Graduate Student Handbook

SDSU | San Diego State University

Department of Economics

2026–2027 Academic Year

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1 Introduction

1.1 Overview

Welcome to the Department of Economics at SDSU! This handbook is intended to guide graduate students through the M.S. program. It provides specific procedures and regulations and other important information. Although it is not a formal contract, following these guidelines is highly recommended to ensure swift completion and success in the graduate program. We welcome any comments or suggestions you may have to improve this handbook. This guide supplements the applicable SDSU University Catalog and your approved Program of Study; it does not replace them. Consult the graduate advisors before changing your degree plan.

The M.S. program in Economics provides students with advanced training in decision making techniques and quantitative analysis by building on a core of applied microeconomics and econometrics classes. Students learn to apply analytic methods to business and policy issues, use advanced econometric methods and computer software. An internship program provides students with valuable work experience. The M.S. program is designed to prepare students for careers in consulting, domestic and multinational firms and government agencies; provide advanced training in economics for students planning on entering a Ph.D. program; and offer opportunities for university-level teaching experience valuable to a wide range of careers.

Our goal is for every student in our program to achieve the following **degree learning outcomes**:

1. Proficiency with advanced microeconomic analysis, including: constrained and unconstrained optimization, comparative statics, market equilibrium, strategy, welfare and policy analysis.
2. Proficiency with advanced econometric data management, analysis, and causal inference methods, including: multiple regression, instrumental variables, panel data methods, and difference-in-differences.
3. The combined application of microeconomic and econometric analysis for academic, private- and public-sector research, including proficiency in data management and statistics with modern software tools.

1.2 Departmental Organization

The **Economics Department Office** is in Nasatir Hall 329; telephone: 619-594-1675. Contact the office for current staffing, hours, payroll routing, and administrative assistance.

The **department chair**, Dr. Joseph Sabia, coordinates departmental academic and administrative matters.

The **graduate program advisors** are your primary contacts for degree planning, course approvals, advancement to candidacy, internships, and the culminating experience:

- **Ryan Abman**, NH-308: rabman@sdsu.edu.
- **Yang Liang**, NH-323: yang.liang@sdsu.edu.

Meet with an advisor at least once each semester and before enrolling in a course that requires approval.

1.3 Faculty, Staff, and Research Resources

Faculty teach graduate courses, supervise research, serve on thesis committees, and advise students about careers and doctoral study. Get to know faculty beyond your current instructors and attend departmental research seminars. Consult the Economics faculty and staff directory for current appointments, research interests, office locations, and contact details.

The department's research community includes the Center for Health Economics & Policy Studies (CHEPS). Research opportunities depend on faculty projects and available funding. Contact faculty whose interests match your own.

For literature searches, data resources, and research assistance, use the SDSU Library. University graduate forms and guidance are available from the College of Graduate Studies.

2 Requirements for the M.S. in Economics

2.1 Unit requirements and core curriculum.

The M.S. in Economics requires a minimum of 33 units of coursework at the 500-700 level. Of these 33 units, the courses listed in the table below are *required* to be completed. The semester offered assumes a full time student completing the requirements for the program over three to four semesters, depending on course scheduling and the culminating experience.

Course	Title	Units	Usual timing
ECON 630	Microeconomic Theory	3	Fall, year 1
ECON 640	Econometrics	3	Fall, year 1
ECON 650	Statistical Tools for Economics	3	Fall, year 1
ECON 631	Topics in Applied Microeconomics	3	Spring, year 1
ECON 641	Applied Research in Econometrics	3	Spring, year 1
ECON 740	Seminar in Applied Economic Research	3	Fall, year 2
ECON 795	Internship in Economics	3	After ECON 630 and 640

Confirm actual offerings in the class schedule. See the program requirements and the University Catalog.

