

# Graduate Handbook

## Linguistics Program

For Students Admitted Academic year 2026-2027 and later  
Last Revised May 12, 2026

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*The Linguistics Program Graduate Handbook supplements The Graduate School's policies and procedures. The following pages contain information about program-specific policies, procedures, and regulations. Students are subject to the regulations in effect at the time of matriculation. It is your responsibility as a student to be aware of these and The Graduate School's regulations.*

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## **Non-discrimination Statement**

Northwestern University prohibits discrimination on the basis of actual or perceived race, color, religion, creed, national origin, ethnicity, caste, sex, pregnancy, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, parental status, marital status, age, disability, citizenship status, veteran status, genetic information, reproductive health decision making, height, weight, or any other class of individuals protected from discrimination under federal, state, or local law, regulation, or ordinance or any other classification protected by law in the matters of admissions, employment, housing or services or in the educational programs or activities it operates, as required by Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972; Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, as amended in 2008; Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973; Title VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964; the Age Discrimination Act of 1975; the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967; and any other federal, state, or local laws, regulations, or ordinances that prohibit discrimination, harassment, and/or retaliation.

The University has designated the Associate Vice President for Civil Rights and Title IX Compliance to coordinate the University's compliance with federal and state civil rights laws regarding protected characteristics, including Title IX and those other laws and regulations references above. They can be contacted at the [Office of Civil Rights and Title IX Compliance](#), 1800 Sherman Ave., Suite 4500 Evanston, IL 60201, (847) 467-6165, [OCR@northwestern.edu](mailto:OCR@northwestern.edu)

The University complies with all federal and state laws that protect individuals with disabilities from discrimination based on their disability or perceived disability status. As such, reasonable accommodations and auxiliary aids and services are available to individuals with disabilities when such modifications and services are necessary to access the institution's programs and services. The University's ADA/504 Coordinator can be contacted at the [Office of Civil Rights and Title IX Compliance](#), 1800 Sherman Ave., Suite 4500, Evanston, IL 60201, (847) 467-6165, [Accommodations@northwestern.edu](mailto:Accommodations@northwestern.edu)

Inquiries about Title IX or the University's prohibitions against discrimination, harassment, and retaliation can be directed to the Associate Vice President for Civil Rights and Title IX Compliance, the ADA/504 Coordinator (for disability-related questions) or to the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights at the contact information listed below. Complaints and inquiries regarding discrimination, harassment, and retaliation involving federal laws may be directed to the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, John C. Kluczynski Federal Building, 230 S. Dearborn St., 37th Floor, Chicago, IL 60604, (312) 730-1560, [OCR.Chicago@ed.gov](mailto:OCR.Chicago@ed.gov); or the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, John C. Kluczynski Federal Building, 230 S. Dearborn St., Suite 1866, Chicago, IL 60604, (312) 872-9777.

Any person who believes that the University as a federal contractor has violated nondiscrimination or equal opportunity obligations may contact the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP) at OFCCP, U.S. Department of Labor, 200 Constitution Ave. NW, Washington, D.C. 20210, [www.dol.gov](http://www.dol.gov), (800) 397-6251.

## Program Administration

The primary responsibilities of each administrative office are given below. A list of current individuals filling each of the offices listed below is available on the Department's website (<http://www.linguistics.northwestern.edu>).

- Director of Graduate Studies: Any academic issues (curriculum, advising, department policy, record keeping); advising of first-year students in the graduate program.
- Department Assistant: Financial issues.
- Graduate Program's Assistant: Other administrative issues (e.g., filing of TGS forms, event scheduling)
- Admissions Officer: Graduate program admissions.

