

**2025-2026  
DOCTORAL PROGRAM  
GRADUATE HANDBOOK**



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If, after reviewing this handbook, you have any concerns or questions, please contact us at the addresses above or visit our website <http://www.geo.msu.edu/> where you can also view our departmental vision, faculty, curriculum, and facilities.



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## 1. Program Overview

Welcome to the doctoral program in Geography in the Department of Geography, Environment, and Spatial Sciences at Michigan State University! Starting graduate school is an exciting time, and you will need lots of information to make the best of it. The Ph.D. program Graduate Handbook is a key source of information that will answer many of your questions about our program. The handbook is intended to serve as a guide to the basic policies and procedures for Geography doctoral students, faculty, and staff so they will have a working knowledge of their opportunities, obligations, and responsibilities.

Within the field of Geography, doctoral students can devise a program of study that fits their areas of interest. We encourage students to take coursework outside of GEO; however, most of our students follow one of these academic areas:

- physical geography, especially climatology, geomorphology, biogeography and soils
- economic/urban geography and regional science
- geospatial technologies (GIS, remote sensing and cartography)
- nature-society studies

Because Geography is such a broad and interdisciplinary field, the Department maintains close ties with many other units at MSU, including area and thematic studies centers such as the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies (CLACS), African Studies Center (ASC), Asian Studies Center (ASN), the Center for Gender in Global Context (GenCen), and International Studies and Programs (ISP). Some of our faculty have joint appointments with academic units such as Agriculture, Recreation, and Resource Studies (CARRS); Anthropology; Forestry; the Center for Global Change and Earth Observation (CGCEO); the Michigan Agricultural Experiment Station (MAES); and Environmental Science and Policy Program (ESPP).

### 1.1. Goals and Objectives of the Ph.D. program

The Ph.D. degree is a research-intensive doctorate aimed primarily at students seeking careers in academia. It is designed to develop the student's ability to conduct original research and to provide a thorough, in-depth learning experience. As such, the program fosters:

- understanding of scientific inquiry
- knowledge of the discipline of Geography, its history, issues, methods and trends
- depth of knowledge in an area of specialization, including an understanding of important research questions
- proficiency in appropriate analytical and technical skills
- skills in communicating the results of research and experience



The program is individualized to allow the student, working with their Guidance Committee, to shape a program of study that is broad in scope yet consistent with specific student interests.

## 1.2. Expected Academic Progress Timeline to Degree

An overview of the program of study for the doctoral program is provided in Figure 1.

### Expected Progression for Ph.D.

|       | Year 1 |        | Year 2 |        | Year 3 |        | Year 4 |        |
|-------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
|       | Fall   | Spring | Fall   | Spring | Fall   | Spring | Fall   | Spring |
| Ph.D. | A      | D      | A      | E      | A      | E      | A      | E      |
|       | B      | E      | C      | H      | H      | I      | J      | L      |
|       | C      | H      | F G    |        | I K    | J      | K      |        |

**A.** Meet with advisor early in the fall to discuss funding support needs for the current year and to set annual goals. Complete Research Overview in SIS. If still in course taking stage, review Course Plan.

**B.** Complete Year 1 RECR MSU Grad School required CITI Modules by March 15. It can take up to two weeks for them to display in SIS and they must display by March 31.

**C.** GEO 986: Theories and Philosophies in Geography course (offered Fall of even years)

**D.** Establish guidance committee and enter into GradPlan by the end of semester.

**E.** Upload advisor signed Annual Review form and updated CV to GradPlan-Annual Review tab by March 31.

**F.** Meet with guidance committee and establish Program of Study. Enter courses in GradPlan - Course Plan and obtain Committee and Program approval. Course Plans are not official until the College approves, but that takes time. What displays is what is currently approved at all levels.

**G.** Complete Year 2 RECR MSU Grad School required CITI modules by March 15.

**H.** Complete 6 hours of group discussion-based RECR training and make sure it is displaying in SIS by March 31 in the RECR module (all 6 hrs. **must be complete before comps**). Note that you may complete some hours when you take GEO886.

**I.** Ph.D. Comprehensive Exam: Written and Oral components. Arrange format with committee. Email GEOGrad@msu.edu with intent to sit for exam and format **at least 10 business days before date**. Comps is expected by the end of your sixth semester but may be taken following or concurrently with course completion.

**J.** Ph.D. Proposal Defense. Email GEOGrad@msu.edu with date, time, title, location & Zoom link, if virtual option offered, **at least 10 business days before** the defense. Propose within one semester of passing comprehensive exams.

**K.** Ph.D. must have completed 3 hours of RECR Annual Refresher training and make sure it is entered and approved in GradPlan by March 31. Required annually until degree is conferred.

**L.** Dissertation Defense. Email GEOGrad@msu.edu with date, time, title, copy of dissertation or how it can be obtained, location & Zoom link, if virtual option offered, **at least 14 business days before** the defense.

**NOTE:** Incomplete RECR training and missing Annual Reviews in SIS will result in a University hold being placed on your diploma.

Updated: June 2025



### **1.3. University Mandatory Relationship Violence and Sexual Misconduct Training**

In their first year, students must complete the University's mandatory Relationship Violence and Sexual Misconduct training. Students do not need to enroll themselves in the course. They will automatically be assigned at the time the course must be completed, and they will receive email notification. The program is accessible from the Ability learning platform.

### **1.4. Student Involvement and Leadership Opportunities in Geography Committees and Groups**

TripleG -or GGG- Geography Grad Group (information included is directly from the TripleG Bylaws) - The broad goals of the organization are to build strong ties within the graduate student population and between graduate students, faculty and staff within the Department of Geography, Environment, and Spatial Sciences at Michigan State University.

Specifically, the functions of TripleG include:

- Exchanging stories and giving support about the unique experience of being a graduate student and more specifically a Geography graduate student at MSU. TripleG provides times and spaces for this. In addition, by knowing each other it builds a friendly more productive work environment. For example, TripleG has a bulletin board with photos and information about the grads as well as an online forum.
- To have a unified and stronger voice on issues that affect the department and our programs directly. Keeping lines of communication open between grad students and faculty is important. For example, TripleG has an elected representative to the faculty meetings to make our opinions known.
- To have a real meaningful impact on the department decisions based on a long-term respectful and thoughtful unified voice. For example, by being organized the graduate students can request input in a more systematic and transparent way.
- To share information and resources available. For example, computer software and hardware information, activities, class recommendations, ANGEL tutorial, funding resources, etc.
- Spreading the word about our department's strengths to attract top quality graduate students and new faculty and to build status and influence as a department. For example, getting information that is helpful to potential and new students and faculty to help them make more informed decisions and to transition more smoothly into the department/programs.
- To document all the work TripleG does year-to-year so graduates build a wealth of information and support services. For example, keeping records of meeting decisions and general information on our webpage for future graduates to use.



- TripleG promotes continued excellence in academics by giving mutual feedback for papers and presentations. Collaborating on research and ideas; for example, organizing panels at meetings.

For more information, see the [Geography Student Clubs webpage](#)

### 1.5. Critical Sources of Information

- [Academic Programs Catalog](#) – This document contains all University approved curriculum, policies and procedures, program requirements, rules and regulations. It is the most current source of information and students are held responsible for following the rules and policies it contains.
- [Digital Accessibility Policy](#) – policy to assure all students, faculty and staff have equal access to digital content across the university community.
- [Office of the University Ombudsman](#) – the University Ombudsman is responsible for providing students with support and guidance when a student feels that university policies have not been fairly or consistently applied. They will review the complaint and help negotiate a resolution.
- [Anti-Discrimination Policy \(ADP\)](#)
- [Disability and Reasonable Accommodation Policy](#)
- The [Office of International Students and Scholars \(OISS\)](#) – Primary source of information for international students. Each international student is assigned an OISS counselor/advisor who will help guide the international student to the resources needed. All Student Visa questions need to be directed to this office. They are tasked with staying abreast of the most current rules and regulations.
- [Policy on Relationship Violence and Sexual Misconduct](#) – all student, faculty and staff must complete mandatory training relevant to this policy as listed in section 1.3. Incomplete training will result in a hold being placed on a student's account, limiting access to certain functionality in the Student Information System (SIS).
- [University Policies](#) – Search feature for most current university policies

## 2. Program Components/Plan Options

### 2.1. Specializations and Certificates

Students have the option to add graduate certifications and specialization programs that can help build new focus areas to complement their degree. Geography works with several administrative units to provide specialized training and certification in a variety of areas. The most common for Geography students to achieve are:

- Professional Certificate in GIS – will not show on student's transcript



- Complete a Graduate Certificate or Specialization program (complete lists linked):
  - ❖ Graduate Certificates:  
<https://reg.msu.edu/academicPrograms/Programs.aspx?PType=GC>
  - ❖ Graduate Specializations:  
<https://reg.msu.edu/academicPrograms/Programs.aspx?PType=SPCG>

## **2.2. Credit Sharing Policy**

### **2.2.1. Master's Credits applied to Ph.D.**

A student can “apply” or share up to 9 credits from a 30 credit MSU MS program toward their Ph.D. program. Applied/shared credits are for those who earned a master's degree before starting a doctoral degree. Students who advance to the PhD program via the Straight-to-PhD do not earn a master's degree along the way; they are moved from the master's program to the PhD before master's completion. For Straight-to-PhD students all courses taken while at the master's level are “moved” to the PhD program. The student must complete a new PhD GradPlan-Committee and Course Plan once the move to the PhD is complete.

<https://reg.msu.edu/AcademicPrograms/Text.aspx?Section=111#s14265>

Shared credits and transfer credits from outside institutions combined are limited to 9 total credits. External transfer credits must go through the University approval process before they can count toward the thirty-two (32) course credit requirement for a PhD.

### **2.2.2. GEO886 Use for Both an MSU Geography MS and PhD Degree**

Students who earn their master's Plan A (with thesis) degree from MSU and continue on to the Ph.D. program following master's degree conferral, may have the PhD GEO886 requirement waived under the following conditions:

- The student's dissertation will be a continuation of the research and writing completed for the student's master's thesis.
- GEO886 was taken within two years of admission to the Ph.D. program. Note that the University policy is three years, but Geography is more restrictive, only allowing two years for GEO886.
- That the approved waiver of GEO886 is noted in the Notes box in the student's PhD GradPlan - Course Plan.



- If approved to share between master's and PhD, the 3 credits from GEO886 course will be "shared" between the programs. This reduces the remaining number of shared credits allowed to 6.

### **2.3. Dual Major Doctoral Degrees**

MSU allows "dual PhD" programs for individual students to span graduate programs, as long as the graduate programs involved agree to do so - see the MSU guidelines on dual major doctoral degrees for more information. To qualify for such a program, the student's dissertation must include significant research contributions in both disciplines.

All dual major doctoral degrees must be approved by the units, Associate Deans of Graduate Studies of the participating Colleges, and the Dean of the Graduate School. A request for the dual major degree must be submitted within one semester following its development and within the first two years of the student's enrollment at Michigan State University.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) must be completed and fully signed by each participating unit, and the Associate Deans of Graduate Studies in each unit's College. It must then be uploaded to a SIS "Request" by the student with routes to the programs and the Dean of the Graduate School. The MOU serves as a contract between these participants and the student and outlines the requirements.

