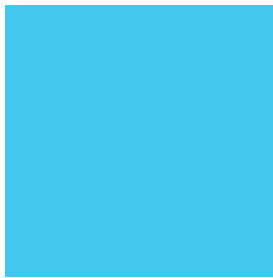


2026-2027 Student Handbook

Department of Nutrition Sciences

PhD in Nutrition Sciences



UAB
The University of
Alabama at Birmingham.
School of Health Professions

UAB SCHOOL OF HEALTH PROFESSIONS
DEPARTMENT OF NUTRITION SCIENCES
PHD IN NUTRITION SCIENCES
2026-2027 ACADEMIC HANDBOOK

Paula Chandler-Laney

Paula Chandler-Laney, PhD
Program Director

09/24/2026

Date

Barbara Gower

Barbara Gower, PhD
Chair, Department of Nutrition Sciences

09/24/2026

Date

Mark Merrick

Mark Merrick, PhD, AT, ATC, FNATA, FNAP,
FASAHP
Dean
School of Health Professions

09/24/2026

Date

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INTRODUCTION

DEAN'S WELCOME MESSAGE

Welcome to the University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Health Professions where you are joining a legacy of excellence!

We are one of the six schools comprising the renowned UAB Academic Health Center. We offer more than 30 programs and 40 offerings at the certificate, baccalaureate, master's, and doctoral levels. And we are home to nearly 3,000 undergraduate and graduate students.

You came here for an outstanding education, and we provide exactly that. However, **only you** can control whether you will become an excellent professional. To do so, you must challenge yourself every day and take advantage of all our vast resources, state-of-the-art facilities and research opportunities during your academic and clinical education. You also need to make the most of your access to the world-class faculty who are here to teach and support your journey. You didn't enroll here to be to be an amateur. You came to become a professional, and not an average one. I encourage you to become a "Pro" and an excellent one at that. Own it, live it, excel at what you do, and make both us and yourself proud.

I look forward to seeing you grow in your respective fields and watching you become the leader we know you can be.

Go Blazers!

Mark Merrick, Ph.D., AT, ATC, FNATA, FNAP, FASAHP

Dean, UAB School of Health Professions

OVERVIEW OF THE SCHOOL OF HEALTH PROFESSIONS

The UAB School of Health Professions (SHP) is one of the largest academic institutions of its type in the United States. What began in the 1950s as a collection of training programs in various para-professional disciplines has grown into an internationally recognized center of academic and research excellence.

Today, we have five academic departments – Clinical and Diagnostic Sciences, Health Services Administration, Nutrition Sciences, Occupational Therapy, and Physical Therapy – that are housed in four buildings: Susan Mott Webb Nutrition Sciences Building (WEBB), Learning Resource Center (LRC), the School of Health Professions Building (SHPB), and the Center for Biophysical Sciences and Engineering (CBSE).

We are proud of many accomplishments including:

- *U.S. News & World Report* ranks all eligible SHP programs in the nation's top 25.
- Research funding is at an all-time high of \$26+ million and growing.
- Nearly 10 of our programs you will only find in Alabama at UAB.

- Our school has never been stronger or better positioned as a national leader in health professions education. And this status will only grow stronger as we continue to welcome students like you.

DISCLAIMER

This Handbook is an overview of general academic regulations specific to SOHP programs at UAB. Although UAB will make its best efforts to abide by this handbook, UAB reserves the right to interpret and apply its procedures and policies, and to deviate from these guidelines, as appropriate in the particular circumstances and in accordance with the mission and goals of the program. UAB also reserves the right to address issues not covered in this handbook and to make changes to the policy without advance notice. Changes become effective at the time the proper authorities determine so and the changes apply to both prospective students and those already enrolled. Please refer to our website for the most up-to-date version.

All students are responsible for knowing and abiding by the general University rules and regulations pertaining to studying at UAB and the specific academic requirements of their particular degree program. This Handbook is not intended to nor does it contain all policies or regulations applicable to students. Each student is responsible for familiarizing him/herself with the contents of this Handbook. Although the policies contained herein are intended to reflect current rules and policies of the University, users are cautioned that changes or additions may have become effective since the publication of this material. In the event of a conflict, current statements of Board policy contained in the Bylaws, Rules, official minutes, and other pronouncements of the Board or Chancellor, or superseding law, shall prevail.

This Handbook does not constitute a contract and may not be deemed or construed as part of any contract between UAB and any student or student representative.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION YOU SHOULD KNOW

Although UAB works hard to prepare students for future careers in their desired fields, employment and salaries are not guaranteed. Employment outcomes depend on a student's efforts and market conditions. Students are responsible for understanding their financial responsibilities. [Tuition costs can be found on this UAB website](#). Scholarships are competitive and not guaranteed.

Admission to other graduate or professional programs is also not guaranteed. Advisors will provide students with guidance, but students are ultimately responsible for degree completion, and timelines for completion may vary based on individual circumstances.

SECTION 1 – SCHOOL AND UNIVERSITY INFORMATION

ACADEMIC CALENDAR

All dates related to registration, payments of tuition and fees, drop/add dates, other administrative requirements, and official school holidays are recorded on the [UAB Academic Calendar](#).

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY CODE

The University established a new Academic Integrity Code effective August 23, 2021. This Code, which applies to undergraduate, graduate, and professional students as well as all academic activities, defines academic misconduct and outlines procedures for breaches of the code. The Academic Integrity Code process is managed by the Academic Integrity Coordinator (AIC). In the School of Health Professions, the AIC is the Associate Dean for Academic and Faculty Affairs, and the office is located in SHPB 660. [You can see the full text of the Academic Integrity Code online.](#)

ADVISING

Undergraduate student advising is provided through advisors assigned to each program as well as through the Office of Student Services. Advisor and recruiter contact information can be found on the [Office of Student Services Website](#). Graduate student advising is provided through the SHP graduate programs.

AMBASSADORS

Ambassadors help to spread awareness of the School of Health Professions and its multifaceted undergraduate and graduate programs, serve as liaisons between the department and university-wide student organizations, and serve as a student voice in school and university committees. The SHP Ambassadors help to support the programs within the school that will impact recruitment and retention initiatives. [You can learn more about the SHP Ambassadors on their webpage.](#)

ASKIT

AskIT is the technology help desk for faculty, staff, and students. You will be asked to supply your BlazerID when you request assistance. Contact them by phone at 205-996-5555 or [via email](#) or [visit the AskIT service portal online](#).

ATTENDANCE

Class attendance is expected in all SHP programs. Specific class, laboratory, or clinical site attendance requirements may be more stringent than university guidelines. Refer to the program requirements in this handbook and in course syllabi for policies. The UAB attendance policy is as follows:

The University of Alabama at Birmingham recognizes that the academic success of individual students is related to their class attendance and participation. Each course instructor is responsible for establishing policies concerning class attendance and make-up opportunities. Any such policies, including points for attendance and/or participation, penalties for absences, limits on excused absences, total allowable absences, etc., must be specified in the course syllabus provided to students at the beginning of the course term. Such policies are subject to departmental oversight and may not, by their specific prescriptions, negate or circumvent the accommodations provided below for excused absences.

The University regards certain absences as excused and in those instances requires that instructors provide a reasonable accommodation for the student who misses assignments, presentations, examinations, or other academic work of a substantive nature by virtue of these excused absences. Examples include the following:

- Absences due to jury or military duty, provided that official documentation has been provided to the instructor in a timely manner in advance.
- Absences for students who have approved disability-related absence accommodations through Disability Support Services may follow the reasonable number of absences outlined in their flex plan or as determined by the instructor. Students are responsible for notifying instructors of these and any other approved accommodations through their Notice of Accommodations letter.
- Absences due to participation in university-sponsored activities when the student is representing the University in an official capacity and as a critical participant, provided that the procedures below have been followed:
 - Before the end of the add/drop period, students must provide their instructor a schedule of anticipated excused absences in or with a letter explaining the nature of the expected absences from the director of the unit or department sponsoring the activity.
 - If a change in the schedule occurs, students are responsible for providing their instructors with advance written notification from the sponsoring unit or department.
- Absences due to other extenuating circumstances that instructors deem excused. Such classification is at the discretion of the instructor and is predicated upon consistent treatment of all students.
- Absences due to religious observances provided that students give faculty written notice prior to the drop/add deadline of the term.

