

Ph.D. in Community Research and Action Student Handbook Vanderbilt University August 2025

PURPOSE OF STUDENT HANDBOOK

The purpose of the Ph.D. in Community Research and Action Student Handbook is to help guide students as they progress through the Ph.D. program. Because the Ph.D. program is governed by the academic requirements established by the Vanderbilt University (VU) Graduate School, students should also be familiar with the policies and procedures in the [Vanderbilt University Student Handbook](#) and [Vanderbilt University Graduate School Catalog](#). For questions about information in the handbook, students should contact their advisor, the Program Manager, or the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS).

OVERVIEW OF PH.D. PROGRAM

The Ph.D. program in Community Research and Action (CRA) is an interdisciplinary program combining community psychology, urban sociology, human geography, and community development. It trains action-researchers committed to promoting social justice in rigorous theoretical analysis and research methods to prepare them for careers in academia, research, and public policy. The Ph.D. includes (a) a core set of courses covering community psychology, community development, ethics, inequality, diversity and social justice, public and community health, and organizational theory and change; (b) research methodology covering quantitative and qualitative methods, action research, field research, and program evaluation; (c) advanced content areas; and (d) minors that are designed individually, drawing from other departments and specializations within Peabody College (e.g., leadership and organizations, quantitative psychology) and departments and schools throughout the university (e.g., economics, sociology, earth and environmental sciences, divinity). Planning is done with the major professor and approved by the student's committee. Students are expected to take a master's degree as part of their doctoral studies. Students entering with a nonempirical master's degree are expected to complete an empirical study.

DEGREE REQUIREMENTS

Requirements for the Master of Science

Students entering without a relevant master's degree or with a nonempirical masters must complete an empirical study or thesis (and receive the Master of Science in Community Research and Action in passing to the Ph.D.). The M.S. requires 30 credit hours, including at least 24 hours of Ph.D. didactic coursework and up to six hours of Master's Thesis Research.

Requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy

Students complete a major area paper (the formal defense of this paper constitutes their qualifying exam for advancement to candidacy), field experience, and dissertation. Ph.D. students are required to complete 72 total credit hours, including a minimum of 42 formal, didactic credit hours.

The program involves 72 credit hours structured into the following sections:

- **Core** (15+ semester hrs.)
- **Methods** (15+ semester hrs.)
- **Advanced Content/Minor(s)/Specialization Areas/Electives** (30+/- semester hrs.)
- **Individual Projects:** M.S. thesis, Internship, Dissertation (12+/- semester hrs.)

RESEARCH EXPECTATIONS

The Ph.D. program in Community Research and Action prepares researchers who can contribute the knowledge base of community dynamics and community change.

Grant Proposal or Graduate Fellowship Proposal

A fundable-quality grant or graduate/dissertation proposal should be completed **by the end of the sixth semester** of study in the program. It generally is focused on the dissertation topic and may be (but is not required to be) submitted to one or more funding agencies to support the dissertation research. There may be coursework in the Human and Organizational Development (HOD) or Leadership Policy and Organizations (LPO) departments to support this. The grant/fellowship proposal may be completed in a variety of forms: as part of a course, in conjunction with the major advisor or another faculty member engaged in grant writing, or independently as part of the student's search for funding for doctoral or independent research. It is up to the major advisor, in consultation with the Program of Studies (POS) committee, to determine whether the student has satisfied this requirement. It is also up to the major advisor to seek opportunities to involve advisees in grant writing. This requirement is reviewed annually at the time the POS committee meets to assess progress and plan next steps in the professional development of the student. A copy of the grant/fellowship proposal should be forwarded to the HOD graduate administrative staff.

Publication Requirements

The Ph.D. program in Community Research and Action trains students to publish research and contribute to the knowledge base, but no publication requirement is a part of the doctoral degree.

Conference Presentations

Students are encouraged to present their scholarship at academic conferences (including through institutional financial supports to attend conferences), but there is no presentation requirement as part of the degree program.

TRAINING FOR THE PROFESSION

Teaching Expectations

Students are expected to develop teaching experience through the role of teaching assistant (TA). In many departmental courses, the TA role requires students to instruct and facilitate groups of students over the course of a semester. There are no teaching expectations as instructors of record in the Ph.D. program.