Usually, a student enters a dual PhD program after starting graduate school at MSU in their primary department and then arranges the secondary affiliation upon choice of a research project and advisor. A request for the dual major degree (Memorandum of Understanding or MOU, followed by a Request in SIS) must be submitted within one semester following its development and within the first two years of the student's enrollment at Michigan State University.

A list of steps for the dual major doctoral degree is here:

<https://reg.msu.edu/AcademicPrograms/Text.aspx?Section=111#s407>

**2.4. Dual Degrees** – Is a program that is offered in collaboration with another institution and results in the student receiving a degree from each institution.

**2.5. Joint Degrees** – Is a program offered in collaboration with another university that produces a single degree, issued in the names of both institutions. The diploma will contain the seal of both universities.

**2.6. Shared Programs** – Provides an opportunity for an academically talented undergraduate student to enroll in graduate courses and conduct research toward a



graduate degree. The student must complete the required request form prior to taking courses at the graduate level. The student must be admitted to an MSU graduate program and there is a limit to how many courses can be shared between programs. The student's bachelor's degree also must be conferred prior to starting a graduate program.

## **2.7. University Residency Requirement**

Students must meet university residency requirements. A year of residency is two consecutive semesters of enrollment in courses taught on the E. Lansing campus and involve the completion of credits at full- time status of graduate work each semester.

## **2.8. Straight-to-PhD Requirements**

Students admitted as "Straight to Ph.D." without holding a master's degree at the time of admission are initially admitted into the M.S. program. At the end of the student's first semester in the program the student must form their four-member Guidance Committee and work with them in preparation to orally present/defend a pre-proposal. The pre-proposal could be a review of the literature in the student's proposed area of research or a condensed version of the student's dissertation proposal.

The pre-proposal presentation will occur at a Department of Geography, Environment, and Spatial Sciences colloquium by the end of their second semester. At least three of the four guidance committee members must approve the pre-proposal before the student will be allowed to move into the doctoral program.

At least two weeks before the colloquium the student must submit a copy of their pre-proposal (or instructions on how to attain one), the day, time, location, title of their pre-proposal document, and a list of committee members to the Graduate Program Coordinator to send out via listservs to the department announcing the pre-proposal presentation.

Every effort should be to conduct the pre- proposal defense in person, particularly if committee members and the student are within reasonable driving distance of Michigan State University. In rare circumstances, the student may participate via teleconference with the approval of the graduate program director. Committee members may participate via teleconference if distance and or the scheduling of the proposal prevent in-person participation. All parties must have access to a reliable Internet connection that supports videoconferencing with audio and video functionality. If such a connection is not possible, the defense must take place in person. If it is determined that the student may participate in the defense via teleconference, and the connection to the videoconference cuts out and it is not possible to complete questions from all guidance committee members, the defense must be rescheduled and redone.



Students who pass their pre-proposal colloquium will have their major code changed to Ph.D. and continue through the doctoral program. No additional time to degree will be provided beyond those of the Ph.D. program. Geography Ph.D. students are expected to complete their degree in four years from matriculation. Having a master's degree conferred is not required for students who pass their pre-proposal defense.

Students who do not pass, will remain in the master's degree program and must complete the M.S. degree, if they wish to seek a M.S. degree. If a Ph.D. is still desired, the student must apply to the Ph.D. program the next admission cycle. Students can choose either a Plan A (with thesis) or Plan B (without thesis) master's degree. If they intend to apply to a Ph.D. program later, choosing the Plan A (with thesis option) is highly recommended.

International students need to consult their OISS advisor if they change programs or choose to have a master's degree conferred to make sure they maintain their student visa.

### **3. Requirements for the Doctor in Philosophy (Ph.D.)**

#### **3.1. General Requirements for the Ph.D. Program and Timeline to degree**

For the doctoral program in Geography, the program is structured for students to finish in four years. It is strongly suggested that students map out their coursework and requirements early as many crucial courses are taught only one semester per year and some elective courses are taught every other year; others may have prerequisites.

A doctoral student's dissertation must involve "original research upon which a dissertation" is based. The dissertation must make a "significant contribution to knowledge" and must be prepared and published to ProQuest by the student.

Research requirements:

<https://reg.msu.edu/AcademicPrograms/Text.aspx?Section=111#s399>.

Dissertation and Abstract requirements:

<https://reg.msu.edu/AcademicPrograms/Text.aspx?Section=111#s400>

The Student Information System (SIS - student.msu.edu) and department will retain an electronic file for each student containing funding information, grades, program of study (GradPlan-Course Plan), Responsible and Ethical Conduct of Research (RECR) training activity, progress toward degree, annual/performance reviews and post-degree employment tracking.

Refer to Figure 1 in section 1.2 for the expected timeline to degree.

#### **3.2. Specific Requirements for the Ph.D.**



### **3.2.1. Breadth Requirements**

Incoming graduate students who do not have a prior degree in geography may be required to take one or more courses to make up 'breadth requirements' in geography. This will be determined by the students' graduate committee. These may be at the 100, 200 or 300-level, and therefore cannot count towards degree credit totals. The student may, with the permission of the instructor, take a lower level (100-300 level) course as GEO490. However, the student may do this with only *one* course (3 or 4) credits. Requests must be submitted on an Independent Study form.

Whether or which deficiencies are 'bumped up' is at the discretion of the student, their Advisor, and the instructor of the course. It is recommended to be a course in the student's area of focus. This is not a requirement; merely a way to do upper-level work in a course which is a breadth requirement and thus making it count towards their degree credit totals. What extra work is required of the student is up to the instructor teaching the course.

#### **3.2.1.1. Course Waivers for Breadth Requirements**

Students requesting course waivers must compile suitable documentation concerning the course proposed as a substitute for the course to be waived. Suitable documentation should include but is not limited to course syllabi, examinations, term papers, bibliographies, textbooks, reading lists, lecture notes and transcript showing their grade. A lack of suitable documentation may be grounds for refusal to grant the waiver.

Students should request a course waiver, with the appropriate documentation (usually a syllabus from a previously taken course, title of textbook used and transcript), to the Graduate Program Director. The Graduate Program Director will consult with appropriate faculty members and the Department Chair regarding the approval or denial of waiver. The decision regarding a waiver will be relayed to the student and Graduate Program Coordinator and recorded in the student's file.

### **3.2.2. Advanced Tool Course Requirement**

Tool courses must be taken at the 800-level or above and may be in such areas as computer science, foreign language (courses taken at the 400-level or above), statistics or mathematics, cartography, remote sensing, geographic information science and social science or physical science research methods. Coursework in combinations of these areas is permitted. The courses may be administered by the Department of Geography, Environment, and Spatial Sciences or by another department or school. Generally, the non-language tool course must *advance the level of competency*, via coursework, while in the MSU program.



**NOTE:** Tool courses taken to satisfy the breadth requirement may NOT also be used to fulfill the tool course requirement.

Acceptance of foreign language as a tool requires the student to pass a competency examination. Approval of the language courses, taken at the 400-level or above, and the level of proficiency is determined by the student's Guidance Committee; the Committee may confer with a faculty member in the department offering the courses for guidance on the issue of language competency. Language competency refers to fluency adequate for the task for fieldwork or archival research in the chosen language.

### **3.2.3. [Traveling Scholars](#) – Inter-Institutional Study**

If MSU does not offer a course that would benefit a student's course plan, but it is offered at another Big Ten or in-state university, the student can apply for permission to take the course outside of MSU through several programs. The most commonly used program is the [Big Ten Academic Alliance Traveling Scholars Program](#). Courses taken through this program will be transcribed on their MSU transcript and tuition and fees are paid at the MSU tuition rate through the student's account. Students with graduate assistantships can count the credits toward a semester's nine-credit waiver provided by their assistantship. Advanced planning and approval by the student's committee, Graduate Program Director, and Graduate School are required. The [MIGS program](#) is used for in-state institutions that are not Big Ten universities.

### **3.2.4. University Approved Curriculum**

Doctoral students must follow the requirements listed in the [Academic Programs](#) catalog for the semester and year the student matriculates (takes their first course, post-admission) into the PhD program. If after admission and matriculation, the Geography faculty change the PhD requirements through the University curriculum process, current students have several options for completing their degree. Any change must be approved by the student's committee and the Graduate Program Director so that their requirements can be modified in SIS – Degree Audit.

Students have three options when a curriculum change occurs:

- They can stay in requirements from their first semester and year with no change to their degree requirements.
- They can voluntarily move to the new requirements, as long as their degree is uninterrupted by a leave of absence of three semesters or more, by discussing their



intentions with their advisor/guidance committee and submitting, in writing, their intent to change to the Graduate Program Coordinator.

- If the new requirements eliminate courses or aspects of the program that affect the student's ability to graduate under their initial requirements, they can discuss with their guidance committee and the Graduate Program Director a hybrid path to graduation. The hybrid path must be documented in a Memorandum of Understanding agreement and approved at the time the change occurs so the student can maintain their four-year path to degree.

**3.2.4.1.** Current PhD students must complete at least 32 credits of coursework in the areas listed in academic programs. They must also enroll in at least 24 credits of GEO999. Students are limited to a maximum of 36 GEO999 credits, so enrollment needs to be monitored closely. GEO999 enrollment is designed to provide the student with the opportunity to work independently on their research development, fieldwork/data collection and dissertation writing and can be taken at any time during their program.

**3.2.4.2.** Courses below the 400-level may not be counted toward the 56-credit requirement for the Ph.D. degree but may be taken to gain knowledge in an area they are less familiar with.

**3.2.4.3.** Ph.D. students may count no more than six credits of coursework in independent study or research problems toward their degree. Geography courses covered under this requirement include, but are not limited to, GEO 490, 492, 495, 890, and 892. Other department's independent study courses also apply to the limit. The exception is when one of these course numbers are used for new courses.

**3.2.4.4.** Ph.D. students who do not have a prior degree in geography (either at the bachelor's or master's level) must complete a course in (1) physical geography (2) human geography (3) quantitative methods, and (4) geospatial technology (e.g., introductory cartography, GIS, remote sensing). These are known as 'breadth requirements.' If these courses were not taken previously, they must be taken while in the degree program at MSU. It is up to a student's Guidance Committee to determine if each course is a breadth requirement or meets a PhD degree requirement.

**3.2.4.5.** Students who started in the MS-A program and move up to the PhD program (via the Straight-to-PhD option) may have earlier courses applied to the PhD with their guidance committee approval. They will be held to the PhD requirements effective the semester and year they took the first course being counted toward their PhD. They may submit a written request to be held to



later standards, if the program changed through the University curriculum process after matriculation at MSU into the master's program.

### 3.2.5. Ph.D. Coursework

Note that the section headings below are the categories required when submitting a Course Plan into the GradPlan system.

#### CORE

- GEO 886 Research Design in Geography (3 credits)
- GEO 986 Theory and Methods in Geography (3 credits)
- Two Geography seminars (6 credits)

#### RESEARCH METHODS

- One advanced level tool course (800 or 900 level) (3-4 credits)

#### REQUIRED

- "Specialized" courses (17-18 credits minimum) as approved by the student's Guidance Committee

- GEO 999 Dissertation credits

All doctoral students must register for a minimum of 24 credits and no more than 36. These do not get listed on the student's GradPlan-Course Plan, they display and are counted automatically

#### Course Overrides

Graduate students cannot enroll themselves in 400-level courses or courses with prerequisite classes they haven't taken, because they are considered undergraduate or not eligible. They must request override approval from the department teaching the course in order to get enrolled. For overrides into 400-level GEO courses, submit an "Override Request Form" found on the following Geography webpage: <https://geo.msu.edu/student-resources/index.html>. The Graduate Program Coordinator will seek instructor approval and enroll the student in the course, if approved.

