

Northwestern

Department of **Economics**

Terminal Master's
Degree
Graduate Student
Handbook

September 2026

Changes since Last Edition

- This is the first edition

This handbook describes the terminal MA degree in Economics. For other Masters' degrees in Economics see:

- Ad-hoc Combined MA Student Handbook (for PhD students in other departments and programs at Northwestern obtaining an MA in Economics in addition to their PhD)
- BA/MA Program Student Handbook (for undergraduates pursuing a combined BA and MA degree)
- Economics Ph.D. Student Handbook (for Economics PhD students obtaining an MA degree along the way to a PhD)

Available at:

<https://economics.northwestern.edu/graduate/student-resources/handbook.html>

This handbook is reissued as needed and represents the policies and degree requirements of the Department of Economics as of the date on the cover.

The requirements in this document are in addition to, or further elaborate upon, the general degree requirements and the policies on satisfactory progress, probation and exclusion adopted by The Graduate School (TGS) of Northwestern University.

Terminal M.A. in Economics Degree Requirements

Coursework Requirements

Total Units Required: 9

Course	Title
ECON 410-1,2,3	Microeconomics
ECON 411-1,2,3	Macroeconomics
ECON 480-1,2,3	Econometrics

Students must:

- Register for all nine required courses for letter grade (rather than pass / not pass (P/N))
- Do not have failing grades in any of the nine required courses.
- Have at least a 3.0 cumulative grade point average (GPA) and no X, Y, K, or NR grades on the transcript at the time of graduation. This is a TGS degree requirement.

It is strongly recommended that students attend ECON 401 *Mathematical Methods for Economic Theory* which is held in the three weeks prior to the start of the Fall Quarter. Graduate students do not formally register for this class. (The course is listed in the registration system in Fall Quarter, but registration is just for undergraduates in the accelerated BA/MA program.)

Other MA Degree Requirements

Examinations: none specified beyond course examinations

Research/Projects: none specified

Master's Thesis: none specified

Other: none specified

Satisfactory Academic Progress

Students must enroll for letter grades in Economics 410-1,2,3, 411-1,2,3 and 480-1,2,3 during their first year. Failure to enroll or dropping any of these classes, except in the case of an approved leave, results in exclusion from the MA program. There is no additional remediation period associated with this requirement.

TGS requires all students to maintain an overall cumulative grade average of B (3.0 GPA) and not have more than three incomplete (Y or X) grades. Students not meeting this requirement are placed on probation by TGS. Students on probation have two quarters (excluding summers) to remediate their grades or else are excluded from the program and Northwestern University. For example, a student who falls below a 3.0 GPA in the Fall Quarter and does not remediate by the end of the Spring Quarter is then excluded from the program and the University.

MA Time Limitation

Normally, the Economics MA requirements must be met within three quarters unless extended by an approved leave. Students should note that ECON 410-1, 411-1 and 480-1 are only offered in the Fall Quarter; ECON 410-2, 411-2 and 480-2 in the Winter Quarter; and ECON 410-3, 411-3 and 480-3 in the Spring Quarter.

Students must complete all the requirements for the master's degree within two years of the date of their initial registration in The Graduate School, which falls on the last day of the eighth quarter. Students who do not complete the degree within two years and were not previously granted deadline extensions related to approved leaves will be excluded from the MA program. There is no additional remediation period associated with this requirement.

Students who have

- (a) completed all nine required courses in the first year without any failing grades
- (b) have a cumulative GPA of less than 3.0, and
- (c) have not exceeded any two-quarter probationary period

can, at their own expense, register for additional Northwestern University courses available for graduate credit to attempt to improve their cumulative GPA to 3.0 or better to permit graduation with the MA.

Optional Transition to the Economics PhD Program

University Application Process

Students wishing to be considered for transition to the Economics PhD program must submit a new application to TGS by December 15. That is by the end of the first quarter of study. The submission is to the standard University application portal. We can apply for an application fee waiver.

Students may submit the same materials, references and transcripts that they used in their previous application.

Minimum Requirements

The student must achieve a cumulative grade point average (GPA) of 3.0 or greater in each of the three courses in each core area of study by the end of the third quarter of registration. Specifically:

- In microeconomics, a cumulative GPA of 3.0 or greater in ECON 410-1, ECON 410-2, and ECON 410-3.
- In macroeconomics, a cumulative GPA of 3.0 or greater in ECON 411-1, ECON 411-2, and ECON 411-3.
- In econometrics, a cumulative GPA of 3.0 or greater in ECON 480-1, ECON 480-2, and ECON 480-3.

Doctoral Admission Approval

Students who have met the requirements will be admitted to the PhD program immediately after Spring Quarter grades are filed. Entry into the PhD program will be effective with the following Fall Quarter.

