

Instructional Technology & Learning Sciences (ITLS)
PhD Handbook

<http://itls.usu.edu>

2025-2026

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ITLS Doctoral Program (PhD)

Program Overview

Congratulations on your admittance to the Instructional Technology & Learning Sciences (ITLS) Department, one of eight departments in the Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services.

This handbook provides an overview of the PhD program requirements and responsibilities for PhD students in our department. Familiarity with the contents is expected of all students. These policies are supplementary to and governed by the overarching regulations of the [School of Graduate Studies](#) at USU. While ITLS can be more strict than the School of Graduate Studies, we must always adopt its minimum requirements.

Department Vision

Our vision is to cultivate an inclusive community of scholars who drive the fields of instructional technology and learning sciences forward by developing a supportive culture of research and practice across all programs and applying it in educational, industry, and community settings.

Students Rights and Responsibilities

The School of Graduate Studies created policies on Graduate Student Rights and Responsibilities. You can find information [here](#).

Responsibilities of Faculty to Students

As faculty at USU, we have several responsibilities as your mentors. You can find more information about those responsibilities [here](#).

Program Contacts

Graduate Program Coordinator (GPC)

Jenny Kearl, jenny.kearl@usu.edu, 435-797-2523

The ITLS Graduate Program Coordinator (GPC) assists both applicants and current students with general questions and the required paperwork for the ITLS department and the School of Graduate Studies. In this role, the coordinator helps students navigate program requirements, deadlines, and university and department policies to ensure a smooth and successful academic journey.

PhD Program Director

Jody Clarke-Midura, jody.clarke@usu.edu

Department Head

Andy Walker, andy.walker@usu.edu

ITLS Community

The ITLS community is a vibrant group of faculty, staff, and students engaged in advancing the fields of instructional technology and the learning sciences. We expect our doctoral students to be active participants in this scholarly community. Key opportunities for engagement include departmental socials and the Instructional Technology Student Association (ITSA), our student-run organization that provides professional development and networking events. Your active participation is vital to our collective success and your professional growth.

Navigating Your First Year

Setting up USU Tools and Resources

- **USU Email:** You received your A-Number in your acceptance letter. Your first step is to set up a strong password at myid.usu.edu. Your university email address is your A-Number followed by "@usu.edu" (e.g., A01234567@usu.edu). All official USU correspondence needs to be sent and received through your usu.edu account ([see Policy 5207](#)).
- **My.usu.edu:** Your student dashboard with links to your email, Canvas courses, Box (cloud storage), OneDrive, and other resources.
- **ServiceNow:** The platform used to request services on campus, such as getting an email alias (e.g., FirstName.LastName@usu.edu). You will use your A# and a strong password to log in. [Knowledge articles and tutorials](#) are available to help you navigate the system. This is also the system you will use to submit formal documentation to the School of Graduate Studies (such as your program of study).
- **Canvas:** Canvas is used to provide course materials to students and to allow students to interact with the instructor and each other.

Schedule a Meeting with Your Advisor

Schedule an initial meeting with your advisor. The purpose of this meeting is to help you select appropriate first-semester coursework, discuss your emerging research interests, and recommend foundational readings to help you get oriented in the field.

The Role of Your Advisor

Typically, students apply to the PhD program to work with a specific advisor. When admitted to the Ph.D. program, students are assigned an Advisor who serves as their Committee Chair. Advisors provide academic and research guidance, including guidance on coursework, research supervision, and professional development.

Exploring Research

We encourage you to get involved in faculty research groups early in your program. As you begin this exploration, it is crucial to understand the university's policies on research ethics and compliance.

University research involving human subjects, animal subjects, or certain materials must be reviewed and approved by the appropriate University committee(s) before the research is started. Graduate students, with assistance from their advisors, are responsible for obtaining this approval. Verification of approval must be submitted to the School of Graduate Studies before your [Application for Candidacy for Doctoral Degree \(ACDD\)](#) can be approved.

Research Involving Human Participants

The [Institutional Review Board \(IRB\)](#) is the campus organization responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of human participants recruited to participate in studies conducted by researchers affiliated with Utah State University. This office administers the review of human subjects research proposals to ensure compliance with federal regulations and ethical principles, so that scientific funding and activities can continue at Utah State University.

Prior to conducting or assisting with research involving human subjects, individuals must take [CITI training](#).

Whenever faculty members or students wish to conduct research involving human participants, they must submit their research proposal for review and approval by the IRB before the research can be started. Some research is considered exempt from full-board IRB review and can be approved more quickly. Only the IRB can make this determination; however, this type of research must still be submitted to the IRB for prior review.

The IRB provides many resources on its [website](#), from determining if you need IRB to preparing your materials.

Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR)

The USU [School of Graduate Studies](#) requires all graduate students in doctoral degree programs (Ph.D., Ed.D.) to complete the [Responsible Conduct of Research \(RCR\)](#) training. RCR is the practice of scientific investigation with integrity. It involves the awareness and application of established professional norms and ethical principles in the performance of all activities related to scientific research.

To fulfill the RCR Training requirement, students must complete the RCR Curriculum via the [Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative \(CITI\)](#) website. Completion of any other CITI training module (such as Social & Behavioral Research Module) does NOT fulfill the RCR training requirement. Students must pass each RCR training module with a score of 80% or higher. Upon completion, the USU [Division of Research Integrity and Compliance \(DRIC\)](#) will automatically receive an email with your certification of completion for their records. Students are strongly

encouraged to take the RCR training early in the doctoral program to allow for this requirement to be met before conducting research.

