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# Field of Computer Science

## PhD Handbook

### Ph.D. Program Structure

There are two programs in which you can earn a PhD within the Field of Computer Science

- Computer Science
- Robotics. Robotics requirement [found here](#). The Graduate School requirements and resources within this handbook are the same for the Robotics program. In addition to the Robotics requirements, students must complete these CS field requirements:
  - 2 semesters of TA
  - Enrollment in CS 6006, Succeeding in the Graduate Environment
  - Fulfill the requirements for the [CS Minor](#)

### Computer Science

Students are required to select a faculty advisor within their first two semesters. This advisor, who must be a faculty member in the Field of Computer Science, serves as both the student's primary academic mentor and the chair of their Special Committee.

When students receive their admission offers, the letters typically include the names of one or more faculty members—known as advocates—who supported the student's admission and have expressed interest in serving as their advisor. While students may choose any faculty member within the Computer Science Field as their advisor, the designated advocates often serve as excellent initial contacts and frequently become the student's chosen advisor.

The Field believes that certain areas are so fundamental to Computer Science that all students be competent in them. Ph.D. candidates are expected to demonstrate competency in four areas of computer science at the high undergraduate level: theory, programming languages, systems, and artificial intelligence.

Each student then focuses on a specific topic of research and begins a preliminary investigation of that topic. The initial results are presented during a comprehensive oral evaluation, which is administered by the members of the student's Special Committee. The objective of this examination, usually taken in the third year, is to evaluate a student's ability to undertake original research at the Ph.D. level.

The final oral examination, a public defense of the dissertation, is taken before the Special Committee.

To encourage students to explore areas other than Computer Science, the graduate school requires that students complete an outside minor. Cornell offers ~90 fields from which a minor can be chosen.

Some students elect to minor in related fields such as Applied Mathematics, Information Science, Electrical Engineering, or Operations Research. Others use this opportunity to pursue interests as diverse as Music, Theater, Law, Business, Psychology, Women's Studies, Philosophy, and Finance.

The computer science Ph.D. program complies with the requirements of the Cornell Graduate School, which include requirements on residency, minimum grades, examinations, and dissertation.

## PhD Requirements

Computer Science seeks to produce well-rounded researchers who have demonstrated both breadth in computer science and depth in specific areas of concentration. Although the program is designed to be flexible, students in the CS Ph.D. program must complete several requirements imposed both by the Field of Computer Science and by the Cornell Graduate School:

### Field Requirements

- competency requirement
- breadth requirement
- project requirement
- teaching requirement

### Graduate School Requirements

- residency
- special committee
- minor requirement
- A exam
- B exam

Each of these requirements is described in some detail below, followed by a FAQ that answers some of the most common student questions. Because no document can hope to cover all the nuances, students who have questions or concerns can consult their advisor and the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS).

The Field requirements were most recently updated in Fall 2018. Students matriculating in Fall 2018 or later must fulfill the new requirements. Students who matriculated into the Ph.D. program earlier may choose to fulfill either the new requirements or the previous requirements.

# Computer Science Requirements

## The Competency Requirement

The Field believes that knowledge of Computer Science at the undergraduate level is an indispensable foundation for doctoral study in CS. Ph.D. candidates are expected to demonstrate competency at the high undergraduate level in four areas of computer science: Artificial Intelligence, Programming Languages, Systems, and Theory. This requirement can be discharged in one of three ways:

1. by demonstrating competency through one's prior coursework;
2. by taking a course for grade credit (acceptable courses are listed below, subject to change);
3. by taking the final exam in one of these courses, if permitted by the instructor.

Students who have earned a bachelor's or master's degree in computer science are automatically deemed to have satisfied the competency requirement in all four areas. Students with no prior degree in CS may still be exempted from one or more of the four competency requirements based on their prior coursework. Requests for such exemptions will be solicited by the CS graduate office in the summer prior to matriculation and are to be accompanied by documentation concerning the relevant prior coursework (course website, detailed syllabus, list of assignments when possible). Requests will be considered on a case-by-case basis by the CS Advisory Committee.

Each area is required to offer students at least one of option 2 or 3. Whichever method is chosen, the requirement must be fulfilled with acceptable performance, as judged by the Field. For option 1, acceptable generally means with a grade of B+ or higher for graduate courses, A- or higher for 5xxx courses.

The acceptable courses are:

- Artificial Intelligence: CS 5700, CS 5780
- Programming Languages: CS 5110, CS 5120, CS 6110, or CS 6120
- Systems: CS 5410, CS 6410, or 6412
- Theory: CS 5820 or CS 6820

This requirement must be fulfilled by the time of the A exam.

## The Breadth Requirement

Ph.D. students must take at least five 5000/6000-level courses for grade credit. Note that only certain 5000 level courses count. These courses must cover at least three different CS areas and all three CS research styles. The requirement is intended to expose students both to the research problems

and techniques associated with different research areas, and to the different value systems of various computer science research styles that differ in how they evaluate and validate research results. Courses taken to satisfy the competency requirement can be used to count towards the breadth requirement. Courses at the 7000 level do not count, nor do courses from other fields (however, see Exceptions below).

The *areas* are as follows:

- **Algorithms and theory of computation**, including algorithms, complexity theory, cryptography, logical and type-theoretic foundations of computer science.
- **Artificial intelligence**, including robotics, computer vision, natural language processing, information organization and retrieval, and machine learning.
- **Systems**, including concurrency, parallel computing, networks, distributed computing, and data management.
- **Programming languages and methodology**, including applied logic, automated reasoning, and compilers.
- **Scientific computing and applications**, including graphics and computational biology.

