

FACULTY OF NATIVE STUDIES

Graduate Student Handbook

2026–2027 Academic Year



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Start Here

The Faculty of Native Studies (FNS) Graduate Student Handbook is intended to help students understand their program, plan milestones, and find the policies and services they need. Students remain responsible for knowing and meeting the requirements that apply to their program.

The Rule of Thumb

Use this handbook for FNS-specific guidance, then confirm deadlines and formal requirements in the [University of Alberta Calendar](#), [GPS Graduate Program Manual](#), and other official University sources.

Acknowledgement of Artificial Intelligence Use:

Artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used as a support in the development and preparation of this Student Handbook. AI was used to assist with organizing, drafting, editing, and refining content. All information has been reviewed, revised, and approved by the Faculty of Native Studies to ensure that the handbook accurately reflects current policies, procedures, and expectations.

The use of AI in preparing this handbook does not replace the responsibility of the Faculty to ensure the accuracy and integrity of the information provided. Students are encouraged to consult the appropriate Faculty, University, and Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (GPS) policies and resources for the most current and authoritative information.



About the Faculty of Native Studies

The Faculty of Native Studies (FNS) at the University of Alberta is North America's only faculty dedicated exclusively to the discipline of Indigenous studies. Established as the School of Native Studies in 1986, the unit became the Faculty of Native Studies in 2006 in recognition of its expanding teaching and research activities.

FNS offers a dynamic, interdisciplinary environment for undergraduate and graduate education and research. Faculty members are engaged in diverse areas of Indigenous Studies and are recognized nationally and internationally for their scholarship and research. The Faculty is supported by dedicated staff who contribute to its academic, administrative, and community-engaged work.

As a graduate student, you are an important member of this academic community. We encourage you to take advantage of the opportunities available through FNS to develop your academic and professional skills, pursue your research and career goals, and contribute to the Faculty and the broader discipline of Indigenous Studies.

Graduate Program Contacts

The Associate Dean (Graduate Studies), **Dr. Paul L. Gareau** oversees FNS graduate programs and can be contacted at nsgrad@ualberta.ca. For program advising and administrative questions, contact the **NS Student Services Advisors** at [NS Advise - ticket](#).

If you have questions about your program that are not addressed in this handbook, please contact the Associate Dean (Graduate Studies) or the NS Student Services Advisors.

Who does what?

AREA	PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY
Student	Manage registration, coursework, program milestones, deadlines, research progress, applications, and communication with the supervisor/committee.
Supervisor & Committee	Provide academic and research guidance; help plan student's program; monitor progress; establish/coordinate the supervisory committee; arrange examinations.
FNS Associate Dean (Graduate Studies) & NS Student Services Advisors	Oversee FNS graduate program progression, approve/coordinate program paperwork, monitor progress, and communicate required changes to GPS.
Graduate Postdoc Studies (GPS)	University-level graduate oversight, including admission, academic standards, awards administration, thesis examinations, final thesis acceptance, and convocation.

Key Contacts

CONTACT	WHEN TO USE
FNS Graduate Program nsgrad@ualberta.ca	Graduate program questions, degree progress, thesis/defence coordination, or matters requiring approval from the Grad Chair.
FNS NS Student Services Advisors nsadvisor@ualberta.ca	Program administration, forms, registration/program changes, and processing requirements.
Supervisor / Supervisory Committee	Research direction, program planning, milestones, thesis/dissertation development, and academic guidance.

Responsibilities as a Graduate Student

- Maintain **continuous registration** as required and ensure fees are paid.
- Know the **regulations** and deadlines that apply to your program; the University of Alberta Calendar is the official rulebook.
- **Communicate** regularly with your supervisor and supervisory committee.
- Complete required **annual progress reporting** and participate in required progress meetings with your supervisor.
- Meet degree **benchmarks**, coursework requirements, proposal/examination deadlines, and final submission deadlines.
- **Seek help** early if academic, supervisory, personal, or emergency circumstances affect your progress.
- Meet scholarship and award **deadlines** and seek supervisor/FNS support early.

Plan backward from hard deadlines

Thesis and defence timelines are not flexible. Build in time for supervisor review, committee review, forms, GPS processing, and required submission windows.

Supervision: A Shared Responsibility

The supervisor provides guidance and support, but the student remains responsible for completing coursework, meeting deadlines, and achieving degree benchmarks.

STUDENT	SUPERVISOR
Manage program responsibilities and stay on track.	Help plan the program and establish realistic goals.
Communicate regularly and raise concerns early.	Provide academic/research guidance and constructive feedback.
Complete agreed work and requirements.	Keep informed of progress and explain relevant FNS & GPS requirements.
Prepare for committee meetings and examinations.	Establish/coordinate the supervisory committee and required meetings.
Meet application, proposal, thesis and defence deadlines.	Arrange examinations and submit required forms for processing.

 Grad Student Space

Grad student space is available in room **1–37 in Pembina Hall**, there are shared workstations that can be held by FNS graduate students.

- These stations are **assigned** by the Executive Coordinator when new students start and as space is available.
- The workstation allows you to **keep items secured** and locked in either the top or bottom cabinet space. It is recommended that you keep your personal items secured, and FNS is not responsible for lost or stolen items.
- These workstations are **intended for students who live in the Edmonton area**. Please let the Executive Coordinator know if you are no longer in the Edmonton area so that your workstation can be reassigned.
- As part of the workstation assignment, you will **receive a key** for the workstation itself. There is a key deposit of \$50 required when the key is issued, which is returned to you when the key is returned.
- There is a **key pad on the door**. The code is provided to you when you are assigned a workstation.
- **Please do not let others in the room.** This room is intended for graduate students only. If you are in need of a meeting space, please reach out to the front desk and we will book a meeting room for you.

