University of North Texas
G. Brint Ryan College of Business
Department of Finance, Insurance, Real Estate and Law (FIREL)

Ph.D. Student Handbook

Professional Expectations and Performance

August 2026

Foreword

"Reading makes a full man; conference a ready man; and writing an exact man."

Roger Bacon
English Philosopher, Mathematician and Scholar
1219-1292

Contents

A. Introduction

A.1 Vision for FIREL's Doctoral Program in Finance

The vision for our doctoral program in finance is to develop graduates who excel in research, teaching, and academic citizenship. We are committed to providing our students with the research skills necessary to produce impactful, high-quality scholarship and to secure placements at universities or institutions that foster discovery and innovation. Beyond research, we emphasize educating our students in the norms and culture of academic life, preparing them to be effective educators, skilled researchers, and collegial members of their departments, colleges, and the broader academic community.

We seek to create a vibrant academic esprit de corps, encouraging students to forge meaningful, lasting connections with their UNT classmates and faculty. These relationships provide a supportive network during the program and serve as a foundation for lifelong professional collaboration and camaraderie. By fostering excellence in scholarship, collegiality, and professionalism, we prepare our graduates to advance the field of finance while contributing to the global community of scholars.

A.2 Purpose of this Handbook

This handbook provides students pursuing a Ph.D. degree in the Department of Finance, Insurance, Real Estate and Law (FIREL) at G. Brint Ryan College of Business (RCOB), University of North Texas, with an overview of the expectations, practices, and organization of the program. This handbook describes the department's expectations regarding academic performance, conduct and behavior, professional etiquette, and scholarly achievement. This handbook also further explains the terms and expectation under which acceptance into our doctoral program is granted. It should be considered as a supplement to the RCOB Handbook for Doctoral Students. and the General Catalog of the University of North Texas.

B. Professionalism, Responsibilities and Conduct

B.1 Expectation of Professionalism for our Students

Gaining an understanding of what constitutes professional behavior is as critical as developing the research skills necessary as a scholar. As a future academic in a professional school such as a college of business, your role extends beyond the classroom. It includes preparing students for success in corporate and business employment environments. To fulfill this responsibility, you must nurture the professional poise and confidence often associated with more experienced individuals. This includes mastering academic etiquette, understanding the culture and expectations of the academy, and modeling behaviors that align with the highest standards of business professionalism.

Professionalism involves effective communication, ethical conduct, and respect for colleagues and students. It requires the ability to navigate complex situations with tact, to represent yourself and your institution with integrity, and to engage thoughtfully with academic and professional communities. By contributing to discussions, collaborating on research, and presenting your ideas with clarity and conviction, you establish your credibility and influence. Ultimately, your ability to model professionalism will set a standard for your students, equipping them to navigate the professional world with confidence, integrity, and resilience.

B.1.1 Communication Etiquette

- **Email conduct**: Use a professional tone in all email. Address faculty by their title (Dr. or Professor) unless invited to do otherwise. Include a clear subject line, a greeting, and a signature. Proofread before sending.
- **Timely response**: Reply to messages from faculty, staff, and fellow students within one business day when possible. If a full answer requires more time, send a brief acknowledgment first. Do not delay in responding to faculty or staff emails.

B.1.2 Seminar and Presentation Etiquette

- **Attendance and punctuality**: Arrive before the session begins and remain for its entire duration. Late arrivals and early departures disrupt speakers and signal disrespect.
- **Device discipline**: Silence phones and close laptops unless you are taking notes on

the presentation. Visible multitasking is discourteous to the speaker. Do not text or check cell phones during seminar.

B.1.3 Etiquette in Working with Faculty

- **Respect faculty time**: Come to meetings prepared with an agenda, updated results, and specific questions. Follow up with a written summary of decisions and next steps.
- **Manage expectations**: Agree on deadlines and deliverables at the start of any collaboration. If you cannot meet a deadline, notify your faculty collaborator as early as possible.
- **Accept feedback gracefully**: Treat criticism of your work as an investment in your development. Respond to feedback with revisions, not defensiveness.

B.1.4 Etiquette toward Students and Peers

- **Collegiality**: Support your fellow doctoral students. Share knowledge, attend their presentations, and offer constructive comments on their work.
- **Confidentiality**: Protect student grades, unpublished research, and personnel matters. Never discuss these in public settings.