The *research* styles are the following:

- **Theoretical**. The theoretical research style is characterized by constructing formal models of computation that are validated primarily by mathematical proof.
- **Systems**. The systems research style focuses on how to improve computing platforms by making them faster, more reliable, more secure, etc. Validation is primarily empirical or experiential.
- **Applied**. The applied research style develops new methods for using computers to solve problems of interest. Validation is achieved primarily by demonstrating empirically that these methods are effective for the problem.

[This table](#) summarizes the breadth requirement. It represents the classification of CS graduate courses into areas and research styles. Students must take five 5000/6000-level courses, covering at least three rows of this table and all three columns.

Students on the Cornell Tech Campus may also take advantage of the [Inter-University Engineering Doctoral Program](#).

As with the competency requirement, the breadth requirement must be fulfilled with acceptable performance, as judged by the Field. A grade of B or better is generally acceptable.

The list of courses that satisfy the area and research style requirements of the breadth requirement are subject to change as faculty develops new courses.

## **The Project Requirement**

Ph.D. students are required to satisfy the project requirement by writing a significant piece of software. One way to satisfy the project requirement is by taking a course with a significant coding component and having the instructor for the course certify that the project satisfied the project requirement. The student is typically expected to get a grade of B- or better in the course. The project requirement can also be satisfied by projects outside of classes, for example, as part of independent research, your thesis research, or as part of a summer job. In these cases, the chair of your special committee needs to certify that you satisfied the project requirement. \*Note external projects require a deliverable or artifact that can be inspected by your Chair of your special committee.

## **The Teaching Requirement**

Ph.D. students must serve as a teaching assistant for at least two semesters or teach a course for at least one semester. Contact with students is valuable both as preparation for a possible academic career and for the experience in communicating ideas to groups, which is important in any setting, academic or otherwise.

## Exceptions

We recognize that the Field requirements as stated above may not be universally appropriate, especially in nontraditional areas such as computational biology that may require significant coursework outside of computer science. In such exceptional cases, students are encouraged to formulate an alternative course of study in consultation with the special committee and to present a proposal to the Field for approval.

# Graduate School Requirements

## [Code of Legislation](#)

The following topics can be found within the Code of Legislation

- Residency Requirement
- The Minor Requirement
- The Special Committee
- The A exam
- The B exam

## Special Committee

### Computer Science Guidelines for selecting your special committees:

Rules: your committee needs to have at least 3 members:

- a chair, the main person advising your research
- a second CS field member who is not in the immediate area of your advisor. There are no course requirements associated with this minor.
- a member of a field other than CS, representing an outside minor which you will do.

Examples of how your committee looks in Student Center if you choose the minimum of three members:

Faculty Member	Role	Concentration/Plan
Faculty A	Advisor	Systems
Faculty B	Minor	Artificial Intelligence
Faculty C	Minor	Applied Math
*Optional Faculty D Faculty D	Co-Advisor Minor	Systems Systems

If your co-advisor is not in the same concentration as your chair, you do not need a CS minor member. Per the graduate school this will satisfy your committee requirements (Advisor, Co-Advisor, outside minor)

From the Code of Legislation: *“A co-chair has the same rights, responsibilities, and obligations as a single special committee chair; both co-chairs must fulfill all chair requirements. Doctoral committees with two co-chairs require only one additional minor member.”*

\*Please do not use the plan "Computer Science", you must use the concentration/plan in which your member represents such as Artificial Intelligence, Systems, etc.

## Suggestions:

- it is perfectly fine, in fact advisable, to have more than one faculty from the same area on your committee. This will lead to having more than 3 member committees, which is great! Extra committee members are an extra source of advice, and likely an extra source of recommendations.
- Committees can be changed any number of times later - all you need is a signature from everyone on your committee stating that they are OK with the change. Although it becomes a bit more difficult to change your committee after your A exam.
- You may also have members of your committee who are not field members. You need to have 3 who are field members, so a non-field member would be a 4th. You may want to add a Cornell researcher, who is not a field member, or even someone not from Cornell (if you are working with someone long distance). This is called an ad-hoc committee member. Please reach out to Becky Stewart for instructions on how to add an ad hoc member if you decide you would like to do this.

## Computer Science A and B Exam Scheduling Guidelines

*\*\*\*A exams must be scheduled at the latest by the 7th semester (4th year). The graduate school will place a hold on your registration if you have not met this milestone before the 7th semester.*

You are responsible for submitting your schedule form WITH approvals 7 days prior to the exam. You must also announce the exam 7 days in advance to the [cs-field@cornell.edu](mailto:cs-field@cornell.edu) and [phd-students@cornell.edu](mailto:phd-students@cornell.edu). The Graduate school is VERY STRICT with this DEADLINE. If it's a weekend, plan accordingly. If you do not make this deadline you will need to reschedule the exam for a later date!

Exams may be given either in-person or remotely. Students giving exams in-person must provide a zoom link in the exam announcement so that anyone unable to attend in person may do so remotely.

## Forms for Scheduling either A or B Exam

- A Exam Form(Online)\*\*
- B Exam Form (Online)\*\*

## Forms to take to exam

A Exam:

- Field Summary Form

A and B Exam:

*On the day of your exam, please submit the results form. Both the A and B results forms can be found here.*

## Process a Proxy:

1. Your minor member on your committee requiring a proxy can submit the name of the field member serving as a proxy within the online exam scheduling form. The field faculty member serving as the proxy must be representing the same graduate field and concentration as the minor member requiring the proxy on your committee.