MA Thesis Guidelines

The MA thesis is an opportunity for students to undertake original research and demonstrate their ability to conduct scholarly work in Indigenous studies and/or a related field. Students should work closely with their supervisor(s) and supervisory committee throughout the process and consult current **Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies (GPS)** regulations for university-wide requirements. For more info, see [GPS Thesis Requirements](#)

Supervisor and Supervisory Committee

Every thesis-based graduate student must have a supervisor. Supervisors are normally selected in consultation with the student and are appointed by the Faculty. Supervisors must have appropriate expertise in the student's research area and meet the University's eligibility requirements.

Students and supervisors may request a change of supervisor during the program. Students are encouraged to discuss concerns about supervision as early as possible.

Resolving Supervisory Conflicts

Most concerns should first be addressed directly between the student and supervisor. If a concern cannot be resolved, the **ADGS** should be consulted. The ADGS may facilitate consultation or mediation and, where appropriate, involve FNS, GPS, the Student Ombuds, or other university resources.

If a supervisory relationship cannot continue, FNS will make reasonable efforts to identify alternative supervision. Students should consult the current [University Calendar regulations on supervision and conflict resolution](#) for complete procedures.

MA Supervisory Committee

The MA supervisory committee should be established **by the end of the student's second term**.

- The MA supervisory committee has **three members**:
 - i. Supervisor (from FNS) or Joint-Supervisors (FNS or UofA/outside)
 - ii. Ex-Officio Member (from FNS)
 - iii. Ex-Officio Member (within FNS or from UofA).
 - The committee is constituted by the end of coursework in consultation with supervisor(s), and supports/examines the thesis research. *No need for external examiners at the MA level.*

FNS guidance calls for regular committee meetings; MA students have a formal annual review of degree progress through GPS. See [below](#) for more information.

Where appropriate, a **community partner** may also be included in consultation with the student, supervisor, and committee.

The supervisory committee supports the development of the student's research and participates in the examination of the thesis. Changes to committee membership must follow University and FNS procedures.

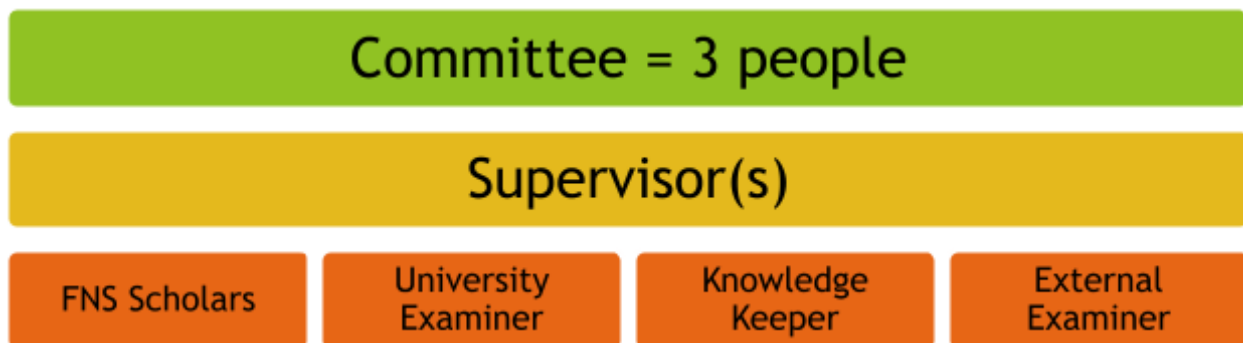
MA Examining Committee

The MA thesis examining committee must have a **minimum of three members**. The committee normally consists of the supervisory committee

There is no need for arms-length examiners like in the PhD program.

At least half of the examiners must hold a degree equivalent to or higher than the degree being examined. GPS recognizes several categories of examiners, including ex-officio, university, specialized knowledge, and external examiners. See the [University Calendar for examiner categories and eligibility](#).

MA Committee: at a glance





MA Thesis Proposal

Under the guidance of the supervisor(s), students must develop a written thesis proposal **by the end of May in the first year of the program.**



Proposal: at a glance

● LENGTH	● DEADLINE	● APPROVAL	● REFERENCES
Normally 2,000 words	End of May, Year 1	Supervisor + Supervisory Committee	20–30 sources
Excludes reference list	Required for satisfactory progress	Approval must be provided in writing	Reference list does not count toward word limit

The proposal should clearly identify the following elements:

1. research problem or knowledge gap
2. theoretical approach and relevant literature
3. community or research context
4. research objectives/questions
5. methodology and methods
6. anticipated outcomes
7. proposed timeline and budget
8. 20–30-source reference list

Once the proposal has been approved by the supervisory committee, the student is formally considered an **MA candidate!** Failure to submit the proposal by the required deadline may be considered unsatisfactory academic progress.

This is something to keep in mind as you progress in your program. It is the responsibility of the student to stay on track and communicate with the supervisor(s) on a regular basis. See [above](#) for reference.



MA Thesis

The thesis should demonstrate the student's ability to conduct scholarly research and make, wherever possible, an original contribution to Indigenous Studies or a related field. The specific organization and format should be developed in consultation with the supervisor and supervisory committee.

Recommended Thesis Components

SECTION	PURPOSE
 Introduction	Establishes the research problem, questions, significance, contribution, and provides a roadmap for the thesis.
 Literature Review	Establishes key concepts and theoretical perspectives, engages relevant scholarship, and identifies the contribution or intervention of the research.
 Methodology	Explains the methodological approach, research methods, ethical considerations, and rationale for the approach.
 Results / Analysis	Presents and analyzes findings and connects them to relevant literature, community contexts, policy, or broader debates in Indigenous Studies.
 Conclusion	Synthesizes the research findings, addresses the research questions, identifies limitations, and suggests future directions.