In these instances, instructors must give students the opportunity to complete assignments in a way that corresponds as much as possible to the nature, scope, and format of the original. Options may include making up exams or other assignments, rescheduling student classroom presentations, or arranging for early or late submission of written assignments. The course make-up policy should be included in the syllabus.

BLAZERID / BLAZERNET / EMAIL

BLAZERID

All students receive a unique identifier, the BlazerID, established at [BlazerID Central](#). Your BlazerID is required for accessing BlazerNET and other campus resources. To activate one's BlazerID, select "Activate Accounts."

BLAZERNET

[BlazerNet](#) is the official portal of the UAB information network and is accessible from any Internet-accessible computer, on- or off-campus.

EMAIL

UAB student email is provided through Microsoft Office 365, a cloud-based system. Students have 50 GB of email space and 25 GB of free file 1 TB storage. The UAB email is the official communication medium for courses, news, information, and announcements. Students should not forward their UAB account to a personal email account. UAB is not responsible for information not received by the student due to the 'redirecting' of a UAB account to another email server.

BLAZER EXPRESS

The UAB Blazer Express Transit System provides transportation throughout the UAB campus. With a valid UAB ID badge, students can enjoy fare-free bus transportation. All buses are ADA-accessible and can seat approximately 35 riders. For an updated schedule, route maps, and hours of operation please [visit the Blazer Express website](#).

BOOKSTORE

There is one bookstore located on the UAB campus in the Hill Student Center. It offers a wide variety of products and services to students, including online purchasing and shipping. The bookstore stocks UAB memorabilia and college wear in addition to all required textbooks and course material. Visit [the UAB Barnes and Noble Bookstore online](#) for more details.

CAMPUS ONECARD

The UAB OneCard is the official university identification card. It is used for personal identification, for entry to campus events and the recreation center, for library checkout, and for other UAB services. It also serves as a declining balance card for the UAB meal plans and for Blazer Bucks accounts. Additional information is available on the [UAB OneCard website](#).

CAMPUS MAP

[UAB's campus map can be found online.](#)

CAMPUS SAFETY

[Campus safety procedures and resources can be accessed online.](#)

CANVAS LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

The Canvas Learning Management System is the platform used for managing instructional materials online. Canvas course sites are accessed through BlazerNET or at the [UAB Center for Teaching and Learning website](#). Students should monitor their course sites routinely for communication from faculty and to manage course assignments.

CATALOG

The UAB Catalog is published annually and includes UAB's courses, policies, and curricula. Students can [find the Undergraduate or Graduate catalog online](#).

COMMUNITY STANDARDS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

[Community Standards and Accountability](#) is responsible for upholding the integrity and purpose of the University through the fair and consistent application of policies and procedures to students' behavior to ensure a community that respects the dignity and right of all persons to reach their highest potential. UAB Student Advocacy, Rights & Conduct (SARC) delivers programs and services in order to promote student safety and success, the pursuit of knowledge, respect for self and others, global citizenship, personal accountability and integrity, and ethical development. More information can be found at the [UAB SARC website](#). [The UAB student conduct code may be accessed online](#).

COUNSELING SERVICES

Student Counseling Services offers no cost, confidential counseling for UAB students related to physical, emotional, social, intellectual, or spiritual concerns. Student Counseling Services is located on the 3rd floor of the Student Health and Wellness Center at 1714 9th Avenue South. For more information, call 205-934-5816 or [visit the Student Counseling Services website](#).

DISABILITY SUPPORT SERVICES (DSS)

UAB is committed to providing an accessible learning experience for all students. If you are a student with a disability that qualifies under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and/or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and you require accommodations, please [contact Disability Support Services for information on accommodations, registration, and procedures](#). Requests for reasonable accommodations involve an interactive process and consist of a collaborative effort among the student, DSS, faculty, and staff. If you have a disability but have not contacted DSS, please call 205-934-4205 or visit [the DSS website](#).

If you are a student registered with Disability Support Services, it is your responsibility to contact the course instructor to discuss the accommodations that may be necessary in each course. Students with disabilities must be registered with DSS and provide an accommodation request letter before receiving academic adjustments. Reasonable and timely notification of accommodations for the course is encouraged and provided to the course instructor so that the accommodations can be arranged.

EMERGENCIES

Report suspicious or threatening activity to the UAB Police Department immediately. Law enforcement officers are available 24 hours, seven days a week. Also, more than 300 emergency blue light telephones connected directly to the police dispatch are located throughout campus.

BEHAVIORAL THREAT ASSESSMENT AND MANAGEMENT (BTAM)

The UAB and UAB Medicine Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management Team (BTAM) is an interdisciplinary team dedicated to maintaining a safe, secure, and healthy campus environment for all students, employees, and visitors. BTAM uses a structured, proactive process to identify, assess, and manage behavioral threats to campus safety and well-being. Concerning behaviors—such as a significant change in academic performance or conduct, aggressive or irrational behavior, expressions of severe distress, or inability to control anger—should be reported promptly. Non-emergency situations involving students may be reported through the Division of Student Affairs at (205) 975-9509 or via the online reporting form. For more information, visit the [UAB BTAM website](#).

UAB POLICE:

For an emergency, dial 911 *from a campus phone*. For non-emergencies call: 205-934-3535 or 205-934-HELP (4357) or 205-934-4434.

Emergencies affecting campus are communicated via the following:

- UAB Severe Weather & Emergency Hotline 205-934-2165
- [UAB home webpage](#)
- [UAB Emergency Management webpage](#)
- Announcements on [BlazerNET](#)
- Cell phone messages and SMS text via B-ALERT. [Register for B-ALERT online](#).

NONDISCRIMINATION STATEMENT:

UAB is an [Equal Employment/Equal Educational Opportunity Institution](#) dedicated to providing equal opportunities and equal access to all individuals regardless of race, color, religion, ethnicity, national origin, sex (including pregnancy), genetic information, age, disability, and veteran's status. As required by Title IX, UAB prohibits sex discrimination in any education program or activity that it operates. Individuals may report concerns or questions to UAB's Assistant Vice President and Senior Title IX Coordinator. [The Title IX notice of nondiscrimination is located online](#).

FERPA TRAINING

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) of 1974 provides protection for all educational records related to students enrolled in an educational program. UAB has a dedicated [FERPA website](#) with information about your rights and protection of your records. You may [email any questions or concerns about FERPA issues](#) to FERPA@uab.edu. All SHP students are required to complete FERPA Training. The course can be accessed at [THIS WEBSITE](#).

FINANCIAL AID

Financial Aid Counselors are available each day in the One Stop Student Services Office located in the Hill Student Center, [1400 University Blvd.](#) Suite 103. If you have general questions, you can contact the Office of Student Financial Aid at 205-934-8223 or [via email](#). For additional financial aid information [visit the UAB Cost & Aid website](#).

FOOD SERVICES

There are several dining facilities available on campus. The [campus dining map](#) can show you the closest to the SHP buildings. For additional information about meal plans and campus dining facilities [visit the Campus Dining website](#).

GRADUATE SCHOOL

The UAB Graduate School offers doctoral programs, post-master's specialist programs, and master's level programs. Graduate programs in SHP are coordinated through the Graduate School, and students must adhere to the Graduate School policies and procedures. Graduate School information for current students is available at [the UAB Graduate School website](#). Policies and Procedures for the Graduate School can be found in the [Graduate School Catalog](#).

GRADUATION

All students must complete an application for degree six months prior to graduating and no later than the deadline in the academic calendar. The University holds commencement every semester. Check the [UAB commencement website](#) for the most current information.

