

YEAR 3 OVERVIEW

Review the [Handbook](#) for detailed information and regulations.

YEAR 3	Fall (6 th semester)	Spring (7 th semester)	Summer (8 th semester)
Milestones		Qualifying Exam	IDP for Year 4
Courses	NSCI 790 Course Requirement	NSCI 790 Course Requirement	GRSC 802 or NSCI 790

IMPORTANT DATES:

September 15 - Year 3 IDP Due
February/March - Plan Qualifying Exam

May 15 - Qualifying Exam Date Due
August 15 - Qualifying Exam Done

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Review the [list of courses pre-approved to satisfy the requirements](#):

- Statistics Course*
- Quantitative and Computational Course*
- Additional Neuroscience-Related Course*

Remember...

- *Two must be 4-unit courses. One may be either: two 2-unit courses OR a 3-unit course
- *Two must be 500-level courses. One may be a 400-level course

Use the [Academic Course Plan](#) to track your completed and outstanding course requirements.

QUALIFYING EXAM: PLANNING YOUR DISSERTATION RESEARCH

The written exam is a research proposal for your dissertation project. It ensures that the project is sound and likely to yield substantive and original findings. It can also be used as a basis for fellowship grant applications.

- Typically includes your Aims, Research Strategy, and References. Confirm sections with your Mentor and Chair!

The oral component demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of the proposed research. You defend the written proposal, answer questions, and address any weaknesses in the proposal.

- Typically a 1-1.5 hour presentation followed by Q&A. Confirm with your Mentor and Chair!

25 units of coursework must be completed before taking your Qualifying Exam.

Work with your Committee to schedule the oral exam date, time, and location.

All committee members must be present, but the exam may be held in-person, remote, or hybrid.

Your Qualifying Exam counts as your APR for that academic year.

- **30 days in advance:** Submit the [Request to Take the Qualifying Exam](#) form
- **3 weeks in advance:** Submit written proposal to your committee and Charly

ADVANCING TO CANDIDACY

Successfully passing the Qualifying Exam means you're now a doctoral candidate! NGP Admin will notify you once your candidacy paperwork has been signed by your committee and processed by the Graduate School.

Next you will appoint your **Dissertation Committee**, which will oversee your dissertation research, writing, and defense.

You can have the same members from your Qualifying Exam Committee, change members, or potentially have a smaller committee.

Deadlines:

- **Within 6 months of passing the Qualifying Exam:** Submit the [Appointment of Dissertation Committee form](#)

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

Minimum of 3 USC faculty:

- **Member 1 (Chair):** NGP faculty; cannot be NGP Associate Member or your Mentor
- **Member 2 (Mentor):** NGP faculty
- **Member 3 (Optional):** NGP or non-NGP
- **Member 4 (Optional):** NGP, non-NGP, or External faculty
- **Member 5 (Outside Member):** USC faculty; If NGP faculty, must be in a different department than your Mentor. If non-NGP faculty, may be in the same department as your Mentor.

A non-USC faculty member from another university can serve as an **External Member** (Member 4). They *cannot* serve as or replace the *Outside Member*, and they require approval from the NGP Director.

YEARLY REQUIREMENTS

Individual Development Plan (IDP)

Work with your mentor to set goals for the upcoming year. By the end of Year 3, your IDP should include concrete milestones for publishing your work, and you should have at least a rough idea of the "shape" of your dissertation.

Use the [IDP Template](#) or [My IDP Science Careers](#).

September 15: Year 3 IDP Due

Student Support Forms

Students must report their source of funding to NGP for each upcoming semester.

October 15: [Spring Support Form](#) Due

March 15: [Summer Support Form](#) Due

May 15: [Fall Support Form](#) Due

This is separate from the **Award Letter** you receive from your mentor's department, which outlines the terms of your award that semester.

SEMESTER EVALUATIONS

Starting in year 2, your mentors submit evaluations at the end of each semester to share student progress. NGP Admin collects the evaluations and sends students an official evaluation letter. See the Handbook for detailed information.

NOTE ON DUAL ENROLLMENT

The Graduate School rarely permits students to enroll concurrently in NGP and in another graduate or certificate program. NGP students must first obtain approval from the NGP Director and provide evidence of the research mentor's approval to petition enrollment in another program. Failure to follow these procedures is considered a basis for dismissal from NGP. Students will be solely responsible for tuition fees, and the final decision is made by the Vice Provost for Graduate Studies.