NOTE: These elements **do not necessarily need to correspond to individual chapters**. Alternative formats may be appropriate depending on the research project.

 | **Typical MA thesis length: 25,000–50,000 words** | 



Thesis Format and Style

Students must follow current GPS requirements for thesis preparation, formatting, and submission. Students should consult GPS **before proceeding** if they are uncertain about an acceptable thesis format.

Carefully consult [GPS Thesis Requirements and Preparation](#)

FNS recommends the most recent edition of the **Chicago Manual of Style** for citation and referencing, consistent with common practice in Indigenous Studies. You can choose either *notes & bibliography* OR *author/date* formatting.

Students can access citation resources through the [University of Alberta Library's Chicago Style Guide](#).

Preparing for the Thesis Defence

The thesis defence is a formal oral examination of the student's research.

Defence Timeline

 6 WEEKS BEFORE	 4 WEEKS BEFORE	 DEFENCE	 REVISIONS	 FINAL SUBMISSION
Student → Supervisor	Committee Receives Thesis	Oral Examination	Complete Required Changes	GPS + FNS + Graduation
Submit completed thesis to supervisor for review and approval.	The supervisor forwards the approved thesis to the examining committee.	Students present and defend the research.	Complete revisions required by the committee.	Complete final GPS/FNS and graduation requirements.

Important: These are minimum timelines. Students should plan well in advance, as defence scheduling and examination timelines are not flexible.

The **supervisor** is responsible for selecting and communicating with the external examiner. Students do not make these arrangements.

Oral Examination

The MA defence is normally completed in the second year of the program and is chaired by a faculty member or professor from the UofA with a degree who is not the student's supervisor or co-supervisor.

The student normally begins with a research presentation of **up to and no more than 20-minutes**, followed by questions from the examining committee. The examination normally lasts **between two and three hours**.

After questioning, the committee deliberates without the student present. The Chair then communicates the decision to the student.

Examinations may be conducted in person, remotely, or using a combination of formats (i.e., hybrid), subject to University requirements.

✓ Possible Examination Outcomes

The examining committee may reach one of **four outcomes**:

 PASS	 PASS SUBJECT TO REVISIONS	 ADJOURNED	 FAIL
Only minor editorial or typographical changes are required.	The thesis is satisfactory, but revisions are required before final approval.	Substantial revisions or other circumstances require the examination to be reconvened.	The committee determines that the thesis and/or defence does not meet the requirements for the degree.

For **Pass Subject to Revisions**, the required changes and approval process must be communicated to the student in writing. Revisions must normally be completed **within six months of the examination**.

An **Adjourned** is an emergency category where examination may be reconvened when substantial revisions, additional research, or other exceptional circumstances require further examination. The reconvened examination must normally occur within six months.

Students should consult the [University Calendar for complete examination regulations and procedures](#).

Conflict of Interest

There must be no unmanaged conflict of interest among the student, supervisor, committee members, Chair, or examiner. Potential conflicts should be identified and disclosed **before the examination committee is approved**.

A conflict may arise from personal or professional relationships that could affect the academic relationship or examination process.

Where a conflict cannot be avoided, it must be disclosed in writing and appropriate measures must be established in consultation with FNS and/or GPS. Students may also consult an Associate Dean in GPS regarding their options.

No changes to committee membership may normally be made after the thesis has been submitted to the committee for examination.

See the [University Calendar's Conflict of Interest regulations](#) for complete requirements.

 MA Completion: at a glance

Important: Thesis-based master's students must normally complete their program within **two years** of their initial registration in the program. The University maximum completion period for full-time MA students is generally **four years**.

Extensions are exceptional and require approval.

Extensions are considered only in exceptional circumstances and require appropriate documentation and approval. Students should not assume that an extension will be granted. [GPS Graduate Program Regulations](#)

Students must apply for graduation through **Bear Tracks** by the deadlines published in the [Academic Schedule](#). To be eligible for convocation, students must complete all program requirements, including coursework, the GPS Ethics and Academic Citizenship requirement, thesis submission, and applicable graduation requirements, while maintaining the required academic standing.

Again, it is the responsibility of students to keep on track in their graduate program.

 Student Reminder

Your supervisor and supervisory committee are your primary academic resources throughout the thesis process. Start planning early, confirm deadlines with FNS and GPS, and discuss your research timeline regularly with your supervisor.

Note: This section summarizes FNS and GPS requirements for student use and does not replace the official University of Alberta Calendar, GPS regulations, or University policies. Students should always consult the current regulations when requirements or deadlines are in question on the FNS graduate webpage: [LINK](#).

Doctoral Program (PhD)

Purpose of the PhD

The PhD is a **research-intensive, terminal degree** designed to develop advanced expertise in the discipline of Indigenous studies and produce original contributions to scholarship.

Students complete coursework, comprehensive and candidacy examinations, and an original dissertation that is **theoretically and/or empirically rigorous** and defended before an examining committee.

Degree Requirements

All PhD students must complete program milestones in the following order:

1. **3-Required courses**
2. **Breadth Comprehensive Examination**
3. **Candidacy Proposal**
4. **Comps & Candidacy Defence**
5. **Dissertation Research & Writing**
6. **Final Oral Defence**

Students must also meet University of Alberta requirements established by the Faculty of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies (GPS). See the [University of Alberta Graduate Calendar](#) for university-wide regulations.

Three-Year Program: at a glance

The FNS PhD is designed as an **accelerated three-year program**.

Period	Main Milestones
Year 1 – Fall	Complete 3 required courses
Year 1 – Winter/Spring	Prepare breadth comprehensive exam + candidacy proposal
Year 1 – Spring/Summer	Complete oral comprehensive/candidacy examination and advance to candidacy
Year 2	Ethics approval (if required), primary/secondary research, dissertation writing
Year 3	Complete dissertation, revisions, examination and defence

The three-year timeline is a planning framework rather than a guarantee. Students should maintain regular communication with their supervisory committee and adjust milestones when necessary.