B.1.5 Professional Appearance and Presence

- **Attire**: Dress in business casual attire for teaching, seminars, and meetings with visitors. Wear business professional attire for proposal defenses, final defenses, conferences, and job interviews.
- **Representing the department**: At conferences and external events, remember that you represent FIREL, the Ryan College of Business, and UNT. Conduct yourself accordingly at both formal sessions and social functions.

B.1.6 Reliability and Self-Management

- **Meet commitments**: Deliver what you promise, when you promise it. Reliability is the foundation of your professional reputation.
- **Punctuality**: Arrive on time for classes, meetings, seminars, and office hours. Chronic lateness signals disrespect for the time of others.
- **Proactive updates**: Do not wait to be asked for a progress report. Update advisors and collaborators at regular intervals.
- **Balance and Resilience**: Manage your workload to sustain performance across coursework, research, and assistantship duties. Seek help early when challenges arise rather than after deadlines pass.

B.2 Student Responsibilities and Conduct

This section briefly documents the expectations related to the professional responsibilities and conduct of the students in our department's doctoral program.

B.2.1 Pre-arrival Requirements

Students in the finance doctoral program are expected to have an outstanding aptitude, motivation, and preparation for rigorous doctoral-level study in finance. This includes a graduate level understanding of finance and econometrics. Further, competency in statistics and data-analytic programming will be necessary for success in the program. The incoming students are responsible for successfully completing the onboarding process required by the UNT human resources prior to the beginning of the first semester of the program. Failure to do so will result in the delay of stipend disbursement because you will not be permitted to begin working without proper authorization. Please check your email about the onboarding process as it will be emailed to you sometimes in the summer. The incoming students are also expected to have red this handbook before the first day of classes at UNT.

B.2.2 Students Responsibilities While Enrolled in the Program

- Students must be responsive and collegial citizens of the department who willingly help other doctoral students as well as faculty and staff.
- Students must be available on campus during the semester in which they are enrolled as students. Any campus absence beyond a week requires written authorization from the PhD coordinator.
- Students are expected to be on campus during the summer when they are funded by the college as research/teaching assistants.
- Students must attend all required department events including but not limited to Friday seminars, dissertation proposal and final defense presentations, meeting with visiting scholars, and other selected research/instructional events.
- 1st-year students must attend the RCOB orientation in the fall semester of their first year.
- 1st- and 2nd-year students are required to attend the non-credit professional development seminar offered weekly by senior department faculty.
- If a student receive **more than two probations (*Form D)***, regardless of the reasons for the probation, she will be removed from the program.

B.2.3 Student Conduct and Expectations While Enrolled in the Program

- **Intellectual Growth**: Strive to develop their intellectual curiosity and a sense of academic exploration and discovery.
- **Faculty Research Collaboration**: Strive to become engaged in research immediately in partnership with faculty within the first semesters of joining the program.

- **Demonstrate Academic Integrity**: Uphold the highest standards of honesty and ethics in all scholarly activities.
- **Engage in Scholar Community**: Actively participate in academic discussions, conferences, and collaborations to contribute to the field's advancement.
- **Maintain Consistent Communication**: Regularly update advisors/PhD Coordinator/Department Chair on progress and seek guidance when necessary.
- **Adhere to Program Requirements**: Fulfill all coursework, research, and teaching obligations as outlined by the department.
- **Demonstrate Professionalism**: Exhibit responsible conduct in research and interactions, adhering to ethical standards.
- **Meet Academic Milestones**: Complete examinations, proposals, and dissertation within established timelines.
- **Seek Feedback**: Actively seek and incorporate feedback to improve research quality and academic performance.
- **Contribute to Knowledge**: Seek to produce original research that adds value to the academic community.
- **Develop Teaching Skills**: Participate in teaching or mentoring roles to gain instructional experience.
- **Pursue Professional Development**: Engage in activities that enhance career readiness, such as workshops and networking.
- **Maintain Good Academic Standing**: Achieve and sustain the required GPA as well as make satisfactory progress in research.
- **Balance Commitments**: Effectively manage time to meet academic, research, and personal responsibilities.