As soon as the registration system shows the change in program from the MA to the PhD, international students should work with the Office of International Student and Scholar Services to update their immigration records. Students should do this promptly (and certainly within 60 days of the date of graduation with the MA degree) to ensure continuous status in the United States.

After Transition to the Economics PhD Program

Students who transition to the PhD should consult the PhD graduate student handbook for program requirements, milestones and practical information. This is posted at: <https://economics.northwestern.edu/graduate/student-resources/handbook.html>

Students should follow the curriculum and milestones as if they are commencing their second year of the PhD program.

The following modifications are necessary as TGS counts from the quarter of entry to the PhD program rather than from the date of entry to the MA program.

Candidacy Deadline

By meeting the minimum requirements to transition to the PhD, the student has already met the requirements for doctoral candidacy. The student should file for doctoral candidacy immediately on entry into the PhD program.

Prospectus Deadline

The wording of the departmental prospectus deadline is modified to reflect the period spent in the MA program, and now reads:

Students in the MA transitioning to PhD program must complete the coursework component of the Ph.D. degree and have their prospectus (dissertation proposal) approved by their committee no later than the end of the Fall Quarter in their fourth year of combined study for the MA and PhD degrees, which falls on the last date of the 9th quarter of study for the PhD. Any student not meeting this milestone is placed on departmental probation. A student who fails to resume satisfactory academic standing within two quarters, which is the last date of the Spring Quarter in their fourth year of combined study for the MA and PhD degrees (last date of the 11th quarter of study for the PhD), is excluded from the program and Northwestern University.

Good Progress on Dissertation

Students in their fifth year of combined study for the MA and PhD degrees must be certified as making “good progress” on their dissertation by July 31 at the end of each year. A student not meeting this milestone is placed on departmental probation. Students are removed from probation if their thesis advisor writes to the Director of Graduate Studies advising that satisfactory progress has resumed. A student who fails to resume good progress within two quarters, which is the last date of the following Winter Quarter, is excluded from the program and Northwestern University.

Annual Certification of Good Progress

To determine the appropriate year-specific requirements for good progress, students should add one year to their date of entry into the PhD program.

Funding

Northwestern University does not provide funding for Masters’ study.

For students successfully transitioning to the PhD program, funding is available starting when they enter the PhD program in the Fall Quarter. The standard TGS funding package will be offered. Currently, this is for 20 quarters from entry into the PhD program. This may be modified if the standard funding package changes.

While students transitioning from the MA to the PhD are eligible for dissertation year fellowship funding, they are not eligible for the fellowships normally taken in the first year of PhD study. Funding prior to any dissertation year fellowship is as a Teaching Assistant or a Research Assistant if a student does not hold an outside fellowship. Working as a Teaching Assistant requires demonstration of proficiency in spoken English. This can occur in several ways:

- Obtaining an undergraduate degree from an accredited institution where the language of instruction is English,
- Scoring 26 or higher on the speaking section of the TOEFL Internet-based test taken in the two years prior to entry to Northwestern,
- Scoring 8 or higher on the speaking section of the IELTS test taken in the two years prior to entry to Northwestern, or
- Taking the Versant English Test and scoring at least 65 (out of a possible 80). This test is not normally available to MA students, but the Graduate Program Manager can arrange it to be taken midway through the MA year.

Nondiscrimination Statement

Northwestern University prohibits discrimination on the basis of actual or perceived race, color, religion, creed, national origin, ethnicity, caste, sex, pregnancy, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, parental status, marital status, age, disability, citizenship status, veteran status, genetic information, reproductive health decision making, height, weight, or any other class of individuals protected from discrimination under federal, state, or local law, regulation, or ordinance or any other classification protected by law in the matters of admissions, employment, housing or services or in the educational programs or activities it operates, as required by Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972; Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, as amended in 2008; Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973; Title VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964; the Age Discrimination Act of 1975; the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967; and any other federal, state, or local laws, regulations, or ordinances that prohibit discrimination, harassment, and/or retaliation.

It is the policy of Northwestern University to comply with Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, which prohibits discrimination (including sexual harassment and sexual violence) based on sex in the University's educational programs and activities. Title IX also prohibits retaliation for asserting or otherwise participating in claims of sex discrimination.

The Title IX coordinator and the deputy coordinators (listed under [Our Staff](#)) have been designated to oversee Northwestern's compliance with Title IX and to respond to reports of violations. For more information about Title IX, go to Northwestern's [Title IX website](#). A person may also file a complaint with the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights regarding an alleged violation of Title IX by visiting [the U.S. Department of Education's website](#) or calling (800) 421-3481.