Important: The University maximum completion period for full-time PhD students is generally **six years**. Extensions are exceptional and require approval.

Extensions are considered only in exceptional circumstances and require appropriate documentation and approval. Students should not assume that an extension will be granted. [GPS Graduate Program Regulations](#)

Students must apply for graduation through **Bear Tracks** by the deadlines published in the [Academic Schedule](#). To be eligible for convocation, students must complete all program requirements, including coursework, the GPS Ethics and Academic Citizenship requirement, thesis submission, and applicable graduation requirements, while maintaining the required academic standing.



Residency Requirement

The FNS PhD requires two academic years of residency. However, students should consult their supervisors, as the ADGS and NS Student Services Advisors establish and monitor residency requirements.

The academic year is September–April. During residency, students are expected to be available on campus for required courses and teaching assistantships.

Students who need flexible living arrangements may consider options such as the [U of A Commuter Study Hostel](#) or make alternative arrangements.

Daily commuting from outside the Edmonton region is **not considered feasible** for the residency requirement.

For general university residency rules, see the [GPS Graduate Calendar](#).



Required Courses

Students must complete the following **three courses** before proceeding to the comprehensive examination and candidacy proposal stage:

- NS 620 – Advanced Theoretical Perspectives in Indigenous Studies
- NS 655 – Professional Seminar
- NS 690 – Advanced Research Methods

- **THES 909 – Thesis Research**

Students must receive satisfactory grades in all three courses.

Additional coursework may be required where a student does not have sufficient background in Indigenous Studies.

See the [current University of Alberta Academic Calendar program listing](#) for the official program requirements.

Supervision & Supervisory Committee

Every thesis-based graduate student must have a supervisor. Supervisors are normally selected in consultation with the student and are appointed by the Faculty. Supervisors must have appropriate expertise in the student's research area and meet the University's eligibility requirements.

Students and supervisors may request a change of supervisor during the program. Students are encouraged to discuss concerns about supervision as early as possible.

Resolving Supervisory Conflicts

Most concerns should first be addressed directly between the student and supervisor. If a concern cannot be resolved, the **ADGS** should be consulted. The ADGS may facilitate consultation or mediation and, where appropriate, involve FNS, GPS, the Student Ombuds, or other university resources.

If a supervisory relationship cannot continue, FNS will make reasonable efforts to identify alternative supervision. Students should consult the current [University Calendar regulations on supervision and conflict resolution](#) for complete procedures.

Supervisor(s)

The supervisor(s) role:

- guides the student's research and dissertation;
- assists with academic and professional development;
- works with the student to establish appropriate milestones; and
- helps coordinate the examination and dissertation defence process.

Students and supervisors may request a change of supervisor during the program.

See the [GPS regulations on supervision and supervisory committees](#).

The PhD supervisory committee has **three members**:

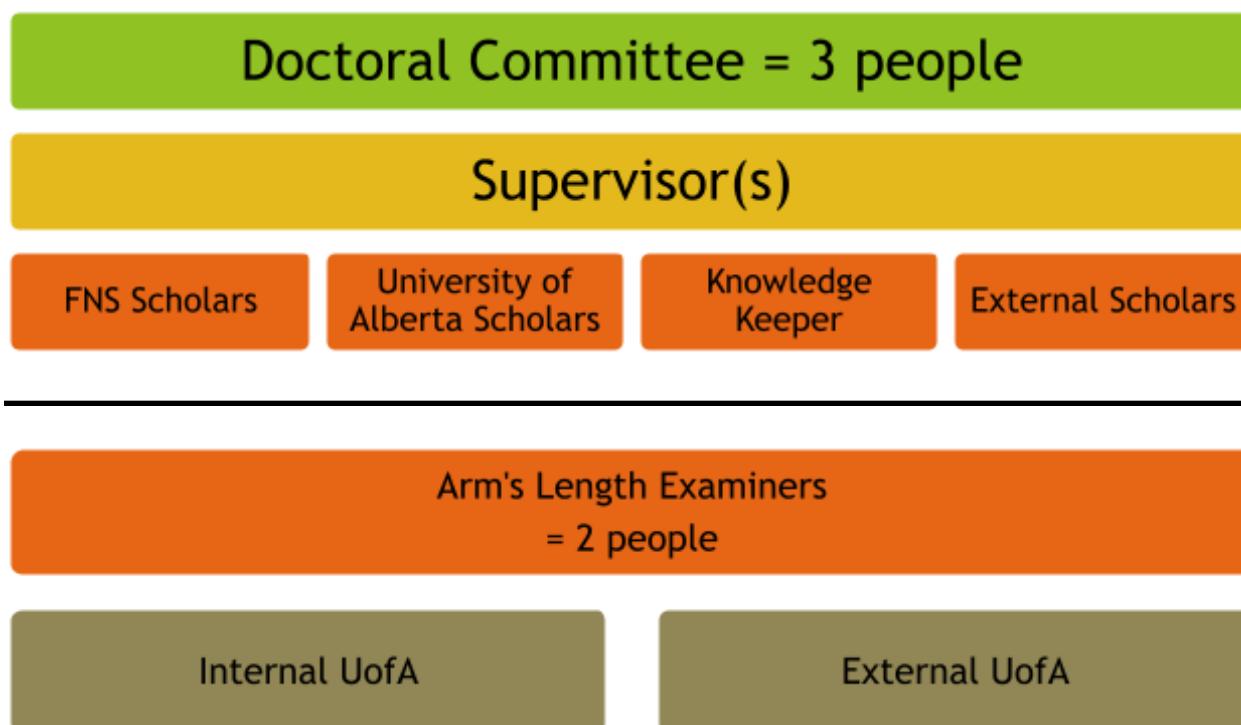
- i. Supervisor (from FNS) or Joint-Supervisors (FNS or UofA/outside)
- ii. Ex-Officio Member (from FNS)
- iii. Ex-Officio Member (within FNS or from UofA).

