Doctor of Philosophy in Gerontology

Gerontology Graduate Programs

Graduate study in gerontology at KU consists of Master of Arts and Doctor of Philosophy degrees in Gerontology, along with the option for a dual-title Ph.D. in Gerontology and selected social science disciplines.

They are administered through the Gerontology Program, a component of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences.

The Doctor of Philosophy degree in gerontology was approved by the Kansas Board of Regents during the 1996-97 academic year. KU is one of only several universities nationwide offering the Ph.D. in gerontology. KU’s gerontology graduate program is unique in that it is an interdisciplinary research degree emphasizing social and behavioral gerontology.

Faculty affiliated with the program include members of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, including the School of the Arts; and the Schools of Architecture, Design and Planning; Education; Engineering; Health Professions; Law; Medicine; Music; Nursing; Pharmacy; and Social Welfare.

The graduate program in gerontology gives students a broad, advanced educational experience in the study of older adults. It provides a common focus for all students, yet allows each student to design a course of study most appropriate for her or his career objectives. Courses give students a multidisciplinary perspective on the issues and problems of aging, built on a strong foundation in basic research on aging. The program prepares students for academic and research careers in gerontology, as well as for professional careers in private and public institutions and agencies providing services to older individuals.

Students seeking a terminal M.A. in gerontology are not admitted; the M.A. is offered only to those pursuing a Ph.D.

Admission to Graduate Studies

An applicant seeking to pursue graduate study in the College may be admitted as either a degree-seeking or non-degree seeking student. Policies and procedures of Graduate Studies govern the process of Graduate admission. These may be found in the Graduate Studies (http://catalog.ku.edu/graduate-studies) section of the online catalog.

Please consult the Departments & Programs (http://catalog.ku.edu/liberal-arts-sciences) section of the online catalog for information regarding program-specific admissions criteria and requirements. Special admissions requirements pertain to Interdisciplinary Studies degrees, which may be found in the Graduate Studies section of the online catalog.

Graduate Application and Admission

Any student who has completed at least a B.A. or B.S. degree at an accredited institution of higher education may apply to the Ph.D. program. Required application materials include a résumé, a personal statement of professional and educational goals in gerontology, 1 copy of all undergraduate and graduate transcripts, list of all courses taken that are relevant to gerontology, 3 letters of recommendation, and scores from the Graduate Record Examination. GRE and other scores should be from the last two years. Non-native speakers of English must meet English proficiency requirements as described here http://graduate.ku.edu/english-proficiency-requirements.

Further information is available from the graduate advisor or on the program’s website (http://www.gerontology.ku.edu).

Submit your graduate application online (http://www.graduate.ku.edu).

Program Requirements

For the Ph.D., the student must complete all general degree requirements, including residence, training in research skills and responsible scholarship, the written preliminary examination, the comprehensive oral examination, preparation of a dissertation, and the final oral examination.

Each student designs his or her own curriculum with the assistance of a support committee of 3 gerontology faculty members. All students are expected to acquire multidisciplinary training in gerontology by taking courses in the sociology, psychology, and biology of aging.

Students may enter the program with an acceptable master’s degree from KU or another institution. The admissions committee reviews master’s-level preparation for doctoral-level research. An acceptable level of preparation includes basic training in statistics, program assessment, or policy analysis and completion of an empirical research study or thesis.

Students entering the program without an acceptable master’s degree must complete the M.A. in gerontology before the Ph.D.

