

# NURSING SCIENCE, PH.D.

The Joint Nursing Science Ph.D. program prepares nurse scholars who will advance nursing science by generating new knowledge through Interprofessional research initiatives and to improve the health of rural and medically underserved populations. This program provides students with faculty and educational resources housed on both The University of Alabama in Huntsville (UAH) and The University of Alabama (UA) campuses. Two pathways to the PhD degree are available, the post-master's to PhD (MSN to PhD) and the post-baccalaureate to PhD (BSN to PhD). All courses are offered in a distance accessible format with one on-campus intensive conference attended each year. The PhD program is offered as both full-time and part-time programs of study.

Entry into the program is available every summer. Students admitted to the program are mentored and taught by faculty from both The University of Alabama Capstone College of Nursing and the University of Alabama in Huntsville College of Nursing.

## Admissions

We accept BSN-prepared and MSN-prepared students into the Joint Ph.D. program. Admission requirements are the same except where noted below.

Admission to the Ph.D. program is determined by the Joint Ph.D. Oversight Committee who will assess the entire composite of information gained from a variety of sources. Each applicant must meet the following criteria and/or provide:

**Please note: We cannot accept applications from International Students who do not reside within the United States.**

- An application to the Joint Ph.D. Graduate Program [Apply online](#)<sup>Opens in a new window.</sup>
- Official transcripts from each university or college attended sent to:  
 UAH Graduate Admissions  
 301 Sparkman Drive  
 SSB, Suite 222  
 Huntsville, AL 35899
- BSN-prepared applicants must have evidence of successful completion of a bachelor of science in nursing degree at an accredited program.
- MSN-prepared applicants must have bachelor of science in nursing degree and a master's degree in nursing or a closely related health field from accredited programs.
- A minimum graduate Grade Point Average (GPA) of 3.0 on a 4.0 scale.
- Resume or curriculum vitae.
- Three (3) letters of reference from professionals or professors who can adequately evaluate the applicant and the applicant's previous work or potential for success. Two of the letters are strongly preferred from nurses with doctoral degrees.
- Scientific Writing Sample — This sample of your written work should demonstrate your intellectual ability (such as logic, critical thinking, analysis, or synthesis) and your technical writing skills (composition, grammar, references, or citations). For example, you could submit an academic paper, essay, published article, or a professional report written by you. If someone other than you contributed to this document (including editing), explain your contribution and the contributions of others.

- Statement of Purpose — In four double-spaced pages respond to the following:
  - Why do you want to pursue a Ph.D. in Nursing Science?
  - What professional goals do you hope to achieve during and beyond your Ph.D. program?
  - Describe prior experiences that have prepared you for doctoral study (e.g. research, presentations, publications, leadership roles in practice, education, or professional organizations).
  - What are your research interests?
  - How might research in this area advance the science of nursing?
- RN Licensure Requirement —
  - Applicants must have an active, unencumbered license as a Registered Nurse in the United States. Applicants who hold an equivalent certification or licensure outside of the U.S. will be considered on a case-by-case basis.
  - Applicants who are not yet licensed will be considered for conditional admission, but proof of licensure must be submitted prior to completing 12 credit hours of Ph.D. coursework
- Transfer applicants — Evidence of good academic standing at the current institution. Determination of whether or not credits may be transferred will be based on evaluation of comparability of requested transfer course to Ph.D. course and university policy, and is completed after admission.

After the first review of the application and at the request of the Joint Ph.D. Oversight Committee, applicants will be asked to successfully complete personal interviews with Oversight Committee members. Research interests, professional involvement, and motivation for successful completion of doctoral study in the Ph.D. program will be assessed.

Completed applications are reviewed by the Oversight Committee throughout the year for summer enrollment. Applications (transcripts, etc.) must be completed by **April 1** if enrollment in the program is desired for that summer. Applicants must register for courses within one (1) years of acceptance into the Ph.D. program, or the acceptance is void.