- NOTE: Students and supervisors can choose more committee members; *at their discretion*.
- The committee is constituted by the end of coursework in consultation with supervisor(s), and supports/examines the thesis research.

FNS guidance calls for regular committee meetings; PhD students have a formal annual review of degree progress through GPS.

Expectations that are not already stated in the Calendar or GPS Graduate Program Manual should be put in writing at the beginning of the supervisory relationship. See [below](#) for more information.

Supervisory Committee: at a glance





Comprehensive Exam & Candidacy

After completing coursework, students complete a **comprehensive exam** and a **candidacy proposal**.

- i. A comprehensive exam tests your broad mastery of foundational literature and theories across an entire academic discipline.
- ii. A candidacy exam evaluates your specific dissertation proposal and methodology to determine your readiness to execute independent doctoral research.

This process includes the following **three components**:

- 1) **Breadth Comp**: 1 comprehensive exam
- 2) **Candidacy Proposal**: 1 proposal regarding dissertation specialization
- 3) **Oral Defense** → An oral defense of the comprehensive exam and candidacy proposal, are conducted in **one four-hour** oral assessment: *1x breadth comp (2 hours) → 1x candidacy proposal (2 hours)*

NOTE: accommodations can be made for these exams.



Breadth Comprehensive Exam

The breadth examination is intended to demonstrate broad knowledge of Indigenous studies and the ability to engage critically and independently with the literature.

Student's Role:

- **Consult** with supervisor(s) and committee on reading lists
- Review the **Critical Indigenous Theory** list (mandatory)
- Select **two elective lists** that resonate with your work
- Write a **12,000-word comprehensive examination essay** responding to one question. NOTE: The question(s) is generated by the ADGS and is unique to each annual cohort of students.

Elective areas include:

- i. **Indigenous Governance (IG)**
- ii. **Indigenous Peoples and Place (P&P)**
- iii. **Indigenous Women: Gender, Sexuality, and Feminisms (IWGSF)**

Candidacy Proposal

Students develop a specialization reading list with their supervisor(s) and committee in order to prepare a **12,000-word dissertation proposal**.

The proposal should address following areas (as appropriate):

- Background and literature
- Theoretical approach
- Methodology and methods
- Research objectives
- Community objectives
- Anticipated outcomes
- Timeline and budget

Students must first submit a preliminary **two-page description of their dissertation vision** to assist the committee in developing the specialization reading list.

The specialization list is approximately **25 books (or equivalent scholarly material)**.

Exam Process Maps: at a glance

PROCESS MAP:			
Indigenous Studies Theory & Method	Elective List #1 <i>Choose One</i> P&P IG IWGSF	Elective List #2 <i>Choose One</i> P&P IG IWGSF	Specialization List 25 books (100 articles/chap) From Committee



 Preparing for your Examination: summary instructions**1. Breadth Comp Exam Question:**

- a. **Exam Question:** The Faculty of Native Studies (FNS) Graduate Studies Administration Committee (GSAC) will provide 1 exam question per cohort year (i.e., start of Winter semester). *Students must wait to hear from the ADGS.*
- b. **Breadth Response:** Students are required to respond to this 1 question using the three areas that will encompass the Critical Indigenous Theory list and the 2 elective lists.
- c. **Essay Length:** The student is expected to address this question in a 12,000-word written essay (including bibliography). This task requires the student to develop a comprehensive understanding of the literature and articulate a well-supported position, demonstrating an inter-textual, sophisticated grasp of the readings from all 3 lists.
- d. **Independent Exam:** Because this is a formal examination, the supervisor and committee can provide advice, but are not permitted to read the text to provide proofreading. This ensures that the work remains independent for the student. This is an exam!

2. Specialization List and Candidacy Proposal:

- a. **Purpose:** This specialization list and candidacy proposal are a core part of your doctoral degree. This proposal represents your program of study and research in your PhD.
- b. **Supervisor and Committee Support:** In contrast to the breadth exam, the supervisor and committee members are encouraged to support and provide feedback on the specialization list and candidacy proposal.
- c. **Short Description:** Students must provide a two-page description of their dissertation vision to help refine the specialization reading list. This will be done early in the process as it is a key component of setting the list.
- d. **Specialization Total Sources:** You will be reading approximately 25 books (or equivalent to 100 articles/chapters) for your specialization list that will inform your candidacy proposal.
- e. **Specialized Sources:** This list will be populated in collaboration with your supervisor and thesis committee. This is to ensure alignment with your proposed thesis project.
- f. **Using Breadth Comp List:** You are also allowed to use literature outlined in the breadth comprehensive exam, which includes the Critical Indigenous Theory List and the two elective lists so long as it relates to your program of research.
- g. **Essay Length:** The student must write a 12,000-word proposal that covers (but isn't limited to) the following areas:
 - i. Background literature
 - ii. Theoretical approach
 - iii. Methodology and Methods
 - iv. Scientific objectives
 - v. Community objectives
 - vi. Anticipated outcomes
 - vii. Timeline & Budget

Summary of Structure: summary

1. Breadth Comprehensive Exam (written): 12,000 words

1. Respond to one question developed by the GSAC committee—one question per cohort.
2. Response drawn from three lists: (1) the Critical Indigenous Theory list; and (2) choose two elective lists.
3. Word count includes cover page and full bibliography.

2. Candidacy Proposal (written): 12,000 words

1. A two-page summary of the thesis proposal is required beforehand to assist the supervisory committee in developing the Specialization list.
2. This is a dissertation proposal that includes a literature review, theoretical framework, methodology (i.e., theory and methods), and research plan.
3. Literature should be utilized from four lists: a Specialization List focused on the student's topic as well as the Critical Indigenous Theory list and two elective lists from the breadth comp.
4. Word count includes cover page and full bibliography. (Consult with your supervisor on bibliography length.)

