

## PhD Research Paper Requirement<sup>1</sup>

The writing of a publishable paper is required during the first two years of the PhD program.<sup>2</sup> The paper must be sole-authored and worthy of submission to an economics or related journal with a Google Scholar h-index of 25 or above. Journals meeting this standard can be found from the bibliometric search engine “Harzing’s Publish or Perish” available as a free download at the web site <http://www.harzing.com/pop.htm>. Students are encouraged to begin development of research ideas immediately upon entering the graduate program. Initial ideas for the paper (consisting of a concise research question, a sketch of a framework for investigation, and verification of available data) must be submitted to the Paper Committee by **January 15 of the first year** as part of the Research Paper course (described later).

Based on the paper idea and student nominations, the Paper Committee assigns a Paper Advisor to each student. Thereafter, students report to and interact frequently with their Paper Advisor. Students are also encouraged to seek advice or reactions to drafts from faculty throughout the development of their paper, just as a faculty member might seek advice from a colleague. But the paper must be solely the student’s work, which excludes work done jointly with faculty here or elsewhere (such as a professor in prior undergraduate/graduate work). Plagiarism standards of the journals apply, and violations could result in expulsion from the university (see Student Academic Honesty Code [www.auburn.edu/academic/provost/ahc.html](http://www.auburn.edu/academic/provost/ahc.html) and discussion below).

The student’s progress is evaluated by the Paper Committee together with the Paper Advisor. To assist the student in meeting the paper requirement, the Paper Committee will teach a 3-hour course on the basics of writing for journals. In this course, which is offered Spring Semester, students make an oral presentation on the development of their paper ideas, and submit a formal Paper Prospectus on or about **April 30** (end of Spring semester). Attendance is required.

The student’s paper must be submitted to the Paper Committee by **September 30** following the first year of course work. After soliciting a thorough review of the paper by the Paper Advisor and two independent reviewers selected from the faculty, the Paper Committee classifies the paper into one of three categories: (i) the paper meets the standard as is, (ii) the paper could meet the standard with minor revision, or (iii) the paper needs substantial work. Students with papers in the first category are finished with the paper requirement. Students with papers in

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<sup>1</sup> Appreciation is expressed to the Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics, University of Maryland, for permission to use their web material in developing this description, some of which is verbatim.

<sup>2</sup> Students are assumed to have earned a MS degree or equivalent at the start of the program. For students entering with a BS degree, the paper requirement will be deferred until the equivalent of a MS degree is earned, which typically occurs after two years of classes.

the second and third categories are given careful advice on how to bring their papers up to journal quality, and continue to work with their Paper Advisors (which subsequently includes the independent faculty reviewers).

The revised paper must be submitted by **January 15** of the second year, when a similar evaluation process occurs. If the revised paper fails to meet the standard, a second revision will be due **April 30**. If the paper at that point does not meet the standard, or could not do so with straightforward revisions, the student will not be allowed to continue in the PhD program. These students have the option of changing to a terminal MS program, or leaving the PhD program. The chair of the Paper Committee conveys the committee's final evaluation for each student in writing to the Graduate Program Officer, who, in turn, provides written notification of the final decision to the student and the Department Chair.

Appeals of decisions made by the Paper Committee must be tendered to the Department Chair within one month of the decision. The appeal must be in writing, and state clearly the reasons for the appeal. The Department Chair will appoint an *ad hoc* committee consisting of three faculty members who hold Level 2 Graduate Faculty status to consider the appeal. At least one of these members must be from outside the department (e.g, Economics or Forestry Economics). The *ad hoc* committee will inform the Graduate Program Officer of its decision, who will then notify the student. In filing the appeal, the student is entitled to the due process procedures described in *The Tiger Cub*, which is available online at <http://www.auburn.edu/tigercub/>.

<b>Table 4. PhD Research Paper Timetable and Deadlines</b>				
Year of PhD Study	Initial paper idea submitted to Paper Committee	Prospectus submitted to Paper Committee	Paper due	Decision letter to student
1	<b>January 15</b>	<b>~April 30</b>	<b>September 30</b>	<b>October 31</b>
	Revision submitted to Paper Committee	Decision letter to student	Final revision submitted to Paper Committee	Decision letter to Student
2	<b>January 15</b>	<b>February 15</b>	<b>April 30</b>	<b>May 15</b>

#### Tips on Producing a Successful Paper

- 1) Select a topic that contributes to the Department's research program. Most faculty have research projects funded by the Alabama Agricultural Experiment Station, or outside contracts and grants. Familiarize yourself with these research projects, with the aim of developing a researchable idea that contributes to the research objectives. This

will align your interest with faculty expertise, and thus result in higher quality feedback as the writing process unfolds.

