

GUIDELINES FOR THE DOCTORAL PROGRAM IN STRATEGY

effective August 31, 2019

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The Michigan Ross doctoral program in Strategy places particular emphasis on training students to conduct inter-disciplinary research. Through coursework and collaboration with faculty, students learn how to draw from theoretical traditions in economics, sociology, psychology, political science, and related fields to develop original theoretical perspectives on strategic phenomena. They also learn to conduct rigorous empirical studies to test their ideas. The interdisciplinary emphasis of the Strategy doctoral program leverages the unique strengths of the Ross School of Business and the University of Michigan. The Ross School is well known for its commitment to academic research. This is reflected in the school's espoused goal of "generating intellectual capital with impact." In addition, Ross is internationally renowned for its excellence in Strategy and Management and the University is renowned as the world leader in inter-disciplinary research on organizations. Doctoral students are integrated into this vibrant intellectual community through attendance and participation in various speaker series in the Strategy area and the Management and Organization area, as well as in "ICOS" (the Interdisciplinary Committee on Organizational Studies) – a unique colloquium that brings together organizational scholars from departments throughout the University and beyond campus.

The University's strength in interdisciplinary research derives from outstanding faculty in the social sciences (in *U.S. News & World Report*, Michigan is regularly ranked as one of the top three programs in Sociology, Psychology, and Political Science). The University's campus culture brings scholars from these various disciplines together to exchange and develop ideas. Faculty from these social science departments also regularly serve on the dissertation committees of our doctoral students. Although PhD Programs are not commonly ranked, the Ross MBA program is regularly recognized as one of the best in the world for Strategy education.

In addition to its emphasis on interdisciplinary research, our program is differentiated from programs at comparable schools by its emphasis on research collaboration with faculty. Students are encouraged to conceive and implement research projects jointly with faculty early in the program, with the aim of learning research by doing and getting an early start on developing a research stream that will lead to success in the field. Co-authorship with faculty involves extensive mentoring, not only about conceiving and executing research, but also about publishing research. The comprehensive exam leading to candidacy reflects the program's emphasis on training and mentoring in research. Rather than a "sit-down" exam that primarily tests content knowledge, it is a take-home exam that tests students' abilities not only to critique theory, but also to develop original and testable research ideas and conceive appropriate empirical designs to test those novel ideas.

The Program admits relatively few students per year (typically 2-3), so that faculty can devote adequate time and attention to each student's development. Given that the Strategy Group has a large group of research-active faculty, and many faculty members in the Management and Organizations Group and other departments such as Sociology also conduct strategy-related research, students have abundant opportunities to collaborate with Michigan faculty on publishable research projects.

Graduates of the program are also expected to exhibit the skills needed to teach strategy courses at both the graduate and undergraduate levels. Our students are normally expected to teach one section of an undergraduate-level strategy course during their tenure in the doctoral program. This provides an excellent first-time teaching experience, as the Ross School offers outstanding teacher training and Michigan's undergraduate business students are among the best and brightest in the world. By limiting their involvement in teaching to one semester, students develop teaching skills without high research opportunity costs.

In short, through extensive research collaboration with faculty and careful mentoring, and leveraging Michigan's leading inter-disciplinary research environment, our program prepares doctoral students to succeed in academia, while also furnishing an intellectually exciting and enjoyable doctoral experience.

Area Chair:	Jordan Siegel
Faculty Ph.D. Co-coordinators:	Maggie Zhou (Co-coordinator) Chris Rider (Co-coordinator)

PROGRAM OF STUDY

The PhD program normally takes five years to complete. With the help of PhD program coordinator(s), first year students are expected to seek research assistance opportunities with faculty members who share common research interests. The students and the faculty can opt into a continuation of research collaboration beyond the first academic year. Throughout the rest of the PhD program, student are expected to continue to work closely with faculty members.

The degree requirements may be classified as follows:

- Coursework
- Qualifying Examination
- Second Year Research Paper
- Department Research Presentations
- Dissertation Proposal
- Dissertation Final Defense

Coursework

Coursework typically takes about four semesters to complete and involves approximately four (4) courses per semester.

1. STRATEGY CORE AND TOPIC CLASSES.

Students are expected to take all of the following classes over a two (2) year period. The core classes are offered every year, while electives are offered every other year. At least one strategy class is offered every semester.