3. Oral Defense (oral): Four-hour exam in one sitting

1. **Approval:** Prior approval from the supervisor is required to proceed to the exam and candidacy.
 - b. The Associate Dean of Graduate Studies (ADGS) appoints a chair for the exam.
3. The committee follows the [Calendar Policy for Doctoral Candidacy Examination Committees](#), identifies external examiners, and selects a date and time suitable for both the exam committee and the student.
4. The oral exam must be conducted at least one month after the examination committee receives the written exam materials.

Breadth Comprehensive Examination: Two hours

- The results of this exam determine whether the student can move on to candidacy.

Candidacy Examination: Two hours

- The results of this exam determine whether the student can move from doctoral student to doctoral candidate.

Oral Examination

The written breadth comprehensive exam and candidacy proposal are defended during a **single four-hour oral examination**:

Component	Time
Breadth Comprehensive Exam	2 hours
Candidacy Examination	2 hours

Successful completion advances the student to **PhD candidacy OR ABD (all but dissertation)**.

Planning Note: Written materials must be submitted sufficiently in advance of the examination to allow examiners time to review them. Students should work closely with their supervisor and Grad Chair when scheduling.

For university-wide doctoral examination requirements, see the [GPS Graduate Calendar – Supervision & Examination Committees](#).

Degree Progress: at a glance

TIMING	MILESTONE
September–December	Complete NS 620, NS 655 & NS 690
January	Select breadth reading lists
January–Summer	Read and write breadth comprehensive exam
January	Prepare 2-page dissertation description
January–Summer	Develop specialization list and candidacy proposal
Summer	Submit breadth comprehensive exam + candidacy proposal
Fall	Complete oral examination
Year 2	Research + dissertation writing
Year 3	Complete dissertation + defence

Degree Progress → 3-year PhD: at a glance

This “easy to follow” table provides an example of how your degree should proceed from course-work to comps/candidacy to research to dissertation defense.

DATE RANGE	ACTIVITY
September to December	Course Work (3x courses) 1. NS 620 – Advanced Theoretical Perspectives in Indigenous Studies 2. NS 655 – Professional Seminar 3. NS 690 – Advanced Research Methods
January to August	Breadth Comp and Candidacy Exam Process
January (early)	Breadth Comp – Choose Reading Lists - 1x IS Theory & Methods List - 2x Elective Lists - <i>Approval from Supervisor + Doctoral Committee</i>
Winter to Summer	Breadth Comp – Read and Write Comp Exam - 12,000 words - Represents <i>Independent Work</i> - Done Concurrently or Sequentially
January (early)	Candidacy Proposal – Write 2-Pager - Description of Dissertation - <i>Approval from Supervisor + Doctoral Committee</i> - NOTE: discuss w/t supervisor in Fall
January (early)	Candidacy Proposal – Choose Specialization List: - 25 books (equivalent 100 scholarly items) - <i>Approval from Supervisor + Doctoral Committee</i>
Winter to Summer	Candidacy Proposal – Read and Write Candidacy - 12,000 words - Done Concurrently or Sequentially
Summer (end)	Complete & Submit: Breadth Comp Exam + Candidacy Proposal - Approval: Supervisor and/or Doctoral Committee (discretion = student & supervisory) - ADGS appoints a chair for the exam
Fall (beginning)	Examination Defense (oral): - Conducted at least one month after the examination committee receives the written exam materials. - 3 Choices: In-Person; On-line; Hybrid.

Progress Reports

PhD students must complete a **formal progress report at least once every 12 months**.

The annual review provides an opportunity for the student and supervisory committee to:

- i. assess progress
- ii. identify challenges
- iii. establish upcoming milestones
- iv. confirm a realistic completion plan

Students should treat the annual meeting as an important planning tool rather than simply an administrative requirement.

Dissertation

After successfully completing candidacy, the student becomes a **PhD Candidate** and begins the primary dissertation phase.

The dissertation should normally be approximately **75,000–80,000 words** and must make an **original theoretical and/or empirical contribution** to the field.

 | **Typical PhD thesis length: 75,000–80,000 words** | 

Recommended Thesis Components

SECTION	PURPOSE
 Introduction	Establishes the research problem, questions, significance, contribution, and provides a roadmap for the thesis.
 Literature Review	Establishes key concepts and theoretical perspectives, engages relevant scholarship, and identifies the contribution or intervention of the research.
 Methodology	Explains the methodological approach, research methods, ethical considerations, and rationale for the approach.

● Results / Analysis	Presents and analyzes findings and connects them to relevant literature, community contexts, policy, or broader debates in Indigenous Studies.
● Conclusion	Synthesizes the research findings, addresses the research questions, identifies limitations, and suggests future directions.

NOTE: These elements **do not necessarily need to correspond to individual chapters**. Alternative formats may be appropriate depending on the research project.

For official thesis requirements, see the [GPS Thesis Preparation, Requirements + Deadlines](#).

