

University of Nebraska-Lincoln Agronomy & Horticulture Student Handbook



2025-26

Table of Contents

Welcome	3
Agronomy and Horticulture Community	5
Admission	7
MS/PhD Requirements	11
GRA/GTA Information	13
Expectations	TBD
Mentoring	TBD
Professional Development	15
Professional Societies, Clubs, and Leadership	15

Welcome

About our department

The Department of Agronomy and Horticulture or its predecessors has been in existence at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln since 1910. The foundation of the current department arose with the integration of the departments of Agronomy and Horticulture in 2001.

Agronomy and Horticulture are integrative sciences, attracting students and scientists from a wide range of disciplines and interests. Plant geneticists, physiologists, ecologists, soil and water scientists, and landscape architects are well represented among the diverse ranks of our faculty.

Growing plants for a purpose is a major driver of Nebraska's economy and in improving lifestyle quality for Nebraska citizens. Nowhere in Nebraska are more future professionals and lifelong learners educated in the plant and soil sciences than in Nebraska's Department of Agronomy and Horticulture.

A degree in Agronomy and Horticulture will open the doors to a wealth of careers. Preparing students for their chosen career, conducting research to ensure sustainable local and global ecological development to feed and enrich the lives of a growing global population and extending this information to end-users makes the Department of Agronomy and Horticulture an exciting place to study and work in the 21st century.

Our Mission Statement

The Department of Agronomy and Horticulture continues to build its leadership in plant, soil, and landscape systems through innovation and technology that is science-based and results-driven, with an urgency to anticipate and embrace future challenges. We partner with our stakeholders to meet these challenges through creative research, learner-driven teaching, and extension that all support multi-function resilient landscapes and food production to enhance the quality of life for the citizens of Nebraska and the world.

Our decisions and actions will be guided by ongoing core goals:

- Share a culture of mutual respect and inclusive excellence among our peers, staff, and the stakeholders we serve
- Develop synergy among Agronomy and Horticulture faculty through collaborations, shared governance, and organized strategic meetings
- Build capacity in research, teaching, extension, and outreach programs
- Increase standard of excellence in all of our programs
- Approach our activities with a spirit of innovation, cooperation, and entrepreneurship
- Identify programs that are fundamental to the mission of our department and ensure their support
- Increase cross-collaboration and stakeholder engagement to fulfill our common mission

Our promise to our graduate students:

Agronomy and Horticulture graduate students are members of the Department of Agronomy and Horticulture, and as such the Department will make every effort necessary to enable its graduate students to be a part of its overall mission and to have the opportunity to successfully complete their graduate programs. The advisor will provide frequent and thorough advice on coursework and research. The department will provide the necessary tools and the environment for the growth and professional development of its graduate students. The students must exhibit the motivation, integrity, and professional ambition to use the resources available. Hopefully, completing the academic program, conducting research, and associating with the staff will be enjoyable and will satisfactorily prepare graduate students in the Department of Agronomy and Horticulture for their professional goals.

Agronomy and Horticulture Community

Administration

- [Martha Mamo](#), Department Head, KEIM 202H
- [David Holding](#), Associate Department Head, BEAD E323
- [Amit Jhala](#), Associate Department Head, Extension Co-Coordinator, KEIM 173
- [David Hyten](#), Graduate Chair, KEIM 322
- [Don Lee](#), Teaching Coordinator, PLSH 279C
- [Jerry Volesky](#), Extension Co-Coordinator, North Platte
- [Kay McClure](#), Administrative Coordinator, KEIM 202J