HEALTH INSURANCE

To ensure that all students have adequate health care coverage, including ongoing primary and specialty care, the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) requires all students to have major medical health insurance. Students can provide proof of their own private coverage or be enrolled in the Student Health Insurance Plan. The plan is a 1-year commercial policy provided by United HealthCare and is re-negotiated annually. This policy is a comprehensive health insurance policy at an affordable cost that is specifically designed to meet the needs of UAB Students. If you are required to have insurance but have sufficient coverage on another plan and wish to opt out of the Student Health Insurance Plan, you are required to submit a waiver to Student Health Services at the beginning of every semester. More information including submitting a waiver can be found at the [UAB Student Health Insurance Waivers website](#).

HIPAA TRAINING

The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) includes significant requirements for protecting individual privacy of health information. All students in the School of Health Professions must complete an online tutorial and be tested on HIPAA regulations at the time of program admission. A BlazerID is required to access the training site, located at [UAB Online](#)

[Learning](#). Compliance with the training requirement is monitored by the Office of Academic and Faculty Affairs.

HONOR SOCIETIES

All students in the School of Health Professions are eligible for consideration for the Alpha Eta Honor Society. The UAB Chapter of this Society recognizes students registered in the final term of a baccalaureate or graduate health professions program. Inductees must have a cumulative grade point average of 3.0 (4.0 = A) and be in the upper 10% of their program. Nominations are made by program directors in spring and summer terms.

IMMUNIZATION POLICY

To provide a safe and healthy environment for all students, faculty, and staff at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB), first-time entering students, international students and scholars, and students in clinical & non-clinical programs, must provide proof of immunization against certain diseases, unless they have an approved medical or religious exemption. Full details can be found on the [UAB Immunizations webpage](#).

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR HUMAN USE (IRB)

Student researchers must comply with all requirements for protection of human subjects. Detailed information is available on the [IRB website](#).

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

Intellectual property refers to an asset that originated conceptually, such as literary and artistic works, inventions, or other creative works. These assets should be protected and used only as the creator intends. Training materials defining inventor status, patent criteria, and other intellectual property issues, as well as University Policies on Patents, Copyright, and Intellectual Property are on [the Office of Compliance & Risk homepage](#).

LACTATION CENTERS

The University has provided several lactation centers for students, faculty, and staff across the campus. Visit [the UAB Lactation Resources webpage](#) for a resource guide and a location map. The School of Health Professions' lactation room is in the Susan Mott Webb Nutrition Sciences Building at [1675 University Blvd](#), Room 431. Lactating students enrolled in the School of Health Professions

have access to the room via their student ID/OneCard. If you cannot access the room, contact the building administrator, Julia Tolbert-Jackson at 205-873-5666.

LIBRARIES AND LEARNING RESOURCE CENTER

[UAB's libraries](#) house excellent collections of books, periodicals, microforms, and other media. Students have online remote access to catalogs and online collections. Computers are available for student use during regular hours of operation.

SHP LEARNING RESOURCE CENTER (LRC)

The School of Health Professions Learning Resource Center (LRC) provides a unique set of enterprise solutions that promote an exciting, intriguing, and innovative learning environment. It provides audio/visual support, and information technology management of public, classroom, and testing labs. The building is at [1714 9th Avenue South](#), and the SHP student space is on the second floor. You can contact LRC staff [via email](#) or via phone at 205-934-5146.

LISTER HILL LIBRARY OF THE HEALTH SCIENCES

[Lister Hill Library](#) (LHL) is the largest biomedical library in Alabama and one of the largest in the south. It is located [across the crosswalk](#) from the School of Health Professions.

MERVYN H. STERNE LIBRARY

[Mervyn H. Sterne Library](#) has a collection of more than one million items supporting teaching and research in the arts and humanities, business, education, engineering, natural sciences and mathematics, and social and behavioral sciences. It is located at [917 13th Street South](#).

UAB STUDENT CONDUCT CODE

The Student Conduct Code promotes honesty, integrity, accountability, rights, and responsibilities expected of students consistent with the core missions of the University of Alabama at Birmingham. This Code describes the standards of behavior for all students, and it outlines students' rights, responsibilities, and the campus processes for adjudicating alleged violations. Behavior that violates UAB standards of conduct listed within the Student Conduct Code and elsewhere will be subject to disciplinary action through the appropriate conduct process. Whether it is determined that an individual or group is responsible for the violation(s), either by direct involvement or by condoning, encouraging, or covering up the violation, appropriate response will occur with respect to the individual(s) and/or group involved.

[Undergraduate Non-Academic Policies](#)

[Graduate Non-Academic Policies](#)

ONE STOP STUDENT SERVICES

The mission of the One Stop is to provide a single point of professional integrated service to students. The One Stop serves students who need assistance with academic records, financial aid, registration, student accounting, OneCard, and other related topics. One Stop is located in the Hill

Student Center, [1400 University Blvd.](#) Suite 103. You may contact the [One Stop](#) office by phone or email at 205-934-4300, 855-UAB-1STP (855-822-1787), [or via email](#).

PARKING

Student vehicles must be registered with [UAB Parking and Transportation Services](#), located at [608 8th Street South](#). Parking is allocated on a first-come, first-served basis. Parking fees are established by location, payable by semester or year, and are billed to the student's account.

PLAGIARISM AND TURNITIN

Plagiarism violates the Academic Integrity Code and will be addressed in accordance with it. All papers submitted for grading in any SHP program may be reviewed using the online plagiarism monitoring software. Please note that all documents submitted to [Turnitin](#) are added to their database of papers that is used to screen future assignments for plagiarism.

RECREATION CENTER

The [Campus Recreation Center](#) is located at [1501 University Blvd.](#) A valid student identification card or membership card is required for access. Facilities include basketball courts, racquetball courts, weight rooms, swimming pools, exercise rooms, and indoor track.

SCHOOL OF HEALTH PROFESSIONS AWARDS

All students in the School of Health Professions are eligible for consideration for [the SHP Student Awards Program](#), which includes the following awards:

- Alfred W. Sangster Award for Outstanding International Student – This award is presented annually to an international student in recognition of their academic and non-academic achievements.
- Cecile Clardy Satterfield Award for Humanism in Health Care – This award is made annually to recognize one outstanding student for humanitarianism, professionalism, and commitment to health care.
- Charles Brooks Award for Creativity – This award is made annually in recognition of creative accomplishments such as written publications or artistic contributions which complemented the student's academic activities.
- Dean's Leadership and Service Award – Presented to a maximum of three outstanding SHP students annually, this award recognizes leadership to the School, UAB, and the community.

A call for nominations will be sent to program directors each year. Please refer to the program section of this handbook for awards available to students in individual programs.

SCHOOL OF HEALTH PROFESSIONS SCHOLARSHIPS

SHP has several scholarship opportunities for students enrolled in SHP programs. The Scholarship Committee, comprised of faculty from each department, reviews and selects awardees. Please go to [the SHP Scholarship Application webpage](#) for a list of scholarships and instructions for application.

Application announcements are made by the Office of Academic and Faculty Affairs. Many programs in SHP also have scholarships available to currently enrolled students in those programs. Please refer to the program section of this handbook for more information.

SCHOOL OF HEALTH PROFESSIONS SHARED VALUES

- Collaboration
- Compassion & Caring
- Excellence & Achievement
- Integrity
- Respect
- Service
- Social Responsibility
- Stewardship

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media can serve as useful communication tools. However, health professions students should use the forums judiciously. For more information visit [the UAB Social Media Guidelines webpage](#). The school's official sites are on the following platforms:

- [Facebook](#)
- [Instagram](#)
- [LinkedIn](#)
- [Vimeo](#)
- [X/Twitter](#)
- [YouTube](#)

STUDENT HEALTH SERVICES

The University provides prevention, counseling, and treatment services to students through [Student Health Services](#) (SHS) located at [1714 9th Avenue South](#). Appointments may be scheduled via [their online portal](#).

TITLE IX

In accordance with Title IX, the University of Alabama at Birmingham does not discriminate on the basis of sex in any of its programs or services. The University is committed to providing an

environment free from discrimination based on sex and expects individuals who live, work, teach, and study within this community to contribute positively to the environment and to refrain from behaviors that threaten the freedom or respect that every member of our community deserves. For more information about Title IX, policy, reporting, protections, resources, and supports, please visit [the UAB Title IX webpage](#).