Overrides into 400-level courses outside of the Geography department must go through the department who administers the course. First, look up the course in "Class Search" in SIS and identify the department who oversees the teaching of the course. Note: If the course is cross-listed in multiple departments, you must reach out to the administering department. This can be found by clicking on the "Course Description" link in the course's SIS window. It is helpful to do a search of the MSU.edu website to see if you can identify who handles the overrides for the department.



You may also reach out to the professor teaching the course to request an override. They must forward your request, with their permission, to their department override processor who will either enroll you in the course or enter the override so you can enroll yourself. This all must be completed before the open drop period ends the first week of each semester.

Note that CSS (formerly Crop and Soil Sciences) courses are now part of the Department of Plant, Soil and Microbial Sciences.

Overrides into courses with time conflicts are difficult to obtain. They require College-level approval and permission from each faculty member teaching the conflicting courses. It is not recommended that you make this type of request without a reasonable explanation. Prepare an email or letter with your request and secure approval from both faculty members. Submit the approved request to the Graduate Program Coordinator who will submit it to the College Associate Dean's Office for processing.

Overrides into 300-level courses will only be approved for "breadth" requirements. They do not appear on a graduate student's GradPlan-Course Plan and cannot be applied to degree requirements. It is recommended that if a student needs a 300-level Geography class, they complete an Independent Study Agreement form with the faculty member teaching the course and submit it to the Graduate Program Coordinator (GPC) when signed by the student and faculty member. The GPC will secure any remaining signatures, and both override the student and enroll them in the GEO490 class. A 300-level course does not equate to a GEO890 (graduate level independent study). The GEO490, will not count against the 6-credit independent study limit, because the course will not be added to the student's Course Plan in GradPlan.

The number of credits listed on an Independent Study form must align with the University contact hour requirements listed in the instructions. If a student is taking a GEO490 in place of a 300-level course, the number of credits of the 490 needs to equal the course credits for the 300-level course.

### **3.2.7. Transfer Credits**

In some circumstances, students may be allowed to transfer previous graduate level coursework into MSU and have it count toward their Ph.D. A maximum of 9 credits are allowed in transfer. The 9-credit limit also includes "shared" credits from a master's degree at MSU. The course(s) must meet all MSU requirements: <https://reg.msu.edu/AcademicPrograms/Text.aspx?Section=111#s404>.

Coursework taken prior to the student's first semester in the Ph.D. program may be considered for transfer only if taken within three years of matriculation into



the Geography Ph.D. program and the student must have earned a 3.0 (B) grade or higher.

To initiate a request a student needs to provide the Graduate Program Coordinator with a syllabus from each course for consideration and have previously discussed the course's applicability to their program with their advisor/guidance committee chair. If the program approves a course(s) for transfer, the student must have an official transcript sent from the institution directly to the Registrar's Office for review, if an official document is not already available. If approved, the Registrar's Office will add the course to the student's record in SIS. The student can then add it to their GradPlan-Course Plan.

### **3.2.8. GradPlan**

GradPlan was developed for graduate students to communicate their program of study (Course Plan), faculty committee (Advisor/Guidance Committee Chairperson, Guidance Committee members and Dissertation Director), Milestone completion plans, submit Annual Review materials, and tracking completion of degree requirements. It is part of the Student Information System (SIS) which stores degree relevant information for degree conferral. SIS also tracks RECR training.

A GradPlan is considered a contract between the student and the university, and can be modified with agreement between the student, their Guidance Committee, the Geography PhD program, the College of Social Science and the University. This is the student's agreed upon plan of study. The Geography PhD program has the right to request it be modified, if the courses on the Course Plan do not meet all graduation requirements.

Student must have an approved committee (by end of year one), complete their Research Overview tab (annually), upload their Annual Review Form and updated CV (by March 30, annually), and submit their Course Plan (by the end of their third semester).

Courses can only be used two times across all programs the graduate student is enrolled in. If a student completed a master's degree and then entered the PhD program, and plan to reuse GEO886 (for example), they cannot also use GEO886 to meet the requirements of a Graduate Specialization or Graduate Certificate. Only courses eligible for use toward the GEO PhD should be entered on the Course Plan. This may mean a student needs to work with the Graduate Certificate or Specialization coordinator to figure out another course to meet the requirements, if the course has already been used two times.



GradPlan and other helpful Job Aids for the Student Information System (SIS or student.msu.edu) may be found at <https://sis.msu.edu/help/students.html>.

### **3.2.9. Research Presentation**

Present a research paper or poster (as first author and presenter), approved by the Advisor, at a professional meeting, while in residence in Ph.D. program.

### **3.2.10. Peer-Reviewed Manuscript**

Submit, as first author, an authored or co-authored manuscript to a peer reviewed journal. It must be approved by the Advisor for publication and done while active and enrolled in the Ph.D. program.

### **3.2.11. Comprehensive Examination**

The comprehensive exam tests a student's mastery of geographical subject matter, knowledge of related geographic literature, and an understanding of research theory and methodology. While it is likely that there is some overlap between a student's areas of mastery and their dissertation topic, the comprehensive exam should not focus on dissertation work. Instead, the exam is intentionally designed to be broader in scope than the dissertation with the goal of preparing the student for work post-graduation. It is recommended that students complete their comprehensive examination immediately following completion of all coursework as approved on the student's Course Plan or by the end of their 6<sup>th</sup> semester in the Ph.D. program at the latest. This examination consists of both a written and oral component.

Previously asked exam questions are available for current student review in the CSS Geography Graduate Program Teams channel, under the Files heading, then Graduate Students, in the \_GEO Community Docs folder and finally the [Comps Exam Question Book](#) folder. If you don't have access by clicking the link, contact [GEOGrad@msu.edu](mailto:GEOGrad@msu.edu) for access.

#### **3.2.11.1. Written Portion**

- The questions for the exam will be formulated by the student's Advisor and Guidance Committee. The length of the written examination will be no fewer than 2 days, and no more than 4 days. Students are afforded flexibility in the amount of time that is devoted to each committee member. However, the time afforded to answer each committee member's questions should not be less than 4 hours per person and no



greater than 6 hours per day. Exams should be scheduled during regular business hours 8:30am-5pm. Leaving at most 30 minutes for lunch/break between morning and afternoon questions, if four hours in length.

- The written examination must be taken on consecutive business days (Monday-Friday). Questions for each day will be provided to the student only on that day of exam and not before. Exams must be taken in-person in the Geography Building and are closed-book without access to the Internet. Students may bring paper notes with them to the exam provided that is agreed upon with their Guidance Committee in advance.
- To verify GPC availability to proctor comps, the student and Guidance Committee Chair must arrange a time with the GPC that the student will sit for their written exam at least three weeks in advance by emailing GEOgrad@msu.edu. If the GPC is not available to proctor the exam or there is a reason for scheduling the exam outside the 8:30am-5:00pm window, the advisor is responsible for proctoring the exam and collecting question responses at the end of the examination period for each day or finding another committee member who can.
- The Guidance Committee Chair will provide the questions to the GPC or faculty proctor at least two business days before the student will sit for their written exam.
- In the rare circumstance that a student has GPD approval to take their written comps outside of the Geography building, it is the Guidance Committee Chair's responsibility to send the questions directly to the student and provide a copy of the questions and responses to the GPC after the student completes all portions of their written exam.
- As with all computer work, it is highly recommended that the student save their work often throughout their response time, in case of power failure or other computer mishaps. Final responses will be collected on a Flash Drive if the GPC is the proctor and they will send the responses to the Guidance Committee Chair at the end of each day. Without internet access, a student will not be able to email their responses from the Comp Exam computer.
- The Guidance Committee Chair will disseminate the student's responses for review by the committee and will communicate at least two weeks before the Oral Exam, so the GPC can prepare the student's paper Comp Exam form for their oral exam.
  - (1) Whether the student advanced
  - (2) Which members advanced them



(3) The “field” (subject area or areas) that each committee members’ question assessed

- Once notified of advancement to the written exam, it is the student’s responsibility to reserve a GEO conference room for their oral exam via their Outlook (Spartan365) calendar and alert the GPC so that department-wide notification can go out.
- Room options include:
  - GEO.rm105 (southwest conference room with windows)
  - GEO.rm120 (east side conference room with no windows)
  - GEO.rm126 (north side Classroom)

### **3.2.11.2. Oral Portion**

The oral examination, like the written examination, will broadly examine the student's general knowledge in geography and their field(s) of specialization, together with related theory, methodology, literature, and research. The oral examination, not to exceed 6 hours, is also an opportunity for the student to defend their answers to the questions in the written test, and for faculty to examine the student further should some responses to the written examination need clarification. Under no circumstances should the oral comprehensive examination focus on the student’s dissertation proposal; the proposal defense is a separate examination. The oral examination will be taken within two academic calendar months of the written exam (August 15-May 15) but cannot occur until the student has advanced to this portion of the exam.

Notice of the oral examination will be given to the Department at least **two weeks** in advance of the date of the examination. All Geography faculty may attend and participate in the oral examination. Geography graduate students and other non-committee members (e.g., family and friends) may attend with prior permission from the student being examined.

The student must send the following information to the GPC for the department notification:

- Day and start time
- Room number
- List of committee members, and if outside of GEO or MSU, their department or university.



Every effort should be made to conduct the oral portion of comprehensive exams in person, particularly if committee members and the student are within reasonable driving distance of Michigan State University. In rare circumstances, the student may participate via teleconference with the approval of the Graduate Program Director. Committee members may participate via teleconference if distance and/or the scheduling of the exam prevent in-person participation. All parties must have access to a reliable Internet connection that supports videoconferencing with audio and video functionality. If such a connection is not possible, the exam must take place in person. If it is determined that the student may participate in the oral portion of the comprehensive examination via teleconference, and the connection to the videoconference cuts out and it is not possible to complete questions from all guidance committee members, the oral portion of the exam must be taken again.

### **3.2.11.3. Assessment of the Comprehensive Exam**

After the student completes the *written examination*, their Guidance Committee will decide whether the student should advance to the oral portion of the examination.

A decision to advance reflects that the Guidance Committee judges that the student satisfactorily responded to the questions on the examination or that concerns regarding the responses could potentially be addressed during the oral portion of the examination. The student will be considered as having 'advanced to the oral examination' provided that no more than one member of the Guidance Committee votes not to advance.

The Guidance Committee Chair will officially notify the student and the Graduate Program Coordinator of their decision within **ten business days (Monday-Friday)** from the date when the written examination answers were given to the Guidance Committee. Decisions to advance the student on portions of the examination are not permitted. Prior to evaluating the student's answers to the written examination, the Guidance Committee will agree as to which members will evaluate which answers.

The Advisor will then inform the student and GPC of the Guidance Committee's decision regarding the outcome of their written examination.