Upon admission, you will receive written notification of admission from the Deans of the Joint Ph.D. Program. You will also receive a letter from the graduate advisors at both UA and UAH outlining requirements for entry into the Ph.D. program. Admission is contingent upon providing documentation of a background check and drug screen and results were acceptable to the admission committee.

Students who are enrolled in the Joint Nursing Science Ph.D. program will be divided evenly between UA and UAH for administrative purposes. Applicants who are employees of either UA or UAH will be enrolled in the University of their employment because of the restriction that employee tuition waivers can only be used on the campus of the individual's employment.

The Joint Ph.D. program requires students to visit campus for three days each year program for an intensive experience. **This is a mandatory intensive experience and all students are expected to attend at least two intensives.**

## Curricular Requirements

PhD Nursing Science

Hours

BSN to PhD Required Courses

NUS 741 BSN-PhD Research Seminar I

1

NUS 742	BSN-PhD Research Seminar II	1
NUS 743	BSN-PhD Research Seminar III	1

**BSN and MSN to PhD Required Courses**

NUS 750	Philosophy of Science	3
NUS 752	Informatics and Analytics	3
NUS 754	Ethical Con Legal Iss Research	3
NUS 756	Appl of Theoretical Models	3
NUS 758	Quant Resrch Methods & Designs	3
NUS 760	Statistics I	3
NUS 762	HC Policy Rural Undrsvd Popul	3
NUS 764	Scientific Writing	3
NUS 766	Epidemiology	3
NUS 768	Statistics II	3
NUS 770	Grant Writing	3
NUS 772	Qualitative Research Methods	3
NUS 774	Measurement in Research	3
NUS 776	Advanced Research Methods	3
NUS 799	Dissertation Hours	18

**Total Hours** **63**

Students enrolled in the Joint Nursing Science PhD will have the following requirements:

1. Required online orientation that will take place the first week of classes during the first summer semester. This provides an opportunity to meet faculty and access student resources such as library, writing centers and financial aid.
2. Two required residencies to be hosted on alternating campuses. All residencies will be attended by faculty from both campuses.
3. Qualifying Examination. At the end of semester 6, students will be given a take home exam that will evaluate writing and critical thinking skills and to assess synthesis of knowledge of the program's core concepts.
4. Final Dissertation Defense. At the conclusion of the 18 required dissertation hours, students will be required to present the findings and implications of their dissertation.

## Transfer Credit

Graduate School information on Transfer Credit.

## Comprehensive Exams Eligibility

- Completion of Ph.D. coursework with B or higher in all courses

## Examination Schedule and Procedures\*

- Students will be advised at the residencies and the semester prior to the comprehensive exam about the comprehensive exam procedures and expectations.
- Written portion of the comprehensive exam will be sent to students the first week of May. Students will be given 2 weeks to complete the comprehensive exam. Written exam will be graded and students will be notified of results.
- Written comprehensive exam will consist of three questions with a maximum 21-page limit.
- The comprehensive exam will be graded as pass/fail for UA home students and satisfactory/unsatisfactory for UAH home students.

- Each exam will be graded by two members of the Comprehensive Exam Committee. If the two members disagree, a third member will grade the exam and be the deciding tie breaker.
- An oral portion will be given during the Summer semester to students who did not pass the written exam.
- Students who did not pass the written portion will be given direction on which question or questions to prepare for the oral presentation.
- If a student fails both the oral exam the first time, the student will be given a second chance to take the written comprehensive exam. The oral portion will not be given a second time. If the student fails the second written exam, that student will be dismissed from the Joint Nursing Science Ph.D. program.

## Re-Examination

The procedure for a second written Ph.D. Comprehensive Examination is the same as for the original comprehensive examination. The second examination date is planned to accommodate remediation recommendations. The procedure for administration and evaluation of the second comprehensive examination is the same as with the first attempt. The student who fails the second attempt of the examination is not eligible for progression in the Joint Nursing Science Ph.D. program and may not enroll in future Ph.D. course work in the program.