Field Experience

Five hundred hours of field experience is required plus an additional 100-hour requirement satisfied by any combination of CRA program or department service or field experience (600 hours total). The purpose of this requirement is to ensure that students are involved directly and meaningfully in the community in ways that are purposefully connected with their research interests and career trajectory. This provides students a way to document their hands-on experiences in the field. Field experience sites are typically off-campus nonprofit organizations or government agencies (e.g., writing policy briefs for government or advocacy groups if actively solicited or used by the groups), but with POS committee approval, could involve a campus-based applied research or intervention opportunity. The field experience is intended to be flexible so as to best fit with the student's particular experience, goals, and aspirations and will amount to a full-time semester or 600 contact hours but may involve a series of brief or part-time experiences spread over several semesters or a more intensive internship. Students may complete this requirement as a summer internship (either in Nashville or elsewhere). Students may also take course credits during the fall or spring terms to complete this requirement, working with local organizations in a research, evaluative, support, or participatory role. Students are also able on occasion to complete part of this requirement in conjunction with their RA assignment or other paid employment. In rare cases (as the goal is to learn from applying knowledge and skills gained in the Ph.D. Program), partial credit towards the 600 hours may be given to students with substantial prior field experience. The final decision is to be made by the student in conjunction with her/his POS committee. The student's major advisor serves as the field experience supervisor.

Students work with their major advisor and POS committee to tailor the timing, placement, and exact nature of the work to meet the needs of the student. Students should begin thinking about and planning their field experience as early as feasible, perhaps as early as the end of their first semester. The student and the POS committee may develop a learning contract for the field experience that will guide the process. Up to 6 practicum coursework hours (HOD 7650) may (but do not have to) be taken if they fit into your Program of Studies but are not needed to complete the Field Experience requirement. Prior agreement with your advisor/supervisor (learning contract) as mentioned above, and Final Report documenting what you did and number of hours is required whether or not HOD 7650 hours are taken. Copies of all field experience documentation should be given to the student, advisor, and filed with HOD graduate administrative staff.

The field experience may be accomplished at any time, but usually students will complete it well in advance of dissertation submission, typically 6 months before its completion. Upon completion of the field experience, the student shall submit to the major advisor a report detailing how the student met the requirements stipulated in the learning contract. The advisor must approve and the report needs to be forwarded to the HOD graduate administrative staff.

ADVISING AND MENTORING

Major Advisor

Upon admission, an initial research advisor is assigned, with student consultation, to work with students for the first semester. As students become familiar with faculty research, **by January of their first year** in the program they should identify a core faculty member who best fits their research interests to serve as their major advisor. They are also encouraged to find one or more other faculty members who might serve as resources in their emerging research program and perhaps serve on their Program of Studies (POS) committee. The Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) will serve as the first semester academic advisor until the official major advisor is identified.

Students wishing to change major advisors at any point in their progress through the program are encouraged to consult first with the new potential advisor. Once the potential new advisor-advisee relationship is established, the decision to change major advisors should be communicated to the former advisor and to the program office. Then, a “Change of Advisors” form must be completed. After conversations between the student and each faculty member, all parties (initial advisor, new advisor, and student) must sign the required form. It then goes to the DGS for final approval. Upon completion of the process, the form is sent to the Graduate School by the Graduate Program Coordinator. If a student feels that power differentials or other factors might be interfering with the change of major advisor process, the advice of the DGS should be sought. It should be stressed that the ability to change major advisors to facilitate progress through the program is one of the highest program priorities.

Program of Studies Committee

The Program of Studies committee consists of a minimum of three people: the major advisor (who is a core faculty member) and two additional Graduate Faculty members, at least one of whom must be core CRA faculty. Students should establish their Program of Studies committee **by mid-March of their first year in the program**. Students are encouraged to meet with their full committee at least annually, but perhaps more often. In addition to approving students’ program of studies, the members of the committee can be a key source of mentoring and support throughout the program and may form the core of degree committees. Students should consult with their advisors for selecting committee members and determining how best to utilize the committee’s time and expertise. Students may change POS committee membership as the need arises, in consultation with their advisor.

Annual Reviews of Progress (Spring)

At the end of each academic year, the progress and performance of all current CRA students are reviewed and constructively evaluated by core CRA faculty. As needed, the faculty will use the CRA Professional Performance Review Requirements as a guiding framework or rubric and/or may place the student on probation (details can be found on program Brightspace page). After the April review, each CRA advisor will draft a feedback letter/memo for each student with approval of their POS Committee and the DGS.