Student Health and Wellness Resources

[The School of Graduate Studies has compiled a list of resources on mental health and wellness.](#)

ITLS PhD Curriculum and Requirements

Timeline

While there is variability in the time it takes to complete a PhD in ITLS, an [estimated timeline is provided by the School of Graduate Studies](#) that may be helpful in planning your major milestones. Students must complete their PhD within eight years of matriculation. Note that your clock does not stop when you take a Leave of Absence and it starts with the first class you want to include in your program of study.

Ph.D. Coursework and Planning Guides

The ITLS PhD requires a minimum of 48 semester credits beyond a master's degree in Instructional Technology or Learning Sciences. A PhD student holding a master's degree in a field other than Instructional Technology or Learning Sciences will be required to complete at least 6 credits of the master's core courses, resulting in a minimum 54 credit program. On some occasions, students with a relevant master's degree may be asked to complete all or part of the ITLS master's core. This determination will be made by the student's advisor and the PhD Director. A PhD student who does not have a master's degree will be required to complete a 70-credit PhD, including the master's core courses.

Master's Core

Students who need to complete the master's core courses should take ITLS 6535 Design Thinking (offered in the fall semester) and ITLS 6520 Instructional Design I (offered in the spring semester).

PhD Planning Sheet

ITLS created a program planning sheet to help students plan which courses to take to complete their approved Programs of Study. The most recent version of the [PhD planning sheet](#) can be found in Appendix A and on the [ITLS website](#).

Information regarding EDUC research courses, sequences and prerequisites can be found at <https://cehs.usu.edu/research/courses/>.

Information regarding ITLS courses can be found at <https://cehs.usu.edu/itls/courses>.

PhD Core

Doctoral students must complete the following three (3) required courses, all of which must be taken face-to-face. These courses are offered in a required sequence, one per semester, during the first three semesters of the program.

- **First Semester (Fall):**
 - ITLS 7011: Introduction to ITLS I
- **Second Semester (Spring):**
 - ITLS 7015: Introduction to ITLS II
- **Third Semester (Fall):**
 - ITLS 7021: Current Topics in ITLS

Research Methods Courses

Doctoral students are required to take 15 credits of Research Methods courses- 4 required and one additional course. [Please see the PhD planning sheet for more information.](#)

EDUC 6570 Introduction to Educational and Psychological Research (required course)

This course provides an introduction to research methods, including identification of a research problem, review and evaluation of research literature, and design and implementation of a research project.

EDUC/PSY 6600 Statistical Foundations (required course)

Research design and statistical concepts for research in education, human services, and psychology, with an emphasis on the selection and interpretation of statistical analyses. Enrollment is limited to passing the EDUC/PSY 6600 pretest. For information on the pretest, see: <https://cehs.usu.edu/research/courses/educ-psy-6600>

Prerequisites: EDUC 6570 and Instructor's Approval.

Note: As discussed in the planning sheet, with advisor permission students can substitute 6050 (applied statistics) for EDUC 6600. This will close doors to advanced statistics methods classes.

EDUC 6770 Qualitative Research Methods (required course)

Introduction to qualitative research, including foundations, research designs, strategies of inquiry (e.g., case study, ethnography, grounded theory, narrative inquiry, and phenomenology), sampling, fieldwork, and data collection and analysis.

Prerequisite: EDUC 6570

EDUC 7610 Regression Analysis

An advanced treatment of research design and statistical concepts and issues in educational, human-services, and psychological research.

Prerequisite: EDUC/PSY 6600

General Electives

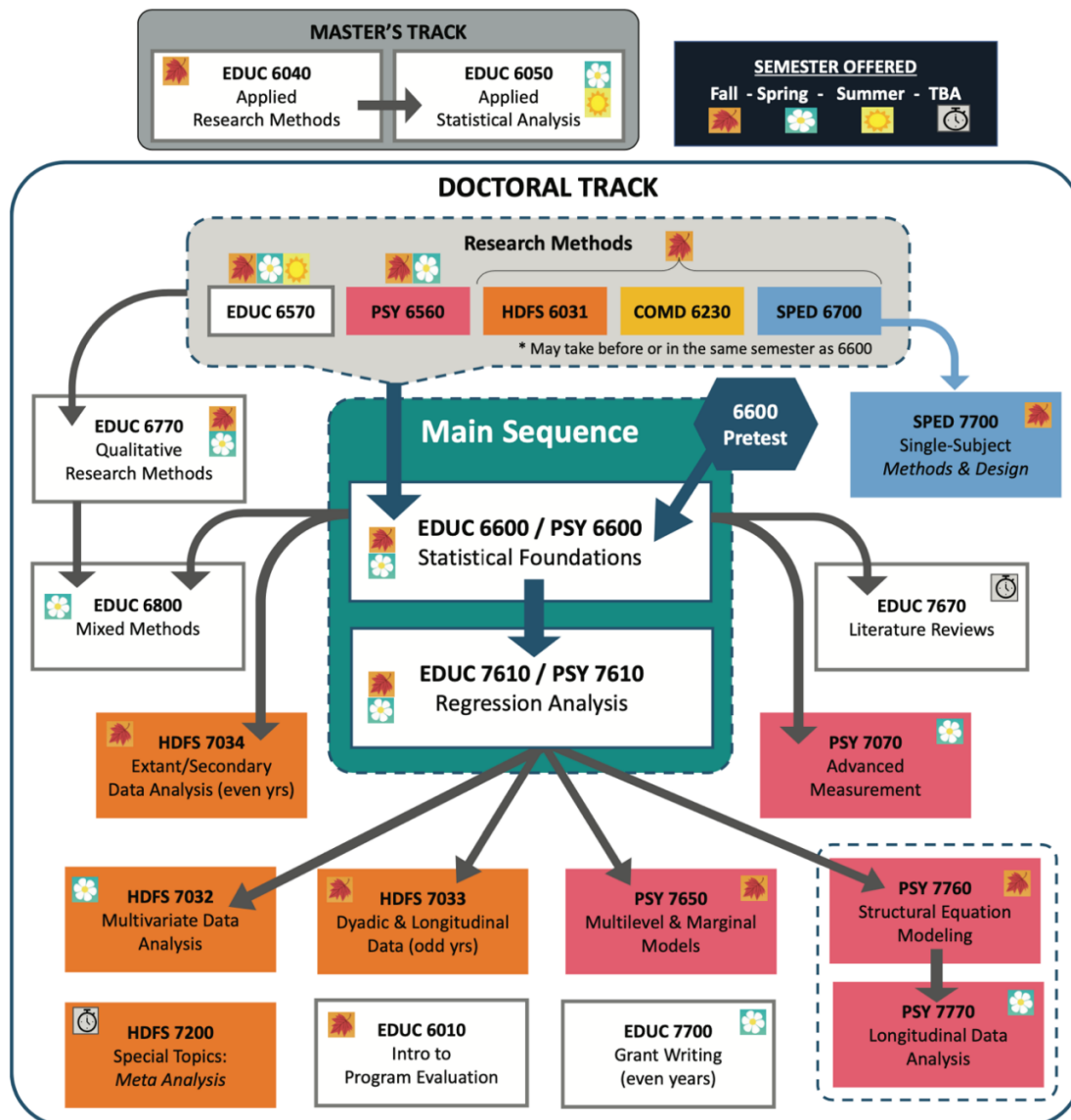
Students take 6 credits in electives that allow them to personalize their PhD journey.