If the answers to the written examination are not considered to be adequate for advancement, the written examination may be repeated but not more than once. Scheduling a 'retake' of the written examination is left to the Advisor and the Guidance Committee but should not exceed one year from the date of the original written examination.

After the examination, regardless of outcome, a copy of all questions and the student's responses to them will be placed in the student's electronic



departmental file. The questions asked will be kept in a file of comprehensive examination questions in Teams. This file will be maintained by the Academic Program Coordinator and may be consulted by all geography graduate students.

The Guidance Committee will meet immediately after the *oral examination* to determine whether

- (1) the comprehensive examination has been passed in full;
- (2) the oral exam must be retaken; or
- (3) the entire exam (oral and written) must be retaken.

The student will be considered as having 'passed' the Comprehensive Examination provided that no more than one member of the Guidance Committee votes to fail on either portion of the examination. If the student does not perform satisfactorily on the oral portion of the examination, this portion of the examination may be repeated only once. Scheduling of the 'retake' of the oral examination is left to the Advisor and the Guidance Committee but should not exceed one year from the date of the original oral examination. Under no circumstances should there be a modification of the format of the examination (e.g. a student being asked to write further essays of clarification).

- The Record of Comprehensive Examination Form must be signed by all committee member's present at the oral exam and returned to the GPC. For committee members not present, the GPC will route the form electronically for signatures. The Guidance Committee Chair must provide each member's oral defense decision when submitting the form.

The comprehensive examination needs to be passed before the student can progress to the Proposal Defense.

#### **IMPORTANT NOTES:**

- The semester after a student passes comprehensive exams the student only needs to register for one credit to be considered a full-time student (as long as a comprehensive exam pass date is entered in SIS).
- Comprehensive examinations expire if a student does not complete their degree within eight years of matriculation into the program.
- The student may be required to retake comprehensive exams if a Time Extension to Degree is requested and approved.



### **3.2.12. Mastering Out Option for PhD Students**

Students enrolled in the PhD program may find it is not possible to complete the degree requirements for any number of reasons. In these instances, students can elect, in writing, to masters out of the program, which involves completing the requirements for a Plan B master's degree. All master's Plan B requirements must be met using coursework previously taken or the student may have to take additional classes to meet the 30 credit and degree requirements. The student must satisfy the master's program requirements effective retroactively back to their first course taken: <https://aacc.msu.edu/ucc/catalog/archived-academic-programs>. A new GradPlan is required, including a new Research Overview and Course Plan once the student's program code is officially switched in SIS.

### **3.3. Degree Conferral Process**

The Graduate Program Coordinator (also known as the GPC, Academic Program Coordinator or APC) will match coursework to degree requirements using the student's fully approved GradPlan-Course Plan and enters the courses into SIS-Degree Audit. When the process is complete, the student's degree progress pie chart will update to complete or near complete status. This does not mean that the student has completed all degree requirements.

The GPC or other department level designee submits to the College a fully signed Oral Defense form and the College enters the Oral Defense Date into SIS milestones.

Once the dissertation is accepted into ProQuest, the Graduate School will enter the title into the student's SIS milestones.

The GPC performs a final record review and submits the departmental conferral decision in Degree Audit. The review includes making sure the student has:

- All four GradPlan tabs up-to-date and fully approved, including the upload of annual review documents (GEO Annual Review form, updated CV and Annual Review Letter).
- The student's academic progress pie chart is at 100%.
- Any Holds placed on the student's account are removed.
- All milestones are entered in SIS.
- All RECR requirements are complete.
- All departmental and university requirements are met.



The Social Science Dean's office will access Degree Audit to complete degree certification by entering a conferral decision in SIS once a student:

- completes an application for graduation
- all degree requirements are met
- Oral Defense form is filed
- student has completed all Graduate School requirements
- the dissertation is accepted into ProQuest

The final step is with the Office of the Registrar who certifies that all degree requirements are met and formally confers the degree. The student will receive an email notification when their degree has conferred.

**NOTE** Degree conferral and participation in the commencement ceremony are not directly related. A student **MUST** apply to graduate in order to be invited to participate in commencement activities.

**NOTE** Graduation during the semester of electronic submission is only guaranteed if the student SUBMITS and has their dissertation ACCEPTED into ProQuest before the [dates/times set by the Graduate School for that semester](#).

## **4. Selection of Dissertation Advisor**

### **4.1. Advising and Committee Formation**

#### **Initial Advisor**

At the time of admission, the department assigns new students an initial advisor. Their role is to help select first year courses, review and approve annual funding request(s) for submission and provide general first-year support to the new student.

Initiation and successful completion of independent research, technical competency, and/or creative activity requires early and continued advice, oversight and mentoring by a faculty Advisor on behalf of the academic unit. The Department of Geography, Environment, and Spatial Sciences is committed to the policy that graduate students have a right to the best advice regarding program planning, research, selection of courses and faculty, and general degree requirements, with the understanding that students are responsible for consulting their Advisors before making program decisions.

#### **Permanent Advisor Selection**

Students should select their permanent Advisor ideally by the end of their first semester, but no later than the end of second semester. This selection should be based on research fit, discussions with several potential advisors, and



consultation with the Graduate Program Director. Selection of a permanent faculty Advisor must be submitted for approval to the Graduate Program Director via GradPlan (in SIS) at the same time the student enters their committee members for approval, and no later than the summer following their first year for fall admits or end of first fall for spring start students. The new advisor must be identified in GradPlan by checking the chair's box next to the advisor's name on the committee tab.

#### **4.2. Mentoring and Faculty Expectations**

The Graduate School has multiple resources to aid both student and faculty with maximizing the student's mentoring experience: [Optimizing Research Mentoring Relationships](#).

Some foundational documents covering mentoring and advising are found on the [The MSU Guidelines for Graduate Student Mentoring and Advising](#) webpage and include:

- Foundational Values for Graduate Student and Faculty Mentoring Relationships
  - Rights and Responsibilities
  - Shared Responsibility
- Faculty will encourage a commitment to a healthy and productive work-life balance for students. A positive and transparent lab environment is conducive to student success and well-being. This is fostered through:
- clear work expectations and objectives that students can understand and track and if not understood, the student asks questions to gain an understanding
  - working with students to develop their writing and research skills
  - understanding that students have life challenges that require time and attention.

When working with students who are not our advisees on projects, we will explain motives clearly with both student and advisor. Faculty will support the student's main objective of graduation, and research time will be negotiated on that principle, unless the student is funded as a TA and RA.

Faculty will be transparent with other faculty regarding their advisory role of a student, because of the significant time invested in mentoring students. Faculty concerned about a student not advised by them will bring any concerns about advising, funding or course performance to the attention of the GPD together with the advisor in a private meeting.



We value and appreciate diversity and recognize its importance to providing new perspectives on research which is vital to maintaining a high-quality research program.

We encourage the practice of collaborating with the advisor to generate individual development plans (IDPs) that take into account the strengths and challenges of the student as well as the students' career goals. For templates, see [myIDP \(Biological & Physical Science fields\)](#) and [ImaginePhD \(Humanities & Social Science fields\)](#) as appropriate to your career path.

## 5. Formation of the Guidance Committee

### 5.1. Guidance Committee Chair and Membership

[GSRR 2.4.2.1](#) states, "For graduate students in doctoral programs, the guidance committee shall be formed within the first two semesters of doctoral study, or within two semesters beyond the master's degree or its equivalent." There is flexibility in regard to the composition of a student's committee according to [GSRR 2.4.2.2, which allows a student to change](#) the composition of the graduate committee with the approval of unit, for the establishment of a distinct dissertation committee to guide dissertation research specifically. While guidance committees are essential from early in the student's career, their composition may change with the student's developing needs.

The student's Guidance Committee Chairperson is the student's lead advisor (major professor). The additional members of the Guidance Committee are chosen by the student in consultation with their Advisor. Any regular MSU faculty (under the rules of tenure) who holds a Ph.D. can serve on a Geography guidance committee.

The Geography doctoral program Guidance Committee must consist of:

- At least four regular, tenure-stream Michigan State University faculty.
- At least half of the members of a student's guidance committee must have Geography as their tenure home.
- At least one faculty member must be from outside of Geography.
- At least three members must hold a Ph.D. or equivalent doctoral degree.

The University requirements governing the composition of a student's doctoral guidance committee can be found here:

<https://reg.msu.edu/AcademicPrograms/Text.aspx?Section=111#s394>.



The composition of the committee must be reported using GradPlan in the Student Information System (SIS – student.msu.edu). The committee must accept their duties and be approved by the Academic Program Coordinator, Graduate Program Director, Department and College (via automated routing within system).

Guidance Committees are expected to share responsibility for reviewing the graduate student's progress and guiding the student toward completion of course and program requirements. Therefore, the Geography Department has developed policies to ensure that the Guidance Committee of each graduate student will be formed in a timely fashion and that its composition will ensure proper guidance of the graduate student and maintenance of high professional standards in the graduate student's studies and research or creative activity.

Students should seek out not only their major Advisor for advice, guidance and mentoring, but should regularly consult with their Guidance Committee and others from the faculty for help, as needed. Geography faculty are willing to provide as much mentoring as graduate students need; students are viewed as young professionals and junior colleagues. Working together with faculty in a mentoring situation can be highly beneficial and is encouraged.

#### **5.1.1. Members from outside MSU or the MSU tenure stream**

A student may request permission for non-regular faculty/staff member to serve on their Guidance/Dissertation Committee; including Fixed-term, Academic Specialist, Instructor, Support Staff, Faculty who recently left MSU, or faculty from another university. The student must submit a formal request to the Graduate Program Director which must be approved by the Department, College and Graduate School. Outside members will preferably hold a Ph.D. degree. Visit the Graduate School page: <https://grad.msu.edu/specialist-faculty-committees>, then contact the Graduate Program Director for help submitting the request for an outside member. An outside member may be included on the Committee or may serve as a fifth 'extra' member with Program, College and Graduate School approval.

University policy on committee formation:

<https://reg.msu.edu/AcademicPrograms/Text.aspx?Section=111#s394>

#### **5.1.2. Appointed Guidance Committee Members**

To ensure fairness in the examination procedure and maintenance of academic standards, the dean of the college (on their own or at the request of the student, committee member, program director or unit chairperson) may appoint an outside member to the examining committee, who would



have voting rights as per college policy. The outside member will read and critique the dissertation, participate in the oral part of the exam, and submit a report to the dean of the college. See Academic Programs regarding the participation policy of committee members for the [doctoral examinations](#).

## **5.2. Dissertation Committee and Director**

One semester after passing Comprehensive Exams, a doctoral student must defend their dissertation proposal. At that time the student's guidance committee becomes their Dissertation Committee. The Chairperson becomes the Dissertation Director. The student is required to go into their GradPlan Committee and check the Dissertation Director box next to their Guidance Committee Chairperson's name to identify them as their Dissertation Director, and they must be approved through the electronic routing system in SIS-GradPlan.