Mid-Year Reviews

Each December, core CRA faculty are asked to share any concerns about student progress. Students will only receive a mid-year review memo if there is concern about their progress and performance as students and/or research/teaching assistants.

PROGRESS TOWARDS THE DEGREE

Program of Studies Form

The student's Program of Studies (POS) form (found on the program Brightspace page) lists all courses the student expects to complete and projects the time frame in which the courses and program milestones will be completed. The POS becomes an individualized road map for the student, their major advisor, and their POS committee to use in monitoring the student's fulfillment of program requirements. The student's progress and plans must be documented on the POS form and must be filed every year with the department until the required 72 hours have been reached. By April 1st of every year, students should submit a POS form to their advisor, and meet with their POS committee to discuss any changes or milestone decisions as a part of their annual review of progress. Although a POS form should be completed in close consultation with the major advisor each year, students are expected to file a POS for final approval by the end of their 4th semester in residence or upon completion of 27 graduate-level semester hours of coursework at Vanderbilt, whichever comes first.

A "POS for final approval" means a completed, up-to-date form that both you and your major advisor sign, which is then delivered to the HOD graduate administrative staff so that final approvals (i.e., Director of Graduate Studies and Dean's signatures) can be obtained.

These hours may also include any transferred credit from a prior university. Transfer credit should be approved by the student's POS committee by spring semester of their 1st year in the program. The Graduate School must approve transfer of credit hours. Transfer credit must be approved by the POS committee, Director of Graduate Studies, and department chair. So, if you are transferring hours into the Ph.D. program, the approved "Transfer of Credit" form along with a copy of your prior school transcript showing those courses and degree conferral should be approved by the department and submitted within the first academic year or as soon as possible after your first POS committee meeting.

Once all parties sign the POS for the final approval process, it becomes a contract between the student and the department. Any changes in the program requirements will not affect continuing students' POS; however, students do have the option of changing their POS to meet new requirements. Only the student can initiate a change in the POS. This is accomplished by submitting a "Change of Program of Studies" form signed by the student, the student's major advisor, and the director of graduate studies and submitted to the HOD graduate administrative staff. Copies are kept in the student's file.

Course Requirements

Any substitution for core courses or other courses listed on the POS form must be discussed with major advisors and approved by the instructor of record and a syllabus of the substitution must be provided.

Core Courses (Minimum of 15 Credit Hours):

HOD 7400 Community Intervention and Change (3)
HOD 7500 Organizational Theory and Change (3)
HOD 8000 Community Research and Action Proseminar (3)
HOD 8100 Theories of Inequality, Diversity, and Social Justice (3)
HOD 8130 Public Policy and Advocacy (3)
HOD 8400 Theory and Application in Action Research (0-9)

Methods Courses (Minimum of 15 Credit Hours):

Entering CRA students are expected to have passed undergraduate or masters-level statistics or an equivalent web course prior to their first semester in the Ph.D. program (please seek advice from your research advisor or the program director as soon as possible if you have not taken or not passed a statistics course) and to take a quantitative methods sequence (e.g., PSY-GS 8861 and 8867 or SOC 6311 and 6312) during their first year, along with the doctoral community inquiry class (HOD 8810). All students must also take at least some coursework on qualitative methodologies (e.g., EDUC 8820, HOD 8820). There is some flexibility in the choice of your remaining methods courses. Your choice of advanced and applied methods courses will depend on your plans for your major research. You should work closely with your advisor and your POS committee to design a program of coursework that best meets your needs.

Elective Options/Flexibility:

Elective courses can be any graduate course from any Vanderbilt department that is relevant to the student's POS, as approved by the advisor and POS committee. Students should discuss possible substantive or methodological areas of specialization with their advisor and POS Committee. Students are encouraged to consider courses in other disciplines that will enhance the student's theory or research training. If students wish to deviate from the prescribed course of studies, they should make the case to and obtain support from the POS committee. If the POS committee supports the student's proposed deviations, and the DGS approves, the student can pursue the chosen path.

Minor or Area of Concentration Requirements

Students may pursue either a formal minor or informally concentrate elective courses in a related area of study. Either can enable students to cultivate a depth of knowledge in an area of particular interest or relevance to their work. Courses for the area of concentration may be taken from within or outside the department, the outside option requiring that an advisor be designated. An area of concentration will usually comprise 15 credit hours, completed at the post-baccalaureate level. If the area of specialization is research methods, it must include 9 hours beyond the required research methods courses.