Department Support

- **Event Coordination**
 - [Connie Hansen](#), PLSH 362C
- **Facilities**
 - [T.J. McAndrew](#), KEIM 202K
 - [Jenny Stebbing](#), Havelock Farm
 - [Greg Teichmeier](#), ARDC
- **Graduate Program Coordinator**
 - [Lisa Hilfiker](#), KEIM 202A
- **Multimedia Design and Communications**
 - [Fran Benne](#), PLSH 362E
 - [Lana Johnson](#), PLSH 362A
- **Office Pros**
 - [Gianna Butcher](#), Keim 202
 - [Tracy Pickering](#), PLSH 279K
 - [Toma Sukhova](#), PLSH 279K
- **Research and Lab Safety**
 - [Mike Livingston](#), KEIM 378

Graduate Committee

- [Cody Creech](#)
- [Katherine Frels](#)
- [Lisa Hilfiker](#), Graduate Program Coordinator
- [David Holding](#)
- [David Hyten](#), Graduate Chair
- [Nevin Lawrence](#)
- [Harshita Mangal](#), Graduate Student Representative
- [Leah Sandall](#)
- [James Schnable](#)
- [Sam Wortman](#)
- [Jinliang Yang](#)

Other community links:

[Faculty Directory](#)

[Graduate Student Directory](#)

[Staff Directory](#)

Admissions

Admission Process

To apply, prospective students need to upload/complete to CollegeNet:

- Completed application
- Personal Statement
- Academic Transcripts
- Three Letters of recommendation
- \$50 non-refundable application fee

Credentials of applicants are evaluated without consideration of gender, age, disability, race, color, religion, marital status, veteran's status, national or ethnic origin or sexual orientation. The applicant's grade point average (GPA) and letters of recommendation are the primary factors considered in the evaluation. A GPA of 3.0 or above is required, although strong letters of recommendation or a trend toward academic improvement later in the undergraduate or graduate program may warrant provisional admittance.

Resident MS Option A and PhD students may apply to the program without an advisor; however, **every MS Option A and PhD student must have a committed faculty advisor to be admitted.**

Online MS Option B will work with an established committee and certificate students will be given an advisor.

Admissions Requirements

Applicants must demonstrate experience, knowledge, and course work relevant to the intended field of study. A bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university with a GPA of at least 3.0 is required. **Students must be accepted by an advisor to be admitted.**

Competitive applicants to our department graduate program have taken at least 18 credit hours of courses in biological sciences, plant and soil sciences, mathematics, computer sciences, chemistry, and/or physics. Applicants are evaluated on a holistic and individual basis.

- Individual programs may have additional criteria that will determine admission into the program.
- Successful applicants often have additional experience which align with faculty research expertise.
- Successful applicants in the online MS in Agronomy program often have additional experience or coursework in plant and soil sciences.

Specializations (optional):

- [Crop Physiology and Production](#)
- [Plant Breeding and Genetics](#)
- [Range, Forage, and Turfgrass Sciences](#)
- [Soil and Water Sciences](#)
- [Weed Science](#)

Online Graduate Certificates

- [Agronomy Graduate Certificate](#)
- [Horticulture Graduate Certificate](#)
- [Grassland Management Graduate Certificate](#)

Policy on Direct Admission to the PhD Program

Applicant files will be reviewed for direct admission to a PhD from a BS on a case-by-case basis. Students currently in an MS program in our department should follow the procedure below to request approval for by-passing the MS degree.

Students desiring to enter a PhD program without having previously obtained an MS degree must demonstrate a high level of academic achievement, have excellent written and oral communication skills, and provide evidence of scholarly creativity and independent thought. Students can be directly admitted to the PHD program or can petition to transfer from a MS to a PhD program with the approval of their graduate advisor and the graduate chair.

Minors are not required for any program.

English Proficiency

If English is not your native language, you will be required to demonstrate your ability to undertake advanced academic work in an English-speaking institution.

UNL accepts English scores of the following: TOEFL, 79, IELTS, 6.5, and Duolingo of 120. Test scores are valid for **two years**.

Exemptions for the English proficiency requirement are granted for non-native speakers who have received a bachelor's or more advanced degree from an accredited US institution or from a university outside the US at which English is the official language instruction.