Dissertation Credits

Students with a master's degree take 12 dissertation credits. Students with a BS take 18 dissertation credits.

Certificate in Advanced Research Methods and Analysis

For students interested in the [Certificate in Advanced Research Methods and Analysis \(CARMA\) – Quantitative](#), please review the 15 credits of advanced statistics and methodology courses offered throughout the CEHS. As illustrated on the course sequencing chart below, the main statistics sequence (EDUC/PSY 6600, 7610) should be taken as a set, and EDUC 6600 should never be taken in isolation.



Graduate GPA Requirements

The School of Graduate Studies requires graduate students to maintain an overall Graduate GPA of at least 3.0 for degree program courses. Grades of C- or lower will not be accepted for a graduate degree.

Course Level Requirement

The School of Graduate Studies requires students to include 6000-level courses and above for all graduate degrees. Courses at the 5000 level or lower cannot be included in a student's Program of Study.

Academic Honesty

Students are responsible for complying with the University policies regarding academic honesty as stated in the Utah State University Student Code Article VI.

Annual Performance Review

Every spring semester, each student is required to submit an annual progress report describing the progress they have made during the past year and their goals for the coming year. [See Appendix B](#). The faculty review these reports and other evidence of students' progress, including coursework, research activities, publications, presentations, and other professional activities. Following this review, each student receives a written comment from their advisor about their progress and suggestions for the coming year at the bottom of the annual review form. Students whom the faculty feel are not making satisfactory progress will be notified of this as part of this review process and can also be notified at any time as part of the remediation process.

Doctoral Residency Professional Requirements

The School of Graduate Studies no longer requires a formal consecutive semester residency. Some doctoral programs are structured to accommodate students who work full-time or are doctoral students at a distance. The ITLS PhD program is designed to be a residential PhD program. To help ensure successful completion, we urge students, whenever possible, to spend a minimum of two years on campus.

Students who opt to leave the state after coursework completion may be unable to find employment with the university due to (1) visa requirements for international students and (2) remote work fees required for out-of-state USU employees.

For Utah Residency (which has major implications for tuition), check [here](#).

Further information can be found in the [General Catalog for School of Graduate Studies](#).

Steps to Degree Completion

This section is meant as a partner to, and in compliance with, all college and School of Graduate Studies requirements relating to those steps for a student to earn a PhD. ****Note**** forms are linked below.

Major Steps

- Complete Coursework (**typically years 2-3**)
- Comprehensive Exams
 - Form a Committee of 3 faculty for the Comprehensive Exams
 - Write Comprehensive Exams
 - Defend Comprehensive Exams (**ideally by the end of year 3**)
- Form Doctoral Supervisory Committee of 5 faculty (for dissertation)
 - Complete the [Supervisory Committee Approval form](#) (**by the end of year 3**)
 - Submit a [Program of Study Form](#) (**by the end of year 3**)
- Dissertation
 - Before beginning work on a dissertation, graduate students should review the [School of Graduate Studies Publication Guide](#) and attend a [Thesis and Dissertation Information Session](#), held in-person and via Zoom.
 - Write Dissertation Proposal
 - Schedule Dissertation Proposal Defense
 - Defend Dissertation Proposal
 - Submit an [Application for Candidacy](#) after your dissertation proposal is approved.
 - **NOTE: The [Application for Candidacy](#) Form should be submitted at least three months prior to the student's final defense.**
 - Optional: Apply for funding to support your dissertation research. One option is the CEHS Graduate Student Research Award. More information [here](#). Another option is the NAED/Spencer dissertation fellowship. Many dissertation fellowships exist. Be sure to communicate with your advisor about resources.
 - Write Dissertation
 - Schedule Dissertation Defense
 - Note that there is at least a three-month period between defending your proposal and defending your dissertation based on the Application for Candidacy Requirements listed above.
 - Submit an Appointment for Exam (AFE) at least 10 days **before your defense**.
 - Defend Dissertation (committee of 5 faculty members) (**typically in year 5**)
 - Submit [the Authorship & Copyright form](#) after your defense and before submitting your dissertation to the School of Graduate Studies
 - Submit [the Format and Style](#) form after your defense, before you are ready to begin the thesis/dissertation review process with the School of Graduate Studies.
 - Have the dissertation professionally edited to meet the [School of Graduate Studies Publication guidelines](#). Note this is a cost over and above tuition and fees.
 - Finalize dissertation to submit to the School of Graduate Studies