Students are encouraged to select from among formalized minors or to develop their own area of concentration with the advice of their POS Committee. Possible areas of concentration include community development, evaluation methods, community psychology, gender and sexuality studies, public health, educational studies, and policy studies. Other possibilities according to student interests.

Master of Science Degree Requirements

Students may earn a formal M.S. degree in route to completing the Ph.D. degree. A minimum of 24 semester hours of formal coursework is required for the master's degree. "Formal coursework" is understood to be approved courses taken for credit other than thesis and dissertation research courses and does not include readings and research or practicum courses. On recommendation of the student's program and approval of the Dean of the Graduate School, credit for up to 6 semester hours toward the master's degree may be transferred from graduate schools in accredited institutions, or other schools of the University. In addition to coursework, students must complete a master's thesis. All requirements for the master's degree must be completed within a six-year period calculated from the end of the student's first semester of enrollment in the Graduate School. International students should contact the Office of International Services concerning time limitations for completion of master's degrees.

Ph.D. Degree Requirements

The Ph.D. requires a total of 72 semester hours. A minimum of 42 semester hours of formal coursework is necessary for the CRA Program. The remaining 30 hours include the field experience, dissertation research, and electives that are selected by the students and their advisor. Doctoral students must register for nine 9 hours (minimum) per Fall and Spring semester with the Graduate School until they reach 72 hours. If the required 72 hours have been met, but candidacy has not been attained, students must register for zero hours under HOD 8999 (Non-Candidate Research). After reaching candidacy, they would register for zero hours of dissertation hours under HOD 9999. Students are encouraged to take as

many classes as they find useful for their degree without worrying about restrictions on funding. The additional classes, however, should not exceed the 72-hour rule by a substantial margin.

In addition to passing all required coursework, students must write a master's thesis by the fifth semester (or have a previously completed thesis approved), write a fundable-quality grant proposal, complete a fieldwork requirement, write and defend a major area paper (which serves as the qualifying exam for doctoral candidacy) and propose, complete, and defend a doctoral dissertation.

Transferring Course Credit

Students wishing to transfer graduate credits from other institutions are advised of the following criteria:

- Transfer credit must carry a minimum grade of B, or P and is required to be earned at the graduate level only. Grades of P, S, etc. are to be documented as equivalent to a minimum graduate level B.
- Transfer credits are required to fit into the student's Program of Studies and to be judged equivalent to the Peabody/Vanderbilt course. Transfer elective credits are also expected to be equivalent.
- Ordinarily, a maximum of 18 graduate credits may be transferred from other institutions; however, in very special cases, up to 30 credit hours may be transferred, provided all requirements listed here and in the "Transfer of Credit" section of the Graduate School Catalog are met.

Procedure for obtaining transfer credit:

- The student's major advisor and POS committee is required to approve the transfer hours.
- The student is required to complete a "Transfer of Credit" form and turn it into the HOD graduate administrative staff.
- If a student is requesting to transfer in credit for a CRA-required core course, then a syllabus for the requested course must be submitted to the CRA faculty member who instructs the required course for approval. Written/email approval from the CRA faculty member is needed for permission to transfer those credits, and this approval should be submitted with the request.
- Once a student has been accepted in the CRA Program, she or he may not take courses at other universities for transfer credit, unless a course that is deemed necessary for the student's professional development is not offered at Vanderbilt University in the time frame applicable to the student's POS. If this is the case, the course shall be approved in advance by the student's major advisor, DGS, and the Dean of the Graduate School.

DEGREE COMMITTEES

Master's Thesis or Empirical Paper

Students entering the program without a master's degree are required to complete a master's thesis or empirical paper within their first two years in the program. The master's thesis or empirical paper proposal is to be submitted to the thesis committee by August after Year 1 and approved by September of the third semester. Students entering the program with a master's degree but without an empirical thesis must complete an empirical paper of publishable quality within their first two years of the program. Students entering the program with a master's degree and an empirical thesis (or a thesis closely related to their academic and career trajectory as approved by the POS committee) must submit their thesis for approval to their advisor and one other faculty member within the first year of the program.

The master's thesis or empirical paper is expected to utilize quantitative and/or qualitative empirical research methods and should follow the "Thesis and Dissertation Guide" on the Graduate School website.