C. Program Structure Summary

This section provides a timeline for the completion of the PhD program in finance. While the finance department expects that each student will adhere to the degree plan developed in the first semester of the program based on this guideline, the PhD coordinator, in consultation with the doctoral committee and the department chairperson, can make changes as a result of unanticipated events or changing circumstances.

Year 1:	
Mid-August	Required orientations by the college
Fall Semester	Take 12 credit hours including ~~one~~ two FINA seminars along with non-credit weekly professionalism seminar
Spring Semester	Take 12 credit hours including ~~two~~ three FINA seminars along with non-credit weekly professionalism seminar
By April 15^{th}	Identification of faculty mentor and 1^{st}-year research idea
Mid-May	1^{st}-year evaluation and review completed

Table C.1: Year 1 schedule

Year 2:	
By October 15^{th}	Successful presentation of the 1^{st}-year paper
Fall Semester	Take 9 credit hours including one FINA seminar along with non-credit weekly professionalism seminar
Spring Semester	Take 9 credit hours including two FINA seminars along with non-credit weekly professionalism seminar
By April 15^{th}	Identification of faculty mentor and 2^{nd}-year research idea
Mid-June	Comprehensive Exam

Table C.2: Year 2 schedule

Year 3:	
By September 30^{th}	2^{nd}-year evaluation and review completed
By October 15^{th}	Successful presentation of the 2^{nd}-year paper
Fall Semester	Teach one course along with dissertation hours
By January 31^{st}	Formation of dissertation committee
Spring Semester	Teach one course along with dissertation hours

Table C.3: Year 3 schedule

Year 4:	
By September 30^{th}	3^{rd}-year evaluation and review completed
By Mid-October	Dissertation proposal defense (if going to the job market)
Fall Semester	Teach one course along with dissertation hours
Spring Semester	Teach one course along with dissertation hours
By Mid-June	Final dissertation defense (graduating before fall)

Table C.4: Year 4 schedule

D. Comprehensive Exam

After the successful completion of all required coursework, the first-year research paper, the second-year research pitch students are required to complete a comprehensive exam. This comprehensive exam will be administered in mid-June following the 2$^{\text{nd}}$-year Spring semester's completion over two days. All tenure-track and tenured faculty members are invited to provide questions to the comprehensive exam. The PhD coordinator selects the final questions from those submitted.

The faculty members are responsible for grading and providing feedback of the questions they submitted (if selected as the actual comprehensive exam questions). The student performance is evaluated and discussed in the meeting of faculty members whose questions are used. In case of borderline pass/fail performance, the student will be asked to rework the questions she/he missed and discuss the possible issues with the faculty members within a few weeks of the evaluation.

In the event of a failure, the department has the option of permitting the student to retake the exam once within three months of the original comprehensive exam. However, the decision to grant the retake of comprehensive exam depends on the student's performance in the first two years of the program as well as on the first exam. If the majority of faculty members believe that there is no clear path for the student to complete our program after grading the first exam, the department has the option of not granting the second exam and directly terminating the student from the program. A second failure will result in termination of the student from the program.

E. Research Papers

E.1 First Year Paper

Students must enroll in FINA 6011 in their first summer session with the credit of 3 hours. This class is guided by a faculty mentor to develop their first-year paper. Students will receive a letter grade for FINA 6011 upon the completion of the requirements for the fist-year research paper summarized below.

Timeline and Presentation Requirements

- Students are responsible for finding and securing a faculty mentor
- Students must successfully complete the research pitch for their first-year paper idea during the presentation to the faculty members. This mandatory presentation will take place in mid-April during the Friday seminar (or Brownbag seminar if the Friday seminar schedule is not available).
- Completed papers (either replication or original research) must be presented at the Friday seminar between late September and mid-October.
- The evaluation of the research pitch and the completed paper is performed by the doctoral program committee.

E.2 Second Year Paper

The research paper to be completed as a second-year research paper should represent significant original research. Students can either extend their first-year research paper or start a new paper. It is expected that after the paper presentation in late-September to mid-October, the paper is ready for a submission to a conference. Proposals for the second-year paper will be done in the Friday seminar (or brownbag seminar) in mid-April. The completed second-year paper is expected to be presented in late-September to mid-October to the department faculty. Doctoral program committee will perform an evaluation of students' second-year paper following the presentation by the students. A failure to meet the expectations of a quality second-year paper will result in a probation or at the worst termination from the program.