Students who are required by Graduate Studies to take ENGL 887 or other English classes will find this requirement on the official letter of offer from UNL. Graduate Studies will enroll students in the required English classes.

For more information, please visit the UNL [English Proficiency](#) page.

Department Standing

Full Graduate Standing – Acceptance with full standing is extended to students who have met the minimum requirements for admission and who have been accepted by the department for work leading to a graduate degree or stated professional goal.

Provisional Status – Qualified applicants with prerequisite course deficiencies will receive (1) provisional admission or (2) a waiver of prerequisite course deficiencies, based upon recommendation of the advisor, as explained below. These prerequisites do not apply to applicants to the Graduate Certificate programs.

Prerequisite course deficiencies will be listed in the student's departmental admission letter. Students admitted provisionally are expected to remove any deficiencies by the end of their first year. A grade of "C" or "Pass" is required to remove a deficiency. In certain circumstances, a student may be allowed

to test out of a deficiency. Students who fail to fulfill deficiencies by the end of their first year will be prohibited from course registration.

Waiver of Prerequisite Course Deficiencies

Advisors can choose to waive prerequisite course deficiencies according to program needs and this will be stated in the student's admission letter. Full-standing status will be granted after the required courses are completed.

Transfer Credits

Students may transfer up to 50% of their program with approval from their committee. Credits are reflected in the Memorandum of Courses (MOC) or Program of Studies (POS).

Comprehensive Exams

Comprehensive exams are required for all PhD students and must be completed no later than 7 months before the student is eligible to graduate. The type and format of the examination will be determined by the student's advisor and examination committee. These examinations are usually taken after the completion of all coursework requirements. Once completed, the student needs to submit the [Application for Admission to Candidacy](#) to the Office of Graduate Studies.

Oral comprehensive exams are required for all PhD students and MS students (Option A (thesis) and Option B (project)). For MS students, the written comprehensive examination is up to the discretion of the faculty advisor and committee.

Program Requirements

MS Degree Requirements	Option A	Option B
Thesis/Project hours	6-10 hours	3 hours
Agronomy hours	15 hours	15 hours
Graduate only hours (No 400-level counterpart)	9 hours	15 hours
AGRO 991	Yes	Yes
AGRO 992	No	No
Specialization	Optional	Optional
Minor	Optional	Optional
Total Hours	30 hours	30 hours

Please note:

- In 400/800 classes, grades need to be a “B” or better
- In graduate only courses, grades need to be a “C” or better

Memorandum of courses (MOC) is due to Graduate Studies halfway through program. MOC may not be submitted in the same semester of graduation.

[Memorandum of Courses \(MOC\)](#)
[MS Committee Form](#)

PHD

- Total hours: 90
- ½ of all coursework needs to be taken at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.
- Required courses: AGRO 991(1), AGRO 992 (1 hour, taken twice)

Program of Studies (POS) and the PhD committee form must be completed and submitted to Graduate Studies before students are ½ way (45 hours) through their program.

[Program of Studies \(POS\)](#)
[PhD Supervisory Committee](#)

PLAS 95 – Agronomy and Horticulture Graduate Orientation

All new resident students, MS and PhD, will enroll in the 0-hour Agronomy and Horticulture Graduate Orientation. This course is a required course that will set our students up for success in their program covering topics such as graduate school expectations, program requirements, student resources, and Individualized Learning Plans.

Progress and Confidential Reports

All graduate students need to annually complete a Progress Report and a Confidential Report. The purpose of these reports is to assist and guide graduate students, their advisors, and their supervisory committees towards regular and meaningful updates regarding progress and expectations within each student's program.

The Progress Report and associated review with advisors can help increase communication between faculty and students, anticipate problems or differences in expectations and resolve them before they become unmanageable or negative. In addition, students experience an evaluation process that is common among professionals.

The Confidential Report is completed by the student and submitted directly to the Graduate Program Coordinator. The coordinator will flag any issues and share them with the Graduate Chair.