Core

Theoretical Perspectives in Strategy

Empirical Research in Strategy

Topic

Technology and Strategy

Theory of the Firm

Sociological Approaches to Strategy

Incentives and Corporate Governance

2. ALLIED AREA CLASSES

Organization Theory

Industrial Organization

3. DISCIPLINE CLASSES

Students are encouraged to select one discipline for specialization. The disciplines typically chosen by strategy doctoral students are economics, political science, psychology, or sociology. Students are expected to take four to five courses in this discipline and enjoy considerable flexibility in tailoring the curriculum to suit their interests. Below are representative courses students have taken in the past.

Economics

Mathematics for Economics (Econ 600)

Microeconomics (Econ 601-604)

Sociology

Sociology (Soc 515)

Theories and Practices of Sociology (Soc 505-506)

4. METHODS CLASSES

Students are expected to take the research methods class offered in the Ross Business School and, in addition, take appropriate statistical methods classes offered in any of the disciplines above. Methods classes that students often take are:

Econometrics (Econ 671, 672 & 675)

Statistics Courses in Other Departments (e.g., PolSci 599/699, Soc 510/610)

5. COURSEWORK EXAMPLES

Below are examples of a typical course schedule for Strategy doctoral students who take either the Economics or Sociology tracks for their coursework. Please note that not all courses are offered in every semester (or year) so that, consequently, the schedules below are intended to be illustrative but not rigid. Students should try to complete the courses below at the end of each year, recognizing that the sequence will differ both within and across student cohorts.

Brief descriptions of most courses can be found on the “U-M Course Catalog” on [Wolverine Access](#) or on the UM department website.

COURSEWORK EXAMPLES, ECONOMICS TRACK

	Fall	Winter
	<i>Note that some courses are half-semester and others full-semester length.</i>	
Year 1	Strat 897: Empirical Research in Strategy	Strat 897: Strategy Doctoral Seminar
	Strat 898: Theoretical Perspectives in Strategy	Strat 898: Strategy Doctoral Seminar
	Econ 600: Math for Economists	BA 875: Applied Industrial Economics
	Econ 601: Microeconomic Theory I	Econ 602: Microeconomic Theory II
	Econ 603: Microeconomic Theory III*	Econ 604: Microeconomic Theory IV
	Polsci 599: Intro to Empirical Methods or Econ 671: Econometric Analysis I	Polsci 699: Statistical Methods, Part II or Econ 672: Econometric Analysis II
	<i>*Required for Industrial Organization and Labor Economics.</i>	
	Fall	Winter
	<i>Note that some courses are half-semester and others full-semester length. Also, 2nd-year paper proposals must be approved by August 31 prior to the second year.</i>	
Year 2	BA 850: Empirical Research Methodology	Strat 897: Strategy Doctoral Seminar
	Econ 675: Empirical Econometrics (w/Prof. Smith) or Polsci 787(w/Prof. Titunik)	Strat 898: Strategy Doctoral Seminar
	MO 899: Doctoral Seminar in Organizational Theory	CSCS 511: Theory of Complex Systems and/or Econ 631: Industrial Organization & Public Policy and/or Econ 621: Labor Economics I
	CSCS 511: Theory of Complex Systems and/or Econ 631: Industrial Organization & Public Policy and/or Econ 621: Labor Economics I	Another full-semester elective or two half-semester electives.
	Fall	Winter
	<i>Note that some courses are half-semester and others full-semester length. Also, 2nd-year papers must be approved by August 31 prior to the 3rd year. Students advance to candidacy by early September.</i>	
Year 3	Strat 995: Dissertation Candidacy	Electives as deemed suitable
	BA 831: Teaching Practicum	
	Teach 1 section of core strategy to non-BBAs	