The specific responsibilities of the dissertation Advisor include:

- advising students on preparing for and selection of a dissertation topic with realistic prospects for success within an appropriate time frame
- providing training and oversight regarding the conduct of research, theoretical and technical aspects of the student's research, and professional integrity
- providing regular feedback on student progress, including providing constructive criticism if the student's progress does not meet expectations
- helping students develop into successful professionals and colleagues

## **6. Dissertation Proposal Defense and Final Oral Examination**

### **6.1. Dissertation Proposal Defense**

A student must prepare a written dissertation proposal in consultation with their Guidance Committee. The content of the proposal will be orally presented and defended in front of the Guidance Committee and other interested faculty and graduate students by the end of the semester immediately following successful passage of comprehensive exams.

Every effort should be made to schedule proposal defenses during the academic year (August 15-May 15). The purpose of following this schedule is so members of the department are able to attend the defense. Only under rare circumstances should defenses take place over the summer and require the approval of the Graduate Program Director.

The primary purpose is to facilitate high-quality dissertation research by providing a forum for student-faculty interaction on this critical part of the student's Ph.D. work. The session gives the student access to evaluation of the research by the committee, other faculty, and students. At least two weeks before the presentation, copies of the written proposal must be made available to each member of the committee and to the



Graduate Program Coordinator for distribution. It is the responsibility of the student to ensure that copies of the proposal are made available by the deadline.

- Two hours will be allowed for the presentation and subsequent questioning. An initial uninterrupted presentation of the proposed research should be 20-30 minutes in length. Anyone, including faculty, students, and staff, is welcome to attend the presentation. The question session that follows will be moderated by the student's Advisor, and all Guidance Committee members will actively participate. However, all persons attending may ask questions and offer comments. Following the session, the student's Guidance Committee will meet to determine whether the proposal must be revised and presented again. A student may present and defend a proposal only twice.
- Every effort should be to conduct the proposal defense in person, particularly if committee members and the student are within reasonable driving distance of Michigan State University. In rare circumstances, the student may participate via teleconference with the approval of the graduate program director. Committee members may participate via teleconference if distance and or the scheduling of the defense prevents in-person participation. All parties must have access to a reliable Internet connection that supports videoconferencing with audio and video functionality. If such a connection is not possible, the defense must take place in person. If it is determined that the student may participate in defense via teleconference, and the connection to the videoconference cuts out and it is not possible to complete questions from all guidance committee members, the defense must be rescheduled and redone.
- When approved by the student's committee, the proposal becomes a written understanding that sets forth the committee's expectations and the student's obligations. The results will be documented on a program Dissertation Proposal Approval form, which requires committee members' signatures. A dissertation that deviates significantly from the approved proposal may be found unsatisfactory.
- Students are required to contact the MSU Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) in the Institutional Review Board Office (IRB) before beginning any research that involves human subjects. IRB approval must be requested, regardless of whether a student intends to use human or animal subjects in their research. Select the "Click: Research Compliance" tile to start the IRB approval process. Approval from IRB or exemption is required of all students and the letter received must be included with the student's dissertation at the time of ProQuest submission. IRB clearance takes at minimum one month: <https://hrpp.msu.edu/>. Students working with hazardous substances should also refer to University policies regarding Environmental Health & Safety <http://www.ehs.msu.edu/>.



## 6.2. Complete a Dissertation

All doctoral students must complete a dissertation. This is a written document of research that makes an original contribution to knowledge. The research is performed under the guidance of the student's Advisor and Guidance Committee and must be acceptable to them. The student, however, is responsible for the quality and design of the research, including any fieldwork, statistical analysis, and graphics. The dissertation must be submitted according to regulations prescribed for Doctoral Dissertation formatting. The Graduate School offers workshops and an online formatting guide: . An abstract not exceeding 600 words must be included.

## 6.3. Pass an Oral Examination in Defense of the Dissertation

At least three weeks before the final oral examination, the student is required to submit the dissertation and abstract to their major professor, members of the Guidance Committee, and Academic Program Coordinator.

The student should check the Graduate School website <https://grad.msu.edu/etd> for exact submission deadlines. The first deadline indicates when a student must start the submission review process. The second deadline is the deadline for acceptance into ProQuest. The dissertation must be in completed form, typed with complete illustrative material and acceptable to the major professor. At this stage, it should be bound only by spiral, or other loose types of binding.

- The defense will consist of two steps; a 30-60 minute uninterrupted presentation by the student summarizing the dissertation research; and a subsequent two-stage questioning session. Anyone, including faculty, students and staff, is welcome to attend the presentation and to participate in the initial portion of the question session, which will be moderated by the Advisor. The Advisor and Guidance Committee will ask questions in the second stage of this session. Faculty are welcome to stay for this stage. Graduate students and other non-committee members (e.g., family and friends) **cannot attend** the second questioning stage. Successful completion of the defense and approval of the dissertation will be determined by a majority vote of the dissertation committee.
- Every effort should be made to schedule defenses during the academic year (August 15-May 15). The purpose of following this schedule is so members of the department are able to attend the defense. Only under rare circumstances should defenses take place over the summer and require the approval of the graduate program director.
- Every effort should be to conduct the defense in person, particularly if committee members and the student are within reasonable driving distance of Michigan State University. In rare circumstances, the student may participate via



teleconference with the approval of the graduate program director. Committee members may participate via teleconference if distance and or the scheduling of the exam prevent in-person participation. All parties must have access to a reliable Internet connection that supports videoconferencing with audio and video functionality. If such a connection is not possible, the defense must take place in person. If it is determined that the student may participate in defense via teleconference, and the connection to the videoconference cuts out and it is not possible to complete questions from all guidance committee members, the defense must be rescheduled and redone.

- To ensure fairness in the examination procedure and maintenance of academic standards, the dean of the college may appoint an outside member to the graduate committee, who would have voting rights as per college policy. The outside committee member will read and critique the dissertation, participate in the oral part of the exam, and submit a report to the dean of the college.

#### **6.4. Dissertation Submission to ProQuest**

- The Graduate School will certify the acceptance of dissertation final format using the [thesis/dissertation formatting](#) guide.
- MSU only accepts electronic dissertations submitted via ProQuest. The instructions for electronic submissions are available from <http://grad.msu.edu/etd/>.
- When submitting an electronic thesis or dissertation to ProQuest, a student has the option to open the document to searches using Google, Google Scholar and Google Books. The option to block such searches continues to be available.
- Students must have IRB approval or an exemption letter at time of submission. If the student has not submitted their IRB request, they must do so before starting the submission process.
- Be aware that a submission via ProQuest does not mean that the document has been ACCEPTED. The review process is interactive, and final approval can take anywhere from a few hours to weeks, depending upon the extent of the necessary revisions and how diligent the author is when making the necessary revisions.
- University policy for accepting supplemental materials for a dissertation:

In addition to the main body of a dissertation, the Graduate School now permits the submission of supplementary materials to ProQuest. These supplemental materials will not be reviewed by the Graduate School for formatting requirements, but they



must be acceptable by ProQuest and comply with ProQuest's criteria and storage limits. All supplementary materials need the approval of the Dissertation Director on the ETD approval form.

- Initial Electronic Thesis/Dissertation Submission and Approval Dates can be found on the Graduate School's website: <https://grad.msu.edu/etd>.

## **6.5. Dissemination**

- Funding agencies sometimes require that students submit a copy (hard copy or electronic) of a thesis or dissertation resulting from funded research. Students should check with the agencies or organizations involved. Failure to adhere to the granting agency's requirements may result in the granting agency's refusal to consider any future grant applications by that individual.
- An electronic finalized copy of the dissertation must be submitted to your Advisor and Guidance Committee.
- Sometimes students may wish to put a hold/embargo on the online publishing of their dissertation for a brief period of time in order to obtain a patent or submit the work for publication. The period of the embargo is restricted and the holding of the document is done by ProQuest after the electronic dissertation is submitted and approved by the Graduate School. Consult the following page for details: <https://grad.msu.edu/etd/hold>.

## **6.6. Exit Surveys**

- Graduating Students are required to complete two Graduate School surveys before their dissertation will be accepted into ProQuest. Only students who have applied for graduation will have access to the surveys. The surveys ask questions about educational experiences in MSU graduate programs. The Graduate School uses data from the surveys when reviewing graduate programs and to guide decisions about services and initiatives for graduate students.
- The identity of all respondents will be kept confidential and only aggregate (group) information will be made available to faculty and administrators.
  - *Instructions for students*
  - Go to the "Complete Survey(s)" instructions on the Graduate School's dissertation submission page: <https://grad.msu.edu/etd> complete the two linked surveys.

## **6.7. Post-graduation Placement Information**



Email the following information to [GEOgrad@msu.edu](mailto:GEOgrad@msu.edu) for entry in SIS:

- Name employing institution, company, agency, etc., including for post-docs
- Provide the Job Title of position (e.g. Post-doc, Tenure-stream faculty, non-tenure-stream faculty, Research Associate, etc.)
- Position location: include full address or at the least, the city and state/province/territory.
- Start Date
- The type of job (select from the descriptions in the chart below)

| Description   |
|---|
| Community college or technical institute in the United States                                     |
| Doctoral-granting college or university in the United States (NOT a stand-alone medical school)   |
| Preschool, Elementary, Middle, Secondary school or school system in the United States             |
| US Federal Government   |
| Foreign Government  |
| US Local Government   |
| US State Government   |
| Industry or business (for profit)   |
| Research institute (not affiliated with a university or outside of the United States)             |
| Master's-granting college or university in the United States (does not grant doctoral degrees)    |
| Stand-alone medical school in the US (including university-affiliated hospital or medical center) |
| Hospital/Medical Center (not including a medical school)  |
| Not-for-profit institution  |
| Other/Unknown   |
| Self-employed   |
| Searching for employment (No position required for this category)                                 |
| University or college outside of the United States  |
| 4-year baccalaureate college or university in the United States (Undergraduates only)             |
| University-affiliated research institute in the United States                                     |

## 6.8. Requests for Hold/Embargo on Publication of Documents Submitted to ProQuest

Students submitting a thesis/dissertation to ProQuest now can request a hold/embargo of publication by ProQuest by contacting the Graduate School at [msuetds.approval@grd.msu.edu](mailto:msuetds.approval@grd.msu.edu) or calling 517 353 3220. In response to the request, the Graduate School will send directly to the student a form that needs to be completed and turned to the Graduate School prior to the document submission to ProQuest. The form needs to be signed by the student's major professor and by the Associate Dean of the student's college. The request for the hold/embargo may be for six months, one year or two years. Requests for a period longer than six months must include a brief justification for the length of the requested hold/embargo.

## 6.9. Creating an Open Researcher and Contributor ID (ORCID) at the Time of Submission of Electronic Documents to ProQuest

At the time of submission to ProQuest, authors now have the opportunity to create an ORCID that provides researchers with a unique identifier for linking their research outputs and activities. An ORCID:



- Improves recognition of research contributions
- Reduces form-filling (enter data once, re-use it often)
- Works with many institutions, funders, and publishers
- Is a requirement of many journal manuscript submission systems and grant application forms.

To learn more about ORCID go to: <https://vimeo.com/237730655>

## **7. Departmental Policies: Academic and Professional Performance**

The Department has obligations to all graduate students, and conversely the students have certain obligations to the Department and to themselves. The most important of these is to maintain an environment in which there is mutual trust, self-respect and integrity, and to strive to attain excellence in scholarship.