TUITION AND FEES

[UAB tuition and fees are published online](#). They may be paid through BlazerNET. SHP programs have specific fees attached to programs, courses, and/ or laboratories. Payment deadlines for each semester are published on the official academic calendar. Please note that failure to meet payment deadlines can result in being administratively withdrawn from courses.

WEATHER

Severe weather situations that may affect the safety of students, faculty, and staff are communicated through the same channels as other emergencies. UAB has a dedicated [Preparedness webpage with Severe Weather Gathering Points and supply lists](#). Other information sources include the [B-ALERT System](#) (contact information must be setup and current) and the UAB Severe Weather & Emergency Hotline 205-934-2165.

WITHDRAWAL FROM COURSE / PROGRAM

Withdrawal from a course or from your program is an official process and should be discussed with your academic advisor and/or program director. Most programs in the School of Health Professions are full-time and the curricula specifically sequenced. Withdrawal from a course may risk you having to wait to register for the class again. Withdrawals are made through the UAB registration system via the Student Resources tab in BlazerNET. Notice of program withdrawal should be given in writing to the program director. For more information [visit the UAB Add/Drop, Extended Drop and Withdrawal Policy webpage](#), which also includes a medical withdrawal policy.

SECTION 2 – SHP AND UAB POLICIES

SCHOOL OF HEALTH PROFESSIONS POLICIES

DISMISSAL OF STUDENT FOR FAILURE TO MAKE SATISFACTORY ACADEMIC PROGRESS

[Dismissal of Student and Appeal Process](#)

EMERGENCY PLAN – SHPB/LRC/WEBB

[SHPB/LRC/WEBB Emergency Plan](#)

BACKGROUND CHECK AND DRUG SCREEN POLICY

Students in SHP programs are required to undergo a background check and drug screen using the school's approved vendor, [Disa Healthcare Technology](#), at the time of program admission, and again, prior to placement in a fieldwork placement (clinical, internship, practicum, residency, etc.). Additional checks/screens may be required by the individual sites therefore; students should work with the program to ensure compliance requirements are met. Instructions for requesting the background check and drug screens are provided to students by their programs. Students in SHP undergraduate programs must complete a module on drug screening and background checks during their first semester. The module will be located in Canvas, UAB's learning management system.

The [SHP Office of Academic and Faculty Affairs](#) is responsible for ensuring student compliance with the Background Check and Drug Screen Policy throughout the program. Students found to be non-compliant with this policy will not be allowed to matriculate in the program (orientation, attend class, fieldwork placement, etc.) until all requirements are met. Program Directors, Fieldwork Coordinators, and students will be notified of non-compliance and a hold will be placed on the students' account.

- Fees for these screenings will be the responsibility of the student.
- The rules and regulations governing individual fieldwork placement sites may include additional provisions and/or more stringent guidelines which supersede this policy. Fees for these screenings are the responsibility of the student.
- Should your criminal background check contain issues, or if you fail a drug screen that may prevent you from receiving or sitting for board certification/licensure, a representative from the Office of Academic and Faculty Affairs will contact you. Depending upon the outcome, students will have a registration hold placed on their account until in compliance and this may result in being dismissed from the program. See your program's guidelines regarding specific consequences.

Programs requiring a criminal background check and drug screening by the end of the first semester of enrollment and again, prior to fieldwork placement (if applicable in the program requirements), are the following:

- Administration Health Services, PhD
- Biomedical Sciences to Biotechnology Fast Track

- Biomedical Sciences to Clinical Laboratory Science Fast Track
- Biomedical Sciences to Health Physics Fast Track
- Biomedical Sciences to Nuclear Medicine & Molecular Imaging Sciences Fast Track
- Biomedical and Health Sciences, MS
- Biotechnology, MS
- Biotechnology, PhD
- Dietitian Education Program, Graduate Certificate
- Genetic Counseling, MS
- Health Administration (Residential), MSHA
- Health Care Management to Healthcare Quality and Safety Fast Track
- Health Care Management to Health Informatics Fast Track
- Health Care Management to Occupational Therapy Doctorate Fast Track
- Health Physics, MS
- Medical Laboratory Science, MS
- Nuclear Medicine & Molecular Imaging Sciences, MS
- Nutrition Sciences, MS
 - Dietetic Internship Clinical Track
 - Dietitian Education Program
 - Research Track
- Nutrition Sciences, PhD
- Occupational Therapy, OTD – (entry level)
- Physical Therapy, DPT
- Physician Associate Studies, MSPAS
- Rehabilitation Science, PhD

The following students enrolled in SHP undergraduate programs will complete a learning module related to background checks and drug screens in Canvas, UAB's learning management system by the first semester of enrollment. If a fieldwork placement (clinical, internship, practicum, residency, etc.) is required, students must complete criminal background checks and drug screens prior to the first day of the semester of a fieldwork placement:

- Health Care Management, BS
- Biomedical Sciences, BS
- Nutrition Sciences, BS
- Disability Studies and Rehabilitation Science, BS

Programs waived from the Criminal Background Check and Drug Screening requirements are the following:

- Applied Mixed Methods Research, Graduate Certificate
- Biotechnology Regulatory Affairs, Graduate Certificate
- Clinical Informatics, Graduate Certificate

- Health Administration (International and Executive tracks), MSHA
- Health Informatics, MSHI
- Healthcare Finance Management, Graduate Certificate
- Healthcare Leadership, DSc
- Healthcare Leadership, Graduate Certificate
- Healthcare Quality and Safety, MS
- Healthcare Quality and Safety, Graduate Certificate
- Health Services Research, MS
- Healthcare Simulation, MS
- Healthcare Simulation, Graduate Certificate
- Nutrition for Community Health, Graduate Certificate
- Nutrition Sciences, MS
 - Clinical Track-Prior Learning
 - Lifestyle Management and Disease Prevention Track
- Low Vision Rehabilitation, Graduate Certificate
- Multi-Tiered Approach to Trauma, Graduate Certificate
- Occupational Therapy Doctorate (Post Professional)
- Physical Therapy Residencies (Neurologic, Orthopedic)
- Primary Care Physical Therapy for Underserved Populations, Graduate Certificate

Students enrolled in exempt programs who participate in a course(s) incorporating community, corporate or other high impact, out-of-classroom activities such as service learning, capstone projects or other hands-on learning experiences, may be required by placement sites to submit background check and drug screening results. Students are responsible for the fees associated with such screening.

DISA HEALTHCARE TECHNOLOGY INSTRUCTIONS

[Disa Healthcare Technology](#) is a secure platform that allows you to order your background check & drug test online. Once you have placed your order, you may use your login to access additional features, including document storage, portfolio builders and reference tools. Disa Healthcare Technology also allows you to upload any additional documents required by your school.

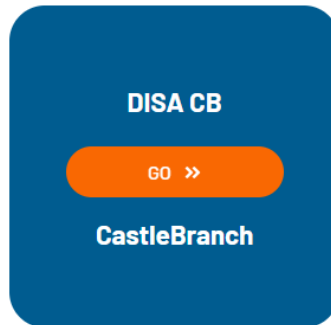
Order Summary

- Required Personal Information
 - In addition to entering your full name and date of birth, you will be asked for your Social Security Number, current address, phone number, and email address.
- Drug Test (LabCorp)
 - Within 24-48 hours after you place your order, the electronic chain of custody form e-chain will be placed directly into your CastleBranch account. This e-chain will explain where you need to go to complete your drug test.
- Payment Information

- At the end of the online process, you will be prompted to enter your Visa or MasterCard information. Money orders are also accepted, but will result in a \$10 fee and additional turn-around-time.

Place Your Order

[Visit the website](#), click “place order” and choose the Disa CB platform (see logo screenshot below).