COURSEWORK EXAMPLES, SOCIOLOGY TRACK

	Fall	Winter
	<i>Note that some courses are half-semester and others full-semester length.</i>	
Year 1	Strat 897: Empirical Research in Strategy	Strat 897: Strategy Doctoral Seminar
	Strat 898: Theoretical Perspectives in Strategy	Strat 898: Strategy Doctoral Seminar
	Soc 515: Economic Sociology	Soc 610: Sociological Methods
	Soc 505: Theory & Practice	Soc 506: Theory & Practice
	Polsci 599: Intro to Empirical Methods or Econ 671: Econometric Analysis I	Polsci 699: Statistical Methods, Part II or Econ 672: Econometric Analysis II
	A programming elective (e.g., R, Python)	
	<i>*Required for Industrial Organization and Labor Economics.</i>	
	Fall	Winter
	<i>Note that some courses are half-semester and others full-semester length. Also, 2nd-year paper proposals must be approved by August 31 prior to the second year.</i>	
Year 2	BA 850: Empirical Research Methodology	Strat 897: Strategy Doctoral Seminar
	Pscyh: 682: Advanced Social Psychology	Strat 898: Strategy Doctoral Seminar
	MO 899: Doctoral Seminar in Organizational Theory	Methods electives in Sociology, Psychology, Political Science, or Economics
	Econ 601: Microeconomic Theory I or CSCS 511: Theory of Complex Systems	
	Econ 675: Empirical Econometrics (w/Prof. Smith) or Polsci 787(w/Prof. Titunik)	
	Fall	Winter
	<i>Note that some courses are half-semester and others full-semester length. Also, 2nd-year papers must be approved by August 31 prior to the 3rd year. Students advance to candidacy by early September.</i>	
Year 3	Strat 995: Dissertation Candidacy	Electives as deemed suitable
	BA 831: Teaching Practicum	
	Teach 1 section of core strategy to non-BBAs	

Qualifying Examination

The primary purpose of the qualifying exam is to ensure that the Ross doctoral student is a discerning consumer of research in strategy.

Discerning consumption involves developing a parsimonious intellectual map of research in the strategy field and being able to position research questions, theories, and perspectives within this overall map. This ability is critical to productive scholarship.

Students are required to take their written qualifying exam (open book) to advance to candidacy at the end of the second year of the PhD program, generally in early June. Preparation for the qualifying exam builds on previously taken strategy classes. This involves significant additional reading beyond coursework to add depth of understanding in the main research areas of strategy.

A qualifying exam committee composed of four to six (4-6) faculty design exam questions. Students are afforded three to five (3-5) days to answer all questions.

Second Year Research Paper

The purpose of the second year paper is to prepare students to become not only discerning consumers of strategy research but, also, sophisticated producers of such work. To that end, the second year paper enables students to accomplish the following:

- develop capabilities to conceive and to execute an independent research project
- establish an independent research stream
- prepare for the dissertation
- produce research that is clearly on a trajectory to be presented at a top strategy conference (e.g., Academy of Management or Strategic Management Society) and published in a top strategy journal

Prior to advancing to the dissertation stage, students are required to conduct an empirical research project with the aspiration of publishing a paper from the project in a top strategy journal. The project will be completed under the supervision of two faculty members, one of whom serves as a primary reader (typically the student's adviser), and the other as a secondary reader. The student is expected to undertake wholly individual and autonomous research for this project. The project will typically have an empirical and/or modeling component (exceptions require approval of the Faculty Ph.D. Co-coordinators).

The student must get approval from two faculty readers by August 31 after their first year on a 3-5 page proposal. The actual paper must be approved by two faculty readers by the end of August just prior to the start of the student's *third* year in the Doctoral Program. Also, the paper from the project is expected to be presented to students and faculty in the brown bag seminar series by the end of October of the student's *third* year in the Doctoral Program. Extensions to the above deadlines can only be obtained with approval of both the Strategy department chairperson and the Strategy doctoral program coordinator(s). While publication in a top journal is an aspiration of the project, publication is not required for successful completion of the project.

Department Research Presentations

Each first-year student will be expected to present for a half hour in the department brown bag series. In the second year of the doctoral program, students will be expected to present for an hour in the department brown bag series. First-year and second-year students are expected to confer with their adviser on what would be appropriate to present. Then, in subsequent years of the doctoral program, students will be expected to present for an hour each year.

Dissertation Proposal and Final Defense

The Dissertation Proposal is devoted to the defense of the candidate's written dissertation proposal and is taken after the Qualifying Examination is passed.

The Dissertation Final Defense is normally taken at the end of winter term of the last year of study in the doctoral program. The student is expected to present his/her thesis to the dissertation committee and any other interested parties. Upon successful completion of the defense, the student is awarded the doctoral degree.

Purpose of the Dissertation Proposal Defense

The Ross PhD Program Handbook details *expectations of students and of faculty* for the proposal defense. According to the handbook, the purpose of the *dissertation proposal* is “to clarify the agreement between the student and the committee that the student's plan for the dissertation is acceptable.” The objective of the *proposal defense* is “to protect students from any misunderstandings about expectations or in case the composition of the committee changes.”

Upon approval of the proposal, questions of research topic, methods, and scope are considered “*settled*” unless the student elects to make major changes to any of these dissertation elements. Specific expectations may vary by academic area and area faculty are obligated to make those expectations clear to students.