### **7.1. The Department Will Provide for the Student**

- An environment in which scholarly attainment and conduct of meritorious scientific research can be achieved.
- Responsiveness to valid academic needs and desires.
- Support and encouragement of creative original study and research.
- A periodic evaluation of their program and a willingness on the part of the faculty to make changes when warranted.

### **7.2. Student Expectations**

Students have the following responsibilities and goals:

- To demonstrate a clear aptitude for the various aspects of scientific research and technical proficiency, including knowledge of relevant literature, formulation of hypotheses, experimental tests of hypotheses, analysis of data and the ability to clearly present those data in both oral and written form.
- At various mileposts through each of the three graduate programs the student is expected to meet stated expectations about progress toward the degree.
- To strive for superior performance in academic coursework.
- To participate in the academic culture of the department, including attendance at departmental and institutional presentations, brown bags and colloquia, thesis and dissertation defenses, as well as at relevant professional meetings.
- Learn and adhere to University and academic unit rules, procedures and policies, including those outlined in:
  - This Graduate Handbook
  - Academic Programs: <https://reg.msu.edu/AcademicPrograms/>



- Graduate Student Rights and Responsibilities and Academic Freedom for Students at MSU: <http://splife.studentlife.msu.edu/graduate-student-rights-and-responsibilities>.
- Select an Advisor and form a Guidance Committee that meets University and Department requirements, and keeping the members of their Committee informed regarding their academic activities and research progress.
- Develop a timeline with actionable dates.
- Follow high ethical standards in accordance with University and federal guidelines in collecting and maintaining data, including seeking regulatory approval for research before any research project begins.
- Exhibit the highest standards of professionalism in teaching, research, and scholarship.
- Work to develop social skills and professional etiquette that exhibit character traits valued by MSU including integrity, honesty, respect for others and ethical responsibility when working independently and in teams.
- Provide the Department with copies of research-related documents (such as permits, approvals, grant proposals, research proposals) within the prescribed deadlines.
- Meet University and Department requirements for degree completion in a timely manner, following the Geography timeline to degree.
- Enroll in courses during student's assigned registration time. Delays in enrollment may result in courses being cancelled. The department cannot offer classes with low enrollment, so students who delay their enrollment for the upcoming semester may cause a course cancellation. The course will not be reinstated, because the instructor/faculty will be reassigned to teach a different course when the course is cancelled.
- Provide the Geography Communications person with a brief bio to be uploaded on the department website directory. A photo is not required but is encouraged. Students can follow the format of bios currently on the directory. Assistance with writing a bio can also be provided by scheduling a meeting with the Communications person.

### **7.3. Minimum Academic Standards**

#### **7.3.1. Grades**

GEO graduate students are required to meet and maintain certain academic



standards while enrolled in their Geography graduate program. This includes having no more than two courses with grades below a 3.0 (including N grades in the P-N grading system), per [College of Social Science policy](#).

This policy holds for all courses the student has taken as a graduate student at MSU. The only courses that are exempt from this rule are courses below the 400 level that are not on the student's program of study or GradPlan. Students who fail to meet any one of the above standards will be notified by the Academic Program Coordinator immediately upon the receipt of the semester grade report. Simultaneous notice will be given, by the Academic Program Coordinator, to the Department Chairperson, Graduate Program Director, and the student's Advisor. This information shall be taken as evidence of failure to meet departmental standards, are grounds for dismissal, and the student may be asked to withdraw immediately from the program.

#### **7.3.2. Overall GPA**

A cumulative GPA of 3.0 or better is required for graduation with a graduate degree from Michigan State University.

### **7.4. Time to Completion of Degree**

#### **7.4.1. Adequate Academic Progress**

It is vital that students make adequate progress in their graduate programs as outlined in the Calendar of Progress. Lack of satisfactory progress toward the degree may jeopardize the student's funding status and other graduate student benefits. Faculty conduct an annual review of all active graduate students (defined as those enrolled for credits during the Academic Year in which the annual review is conducted) and they are sent a letter stating their level of progress in their degree. If progress is inadequate, the department can withhold financial support, assistantship offers, office space, copying privileges, and other similar department resources. Students not making satisfactory progress towards degree will be asked to develop a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with their advisor that outlines completion dates for remaining degree requirements. The list of items to be completed should be specific and measurable so that the student and advisory committee can assess progress. For example, instead of noting "complete dissertation", more specific and better milestones would be to list dissertation chapters to be completed with associated completion dates. If a student is still unable to complete milestones listed in their MOU, the first in a series of warning letters can be initiated.

#### **7.4.2. University, Graduate School, and College of Social Science Requirements**



- The time limit for completion of the requirements for the doctoral degree is eight years from the date of matriculation into the Ph.D. program and is not required to be extended as a result of a break in attendance/leave of absence.
- The PhD Comprehensive Examination must be taken within five years of initial acceptance to the program and expire after three years if there has been no progress toward the degree. This means the student will be required to retake their comprehensive exam (written and oral).
- An extension request must be filed for exceeding five years to complete the comprehensive exam. Graduate School's website contains additional information regarding time extensions: <https://grad.msu.edu/policies-and-procedures>.
- All remaining requirements for the Ph.D. degree must be completed within eight years, from the time when a student begins the first class at MSU that appears on the GradPlan. Applications for extensions of the eight-year period of time toward degree must be submitted by the department/school for approval by the Dean for Graduate Studies of the College of Social Science and the Dean of The Graduate School. Should the degree requirements not be completed within this eight-year period, all of the doctoral comprehensive exams must be passed again.
- Additional requirements for an advanced degree are also set by the curriculum and academic governance process. All Geography graduate students should become thoroughly familiar with these requirements by consulting the Academic Programs catalog: <http://www.reg.msu.edu/AcademicPrograms/Index.asp>.

#### **7.4.3. Degree Interruption**

Ph.D. students whose enrollment at MSU is interrupted for any reason so that they have not been enrolled for three consecutive semesters, including Summer Session, are automatically dropped from their program and must apply for readmission via the Web at [www.reg.msu.edu](http://www.reg.msu.edu).

NOTE: IF you are anticipating completing a dissertation away from campus, time extensions for the doctoral degree are difficult to obtain and must be approved by the Department Chair, the College of Social Sciences, and the Graduate School. The Graduate School will allow an extension for only a specific time period, normally no longer than one year. The extension will include a specific time frame and plan of work for each remaining requirement.

#### **7.5. Withdrawals**

In rare instance a student decides to withdraw from the graduate program, he or she is required to inform the Department in writing in a timely manner outlining the reasons for withdrawal and the timing of departure from the unit. A meeting with the student and advisor will be set to best aid the student in their departure.



## 7.6. Leave of Absence

A student may request a Leave of Absence from the program after discussing the reason(s) with their advisor and the Graduate Program Director. They must complete a Geography Leave of Absence Statement of Understanding form which requires advisor, program, department and college approval (if the leave is anticipated to be longer than two consecutive semesters). The student must provide their best estimate regarding when they will return to their degree work and are limited to the [university's time to degree requirements](#).

It is possible that funding guarantees may have to be relinquished, and future funding may not be guaranteed when the student returns. Reinstatement of funding guarantee is dependent on faculty or department need and available funding source(s).

A student whose leave of absence is 3 consecutive semesters or longer (including summer) is required to complete a university [Readmission request through the Registrar's Office](#). Completion of the request must be submitted at least two months before the student's return, so there is time to reactivate them as a student and have time to enroll in classes/GEO999 credits.

Students who hold a graduate assistantship at the time of their leave should also consult the Work-Related Policies section.

Upon return from a Leave of Absence, the student must meet with their advisor and generate a Memorandum of Understanding document with a new timeline to degree. The MOU must be signed and submitted to the Graduate Program Coordinator for review by the Graduate Program Director and any other necessary administrators.

## 7.7. Readmission to Original Program

Graduate students whose enrollment at Michigan State University is interrupted for any reason so that they have not been enrolled for three consecutive semesters, including the summer sessions, must apply for readmission via the web at [www.reg.msu.edu](http://www.reg.msu.edu) at least two months prior to the first day of registration for the semester in which the student expects to resume graduate studies. Please also note that your program clock keeps ticking during a leave of absence, and so all time limits continue to be in force. You may apply for a time extension by contacting the Geography Graduate Program Director.

Applicants requesting readmission will be asked to submit a program completion plan which outlines a plan for completing remaining program requirements in a timely fashion. The department admissions committee will evaluate the application for readmission when submitted and may ask for additional materials. The ability of faculty to advise the student in their area of research, as well as the likelihood of completion in a timely fashion will be key factors in determining whether or not a student will be



readmitted to the program. The department is under no obligation to readmit and all initial funding offers are null and void after students are dismissed or otherwise separated from the university.

## **7.8. Readmission with Change of Program**

A graduate student wishing to pursue a degree or program other than the one originally sought, or who has not been enrolled for three consecutive semesters, including the Summer Sessions, or who has completed prior courses of study, must file a new graduate application as noted in the [Application Procedure](#) section of this catalog.

## **7.9. Grief Absence Policy**

MSU has a Grief and Bereavement Policy for graduate students, here:

<https://reg.msu.edu/ROInfo/Notices/GriefAbsence.aspx>

### **7.9.1. Student Responsibility**

For doctoral students, it is the responsibility of the student to

- notify their advisor/major professor and faculty of the courses in which they are enrolled of the need for a grief absence in a timely manner, but no later than one week from the student's initial knowledge of the situation
- provide appropriate verification of the grief absence as specified by the advisor/major professor and faculty
- complete all missed work as determined in consultation with the advisor/major professor and faculty.

### **7.9.2. Advisor Responsibility**

It is the responsibility of the advisor/major professor to

- determine with the student the expected period of absence - it is expected that some bereavement processes may be more extensive than others depending on individual circumstances
- receive verification of the authenticity of a grief absence request upon the student's return
- make reasonable accommodations so that the student is not penalized due to a verified grief absence. If employed as a RA or TA, the graduate student must also notify their employer.

## **7.9. Traveling on MSU business**

### **7.9.1. Basic Travel Policies**

- Any travel that you do as a student that is related to your research (conference presentations, fieldwork) is considered to be 'university business.' When you are travelling in this capacity, you are REQUIRED to fill



out an Emergency Contact Form for EACH trip that you take (contact the GPC for the form at [GEOGrad@msu.edu](mailto:GEOGrad@msu.edu). This form is necessary so that the university knows where you are and to be able to contact you or your emergency contact in case of an emergency. There are several databases where travel needs to be reported regardless of funding source; please contact the Academic Coordinator for more guidance.

- Completion of the form generates a Travel Authorization, a form that needs to be on file before you depart. Please complete the Emergency Contact Form and send to the APC/GPC at [GEOGrad@msu.edu](mailto:GEOGrad@msu.edu).
- Students traveling abroad must obtain permission to travel on University business. Student is required to use the Global Travel Registry website (<https://travelregistry.msu.edu/>) before their trip. When students appointed as a TA or an RA travel outside the U.S. to conduct required thesis or dissertation research, or to collaborate with investigators conducting research abroad, the department or research grant supporting the work will be required to pay for all needed vaccinations and/or medications (e.g., anti-malarias) as determined by International Studies & Programs' Non-Education Abroad information: <https://globalsafety.isp.msu.edu/students/>. Students may include those costs in applications for funds from the Research Enhancement or Travel Grant programs administered by the department, College and/or Graduate School.