F. The Dissertation Process

Identifying a dissertation topic and selecting an advisor is a critical process for doctoral students, requiring self-reflection, exploration, and collaboration. The journey begins with immersing oneself in coursework, seminars, and literature to uncover gaps in knowledge and emerging trends in the field. Students can draw from personal interests, previous research, seminar discussion, or pressing societal issues to identify a topic that aligns with their academic goals and career aspirations. Engaging in discussions with faculty members, peers, and experts sharpens ideas and provides critical feedback.

The student's choice of an advisor is equally important since this partnership shapes the research journey. Students should consider factors such as the advisor's expertise, mentoring style, and experience of supporting students for success. Compatibility in communication and shared research interests are crucial for fostering a productive relationship. Ultimately, a successful match between topic and advisor creates a foundation for rigorous scholarship and meaningful contributions to the academic community.

Establishing Candidacy

Students are required to form a dissertation committee, consisting of no less than three faculty members, by January 31st of the third year. At least one committee member may be from outside the student's concentration area. Once the dissertation committee is formed, students need to file ***Form K*** (***Designation of Dissertation advisory Committee***). Upon the verification by PhD coordinator of the ***Form K***, the Dean of the Graduate School is notified the formation of the candidate's dissertation committee. This represents the admission of the students to *candidacy.*

Dissertation Proposal Defense

Students can schedule a dissertation proposal defense with the approval of their Dissertation Committee and after completing a minimum of six credit hours of dissertation research (FINA6950). The proposal defense serves two essential purposes: to verify that the proposed research questions possess academic merit and to establish a clear blueprint for the dissertation research plan. A successful proposal defense creates a contract between the student and the Dissertation Committee regarding the research direction and scope.

To schedule a dissertation proposal defense, students must file ***Form L***. For comprehensive requirements regarding the dissertation proposal, please consult the RCOB Handbook for Doctoral Students.

Final Dissertation Defense

Students can schedule a final dissertation defense after their Dissertation Committee agrees that the research has been completed according to the proposal and that it is now ready for its final defense. The completed dissertation represents the fulfillment of the proposal, which serves as an overview of the research questions, methods, and data that the candidate will examine. Any significant deviation from the proposal regarding the scope or nature of the research question(s) must receive approval from the Dissertation Committee before the final defense can be scheduled. Students must file ***Form O*** to initiate the defense scheduling process.

The department requires that the final draft be distributed to all committee members and made available to department faculty at least two weeks before the scheduled defense date. Additionally, students must schedule their final defense at least a month in advance of the library submission deadline to allow adequate time for possible post-defense revisions.

Final Dissertation Defense

The proposal and final dissertation defenses represent important milestones in the doctoral journey. The department expects students to show professionalism and respect during these events, including appropriate professional attire.

Regular communication with the Dissertation Committee is essential throughout the entire process. Students should meet with committee members several weeks before the defense to confirm the dissertation's completeness and readiness for presentation. Maintaining regular communication with your Dissertation Committee is critical for the successful completion of the dissertation process.

G.Student Assessments

The program annually evaluates the progress of all PhD students. The evaluation is typically performed at the end of the spring semester or during the summer. By the start of each academic year, the PhD coordinator will discuss with each student her or his academic plan for the upcoming year.

During the spring semester, the PhD coordinator will solicit feedback from faculty members about the students' performance, including classroom performance and/or TA/RA assignment performance, and language proficiency if needed.

If a student demonstrates unsatisfactory progress in the program, the department can take one of the following actions; (1) offer a formalized program for performance improvement and counseling or (2) elect to dismiss the student from the program.

Below is a chronological listings of the formal assessment made by the program to determine the student's progress towards graduation.

Assessment	**Evaluator**
End of first year	PhD program director
First-year paper	Doctoral committee
End of second year	PhD program director
Second-year paper	Doctoral committee
Comprehensive Exam	Comprehensive exam committee
Dissertation proposal	Dissertation committee
Final dissertation defense	Dissertation committee

Table G.5: Assessments and Evaluators in the PhD Program

H. Doctoral Teaching and Research Assignments

This is a funded program where students are assigned as TA and RA. Because the assistantship is offered on an annual basis, students are expected to perform their assignments successfully. A failure to do so can result in the withdrawal of an assistantship.