As students approach their B exams, we encourage fields and committees to consider these options:

- Defense exams scheduled and held only when the dissertation and all required academic research is complete. Defense exams are not to be conducted with the expectation that students will enroll for additional terms following the exam.
- If unexpected significant revisions, edits, or additional research are required, the committee will record the exam results as a conditional pass, and document specific requirements for a full pass on the results form

## **\*\*Notifications and tracking of scheduling forms:**

- Students receive email notifications of each approval (GFA, committee members) and receive a final notification when all members of the committee and the DGS have approved informing them that the schedule form has been submitted to the Graduate School for processing.
- Students and GFAs can track the approval process by following this link to login to Dynamic Forms. The link is also provided in the email notification by the Graduate School once the student has submitted the form.
- Both the student and GFA receive an email from the Graduate School when the schedule form has been processed and approved.
- Students are responsible for ensuring committee approval and sign off so please encourage them to track the progress if it appears to be stalled.

## **Planning your A Exam**

The A-exam (Admission to Candidacy Exam) is a final test of a student's preparedness for undertaking thesis research. The content and coverage of the A-exam is determined by the special committee and discussed with the student beforehand. Typically, the student will present an in-depth survey of the area in which the student intends to pursue their research. Sometimes, the student at an A-exam will describe the problem to be attacked in the thesis and give some preliminary research results.

## **Requirements**

Students must attempt the A-exam before beginning their seventh semester of study. The field recommends taking the exam within 2 semesters of forming a special committee (which must be formed by the end of the third semester). Students are required to have completed the competency requirement and to have at least two units of residency prior to the A-exam. (More details of the university's requirements can be found in Cornell's Guide to Graduate's Study.) Although students have normally made substantial progress towards completing the breadth requirement before taking their A-exam, it is not necessary to have completed this requirement before the A-exam. The chosen

minor field or advisor may require the student to have taken some courses before the A-exam. The members of the special committee are required to be present at the exam.

You are responsible for submitting your schedule form with approvals 7 days prior to the exam. You are also expected to announce the A-exam to CS field members and PhD students 7 days prior to the exam. If you do not make this deadline you will need to reschedule the exam for a later date.

### **Preparing for the A-Exam**

The student and committee agree on a topic of research---it could be broad or narrow. Typically, the topic will align closely with the research interests of the student. The exact format of the exam is up to the special committee.

In one format, the student and advisor agree on some set of (typically 3-5) important papers in the subject. The student synthesizes the contents of those papers and writes a survey (length to be decided by the special committee) that must be submitted to the committee at least one week before the A-exam. The survey includes a discussion of open research problems in the area. Doing PhD research will—at some point—require an understanding of the background literature. So, time spent on this will be an investment in the PhD research and in writing a thesis.

Another format is possible if the student is already further along with their research before the A-exam deadline and will typically have written papers on the subject already. The student can give a talk including progress already made, as well as a proposal for further research. The special committee may or may not require a written proposal or survey in this format, although the presentation will contextualize the current work.

In any case, the student must prepare to give an oral presentation at the exam, usually using a slide set. While the student is expected to work independently, the student is allowed to ask the advisor and/or committee specific technical questions throughout the A-exam preparation. The advisor or committee does not help the student to do the synthesis, proofread the written materials, or prepare the presentation. That is, the advisor or committee does not see dry-runs and does not edit prose.

### **The A-Exam Presentation**

The A-Exam typically lasts two hours and includes both a public and private component. The goals are for the special committee to determine whether the student shows the ability to generalize and organize, whether the student is able to identify interesting open research questions, and whether the student has adequate presentation skills (including the organization and delivery).

In the first hour (approximately), the student presents their prepared work, which may include a written statement, a research plan, and early research results. During and directly after the presentation, the audience as well as the special committee members can ask questions. Only the student can answer those questions and decide how much time to allocate to them.

The remaining time of the exam is not public and may only be attended by the student, members of the special committee, and, optionally, members of the graduate field of computer science. It is split into three parts. In the first part, the committee can ask additional questions. For example, the

committee may ask specific questions about the presentation or the related work. In the second part, the committee discusses the student's performance at the exam. In the third part, the committee discusses the outcome with the student.

### **Outcomes**

To discuss the A-exam, it is useful to follow this rubric (excellent, satisfactory, needs work, unsatisfactory):

- Ability to synthesize, doing critical analysis, discuss broader implications
- Demonstrate capability for independent thinking and research
- Presentation quality (incl. organization, time management, English proficiency)
- If applicable, survey quality (incl. well-written, sound knowledge of the literature)

The student can pass, conditionally pass, or fail the A-exam. A student who fails the exam is no longer in good standing and can be invited to retake it again within three months. If invited to retake the A-exam again, the student may work more closely with the advisor to obtain an improved organization and presentation. A conditional pass typically involves additional work to be done on the written survey, to be completed within a month and to be approved by the special committee afterwards.

## Preparing for your B Exam

Typically, the B exam looks like: 1 hour for a presentation plus questions from the general audience. It usually starts a little late so in reality the talk usually is 45-50 minutes plus the rest for questions. Then the audience is asked to leave. The next 30-60 minutes will be spent on two sections. First, the committee and optionally other members of the field ask the candidate additional questions. Then the committee, without the candidate, discusses the outcome of the exam and what feedback to provide to the candidate. These two sections don't usually take more than 30 minutes. Plan to schedule 2 hours for the exam.

## Dissertation

Doctoral candidates in our field are required to complete a dissertation that demonstrates original research contributing new knowledge to the discipline. The dissertation should address significant theoretical questions and may take the form of a traditional monograph or a set of three [or more as determined by your advisor] publishable articles.

The dissertation must include an abstract and adhere to a recognized academic style guide, such as the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, as approved by the special committee chair. It must also meet the [Graduate School's formatting requirements](#) for doctoral dissertations.

A complete draft of the dissertation must be given to each committee member at least six weeks before the B exam is scheduled and submitted to the Graduate School within **60 days** of passing the final exam. **Enrollment in future semesters is not permitted** after passing the final exam, even if the 60-day submission window extends into a subsequent semester.

