is receiving a research assistantship).

If the student needs to revise their program of study, they should get approval from their mentor and graduate committee. Track these changes using the POS template NDFS and submit it to our GPC the semester before you plan to graduate as a POS revision. Please do not submit a revision for each change as they are made.

Research Proposal

In consultation with the major professor, the student must choose a research area suitable for the MS thesis or PhD dissertation, and then prepare a research proposal. Research proposals should be written and approved **within the first year** for students completing the MS degree and **within the second year** for PhD students.

The content and duration of the proposed research should be appropriate for the degree. It is expected that MS research and coursework (including writing and defense of the thesis) should be completed within 2 years (24 months). The length of research being proposed for the PhD dissertation is dependent on the discovery by the student of a substantial level of new information that can be added to their field of specialization.

The proposal should include the following:

Title

Description of the problem, based on the most current literature

Statement of the purpose of the intended research

Research Plan

List of references cited, presented in a form acceptable for publication in a scientific journal in the student's field

The student prepares the research proposal under the guidance of the major professor. Once the research proposal is completed, it is the student's responsibility to schedule a meeting with his or her supervisory committee, and to provide each committee member with a copy of the research proposal at least **two weeks** prior to the meeting.

During the committee meeting, the student is expected to provide an oral presentation of the proposed research, and discuss any regulated aspects of the research, such as hazardous materials, experimental animals, or human subjects. The Dissertation and Defense or Thesis and Defense rubrics may be useful tools to help evaluate if the proposed research will meet expectations. Students should consider asking their committee members and advisors for guidance on preparing for the proposal defense. i.e. "What questions should I be able to answer? What material should I present?" After completing the proposal defense, MS students should complete the Thesis Project Proposal form. PhD students will wait until after they have also completed their Comprehensive Exam and then complete the Application for Candidacy for Doctoral Degree form. (Both forms are located in [service now.](#))

Comprehensive Examination (PhD students only)

Before a student can become a candidate for the PhD degree, he or she must take a comprehensive examination, as required by the School of Graduate Studies. The qualifying/comprehensive exam will consist of 2 parts:

Written exam: the purpose of this exam is to evaluate the students' critical thinking skills. The format of this exam will be established by the major professor and the committee members. Some examples include requesting the student to write a review paper or a literature review on a topic outside his/her area of research, discussion of specific papers, or evaluation of different situations related to their discipline.

Oral exam: The written exam will be closely followed by an oral exam where the student will be questioned on his/her general knowledge of topics related to his/her discipline. This test is designed to assess students' oral communication skills and their ability to think "on the spot". The oral exam can be a follow up of the written exam or can be based on a different topic.

The qualifying/comprehensive exam must be taken during the **second year** of the student's program. If the student does not pass the exam, he/she will not be accepted into the PhD program and could be considered for an MS degree.

Typically, students will be asked questions related to their area of specialization and their field of research. However, the comprehensive exam can also be used to test students' overall knowledge of food science or nutrition, and committee members can ask any questions that will test the student's knowledge and ability to synthesize nutrition and food science information, as well as answer questions. Students should ask their committee members and advisors for guidance on preparing for the comprehensive exam. Example written comprehensive exam instruction and questions will be coming soon on the MS/PhD canvas course.

After passing the Comprehensive Exam and the Proposal Defense, the Application for Candidacy for Doctoral Degree Form should be completed at this time. It is located in [Service Now](#).

Thesis or Dissertation Defense

The Graduate School provides important [deadlines and requirements for](#) the Thesis and Dissertation. This information should be reviewed and followed carefully.

Students write the thesis or dissertation under the guidance of their major professor. To schedule a tentative date for the defense of the thesis or dissertation, students should also contact their supervisory committee members. Students need to plan well in advance, so that there will be sufficient time allowed for the student to complete their writing and for the committee members

to read the thesis or dissertation. When the thesis or dissertation is ready to be defended, and at least **four weeks** prior to the tentative defense date and time, the student submits a copy to each committee member. The student should also provide all committee members with a copy of the defense rubric and faculty summary form, found on the [NDFS resource website](#).

After the committee members have read the thesis or dissertation and have determined that it is indeed ready to be defended, the student prepares the Appointment for Examination Form a minimum of **10 working days** prior to the defense. (This form is on [Service Now](#).) Each of the supervisory committee members is required to sign this form, indicating that they have read and tentatively approve the content and format of the thesis or dissertation, and that they can attend the defense.

Students need to schedule a room for their defense with the GPC at least **two weeks** before the exam date. (MS and PhD students in NDFS are required to give a presentation on the results of their research during the semester in which they defend their thesis or dissertation, typically this is the first portion of their dissertation defense.) At this time, the GPC will add the defense to the calendar, send an announcement of the defense to the faculty and other graduate students, and check to make sure the Appointment for Examination Form has been submitted.

Completing the Thesis or Dissertation

After a successful defense of the thesis or dissertation, the GPC will send the Record of Examination to the graduate school. The graduate school will send an email to the student outlining necessary steps to complete the thesis or dissertation. **That email is the ultimate guide and should be read and followed very carefully.** The general steps are summarized here.

The student is required to make any changes to the thesis or dissertation that are required as a consequence of the final examination. When the thesis or dissertation has been revised to the satisfaction of the committee member(s) assigned the responsibility of ensuring such changes are completed to the satisfaction of the supervisory committee (usually the major professor), the front page of the thesis or dissertation can be signed.