Enter package code AHO1 – Background Check and Drug Test. You will be required to enter your program under “Student Information” classification. You will then be directed to set up your Disa/CastleBranch profile account. This package code is for the following majors:

- Health Care Management
- Biomedical Sciences
- Biotechnology
- Biomedical and Health Sciences
- Genetic Counseling
- Health Administration – Residential (MSHA)
- Health Care Quality and Safety (not employees of health care organizations)
- Health Informatics
- Health Physics
- Medical Laboratory Sciences
- Nuclear Medicine and Molecular Imaging Sciences
- Occupational Therapy
- Physical Therapy
- Physician Associate Studies
- Rehabilitation Sciences

View Your Results

Your results will be posted directly to your Disa/CastleBranch profile account. You will be notified if there is any missing information needed to process your order. Although 95% of background check results are completed within 3-5 business days, some results may take longer. Your order will show as “In Process” until it has been completed in its entirety. Your school’s administrator can also

securely view your results online with their unique username and password. If you have any additional questions, you may contact the Service Desk at 888-723-4263 x 7196 or submit a question [using the online contact us form](#).

ACCIDENTS / INJURIES OCCURRING ON CAMPUS:

All accidents/injuries occurring while involved in a program associated with the School of Health Professions are to be promptly reported to the faculty member in charge of class. Incident reports for accidents and injuries must be filed with the Department Administrative Office within 48 hours of the incident. Failure to report accidents or injuries within 48 hours of the incident may impact UAB's ability to address the accident or injury.

ACCIDENT / INJURY REPORTING PROCEDURE

When a student, visitor, faculty, or staff is involved in an accident or sustains an injury while involved in a program associated with the School of Health Professions, an accident / injury report is required. The faculty member in charge of the class where the injury occurs, or who is the first point of contact following the injury should download and complete this [Incident Report Form](#).

NEEDLESTICK/ BLOOD OR BODY FLUID EXPOSURES

When a student, visitor, faculty, or staff is involved in a body fluid or needlestick exposure while involved in a program associated with the School of Health Professions, they should follow the procedures on [the UAB Human Resources website](#). The faculty member in charge of the class where the exposure occurs, or who is the first point of contact following the injury should download and complete this [Incident Report Form](#).

UNDERGRADUATE AND GRADUATE VOLUNTEER RESEARCH:

Undergraduate or graduate volunteer students wanting to conduct research in a School of Health Professions laboratory should contact [Dr. Samantha Giordano-Mooga via email](#) for requirements.

UAB POLICIES

ACADEMIC PROGRESS

[UAB ACADEMIC PROGRESS POLICY FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS](#)

[UAB ACADEMIC PROGRESS POLICY FOR UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS](#)

HEALTH

[UAB POLICY ON IMMUNIZATIONS](#)

[UAB POLICY ON NEEDLE STICKS AND EXPOSURES](#)

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

[UAB POLICY ON EQUAL OPPORTUNITY AND DISCRIMINATORY HARASSMENT](#)

POLICE AND PUBLIC SAFETY

[UAB POLICY ON CAMPUS SAFETY](#)

[UAB POLICY ON FIREARMS, AMMUNITION, AND OTHER DANGEROUS WEAPONS](#)

RESEARCH AND SCHOLARLY ACTIVITIES

[UAB POLICY ON ACADEMIC INTEGRITY CODE](#)

[UAB POLICY ON ETHICAL STANDARDS IN RESEARCH AND OTHER SCHOLARLY ACTIVITIES](#)

[UAB POLICY ON PATENTS](#)

SUBSTANCE USE/ABUSE

[UAB POLICY ON ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES, USE AND CONSUMPTION](#)

[UAB POLICY AS A DRUG FREE CAMPUS](#)

[UAB POLICY ON NON-SMOKING](#)

TECHNOLOGY

[UAB POLICY ON TECHNOLOGY RESOURCES](#)

STUDENT COMPLAINTS

[UAB COMPLAINT POLICY](#)

SECTION 3: PROGRAM SPECIFIC INFORMATION

PHD IN NUTRITION SCIENCES PROGRAM

INTRODUCTION

The Department of Nutrition Sciences (DNS) at the University of Alabama at Birmingham is a multidisciplinary department dedicated to excellence in nutrition research, education, and training. Through collaborations across UAB and its affiliated research centers, students have opportunities to engage in basic, clinical, translational, and population-based nutrition research.

The PhD in Nutrition Sciences program exists to prepare the next generation of independent investigators who will advance scientific knowledge and improve human health through nutrition research. The program combines rigorous academic training, mentored research experiences, and professional development to prepare graduates for leadership roles in academia, industry, government, and other research-intensive settings.

MISSION, VISION AND VALUES

The mission of the PhD in Nutrition Sciences program is to prepare independent investigators who advance nutrition science through rigorous research, scholarly inquiry, innovation, and collaboration. The program provides students with advanced training in scientific methodology, critical thinking, and research communication while fostering the development of future leaders in academia, industry, government, and healthcare.

OVERVIEW

The PhD in Nutrition Sciences is a research-focused doctoral degree that includes coursework, research training, admission to candidacy, dissertation research, and successful completion and defense of a doctoral dissertation. Areas of study may include nutritional biochemistry, metabolism, obesity, body composition, aging, community nutrition, and disease prevention.

FACULTY AND STAFF

Our faculty and staff are teachers, scholars, researchers, and leaders who provide exceptional mentoring, research training, and academic support to students throughout the program. The Department of Nutrition Sciences is committed to fostering an environment that promotes scientific discovery, professional development, and student success.

To learn more about the diverse backgrounds, expertise, and research interests of our faculty and staff, please visit the [Department of Nutrition Sciences Faculty and Staff webpage](#).

ACCREDITATION

Please refer to section 1 for institutional accreditation information.

OUTCOMES & COMPETENCIES

The PhD in Nutrition Sciences program prepares students to become independent investigators capable of developing, conducting, evaluating, and disseminating nutrition science research. Through coursework, mentored research experiences, research rotations, and dissertation research, students are expected to develop competency in four core areas:

Design:

- Develop research ideas and testable hypotheses informed by published research.
- Identify important gaps in scientific knowledge.
- Design rigorous and reproducible research studies to address research questions.

Conduct:

- Plan and implement research studies.
- Collect data using valid and reliable methodologies.
- Apply appropriate research practices and ethical standards in the conduct of research.

Analyze:

- Analyze research data using appropriate statistical and analytical methods.
- Interpret findings within the context of scientific literature.
- Evaluate the strengths, limitations, and significance of research results.

Communicate:

- Disseminate research findings through presentations, manuscripts, and other scholarly activities.
- Effectively communicate scientific concepts to professional and academic audiences.
- Defend research methods, findings, and conclusions in written and oral formats.

CANDIDACY EXAMINATION

Admission to candidacy is a major milestone in the PhD in Nutrition Sciences program. The candidacy examination is designed to evaluate whether students have acquired the scientific knowledge, research skills, and scholarly independence necessary to transition to dissertation research.

Students are eligible to apply for candidacy after completing required coursework, passing the qualifying examination, presenting an acceptable dissertation proposal, and obtaining any required IRB or IACUC approvals.

The candidacy process evaluates a student's ability to synthesize scientific literature, identify important research questions, formulate hypotheses, design rigorous research studies, and communicate research effectively in written and oral formats. In the Department of Nutrition Sciences, the qualifying examination and dissertation proposal are integrated into a single process culminating in a written proposal and oral defense before the student's committee.

Successful completion of the candidacy examination signifies that the student has demonstrated readiness to undertake independent dissertation research and advances the student to doctoral candidacy.

ADMISSIONS & ENROLLMENT REQUIREMENTS

CRITERIA AND REQUIRED MATERIALS

Admission to the PhD in Nutrition Sciences program is for the fall term only. Applicants must hold, at minimum, a bachelor's degree in a recognized field of biological, physical, chemical, exercise, nutrition, agricultural, or engineering science from an accredited institution. Applicants must meet all UAB Graduate School admission requirements and submit a completed application through the UAB Graduate School application system,

Application materials include:

- Completed UAB Graduate School application
- Application fee
- Letter of application describing professional goals, research and training experiences, and reasons for pursuing the UAB PhD in Nutrition Sciences
- Official transcripts from all colleges and universities attended
- Current résumé or curriculum vitae
- Three letters of recommendation from individuals familiar with the applicant's academic, professional, or research qualifications
- English proficiency documentation, when required by the UAB Graduate School for international applicants

Applications are reviewed by the Nutrition Sciences PhD Program Committee, which provides recommendations to the Program Director and the UAB Graduate School. Admission decisions are communicated through the UAB Graduate School.

