

# Ph.D. Student Progress Evaluation Criteria

Department of Computer Science, Dartmouth College

This document describes how the Computer Science faculty evaluate the progress of Ph.D. students.

## Ph.D. Progress Meetings

The tenure-track members of the CS faculty meet for a full day in the Spring term to evaluate the progress of each Ph.D. student in their second year or beyond. Based on the student's research, TA, and course performance, the faculty determine that the student is progressing well; or that concerns exist and the student should be given an opportunity to address these in order to remain in the program; or that the progress is seriously deficient and the student must leave the Ph.D. program by the end of the Spring or Summer term. The Ph.D. Program Director communicates the outcome of the meeting to each student in a letter.

A second meeting is held in early Fall to discuss the performance of Ph.D. students entering their second year and, if necessary, to reevaluate a select set of senior students.

## Evaluation Criteria

The Faculty's evaluation of students is based on their performance in courses, TA, and research. Since students often wonder which component is more important—courses, TA, or research—we have attempted to address this issue below frankly and clearly.

**Course performance.** Although we welcome uniform excellence, we do not expect a student to perform excellently in every course. However, if a student wishes to work in a certain area and does not demonstrate excellence in the corresponding courses (e.g., a student interested in Theory does not perform impressively in 231), the student might find it hard to convince a faculty member to be their thesis advisor, which, in turn, can affect the student's ability to continue in the Ph.D. program. It is important not to perform badly in courses. A single NC grade or more than one LP grade puts a student on probation and can seriously affect their ability to continue in the program. Excellent performance in courses, on the other hand, can be very helpful; for instance, it might help a student get strong letters of recommendation even from those members of the faculty that are not involved in the student's research.

**TA performance.** The success of a course depends critically on the Teaching Assistant's willingness and ability to communicate clearly and effectively in English, help answer student questions during office hours, grade the work accurately and in a timely manner, and help the instructor in other ways, e.g., prepare solutions, proof-read exams. So we take TA performance seriously. Unless a student maintains a good record as a TA, a student cannot be allowed to remain on DF (Dartmouth Fellowship) for long. Thus, if a student does not prove to be an effective TA, they will not be allowed to continue in the program unless they are supported on a research grant. In recognition of the importance of TAs work to the departments teaching mission, the department has an annual Best Teaching Assistant award with a cash prize and engraves the TA's name on a plaque displayed in the department.

**Research performance.** Research performance is the most important component of a Ph.D. students record: no amount of excellence in other components can compensate for weakness in research performance. Commitment and demonstrated excellence in research are the primary criterion by which faculty determine how well the student is progressing and whether the student should be allowed to remain in the Ph.D. program. It is therefore important for students to clearly understand what the research expectations and requirements are during each year of the program. We list these below. Note the high expectations right from the start.

## Research Performance Expectations

1. First year research:
  - (a) Take a minimum of two terms of research and be supervised by a tenure-track faculty member.
  - (b) By September 15, submit a high-quality paper that describes in detail your research efforts and results to date, including motivation, relation of your work to the work of others, and specifics about results or obstacles faced in obtaining results. This paper should be submitted to your research advisor and the Ph.D. Program Director. It will be the basis of your initial evaluation in the Fall term of your second year.
2. Second year research:
  - (a) Take a minimum of two terms of research and be supervised by a tenure-track faculty member.
  - (b) By the end of Spring term, you must have a Ph.D. advisor who is a member of the tenure-track faculty in Computer Science. Students may change advisors after this point, but they should not be without an advisor for more than a term.
3. Third year research:
  - (a) Pass the Research Presentation Exam (RPE) by the end of Winter term.
  - (b) Do good research and publish in good conferences and journals.
  - (c) Identify a thesis topic and do a successful thesis proposal.
4. Fourth year research:
  - (a) If you have not already done a successful thesis proposal, you are late with respect to this requirement and you must do a successful thesis proposal as soon as possible in the year.
  - (b) Do good research towards the thesis and publish in good conferences and journals.
5. Fifth year research:
  - (a) Defend and submit the thesis.
  - (b) The College policy is for students to no longer receive DF support (Dartmouth Fellowship) beyond the fifth year. Therefore, if your thesis advisor has no grant support for you, you will not receive a stipend after the fifth year.
6. Sixth year students:
  - (a) You are late. Students are expected to complete the Ph.D. in five years. So complete the thesis and any other requirements, and graduate a.s.a.p.
  - (b) See the note about funding in the previous section for fifth year students.
7. Seventh year students, if any:
  - (a) You are very late. In fact, Dartmouth's Office of Graduate Studies does not normally allow a student to count the courses done more than seven years ago towards the degree. We don't normally allow students to remain in the Ph.D. program beyond the seventh year. So defend, submit, and graduate right away.
  - (b) See the note about funding in the section for the fifth year students.