- 2) Do a thorough review of the literature with the aim of identifying gaps, problems, or puzzles that your work could address. Focus on work published in the better journals, i.e., those with a GS h-index higher than 25. Avoid unpublished work, and work published in “popular” outlets, i.e., those intended for a non-scientific audience. And be sure that the review is up to date, i.e., includes the most recent work on the topic. A good place to find relevant articles is *EconLit*, the electronic data base maintained by the American Economics Association. Harzing’s Publish or Perish is also a good source, as it allows you to re-arrange articles on any given topic by date of publication, journal, and citation rate.
- 3) Assemble a data base early in the research process, ideally by the end of the first semester of classes. This will give you an opportunity to explore alternative hypotheses, apply econometric techniques learned in class, and develop a realistic understanding of what can be accomplished given data limitations and time constraints.

### Policy on Late Papers

Consistent with university policies laid out in *The Tiger Cub*, paper deadlines will be strictly enforced. A student who misses a deadline without the prior approval of the Paper Committee will be terminated from the program. Requests for deadline extension must be received at least one month before due date.

After completion of the Ph.D. research paper, the student should prepare for the General Doctoral Examination (preliminary oral exam). The purpose of the preliminary oral exam is to assess the quality and viability of the student’s proposed dissertation research. Details about the process are given in the subsection below entitled “Preliminary Oral Examination.” The exam must be scheduled with the Graduate School at least one week (five working days) prior to the exam date. This is done by filing “Form A” available online from the Graduate School. Upon successful completion of the preliminary oral examination, the student becomes a candidate for the degree.

### Writing Help

Poorly written papers are apt to be rejected by faculty reviewers. With this mind, international students whose first language is not English in particular are strongly encouraged to take advantage of writing help offered by the university. Two places where help can be found are the International Student/Scholar English Center (ISEC) and the Miller Writing Center located in RBD Library. ISEC offers free tutoring services as well as specialized courses (INT 1800 and INT 1830) designed to improve proficiency in oral and written English. The Miller Writing Center has a program called “WriteFest” that is designed specifically to support graduate student writing. Students (domestic and international) who turn in poorly written papers and who have

not taken advantage of these services are apt not to get much sympathy in the appeals process. So it is smart to work these services/programs into your schedule early in your Ph.D. studies, preferably in the first year.

### Plagiarism

Plagiarism -- the use of another's words or ideas as if they are one's own -- is a violation of Auburn University's Student Academic Honesty Code (<https://sites.auburn.edu/admin/universypolicies/Policies/AcademicHonestyCode.pdf>). It will not be tolerated in the PhD Research Paper.

University sanctions for plagiarism range from receiving a zero on the paper (with written notification to the dean) to expulsion from the university. Lack of intent (as in accidentally committing plagiarism) is not an acceptable defense.

Examples of plagiarism include:<sup>3</sup>

- Quoting another person's actual words, complete sentences, paragraphs, or an entire piece of written work without proper acknowledgement of the source
- Using another person's ideas, opinions, or theory, *even if it is completely paraphrased in one's own words*, without acknowledgement of the source
- Borrowing facts, data, statistics, figures, or other illustrative materials that are not common knowledge without acknowledgement of the source
- Submitting as one's own work a paper or parts of a paper copied *or paraphrased* from other sources
- Simply rearranging passages and making slight changes or additions in wording

Material provided by anonymous reviewers in the review process is subject to the same rules for plagiarism, as is material obtained from the web. Students who are unsure about what constitutes plagiarism should consult with their PhD paper advisors, other faculty, or the web sites of economics journals.

The best way to avoid plagiarism is to develop skills in quoting, citing, and paraphrasing another's work. Helpful information on these topics is available at the Miller Writing Center (<http://wp.auburn.edu/writing/writing-center/>) and at Purdue University's Online Writing Lab (<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/589/01/>).

To help ensure that PhD research papers are free of plagiarism, the student should affix to the title page of each submission (original and revisions) the following statement:

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<sup>3</sup> These examples are taken either verbatim or in slightly modified form from the academic honesty policies of AU's history and chemical engineering departments (<http://cla.auburn.edu/history/students/undergraduate-students/academic-honesty-policy/> and <http://www.eng.auburn.edu/chen/programs/undergraduate/student-handbook/honesty-ethics/honesty-policy.html>. Accessed 5 August 2014)

“I certify that this paper is free of plagiarism, and understand that if plagiarism is detected I could be subject to sanctions as defined in Auburn University’s Student Academic Honesty Code.”

Signed \_\_\_\_\_