2.2 Elective courses

Looking at the table above, there are a total of 21 units of required courses. Thus, the remaining 12 units of coursework are to be met by elective courses. These are courses for which you have some discretion over what to take. Electives must be taken at the 500-700

level, with no more than 6 units at the 500 level. As nearly all elective courses are three units, this means you need to select four elective courses, no more than two of which can be at the 500 level. The following is a list and description of potential elective courses in the economics department that can be used as electives:

Upper Division Courses (open to both undergraduate and graduate students)

ECON 507. Mathematical Economics (3)
Prerequisite: Mathematics 124 or 150. Recommended: Economics 320 or 321.
Mathematical concepts as tools in understanding, developing, and illustrating economic theories. Applications of calculus and linear equations to constrained optimization, macro models, elasticity, general equilibrium, and input-output analysis.

ECON 561. International Trade (3)
Prerequisites: Economics 320 and 321.
Theory and policy of international trade with examples drawn from current issues. Models of determinants of trade. Free trade and protectionism. Trade and economic development. Trading blocs, the European community, GATT and U.S. trade policy.

ECON 565. North American Economic Relations (3)
Prerequisites: Economics 101 and 102. Recommended: Economics 360.
Socioeconomic development of U.S., Mexico, and Canada since World War II. Issues affecting the three countries' relations, including trade investment, technology, and international organizations and agreements.

ECON 592. International Monetary Theory and Policy (3)
Prerequisite: Economics 320 or 490.
International monetary spillovers from domestic macroeconomic policies. Foreign exchange markets and balance of payments. Fixed, flexible and managed exchange rates. Bretton Woods, international monetary fund, and world debt crisis.

Graduate Courses

ECON 700. Seminar in Microeconomic Applications (3)
Prerequisites: Economics 630 or classified graduate standing in another department and consent of instructor.
Microeconomic applications to individual, firm, or government. Maximum credit six units of Economics 700 applicable to a master's degree. See Class Schedule for specific content.
Seminar topics include:
Seminar in Industrial Organization and Firm Behavior
Seminar in Labor Economics
Seminar in Economic Issues in Demography
Seminar in Experimental Economics

ECON 710. Seminar in Public Economics (3)
Prerequisites: Economics 630 or classified graduate standing in another department and consent of instructor.

Government in a market economy. Impact on individual and firm behavior. Maximum credit six units of Economics 710 applicable to a master's degree. See Class Schedule for specific content. Seminar topics include:
Seminar in Environmental Issues
Seminar in Public Expenditures
Seminar in Urban and Regional
Seminar in Regulation
Seminar in Tax Policy
Seminar in International Trade and Commercial Policy

ECON 720. Seminar in Development and Planning (3)
Prerequisite: Consent of instructor.
Development process and policies. Planning techniques. Relations among developing and developed countries. Maximum credit six units of Economics 720 applicable to a master's degree. See Class Schedule for specific content. Seminar topics include:
Seminar in Development Economics
Seminar in Development Planning
Seminar in International Trade and Commercial Policy

ECON 730. Seminar in Macroeconomic Policy (3)
Prerequisite: Consent of instructor.
Applications of macroeconomics to open economies. Maximum credit six units of Economics 730 applicable to a master's degree. See Class Schedule for specific content. Seminar topics include:
Seminar in National Monetary Institutions
Seminar in International Monetary Policy
Seminar in Business Cycles
Seminar in Macroeconomic Modeling and Prediction

ECON 750. Seminar in History of Economic Thought (3)
Prerequisite: Consent of instructor.
Economic development in historical perspective. Maximum credit six units of Economics 750 applicable to a master's degree. See Class Schedule for specific content. Seminar topics include:
Seminar in U.S. Economic History
Seminar in Economic Growth in Historical Perspective
Seminar in Contemporary Economic Systems

ECON 795. Internship in Economics (3) Cr/NC
Prerequisite: Economics 630, 640, and approval of graduate adviser.
Students will be assigned to various jobs in which economic theory can be applied to decision making. Supervision will be shared by the graduate adviser and on-the-job supervisor.

ECON 797. Research (3) Cr/NC/RP
Prerequisites: Classified graduate standing and consent of instructor.
Independent research project in an area of economics.

ECON 798. Special Study (1-3) Cr/NC/RP
Prerequisite: Consent of staff; to be arranged with department chair and instructor.
Individual study. Maximum credit six units applicable to a master's degree.