## Notification of Results

Ph.D. Comprehensive Examination results are sent to the gradebook in Canvas. A copy of the results letter is placed in the student's academic file. Notification of individual students' examination performance is sent by the ADGP to the Dean of the Graduate School.

Graduation School information on Comprehensive Exams.

Admission to Candidacy Requirements

Upon the successful defense of the dissertation proposal, an application for candidacy is submitted to the Graduate School of the student's home institution. The application for candidacy is initiated by the Coordinator of Graduate Student Services.

## Continuous Enrollment Policy

Candidacy is retained by maintaining continuous enrollment in NUS 799 Dissertation Hours each fall and spring semester, up to and including the term in which the dissertation is defended. Failure to enroll continuously in NUS 799 until the Ph.D. degree is awarded terminates candidacy.

Graduate School information on Continuous Enrollment.

## Dissertation Requirements

### NUS 799, Dissertation Hours

Students are required to take dissertation credit (NUS 799) to begin the dissertation proposal and continue until graduation. Student and the chair (in consultation with the committee) must decide the number of hours per semester. The number of course hours is related to the objectives/student learning outcomes to be accomplished in a given semester. At the beginning of each semester, student objectives are to be determined. These objectives will be used for determining tasks and deadlines as well as the course grade. Failure to successfully complete the dissertation assignments according to the syllabus will result in a grade of fail/unsatisfactory for the course.

## Dissertation Proposal

While registered in NUS 799, students have 12 months to complete the dissertation proposal from the date of the successful completion of the

comprehensive exam. If the dissertation proposal is not completed in this time period, the Chair of the Dissertation Committee will meet with the student about her/his progress. The student is then responsible for developing a written plan for completion of the dissertation proposal and submitting this to the dissertation committee for approval within two weeks following the meeting with the Dissertation Committee Chair.

The proposal defense is graded on a Pass, Pass with revisions, or Fail basis by unanimous vote of the dissertation committee members. If revisions are requested in order to determine the status of the proposal, the Chair of the Dissertation Committee, in consultation with committee members, will monitor the completion of the revisions as requested by the dissertation committee members. After revisions are received, the committee determines whether a student passes with revisions or fails.

For a failure, a second proposal defense will be held within six (6) months from the date of the defense of the first proposal defense, and the Dissertation Committee Chair makes the required notifications about the second proposal defense. The candidate may re-attempt the proposal defense once.

## Dissertation Proposal Format

Two formats for the dissertation are acceptable in the Joint Nursing Science Ph.D. Program: 1) a five-chapter dissertation (see page 16 for further description) or 2) a 3-article dissertation (see page 17 for further description, [http://services.graduate.ua.edu/etd/article\\_style.html](http://services.graduate.ua.edu/etd/article_style.html)). Students must choose the format prior to the Dissertation Proposal Defense and the format is defended to and approved by the committee at the Dissertation Proposal Defense.

The student must submit for approval by the Dissertation Committee a written dissertation proposal for the doctoral dissertation research. For both styles of dissertation, the student will complete the dissertation proposal as outlined below.

The dissertation proposal includes:

- Title Page
- Chapter One: Background, Significance and Specific Aims. This section should: (1) provide an introduction, significance, and purpose of the research and the specific aims of the project; (2) state the research questions to be addressed or hypotheses to be tested; and, (3) provide a conceptual/theoretical framework that is clearly described.
- Chapter Two: Review of literature. This section should: (1) provide a review of the literature leading to the research proposal, critically evaluate existing knowledge, and specifically identify the gap(s) which the proposal is intended to address.
- Chapter Three: Research Design and Methods. This section should: (1) describe the research design (design, sample, variables and measures) and the procedures to be used to accomplish the specific aims of the project; identify instruments to be used and describe procedures for addressing the specific aims. (2) include any pilot work or preliminary studies related to the proposal; and (3) include how the data were collected, analyzed, and interpreted.
- References in APA style
- Appendices as needed