## Required Courses

### PhD program

Coursework requirements	Means of meeting requirements
Fundamental Properties of Language (4 quarters)	LING 420: Sociolinguistics LING 450-1: Laboratory Phonology 1 LING 460-1: Syntactic Analysis 1 LING 470-1: Semantic Analysis 1
Advanced Competency (4 quarters)	Any 4 400-level LING courses excepting independent study and other required courses. Most 300-level LING courses are not appropriate for the requirement; exceptions listed on the Grad Student Wiki.
Computational analysis (1 quarter)	LING 331: Introduction to Programming and Text Processing for Linguists <i>or</i> LING 334: Introduction to Computational Linguistics
Statistics (1 quarter)	STAT 330: Applied Statistics for Research <i>or</i> LING 430: Advanced Statistics for Language Science

### MA program

Coursework requirements	Means of meeting requirements
Fundamental Properties of Language (4 quarters)	LING 420: Sociolinguistics LING 450-1: Laboratory Phonology 1 LING 460-1: Syntactic Analysis 1 LING 470: Semantic Analysis 1
Computational analysis (1 quarter)	LING 331: Introduction to Programming and Text Processing for Linguists <i>or</i> LING 334: Introduction to Computational Linguistics
Statistics (1 quarter)	STAT 330: Applied Statistics for Research <i>or</i> LING 430: Advanced Statistics for Language Science
Electives (3 quarters)	Any 3 LING courses offered for graduate credit.

## **PhD Program: Qualifying Paper**

A research project on which the PhD student is the lead or sole researcher must be presented to the Department before the end of the spring quarter of Year 2. A first- or single-authored manuscript reporting this project (the Qualifying Paper) must also be approved by the student's Qualifying Paper committee (the student's primary research advisor for the project, along with a second reader) before the end of the spring quarter of Year 2 (the end of the seventh quarter). This is submitted to the DGS via e-mail, copying the advisor, who will gather feedback and/or approval from the committee. This can be used to satisfy the requirements for an MA Thesis.

## **Language Requirement**

### **PhD Program**

Prior to advancing to candidacy, students must demonstrate deep engagement with a second natural language. (For nonnative English speakers, advanced competence in English satisfies this requirement.) Examples of how deep engagement can be demonstrated include:

- two years of college study with a grade of B or better;
- home language or immersion experiences;
- completing a graduate-level, department-approved course (e.g., Structure of Various Languages) on a specific language with a grade of B or better;
- fieldwork on a language;
- or an alternative approved by the Director of Graduate Studies.

### **MA Program**

Students must demonstrate proficiency in a language other than English, at a level equivalent to two years of college study, with an average grade of at least B.

## **PhD Program: Advancing to Candidacy/The Dissertation Prospectus**

By the end of the spring quarter of Year 3, students must be admitted to candidacy. In addition to completing the course requirements, language requirements, and qualifying papers, they must complete and successfully defend (in a closed oral defense) a Dissertation Prospectus.

The specific requirements for the Dissertation Prospectus are developed in consultation with the Dissertation committee (consisting of the primary research advisor as chair and at least two other committee members). The Prospectus and Prospectus defense must demonstrate to the Dissertation committee that the student has a well-defined area of research, has identified a problem to investigate within this area, knows the relevant literature, and has developed a clear research strategy. The oral Prospectus defense will provide the student with an opportunity to receive feedback from the committee on the direction of their research. The Prospectus defense is closed.

## **PhD Program: Dissertation Completion**

A Dissertation must be completed by the end of the 5th year of study. To complete the Dissertation, students must:

- Pass an oral defense with the full committee. A full draft of the Dissertation must be submitted to the members of the Dissertation committee at least two weeks before the defense.
- Obtain committee approval for the final Dissertation document. Following the defense, the student must make any revisions required by the committee. The full committee must approve the final document.

- Present the Dissertation research in a public, colloquium style talk. If at all possible, students will give this talk during the regular academic year (i.e., not in summer) during a regular colloquium slot. The advisor must confirm that this event was a satisfactory presentation of the Dissertation research.
- Store all primary data, participant records, analysis scripts, and any other research products associated with the Dissertation in an IRB-compliant format accessible to the student's primary research advisor.