CONTINUOUS ENROLLMENT REQUIREMENTS

Students are expected to maintain continuous enrollment and satisfy all Graduate School registration requirements throughout their program of study. Students receiving departmental scholarships, fellowships, assistantships, or other forms of financial support should consult with the Program Director or Program Manager before making any schedule changes that may affect eligibility for funding.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE, RE-ENTRY & WITHDRAWAL PROCEDURES

Students requesting a leave of absence, returning after an approved leave, or withdrawing from the program must follow applicable UAB Graduate School procedures. Students should consult the Program Director and Program Manager before initiating any enrollment status changes to ensure understanding of the academic, financial, and research implications of their decision.

DEGREE REQUIREMENTS

CREDIT HOURS

The PhD in Nutrition Sciences program requires completion of:

- 36 credit hours of required core coursework
- 12 credit hours of non-dissertation research (NTR 798)
- 12 credit hours of dissertation research (NTR 799)
- 12 credit hours of approved elective coursework

The UAB Graduate School allows a maximum of seven years to complete a doctoral degree. Students should consult the UAB Graduate Catalog and work closely with their faculty mentor and Program Director to ensure timely progression through the program.

CURRICULUM OUTLINE

The PhD curriculum includes required coursework in nutrition science, research methods, statistics, scientific integrity, research techniques, and current topics in nutrition sciences, along with approved electives, research experiences, dissertation research, and professional development activities. Students should work closely with their faculty mentor, Program Director, and Program Manager when planning coursework. [Visit the UAB Catalog website for course descriptions.](#)

Semester 1 – Fall

- NTR 621 Applied Statistics to Nutrition Sciences I (3 credit hours)
- GRD 717 Principles of Scientific Integrity (3 credit hours)
- NTR 690 Seminar (2 credit hours)
- NTR 788 Advanced Nutrition Seminar (1 credit hour)
- NTR 733 Laboratory Instruments and Methods in Nutrition Research (1 credit hour)

Semester 2 – Spring

- NTR 637 Applied Research in Nutrition Sciences (3 credit hours)
- NTR 788 Advanced Nutrition Seminar (1 credit hour)
- NTR 747 Molecular Biology and Nutrition Sciences (3 credit hours; even years)
- NTR 779 Obesity in the 21st Century (3 credit hours; odd years)
- NTR 733 Laboratory Instruments and Methods in Nutrition Research (1 credit hour)

Semester 3 – Summer

- NTR 618 Nutritional Biochemistry (6 credit hours)
- NTR 798 Non-dissertation Research (3 credit hours)

Semester 4 – Fall

- NTR 623 Applied Statistics to Nutrition Sciences II (3 credit hours)
- NTR 736 Scientific Methods (3 credit hours; even years)

- NTR 788 Advanced Nutrition Seminar (1 credit hour)
- NTR 798 Non-Dissertation Research (2 credit hours)

Semester 5 – Spring

- Approved elective coursework
- NTR 788 Advanced Nutrition Seminar (1 credit hour)
- NTR 798 Non-Dissertation Research

Years 3 and Beyond

- Approved elective coursework
- NTR 798 Non-Dissertation Research (until candidacy)
- NTR 799 Dissertation Research (after admission to candidacy)
- Dissertation research and scholarly dissemination activities

ADVISING & MENTORING

ADVISOR/MENTOR ASSIGNMENT PROCESS

During the first year, students participate in research rotations that provide opportunities to explore research interests and work with potential mentors. Following completion of the rotation process, students and faculty work together to identify a mentor whose research interests align with the student's training goals.

The faculty mentor is responsible for providing guidance in research training, academic and professional development, oversight of dissertation planning, and degree progression. Faculty mentors also assist students in identifying research opportunities, professional activities, and potential sources of research support.

DISSERTATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

In addition to having a faculty mentor, students are required to establish a Dissertation Advisory Committee to provide guidance throughout the dissertation process. The committee assists the student in developing a coherent research agenda, evaluates progress toward degree completion, and assesses the student's readiness for candidacy and dissertation defense.

The Dissertation Advisory Committee must be approved by the program director prior to candidacy and must comply with all current department and UAB Graduate School requirements regarding committee composition and graduate faculty status. Committee appointments are also subject to approval by the UAB Graduate School.

The committee typically consists of five or more graduate faculty members whose expertise collectively supports the student's area of research and dissertation objectives. In DNS, the committee should include a faculty member with biostatistics expertise, a faculty member from outside the department, and the committee members should not all be part of the same research team. Students should work closely with their faculty mentor and the PhD Program Director when identifying potential committee members.

The Dissertation Advisory Committee is responsible for:

- Providing scientific and professional guidance throughout the dissertation process.
- Reviewing and evaluating the dissertation proposal.
- Assessing the students' readiness for admission to candidacy.
- Monitoring progress toward completion of dissertation research.
- Evaluating the written dissertation and oral defense.
- Determining whether dissertation requirements have been satisfactorily completed.

Students are encouraged to meet regularly with their Dissertation Advisory Committee to discuss research progress, dissertation planning, professional development, and any proposed changes to the scope or direction of the dissertation project.

CHANGING ADVISORS/MENTORS

Students are encouraged to work closely with their faculty mentor throughout their doctoral training. However, in some circumstances, a change in faculty mentor may be appropriate. Students considering a change in mentor should discuss the situation with their current mentor, when appropriate, and consult with the PhD Program Director as early as possible. If a change in the faculty mentor is determined to be the best option, the program director will assist in identifying alternative mentoring arrangements and facilitating a smooth transition.

Changes in faculty mentorship should be approved by the Program Director and may require modification of the student's research plan, funding arrangements, dissertation committee composition, and degree progression timeline. Students are expected to work collaboratively with all parties to ensure continuity of academic and research activities during the transition.

EXPECTATIONS FOR FACULTY MENTORS AND STUDENTS

The mentoring relationship is a critical component of doctoral training and is built upon mutual respect, professionalism, communication, and shared responsibility for student success. Faculty mentors and students are expected to work together to establish goals, support academic and professional development, and maintain steady progress toward completion of degree requirements.

Faculty mentors are expected to:

- Provide guidance in research training, scientific inquiry, and professional development.
- Assist students in developing research skills and increasing independence as investigators.
- Provide timely feedback on research activities, written work, presentations, and dissertation materials.
- Support students in establishing realistic goals and milestones for academic and research progress.
- Encourage participation in scholarly and professional development activities.

Students are expected to:

- Take primary responsibility for their academic and research progress.

- Communicate regularly with their faculty mentor regarding goals, expectations, and research activities.
- Demonstrate professionalism, integrity, and ethical conduct in all academic and research endeavors.
- Actively participate in research, professional development, and scholarly dissemination activities.
- Demonstrate increasing independence and initiative as they progress through the program.

Mentors and students are expected to work collaboratively to ensure that research experiences, candidacy preparation, and dissertation activities provide sufficient opportunities for students to develop and demonstrate the competencies expected of independent investigators in nutrition sciences.

DISSERTATION

The dissertation is the culminating scholarly requirement of the PhD in Nutrition Sciences program. Through the dissertation process, students demonstrate their ability to conduct independent, original research that contributes to the field of nutrition sciences. Students' progress from research training and mentored research experiences to admission to candidacy, completion of dissertation research, preparation of a written dissertation, and successful oral defense of their work.

RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS

Research training is a central component in the Nutrition Sciences program. Students participate in research activities throughout their doctoral training, beginning with research rotations and continuing through dissertation research. Research experiences are designed to help students develop the knowledge, skills, and independence necessary to conduct original research that contributes to the field of nutrition sciences.

Students register for research credit as they progress through the program. During the first year, students complete research rotations through NTR 733 (Laboratory Instruments and Methods in Nutrition Research) to gain exposure to different research areas and identify a faculty mentor. Following mentor selection, students register for NTR 798 (Doctoral Level Non-Dissertation Research) until admission to candidacy. After successful completion of candidacy requirements, students register for NTR 799 (Doctoral Level Dissertation Research).