As part of an assistantship, beginning in their 3rd-year of the program, students are expected to teach one section of a class each semester. The teaching assignments will be determined by the department chairperson in conjunction with the PhD program coordinator.

The RCOB Dean's Office offers a competitive 5th-year funding for qualified students on a limited basis. Applications for 5th-year funding are solicited from 3rd-year students during the spring semester.

H.1 Expectations as a Doctoral Research Assistant

- **Demonstrate Proactiveness**: Take initiative in identifying tasks or areas where assistance is needed without waiting for explicit instruction.
- **Communicate Effectively**: Provide regular updates on progress, challenges, and results through clear and concise communication.
- **Maintain Professionalism**: Respect deadlines, follow through on commitments, and manage time effectively.
- **Show Curiosity and Engagement**: Display a genuine interest in the research topic and actively seek to learn more about it.
- **Be Open**: Accept constructive criticism gracefully and use it to improve performance and deliverables.
- **Foster Collaboration**: Work well with team members, including other research assistants, faculty, and collaborators.
- **Exercise Attention to Detail**: Ensure accuracy and precision in all research-related tasks, from data entry to analysis.
- **Protect Confidentiality**: Handle sensitive data and intellectual property with the utmost discretion and care.

- **Adapt to Faculty Preferences**: Align work habits and deliverables with the faculty member's expectations and working style.
- **Exhibit Resilience**: Approach challenges and setbacks with a problem-solving mindset and a willingness to persevere.
- **Stay Organized**: Maintain thorough records of tasks, data, and project progress to ensure reproducibility and clarity.
- **Demonstrate Integrity**: Uphold ethical standards in research and interactions with colleagues and faculty.

H.2 Expectations as a Doctoral Teaching Assistant

- **Prepare Thoroughly**: Review course material, assignments, and lecture notes ahead of class to ensure readiness.
- **Communicate Clearly**: Explain concepts in a way that is accessible and tailored to students' needs and levels of understanding.
- **Be Approachable**: Foster a supportive environment by being available, patient, and open to questions during office hours or interactions.
- **Provide Constructive Feedback**: Offer timely, specific, and actionable feedback on students' work to help them improve.
- **Demonstrate Professionalism**: Maintain respect, fairness, and impartiality when interacting with students and handling grades.
- **Facilitate Engagement**: Use active learning techniques to keep students engaged in discussion sections, labs, or recitation sessions.
- **Uphold Academic Integrity**: Promote and enforce policies on plagiarism and cheating with consistency and fairness.
- **Adapt to Student Needs**: Be flexible and responsive to the diverse learning styles, needs, and challenges of students.
- **Manage Time Effectively**: Balance teaching responsibilities with research and coursework while meeting deadlines.
- **Maintain Confidentiality**: Protect students' privacy when discussing grades, assignments, or personal matters.
- **Collaborate with Faculty**: Coordinate closely with the course instructor to align teaching efforts and meet course objectives.
- **Model Ethical Behavior**: Demonstrate respect for academic values, policies, and inclusivity in the classroom.
- **Resolve Conflicts Diplomatically**: Address classroom challenges or student issues with tact and professionalism.
- **Encourage Participation**: Create an inclusive environment where all students feel encouraged to contribute to discussions.

- **Seek help and Advice**: Please contact department faculty for help, advice, counsel when needed.

H.3 English Proficiency Requirements

All funded students who are sponsored with a Teaching Assistant (TA) and Research Assistant (RA) and whose primary language is not English[1] are required to complete the International TAs Testing for Language Proficiency under UNT Policy 06.023.

When you join the program:

After official acceptance into the department's doctoral program, you will receive an email from Ms. Inez Loche, Program Associate Director, with the following subject line: Fall 202* International TAs Testing for Language Proficiency," to inform you about testing for English language proficiency. The dates for the testing will be specified in the email from Ms. Loche. Failure to complete this requirement will result in the loss of your university funding.

Once you receive this email, you must email internationalTA@unt.edu to confirm your testing arrangements. You will be required to take separate testing for TA and RA. The testing is typically offered starting in July and is conducted remotely. After test completion, you must submit the results to Ms. Loche at inez.loche@unt.edu.