ECON 799A. Thesis (3) Cr/NC/RP
Prerequisites: An officially appointed thesis committee and advancement to candidacy.
Preparation of a project or thesis for the master's degree.

In addition to the economics courses listed above, you are welcome to take graduate courses offered by other departments at SDSU, provided you meet the pre-requisites for these courses. Suitable courses outside economics that may appeal to you include the examples below. Availability, course titles, prerequisites, and degree applicability must be checked before enrollment:

Course Number	Course Name
BA 629	Financial Management
Fin 642	Financial Risk Management
Fin 651	Seminar in Investments
Fin 654	Seminar in International Business Finance
Geog 573	Population and the Environment
Math 524	Linear Algebra
Math 531	Partial Differential Equations
Math 537	Ordinary Differential Equations
Math 623	Linear Algebra and Matrix Theory
Math 636	Mathematical Modeling
Pol S 560	Comparative Public Policy
Pol S 615	Seminar in Research Design and Analysis in Political Science
Soc 555	Immigrants and Refugees in Contemporary American Society
Stat 550	Applied Probability
Stat 551A	Probability and Mathematical Statistics I
Stat 551B	Probability and Mathematical Statistics II
Stat 575	Actuarial Modelling
Stat 670A	Advanced Mathematical Statistics I
Stat 670B	Advanced Mathematical Statistics II
Stat 672	Nonparametric Statistics
Stat 676	Bayesian Statistics
Stat 701	Monte Carlo Statistical Methods

This is by no means an exhaustive list and you should discuss *any* non-Economics elective courses you plan on taking with the graduate advisors before enrolling. A maximum of 9 approved units outside Economics may count toward the degree. Inclusion in this list does not constitute approval for an individual Program of Study. Elective courses may be completed at any time, though we recommend spacing your four electives out over your 3-4 semesters.

2.3 Program of Study and Course Approvals

Develop your Program of Study with the graduate advisors early in the program. Check your degree evaluation in my.SDSU and resolve discrepancies before your graduating semester. Discuss outside electives, substitutions, transfer credit, independent study, and any certificate coursework before enrolling; a course that counts toward another credential does not automatically count toward this degree.

An approved change may require a Petition for Adjustment of Academic Requirements (PAAR). Student-initiated graduate forms are available in my.SDSU under *Academic Records* and *Student Records Forms*; some requests are initiated by the advisor. See Graduate Student Forms for the current process. A submitted petition is not an approved exception.

2.4 Advancement to Candidacy

A student who holds classified graduate standing and who meets the scholastic, professional, and personal standards of the university may be considered for advancement to candidacy for the master's degree at the point of submission of the official program of study. The student must have completed Economics 630, 631, 640, 641 and 650 with at least a 3.0 (B) average and no individual core course grade lower than a 2.7 (B-). The average GPA across all courses listed on the student's program of study must also be no lower than a 3.0. Deficiencies must be discussed with the graduate advisors before any repeat enrollment or petition. Retaking a course is subject to university approval and applicable repeat rules. Advancement to candidacy is a pre-requisite for taking the comprehensive examinations, writing a thesis, and enrolling in Econ 740.

2.5 Selecting a Capstone Plan

Students must decide if they will follow Plan A: Thesis or Plan B: Comprehensive Examination. If a student selects Plan A, they must enroll in Econ 799A (Thesis), form a thesis committee, and submit a completed and approved thesis by the university's deadline in order to graduate. Students selecting Plan B must pass an exam drawing on the major knowledge and abilities built through the program. The process of writing a thesis can be very rewarding and a published thesis is the traditional demonstrative research product of the master's degree. There are also opportunities for independent research projects for those students who choose Plan B. The comprehensive exam is administered following the completion of Econ 740.

2.6 Model Course Map for Plan A and Plan B

The following illustrative plan spans four semesters. Electives can sometimes be moved earlier, but completion depends on course availability and the timing of the thesis or comprehensive examination. Complete the core sequence (ECON 630, 631, 640, 641, 650, and 740) on schedule because these courses are normally offered once per year. Confirm a personal plan with an advisor. For Plan A, ECON 799A occupies one of the four elective-course slots in this map.