## Upon Graduation/Accounts

- Please see the following information regarding your accounts as you graduate in May/August/December.
- Cornell Access: Please See: "[IT Services Available with Your New Relationship to Cornell](#)"
- Data left at Cornell will be deleted in time, please back up or relocate it to a space you control.
- Students can work with their advisor to sponsor a [NetID extension](#) or re-locate data
- @CS address is forwarded to Cornell NetID, the current CIT policy is to continue the forward to their NetID email indefinitely. If you would like to change your mail forwarding, please refer to "[Cornell Email Delivery Options \(Alumni\)](#)"
- If they were provided/made use of a dept web space, they will lose the ability to edit that space once their NetID is transitioned. They should go in ahead of time to "close out" the space.
- Computer: You will need to turn in your department issued computer(s) to ITSG. If you would like to retain your computer, please contact [Becky](#).
- Please be aware of Cornell policies concerning Data Stewardship and Use of IT Resources
  - [https://www.dfa.cornell.edu/sites/default/files/policy/vol4\\_12.pdf](https://www.dfa.cornell.edu/sites/default/files/policy/vol4_12.pdf)
  - [https://www.dfa.cornell.edu/sites/default/files/vol5\\_1.pdf](https://www.dfa.cornell.edu/sites/default/files/vol5_1.pdf)
  - [https://www.dfa.cornell.edu/sites/default/files/vol5\\_10.pdf](https://www.dfa.cornell.edu/sites/default/files/vol5_10.pdf)

## Helpful Links

- [Degree Deadlines and Dates](#)
- [Graduate School Thesis & Dissertation Guidelines](#)

### Suggested Timeline Toward Ph.D. Degree

1 <sup>st</sup> /2 <sup>nd</sup> Semester	Meetings with prospective advisors. Students are encouraged to explore multiple potential advisors. We encourage students attend group research meetings and area seminars.
2 <sup>nd</sup> Semester	Start identifying CS and outside minor members
3 <sup>rd</sup> Semester (end)	Submit Special Committee in Student Center
5 <sup>th</sup> /6 <sup>th</sup> /7 <sup>th</sup> Semester	Completion of A-exam. The A-exam must be completed before the beginning of the 7th semester (4th year). Taking the A-exam earlier offers the advantage of providing an early opportunity to collect constructive feedback on the planned PhD research project. Students will discuss expectations with their PhD advisor and Special Committee members well before the 7th semester.
6 <sup>th</sup> to 12 <sup>th</sup> semester	Students meet regularly with their Special Committee to discuss research progress and, particularly from the ~8th semester on, to discuss the plans required towards graduation. Materials such as an updated CV, conference abstracts, publications and transcript, recommended to be distributed in advance of the meeting.
~12 <sup>th</sup> semester	Completion of B-exam, thesis submission, and degree conferral

## Good Standing

[The Code of Legislation of the Graduate Faculty](#) outlines the core policies governing graduate education at Cornell. This handbook complements the [Code of Legislation](#) and Graduate School policies by offering additional academic guidance specific to students in the field of Computer Science.

To remain in good standing and demonstrate satisfactory academic progress, students must meet the academic requirements as outlined in the [Code of Legislation](#), field handbook, and by the chair/special committee. These layers of governance work together to provide oversight and support for academic progress, while the policies help clarify and establish mutual expectations for achieving degree progress.

To make satisfactory academic progress and remain in good academic standing in the Computer Science graduate program, a student must [at minimum]:

- Maintain a minimum cumulative GPA of 2.5
- Receive a rating of 'Satisfactory' or 'Excellent' on their [Student Progress Review \(SPR\)](#).
- Make timely progress toward degree requirements, including:
  - Completing required coursework by established deadlines.
  - Forming a special committee by the end of the third semester (for Ph.D. students).
  - Fully passing the:
    - Competency requirements prior to the A Exam
    - A by before 7<sup>th</sup> semester
    - B by 12<sup>th</sup> semester (the timing of the B exam is ultimately determined by the student's special committee based on readiness and progress toward completion.) Many students graduate by the 10<sup>th</sup> semester.
  - Completing required teaching responsibilities (2 semesters)
  - Meeting all field-specific requirements as outlined in this handbook.

Students can track their progress on their student checklists. Links to your checklist can be found on the [Field of Computer Science MS/PhD Program Confluence Page](#).

Students are encouraged to work closely with their special committee, the director of graduate studies (DGS), and the Associate Director of the PhD program to stay on track and to communicate early about any delays or challenges. Failure to meet these expectations means that a student is not making satisfactory academic progress and is deemed not in good academic standing, which may impact continued enrollment in their degree program.

## Ph.D. Student Financial Support

Students in good standing in the Field of Computer Science are guaranteed financial support.

Students on the Cornell Tech (CT) Campus: Your support processed on the CT Campus. CT strives to meet the same deadlines. Should students have any questions please email [studentaffairs@tech.cornell.edu](mailto:studentaffairs@tech.cornell.edu).

## Appointment Periods:

Fall:	Aug 21 - Jan 5
Spring:	Jan 6 - May 20
Summer*:	May 21 - Aug 20

Pay periods land on the 15th and 30/31st of each month. If that date lands on a weekend, money will be direct deposited on the Friday prior. We encourage setting up direct deposit in workday. \*Please note a full pay period is either 1-15th day and 16-30/31st day of each month.

\*If you choose to not take a summer internship, GRA opportunities are available, please speak with your advisor about a GRA for the summer. In addition, there is potential for course development positions over the summer if you do not have an internship or GRA. Please reach out to Becky early with interest.