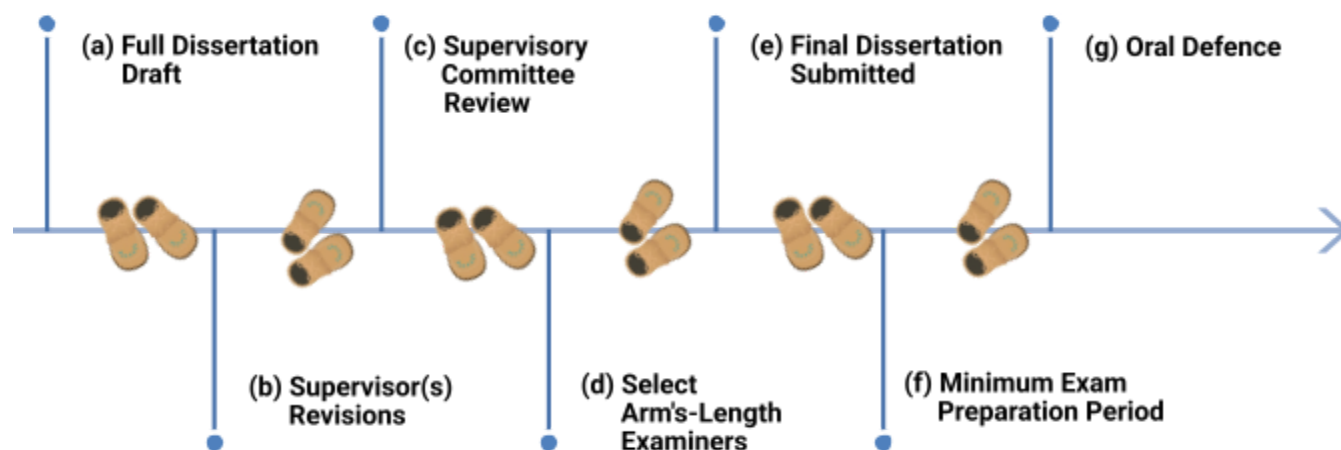
The current [GPS Minimum Formatting Requirements for Chapter- and Paper-Based Theses](#) should also be consulted before final submission.

FNS recommends the **Chicago Manual of Style** as the standard citation style for Indigenous Studies. Students can consult the [U of A Library Chicago & Turabian guide](#).

Dissertation Defence

The final oral examination is the **last major academic requirement** of the PhD.

Students should plan well ahead. A typical process involves (dancing):



Students should allow **several months** between completing a first full draft and the final defence. (so keep dancing!)

The examining committee normally includes:

- the supervisor and supervisory committee members;
- **two arm's-length examiners**;
- a non-examining chair; and
- any additional members required under GPS/FNS regulations.

The student normally begins with a **up to and no more than 20-minute presentation**, followed by questions from the examining committee.

Final Examination Outcomes

The dissertation defence can result in:

Pass

Only minor editorial or typographical revisions are required.

Pass subject to revisions

The dissertation is acceptable, but specified revisions must be completed without reconvening the examination committee.

Adjourned

Substantial revisions, additional research, or other circumstances require the examination to be reconvened.

Fail

The committee determines that the dissertation and/or defence does not meet doctoral standards.

For complete university procedures, consult the [GPS Graduate Calendar regulations](#).

Completing the PhD

Full-time students must normally complete the PhD within **six years** of their initial registration.

Extensions are possible only in exceptional circumstances and require approval.

For quick access to the official resources referenced in this section, see the Appendix: Essential Links & Student Resources.

Students should **not plan around an extension** and should work with their supervisory committee to maintain realistic milestones throughout the program.

Student takeaway

Coursework → Breadth Comp Exam → Candidacy → Research → Dissertation → Defence → PhD

The three-year structure is intentionally intensive. The best way to stay on track is to **establish milestones early, maintain regular contact with your supervisor and committee, and plan well ahead for examinations and dissertation submission.**

Financial Support & Graduate Assistantships

The Faculty of Native Studies (FNS) and the University of Alberta offer a range of funding opportunities for graduate students, including **scholarships, fellowships, bursaries, research travel funding, Teaching Assistantships (TAs), and Research Assistantships (RAs)**.

Students are strongly encouraged to seek funding throughout their program and to begin preparing applications well in advance of deadlines.

Fellowships, Scholarships & Bursaries

Funding is available through **national, provincial, university, and external sources**.

Major opportunities include:

- **SSHRC** – including Master's, Doctoral, and Canada Graduate Scholarships
- **Alberta Graduate Excellence Scholarship (AGES)** – see the [AGES information page](#)
- University of Alberta and Faculty-specific awards
- Indigenous-specific scholarships and awards
- External fellowships and bursaries

The University maintains a searchable collection of opportunities through [GPS Scholarships & Awards](#).

FNS Internal Deadline

Many competitive awards require **FNS review or nomination before submission to GPS**.

Unless otherwise specified by the Grad Chair:

Scholarship applications and award nominations must be submitted to the FNS NS Student Services Advisors at least TWO WEEKS before the GPS deadline.

Students should always check the specific award instructions for current deadlines.

Funding Tip

FNS regularly offers **SSHRC application workshops** for MA and PhD students. Students are strongly encouraged to attend before applying. These workshops provide guidance

on developing competitive applications and have been associated with stronger application success.

Students should also maintain their **Annual Report** and be prepared to provide a short description of their research and/or relevant experiences when being considered for competitive awards.

For information about administering awards, see the [GPS Scholarships & Awards Manual](#).



Indigenous Student Award Opportunities

Students should also explore Indigenous-specific awards, including opportunities administered through the First Peoples' House and other university units.

Award	Key Eligibility / Information	Value
Dorothy Leslie Memorial Award	U of A students of Indigenous ancestry/community membership; satisfactory academic standing	\$2,700
Dr. William Morrison MacKay Memorial Award	Indigenous students; minimum 2.7 GPA; financial need and community involvement considered	\$1,000
Billy Mills Award	Indigenous graduate/undergraduate students in thesis or major-paper programs; academic standing requirements apply	\$1,400

Note: Award eligibility, deadlines, values, and availability can change. Always consult the linked award page for current information.



Research & Conference Travel Funding

GPS provides funding to support graduate students who **present research at conferences or undertake research-related travel**.

Students should apply through the [Graduate Travel Awards](#) program as early as possible.

Funding is limited and **not every applicant can be guaranteed an award**.

FNS may have additional funding available for conference participation through the [FNS Graduate Student Travel Fund](#), subject to budget availability. **Students must apply for GPS travel funding first**, and FNS support is generally limited to students who are presenting their research.