With submission of the dissertation proposal, the student also submits the following in writing. These items are discussed and approved during the proposal defense:

- Dissertation Format. Identify the dissertation format. If the 3-article option is chosen, outline the subject of each article (manuscript) and the journal(s) chosen for submission.
- Projected Timeline. Identify a complete timeline for the research study from submission of the IRB application(s) to graduation. Included in this timeline will be how often the student will apprise the committee members of their progress.

Review Appendix E, Dissertation Guidelines carefully for additional assistance.

## Process for the Dissertation Proposal Defense

The completed dissertation proposal must be submitted to the dissertation committee. There may be multiple drafts of the proposal necessary to achieve the quality expected to progress to the proposal defense. The student primarily works with the dissertation chair on the chapters that comprise the dissertation proposal. Committee members are consulted as needed and are kept apprised of the progress of the proposal according to the agreed upon timeline. Students may ask for committee members to read sections of the proposal during its development, in order to obtain direction based on the members' areas of expertise. Once the dissertation chair determines student readiness to defend the proposal, and after an agreed upon date among all committee members, a two weeks' notice to the Graduate School is required; see below for school specific paperwork that is required. All dissertation committee members are required to be in attendance. The defense may be scheduled virtually, but video presentation is required.

The proposal defense is a formal meeting in which the student presents the proposed research, and answers questions posed by the dissertation committee members. Areas to be included in the oral presentation will be specified by the student's Dissertation Committee. The dissertation proposal must be defended orally and approved by the Dissertation Committee before submission of the Institutional Review Board application(s), see below.

The approved dissertation proposal serves as a written agreement between the student and the dissertation committee regarding the expectations, limitations, and scope of the dissertation work.

## Institutional Review Board

The student must gain Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval at the home institution following successful completion of the dissertation proposal defense and prior to implementation of the dissertation research. In some instances, one or more agencies may also require IRB approval. For more information please contact the UAH IRB chair, Ann L. Bianchi Ph.D., [ann.bianchi@uah.edu](mailto:ann.bianchi@uah.edu) or the UA Member,

## Dissertation

After the completion of work proposed in the dissertation proposal, the student is expected to submit the completed work as a dissertation.

The dissertation is the final milestone to be completed by a doctoral student to fulfill the objectives of the Ph.D. in Nursing Science degree. The goal of the dissertation is to engage the student in the research process. The purpose of the dissertation is to demonstrate the student's development as a scholar through implementation of the research process.

A student successfully completes the dissertation when the dissertation committee members confirm that he or she:

1. Articulates a theoretical framework that extends or advances knowledge and/or contributes to human/reality understanding of the patient care phenomenon selected for study.
2. Conducts an investigation of a research question relating to some aspect of nursing science and patient care.
3. Completes an investigation that lends itself, in part or in whole, to publication in a refereed journal.
4. Writes a scholarly dissertation and defends the dissertation.

## Dissertation Format

Doctoral students, in consultation with their committee members, may choose a traditional dissertation format or the manuscript (article style) option format.

### ***Traditional Dissertation Format***

The traditional dissertation should be formatted in a standardized way, using APA (7th ed.) as a guideline. Within these three parts, the following are included:

- Abstract: An abstract of no more than 350 words (not counting title and author's name), with structure determined by the doctoral dissertation committee).
- Chapter One: Background, Significance and Specific Aims. This section should: (1) 17 Date Approved: Fall 2021 provide an introduction, significance, and purpose of the research and the specific aims of the project; (2) state the research questions to be addressed or hypotheses to be tested; and (3) provide a conceptual/theoretical framework that is clearly described.
- Chapter Two: Review of literature. This section should: (1) provide a review of the literature leading to the research proposal, critically evaluate existing knowledge, and specifically identify the gap(s) which the proposal is intended to address.
- Chapter Three: Research Design and Methods. This section should: (1) describe the research design (design, sample, variables and measures) and the procedures to be used to accomplish the specific aims of the project; (2) include any pilot work or preliminary studies related to the proposal; and (3) include how the data were collected, analyzed, and interpreted.
- Chapter Four: Results. Describe in detail the results of the completed data analysis. Include relevant tables and graphs to illustrate findings.
- Chapter Five: An integrative summary of findings, strengths, limitations and implications for research and practice, and recommendations for future exploration.

### ***Manuscript (article style) Dissertation Format***

The 3-manuscript (article-style) dissertation is formatted, as with traditional dissertations, elements of the preliminary pages, the text, and the reference matter are described.

As with traditional dissertations, the article-style dissertation must be the student's original idea resulting from research conducted while enrolled in the doctoral program. Furthermore, the article-style dissertation must contain three articles of publishable quality centered around a single scholarly focus with a comprehensive review of literature demonstrating an in-depth understanding of the unifying framework and an explanation of the work's originality and significance to the field of nursing.

The main body (text) of the article-style dissertation must include:

- An introductory chapter containing a statement of purpose, background information, a description of the articles, a description of how the articles are related (theoretical/conceptual framework), and an explanation of the unified work's originality and significance to the field of nursing.
- First article
- Second article
- Third article
- A summarizing chapter that reiterates the importance of the unified work's significance to the field of nursing, synthesizes and integrates the major findings, connects study findings to the guiding theoretical/conceptual framework, outlines the implications of the findings, discusses limitations, and provides recommendations for future research.

NOTE: At least one of the three articles must be a data-based report of the dissertation research. A data-based manuscript should include a review of the literature and use an acceptable convention for data-based reports.

The dissertation committee will provide oversight and direction for the focus of non-data-based articles. Some examples of non-data-based manuscripts are concept analysis papers, scoping reviews, systematic reviews, policy papers, clinical guidelines, or a description of a unique research methodology.

Manuscripts/articles in this type of dissertation may be published, in press, or developed but not yet submitted for journal review. The student will be the lead or sole author on each of the three articles. The inclusion of any articles that are previously published or accepted for publication requires permission from the copyright holder. Please note that not all journals will allow copyright release. It is important to discuss any previously published articles with your dissertation chair and committee members early in the dissertation process, to determine if these will be accepted as part of your dissertation. If approved by your chair and committee, it will also be important to check with the journal editor where the article was published before submitting a published manuscript in your dissertation.

### ***Items that may be helpful to students during the dissertation phase of the Ph.D. program.***

The first three chapters of the dissertation make up the proposal and are written for the proposal defense, regardless of whether proposing to complete a traditional or a 3-manuscript dissertation. However, it is expected that these three chapters may require revision prior to submission of the final dissertation.

It is important to consult with the committee chair and members throughout the dissertation process for discussion of ideas and for guidance.

Reviewing other dissertation products may be helpful as the plan develops and as the dissertation product(s) are written.

Coursework and textbooks from throughout the program can be useful in writing the chapters or papers comprising the dissertation.

The dissertation process involves independent work and can be a solitary experience. Maintaining regular contact with the committee chair and members and obtaining social support from peers in the program can help you to stay engaged and productively moving forward in the process.



## Dissertation Defense: Final Oral Examination

In order to be awarded the Ph.D. degree, each student will successfully complete a final oral examination of the dissertation and submit a final version of the dissertation document, approved by the Dissertation Committee to the home institution Graduate School. The Dissertation Committee serves as the final oral examining committee.