## University Policy 1.3, Graduate Student Assistantships

### **Support Letters\*\***

TA/GRA Support letters are sent two times in the fall and spring. Letters are available in Workday.

- July 20 Fall/December 6 Spring: (Available in Workday).

TA/GRA support letters are sent once in the summer:

- April 20: (Available in Workday)

Vacation Policy: [Cornell Policy 1.3](#)

**Graduate School Page** where you can find information on Graduate Funding and Enrollment, Stipend Rates, and Tax Information.

### **How do I find my appointment letter(s) in Workday?**

- Login to Workday
- Choose Personal and then Documents
- If you are still having trouble locating your letter(s), please reach out to [Cameron Kull](#)

## Funding

Doctoral students enrolled in our program normally complete their degrees within [5-6] years and receive full financial support for the duration of their graduate studies if they remain in good academic standing, make satisfactory academic progress towards the degree, and perform satisfactorily in their assistantship responsibilities.

This financial support is provided through a variety of sources [fellowships, teaching and/or research assistantships]. Students in our program regularly apply for and receive external fellowships and grants. [Cornell will supplement qualified external awards.](#)

Qualified external fellowships will replace internal funding. If a student receives an external fellowship or grant, the Associate Director must be notified as soon as possible so appropriate arrangements can be made. You can find more information fellowship opportunities on the [Graduate School website](#).

Failure to make timely, satisfactory academic progress may result in the loss of good academic standing, funding, and/or eligibility for future opportunities.

Students appointed to assistantships are subject to the terms of the [CGSU-UE Collective Bargaining Agreement](#). Students appointed to fellowships are not included in the bargaining unit and therefore not represented by the union.

## Student Review Process

The [Student Progress Review](#) (SPR) supports regular communication including written feedback between students and their advisors, requiring research degree students and their special committee to have at least one formal conversation each year about academic progress, accomplishments, and plans. Students complete a [form](#) describing milestones completed, accomplishments, challenges, and plans. The special committee chair responds in writing and indicates whether the students' progress is excellent, satisfactory, needs improvement, or is unsatisfactory.

September	Review graduating students. Inform CS Field Faculty of students graduating and who will be on job market to help promote.
October	2 <sup>nd</sup> year and beyond students fill out Student Progress Review (SPR). Once student submits, faculty fill out SPR on progress. Students and faculty will meet after the process to discuss. *Note: what student enters into SPR may/will be shared with CS Field at Annual Review (barring anything prevented by FERPA)
December	2 <sup>nd</sup> year and Beyond students reviewed by CS Field. Students may receive a field letter if the CS Field has any concerns. Again, students will have ample warning if there are any concerns to course correct.
December	Request comments from 1 <sup>st</sup> year students on progress. Competency, faculty talking to about research, etc.
January	1 <sup>st</sup> year students reviewed by CS Field
January	Re-Orientation for first year students

## Accountability and Due Process

All field policies will be enforced consistently across students and timeframes. A doctoral student is expected to design, execute, and manage an independent research agenda and meet their academic milestones in a timely manner. If a student is not meeting expectations, their special committee chair or advisor and the director of graduate studies (DGS) will provide timely written notice (as soon as concerns become evident) outlining the issues, outcomes, or potential consequences, including:

- Written notice of a lack of academic progress or loss of academic standing (separate, and in addition to, the SPR).
- A clear explanation of the concerns and specific expectations for improvement.
- A reasonable timeline and opportunity to meet expectations before any adverse action (e.g., changes in funding status or withdrawal recommendations).
- Further, all students should be provided with an opportunity to meet with the DGS to discuss the concern and plan for improvement.

If a student fails to meet the conditions of that plan, the special committee in collaboration with the field DGS will consult with the Graduate School to review the case and determine next steps. This can include academic withdrawal from their degree program and the Graduate School accompanied by documentation showing that the process above was followed, and in accordance with Graduate School policy and the terms of the CGSU-UE Collective Bargaining Agreement.

Graduate students will be given an opportunity to respond or appeal as outlined by the Graduate School and CGSU-UE policies. Final decisions will be documented and archived by the DGS and GFA and the Graduate School.

## Petition Process

When a Ph.D. student petitions to delay an academic milestone, the petition must be approved by the DGS and Associate Director, and if the student has formed a special committee, then the committee members need to approve as well. The decision whether to approve delaying an academic milestone is made on a case-by-case basis, taking account of the circumstances of each student, so there is no formal criterion that students can use to pre-compute whether their petition will be approved. An exception was the 2020-21 academic year, when the DGS committed to approve all petitions to delay completion of academic milestones until at least the end of the Spring 2021 semester, to offset the unique difficulties created by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Graduate School, as always, had the option to reject petitions even if they were DGS-approved, but thus far they have not exercised that option during 2020-21.

The two general considerations that factor into our judgements on whether to approve delaying milestones are the following.

1. **Justification:** The petition should explain why extending the deadline for completing the milestone will contribute to the students' plans for attaining their academic goals, or it should

explain particular circumstances that interfered with the student's original plan of attaining the milestone before the deadline. The following are some common justifications for delaying academic milestones.