- Submit the [Title Page](#) once your committee has signed off on the final edits of your dissertation.
 - Submit the dissertation to the School of Graduate Studies for Review (the Graduate Program Coordinator will send it)
- Graduation
 - Submit a [Graduation Check](#), which must be reviewed by the Graduate Program Coordinator for accuracy prior to final submission to the School of Graduate Studies.
 - Submit a [Graduate Application](#)

Comprehensive Examination

The comprehensive examination *serves as preparation for and demonstration of one's ability to conduct independent scholarly research and one's readiness to embark upon their dissertation research*. The Comprehensive examination is typically done after two years of coursework and must be completed before starting the dissertation. See table 1, Deadline for completing comprehensive exams below.

The expectation for the comprehensive examination is that students write two papers: a Conceptual Paper and an Empirical Paper.

Conceptual paper

The conceptual paper focuses on exploring and developing ideas, theories, or concepts by reviewing and synthesizing theory and research in an ITLS-relevant topic area. The purpose is for PhD students to demonstrate that they can engage in critical analysis, synthesis of existing knowledge, and develop a well-structured argument regarding the current state of knowledge in the major area. Examples include, but are not limited to: A literature review, theory synthesis, theory adaptation, or meta-analysis.

Empirical paper

The empirical paper must present a well-structured argument based on original empirical research led by the student, comparable in structure to what would be prepared for a journal article or published conference proceedings. The student may choose to use data that is part of an existing research project. The student may also choose to design a study that requires the collection and analysis of new data unaffiliated with an existing project. Regardless of what data are used, the appropriate authorizations and approvals from the research participants, the institutional review board (IRB), and (when applicable) the principal investigators must be obtained. See the IRB section above for more information.

Comprehensive Paper Guidelines

Each paper should be between 6000 – 10000 words (note that it can exceed 10000 words with prior consent form your committee).

Authorship/leadership

The student should be the lead author on the comprehensive papers. It is okay if there are multiple authors behind the student; however, it is expected that the student demonstrates leadership in the writing of the paper. Any additional authors on comps papers should have a defined [CrediT](#) role and be part of a collaboration agreement decided in advance, modified as the work progresses.

Format & Style

Papers should be formatted in the APA style guide, 7th edition.

- One-inch margins on all sides.
- Double-space all text, including headings.
- Indent the first line of every paragraph 0.5 inches.
- Use an accessible font (e.g., Times New Roman 12pt., Arial 11pt., or Georgia 11pt.).
- Include a page number on every page.

Please refer to the [APA website](#) for in-depth guidance on APA formats.

The Committee for the Comprehensive Exams

Students form a three-person committee of three faculty members: their chair and at least one other member of the ITLS faculty. The third committee member can be an ITLS faculty member or an approved member from an outside department or university.

Committee Feedback

It is expected that students will seek feedback from committee members when writing their comprehensive papers. The expectation is that committee members will have had a chance to provide feedback prior to scheduling the defense.

Engage with members of your committee and get feedback on portions of your comprehensive papers, especially sections that intersect with their expertise.

The Oral Defense

Timeline

1. When the student and the chair agree the papers are ready to defend, the student schedules a 90-minute oral defense with the committee (at least two to four weeks out).
2. Student sends their final papers to all three members at least two weeks prior to the scheduled defense. *Note, there is an expectation that committee members have already seen and had a chance to provide feedback on your papers.*
3. Committee members are expected to read the papers prior to the defense and agree that the papers are ready to be orally defended. If a committee member has concerns about the paper(s) being defensible, they should contact the committee chair at least three days prior to the scheduled defense.

Structure

Students are expected to create a presentation that provides a brief executive summary of each paper. The presentation for each paper should be 5 minutes max. The structure of the defense is as follows:

1. Student presents slides for Paper 1 (5 min max).
2. The committee asks questions about paper 1.
3. Student presents slides for Paper 2 (5 min max).
4. The committee asks questions about paper 2.
5. Committee Deliberation. The student is asked to leave the room while the committee votes on the outcome of the oral defense.
6. The student is invited back and informed of the committee's decision.

Oral Defense Outcomes

Pass

Possibly no or small grammatical/style revisions for both papers.

Fail

After the oral defense, it is clear that portions of one or both papers need substantial revisions that would require a complete redesign or reconceptualization of the work.

Reasons a comps paper could fail include (but are not limited to):

- The research questions are not addressed by the data and/or analyses (or the data and analysis do not answer the research questions)
- Analysis of the questions is not addressed with the current data collection and analysis.
- Discussion/conclusion not supported by data from the study.
- Insufficient review of the literature relevant to the study.
- Failure to describe a clear purpose for the work.
- No synthesis, critique, or rationale.
- There is not a clear academic argument.
- Fundamental flaws that would require new data collection and/or analysis of data.
- In its current form, the paper lacks clarity and organization which makes it difficult to evaluate on important features.

Common Questions about Comprehensive Exams

How involved should my committee members be?

Your committee members are meant to support you. You can reach out to your committee members for guidance anytime, and your committee members should all have provided feedback on a complete draft of each paper prior to scheduling your defense. However, you need to be the clear first author of both papers. An example of indicating contributions to research is the Contributor Role Taxonomy (CrediT) or the ICMJ guidelines for authorship.