Following completion of all the above, the student may file the thesis with the Graduate School.

## **MA Program: MA Thesis**

Students must demonstrate their research skills by having a thesis approved by a committee (consisting of a primary advisor and a second reader). It must be an original research contribution to the field, suitable for a conference presentation or publication. It must demonstrate the student's ability to conduct independent research, corresponding to the level of first author of a potentially multi-authored work.

## **Responsible Conduct of Research Requirement**

To fulfill the Responsible Conduct of Research requirements, all graduate students must complete both the online training and the instructor-led RCR training in their first year.

- Online CITI training: "RCR for Graduate Students and Postdocs" course
- Instructor-led RCR training: register for LING 519 each regular quarter and attend the instructor-led in-person RCR training sessions.

In addition, all graduate students involved in human participants research must complete:

- Online CITI trainings: "Human Research Protections (IRB)" basic course, and then "Human Research Protections (IRB)" refresher course every three years
- Note that the online CITI training "Social Science and Behavioral Science Research" course will satisfy this requirement if completed before September 1, 2023. At the time of refresher training, students should take the "Human Research Protections (IRB)" refresher course.

## **Advising and Committee Membership**

### Advising timeline: PhD Students

Year 1, Q1-Q3: Director of Graduate Studies advises all students; students should actively seek out a research advisor throughout the first year.

Year 1, Q4 – Year 2, Q8: Qualifying Paper research is advised by a primary research advisor and a second reader.

Years 3-5: Work on the student's dissertation is supervised by a committee chair, who serves as the student's primary research advisor, along with two additional committee members.

### Advising timeline: MA Students

Year 1, Q1-Q3: Director of Graduate Studies advises all students; students should actively seek out a research advisor throughout the first year.

Year 1, Q4 – Year 2, Q8: Master's thesis research is advised by a primary research advisor and a second reader.

In addition to regularly consulting with their primary research advisor, students should arrange for some form of annual update for their entire committee.

### Advising eligibility

- Primary research advisor (Qualifying Paper, MA Thesis, or Dissertation): A faculty member of the

- Department of Linguistics and on the Graduate School Faculty. The Qualifying Paper advisor and Dissertation advisor need not be the same individual. Two faculty members may serve as co-advisors.
- Second reader of the Qualifying Paper or MA Thesis: A member of the Northwestern Faculty or another qualified researcher approved by the Director of Graduate Studies. For an MA Thesis (or a Qualifying Paper used to satisfy the requirements for a Master's Degree), the second reader must be on the Graduate School Faculty.
  - Dissertation committee member: A member of the Northwestern Faculty or another qualified researcher approved by the Director of Graduate Studies. The committee must have in total at least 3 members (including the chair or co-chairs). At least 2 of these 3 members must be on the Graduate School Faculty.

Students identify the faculty members that will advise their research using the Graduate Student Progress System (<https://gsp.northwestern.edu/>). Approval of advising arrangements by program staff will be recorded by this system.

If the student and/or primary research advisor believe at any point that the student would be better served by a different advisor, the student must identify another advisor or be subject to possible exclusion from the graduate program. In such a situation, the student must immediately contact the Director of Graduate Studies, who will consult with the faculty to determine a deadline by which the student must identify a new advisor.

Changes to second readers and committee members may be made at the discretion of the student and primary advisor. Faculty that can no longer serve in these roles must promptly notify the affected student(s).

Students should notify all faculty affected by any changes to advising (including anyone who will no longer be advising the student) and promptly update records in the Graduate Student Progress System.

## **Progressing Through Program: Timeline overview**

Note: Each deadline is at the conclusion of the listed quarter (e.g., Q4 means at the end of the fourth quarter of study, the summer following the first academic year)

### **PhD Program**

#### Year One Milestones

- Q3: Identification of Qualifying Paper advisor.
- Q4:
  - Completion of Responsible Conduct of Research Training.
  - Identification of Qualifying Paper second reader.

