

Graduate Student Timeline -- Target Dates

Although each student takes a unique path through graduate school, these targets for achieving various milestones may be useful. See below for more details on coursework, exam, and research timing, including deadlines for acceptable progress. If you think you may not meet the deadlines, talk to Lenna to learn more about your options.

First Year

- Pass Preliminary Examination before entry, if possible
- Complete required core classes (200ABC, 215AB, 219A)
- Explore research areas through Colloquium (290) and informal discussion
- Spring: Begin attending research group meetings
- Summer: Select research adviser, do trial project
- Summer: Study for Preliminary Examination, if haven't yet passed

Second Year

- Fall: Pass Preliminary Examination
- Complete cluster courses (vary by specialization)
- Continue working with research group
- Prepare for Qualifying Examination

Third Year

- Spring: Take Qualifying Examination in spring if not earlier
- Continue research
- Summer: Advance to candidacy by end of summer; can then receive Master's degree

Fourth and Fifth Years

- Continue research and begin publishing papers

Sixth Year

- Write dissertation and graduate
- Apply for postdoctoral positions or other jobs

Coursework

Normal progress

Core classes (200ABC, 215AB, 219A) - mostly first year

Cluster classes (vary by specialization) - second year

Possible reasons for exceptions

Taking missing undergraduate coursework in first year in place of some core classes

Taking advanced classes in first year if exempted from some core classes

Delaying one or more core classes to the second year in order to take research-related courses that are not offered every year or are particularly valuable in starting research

Deadlines for acceptable progress

Completing core classes (200ABC, 215AB, 219A) - second year

Completing cluster classes (vary by specialization) - third year

Exams

Normal progress

Preliminary examination - pass by the end of the first year

Qualifying examination - pass by June of third year

Possible reasons for exceptions, qualifying examination

Severe coursework delays because of undergraduate preparation or because of a long gap between college and grad school

Out of country for research (e.g., at CERN) and could not take exam until summer

Deadlines for acceptable progress

Preliminary examination - pass by spring of second year. In rare cases students may receive an extension.

Qualifying examination - attempt by June of third year; pass before the beginning of the fourth year. *The qualifying exam deadline has financial consequences, which are especially severe for international students. Unless a rare exception has been granted, the department will not fund students who do not pass the qualifying exam and advance to candidacy before their fourth year.*

Research

Normal progress

Explore research areas through colloquium and informal discussion - first year

Begin attending research group meetings - spring of first year

Select research adviser, do trial project - summer after first year

Prepare for qualifying exam - second year; allow one full year after beginning research

Publish initial work - fourth year; may vary significantly

Complete research for dissertation - fifth year; may vary significantly

Write dissertation - sixth year; allow at least 6 months and preferably 1 year

Possible reasons for exceptions

Beginning research later to commit more time for preliminary exam studying in the summer after the first year

Needing additional coursework before beginning in the chosen research area

Exploring several groups concurrently to select the best fit

Changing research group or area after an initial trial

Working on research involving significant initial construction or programming efforts, so that publishable results occur later in graduate school

Deadlines for acceptable progress

Select research adviser - June of second year

Prepare for qualifying exam - third year; allow at least 6 months from starting research

Complete dissertation - end of eighth year. *For many students funding issues arise before 8 years. International students who do not finish within 5 years of passing the qualifying examination face severe financial consequences.*