### **7.9.2. International travel**

Graduate students traveling internationally for MSU-related work (research data collection, international professional conferences, courses, or other academic business, are required to sign up using the MSU Global Travel Registry (even if they are not being reimbursed for travel). This is the best way for MSU to stay in touch with our students if there is an emergency: <https://travelregistry.msu.edu/>. Students not registered will be responsible for paying any expenses if there is an emergency.

### **7.10. Plotter Policy**

The Remote Sensing and Geographic Information Science Research and Outreach Services (RS&GIS) maintain a plotter for departmental use on a pay-as-you-go basis. The department has negotiated an arrangement with RS&GIS so that graduate students can use this service. All active graduate students that are in good standing in the department are eligible for one (1) poster size plot per academic year. A plotting request will need to be made two (2) business days before the plot is needed. Please note that RS&GIS is not a 24/7 operation but works on an 8-5, M-F basis. Poster materials may be submitted on CD, flash drive, via e-mail, etc. Graduate students may



not operate the plotter themselves. Only one paper plot will be paid for by the department per year. Please be sure that the material is ready for final printing before submitting your plot request. The department will not cover the cost of draft plots. If you are presenting a second poster at a conference or similar event, requests for additional plots can be made, in writing, to the Department Chair and Graduate Program Director.

### **7.11. Copy Machine**

Graduate students are allowed 1000 free photocopies per semester (including summer session). A copy machine access code will be assigned to you – it is the last four digits of your PID number. Staff in the Geography Department office can assist you if you forget your code. If you go over your allotment of free copies, you will be notified, and your copy code will be suspended until the beginning of the next semester.

### **7.12. MSU Email**

Per University policy, all MSU communications must be directed to the university issued email (@msu.edu). Email that is forwarded to another email client (e.g. Gmail, Yahoo, etc.) are not guaranteed to go through. Missing important university and department communications may have detrimental consequences (e.g. missed deadlines, lost job opportunities, late coursework, etc.).

## **8. Graduate School and University Academic Policies**

### [Policies and Procedures](#)

#### [Academic Integrity/Standards](#)

##### [Integrity of Scholarship & Grades](#)

#### [Student Rights and Responsibilities](#)

##### [Graduate Student Rights and Responsibilities \(GSRR\)](#)

##### [MSU Student Rights and Responsibilities \(SRR Handbook for all students\)](#)

##### [General Student Regulations](#)

#### [Leave, Extensions, and Waivers](#)

##### [Medical Withdrawal Process](#)

##### [Research/Teaching Exempt Assistantship Illness, Injury, and Pregnancy Leave Policy](#)

## **9. Responsible and Ethical Conduct of Research, Scholarship and Creative Activities (RECR)**

### [9.1. Guidelines for Integrity in Research and Creative Activities \(RECR\) and Mandatory University RECR Training Requirements](#)



Integrity in research and creative activities is based on sound disciplinary practices as well as on a commitment to basic values such as fairness, equity, honesty and respect. Students learn to value professional integrity and high standards of ethical behavior through interaction with members of their academic unit and their faculty Advisor and by emulating exemplary behavior. In this section of the handbook, the program's expectations for the responsible conduct of research and creative activities of graduate students is spelled out. Additionally, explicit criteria for dismissal for reasons other than academic deficiencies, including research misconduct, dishonesty with respect to grades or academic records and scholarship, and violations of professional standards are explained.

Training in the Responsible and Ethical Conduct of Research is essential in the preparation of future scholars and professionals. An understanding of the issues concerning the conduct of research in an increasingly complex world has become critical in successfully navigating the research landscape. This plan has been developed to help prepare MSU Geography graduate students and postdoctoral researchers for their future work. It meets College, Graduate School, and University requirements, effective October 2018. The University's tracking and training of research conduct is managed by the Office of Research Regulatory Support: <https://orrs.msu.edu/train/index.html> and training must display or be recorded in the Student Information System. Training that is documented in the Ability system will display automatically.

Students and postdoctoral researchers who are supported by NSF, NIH, or USDA grants may be required to complete additional specific training; they must meet the timeline and content requirements of training for that grant.

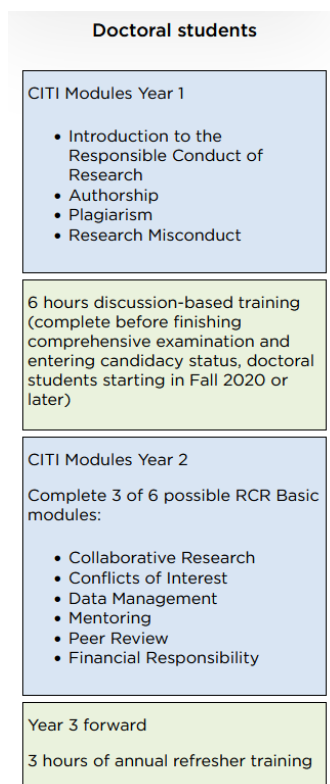
Students and postdoctoral researchers engaged in research involving human subjects or animal use must complete the Michigan State University training modules for those subjects before submitting IRB or IACUC approvals. These modules may be completed as part of the training requirements below, or in addition to them. Mandatory training programs from the Graduate School webpage are shown below.

Incomplete RECR training documentation in SIS will result in a degree conferral hold, pending completion and entry in SIS.

Review the Graduate School Research Integrity page annually to make sure there are no changes to requirements in Figure 2.

**Figure 2. Responsible and Ethical Conduct of Research Requirements**  
(<https://grad.msu.edu/researchintegrity>)





## 9.2. Documenting Responsible and Ethical Conduct of Research (RECR) training:

Students should be logging into the ABILITY information management system at <https://orrs.msu.edu/train/> to complete their on-line RECR training. This is the system that *must* be used for proper documentation of training. The Ability system will feed CITI module completion into the Student Information System (student.msu.edu). Annual training must be recorded by **March 15**, so that it displays in SIS at the time of the student's annual review.

Students who complete a master's degree at MSU before moving into the Ph.D. program at MSU need to repeat the first- and second-year modules, if there was more than one full year or more between master's completion and Ph.D. program admission.

### 9.2.1. Initial Training

**Year 1** - All new graduate students will complete 4 mandatory MSU Graduate School CITI online modules within the first year of enrollment in their program. These courses are listed as CITI Modules Year 1 above. To access the CITI system, use the link above or click on this link: <https://grad.msu.edu/researchintegrity>.



**Year 2** - During the student's 2<sup>nd</sup> year of enrollment in their program, doctoral students must complete 3 additional online CITI training modules, to be selected from the supplemental module list for "Michigan State University (MSU)" under the "MSU Graduate School RCR Program" course list.

### **Group Discussion-Based Training**

All graduate students must complete a minimum of 6 hours of discussion-based training in a group setting. Ph.D. students must complete them before taking comprehensive exams. These hours can be completed as early as the first 2 years (e.g., as part of a course or through participation in Graduate School discussion-based training sessions).

- *Graduate School RECR workshops*. See <http://grad.msu.edu/recr/> for the schedule and important details. Normally about four workshops are offered each semester. Participants must register in advance and complete some readings and other tasks prior to attending the workshop. The Geography Department strongly recommends that all of its graduate members complete the entire Graduate School RECR workshop series.
- *Department of Geography Professional Development series (RECR)*. Each year the Department hosts a series of workshops on a range of professional issues of direct importance for geographers in and out of academia. These workshops include substantial face to face interaction between faculty and graduate students. At least two each year will be designated as satisfying RECR requirements, with topics such as authorship guidelines, research ethics, and mentor/mentee relationships.
- Other acceptable events may include but are not limited to a seminar session devoted to a RECR subject or participation in RECR specific CSTAT training sessions.

### **9.2.2. Refresher Training**

After their second year in the Department, doctoral students need to refresh and extend their training in RECR. Note that CITI modules and Graduate School workshops cannot be repeated for credit. Select CITI modules or workshops not previously taken.

PhD students, starting in year three, must complete 3 hours of annual refresher training. This training can include discussion-based training and online courses beyond the seven required in basic training, or it may include other RECR related activities, as described previously. **Laboratory Safety**

All students working in the Geomorphology or Pollen Laboratories, outside of regularly scheduled classes, must have prior approval by a faculty member. No approval can be



given unless students have completed safety training (to handle hazardous material) provided by MSU's Environmental Health and Safety (formerly Office of Radiation, Chemical and Biological Safety- ORCBS) Environmental Health and Safety is in charge of laboratory safety and hazardous waste disposal on campus and they provide the initial and follow-up lab safety training. Specifically, students must complete Environmental Health and Safety's initial on-line course in Chemical Hygiene and Laboratory/Hazardous Waste Safety Training (<https://ehs.msu.edu/lab-clinic/chem/index.html>). This training is valid for a year and before 12 months have expired the students must complete an on-line Hazardous Waste Refresher training session to continue working in the laboratories. Federal law mandates this training, and we must assure that all of the workers handling hazardous materials have valid clearance. For further information Environmental Health & Safety <https://ehs.msu.edu/>

#### **9.4. Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval**

All doctoral students, regardless of whether they are using human or animal research subjects must submit IRB review documents and receive a letter confirming the review. At ProQuest submission, a copy of the letter must be provided to the Graduate School before the student's dissertation will be accepted for publication. The letter will either say "exempt" or will contain an IRB number.

#### **9.5. Human Subjects Research**

A student whose research involves human subjects IN ANY WAY must receive approval for their project from the [Human Research Protection Program \(HRPP\)](#) prior to initiating data collection for their master's thesis, pre-dissertation research, or doctoral dissertation. HRPP is an Institutional Review Board (IRB) and Federal and University regulations require that all research projects involving human subjects be reviewed and approved by an IRB before initiation. Under the regulations, research is defined as a formal investigation designed to develop or contribute to general knowledge. A human subject of research is an individual (1) from whom an investigator obtains data by interaction or intervention or about whom the researcher obtains confidential information.

Depending upon the level of risk to subjects in the protocol, HRPP assigns the student's application to one of three review categories (exempt from full review, expedited review, and full review) and sends it to one, two or five reviewers, respectively. If the reviewer(s) is satisfied that the rights and welfare of the human subjects are adequately protected, he or she approves it. However, if the reviewer has concerns, the reviewer returns written comments to the HRPP office for transmission to the investigator. The investigator must then send a response to each comment, in writing, to HRPP which will forward it to the reviewer(s). If the proposal is either an exempt or expedited proposal, an approval letter can be issued as soon as the reviewer(s) approves. When a proposal



receives full (five-member sub- committee) review, an approval letter is issued after the proposal is discussed and approved by vote of the full committee at its monthly meeting.

Copies of the HRPP application form and the official notification of HRPP approval must be kept in the student's file maintained by the Department's Academic Program Coordinator and in the files maintained by the student's Advisor. The student should also keep copies in his/her own personal files. Failure to satisfy the University and Department ethical standards and HRPP regulations is considered grounds for dismissal of a student from the program. A copy of the approval must be included as an appendix in the thesis or dissertation.

## **9.6. Additional Research Related Policies**

- [MSU Guidelines on Authorship](#)
- [MSU's Institutional Data Policy](#)
- [MSU's Procedures Concerning Allegations of Misconduct in Research and Creative Activities](#)
- MSU's criteria for dismissal due to unethical or dishonest behavior while engaged in research, scholarly, and creative activities ([GSRR 2.4.9](#); [LSRR 2.4.1.5](#); [MSRR 2.4.1.5](#)).