When do students need to complete comprehensive exams?

Comprehensive exams are typically completed by the end of year three for full-time students. While students are welcome to complete these at any time, it is recommended that students complete their comprehensive exams by:

Highest degree completed by time of matriculation	Comprehensive exam must be successfully defended by the time you complete regular coursework (pre-dissertation credits):
Masters in ITLS or directly related field (12 dissertation credits)	36 credits
Masters in a non-related field (12 dissertation credits)	42 credits
Bachelor's degree (18 dissertation credits)	52 credits

Table 1: Deadline for completing comprehensive exams.

What happens if a student does not complete their comprehensive exams within this timeframe?

They would be subject to faculty vote for remediation and dismissal.

What happens if a student fails?

Students can redo one or both papers one additional time, bearing in mind they are still subject to the completion timeframe. Note: students will be put on a remediation plan after failing their comprehensive exams.

How many votes does it take to fail?

If two committee members vote fail (a majority) then the student fails.

Do I need to put together a slide presentation for my oral defense of my comps?

Yes. Please see the Oral Defense section.

Are there any examples of previous comprehensive papers I can look at?

Examples of comprehensive papers written by ITLS doctoral students can be [found in the following box folder linked here](#) (note: you will need to log into box using your USU credentials in order to see the folder).

Can I use ChatGPT or any Large Language Model to help me write my papers?

It is expected that comprehensive papers are your own work. If any AI tools are used, you need to clearly acknowledge this by including a statement that includes 1) which AI tool(s) were used, 2) for what purposes, and 3) how you used and modified the AI's output with your own contributions.

What if I want to use an article I wrote that is not in APA format?

Discuss this with your committee and ask them to agree on the format of the paper.

Planning for the Dissertation

Doctoral dissertation research provides an avenue for students to develop, design, conduct, and present independent, thorough, and ethical research that advances educational scholarship. This experience positions doctoral students as skilled researchers, preparing them to work in a variety of contexts (i.e., industry, academia, K-12, nonprofits, etc).

Deciding on a Dissertation Format

The first decision that impacts the format and style of a dissertation is whether the document will be written in the monograph or multi-paper format.

- **Monograph Format:** A traditional, multi-chapter document written in a consistent style throughout.
- **Multiple-Paper Format:** Consists of an introductory chapter, at least two independent research papers as chapters, and a concluding chapter that integrates the studies.

School of Graduate Studies Requirements

- Review the [Dissertation Requirements](#) on the USU School of Graduate Studies website.
- Download and review the [Publication Guide](#). It is designed to assist graduate students in the preparation of dissertations.

Assembling the Dissertation Committee

Students, along with their Advisor, identify four other committee members (five members total). The dissertation committee is responsible for approving your Program of Study, overseeing your dissertation, and conducting your final defense. According to the School of Graduate Studies, you must fill out the [Supervisory Committee Approval form](#) once your 5-person committee is established or by the end of year 3, whichever comes first.

Committee Composition and Roles

- **Required Structure:** The committee must have at least five members who hold doctoral degrees and are current members of the Graduate Faculty. At least three members must be from within the ITLS department, and at least one member must be from outside the department.
- **Outside Member:** The role of the outside member is to ensure a fair and rigorous academic process for the student.
- **Members from Outside USU:** A qualified professional from outside the university may serve as a committee member but cannot fulfill the “Outside Member” role.
- **Emeritus Faculty:** Emeritus faculty may continue to serve on any committee they were on at the time of their retirement. They may join new committees as members, but not as the primary advisor/chair.
- **Faculty Who Leave USU:** A faculty member who leaves USU may continue to serve on a committee with approval, but a new advisor or co-advisor from USU must be appointed if they were the chair.

Member and Student Expectations

All committee members are expected to hold a degree equivalent to the one you are seeking, be available for meetings, and attend your final defense, either in person or remotely. Before your defense, every committee member must have carefully read and approved your dissertation.

Committee Changes

The membership of your committee cannot be changed within the six weeks prior to your final dissertation defense without special approval from the School of Graduate Studies.

Program of Study (POS)

Once the Supervisory Committee has been arranged and the SCAF form submitted, students should work with their Advisor to file an approved [Program of Study](#) (POS), which lists the courses that will fulfill the course requirements for the program.

The POS form is available on Degree Works and described on [the School of Graduate Studies website](#). The POS form should be entered by the student and then processed by the Graduate Program Coordinator. Students will receive an email notification when the POS is approved.

Remember that the responsibility for knowing and following degree procedures and requirements rests with the student. However, your advisor, the PhD Director, and the Graduate Program Coordinator are available to provide direction and support students in making progress and completing the degree.

Planning the Dissertation Study

Students should have an approved dissertation proposal before carrying out their research.

The Dissertation Proposal

The dissertation proposal is a document that outlines the research plan for the doctoral dissertation. The proposal should include sufficient detail for Committee members to ascertain the level of the student's understanding and the merit of the proposed research. Given these guidelines, each student should discuss proposal length and content with their Chair.

While Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval cannot be sought until after the proposal defense, the proposal appendix should include any essential information that the IRB will request (e.g., interview protocols). Students who are planning to conduct their dissertation as part of an existing IRB protocol should work with the PI of the IRB to submit an amendment to use the IRB for a dissertation project after passing their proposal defense.

Students have the option of writing a monograph dissertation or a multiple-paper dissertation. In order to ensure consistency in rigor and expectations between the two formats, the following table outlines the requirements for the dissertation proposals in ITLS.

Monograph Dissertation Proposal Structure

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Chapter 2 – Review of Literature

Chapter 3 – Methodology

Appendix

Multiple-Paper Dissertation Proposal

Chapter 1 – Explanation of how the papers work together to advance a broader argument that sets the context for the multiple papers.