- The student was originally working with one faculty member with the intention of appointing that professor as their advisor, but now they have decided to seek a different advisor, or the professor told the student they must seek a different advisor or find a co-advisor. Now the student needs additional time to form a special committee. (A one-semester extension of the deadline for special committee formation is often granted in this case.)
- A new professor is anticipated to join the field at the start of the upcoming fall, and the student is delaying forming their special committee until the new field member joins so they can include that person on their special committee.
- The student is working on a paper that will form the basis of their A exam, and they are petitioning to delay their A exam until after the paper has been completed and the student has had some time to formulate a research plan that builds upon the paper's discoveries. *(A paper does not need to be accepted for publication in order to form the basis of an A exam. Waiting for an already-written paper to be accepted is usually not considered a good justification for delaying one's A exam.)*
- The students' progress was delayed due to the effects of COVID, and they need additional time to make research progress before they can take their A exam. *(Remark: completion of the Ph.D. competency requirement is usually a precondition for scheduling one's A exam. Students that were enrolled in our Ph.D. program during Spring 2020, Fall 2021, or Spring 2021, are permitted to take their A exam even if they have not yet completed the competency requirement. This temporary adjustment to the A exam rules is in recognition of the fact that COVID has delayed fulfillment of competency requirements for some students.)*

2. **Plan for completion:** The petition should outline a plan and timeline for completing the academic milestone. The plan will be evaluated according to whether there is a realistic chance of success, given the student's current circumstances.

- For example, if a student is petitioning to delay forming their special committee because they need additional time to find an advisor, the plan should specify a potential advisor, or advisors, with whom the student is working or intends to try working. The plan will be deemed more realistic if the designated potential advisor has already started working with the student or has already committed to try working with the student, and has accepted the specified timeline for making a decision whether or not to become the student's advisor.

# CS Graduate Student Space Policy

## Guiding Principles:

- MS Students will be located in designated MS offices.
- First year PhD students will be located in designated first year PhD offices.
- Students will be assigned one desk only.
- Students in their second year and beyond: Students will be located in labs, which are organized by research area. The primary goal guiding lab assignments is to support group cohesion among students in a research area and among students sharing an advisor.
  - In most cases the students of an advisor sit together in one lab.
  - When a student has multiple advisors, or an advisor has students in multiple areas, the advisor(s) will decide, in consultation with other faculty whose students are in the relevant labs, which students should sit with which area.
  - Within each lab, the faculty and students should organize their own process to decide who is assigned to which specific desk. These processes do not have to be the same for all labs.
- In late May/early June current first-year students will be informed of their new office location for the following academic year, where they will normally remain until graduation.
  - There may be special instances where a student may wish to move to another research lab as their research topic evolves. Students should work with their advisor to determine the appropriate research area to sit with following the steps above.
  - First-year students leave monitors in first-year offices. Advisors are responsible for purchasing any computer peripherals and devices for research area spaces.

## Postdocs and Visiting Graduate Students:

- Visiting PhD students will be assigned desks in area labs.
- Postdocs will be assigned desks in area labs or postdoc offices.
- Faculty hosting postdocs or visiting students should reach out to [Elizabeth Estabrook](#) with the following:
  - Postdoc or student Name
  - Postdoc or student ID Number
  - Period of time for access (for example: September 1-December 31).

## Undergraduate Students:

- Undergraduates will not be assigned desk space.
- Undergraduates may have access to a lab with faculty approval to collaborate with graduate students for a termed limit. Faculty should reach out to [Elizabeth Estabrook](#) with the following:
  - Student Name
  - Student ID Number
  - Period of time for access (for example: September 1-December 31).

## Personal Belongings:

- Personal belongings of a typical work-related nature are allowable (writing implements, mugs, photographs, figurines, books, macbook stands, etc.)

- Due to building code regulations, students cannot use offices to store household belongings and apartment appliances over the summer while they are in flux between living spaces. These include but are not limited to small appliances, bedding, clothing, shelving, chairs, etc. Many storage options are available in the greater Ithaca area for those individuals between apartments.
- Storage (including during breaks and summers) of battery powered scooters, Hoover boards, etc. is not permitted. Use of these items for a daily commute is OK, but they must return home with you when you leave the building each day.
- Bikes are not permitted in our offices and labs, however, these can be locked to the bike racks located outside of each building.
- Unsanctioned items will be removed by facilities staff.

**Conflicts:**

Should any conflicts arise, we will work closely with students, advisors, and area faculty to find suitable solutions. Please reach out to [Becky Stewart](#) or [Andrew Myers](#).

## CS PhD Student Start-Up Funding Policy

**Purpose**

As a newly admitted MS or PhD student in the Field of Computer Science, you will receive start-up funds to assist with your transition to graduate study at Cornell. These funds are intended to help offset initial academic and relocation-related expenses.

**Award Amount**

Policy Effective Fall 2026. Each eligible student will be awarded **\$2600** in start-up funding. The award will be issued as a credit to your bursar account.

**Recommended Use:** Students are encouraged to use these funds to purchase a personal laptop for use during their graduate studies.

**Eligibility Requirements**

- You must be admitted to and enrolled in an MS or PhD program in the Field of Computer Science.
- You must be actively enrolled to receive the funds.

Campus	Amount	Disbursement
Ithaca	<b>\$2600</b> to be awarded on your bursar bill by the CS Graduate Office	<a href="#">Disbursed per the Graduate School Fellowship schedule.</a>
Cornell Tech	<b>\$2600</b> to be awarded on your bursar bill by the CT Student Academic Affairs Office	<a href="#">Disbursed per the Graduate School Fellowship schedule.</a>

## Computing Equipment and Facilities on the Ithaca Campus

- Students will be provided with a monitor in their first-year shared office. These monitors stay in the first-year office space, and they do not move with the student.
- After completing the first year and upon relocation to a permanent lab or office space, students should consult with their faculty advisor regarding additional monitors or other computing peripherals.

## Computing Equipment and Facilities on the Ithaca Campus

- Students are required to coordinate with their faculty advisor to outfit their desk space with monitors and/or other items.

## Personal Devices

Devices purchased in this manner will be considered a Personal device. Along with any other personally owned device; this means you will have no IT support for the device itself, and limited support for IT services. You will be responsible for procuring software and securing the device and contents (see below).