Semester	Plan A (Thesis)	Plan B (Comprehensive Exam)
Fall Semester, Year 1	Econ 630	Econ 630
	Econ 640	Econ 640
	Econ 650	Econ 650
Spring Semester, Year 1	Econ 631	Econ 631
	Econ 641	Econ 641
	Elective	Elective
Summer, Year 1	Econ 795	Econ 795
Fall, Year 2	Econ 740	Econ 740
	Elective	Elective
	Elective	Elective
Spring, Year 2	Econ 799A	Comprehensive Exam
		Elective

3 Thesis

Plan A provides an opportunity to develop an original research project under faculty supervision. Begin identifying a research question and a potential chair during the first year. Agree on a schedule for proposals, data work, drafts, committee review, and the public defense. Allow several rounds of revision and sufficient time for each committee member to read your work.

The department's thesis committee normally consists of three faculty members: a chair and second member from Economics and a third member from another SDSU department. Discuss membership with the graduate advisors before requesting formal appointments. The chair normally must be active tenured or tenure-track faculty. Other appointments and exceptions require the approvals described in the Graduate Studies thesis committee guidance.

You must advance to candidacy and obtain approval of the thesis committee before registering in ECON 799A. The graduate advisor submits the committee packet through the current electronic process. Identify any necessary human-subjects or animal-research approvals before beginning the relevant research.

Enroll in ECON 799A for the thesis. If completion requires a later term, arrange ECON 799B enrollment with Graduate Studies. Confirm the enrollment required for thesis submission, funding, and campus services before choosing main-campus or Global Campus registration.

The committee must approve the thesis and the department's defense requirements must be completed. Submit the approved, formatted thesis through Montezuma Publishing and complete the review and publication process. Check the current submission and publication deadlines, and apply for graduation separately. A missed deadline can move graduation to a later term.

Keep research files organized, document data sources and permissions, and agree with your chair on data ownership and publication plans. The thesis should demonstrate independent understanding of the research question, methods, evidence, and limitations.

4 Comprehensive Examinations

Students opting for Plan B must take a comprehensive examination (in lieu of writing a thesis). These examinations ask students to apply what has been learned in the core coursework. Students may not register for these exams until they have met the conditions required for advancement to candidacy and submitted an official program of study.

A student will have at most two chances to pass the comprehensive examination (i.e. you can fail only one time). These two attempts must be made within one year of completion of the first year core course sequence (Econ 630, 640, 631, 641, 650). The exam will typically be offered two times per year. In order to pass the examination, students must demonstrate a comprehension and application of the material taught in the first year core course sequence in econometrics and microeconomics.

4.1 2027 Examination Format and Schedule

The 2027 examination combines an in-person component worth 50 points with an empirical packet and oral defense worth 50 points together.

- **In-person examination:** Friday, February 19, 2027, noon to 2:00 p.m.
- **Empirical packet:** released at the start of the in-person examination; due Sunday, February 21, 2027, at 5:00 p.m.
- **Oral defenses:** Monday, February 22, 2027, 10:00 a.m. to noon. The graduate advisors will send individual appointment times.

The oral component begins with a five-minute explanation of the research question, approach, and findings, followed by approximately five to ten minutes of faculty questions. The examination materials will specify deliverables, grading details, permitted resources, and any AI-use rules. Follow those instructions and complete the work independently. Confirm logistics with the graduate advisors before the examination.

5 Internships

All students are required to complete Econ 795 (Internship) as part of the M.S. program in Economics. Econ 795 is a required course, meaning that you have to register for the course and fulfill the course requirements to earn credit.

An internship is a great way to gain experience in a particular industry or field, applying the tools of economic analysis to real world problems. Past students have had internships at a wide range of fields, from the private sector to government agencies to political campaigns, to research centers. While the graduate advisors can offer advice on securing an internship, we highly recommend that you start thinking about what careers interest you and look into potential internship opportunities in these fields.

Obtain graduate-advisor approval before beginning an internship for credit and use the current internship contract and supervisor evaluation forms. Discuss the work, learning objectives, supervision, and course requirements in advance. A job does not automatically qualify as an internship.