Graduate Assistantships

FNS has a limited number of:

- **Teaching Assistantships (TAs)**
- **Research Assistantships (RAs)**

Assistantships support the Faculty's teaching and research while providing graduate students with valuable professional development and academic experience.

Availability depends on **course needs, faculty research funding, student qualifications, and available positions**.

Assistantships are normally available to students who are within their expected program completion period:

- **MA:** approximately 2 years
- **PhD:** approximately 3 years

Students must be registered in their graduate program and meet the requirements of the position.



Teaching Assistantships (TAs)

A TA appointment normally involves teaching-related duties for a **four-month term**.

Duties may include:

- preparing course materials or assignments;
- marking;
- facilitating discussions;
- limited lecturing under instructor supervision; and
- other instructional support.

Students are expected to prioritize their assigned TA responsibilities during the term and remain available from the beginning of term through **five days after final examinations**, unless released by their supervisor.

Students must:

- track their hours;
- work only the hours assigned;
- communicate promptly with their TA supervisor if assigned work cannot be completed within the allotted hours; and
- obtain advance approval for absences during the teaching term.

TA Allocation

TA assignments consider:

- academic performance and teaching ability;
- course instructional needs;
- equitable distribution of teaching opportunities;
- satisfactory academic progress;
- submission of required proposals and Annual Reports; and
- previous TA experience and performance.

Teaching Evaluations

Graduate teaching performance may be evaluated by students and/or course instructors.

Evaluations are confidential and may be considered when:

- awarding future TA appointments; or
- making teaching award nominations.



Research Assistantships (RAs)

RAs are generally funded through faculty research grants and are assigned at the discretion of the faculty member.

Whenever possible, RA work should provide **research and professional development value** connected to the student's interests.

Duties may include:

- research support;
- data collection;
- research organization;
- logistical coordination;
- literature reviews; and
- other research activities.

Responsibilities should be **established in writing at the beginning of the appointment**.

As with TAships, students must track their hours and work only the hours assigned.



Graduate Student Assistantship Agreement

All TA and RA appointments are governed by the **Graduate Student Assistantship Collective Agreement**.

Students should familiarize themselves with their rights, responsibilities, appointment conditions, and employment provisions in the [Graduate Student Assistantship Agreement](#).

Important: The collective agreement is the authoritative source for assistantship terms and conditions. Where Faculty guidance and the agreement differ, students should seek clarification from the appropriate FNS/GPS contact.

Funding Checklist for Graduate Students

Each year, students should:

- ☐ Review available **scholarships and bursaries**
- ☐ Check **SSHRC and major award deadlines**
- ☐ Submit FNS-reviewed applications **at least two weeks before the GPS deadline**
- ☐ Attend FNS **SSHRC workshops** where applicable
- ☐ Keep the **Annual Report** up to date
- ☐ Apply early for **research/conference travel funding**
- ☐ Monitor opportunities for **TA and RA appointments**
- ☐ Review the **Graduate Student Assistantship Collective Agreement** before accepting an appointment

Funding is competitive and not guaranteed. Students should pursue multiple funding opportunities and plan their applications well in advance.

For questions about FNS graduate funding, scholarships, awards, or assistantships, contact the FNS NS Student Services Advisors at nsgrad@ualberta.ca.



Graduate Student Participation & University Life

Graduate students are encouraged to participate in the broader life and governance of the University.

Opportunities may include:

- **Graduate Students' Association (GSA)** activities and governance;
- Faculty committees and councils;
- Graduate student representation;
- Professional development opportunities; and
- Participation in academic and community events.

FNS graduate students may also participate in Faculty governance and planning through student representation on the Faculty Council and other initiatives.

Appendix: Essential Links & Student Resources

Quick-reference links for the official resources referenced throughout this handbook. Always confirm current requirements, deadlines, and procedures on the official University pages.

Academic & Program Requirements

[University of Alberta Academic Calendar](#) – Official academic regulations, program requirements, schedules, and deadlines.

[GPS Graduate Program Manual](#) – University-wide graduate program policies and procedures.

[GPS Regulations & Policies](#) – Graduate regulations covering supervision, committees, examinations, and degree requirements.

[FNS Graduate Programs](#) – Faculty of Native Studies graduate program information.

[FNS PhD in Indigenous Studies](#) – Current FNS PhD program information.

[GPS Thesis Preparation, Requirements & Deadlines](#) – Current thesis/dissertation preparation and submission guidance.

[GPS Minimum Formatting Requirements – Chapter/Paper Based Theses](#) – Minimum formatting requirements for chapter- and paper-based theses.

[U of A Library – Chicago & Turabian Guide](#) – Citation and style guidance for Chicago/Turabian referencing.

Funding, Awards & Assistantships

[GPS Scholarships & Awards](#) – Graduate scholarships, awards, and funding opportunities.

[GPS Scholarships & Awards Manual](#) – Rules and procedures for merit-based graduate awards administered by GPS.

[Alberta Graduate Excellence Scholarship \(AGES\)](#) – Information about the Alberta Graduate Excellence Scholarship.

[GPS Graduate Travel Awards](#) – Graduate funding for eligible research and conference travel.

[Graduate Student Assistantship Collective Agreement](#) – Authoritative terms and conditions for graduate teaching and research assistantships.

Student Support & Research

[Indigenous Student Awards](#) – University information on Indigenous student awards.

[Research Ethics Office](#) – Human research ethics information and guidance.

[Graduate Students' Association \(GSA\)](#) – Graduate student representation, services, and advocacy.

[Student Services](#) – University student support services and resources.

[Bear Tracks](#) – Registration, student records, fees, and graduation applications.

[U of A Commuter Study Hostel](#) – Accommodation resource referenced in the PhD residency section.

[FNS Graduate Program – nsgrad@ualberta.ca](#) | [FNS Graduate Program Advisor – nsadvisor@ualberta.ca](#)

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