The [formatting requirements](#) from the graduate school should be followed throughout the document. The graduate school provides [Thesis and Dissertation Information Sessions](#) to provide a thorough overview. The student will complete the Thesis/Dissertation Format and Style Form and Authorship and Copyright forms on [ServiceNow](#). Then the student should email the completed document to our GPC for submission to the graduate school for review.

Following the review by the School of Graduate Studies, their thesis or dissertation is returned to the student's Box folder showing annotations that need to be corrected throughout their paper. Not all the changes will be highlighted, it's up to the student to check all formatting and spacing issues show in the first several pages of their document. The student will go through their document to change any formatting issues and will resubmit their document to the GPC to go through the process again until all formatting is correct throughout the document. It is also the student's responsibility to ensure that all other forms and fees related to the thesis or dissertation and to the completion of his or her degree are finalized.

Graduate School Requirements and Policies

The NDFS MS/PhD program adheres to all of the requirements and policies of the USU School of Graduate Studies. Please be familiar with these policies, especially GPA requirements, good standing with the School of Graduate Studies, degree deadlines and timelines, and required forms. You can find all required forms on the [graduate school website](#).

It is your responsibility to ensure all graduation requirements are met. Please meet with your major professor or the GPC if you have any questions. You are encouraged to fill out important dates, forms, etc. from the [graduate school website](#). Please note that it is ultimately your responsibility to make sure your template is correct according to the most recent guidance from the [graduate school](#).

Time Limit

A master's degree must be completed within six years of entering the degree program and a PhD must be completed within eight years.

Leave of Absence/Continuous Registration/ Withdrawal

If for any reason you will not be registered for *any* courses in either the spring or fall semester, submit the [leave of absence form/continuous registration form](#).

Graduation

A graduate student must [apply for graduation with the registrar's office](#). Please see the [degree completion page](#) on the graduate school website for details for your degree (you may need to scroll down).

Changing Major Professors

Although the Department expects most student-Major Professor relationships to last for the entire degree program of the student, either the student or the Major Professor may terminate the arrangement. Students have the right to mentorship from their Major Professor that is free from exploitation or harm (e.g., sexual advances, inappropriate remarks, humiliation, appropriation of your work). Keep in mind, however, that there is a difference between exploitation and harm and the regular ups and downs of the student-Major Professor relationship. Before students explore changing Major Professors by speaking with other faculty in the department the student should meet with their Major Professor and MS/PhD Director or Department Head to 1) identify reasons for wanting to change, 2) fully consider the implications of a change, and 3) create a plan for successful transition.

It is the student's responsibility to identify a new faculty member willing to serve in this role. The department cannot guarantee reassignment to a new Major Professor or continuation of funding under the new Major Professor. A student without a Major Professor is not eligible to complete their degree.

In cases where the Major Professor becomes unavailable through no fault of the student (e.g., retirement, resignation, extended illness, or death), the department will make a good faith effort to identify a replacement to allow the student to continue their program.

Dismissal from the Graduate Program

A graduate student may be recommended for dismissal from the MS or PhD program for the following semester for the following reasons:

- Failure to make satisfactory academic progress, including coursework or research;
- Inability or unwillingness to complete the agreed-upon research;

- Serious misconduct, including academic dishonesty or violations of the Student Code of Conduct.

Definitions and Criteria

- **Unsatisfactory Progress in Coursework:** A cumulative GPA below 3.0 for more than one semester, or failure to enroll in a minimum of 3 credits per semester.
- **Unsatisfactory Progress in Thesis/Dissertation Research:** As outlined in the signed mentorship agreement between the student and Major Professor.

Probation and Remediation

If the Supervisory Committee determines a student is not making sufficient progress, they may place the student on *matriculated-probationary status*. The committee must provide written notice to the student and, in consultation with the student, develop a remediation plan with clear objectives and deadlines. The plan should be shared with the Department Head and included in the Annual Committee Meeting Form.

Dismissal Process

If remediation is unsuccessful or if there is serious misconduct, the Supervisory Committee may recommend dismissal of the student to the Department Head. The Department Head will convene a hearing with the graduate faculty, chaired by the Director of the MS/PhD program (or a designated faculty member if the Director serves on the student's committee). The graduate faculty will review documentation of the student's probationary status and or misconduct. A formal vote will determine the recommendation—to continue or dismiss—which will be forwarded to the Department Head.

If dismissal is recommended, the Department Head will issue a **letter of intent to dismiss**, stating:

- Specific reasons for dismissal,
- A summary of prior remediation efforts,
- Notice of the student's right to respond or appeal in accordance with USU's School of Graduate Studies policies.

MS/PhD in Nutrition and Food Sciences Student Handbook Signature Form

This page is to be signed by the student after receiving and reading the Utah State University, NDFS MS/PhD Student Handbook. This handbook includes information pertaining to USU student policies, program specific requirements, and expectations.

I realize it is my responsibility to read the NDFS MS/PhD Student Handbook and clarify any questions or concerns with my major professor or the program director.

My signature indicates that I have read, understand, and agree to adhere to the requirements as stated in the NDFS MS/PhD Student Handbook.

Name of Student (Print)

Signature of Student

Date

Please return completed form to Tara Black, in person, or email to tara.black@usu.edu



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College of Agriculture & Natural Resources
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