



UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS  
G. BRINT RYAN COLLEGE OF BUSINESS  
DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE, INSURANCE, REAL ESTATE AND LAW  
(FIREL)

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**Ph.D. Student Handbook**  
Professional Expectations and Performance

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# A. Introduction

## A.1 Vision for FIREL's Doctoral Program in Finance

The vision for our doctoral program in finance is to develop graduates who excel in research, teaching, and academic citizenship. We are committed to providing our students with the research skills necessary to produce impactful, high-quality scholarship and to secure placements at universities or institutions that foster discovery and innovation. Beyond research, we emphasize educating our students in the norms and culture of academic life, preparing them to be effective educators, skilled researchers, and collegial members of their departments, colleges, and the broader academic community.

We seek to create a vibrant academic esprit de corps, encouraging students to forge meaningful, lasting connections with their UNT classmates and faculty. These relationships provide a supportive network during the program and serve as a foundation for lifelong professional collaboration and camaraderie. By fostering excellence in scholarship, collegiality, and professionalism, we prepare our graduates to advance the field of finance while contributing to the global community of scholars.

## A.2 Purpose of this Handbook

This handbook provides students pursuing a Ph.D. degree in the Department of Finance, Insurance, Real Estate and Law (FIREL) at G. Brint Ryan College of Business (RCOB), University of North Texas, with an overview of the expectations, practices, and organization of the program. This handbook describes the department's expectations regarding academic performance, conduct and behavior, professional etiquette, and scholarly achievement. This handbook also further explains the terms and expectation under which acceptance into our doctoral program is granted. It should be considered as a supplement to the RCOB Handbook for Doctoral Students: ([https://cob.unt.edu/\\_files/phd/college\\_of\\_business\\_phd\\_handbook.pdf](https://cob.unt.edu/_files/phd/college_of_business_phd_handbook.pdf)) and the General Catalog of the University of North Texas.

# B. Professionalism, Responsibilities and Conduct

## B.1 Expectation of Professionalism for our Students

Gaining an understanding of what constitutes professional behavior is as critical as developing the research skills necessary as a scholar. As a future academic in a professional school such as a college of business, your role extends beyond the classroom. It includes preparing students for success in corporate and business employment environments. To fulfill this responsibility, you must nurture the professional poise and confidence often associated with more experienced individuals. This includes mastering academic etiquette, understanding the culture and expectations of the academy, and modeling behaviors that align with the highest standards of business professionalism.

Professionalism involves effective communication, ethical conduct, and respect for colleagues and students. It requires the ability to navigate complex situations with tact, to represent yourself and your institution with integrity, and to engage thoughtfully with academic and professional communities. By contributing to discussions, collaborating on research, and presenting your ideas with clarity and conviction, you establish your credibility and influence. Ultimately, your ability to model professionalism will set a standard for your students, equipping them to navigate the professional world with confidence, integrity, and resilience.

## B.2 Student Responsibilities and Conduct

This section briefly documents the expectations related to the professional responsibilities and conduct of the students in our department's doctoral program.

### B.2.1 Pre-arrival Requirements

Students in the finance doctoral program are expected to have an outstanding aptitude, motivation, and preparation for rigorous doctoral-level study in finance. This includes a graduate level understanding of finance and econometrics. Further, competency in statistics and data-analytic programming will be necessary for success in the program.

### B.2.2 Students Responsibilities While Enrolled in the Program

- Students must be responsive and collegial citizens of the department who willingly help other doctoral students as well as faculty and staff.

- Students must be available on campus during the semester in which they are enrolled as students. Any campus absence beyond a week requires written authorization from the PhD coordinator.
- Students are expected to be on campus during the summer when they are funded by the college as research/teaching assistants.
- Students must attend all required department events including but not limited to Friday seminars, dissertation proposal and final defense presentations, meeting with visiting scholars, and other selected research/instructional events.
- 1<sup>st</sup>-year students must attend the RCOB orientation in the fall semester of their first year.
- 1<sup>st</sup>- and 2<sup>nd</sup>-year students are required to attend the non-credit professional development seminar offered weekly by senior department faculty.