The thesis for a master's in passing must:

- Give evidence of original investigation in the major subject,
- Be approved by two CRA faculty members,
- Use the Graduate School format and,
- Be submitted to the Graduate School within their time guidelines for graduation.

All students are strongly encouraged to present their master's thesis or empirical paper in departmental settings (colloquium, etc.), whether it was completed in or outside of CRA.

A "master's in passing" M.S. in Community Research and Action may be taken at the student's request and after they have met Graduate School requirements. The thesis or empirical paper is a CRA program requirement and must be completed regardless of whether a master's in passing is sought. A "Completion of Master's Thesis" form must be submitted to the Graduate School if a master's in passing is sought. The form is to be signed by the Director of Graduate Studies, copied for the department or program file, and delivered to the Graduate School along with the deposit of the final thesis.

Master's Thesis or Empirical Research Paper Committee

The thesis or empirical paper committee consists of a minimum of two people: the thesis advisor, who chairs the committee, and at least one additional faculty member who serves as a reader. Students may find thesis, empirical paper, or dissertation topics and data either on their own (with advice of their committee) or as part of past or ongoing faculty or research staff projects. If the data are from a faculty or research staff project, it is generally expected that the project Principal Investigator (PI) will serve on the student's committee [if non-faculty staff, as ex officio or an unofficial member], will be kept well informed of the student's plans and progress, and any publications from the thesis, empirical paper or dissertation will be discussed in advance with the PI.

The thesis or empirical paper committee should be formed by the end of the second semester in residence. Both the thesis advisor and at least one reader must be program faculty. If both are not members of the Graduate Faculty, similar to dissertation committees, permission must be requested from the DGS and the Graduate School. If a student wants a non-core-CRA faculty on the thesis committee it must be as a 3rd member. The thesis or empirical paper committee can, but does not have to, draw members from the POS committee.

Dissertation Committee

The functions of the Ph.D. dissertation committee are:

- to administer the qualifying examination
- to approve the dissertation proposal
- to aid the student and monitor the progress of the dissertation
- to read and approve the dissertation and administer the final oral examination.

The CRA dissertation committee has a minimum of four members: the chair (a core CRA faculty member, usually the major advisor) and at least three other members (the typical committee size has been five), with a minimum of three Graduate Faculty in the HOD department. One committee member must be a Vanderbilt Graduate Faculty member whose primary appointment is outside the HOD department. Although only four members are required, additional committee members can have voting privileges if the HOD Graduate Faculty members on the committee so choose; however, only four signatures are required by the Graduate School. Students are generally expected to form their dissertation committee before the start of their 7th semester if they enter without a master's degree or before the start of their 5th semester in the program if they enter with a relevant master's degree.

Committee composition should be determined in consultation with the committee chair/ major advisor. Any exceptions to committee composition guidelines (e.g., adding a Vanderbilt faculty member who is not a member of the Graduate Faculty or adding an external committee member who is not employed at Vanderbilt) must be approved first by the committee chair, then by the Director of Graduate Studies, and the Graduate School based on a request and rationale.

Membership of a CRA student's dissertation committee is the student's choice throughout the graduate school experience, as long as those choices are consistent with Vanderbilt and HOD doctoral committee member requirements. Prior to attaining candidacy status, students can change committee member makeup by submitting the Graduate School, "Request to Change Ph.D. Committee" form. The student, before submitting the form, should discuss the request to change with all (i.e., the faculty member being replaced and the faculty member being added) and their committee chair. After

conversations between the student and each committee member, all parties will put their required signatures on the form. It is then delivered to the DGS for signature and final approval. Upon completion of the process, the final change form is sent to the Graduate School. Members should not be changed simply for the sake of convenience, as this is not a substantial reason and lacks professional integrity. Students should not remove committee members simply because they are unavailable over the summer.

Qualifying Examination Process

The purpose of the qualifying examination process is to test the student's knowledge of the field of specialization, to assess familiarity with the published research in the field, and to determine whether the student possesses those critical and analytic skills needed for a scholarly career. The qualifying exam process for the CRA program usually entails a Major Area Paper (MAP) that consists of a literature review for the dissertation in publishable form. The student's dissertation committee evaluates the MAP and conducts an oral exam. The student collaborates with the dissertation advisor on the content and scope of the literature review. Once the advisor and student are satisfied with the product, a copy of the paper is submitted to the rest of the dissertation committee for reading prior to an oral exam. If a different format is preferred for the qualifying examination (e.g., sit down or take-home exam), it must be approved by the DGS, and may be administered at any time during the academic year and be completed within a period of four weeks.