The requirements for the M.A. in gerontology are as follows:

- Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Gerontology and Aging (SOC 767)
- 6 hours of core courses in gerontology (selected from at least 2 of the following areas: biology of aging, psychology of aging, social gerontology)
- 12 hours of supplemental courses in gerontology and related fields
- 6 hours of basic statistics courses
- 3 hours of methodology
- 6 hours of thesis credit

For students who enter the program with master’s degrees or who complete the M.A. in gerontology, minimum requirements for the Ph.D. are as follows:

- Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Gerontology and Aging (SOC 767)
- At least 6 hours of core courses in gerontology (selected from at least 2 of the following areas: biology of aging, psychology of aging, social gerontology)
- At least 12 hours of additional supplemental courses in gerontology and related fields
- 6 hours of advanced statistics courses
- 6 additional hours of methodology
- Completion of written and oral comprehensive examination
- 6 hours of dissertation credit, completion of dissertation, and final oral examination

A list of courses meeting requirements in gerontology, statistics, and methodology is available from the graduate advisor.
Evaluation of Satisfactory Performance

Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Gerontology and Aging (SOC 767) and core courses should be completed during the first 2 semesters. Students normally are expected to complete the M.A. degree in 2 years. The maximum time limit for completing all requirements for the M.A. degree is 3 years. Students normally are expected to complete the Ph.D. within 3 years of entering the program or of completing the M.A. The maximum time limit for completing all requirements for the doctoral degree is 8 years after admission to the doctoral program with an acceptable master’s degree or after completion of the M.A. degree in gerontology. Students who complete the M.A. degree in gerontology at KU and subsequently begin doctoral studies have a total enrolled time of 10 years to complete both degrees.

Written Preliminary Examination

Upon completion of the M.A., a major portion of the course requirements, and the research skills and responsible scholarship requirement, each student must pass a written preliminary examination. This examination covers two content areas reflecting the student’s area of concentration and integrates theoretical and methodological issues in gerontology.

Comprehensive Oral Examination

The comprehensive oral examination covers gerontology. The examination can take one of 5 forms:

1. A defense of the written preliminary examination,
2. A defense of a completed research project,
3. A defense of a prospectus for a future research project, including the dissertation,
4. A discussion of a major review paper written by the student,
5. A review of a research grant proposal and a simulated site visit defense of the proposal.

Dissertation Preparation and Final Oral Examination

Upon passing the comprehensive oral examination, the student becomes a candidate for the doctorate. Graduate Studies designates a dissertation committee based on the recommendation of the program. The dissertation committee includes at least three members of the gerontology program faculty.

After passing the comprehensive oral examination, the candidate must be continuously enrolled until all degree requirements have been met. When the completed dissertation has been accepted by the committee, but before it has been bound, and all degree requirements have been met, the program requests the final oral examination to be scheduled, allowing a minimum of 2 weeks to verify the requirements and publicize the examination. At least 5 months must elapse between successful completion of the comprehensive oral examination and the final oral examination.

Research Skills and Responsible Scholarship Requirement

Doctoral students must demonstrate competence in a research skill “distinct from, but strongly supportive of, the dissertation.” The program advisory committee establishes requirements for research skills, including the following options:

1. Demonstrated competency of a language, other than English, relevant to research in gerontology;
2. Competency in research methodology, including quantitative and/or qualitative data analysis;
3. Competency in both computer programming skills and computer applications.
4. A record of professional experience, publication, or presentation at professional meetings or a record of course work in a substantive area such as statistics beyond that required to satisfy the master’s or doctoral degree requirements in gerontology.
5. Successful completion of SPLH 982/PSYC 982 with a grade of B or higher.

Doctoral students are required to have training in responsible scholarship. Such topics may include protection of human subjects; welfare of laboratory animals; conflicts of interest; data management; mentor/student responsibilities; collaborative research; authorship, publication, plagiarism, copyright; peer review; professional practices; maintenance of confidentiality; and appropriate research conduct and research misconduct.

Please contact your advisor or the Director of Graduate Studies for more information about the Research Skills & Responsible Scholarship requirement. More information can also be found in the departmental Graduate Student Handbook.

Research Experience

All students are expected to be continuously involved in research under the supervision of the graduate advisor and support committee. Research involvement includes the design, execution, and dissemination of research on aging.

Courses

Cooperating departments and schools list courses related to aging. See the website (http://www.gerontology.ku.edu) for course listings from recent semesters.