#### Year Two Milestones

- Q7:
  - Presentation of Qualifying Paper research to Department.
  - Approval of complete Qualifying Paper by Qualifying Paper committee.
  - Identification of dissertation advisor.

#### Year Three Milestones

- Q10: Identification of complete dissertation committee.
- Q11: Advance to candidacy
  - Completion of all course requirements.
  - Satisfaction of Foreign Language requirement.
  - Complete and successfully defend (in a closed oral defense) a Dissertation Prospectus

## Year Five Milestones

- Q20: Successful oral defense of approved Dissertation.

## **MA Program**

### Year One Milestones

- Q4: Completion of Responsible Conduct of Research Training.

### Year Two Milestones

- Q8: Completion of Program
  - Approval of MA thesis by committee.
  - Completion of all course requirements.
  - Satisfaction of Foreign Language requirement.

## **Graduate student annual review process**

### **PhD Program**

Graduate students' academic progress is evaluated every year at the end of Spring Quarter. The annual review process follows the steps outlined below.

#### Step 1.

By June 1<sup>st</sup>, the student must complete the Academic Progress review in GSP. The student must put comments on specifically the following items:

- Academic/research progress narrative
  - An overview of the academic/research progress to date
- Teaching
  - Include TA duties for Linguistics classes
- Goals for Academic/Research Progress for Upcoming Year
  - Narrative describing the student's academic and research goals for the upcoming year.
- Comments
  - Note any duties related to positions as TA, tutor or instructor outside of the Linguistics Department (e.g., in the English Language Program).

#### Step 2.

The student's research advisor and dissertation committee members (if desired) review the student's academic progress statement. No comments are entered into GSP at this point.

#### Step 3.

Faculty meet together to discuss student evaluations.

- Students in years 1-5 are assessed by all faculty who have interacted with the student in the past year. For students in year 2, additional input is provided by the faculty advisor and 2<sup>nd</sup> reader of the student's QP. Students in years 3 and beyond are assessed by their PhD advisors + other departmental faculty on their dissertation committee.
- For graduate students who hold TA or Instructor positions in Linguistics or other units, the DGS gathers additional input from the corresponding faculty instructor or staff member supervising the graduate student in their TA or Instructor role.

#### Step 4.

By August 1<sup>st</sup>, the advisor enters an assessment of the student's progress in GSP, which is then available to the student.

- The assessment letters for pre-candidacy students will be written by the student's research advisor.
- The assessments for post-candidacy students will be written by the chair of the student's Ph.D. committee.

The advisor's assessment narrative covers performance in the following categories:

- Progress towards milestones (including coursework); reminder of upcoming milestones
- Quantity and quality of research productivity
- Performance in department TA positions
- Performance in program office (service) positions
- Participation in department events, including colloquia, job talks and events that are part of the admitted student open house
- Overall assessment
  - Is the student making satisfactory progress considering all areas of performance and participation, combined?

If advisors do not enter their review of student progress in GSP by August 1<sup>st</sup>, the DGS will enter comments on milestones and a brief statement on whether the student is making satisfactory academic progress or not. The advisor can supplement this information at a later date.

## **Graduate Student Responsibilities**

### **PhD Program: Department positions**

Students in Year 1 of the program are not assigned TA roles. Students in Year 5 of the program who have met all milestones in Years 1-4 are granted a fellowship year, in which they are not assigned TA roles. Year 5 students are expected to remain actively engaged in the activities noted in the section on General Expectations for Graduate Students.

Students in Years 2, 3, 4 and 6 will be assigned TA positions for 200- and 300-level courses by the department.