The MAP is usually completed during the fourth year in the program and must be completed **before the end of the fourth year of Ph.D. study**. Note that this deadline is a requirement of the Graduate School. Before the qualifying process can be completed, the student must have completed at least 36 hours of graduate work (to include all course work required for the degree). When in process of scheduling the oral exam, the Graduate School should be notified two weeks in advance of the exam date. Once the Major Area Paper is ready for oral presentation, and copies have been distributed to all members of the dissertation committee, then, in consultation with all members of the dissertation committee, the student will set up and finalize a scheduled date, time, and location for the oral presentation. Once this is established between the student and their committee, the student completes the "Request to Schedule the Qualifying Examination" form. After completing this form, the student brings the form to the HOD graduate administrative staff to get the one signature needed for processing, that of the Director of Graduate Studies. The administrative staff will take care of processing the form so that a copy is made for the student's record in the department, and then sends on to the Graduate School for final set up of the oral exam.

The "Request to Cancel and/or Reschedule Qualifying Exam or Dissertation Defense" form should be submitted to the Graduate School:

- When cancelling/rescheduling exam, and a new date is known, (with rescheduled exam information).
- When cancelling exam and new date is not known, (mark as "TBD").
- When new exam date is known, (with reschedule exam information).

It is recommended, although not compulsory, that there be two separate sessions for the presentation and defense of (a) the MAP and (b) the dissertation proposal. The dissertation proposal usually builds on the literature review and, therefore, the program recommends that the MAP be reviewed first. We recommend that students have a chance to incorporate feedback from the committee on the MAP before they present the dissertation proposal. We understand, however, that at times it may be more appropriate to have one session in which both the MAP and the dissertation proposal are presented and evaluated. In preparation for the oral presentation of either the MAP or the dissertation proposal, the student obtains the required forms from the HOD graduate administrative staff, one for the qualifying examination and one for the dissertation proposal. Upon completion of the student's oral exam over the MAP, the committee makes one decision: pass or fail. The committee may pass the MAP but recommend revisions.

A student is allowed only two opportunities to pass the qualifying examination. Results of the qualifying examination process are forwarded to the Graduate School. When the student has successfully completed the qualifying process, the Ph.D. committee recommends to the Graduate School that the student be admitted to candidacy for the degree.

Dissertation Proposal

The dissertation proposal should communicate, as clearly as possible, the rationale and design of the research the student intends to carry out for their dissertation. Upon completion of the oral presentation and evaluation of the dissertation proposal, the dissertation committee makes one decision: pass or fail. The dissertation committee may pass the proposal but recommend revisions.

Upon completion of the oral presentation (MAP or dissertation proposal, or both combined in one session), the dissertation committee chair asks the student to leave the room while the committee deliberates. Once decisions are made, the dissertation advisor shares the decisions with the student, and all members sign the appropriate forms. If revisions are required, the dissertation advisor assumes the responsibility for overseeing changes, with the option of consulting with members of the committee as needed to determine if the changes have been satisfactorily made. The committee may request that changes be made by a certain date.

CANDIDACY AND DISSERTATION

Admission to Candidacy

To be admitted to candidacy, the student must successfully complete the qualifying examination process. The process is administered by the student's Ph.D. committee, which supervises subsequent work toward the degree. Upon completion of these requirements the Ph.D. committee recommends to the Graduate School that the student be admitted to candidacy.

Dissertation

A candidate for the Ph.D. degree must present an acceptable dissertation within the major field of study. The dissertation demonstrates that the candidate has technical and theoretical competence in the field and has done research of an independent character. It must add to or modify what was previously known or present a significant interpretation of the subject based upon original investigation. It may take the form of one overall document or three separate publication-quality articles. The student's dissertation advisor and Ph.D. committee must approve the dissertation proposal. The dissertation proposal oral may take place in conjunction with the qualifying exam. If, however, the student and dissertation advisor choose to schedule a separate time for the proposal oral, the following procedure shall take place:

Proposal and Oral exam

After candidacy has been attained, the student is eligible to submit the dissertation proposal. Once the student has conferred with each dissertation committee member, the completed proposal is officially submitted to the committee. The student then schedules a committee meeting at which the proposal is presented, discussed, and evaluated. The student must notify the HOD graduate administrative staff of the time and date of the proposal meeting. After approval, one copy of the proposal is submitted to the departmental office along with a signed copy of the dissertation proposal report form. Upon final approval of the proposal, the student is ready to proceed with the dissertation. As noted above, if revisions are required, the dissertation advisor assumes the responsibility for overseeing changes, with the option of consulting with members of the committee as needed to determine if the changes have been satisfactorily made.