### B.2.3 Student Conduct and Expectations While Enrolled in the Program

- **Intellectual Growth:** Strive to develop their intellectual curiosity and a sense of academic exploration and discovery.
- **Faculty Research Collaboration:** Strive to become engaged in research immediately in partnership with faculty within the first semesters of joining the program.
- **Demonstrate Academic Integrity:** Uphold the highest standards of honesty and ethics in all scholarly activities.
- **Engage in Scholar Community:** Actively participate in academic discussions, conferences, and collaborations to contribute to the field's advancement.
- **Maintain Consistent Communication:** Regularly update advisors/PhD Coordinator/Department Chair on progress and seek guidance when necessary.
- **Adhere to Program Requirements:** Fulfill all coursework, research, and teaching obligations as outlined by the department.
- **Demonstrate Professionalism:** Exhibit responsible conduct in research and interactions, adhering to ethical standards.
- **Meet Academic Milestones:** Complete examinations, proposals, and dissertation within established timelines.
- **Seek Feedback:** Actively seek and incorporate feedback to improve research quality and academic performance.
- **Contribute to Knowledge:** Seek to produce original research that adds value to the academic community.
- **Develop Teaching Skills:** Participate in teaching or mentoring roles to gain instructional experience.
- **Pursue Professional Development:** Engage in activities that enhance career readiness, such as workshops and networking.

- **Maintain Good Academic Standing:** Achieve and sustain the required GPA as well as make satisfactory progress in research.
- **Balance Commitments:** Effectively manage time to meet academic, research, and personal responsibilities.

## C. Program Structure Summary

This section provides a timeline for the completion of the PhD program in finance. While the finance department expects that each student will adhere to the degree plan developed in the first semester of the program based on this guideline, the PhD coordinator, in consultation with the doctoral committee and the department chairperson, can make changes as a result of unanticipated events or changing circumstances.

Year 1:	
Mid-August	Required orientations by the college
Fall Semester	Take 12 credit hours including one FINA seminar
Spring Semester	Take 12 credit hours including two FINA seminars
By April 15 <sup>th</sup>	Identification of faculty mentor and 1 <sup>st</sup> -year research idea
Mid-May	1 <sup>st</sup> -year evaluation and review completed

Table C.1: Year 1 schedule

Year 2:	
By October 15 <sup>th</sup>	Presentation of the 1 <sup>st</sup> -year paper
Fall Semester	Take 9 credit hours including one FINA seminar
Spring Semester	Take 9 credit hours including two FINA seminars
By April 15 <sup>th</sup>	Identification of faculty mentor and 2 <sup>nd</sup> -year research idea
Mid-June	Comprehensive Exam

Table C.2: Year 2 schedule

Year 3:	
By September 30 <sup>th</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup> -year evaluation and review completed
By October 15 <sup>th</sup>	Presentation of the 2 <sup>nd</sup> -year paper
Fall Semester	Teach one course along with dissertation hours
By January 31 <sup>st</sup>	Formation of dissertation committee
Spring Semester	Teach one course along with dissertation hours

Table C.3: Year 3 schedule

Year 4:	
By September 30 <sup>th</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup> -year evaluation and review completed
By Mid-October	Dissertation proposal defense (if going to the job market)
Fall Semester	Teach one course along with dissertation hours
Spring Semester	Teach one course along with dissertation hours
By Mid-June	Final dissertation defense (graduating before fall)

Table C.4: Year 4 schedule



## D. Comprehensive Exam

After the successful completion of all required coursework and the 1<sup>st</sup>-year research paper, students are required to complete a comprehensive exam. This comprehensive exam will be administered in mid-June following the 2<sup>nd</sup>-year Spring semester's completion over two days. All tenure-track and tenured faculty members are invited to provide questions to the comprehensive exam. The PhD coordinator selects the final questions from those submitted.

The faculty members are responsible for grading and providing feedback of the questions they submitted (if selected as the actual comprehensive exam questions). The student performance is evaluated and discussed in the meeting of faculty members whose questions are used. In case of borderline pass/fail performance, the student will be asked to rework the questions she/he missed and discuss the possible issues with the faculty members within a few weeks of the evaluation.

In the event of a failure, the department has the option of permitting the student to retake the exam once within a year of the original comprehensive exam. A second failure will result in termination of the student from the program.

# E. Research Papers

## E.1 First Year Paper

Students are required to develop a 1<sup>st</sup>-year research paper under the guidance of a faculty mentor. A proposal of the 1<sup>st</sup>-year research idea presentation is mandatory in mid-April during the Friday seminar (or Brownbag seminar if the Friday seminar schedule is not available). A complete 1<sup>st</sup>-year research paper will be presented during the Friday seminar in early- to mid-October.