## Security and Use of Cornell IT Resources

Please see the following CIT guidelines on how to securely use an unmanaged device:

- [Security Practices When Working from Home](#)
  - It is strongly recommended that you have the following
    - Malware protection
    - Disk Encryption
    - Backup
- Responsible computer use policies:
  - Policy 4.12 (Data Stewardship and Custodianship):  
[https://policy.cornell.edu/sites/default/files/policy/vol4\\_12.pdf](https://policy.cornell.edu/sites/default/files/policy/vol4_12.pdf)
  - Policy 5.1 (Responsible Use of Information Technology Resources)  
[https://policy.cornell.edu/sites/default/files/vol5\\_1.pdf](https://policy.cornell.edu/sites/default/files/vol5_1.pdf)
  - Policy 5.10 (Information Security) [https://policy.cornell.edu/sites/default/files/vol5\\_10.pdf](https://policy.cornell.edu/sites/default/files/vol5_10.pdf)

## Software and Licensing

Common software:

- MS Office: <https://it.cornell.edu/software-licensing/microsoft-365-apps-students>
- Matlab: <https://it.cornell.edu/software-licensing/matlab-licensing>
- Mathematica: <https://it.cornell.edu/software-licensing/mathematica-licensing>
- Github: <https://github.coecis.cornell.edu/>
- Cornell AI Sandbox: <https://it.cornell.edu/sandboxai>
- Adobe Products: You will need to procure your own
- For additional software available to you as a member of the Cornell community, see:  
<https://it.cornell.edu/software-licensing>

## Questions

Questions regarding this policy or the disbursement of start-up funds should be directed to the appropriate graduate administration office for your campus.

Rev June 2026

Campus	Person	Contact
Ithaca	Becky Stewart	<a href="mailto:Rss7@cornell.edu">Rss7@cornell.edu</a>
Cornell Tech	Student Academic Affairs	<a href="https://tdx.cornell.edu/TDClient/235/Portal/Home/">https://tdx.cornell.edu/TDClient/235/Portal/Home/</a>
Ithaca & CT	ITSG policies/ticket system	<a href="https://it.coecis.cornell.edu/">https://it.coecis.cornell.edu/</a>

## Setting Mutual Expectations for Mentoring

Cornell supports the Faculty Advancing Inclusive Mentoring (FAIM) framework for faculty/student mentoring that draws upon a strengths-based and identity-informed approach to support mutual growth, development, and success ([NASEM, 2019](#); [Windchief, 2019](#)).

The FAIM [philosophy, key principles](#), and [core mutual expectation](#) areas for inclusive mentorship provide a foundation for fulfilling mentoring relationships by:

- supporting mentors and mentees as they seek to develop an understanding of one another's expectations, cultures, values, and sources of motivation;
- helping mentors and mentees develop a mentorship plan better aligned to a mentor's and mentee's strengths, needs, and goals; and
- providing resources and tools that can be adapted and adopted by mentors and mentees to be contextually relevant.

Please review the [FAIM website](#) for resources and tools to support your mentoring relationships. Please reach out to either [Becky Stewart](#) or the DGS, both can provide advice and help navigate mentoring challenges.

## Cornell Tech

The Computer Science PhD at Cornell Tech is the same program as in the Cornell University CS department. Any CS field member can advise CS PhD students. The degree requirements in Ithaca and the Cornell Tech campus are the same.

Students interested in pursuing their research at the Cornell Tech campus are expected to spend their first year of graduate studies on the Ithaca Campus. During their first year, PhD students are strongly encouraged to complete their competency requirements in AI, PL, Systems and Theory as well as initiating research with faculty. Students who choose an advisor at Cornell Tech generally relocate to New York City. Students at Cornell Tech can engage with Ithaca faculty on their committees and are welcome to spend time in Ithaca as appropriate for their research.

Students should consider carefully their minor subject area as limited minor courses are available at Cornell Tech. Suggested minors are: Information Science, Electrical and Computer Engineering, Operations Research and Information Engineering, Business.

First year PhD students in the Field of Computer Science may petition to waive the default first-year Ithaca residency requirement; allowing a student to start the PhD program located in NYC to start research with a Cornell Tech CS field member. You may petition this requirement by using this form. You will need the approval of a faculty member located on the Cornell Tech campus and the DGS. Please submit the completed form to Becky Stewart by April 15.

## Moving to Cornell Tech

- Must have advisor at Cornell Tech
- Approval from Cornell Tech Advisor to move to NYC
- Satisfactory progress on competency requirements
- Inform CS Graduate Office and Cornell Tech of your intention to move to the Tech campus. The suggested timeline is early during summer. Please also include the date of your intended move.
- Once you have informed Cornell Tech of your arrival date, you will receive further technical details with regard to your move from Student & Academic Affairs (access to the Tech Campus Building, computer, space, etc). [studentaffairs@tech.cornell.edu](mailto:studentaffairs@tech.cornell.edu)
- Please be sure to remove all personal belongings from your graduate office on the Ithaca campus.
- The laptop that you were issued when you arrived to the Ithaca campus will move with you to the Tech Campus.
- Please see: Cornell Tech PhD Student Campus Policy
- For housing: <https://thehouseatcornelltech.com/>

## Curricular Practical Training

International students wishing to partake in an internship during a semester (Fall, Spring, or Summer) will need to apply for Curricular Practical Training (CPT). CPT can be either part-time or full time.

- Typically, students participate in part-time internships during either the Fall or Spring semester while also supported on a TA, GRA or fellowship. The part-time internship would be an additional 5 hours per week on top of the TA or GRA. Students should confirm that their fellowships allow for an internship.
- Full-time CPT can be taken during Fall, Spring, or Summer for 40 hours a week. Students must register LOA for the semester while on CPT.