Dissertation Enhancement Grant

A dissertation enhancement grant is offered through the Graduate School. These grants are intended to enhance already outstanding dissertation projects by permitting the addition of a new dimension, additional breadth, or other worthwhile extensions. Visit the Graduate School website funding page for the application and for the application guidelines. These are submitted with approval by the DGS, usually twice per year.

Institutional Review Board

If human participants are involved in the research, a proposal must be submitted to the Vanderbilt Institutional Review Board for approval before proceeding with the dissertation research. Guidelines can be obtained from the Vanderbilt IRB website.

Technical Editor

The Graduate School has a technical editor to read and review all dissertations for conformity to the appropriate style (APA style). The technical editor should meet with the student several times during preparation of the dissertation prior to completion.

Final Draft of Dissertation

Dissertation defense drafts should be shared with committee members at least 6 weeks prior to the scheduled defense to allow 4 weeks for committee review, feedback, and approval for the defense to proceed and 2 weeks for the dissertation to be made available to faculty and students. Students should consult the Graduate School Catalog and website for guidelines on dissertation submission.

When a thesis or dissertation is approved by committee members, and the format has been reviewed by the Graduate School, this becomes the “final copy.” After it has been finalized and approved, changes cannot be made to this document. Students are strongly urged to carefully proofread their final document before submitting.

Final Defense of Dissertation

The candidate takes a final examination administered by the Ph.D. committee. The examination is on the dissertation and significant related material; the student is expected to demonstrate an understanding of the larger context in which the dissertation lies. The University community is invited to attend the final examination, which is announced in advance.

The “Request to Cancel and/or Reschedule Qualifying Exam or Dissertation Defense” form should be submitted to the Graduate School:

- When cancelling/rescheduling exam, and a new date is known, (with rescheduled exam information).
- When cancelling exam and new date is not known, (mark as “TBD”).
- When new exam date is known, (with reschedule exam information).

Students and advisors should schedule an opportunity for dissertation committees to meet informally with the student to discuss the dissertation. That can happen either prior to the defense or as part of the defense (after the public presentation of the dissertation and before the committee-only deliberation). Although the defense is required to take place in-person, non-present committee members can participate in the meeting and defense electronically when needed.

The chair of the Ph.D. committee, after consultation with the candidate, shall notify the Graduate School in advance of the place and time of the examination and the title of the dissertation. This should be done no later than two weeks prior to the examination. The Dean of the Graduate School then formally notifies the Ph.D. committee and appoints such additional committee members as are desired. The final examination is announced beforehand on the Graduate School website. The result of the examination should be reported immediately afterward to the Director of Graduate Studies for the program, who will forward it to the Graduate School.

Time Limits

The dissertation must be completed within four years after a student has been admitted to candidacy for the degree. Upon petition to the Dean of the Graduate School, a one-year extension of candidacy may be granted. If such a period has expired without successful completion of the dissertation, the student will be removed from the rolls of the Graduate School. Readmission to the Graduate School, and to candidacy, requires reapplication to the Graduate School, with approval of the program faculty. In such cases the student may be required, by the Dean or by the Ph.D. committee, to demonstrate competence for readmission by taking a qualifying examination or additional course work.

Leaves of Absence

The Graduate School requires continuous registration except for summer sessions. Students who want to interrupt their graduate study must apply to the Department (the academic advisor, Director of Graduate Studies, and the Chair). The Graduate School will receive the request from the department for the authorized leave of absence, which must clearly state the reasons for the requested leave and conditions and timeline for reinstatement. Leaves of absence can be granted for a maximum of one year. Those without authorized leave who do not register are dropped from the rolls of the Graduate School and are not considered students. If they want to resume graduate study at Vanderbilt, they must apply for reinstatement. Candidates who have passed the qualifying examinations or completed 72 or more hours of credit toward the Doctor of Philosophy degree are not usually granted a leave of absence, except in special circumstances (e.g., maternity or medical leave).