Research activities are conducted under the guidance of a faculty mentor and, later, a Dissertation Advisory Committee. Students are expected to demonstrate increasing independence in the design, conduct, analysis, and communication of research as they advance through the program.

RESEARCH ROTATIONS (NTR 733)

Research rotations are an integral component of the first year of doctoral training in the Department of Nutrition Sciences. These rotations provide students with opportunities to explore different areas of nutrition research, gain experience in a variety of research environments, and identify a faculty mentor whose research interests align with their career goals and training needs.

Students complete research rotations through NTR 733: Laboratory Instruments and Methods in Nutrition Research. Most students participate in two to three research rotations, allowing them to gain firsthand experience conducting basic and/or clinical research with multiple potential mentors. Each rotation must be approved by the PhD Program Director prior to initiation. Research rotations are typically completed during a single semester but may be structured differently with approval from the Program Director.

Students and faculty mentors are expected to establish goals for each rotation. These goals should include exposure to the overall research topic, review of relevant scientific literature, experience with one or more research methodologies, and development of an understanding of the assumptions, strengths, limitations, validity, and application of those methods.

Research rotations are intended to support the development of foundational research skills and facilitate mentor selection. While authorship on scientific publications is not an expectation of research rotations, students are encouraged to develop skills related to scientific communication, data presentation, and scholarly writing that will support future research and dissertation activities.

NON-DISSERTATION RESEARCH (NTR 798)

After completing research rotations and selecting a faculty mentor, students register for NTR 798: Doctoral Level Non-Dissertation Research. NTR 798 provides students with the opportunity to develop and conduct research under the guidance of their faculty mentor while progressing toward admission to candidacy.

Students register for NTR 798 until they have successfully completed all candidacy requirements and have been admitted to doctoral candidacy. A minimum of 12 credit hours of non-dissertation research is required prior to admission to candidacy. Following admission to candidacy, students register for NTR 799: Doctoral Level Dissertation Research.

Students whose primary research mentor is outside the Department of Nutrition Sciences will register under a Department of Nutrition Sciences co-chair, collaborator, or another approved faculty member, as determined by the Program Director.

Each semester, students and mentors are expected to establish research goals and objectives that align with the student's stage of training and progress toward degree completion. Students are expected to demonstrate increasing independence, initiative, and responsibility in the conduct of research as they advance through the program.

Performance in NTR 798 is evaluated by the supervising faculty member and assigned a grade of Pass (P), Fail (F), or Incomplete (I) in accordance with program and Graduate School policies.

ADMISSION TO CANDIDACY

Admission to candidacy is a formal milestone in doctoral training and signifies a student's transition from advanced coursework and mentored research to independent dissertation research. Students are eligible to apply for candidacy after completing all required coursework, passing the qualifying examination, presenting an acceptable dissertation proposal, and obtaining

any required Institutional Review Board (IRB) or Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) approvals for the proposed dissertation research.

The candidacy process is designed to evaluate whether students have acquired the scientific knowledge, research skills, and scholarly independence necessary to undertake dissertation research. Prior to admission to candidacy, students are expected to demonstrate proficiency in scientific and experimental design, research methodology, statistical analysis, scientific writing, and oral communication. Students should also possess a thorough understanding of the scientific literature related to their proposed area of dissertation research.

As part of the candidacy process, students develop a dissertation proposal and defend it before their Dissertation Advisory Committee. The proposal and defense provide an opportunity for students to demonstrate their ability to synthesize scientific literature, identify important research questions, formulate hypotheses, design rigorous research studies, and communicate research plans effectively.

Successful completion of candidacy indicates that the student has demonstrated readiness to conduct independent dissertation research and may proceed to doctoral candidacy status.

CANDIDACY PROCEDURES

Students should review all current requirements and deadlines established by the UAB Graduate School in addition to departmental requirements. Prior to initiating the candidacy process, students should confirm with the PhD Program Director that they have met all eligibility required for candidacy. To be eligible to seek candidacy, students must:

- Complete all required coursework.
- Establish an approved Dissertation Advisory Committee.
- Obtain all required IRB or IACUC approvals for the proposed dissertation research, as applicable.
- Meet departmental and Graduate School requirements for advancement to candidacy.

The candidacy process includes development of a written dissertation proposal, review of the proposal by the student's Dissertation Advisory Committee, and a public oral defense of the proposed research. Students work closely with their faculty mentor throughout the proposal development process.

Students will meet with the Dissertation Advisory Committee several times as they work through the candidacy process:

- Meeting 1: It is recommended that the student, mentor, and committee meet to discuss the Specific Aims page and progress to date, before finalizing the scope of the proposed dissertation work. The student will consider committee feedback as they finalize the written proposal document. Once the mentor has approved the written proposal, it will be distributed to the committee.
- Meeting 2: The committee and program director will meet without the student to discuss the dissertation proposal document and determine whether the student is ready to proceed

with their oral candidacy defense or whether additional work is warranted. The program director will summarize the committee feedback and provide it to the student.

- Meeting 3: The public candidacy defense will take place after the committee has approved the written proposal document.

Successful completion of the written proposal and oral defense fulfills the departmental candidacy requirement and allows the student to advance to doctoral candidacy status.

CANDIDACY PROPOSAL

The written component of the candidacy examination consists of a dissertation proposal developed by the student in consultation with their faculty mentor. The proposal is designed to demonstrate the student's ability to synthesize scientific literature, identify a significant research question, formulate a testable hypothesis, and design an original research study that addresses an important gap in knowledge.

The dissertation proposal follows an NIH F31-style format and includes a Specific Aims page, Research Strategy, and Project Timeline. This format is used to help students develop independence as researchers while preparing a rigorous and clearly articulated plan for dissertation research. Although submission of an NIH F31 application is not required, students are encouraged to work with their faculty mentor to pursue external funding opportunities when appropriate.

The proposal should present research that:

- Has the potential to make a meaningful contribution to nutrition sciences.
- Demonstrates original, hypothesis-driven research.
- Is scientifically rigorous and feasible.
- Provides an opportunity for the student to demonstrate competencies in research design, methodology, analysis, and scientific communication.

Students should work closely with their faculty mentor throughout proposal development and allow sufficient time for mentor review, revision, committee review, and preparation for the oral candidacy defense.

CANDIDACY EVALUATION

The candidacy evaluation is designed to determine whether a student has acquired the knowledge, skills, and independence necessary to successfully conduct dissertation research. Evaluation is based on both the written dissertation proposal and the oral defense of the proposed research.

The Dissertation Advisory Committee evaluates the student's ability to:

- Synthesize and critically evaluate scientific literature.
- Identify an important gap in knowledge and justify the significance of the proposed research.
- Formulate research questions and testable hypotheses.
- Design rigorous and feasible research studies.

- Apply appropriate methodological and statistical approaches.
- Interpret and communicate scientific concepts and proposed research plans effectively.
- Demonstrate readiness to conduct independent dissertation research.

Evaluation of the proposal will include the students' understanding of the significance of the research question, their knowledge of the background literature, as well as the rigor and feasibility of the proposed research plan. The committee will also evaluate the students' ability to defend the scientific rationale and methodological approach during the oral examination.

Successful completion of the candidacy evaluation indicates that the student has demonstrated the competencies necessary to advance to doctoral candidacy and proceed with dissertation research. Students who do not successfully complete the evaluation may be required to revise their proposal, complete additional preparation, or satisfy other requirements as determined by the Dissertation Advisory Committee and Program Director.

DISSERTATION REQUIREMENTS

An intensive period of original dissertation research is required of all students enrolled in the PhD in Nutrition Sciences program. The duration of dissertation research is determined by the Dissertation Advisory Committee; however, students must complete a minimum of 12 credit hours of doctoral dissertation research (NTR 799) across at least two semesters to satisfy degree requirements.

The dissertation must represent original scholarly work that contributes to the field of nutrition sciences and demonstrates the student's ability to conduct independent research. Dissertation research should build upon the knowledge and skills acquired through coursework, research rotations, non-dissertation research experiences, and the candidacy process.