## E.1 Second Year Paper

The research paper to be completed as a 2<sup>nd</sup>-year research paper should represent significant original research. Students can either extend their 1<sup>st</sup>-year research paper or start a new paper. It is expected that after the paper presentation in early- to mid-October, the paper is ready for a submission to a conference. Similar to the 1<sup>st</sup>-year paper, proposals for the 2<sup>nd</sup>-year paper will be done in the Friday seminar (or brownbag seminar) in mid-April. The completed 2<sup>nd</sup>-year paper is expected to be presented in mid-October to the department faculty.

## F. The Dissertation Process

Identifying a dissertation topic and selecting an advisor is a critical process for doctoral students, requiring self-reflection, exploration, and collaboration. The journey begins with immersing oneself in coursework, seminars, and literature to uncover gaps in knowledge and emerging trends in the field. Students can draw from personal interests, previous research, seminar discussion, or pressing societal issues to identify a topic that aligns with their academic goals and career aspirations. Engaging in discussions with faculty members, peers, and experts sharpens ideas and provides critical feedback.

The student's choice of an advisor is equally important since this partnership shapes the research journey. Students should consider factors such as the advisor's expertise, mentoring style, and experience of supporting students for success. Compatibility in communication and shared research interests are crucial for fostering a productive relationship. Ultimately, a successful match between topic and advisor creates a foundation for rigorous scholarship and meaningful contributions to the academic community.

Students are required to form a dissertation committee, consisting of no less than three faculty members, by January 31<sup>st</sup> of the third year. At least one committee member may be from outside the student's concentration area. Once the dissertation committee is formed, students need to file **Form K** (*Designation of Dissertation advisory Committee*). Upon the verification by PhD coordinator of the **Form K**, the Dean of the Graduate School is notified the formation of the candidate's dissertation committee. This represents the admission of the students to *candidacy*. For more specific details about the dissertation process, students can refer to the RCOB Handbook for Doctoral Students: ([https://cob.unt.edu/\\_files/phd/college\\_of\\_business\\_phd\\_handbook.pdf](https://cob.unt.edu/_files/phd/college_of_business_phd_handbook.pdf)).

The department requires that the final draft of the student's dissertation is distributed to the committee and made available to department faculty two weeks prior to the scheduled defense date.

## G.Student Assessments

The program annually evaluates the progress of all PhD students. The evaluation is typically performed at the end of the spring semester or during the summer. By the start of each academic year, the PhD coordinator will discuss with each student her or his academic plan for the upcoming year.

During the spring semester, the PhD coordinator will solicit feedback from faculty members about the students' performance, including classroom performance and/or TA/RA assignment performance, and language proficiency if needed.

If a student demonstrates unsatisfactory progress in the program, the department can take one of the following actions; (1) offer a formalized program for performance improvement and counseling or (2) elect to dismiss the student from the program.

# H. Doctoral Teaching and Research Assignments

This is a funded program where students are assigned as TA and RA. Because the assistantship is offered on an annual basis, students are expected to perform their assignments successfully. A failure to do so can result in the withdrawal of an assistantship.

As part of an assistantship, beginning in their 3<sup>rd</sup>-year of the program, students are expected to teach one section of a class each semester. The teaching assignments will be determined by the department chairperson in conjunction with the PhD program coordinator.

The RCOB Dean's Office offers a competitive 5<sup>th</sup>-year funding for a qualified students on a limited basis. Applications for 5<sup>th</sup>-year fundings are solicited from 3<sup>rd</sup>-year students during the spring semester.

## H.1 Expectations as a Doctoral Research Assistant

- **Demonstrate Proactiveness:** Take initiative in identifying tasks or areas where assistance is needed without waiting for explicit instruction.
- **Communicate Effectively:** Provide regular updates on progress, challenges, and results through clear and concise communication.
- **Maintain Professionalism:** Respect deadlines, follow through on commitments, and manage time effectively.
- **Show Curiosity and Engagement:** Display a genuine interest in the research topic and actively seek to learn more about it.
- **Be Open:** Accept constructive criticism gracefully and use it to improve performance and deliverables.
- **Foster Collaboration:** Work well with team members, including other research assistants, faculty, and collaborators.
- **Exercise Attention to Detail:** Ensure accuracy and precision in all research-related tasks, from data entry to analysis.
- **Protect Confidentiality:** Handle sensitive data and intellectual property with the utmost discretion and care.