If you cannot secure a suitable internship, contact the graduate advisors promptly to discuss an individually approved alternative and any required PAAR. Do not substitute a course or independent study for ECON 795 without formal approval.

6 Academic Student Employment

6.1 Graduate Assistants

A limited number of Graduate Assistant (GA) positions are available each semester. Students working as GA's will have a certain number of hours that they are assigned to work with faculty in the Economics department. Typical activities for GA's include providing assistance to faculty conducting research by collecting and arranging data, assisting in the instruction of students, conducting small discussion groups related to a large lecture course, holding office hours, preparing course materials, and assisting professors in evaluating student work and examinations. The number of positions and hours available each semester depends on course offerings, enrollment, and professor need.

Interested students should consult the department financial support page and the graduate advisors for the current application process. Follow the application or renewal instructions for each semester. A fall appointment does not automatically continue into spring, and the written appointment specifies the assigned hours and duties.

Grant-funded research employment, including CHEPS or SDSU Research Foundation appointments, is separate from departmental GA assignments. Confirm the funding source, supervisor, authorized hours, and reporting procedure for each appointment. Do not assume that project involvement guarantees additional paid hours.

6.2 Graduate Teaching Associates

The department offers qualified graduate students opportunities to teach their own principles courses following appropriate preparation. Selection depends on academic standing, readiness to teach, training, course demand, and funding. Contact the graduate advisors and the faculty coordinating the GTA program about recruitment and preparation for the following academic year.

Students should plan ahead and discuss how teaching responsibilities fit with coursework and the culminating experience. Continuation in a later semester depends on performance and available assignments; it is not guaranteed.

7 Scholarships

Economics students may be eligible for the McCuen Endowed Economics Scholarship, Terhune Economics Scholarship, Daniel Weintraub Endowment Scholarship, Center for Public Economics awards, and the Weintraub Paper Award. Eligibility and application requirements differ. The department also recognizes outstanding graduating students through the M.C. Madhavan Prize.

Consult the department scholarships page and Graduate Studies financial support resources for current opportunities and application links. Check each award's current GPA, enrollment, essay, and financial-need requirements. Submit any required FAFSA or California Dream Act application by the applicable deadline.

Renewal is not automatic. Reapply when required and verify the current award cycle rather than relying on a prior year's deadline or award amount. Nonresident tuition support is limited; ask the graduate advisors about availability and eligibility.

8 University Policies

8.1 College of Graduate Studies

Use the College of Graduate Studies, the University Catalog, and your degree evaluation for current academic requirements. Registration and student records are managed through my.SDSU. Review your SDSU email regularly for notices and deadlines.

8.2 University Grade Requirements

The university requires at least a C in each letter-graded course applied to the degree, unless the program requires a higher grade. Both the SDSU and overall post-baccalaureate GPAs, and both the SDSU and overall Program of Study GPAs, must be at least 3.00. The Economics core-course B-minus floor in Section 2.4 remains a separate requirement. See Graduate Studies grade requirements.

8.3 Credit/No Credit

Graduate students may not take a course listed on their program of study for a Cr/NC grade unless the course is specifically designated as credit/no credit only. The symbol "Cr" is used to report the satisfactory completion of courses Econ 795, 797, 798, 799A, and 799B. These are the only Economics courses that may be taken Cr/NC. All other Economics courses must be taken for a letter grade.

8.4 Schedule Adjustment

Check your registration in my.SDSU and use the Registrar's academic calendar for each term's add, drop, and grading-option deadlines. Attendance alone does not enroll you in a course,

and stopping attendance does not drop it. Verify that every intended change appears in your record.

After the deadline, changes require the applicable petition and approval. See the graduate forms page and consult the advisors when a change affects your degree plan or progress.

8.5 Withdrawals and Leaves of Absence

Consult Graduate Studies and the graduate advisors before taking a semester away or withdrawing. Enrollment, approved leave, financial aid, employment, and international-student requirements can interact. Do not assume that simply skipping registration preserves your standing or that a leave extends the degree time limit.

Use the current university leave and withdrawal procedures. Thesis students should also verify whether ECON 799A or 799B enrollment is required. Obtain advice before changing enrollment if you hold a GA/GTA appointment or receive financial support.