For more detailed information, please consult Rackham Graduate School dissertation handbook (<https://www.rackham.umich.edu/downloads/oard-dissertation-handbook.pdf>) and guidelines (<https://rackham.umich.edu/faculty-and-staff/dissertation-committees/guidelines-for-dissertation-committee-service/>).

Strategy Area Guidelines for the Dissertation Proposal Defense

In the interest of achieving these objectives, Strategy Area faculty agree on the following guidelines:

- Students will comply with all Ross and Rackham requirements for dissertation defense proposals, including the dissertation committee composition and the proposal structure.

- The dissertation proposal will serve as an *ex ante* dissertation plan that is subject to the approval of the student's committee. The committee will seek to “settle” questions of topic, methods, and scope so that students can proceed with empirical investigation according to this plan.
- At a minimum, the proposal will consist of the following:
 - a. an explicitly stated *research question* [or questions];
 - b. a *theoretical motivation* for the research question;
 - c. a clear statement of the dissertation's *intended contribution*;
 - d. a thorough *literature review*, both theoretical and empirical in scope;
 - e. a novel *theoretical argument* with explicit assumptions, propositions, and – if and when sufficiently developed – falsifiable hypotheses;
 - f. a *methodological framework* for testing the argument [e.g., formal model, simulation, ethnography, experiment, econometrics]; and
 - g. a specific and suitable *empirical context*, if and when appropriate.
- It is expected that some students will not yet have collected data before defending their proposal but also that some students will have already proceeded to the analysis state.
- It is, therefore, *not* expected that students will present empirical results at their dissertation proposal but they *are* permitted to do so.
- Faculty who serve on the oral defense committee are expected to evaluate the quality of the theoretical argument and the research design; the student's ability to conduct the proposed research project; and the potential scholarly impact of a successfully completed project. Strategy faculty will provide developmental feedback to students along these lines.

Strategy Area Timeline for the Defense

Deadline. Students must earn approval from their committee for their doctoral dissertation proposal defense *on or before September 15th of their fourth year* of study in the doctoral program.

Timing. Students are encouraged to defend their proposals weeks and even months before the September 15th deadline. Students should solicit guidance from their adviser and committee members on appropriate timing. All students should plan to assemble their committee and identify potential defense dates prior to completion of their third year of study in the doctoral program.

Extensions. An extension of the deadline can only be granted by agreement of (a) the student's adviser, (b) the faculty coordinator (or co-coordinators) of the Strategy area's doctoral program, and (c) the Strategy area chair.

Applications by Year of Study.

- This timeline applies to students in their first, second, or third year of study as of the 2019-20 academic year.
- This timeline will also apply to all students who enroll in the program after 2019-20.
- Students currently in their fourth year of study and beyond are not subject to this timeline; they may proceed on the timeline approved by their advisers and committee members.

RESEARCH ASSISTANT REQUIREMENT

From the beginning of the first year, students are assigned as a RA to one or two faculty members. The RA assignment lasts the entire year, including summer (i.e., September 1 until August 31). This is part of the funding for doctoral students and is guaranteed for the first four years.

According to the Ross Doctoral Office, students are expected to work as research assistants for about 10 hours per week. Students can be assigned to different faculty every year. The faculty member with whom the Ph.D. student works in the first year is called the “start-up adviser” and has the role of introducing the student to how to conduct academic strategy research. There is no expectation that the student continue on with the same adviser after the first year. We encourage all students within their first year to talk with all the faculty members and to then decide later on in their first year or during the summer after their first year on their second-year adviser. The student can have a new adviser in their second year and beyond, or the student along with the first-year “start-up adviser” can choose to continue their collaboration. To the extent possible, it is the intention of the doctoral committee to assign students to faculty members based on mutual interest, especially the first-year doctoral students. The RA-ships will ideally lead to publishable research, but they might not, and the RA should also be prepared to engage in some less immediately or directly rewarding activities, such as data processing, assisting in running experiments, and so on. Fifth-year students will be given financial support without obligations to perform an RA-ship.

TEACHING REQUIREMENT

The teaching requirement – teaching one section of a Strategy course (e.g., STR 290 Business Strategy) – is typically fulfilled in the winter or spring semester of the third year. In preparation for that class, students are required to take BA 830 and BA 831. Students generally take BA 830 in the winter of their second year. BA 831 can be taken shortly before the semester in which you teach (e.g., BA 831 is offered in August for doctoral students teaching in the Fall term and in November for those teaching in the Winter term).

Last Updated: October 2019