A copy of the dissertation must be submitted to all members of the Committee at least three (3) weeks before the pre-defense meeting. The Committee then meets to decide if the document is acceptable and defensible. When accepted, the oral final examination is scheduled. Students also are required to submit an email announcement (including dissertation title and brief abstract) to their Dissertation Chair at least three weeks prior to the scheduled defense so that faculty and students can be invited to attend the oral dissertation defense. The defense is open to the public and members of the University community.

The Committee administers the examination. A 30 - 45-minute presentation is given by the student using presentation software. Anyone attending may ask questions. After the public presentation, the audience is dismissed, and the Dissertation Committee may further question the candidate. The success of the oral defense is determined by a vote of the official committee. The decision to award the degree must be unanimous. The Dissertation Committee may request changes to the final written document, and the Dissertation Committee Chair will be responsible for assuring that the student has made the changes before final approval. The Dissertation Committee Chair notifies the ADGP and Graduate School of the student's home campus of the outcome of the oral dissertation defense. The candidate will be informed of the outcome after the oral defense. If necessary, reexamination will be held within six (6) months from the date of the defense of the first examination, and the Dissertation Committee Chair makes the required notifications about the second oral dissertation defense. The candidate may re-attempt the final oral examination once.

## Report of Completion of Requirements for Doctoral Degree

An Application for Degree/Graduation must be completed and submitted by the student according to the timeline of the home institution. If students do not meet the requirements, they must reapply for the degree. The dissertation chair will report to the ADGP and the Graduate School of the student's home campus regarding the acceptance of the dissertation. Upon completion of a successful defense, faculty must complete and submit the appropriate forms, signed by all committee members and the ADGP of the student's home university.

## Submission of Final Dissertation

UA home students will submit their dissertations electronically according to the instructions at <https://www.etdadmin.com/main/home?siteId=176>.

Graduate School information on Degree Requirements.

## Time Limits for Degree Completion Requirements

Graduate School information on Time Limits.

## Student Progress Requirements

Student progression is monitored and evaluated each semester.

## Additional Academic Requirements

Each summer, however, is devoted to intensives, a time when students are required to be in residence (physically present) on either The University of Alabama or University of Alabama in Huntsville campus. During this week, students meet with their major advisors and advisory committees, attend scheduled enrichment activities, and interact within and among student cohorts to form important bonds for social support. The schedule for intensives week is developed by the Ph.D. Program Oversight Committee with feedback from students and faculty. The schedule is sent to students at least 2 months in advance to allow students to make travel plans.

## Academic Misconduct Information

Graduate School information on Academic Misconduct.

## Withdrawals and Leave of Absence Information

Graduate School information on Withdrawals and Leave of Absence.

## Leave of Absence Policy

Under compelling circumstances beyond the student's control, a graduate student may request that the department petition the Graduate School with the rationale for granting a leave of absence. If granted by the Graduate School, a leave of absence will cover one or more upcoming semesters rather than any prior semester(s). A leave of absence is not a method of avoiding continuous registration requirements, and it does not lengthen the time limit for degree completion. When a student returns from a leave of absence, the Graduate School must be notified and will work with the department and student to determine the number of semesters remaining on the time limit and the degree requirements that remain.

## Process for Requesting a Leave of Absence

- The student contacts the academic advisor at his/her home campus to request a leave of absence (LOA).
- The academic advisor discusses the LOA policy, time limits, and revised POS.
- The academic advisor informs the Ph.D. Coordinator or Associate Dean at home campus and joint campus.
- The academic advisor sends the LOA form to the student.
- The student returns the completed and signed form to the academic advisor; who forwards it to the Graduate school for a decision.
- Once a decision is received from the Graduate School, the academic advisor at the home campus informs the student, the advisor at the other campus and the coordinators of the decision and updates information in the database or tracking system.

## Academic Grievances Information

Graduate School information on Academic Grievances.

## Grades and Academic Standing

Graduate School information on Grades and Academic Standing.

## Graduate School Deadlines Information

Information on Graduate School Deadlines.

## **Application for Graduation Information**

Information on the Application for Graduation.