Students are expected to work closely with their faculty mentor and Dissertation Advisory Committee throughout the dissertation process. The committee provides guidance regarding the scope, quality, and scientific rigor of the research and evaluates the students' progress toward completion of all degree requirements.

The written dissertation may be prepared using either a manuscript-based format or a traditional chapter format, as approved by the faculty mentor, Dissertation Advisory Committee, and Program Director. Regardless of format, the dissertation must comply with all current UAB Graduate School requirements and formatting guidelines.

Students are expected to actively participate in scholarly dissemination during their doctoral training. Under normal circumstances, students are expected to contribute to peer-reviewed publications arising from their doctoral research and scholarly activities, consistent with program expectations and any approved exceptions.

Successful completion of the dissertation requires:

- Completion of approved dissertation research.
- Preparation of a written dissertation that meets Graduate School requirements.

- Successful public oral defense of the dissertation.
- Submission of the final approved dissertation to the UAB Graduate School.

DISSERTATION DEFENSE

The dissertation defense is the final academic requirement of the PhD in Nutrition Sciences program. Following approval of the written dissertation by the faculty mentor, students must distribute the dissertation to their Dissertation Advisory Committee and complete a public defense in accordance with departmental and Graduate School requirements.

The defense consists of a public presentation of the dissertation research followed by a question-and-answer period and a private examination conducted by the Dissertation Advisory Committee. During the defense, students are expected to demonstrate mastery of the scientific literature, the significance of the research, the methods employed, the analysis and interpretation of findings, and the contribution of the work to the field of nutrition sciences.

The Dissertation Advisory Committee evaluates both the written dissertation and the oral defense. Following deliberation, the committee may approve the dissertation, approve it pending revisions, or require additional work before final approval is granted.

Upon successful completion of the defense and any required revisions, students must submit the final approved dissertation to the UAB Graduate School in accordance with established deadlines and graduation requirements.

POLICIES & STANDARDS

PROGRAM POLICIES

Students are responsible for complying with all policies of the University of Alabama at Birmingham, the School of Health Professions, the UAB Graduate School, and the Department of Nutrition Sciences. University-wide and Graduate School policies are described elsewhere in this handbook.

Additional program-specific policies include requirements related to academic progression, course changes, research training, publication expectations, and completion of program exit procedures. Students should consult the Program Director or Program Manager before making changes that may affect funding, enrollment status, or progress toward degree completion.

EXPECTATIONS REGARDING ACADEMIC PROGRESS

Students are expected to make consistent progress toward completion of degree requirements, including coursework, research training, candidacy, dissertation research, and dissertation defense. Students should work closely with their faculty mentor, Dissertation Advisory Committee, and Program Director to establish goals and maintain satisfactory progress throughout the program.

Students must comply with all UAB Graduate School requirements regarding academic standing, degree progression, and time-to-degree completion. In addition to meeting Graduate School

requirements, students are expected to demonstrate increasing independence in the design, conduct, analysis, and communication of research as they advance through the program.

Students experiencing circumstances that may affect academic or research progress are encouraged to communicate with their faculty mentor and the Program Director as early as possible so that appropriate support and guidance can be provided.

GRADE POLICIES

Please refer to the UAB Graduate School Catalog for policies and procedures for GPA.

ACADEMIC PROBATION & DISMISSAL PROCEDURES

Please refer to the UAB Graduate School Catalog for policies and procedures for probation and dismissal.

PROFESSIONALISM EXPECTATIONS

PROFESSIONAL EXPECTATIONS

Professionalism expectations for PhD students are guided by the UAB Student Conduct Code, School of Health Professions policies, and all applicable university research and academic integrity requirements. In addition, students are expected to demonstrate professional behavior in research, teaching, service, and scholarly activities; communicate respectfully and promptly; meet program deadlines and milestones; and uphold the highest standards of research integrity and ethical conduct

CONDUCT/INTEGRITY

Students must adhere to all UAB and School of Health Professions policies regarding student conduct, academic integrity, ethical behavior, and research conduct. Refer to the UAB Student Handbook and SHP policies for current requirements.

DRESS CODE

Students may work in laboratories or clinical and professional settings during the program. Students must adhere to the dress code specified for their work environment, and if none is specified, should dress appropriately and professionally.

FUNDING & FINANCIAL INFORMATION

Students in the PhD in Nutrition Sciences program may receive financial support through a variety of mechanisms, including:

- Departmental tuition scholarships
- Graduate research assistantships (GRAs)
- Graduate teaching assistantships (GTAs)
- University and external fellowships
- Institutional training grants (e.g., T32 programs)

- Individual predoctoral awards (e.g., NIH F31 fellowships)
- Faculty-sponsored research grants
- Other internal or external funding opportunities

Funding availability varies by student and depends on eligibility, available resources, mentor funding, and program priorities. Admission to the program does not guarantee financial support.

OUTSIDE EMPLOYMENT INFORMATION

Students receiving assistantships should comply with current Graduate School and program requirements regarding outside employment. When awarded, assistantships are intended to support students to be fully engaged in their research and training. Those who would like to seek outside employment are required to obtain approval from the program director and Graduate School before accepting additional employment.

PROFESSIONAL & STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS

Students are encouraged to engage with professional and scientific organizations that support their academic, research, leadership, and career development goals. Participation in professional organizations provides opportunities for networking, professional service, continuing education, conference participation, and leadership experience.

Examples of organizations relevant to Nutrition Sciences students include, but are not limited to:

- American Society for Nutrition (ASN)
- Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
- The Obesity Society
- American Diabetes Association
- American Heart Association
- American College of Sports Medicine

Students are also encouraged to participate in UAB student organizations, Graduate Student Government, and other campus initiatives that support professional development and interdisciplinary collaboration.

DEGREE COMPLETION

Students need to complete all of the following to earn their PhD in Nutrition Sciences:

- Complete all coursework and research credit
- Pass a written and oral qualifying examination (candidacy examination)
- Author and publish at least two original research manuscripts based on research conducted during the program. The student must be the first author for at least one of these manuscripts, and the manuscripts must have been accepted for publication in a peer-reviewed journal before the final defense.

- Submit and successfully defend a dissertation reporting the results of original scientific research that makes a genuine contribution to the field of nutrition sciences.
- Adhere to the Graduate School guidelines for degree completion.

LEAVING THE PROGRAM OR GRADUATING FROM THE PROGRAM

Students who leave the program before completion, or who graduate from the program, are expected to complete an exit process to ensure the appropriate transfer of research materials, university resources, and institutional records. These requirements help support a smooth transition and maintain compliance with university, sponsor, and research obligations.

Unless expressly authorized through appropriate approvals and agreements, students who leave UAB may not continue to access, use, analyze, or retain UAB-owned data specimens, records, software or other resources unless all of the following conditions are met:

- Approval has been obtained from both the student's PhD mentor and the student's new mentor/supervisor (e.g. postdoctoral mentor).
- Any required IRB approvals, data use agreements (DUAs) confidentiality agreements, or other required institutional approvals have been obtained.
- Continued access and use are permitted under applicable UAB policies and sponsor requirements.

In the absence of such approvals, all access to UAB-owned data and research resources must cease upon departure from UAB.

Students who move to another position within UAB and wish to continue working with data or resources from the research group(s) in which they conducted their doctoral training must obtain approval from both their PhD mentor and their new mentor/supervisor before continuing such work.

Before departing from their doctoral training position, students should complete the following:

- Meet with their mentor to transfer any research data, research notes, manuscript drafts, laboratory records, code, and other scholarly work. as applicable.
- Determine whether a data use agreement (DUA) or other agreement is required to permit continued access to data after departure.
- Ensure that the mentor has access to the complete and current versions of all manuscripts, tables, figures, analyses, and data files associated with submitted or accepted publications.
- For accepted manuscripts, verify compliance with NIH Public Access Policy requirements including submission to PubMed Central, when applicable.
- Return all UAB-owned equipment, supplies, records and materials to the department or research group.
- Return all UAB keys, identification badges, and other institutional property to the program manager or their designee.

- Complete PhD Exit Survey and provide updated CV.

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Final Audit Report

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