Frequently Asked Questions about Doctoral Degree Programs

Science Education Program
Department of Mathematics and Science Education
University of Georgia

Please contact the Graduate Coordinator for Science Education Programs, Dr. David Jackson, djackson@uga.edu, with any other questions or for further clarifications of any of these answers.

How long does it usually take to complete the program?

Most full-time doctoral students complete the program in 3-4 years (most often 4, occasionally more).

Time to degree completion is nearly always significantly longer, and varies much more greatly, for part-time students, with the median about 6-7 years. A very few exceptional part-time students have finished in 3-4 years, and a very few others have pushed the Graduate School’s limit of 11 years (maximum of 6 to achieve Candidacy and 5 more to complete the dissertation).

It is possible to begin doctoral work part-time and finish full-time (or vice versa), and time to degree completion tends to be intermediate for such students.

In general, students with a greater amount of graduate coursework already completed in the context of a master’s degree (whether in an education field or a science field) will need less time to complete coursework before advancing to candidacy (“all-but-dissertation” status).

What academic and professional background is expected for admission to the doctoral program?

The most important qualification for applying for doctoral study in Science Education at UGA is a significant record of science teaching experience in some setting, with at least three full-time years highly recommended. Most doctoral students have taught science in a traditional secondary (middle or high school) setting, but many have extensive and successful college-level science Teaching Assistant experience instead, and elementary teachers with a special interest in science are also welcome. Other doctoral students have experience primarily in informal science education settings, such as museums, planetariums, nature centers, environmental education programs, or extension/outreach programs associated with scientific research institutions. A few, especially among international students, have limited previous experience in teaching but have an extremely strong academic record in a scientific research field and have been identified by their current university or by their nation’s government as promising future leaders in science education.

Most doctoral applicants have already earned a master’s degree in either an education field or a science field, but a previous graduate degree is not required.

Previous experience in educational research, leadership in inservice teacher education, or experience in curriculum development is not assumed, although all are certainly desirable and one or more is common among our applicants.

Can I complete a doctoral degree part-time, while keeping my full-time teaching job?

Yes, although in many cases such students are limited to the EdD rather than PhD degree (see the next question). All Science Education courses intended primarily for graduate students, and most others typically included in a doctoral program, are scheduled either on one evening per week during the Fall and Spring Semesters or during the Summer Semester, so as not to conflict with the typical core schedule of practicing classroom teachers. Approximately half of our doctoral students are part-time.
Note, however, that at UGA all graduate studies must be fairly continuous, and cannot, for instance, be pursued exclusively during the Summer Semester. The Graduate School’s Continuous Enrollment Policy requires at least 3 credit hours of enrollment during at least two of the three semesters (Fall, Spring, Summer) of each academic year cycle until degree requirements are met.

**What are the major differences between the EdD and PhD programs?**

In principle, the EdD is a professional degree meant to more greatly emphasize practical applications to science classroom teaching and curriculum issues, while the PhD is a research degree intended to accommodate students with a stronger interest in more abstract questions and issues.

Specific differences between the two degrees in admissions standards, coursework requirements, and effective professional qualifications achieved upon graduation are minimal. The most important practical difference is that PhD students must technically qualify as full-time students for at least two consecutive academic year semesters in order to meet the UGA Graduate School’s Residency Requirement.

**What is the cost of tuition?**

Nearly all full-time doctoral students have a Graduate Assistantship appointment (see the next question) that includes a waiver of all but a token amount of tuition and requires payment only of standard miscellaneous student fees each semester.

Part-time students or those not anticipating an Assistantship position should check with the UGA Bursar’s Office for specific and up-to-date information about both tuition and miscellaneous fees.

**What sources of financial aid are commonly available for doctoral students?**

Most full-time doctoral students in Science Education apply for a Graduate Assistantship appointment, and funding for such appointments is usually available for most of those admitted. Assistantship benefits include both a cash stipend and a tuition waiver, and duties may involve teaching, research, or both. Time commitments for assistantship duties vary between 1/3 and 1/2 time (operationally defined as 13 to 20 hours per week). Miscellaneous fees (currently slightly over $1000 per semester of enrollment) must still be paid by students with an assistantship appointment.

A very limited number of unusually highly qualified and already accepted applicants who intend to be full-time students may be nominated by the Graduate Coordinator for competitive special assistantships, with a higher level of stipend and other special privileges, funded by the Graduate School. Early application (by November 1 is highly recommended) and admission is essential to eligibility for these special assistantships, for which the nomination deadlines begin in January.

A limited number of unusually highly qualified students who are residents of other states may be nominated by the Graduate Coordinator for a Regents Out-of-State Tuition Waiver (ROOSTW) award, through which the Graduate School subsidizes the very substantial difference between in-state and out-of-state tuition rates. ROOSTW awards usually must begin in Fall Semester. Nominations are usually solicited in March and are only accepted for applicants already admitted. Part-time students are eligible.

**Can I complete a doctoral degree largely or wholly online and/or at the Gwinnett campus?**

No. However there are a few UGA graduate-level courses given on an online basis or at the Gwinnett campus that may be applied to doctoral degree requirements in Science Education. The most prominent examples include several Educational Psychology, Educational Research, and Qualitative Research Methods courses. Currently there are few doctoral-level courses offered at the Gwinnett campus and no doctoral-level Science Education courses offered either online or at the Gwinnett campus.
Can I start a doctoral program at any time of the year, or only when the academic year begins in the Fall?

Applications are accepted to start in any semester – Fall, Spring, or Summer. Assistantship appointments normally begin in the Fall, but new students with an Assistantship qualify for a tuition waiver for the preceding Summer.

What are the basic procedures and requirements for application?

All applicants for Science Education graduate programs must complete the online application to the UGA Graduate School. Other required application materials that should be sent directly to the Graduate School include official transcripts from all institutions previously attended, an official Graduate Record Exam (GRE) (General Test) score report, and a Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) score report if applicable.

Three letters of recommendation are also required. The Graduate School’s online application provides a function to request via automated email that writers of recommendation letters complete the process online. For those preferring to solicit or submit letters in another format, completed letters should then be sent directly to the Graduate Coordinator for Science Education.

Doctoral applicants should also submit an academic writing sample and a Statement of Purpose and Research Interests, and will be asked to schedule an interview (in person or via distance technology) with the faculty Doctoral Admissions Screening Committee. Applicants are also strongly encouraged to contact any other member of the faculty whose research area is of particular interest.

Doctoral admissions decisions are made by the entire Science Education faculty on a “rolling” basis throughout the academic year, usually no longer than 3 weeks after all application requirements (including the interview) are completed. Although several minimum quantitative standards are maintained (see next question), doctoral admissions decisions involve careful and painstaking subjective consideration of many qualitative factors as well, and are ultimately made by a vote of the entire Science Education faculty.

What are the minimum quantitative standards for admission?

Minimum quantitative admissions standards are the same for the EdD and PhD programs in Science Education, and include:

- Grade Point Average (GPA): Undergraduate GPA of 3.0 and graduate GPA of 3.5, both overall and in all education and science courses.
- Graduate Record Examination (GRE), General Test: Total score (sum of Verbal and Quantitative) of 300, including 146 on each part. (On the score scale in use before 2011, these equate to a total of 1050, including 400 Verbal and 550 Quantitative.)
- Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL): When English is not the applicant’s first language, a total score of 80, including 20 on the Speaking and Writing sections.

The GPA and GRE standards are potentially flexible for applicants whose other qualifications are unusually outstanding. The TOEFL standards are an absolute and inflexible requirement of the Graduate School.