8.6 Degree Time Limitations

For this 33-unit master's program, degree requirements generally must be less than six years old when the degree is awarded. A leave of absence does not extend that period. Consult the graduate advisors well before any coursework expires. Extensions or validation of older work require the applicable university approval; they are not automatic. See the university degree time-limit policy and the current Catalog.

8.7 Probation and Disqualification

Graduate students must maintain both an SDSU GPA and an overall cumulative GPA of at least 3.00. Falling below 3.00 in either measure results in academic probation. While on probation, a semester GPA below 3.00 can lead to disqualification. Both cumulative measures must return to at least 3.00 by the end of the second probationary term.

Contact the graduate advisors immediately if you receive a probation notice. Readmission after disqualification requires the applicable application and petition and is not automatic. See the Registrar's graduate probation and disqualification policy for the complete rules. These university thresholds are distinct from the program's core-course and advancement requirements.

8.8 Academic Integrity and AI

Academic work must represent your own learning and appropriately credit the ideas, words, data, and code of others. Follow course and examination instructions about collaboration, prior work, and permitted resources. Fabricating results, presenting another person's work as your own, or using unauthorized assistance can lead to academic and disciplinary proceedings under university policies.

Consult the applicable instructor, thesis chair, or examination instructions about permitted AI use and disclosure. If instructions are unclear, ask before using a tool. You remain responsible for understanding and checking all submitted work.

For research and empirical assignments, retain your code, document sources, and ensure that you can explain how results were produced. Consult your supervisor before placing confidential or restricted research material into an external tool.

9 A Few Last Tips

- Meet with the graduate advisors at least once a semester to check and see how you are progressing and to discuss any issues that arise. You are encouraged to meet with us any time you have a question.
- It is easy to get overwhelmed by the dense course material you will be taking. In order not to fall behind, it is critical that you have regular class attendance, make full use of office hours and put in work reviewing your course material every day, even when you don't have any assignments due. One practice that may be helpful is to take 1-2 hours after each class and re-write your class notes. Don't re-write these word for word, but rather re-write them in your own words while the material is still fresh in your head. Doing so will reinforce the knowledge that you have learned, highlight areas that you need to review early on, and save you a lot of time when it comes to studying for exams.
- Do participate in class discussions. Don't be afraid to ask questions of your instructors. Chances are if you have a question, your classmates probably do too. Don't let a fear of looking foolish hurt your chances at academic success.
- Attend all department research seminars. These provide a great opportunity to see cutting-edge economics research and provide important applications of the material you learn in your courses.
- Get to know faculty in the department, not just those teaching your classes. We all have office hours, so stop by when we have hours (and don't have a line of students out the door). We want to get to know you and this is your chance to find out more about our research and potential opportunities for collaborations, mentoring, etc.
- Take advantage of all the resources that SDSU has to offer. These could be academic resources like the writing center, athletic facilities at the ARC, discounted classes/rentals at the MBAC, etc. Become a part of the campus community and you will enjoy your time here a lot more.
- Pay close attention to course, registration, graduation, scholarship, and thesis deadlines. Keep a personal calendar and check the official sources below throughout the year.

10 Dates and Degree Completion Checklist

University calendars can change. Use the live academic calendars and Graduate Studies announcements to verify current deadlines.

- Check your my.SDSU degree evaluation and meet with a graduate advisor before the graduating semester.
- Confirm completion of the core, approved electives, internship or approved substitution, and all GPA requirements.
- Verify advancement to candidacy and the requirements for your thesis or comprehensive examination.
- Apply for graduation by the university deadline; completing coursework or participating in commencement does not replace this application.
- For Plan A, verify committee approval, required thesis enrollment, defense arrangements, manuscript review, and publication deadlines.
- For Plan B, follow the examination instructions and confirm that the department reports the final result.
- Resolve missing grades, outstanding petitions, and degree-audit discrepancies promptly.

The Spring 2027 calendar currently lists February 3 as the graduation-application deadline for spring or summer 2027 and May 5 as the deadline for departments to report comprehensive-examination results. The department's February examination schedule appears in Section 4.1. Confirm the live university calendar before relying on any date.