Chapters 2 and 3 – A separate chapter for each proposed paper. Each chapter contains a comprehensive explanation of the planned research design and products, including methodology with a table and timeline for completing the proposed papers. Note that one of the planned projects could be a literature review.

Appendix

To facilitate committee member feedback, even if the work is complete, it should be presented as proposed work. Students who have already completed one or more papers take a risk that requested revisions (e.g. new data collection) will necessitate doing new work.

Feedback on the Dissertation Proposal

When they think it is ready, students submit their dissertation proposal for review to the committee chair. It is recommended but not required that after addressing recommendations from their chair, the student send the proposal to other members of the committee for feedback.

The Dissertation Proposal Defense

Timeline

- After all recommendations from committee members have been adequately addressed, and the committee chair has approved the proposal, students schedule their 90-minute defense.
- Students send their proposal to all committee members a minimum of four weeks prior to the proposal defense. If the student intends to write a multi-paper dissertation, it must be in the proposal so that the committee is all in agreement.

Structure

Students are expected to create a presentation focused on the research plan. It is expected that committee members have read the proposal prior to the defense. The suggested structure of the defense is as follows:

1. Student presents the research plan outlined in the proposal (15 minutes)
2. Committee members ask clarifying questions and discuss the proposal.
3. Committee Deliberation. The student is asked to leave the room while the committee votes on the outcome of the defense.
4. The student returns and is informed of the decision. Any revisions are discussed at this time.

Proposal Defense Outcomes

Pass

Possibly no or small grammatical/style revisions.

Pass with Revisions

If a proposal is passed with requested revisions, the committee will discuss how they want to proceed. They can request a second meeting with the entire committee to approve the changes. Or they may allow the chair or the chair and one or more committee members to monitor the revisions. The revision process will be discussed by the committee and clarified during the defense. Note that students should not start conducting research until the procedures discussed with the committee during the defense are followed.

Fail

Either it is clear that a new proposal needs to be started, or after the oral defense, it remains unclear if the proposal can be salvaged or needs a completely new effort. The committee will determine if an additional meeting is needed after the defense.

After the Dissertation Proposal is Approved

Once the dissertation proposal is approved, students need to submit the necessary paperwork:

- Submit [The Application for Candidacy \(ACDD\) Form](#).
- Obtain Necessary Regulatory Approvals to Conduct the Proposed Research. For updates on IRB regulations and to determine whether their research requires IRB approval, students can visit the [IRB website](#).

Common Questions about the Proposal Defense

How long is the defense?

Defenses should be scheduled for 90 minutes.

Who sends the proposal and schedules the defense?

Either the committee chair or the student can share the proposal and request a 90-minute dissertation defense meeting. Note, students must have chair approval before sending the proposal and request for defense.

What happens at the Dissertation Proposal Defense?

The student presents their proposed research as outlined in the proposal for about 15 minutes. The committee asks clarifying questions and discusses the proposal. Then, the student leaves the room and the committee votes on whether the student passes, passes with minor revisions, or fails. The student is then invited back into the room, where they are told the decision. At this point, any revisions will be discussed with the student present.

Can I use ChatGPT or any Large Language Model to help me write my proposal or dissertation?

It is expected that comprehensive papers are your own work. If any AI tools are used, you need to clearly acknowledge this by including a statement that includes 1) which AI tool(s) were used, 2) for what purposes, and 3) how you used and modified the AI's output with your own contributions.

The Dissertation

Formatting Guidelines

Students must adhere to the formatting [guidelines](#) established by the USU School of Graduate Studies.

Monograph Format

Considered a 'traditional' format, a monograph dissertation consists of a multi-chapter document that uses the same style throughout. A single chapter is not acceptable for a thesis or dissertation.

Monograph dissertations typically have five chapters and an Appendix:

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Chapter 2 - Review of Literature

Chapter 3 - Methodology

Chapter 4 - Results

Chapter 5 - Discussion & Conclusion

Appendix

While the Office of Research and Graduate Studies strongly encourages publication of research results, it reminds students that preparation of a thesis/dissertation and preparation of the manuscript for publication should be considered two separate operations. Certain mechanical stipulations for submitting manuscript copy will differ from those specified herein and may not be acceptable to the Office of Research and Graduate Studies.

If any part of the dissertation has been published, for example, the literature review, permission to reprint must be obtained from the journal holding the copyright. The signed permission letter is then included in an appendix.

Multiple-Paper Format

According to the ITLS department, a multiple-paper thesis/dissertation must contain at least two new publishable scholarly papers that have conceptual coherence. The thesis/dissertation must have:

- An inclusive abstract.
- An introductory chapter that sets the context for the thematic research, and
- A summary and conclusions chapter that integrates all of the papers.

When preparing a thesis/dissertation composed of multiple papers, a student has the following options:

- Including a separate abstract or summary for each paper (chapter), in addition to the always-required general thesis abstract; and
- Including separate reference lists for each paper (chapter) rather than a single reference list for the entire thesis/dissertation.

When a student prepares a multiple-paper thesis/dissertation, reference citations in text and reference lists for each paper (chapter) are prepared according to the journal style for that paper (chapter). A style manual for the journal, a copy of the journal being used, or an off-print of an article from the journal (the article must include examples of all pertinent style components) must be submitted with the thesis/dissertation.

While the Office of Research and Graduate Studies strongly encourages publication of research results, it reminds students that preparation of a thesis/dissertation and preparation of the manuscript for publication should be considered two separate operations. Certain mechanical stipulations for submitting manuscript copy will differ from those specified herein and may not be acceptable to the Office of Research and Graduate Studies.