### **PhD Program Offices**

Each year, students in the PhD program work together to decide who will fill various committee roles to support the PhD program offices. All students (including those who are on fellowship and 6<sup>th</sup> year students) should expect to contribute to a program office each year. These include (subject to change/adjustment by year at the discretion of the department):

- First Year Social Committee
  - All first years are assigned to this committee, which is responsible for assisting department staff with procurement, setup and cleanup of refreshments served at department colloquia
- Admissions and Outreach Committee
  - Assist faculty member who is Director of Admissions with outreach, communications and admitted student visit.
- Colloquium Committee
  - Assist faculty member in charge of Departmental colloquia and colloquium hosts with all aspects of colloquium planning, including logistics and activities on day of event
- Events Committee
  - Coordinate with grad students to plan and schedule Noon Colloquia
  - Assist faculty or staff with department non-colloquium events
- Graduate representative to Department
  - Graduate representative is elected for one year term by students and attends monthly Departmental Meetings and facilitates communications between faculty and grad students
- First year graduate liaison
  - Serve as graduate student "point person" for first-year PhD students, plan and carry out

- meetings or other events to help Y1 students transition in the graduate program
- Subject Pool coordinator(s)
  - Assist faculty member in charge of Subject Pool; Responsible for Sona administration; communicate with instructors and investigators (student or faculty)

Select and schedule videos for the experiment option on Sona

## **General Expectations for Graduate Students**

Students are expected to participate in the intellectual life of the department through participation in department events including (but not limited to):

- the departmental colloquium series;
- other (inter)departmental speaker series;
- new student recruitment;
- faculty searches;
- a weekly graduate-student brownbag series ('noon colloquium');
- departmental discussion groups and lab meetings.

In addition to the above activities that all students are engaged in, the Department requests that one graduate student volunteer to serve as the Linguistics Department representative to the NU Graduate Student Association (GSA) for a term of one academic year. If more than one student shows interest, the graduate students will vote to select one person for this volunteer position.

Students are expected to maintain a personal web page for dissemination of their academic work.

Students must consult, in advance, with their primary research advisor regarding:

Any academic submission (including but not limited to applications for internal or external fellowships, submissions to conferences, and submissions for publication); vacation plans.

## **Satisfactory Academic Progress; Conflict Resolution and Appeals Processes**

Satisfactory progress in the program depends on many factors, including following the timeline for successful completion of the milestones outlined above (e.g., coursework, language requirements, qualifying papers, MA thesis), a minimum quantity and quality of research productivity, fulfilling all program responsibilities (e.g., teaching or research assistantship duties), full participation in the intellectual life of the program, and respectful and responsible conduct within the department. If the faculty has any concerns about a student's progress, these concerns will be brought to the student's attention. In cases where a student's performance is inadequate, they may be put on probation. If the student fails to make sufficient improvement they may be excluded from the program by the faculty.

Annual assessment letters for PhD students are written at the end of spring quarter on the basis of input from all the faculty in the department, as well as qualifying paper and thesis committee members outside the department. The assessment letters for first-year students who have not identified the research advisor will be written by the Director of Graduate Studies. The assessment letters for pre-candidacy students will be written by each student's research advisor. The assessments for post-candidacy students will be written by the chair of the student's Ph.D. committee. (See also *Graduate student annual review process*)

In the event that a student is in a dispute with their primary research advisor (including but not limited to approval of qualifying papers, assessment of prospectus or thesis defense, assessment of the dissertation or MA thesis) or any other supervisor (including but not limited to a research assistant advisor or instructor), they should contact the Director of Graduate Studies or the Department Chair to discuss the issues. If they do not feel comfortable contacting someone within the department, they should contact the Graduate School's Associate Dean for Student Affairs.

If a student wishes to appeal a probation decision, they should contact the Director of Graduate Studies or the

Department Chair to discuss the issues. If they do not feel comfortable contacting someone within the department or feel that this route has not produced acceptable results, they may file a petition through the Graduate School's regular petition process.

Students may appeal an exclusion decision to The Graduate School. Students should submit a request in writing to the attention of the Director of Student Services within ten days of the date of the program's final written determination of exclusion to the student and include any supporting materials at that time.