

**Degree Proposal**  
**Interdisciplinary Doctor of Philosophy**  
**Office of the Provost**

**Executive Summary**

Knowledge creation – the core of Doctor of Philosophy education – mandates the flexibility to explore new and emerging fields. The proposed **University – Level Doctor of Philosophy** program will enable Ph.D. students to train as the next-generation of multidisciplinary researchers and be well positioned to address high impact research questions as trailblazers in new and emerging research fields. The proposed University-Level Ph.D.—which we refer to as the Doctor of Philosophy or the **Northeastern University Doctor of Philosophy**—will complement existing Ph.D. programs and is structured to offer flexibility in choice of disciplines and research locations and will provide real-world experiences. Students can create an individually tailored program of study for which they can draw from the disciplines supporting their research – emerging interdisciplinary fields that cross colleges or fields not yet captured within Northeastern’s portfolio of Ph.D. programs. Students will also have the flexibility to perform their dissertation research at a location most appropriate for their research program and to draw on the most appropriate disciplines for their research. This includes engaging scholars at Northeastern’s partner institutions for research supervision and as instructors, as well as pursuing the Ph.D. as a joint or dual degree with another higher education institution, provided a university level partnership agreement is in place.

Enrollment in this new degree is expected to be small because the program will be available only when the desired research curriculum cannot be supported by one of Northeastern’s existing Ph.D. programs. The proposed Ph.D. meets the unique needs and opportunities available through Northeastern’s Global University System, research Institutes and future Impact Engines as defined in Experience Unleashed. This degree differs from existing interdisciplinary pathways described in the Northeastern Graduate By-Laws or through existing college-based interdisciplinary Ph.D. degrees because it is a degree awarded by the Office of the Provost rather than a single academic college. This positioning is inclusive of all research across the University System and includes the ability for research active faculty beyond our existing five Ph.D. granting colleges to engage in Ph.D. program leadership and advising roles.

**Program Description**

The proposed **University – Level Doctor of Philosophy** degree, aligned with Graduate Council by-laws, paves a pathway for innovative and experiential Ph.D. and offers the ability to create an individualized curriculum for a field of study that has the capacity to span multiple disciplines. The proposed implementation date is Fall 2022, with referred applicants to be considered during Spring 2022. The Office of the Provost of the PhD Network will initially support this degree, for which 30 SH will be required for the full program and 12 SH for students admitted through the Advanced Standing pathway. The degree will be a 5-year (or less). Consistent with Northeastern’s goals for Ph.D education all students will be admitted with 5-years of funding through Northeastern or through an external partner.

Each individually proposed Ph.D. program will initially be supported administratively through the PhD Network within the Office of the Provost. A newly created Graduate Group with representation from all academic colleges will provide faculty oversight for the proposed degree program. Since the Graduate Group composition will inherently consist of faculty from Ph.D. granting Colleges, these representatives will confirm that candidates cannot be supported by one of Northeastern's existing Ph.D. programs. The Graduate Group will create a Dissertation Committee that will establish the required curriculum for the Ph.D. student. The Dissertation Committee may be composed of faculty from any Northeastern College, provided that committee members are research active and represent a good fit for the topic of the focal dissertation. Each student will be approved a Specialization; to ensure that there is no duplication with existing Ph.D. programs each new Specialization will be presented to Graduate Council for notification and discussion. Faculty from any college, Institute, Impact Engine or Global Campus can refer a candidate for this new Northeastern University Ph.D.

The proposed Doctor of Philosophy:

- Provides an opportunity for students with their Dissertation Committee to design their own interdisciplinary program to address the needs of their research and career goals.
- Supports research at partners and across the Global University System by having a single Ph.D. degree approved at our regional campus locations, thereby avoiding the need to have each of the University's Ph.D. programs approved individually by the current and future network locations before student and research demand is demonstrated.
- Makes it possible for scholars at Northeastern's partner institutions to serve as course instructors and members on Dissertation Committees.
- Allows for joint or dual degrees with other institutions of higher education, provided a university level partnership agreement is in place.
- Serves as a mechanism to enroll students in an area that may justify a future Ph.D. program.

### **Program Contribution to the University's Mission**

The proposed university-level Ph.D. aligns with Northeastern University's drive to maximize impact by pushing the frontiers of knowledge – combining disciplines in new and innovative ways to address society's greatest challenges. It reflects Northeastern's mission in that it incorporates research, entrepreneurship, and experiential components, where students may pursue their research while leveraging global connections to maximize their research impact at the intersection of disciplines.

The proposed degree program will fulfill the vision of Northeastern's Research Institutes and the Impact Engines, conceptualized in Experienced Unleashed, which were designed to push the frontiers of research into new and unforeseen areas through requiring Ph.D. students to engage in interdisciplinary research. Thus, the proposed degree program will build on the disciplinary pillars of existing Ph.D. programs. The new program will also promote student agility and mobility as we continue to strengthen research initiatives across our global system.