Additional ITLS Expectations and Guidelines for a Multiple-Paper Dissertation

In addition to the expectations outlined by the graduate school, the ITLS department requires:

- The dissertation proposal needs to include intent to write a multi-paper dissertation so that the committee is all in agreement.
- All the papers need to work together to advance a broader argument, which, as a whole, must represent the student's intellectual effort.
- The comprehensive papers cannot be repurposed for the multi-paper dissertation unless there are substantial changes agreed upon by the five-person committee. This should be discussed during the oral defense of the proposal.

Feedback on the Dissertation

When they think it is ready, students submit their dissertation for review to the committee chair. It is recommended but not required that after addressing recommendations from their chair, the student send the dissertation to other members of the committee for feedback.

The Dissertation Defense

Requirements to Schedule Dissertation Defense

In order to schedule your dissertation defense, make sure you:

- Have an approved Supervisory Committee Approval form (committee changes cannot be made less than 6 weeks prior to the defense date).
- Have an approved Program of Study form.
- Have an approved Application for Candidacy form (doctoral students—must be approved at least three months prior to defense date).
- Register for at least *3 graduate-level credits.

*If a student has completed all coursework and research credits on an approved Program of Study, they can register for 1 graduate-level credit to defend their dissertation. Keep in mind, if a student is registered for 1 credit, they cannot be on an assistantship and will NOT be considered “full-time” or eligible to defer repayment of some student loans. If a student needs to be considered full-time at 3 credits, submit the Full-Time at Three Credits form.

Scheduling the Dissertation Defense

- Ensure all committee members agree that your dissertation has reached a defensible state before scheduling the defense.
- Note that defenses cannot be scheduled between academic terms.
- Consult the annual deadlines published by the Graduate School for specific dates.
 - To have your name printed in the commencement program, you must schedule your final exam at least four weeks prior to the ceremony.
 - To participate in the hooding ceremony, you must schedule your exam by the last day of finals week.
- Students send their dissertation to all committee members a minimum of four weeks prior to the defense date.
- Students must submit their [Appointment for Examination](#) (AFE) **at least 10 business days prior to their defense.**
- The dissertation defense is a public meeting and must be attended by the student and all members of the committee.
- Students work with the GPC to advertise their dissertation defense through department and college channels (i.e., listservs).
- The defense must be advertised a minimum of one week before the scheduled date.

Structure of the Dissertation Defense

Students are expected to create a presentation summarizing their dissertation research (e.g., research topic, its significance, methodology, key findings, conclusions & implications).

It is expected that committee members have read the dissertation prior to the defense. The structure of the defense is as follows:

- Student presentation (15-20 minutes).
- Committee members ask questions to assess the candidate's understanding of the research, methodology, and implications.
- The audience is invited to ask questions.
- Committee Deliberation. The student and the audience are asked to leave the room while the committee votes on the outcome of the defense.
- The student returns and is informed of the decision. Any revisions are discussed.

Dissertation Defense Outcomes

Pass

Awarded when the dissertation is approved with no revisions or only minor grammatical and stylistic corrections.

Pass with Revisions

Awarded when the committee requires substantive revisions. These changes must be completed under the supervision of the dissertation chair, or the chair and other committee members as specified during the defense.

Fail

Awarded when the dissertation has fundamental flaws (e.g., in coherence, organization, or methodology) that cannot be resolved through revisions. Other reasons for failure include ignoring committee feedback or being unable to adequately defend the research.

After the Dissertation Defense is Approved

- Submit [Authorship & Copyright form](#).
- Submit [Format and Style](#) form.
- Finalize dissertation to submit to the School of Graduate Studies.
- Submit [Title Page](#) once your committee has signed off on the final edits of your dissertation.
- Work with your GPC to submit your dissertation to the School of Graduate Studies for review.

Preparing for Graduation

- Submit a [Graduation Check](#), which must be reviewed by the Graduate Program Coordinator for accuracy prior to final submission to the School of Graduate Studies.
- Submit a [Graduate Application](#).

Changes to Advisor and/or Committee Members

Your advisor is assigned at the time of admission with the intention that they will guide you through early curriculum decisions, comprehensive examinations, your dissertation proposal, and your dissertation. This assignment should not be a surprise, as it is generally someone you identified in your application materials.

For various reasons, either you or your faculty advisor may decide that a change in advisor is in your best interests. One of your [rights as a graduate student](#) is clarity on the process for making changes either to your chair or a committee member without fear of retribution. Here are some key points to consider:

- **Normal Process:** As your interests mature and evolve, changes to your committee are a normal part of the PhD process.
- **Right to Choose:** You have the right to decide who your academic advisor is (though new advisors cannot be compelled to chair you) and, in consultation with your advisor and other stakeholders, who your committee members will be.
- **Communication:** You are free to provide an explanation for the change to a former chair or committee member. However, given the inherent power dynamics, it is also reasonable to choose not to provide a reason.

- **Courtesy Notification:** It is advisable to inform your advisor of the change so they are not surprised by notifications from ServiceNow.
- **Know Your New Advisor:** Before informing an existing chair or committee member about a change, it is a good practice to know who your new advisor will be. You can ask for discretion while a prospective advisor is considering taking on this new role.
- **Complete the Form:** Once discussions have taken place, you should complete a [Supervisory Committee Approval form](#) as soon as possible.
- **Timeline restrictions:** Changes in the membership of a supervisory committee **cannot be made during the six weeks prior** to the defense without a written request from the department head and approval of the Vice Provost of Graduate Studies.