Graduate Student Participation

All students should take the opportunity to assist in teaching or guest lecturing at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The experience is invaluable. Teaching experience should be noted in the annual Progress Report.

Every student is encouraged to attend field days and participate when possible.

Each student is encouraged to participate in service through participation in university-wide or department graduate student association.

GRA/GTA Information

- Students with a GRA (Graduate Research Assistantship) or GTA (Graduate Teaching Assistantship) are automatically enrolled and billed for student health insurance. GRA/GTA students are responsible for 21% of the insurance premium while the student's employing department pays 79% of the premium.
 - Domestic students may opt out by declining on MyRed at the beginning of the Fall and Spring semesters. If you choose to waive the insurance, you must provide proof of equivalent health insurance.
- All GRA and GTA students are responsible for 100% of their fees.
- All GRA and GTA paychecks are directly deposited into your personal bank account on the last working day of the month. To sign up for direct deposit, please visit our HR team.
 - Be aware that each paycheck will have taxes deducted. The amount deducted can vary between individuals. For more information on taxes and how to submit your tax return, please contact [TCAN/VITA](#).
- Every student will receive an invoice from student accounts on the 25th of each month with payment due the following month on the 12th. It is the responsibility of the student to be aware of their student account and to act when needed.
- As a GRA/GTA, your tuition is paid for through your assistantship. Tuition will be posted to your account every term that you enroll for, however, if

you are currently a GRA/GTA student, there is not an expectation that you will be responsible for it.

- GRA/GTA students are not full-time and do not accrue sick time, leave, or vacation hours. All arrangements are to be made between the student and approved by the advisor. It is highly recommended for these interactions to be in writing and saved (for example, in an email thread).
- It is the responsibility of the student to frequently check their Husker email for information pertinent to their program.

Nebraska's Commitment to Preventing Academic Misconduct

The University is dedicated to educating all students, faculty, and staff about academic integrity. The Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards (SCCS) is responsible for investigating, tracking, and educating the University community about academic integrity. As required by [Faculty Senate Policy](#), all faculty members must report any violation of academic misconduct that they determine has occurred in their class to SCCS. Please refer to the University of Nebraska Student Code of Conduct [Standards of Academic Integrity and Responsible Conduct](#) for additional information. If you have any other questions, please feel free to contact Student Conduct and Community Standards at 402.472.2021 or studentconduct@unl.edu.

Students are expected to approach and complete their academic work with honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility. The University of Nebraska-Lincoln expects all students to do their own work, to be honest in the statement they make, to refrain from harming others, to refrain from improperly helping others, and to follow the rules. Students must read instructions and syllabi carefully so that they know what their instructors expect in terms of academic integrity in their course.

Students who are unsure whether or not a particular conduct is appropriate should ask their instructor prior to submitting coursework. Failing to act with integrity is a violation of the Student Code of Conduct.

University of Nebraska Student Code of Conduct [Standards of Academic Integrity and Responsible Conduct](#) include 5 categories:

- Cheating
- Dishonesty, Falsification, and Fabrication
- Harmful Academic Actions Towards Others
- Improperly Helping Others
- Failing to Follow the Rules

Professional Development Links

- [CASNR Career Development](#)
- [Center for Transformative Teaching](#)
- [Diversity and Inclusion](#)
- [Office of Graduate Studies](#)
- [On-Demand Graduate and Professional Student Professional Development Learning Modules](#)
- [Teaching Resources](#)

Professional Societies, Clubs, and Leadership

- [AHGSA](#) – Agronomy and Horticulture Graduate Student Association
- [ASUN](#) – UNL Student Government
- [GSA](#) – Graduate Student Assembly
- [ASA](#) – American Society of Agronomy
- [CSSA](#) – Crop Science Society of America
- [SSSA](#) – Soil Science Society of America

Fellowships

- [ARD Fellowships](#)
- [CASNR Fellowships](#)
- [Office of Graduate Studies Fellowships](#)