The International Services Office of Global Learning has moved their CPT Forms Online. Below is our suggested process for applying for CPT.

1. Discuss your offer of an internship with your advisor to get their approval
2. Obtain an offer letter for your CPT
3. Enter your request for CPT online. Link found here:  
<https://international.globallearning.cornell.edu/employment-and-taxes/f-1-cpt>

4. If your internship will be remote, please note on the form the address in which you will be working from
5. Please enter Becky Stewart's name and email (rss7@cornell.edu) as advisor information so that Becky can finalize the process with supporting documentation.
  - a. Once you submit the CPT, please send Becky Stewart 2-3 sentences on "how this internship provides an integral research component of the dissertation or thesis project". Please send this statement in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person your advisor should approve this statement.

# The Minor in Computer Science

To minor in Computer Science the students must have a CS field member on his/her special committee. This minor requires a certain amount of knowledge in CS (which may or may not be acquired at Cornell). This requirement is best conveyed in terms of the following two groups of CS courses:

(A) All 5000-level courses except Practicums (e.g., 5121, 5321, 5411, 5431, 5621, 5701)

(B) All 6000 and 7000-level courses and graduate seminars (only if letter grade is available).

## Typical requirements for Ph.D. students in other fields

The student must have knowledge of at least four courses from either (A) or (B), of which at least two must be from (B). In addition, at least two of these courses must form a natural sequence. It is up to the student's CS special committee member to determine whether two courses constitute a reasonable sequence. Examples of possible course sequences are listed below (this list is NOT intended to be inclusive). 5110-5120, 5110-6110, 5110-6120, 5120-6110, 5120-6120, 5410-6410, 5210-6220, 5700-4860, 5700-6700, 5810-6810, 5820-6820, 6110-6120, 6210-6220, 6810-6820.

## Typical requirements for master's Students in other fields

The student must have knowledge of at least two courses from (B), or at least two from (A) and one from (B). In the latter case, 3410 counts as a group (A) course.

## Grade requirements

Courses taken at Cornell must be for letter grade and be passed with a grade of B- or better to count toward the minor.

## Modifications

The student and the CS special committee member must agree on a plan of study that fulfills the requirement for the CS minor (this should be done when the CS member joins the student's committee). The CS special committee member may modify the above requirements.

# Special master's in computer science for Ph.D. students in other fields

A [Master's degree in Computer Science](#) (CS) is available to students enrolled in a PhD or MS/PhD program in the following fields:

- Mathematics
- Applied Mathematics
- Information Science
- Statistics

(A Master's degree in Mathematics is also available to students enrolled in the PhD program in Computer Science; consult the [Field of Mathematics](#) for information.)

## Requirements

1. 4 residence units
2. A Computer Science field member on the special committee
3. Passing an A-exam in the student's major field of study
4. Knowledge of CS 2110, CS 3110 and CS 4410/4411 (e.g., by having taken these courses at Cornell, or equivalent courses at other institutions)
5. Two of the following courses: CS 6410, CS 6110, CS 6320, CS 6820
6. In addition to 4 and 5, any two CS courses numbered 5000 and above (lecture/practicum pairs such as CS 5120/5121, CS 5320/5321, and CS 5620/5621 count as one course).

All courses taken in fulfillment of these requirements must be taken for grade credit, and grades of B– or better in all coursework are required.

Minor amendments to these requirements for a particular student, such as the substitution of one course for another, may be made on a case-by-case basis with the unanimous approval of the special committee and the DGS of CS. Please note all course requirements must be completed within two semesters of taking the A exam.

## Administration

A PhD candidate wishing to receive a master's degree from CS must apply formally. The student must obtain approval from all members of the special committee and apply to the Graduate School for this degree. There is an application form available for this purpose ([link below](#)). The application must be submitted at the time of admission to candidacy (that is, at the time of the A-exam), and submitted to the CS Graduate Office in Bowers CIS, where it will be kept on file and communicated to the Graduate School.

- [Special Masters Application Form](#)

**Formal registration in CS is not required.**

The member of the student's special committee representing CS is primarily responsible for supervising the content of the program of study as it pertains to the master's degree. That member must be present at the A-exam. It is expected that substantial progress toward fulfilling the requirements for the master's degree will have been made by the time of the A-exam, and a suitable demonstration of understanding at the A-exam will be expected. It is not necessary for all requirements to have been met at the time of the A-exam, but the degree will not be awarded until all requirements are satisfied.

When all requirements have been satisfied, a copy of the application form will be signed by all members of the special committee and DGS of CS and submitted to the CS Graduate Office in Upson Hall for communication to the Graduate School.

### **Special Circumstances**

If the student leaves the PhD program or transfers to a different major field that is not one of the approved major fields, the student may still receive the master's degree in CS if all other requirements have been met.

### **Financial Support**

Financial support will still be the responsibility of the major field.

# Grievance Process

The Graduate School provides a [grievance policy](#).

There are different options for assistance and support based on the nature of the conflict. The Graduate School grievance policy is available specifically to help resolve issues such as the enforcement of program requirements, assistantships, or authorship disputes, for example. The grievance procedure is not a mechanism for appealing academic decisions such as decisions made by graduate faculty about a student's academic or research performance; decisions about removing funding as a result of insufficient academic progress; or a decision by a graduate faculty member to resign as special committee chair.

Depending on your goals or preferences, you could also seek confidential help; the designated confidential resources are found on the [list of confidential resources](#). Related, as a confidential, independent, impartial, and informal resource available to the university community that addresses conflicts, concerns, and other issues impacting our community, you could seek support through the [University Ombuds Office](#).

## Graduate School Policies

You can find the [Graduate School Policies here](#).