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Assistantships

The Ph.D. program in CRA offers full support (stipend and 18 hours tuition) for each of 5 years in the program in the form of teaching or research assistantships. The department chair monitors assistantship placements to assure an adequate balance of teaching and research depending on student interests and needs. The typical assistantship is 20 hours/week. Students may only work more than 20 hours per week with approval. Requests can be made via InfoReady at <https://vanderbilt.infoready4.com/>. Once a request is submitted, the academic advisor, Director of Graduate Studies, and Administrative Officer will review it. After those reviews, Peabody's Associate Dean for Graduate Studies will make the final decision.

Summer Funding

Students may have various sources of summer funding, including College summer funds or grant or other funding from their mentors/ faculty supervisors. Limits apply to how these sources of funding can be combined and how much a student can work in total over the summer and over the course of an academic year. As you plan for summer, please consult with department graduate administrative staff and carefully review the policies for summer funding, provided here, under Funding: <https://peabody.vanderbilt.edu/admin-offices/deans-office/college-policies/>

Conference Travel Support

There are several sources for support with relevant conference travel:

Graduate School Travel Grant to Present Research

After completing at least one academic year at Vanderbilt, students may apply for a travel grant from the Graduate School for up to \$500 per budget year (July 1-June 30) for domestic or international travel. Students are allowed a total of three travel grants during their entire tenure at Vanderbilt. Complete details and applications are available on the Graduate School's website: <https://gradschool.vanderbilt.edu/funding/travel.php>

****The Graduate School must receive applications at least four weeks before you travel.****

Peabody College – Office of the Dean

Peabody College provides funding for each on-campus Ph.D. student to present papers at up to two major professional meetings per year during the years for which support was promised when they were admitted. Policies and guidelines for accessing this support are available here, under Travel: <https://peabody.vanderbilt.edu/admin-offices/deans-office/college-policies/>. Requests can be made via InfoReady at <https://vanderbilt.infoready4.com/>. Once a request is submitted, the academic advisor, Director of Graduate Studies, and Administrative Officer will review it. After those reviews, the Associate Dean for Graduate Studies will make the final decision.

Human and Organizational Development Department

The HOD department is sometimes able to provide limited funding for the support of student conference travel. Please apply for applicable sources of support (Graduate School and/or Peabody College) before requesting funds from the department. Faculty members may also have grants or other sources of funding to help cover student travel for research and/or conference presentations.

Graduate Student Council

The Graduate Student Council occasionally makes funds available to support student conference travel. See the current GSC CRA student representative for information on available funds.

Professional Development Funds

Dean's Fellowships are awarded to new Peabody Ph.D. students each year and consist of a onetime \$5,000 fund for professional development. This fund is provided to help defray the direct expenses of the recipient's research or other experiences that could help build a strong CV. Details on eligible expenditures and the process for accessing professional development funds can be found here, under Funding: <https://peabody.vanderbilt.edu/admin-offices/deans-office/college-policies/>. Requests can be made via InfoReady at <https://vanderbilt.infoready4.com/>. Once a request is submitted, the academic advisor, Director of Graduate Studies, and Administrative Officer will review it. After those reviews, the Associate Dean for Graduate Studies will make the final decision.

FREE EXPRESSION

At Vanderbilt, we have a long tradition of free expression, which is one of our core principles. We believe in bringing together people of differing viewpoints for a common purpose. Learn more about [how we practice](#) free expression at Vanderbilt and read [Vanderbilt's Freedom of Expression policy in the Student Handbook](#).

OTHER RESOURCES

Vanderbilt University offers a wide array of student support resources for health, wellness, student life and identity, academic support, funding, professional development, and administrative assistance. Please visit Vanderbilt's Graduate School website at <https://gradschool.vanderbilt.edu/> where you can find resources for support units such as the University Counseling Center (UCC), International Student & Scholar Services (ISSS), AdvancED: The Institute for the Advancement of Higher Education (AdvancED), Vanderbilt Career Center, and many others.

Additional information, links, and forms can be found on the Brightspace page for the Ph.D. program in Community Research and Action. Log into Brightspace: <https://brightspace.vanderbilt.edu/>, then select "Sandbox Courses" from the menu bar that lists semesters.