- **Adapt to Faculty Preferences:** Align work habits and deliverables with the faculty member's expectations and working style.
- **Exhibit Resilience:** Approach challenges and setbacks with a problem-solving mindset and a willingness to persevere.
- **Stay Organized:** Maintain thorough records of tasks, data, and project progress to ensure reproducibility and clarity.
- **Demonstrate Integrity:** Uphold ethical standards in research and interactions with colleagues and faculty.

## H.2 Expectations as a Doctoral Teaching Assistant

- **Prepare Thoroughly:** Review course material, assignments, and lecture notes ahead of class to ensure readiness.
- **Communicate Clearly:** Explain concepts in a way that is accessible and tailored to students' needs and levels of understanding.
- **Be Approachable:** Foster a supportive environment by being available, patient, and open to questions during office hours or interactions.
- **Provide Constructive Feedback:** Offer timely, specific, and actionable feedback on students' work to help them improve.
- **Demonstrate Professionalism:** Maintain respect, fairness, and impartiality when interacting with students and handling grades.
- **Facilitate Engagement:** Use active learning techniques to keep students engaged in discussion sections, labs, or recitation sessions.
- **Uphold Academic Integrity:** Promote and enforce policies on plagiarism and cheating with consistency and fairness.
- **Adapt to Student Needs:** Be flexible and responsive to the diverse learning styles, needs, and challenges of students.
- **Manage Time Effectively:** Balance teaching responsibilities with research and coursework while meeting deadlines.
- **Maintain Confidentiality:** Protect students' privacy when discussing grades, assignments, or personal matters.
- **Collaborate with Faculty:** Coordinate closely with the course instructor to align teaching efforts and meet course objectives.
- **Model Ethical Behavior:** Demonstrate respect for academic values, policies, and inclusivity in the classroom.
- **Resolve Conflicts Diplomatically:** Address classroom challenges or student issues with tact and professionalism.
- **Encourage Participation:** Create an inclusive environment where all students feel encouraged to contribute to discussions.

- **Seek help and Advice:** Please contact department faculty for help, advice, counsel when needed.

# I. Job Market Preparation

Preparing for job interviews is a critical step for students seeking academic positions. The department requires students to participate in mock job interviews as part of their preparation. These sessions simulate real interviews, offering students an invaluable opportunity to refine their responses, build confidence, and receive constructive feedback. Further, students are required to present their “job market paper” in a seminar to department faculty prior to a flyout. It is also encouraged that the students present their research to faculty before interviewing at any academic conference. Students are further encouraged to work closely with their advisors to identify suitable employment opportunities that align with their research expertise and career goals. Advisors play a primary role in helping students strategize for interviews, choose appropriate references, and master negotiation techniques for potential job offers. Finally, our faculty members will not provide you with a recommendation letter for your job application unless you have successfully defended your dissertation proposal.

While all faculty members in the department are available to provide guidance, the student’s dissertation advisor assumes primary responsibility for mentoring throughout the job-seeking process. Advisors assist in tailoring applications to specific positions, crafting compelling research and teaching statements, and rehearsing key aspects of interviews. Successful job placement requires proactive collaboration between students and their advisors. Students must actively engage with their advisors to seek support, incorporate feedback, and stay informed about opportunities.



# J. Appendix

## J.1 Important Contacts

Department Chairperson, FIREL  
Professor Stephen Ferris  
BLB 212A  
[stephen.ferris@unt.edu](mailto:stephen.ferris@unt.edu)

Ph.D. Program Coordinator, FIREL  
Professor Takeshi Nishikawa  
BLB 336B  
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Administrative Coordinator, FIREL  
Ms. Kathy Nichols  
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## J.2 Academic Professional Associations

- American Finance Association (<https://afajof.org/>)
- Western Finance Association (<https://westernfinance.org/>)
- Financial Management Association (<https://www.fma.org/>)
- Northern Finance Association (<https://northernfinanceassociation.org/>)
- Eastern Finance Association (<https://easternfinance.org/>)
- Midwest Finance Association (<https://www.midwestfinance.org/>)
- Southwestern Finance Association (<https://www.swfinance.org/>)
- Southern Finance Association (<https://southernfinance.org/>)