Financial Information

Many full-time graduate students at USU receive some sort of financial assistance to support their graduate education. Please refer to the School of Graduate Studies site for information on [tuition, fees, assistantships, and financial aid](#). Be sure to also explore options through [USU's Financial Aid Office](#).

Department Graduate Assistantships

Students should contact the ITLS Department Head for all inquiries regarding graduate research or assistantships.

The maximum credit load for students on an assistantship is 12 credits. With an assistantship, students are expected to carry work responsibilities ranging from one-fourth (10 hours per week) to one-half time (20 hours per week).

Students who are graduate graders, teaching assistants, or instructors must enroll in courses developed by the School of Graduate Studies. Please see the table below that identifies which course is needed based on role. Note, these courses are being developed and only CEUS 7901 is available for Spring 2026.

CEUS Courses, Units, and Focus

	CEUS 7901	CEUS 7902	CEUS 7903
Grad Graders	X		
Grad Teaching Assistants	X	X	
Grad Instructors	X	X	X
Number of Units	1	2	2

USU Academic Policies and Procedures

Please review the most current USU Academic Policies and Practices on the following links:

- [Graduate Student Rights per SGS](#)
- [Graduate Student Rights per USU code of Conduct](#)
- [Graduate Student Rights and Responsibilities](#)
- [Graduate Student Required Training](#)
- [Policies on Student Misconduct & Dismissal](#)
- [Academic Integrity](#)
- [SGS Graduate Student Handbook](#)

Student Review, Remediation, and Dismissal

All graduate students undergo yearly review by program faculty both for academic progress and for professional conduct. Students are classified by means of a faculty vote as making good progress, under remediation, or are dismissed from the program based on the PhD annual review sheet.

Students on remediation have two weeks to work with their advisor or the department head as appropriate on a remediation plan with clear objectives and a timeline. If students under remediation do not create an improvement plan or meet progress on their plan objectives within the improvement plan timeline, they can be dismissed by faculty vote from the program.

Note: Other University policies and procedures (such as Title IX violations or student conduct, including academic integrity violations) may and should be pursued in parallel to any department actions. A department decision for remediation or to not pursue remediation or dismissal does not imply the department supports or condones student actions.

Procedures for Remediation

1. Faculty are encouraged to be thoughtful about the progress of their students at all times, including milestones like the end of a semester. At any time, a faculty member can bring up concerns about the conduct as defined in USU student conduct policies or academic performance of a graduate student. A motion and vote for remediation will occur at faculty meeting. The motion must align with ITLS policy and/or relevant University policies.
2. If the issue is about academic progress, assuming support for remediation, the ITLS Department Head will write a memo to the student and advisor asking them to develop and agree on a to agree on an improvement plan with clear objectives and a clear timeline to complete them.
3. If the issue is about conduct (or a combination of conduct and academic progress), assuming support for remediation, the ITLS Department Head will collaborate with the

advisor and the student to write an improvement plan with clear objectives and a clear timeline to complete them which will then be shared with the student and the advisor.

4. Students failing to meet the objectives of an improvement plan can be dismissed (see below) any appeals would happen at the time of dismissal.
5. Other faculty, as relevant (e.g. course instructor), at the time of the faculty vote may be involved in both the remediation and improvement plans.

Procedures for Dismissing a Student From a Graduate Program in ITLS

The following procedures, used by ITLS, are consistent with those outlined in The Code of Policies and Procedures for Students at Utah State University:

<https://studentconduct.usu.edu/studentcode/index>

1. Faculty will motion and a majority of faculty will vote to recommend dismissal of a graduate student. The motion must align with ITLS policy and/or relevant University policies. Not all faculty need to vote and a simple majority of those voting is needed to uphold the dismissal recommendation.
2. Assuming support for the dismissal, the ITLS Department Head will write a memo to the Dean of Graduate Studies recommending the student be dismissed from the relevant ITLS graduate program.
3. If faculty do not vote to uphold the dismissal recommendation, specific reasons for non-support must be provided. In instances in which the faculty cite a lack of adequate due process as a reason for non-support, the program committee recommending dismissal should address these concerns and then may again move forward with a recommendation for dismissal. If concerns other than due process ones are raised, those faculty raising the concerns must take responsibility for the student and for addressing those concerns. If these faculty then decide the concerns cannot be remediated, they can again recommend to the entire faculty that the student be dismissed.
4. Per university policies, the dismissed student retains the right to appeal the dismissal as outlined below.

Student Grievances

Definition of Academic Grievance

An instructor has full autonomy to evaluate a student's academic performance in a course. Accordingly, options for outcomes from a grievance process are limited. The University administration would override an instructor's evaluation only in an extremely limited circumstance. Specifically, the occurrence or incident relating to an academic grievance must constitute a failure to adhere to Policy 4002 of the Utah State University Policy Manual.

If a student believes that the actions of an instructor, academic supervisor, or supervisory committee represent a failure to uphold responsibilities to students as outlined in section 2.3.1 (Faculty Responsibilities to Students) of the faculty code, the student may initiate an academic grievance. An academic grievance includes complaints related to course conduct or grades (e.g., unfair grading, unfair course policies, unwillingness to accommodate approved class

absences), graduate committee decisions, practicum or internship placements or evaluations, and other discipline-specific activities that impact the students' academic record or progress.

Academic Grievance Process

For all academic grievances, the channel is:

1. The instructor, or the graduate supervisory committee, if the grievance pertains to committee action.
2. The academic department head.
3. The dean of the college for graduate students: the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies, who will consult and coordinate with the academic dean.
4. Grievance Board.
5. The Hearing Officer.
6. The Provost.
7. The President of the University.

See [Article VII](#). For matters of grievances pertaining to student conduct, see Article V. For academic integrity, see [Article VI](#).