If you do not pass this test, you might still be assigned as TA/RA for your first fall semester with funding. However, you must enroll in the Intensive English Language Institute English Communication Classes and Pronunciation Workshops and successfully meet the requirements as defined in the UNT Policy.

Before you begin your teaching in the third year:

During the summer of your second year, you will receive an email from Ms. Inez Loche with the subject line: Fall 202* International TFs Testing for Language Proficiency," to inform you about the testing requirement for your English Proficiency as a Teaching Fellows (TFs). Once you receive this email from Ms. Loche, you will need to email internationalTA@unt.edu to arrange this testing. The testing will be conducted remotely. Once you complete the testing, you must send the results to Ms. Loche at inez.loche@unt.edu. There will be a due date for this testing in August (the specific date will be specified in the email from Ms. Loche) and failure to complete this requirement will result in your loss of university funding. If you do not meet the requirements of the TF testing, you may teach for a department for one semester on the condition that you participate in the ITA/TF training program simultaneously and be evaluated again at the end of the semester.

ITA/TF Training Program

[1] If the student's residency data indicates a foreign non-resident status, then the student will be notified of this testing requirement. If the student is from an English-speaking country, he/she must still contact a university representative at internationalTA@unt.edu to provide documentation to test exepmtion. This is also the same if a student wants to use the TOEFL speaking section; they must have a score of 26 or higher to be exempt. The student must provide proof of the TOEFL score to the university representative at internationalTA@unt.edu.

The training program consists of three parts. The student must complete all three parts to receive full approval to work as a TF.

1. **Part 1: Communication workshops** (Five 90-minute English communication sessions: 1 hour of training and 30 minutes of homework)
2. **Part 2: Presentation workshops** (Five 90-minute English communication sessions: 1 hour of training and 30 minutes of homework)
3. **Part 3: Final evaluation** with a departmental representative at the end of the semester

Alternatively, the department may decide not to keep you as TA/RA instead of TF. While you will not be teaching a class under this option, you are still required to go through the ITA/TF Training Program. Regardless of the department's decisions on your assignments, you will be placed on following your unsuccessful completion of TF testing.

If students still do not meet the requirements of the TF testing again after completing the ITA/TF Training Program, their assistantship and tuition benefits will be terminated. If a student wishes to appeal a decision of termination of an assistantship for unsatisfactory performance, they can file a written appeal within 30 days of the notification or attempted notification of the termination.

I. Job Market Preparation

Preparing for job interviews is a critical step for students seeking academic positions. The department requires students to participate in mock job interviews as part of their preparation. These sessions simulate real interviews, offering students an invaluable opportunity to refine their responses, build confidence, and receive constructive feedback. Further, students are required to present their "job market paper" in a seminar to department faculty prior to a flyout. It is also encouraged that the students present their research to faculty before interviewing at any academic conference. Students are further encouraged to work closely with their advisors to identify suitable employment opportunities that align with their research expertise and career goals. Advisors play a primary role in helping students strategize for interviews, choose appropriate references, and master negotiation techniques for potential job offers. Finally, our faculty members will not provide you with a recommendation letter for your job application unless you have successfully defended your dissertation proposal.

While all faculty members in the department are available to provide guidance, the student's dissertation advisor assumes primary responsibility for mentoring throughout the job-seeking process. Advisors assist in tailoring applications to specific positions, crafting compelling research and teaching statements, and rehearsing key aspects of interviews. Successful job placement requires proactive collaboration between students and their advisors. Students must actively engage with their advisors to seek support, incorporate feedback, and stay informed about opportunities.

J. Appendix

J.1 Important Contacts

Department Chairperson, FIREL
Professor Stephen Ferris
BLB 212A
stephen.ferris@unt.edu

Ph.D. Program Coordinator, FIREL
Professor Takeshi Nishikawa
BLB 336B
takeshi.nishikawa@unt.edu

Administrative Coordinator, FIREL

J.2 Academic Professional Associations

- American Finance Association (https://afajof.org/)
- Western Finance Association (https://westernfinance.org/)
- Financial Management Association (https://www.fma.org/)
- Northern Finance Association (https://northernfinanceassociation.org/)
- Eastern Finance Association (https://easternfinance.org/)
- Midwest Finance Association (https://www.midwestfinance.org/)
- Southwestern Finance Association (https://www.swfinance.org/)
- Southern Finance Association (https://southernfinance.org/)