## **10. Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution**

The University has established a judicial structure and process for hearing and adjudicating alleged violations of recognized graduate student rights and responsibilities (see Article 5 of the [Graduate Student Rights and Responsibilities handbook](#)). However, the first venue to resolve such conflicts informally or formally rests with the department. Because the faculty advisor-graduate student relationship is deemed so important, special attention should be given to the resolution of conflicts between a graduate student and his or her faculty Advisor.

Students who find themselves in conflict with other students, course instructors, or committee members are advised to seek guidance and support from their Advisor or from the Graduate Program Director. For disputes or grievances involving Advisors or the Graduate Program Director, students are advised to seek counsel through the Chairperson of the department.

Any time a student changes advisors, or is dismissed on a grant, a discussion about intellectual property will occur between the former advisor and student and if needed, mediated by the GPD or Chair to ensure the faculty member's research program is not compromised. Intellectual Property protection must be ensured for all parties.

### **10.1 Code of Ethics**



Disciplinary and scholarly codes of ethics in course work, research, and professional activities are a crucial part of successful research. The MSU Academic Council and Academic Senate approved a revision of the Integrity of Scholarship and Grades Policy. This document is available at:

<http://splife.studentlife.msu.edu/regulations/selected/integrity-of-scholarship-and-grades>

## **10.2 Grievances**

If a student is dissatisfied with any part of their graduate program, the student should first consult with their Advisor about the issue/problem. If the issue is not resolved, then the student should consult with the Graduate Program Director. If the issue is not resolved at that level, the Department Chair should be consulted, thereafter the College of Social Science Associate Dean for Graduate Affairs, thereafter the Graduate School Dean's office. Further recourse is available through the standard grievance procedure outlined in the Student Handbook and Resource Guide

<https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/about/handbook/rights-and-responsibilities/student-conduct-system.html>. The University Ombudsman is another resource for problem solving, <http://www.msu.edu/unit/ombud/>

Other resources are Academic Programs (for both undergraduate and graduate programs) can be viewed on the web at <https://reg.msu.edu/AcademicPrograms/>

## **10.3 Hearing Procedures**

The Michigan State University Student Rights and Responsibilities (SRR) and the Graduate Student Rights and Responsibilities (GSRR) documents establish the rights and responsibilities of MSU students and prescribe procedures to resolve allegations of violations of those rights through formal grievance hearings.

<https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/about/handbook/graduate-student-rights-responsibilities/article-five-adjudication-cases-involving-graduate-student-rights-and-responsibilities.html>

In accordance with the SRR and the GSRR, the Geography Program has established the Hearing Board procedures for adjudicating graduate student academic grievances and complaints. For the resolution of conflicts between a graduate student and their faculty advisor or guidance committee. It begins with the student contacting the GPD or chair about the issue in question; the GPD or Chair will serve as mediator. Where a conflict of interest exists with the GPD or Chair, or when further consultation is needed, the Chair and the FAC may be included to help resolve the conflict including assigning a mediator. Resolution can include, but is not limited to: change of advisor, change of committee, student dismissal. For further student support please contact the University Ombudsman's Office.



## 10.4 Warnings and Dismissals

Students can be dismissed from the program due to conduct and other factors like grades below minimum academic standards or failure to make academic progress. Annual review letters are provided to every student at the end of Spring semester summarizing student performance as satisfactory, marginal, or unsatisfactory (informally known as A, B, or C letters).

Students can receive up to two warning letters about lack of satisfactory progress; the issue of a third letter is when students are dismissed from the program for unsatisfactory progress. The College of Social Science Dismissal policy is outlined in the Appendices.

## 10.5 Plagiarism

The number of cases of scientific misconduct due apparently to unintentional plagiarism can be an issue. There is anti- plagiarism software that is available on Desire 2 Learn (D2L) <https://d2l.msu.edu/d2l/loginh/> as part of the “Turn-It-In” package. “Ithenticate” is set up so faculty, postdocs, and graduate students can check their manuscripts for unintentional plagiarism before submitting them. Read more at <https://tech.msu.edu/service-catalog/teaching/tools/ithenticate/>.

University definitions and policy on plagiarism:

<https://ombud.msu.edu/sites/default/files/content/Plagiarism-What-is-it.pdf>

# 11. Graduate Student Funding

## 11.1 Graduate Assistantships

Graduate Assistantship funding is limited to 8 semesters for PhD students during the academic year and can come from a variety of sources (e.g. external grants, department funds, university fellowships, external fellowships. Assistantship funding found outside the department (e.g. MSU (university) fellowships and external fellowships) counts towards the 8 semester limit. Assistantships (e.g. RA/TA/TE) will be assigned based on unit needs. The Chair is authorized to handle extended time requests. See the procedure below to apply for an extension of your semester limit.

If a student comes in with funding from the university, the student is expected to be advised by the faculty member who put forward their funding application with the GPD. If the university-funded student wants to change advisors, that change is documented so the faculty member is no longer accountable to that student, under that university program.



Students who join the department with funding from their advisor's grant, need to discuss with their faculty supervisor/advisor what the student can expect from them in their role as advisor vs. supervisor during the first month. These two roles are different but can be intertwined. If requested, both parties will develop written expectations for their assistantship responsibilities with cooperation from the GPD while working on the grant, and consequences if those expectations are not met.

#### **11.1.1 Types of Financial Support**

There are six main types of financial support:

- 1) Teaching assistantships (TA) that are eligible to join the Graduate Employees Union (GEU) Note that students assigned to TAs will be asked at the Teaching Assistant Orientation Session if they want to join the GEU. During that session, they will be given a card on which they indicate their decision to join or not join the GEU. This issue is discussed more in-depth during the Teaching Assistant Orientation Session.
- 2) Assistantships that support the department's teaching functions but are not eligible to join the Graduate Employees Union (e.g., graders) are labeled as Teaching Excluded Assistantships (TE).
- 3) Research assistantships (RA) which are also not represented by the GEU.
- 4) Academic Achievement Graduate Assistantships (AAGA) involve work that may be in the form of either TA or RA assignments depending on departmental needs; TAs funded by an AAGA are eligible to join the GEU.
- 5) University Distinguished Fellowships (selected through a highly competitive process during the admission process).
- 6) External fellowships (e.g., National Science Foundation, NASA, or National Institutes of Health).

#### **11.1.2 Evaluations of Assistantship Performance**

Students receiving funding from a grant administered by the department or from department funds (which includes Teaching Assistants and Teaching Exempt - Grader Assistants) will be evaluated at least twice a year. Students holding assistantships should meet with their faculty supervisor at the beginning of the semester to establish expectations. Subsequent evaluations will be conducted mid-semester and at the end of the semester. Copies of evaluations will be part of the student's departmental record. Performance on assistantships, as noted in these evaluations, will also be noted in students' annual evaluation letters. Student not performing in a satisfactory manner will be given areas for growth to



improve upon. If after follow up, improvement is not demonstrated, assistantships can be terminated for future semesters.

**11.1.2.1** Students who do not perform on grants can be removed from the grant. The faculty supervisor will meet with the student to discuss the performance issue. In this conversation the supervisor will define specific expectations for improvement and a time frame to turn performance around. The supervisor will ask the graduate student if there are any barriers to work performance or if there is anything the student needs in order to reach the expected performance level. After the meeting the supervisor should follow up the conversation with an email to the student to document the discussion, the performance expectations, and the time frame needed for improvement. The improvement time frame must be no less than one week and provide ample time for the student to complete the improvement plan.

**11.1.2.2** If performance has not improved within the given time frame, the supervisor has the authority to meet with the student and terminate employment on the grant.

## **11.2 Summer Funding**

Students are not guaranteed summer support and funding offers at the time of admission do not include summer funding, although summer support is sometimes available. Opportunities for summer support include but are not limited to RA positions on faculty grants inside and outside of the department and positions with the department's online teaching unit (OnGEO). Students need to discuss summer funding opportunities with their advisor. Students that are not in good academic standing and/or are not making satisfactory degree progress are not eligible for OnGEO positions.

## **11.3 Assistantship Benefits and General Information**

<https://hr.msu.edu/graduate-assistants.html>

<https://grad.msu.edu/assistantships>

<https://reg.msu.edu/AcademicPrograms/Text.aspx?Section=111#s354>

## **11.4 Assistantship opportunities for unfunded students**

If the department has additional need for Teaching Assistantship (TA) support, a student who entered the program with external funding may apply, if the funding authority allows and the TA appointment will not result in duplicative benefits (e.g. Fulbright, non-U.S. Government, FLAS). Students beyond their funding guarantee may apply if they are in their fifth year of the program or took a formal leave of absence



that documents the length of the leave and their total time in the program does not exceed five years. Anyone beyond year five, without a break in their progress, is not eligible. The call for applications will be communicated via the GEO.dl.Grads listserv and include the application deadline. Applicants must be in good standing and there is no guarantee of future assistantship.

### **11.5 Research (Travel, Equipment, Data Access), Professional Development, Conference Travel, and Tuition Support Fellowships**

Once per year, in early fall, students will be asked to discuss their funding needs for the academic year (Fall, Spring and Summer) with their academic advisor/Guidance Committee Chair/Dissertation Chair. They will submit a funding request to the Graduate Program Coordinator on a department form and provide rationale with budget and prioritized requests. The department has limited funding to support student's requests.

Any equipment funded by a fellowship (university or grant funds) belongs to Michigan State University and must be returned to the department no later than the time of degree conferral. This includes but is not limited to computers, software, and research equipment. Discuss with your advisor whether requesting funding for equipment is appropriate.

#### **11.5.1 Fellowship Awards**

- Fellowships are part of a student's Financial Aid package by Federal law. The University calculates a student's Cost of Attendance (COA) each semester. If a fellowship is awarded and the student has already reached their COA amount, any fellowship provided will not disburse without requesting a COA adjustment. A COA Adjustment form must be submitted by the Graduate Program Coordinator providing proof that the funds are intended to cover costs not included in the COA calculation. Conference travel is an example as well as some research costs.
- Fellowships are considered taxable income. In your student account at the end of each calendar year, students can access the tax documents needed for the IRS.
- Students must set up Direct Deposit on their Student Account in SIS, so that any fellowship awards can be deposited into the student's bank. The university no longer issues checks for fellowship awards. Students are required to set up Direct Deposit on their Student Account and if employed by the university, they must also set up payroll direct deposit in EBS (ebs.msu.edu).



### 11.6 Michigan Indian Tuition Waiver Program

Students with documented American Indian lineage and whose tribe resides in the state of Michigan may be eligible for this tuition waiver program:

<https://finaid.msu.edu/undergrad/other-aid#mitw>

## 12. Work Related Policies

In this section, we make explicit Geography's expectations concerning graduate students work related to graduate assistantships (GAs). Graduate Assistants are Teaching Assistants (TAs) and Research Assistants (RAs). All policies related to graduate assistantships must be consistent with GSRR 4.2.1 – 4.2.8. For graduate assistants appointed as teaching assistants, the departmental policies also must conform to the specifications of the current MSU/GEU Contract: <https://hr.msu.edu/contracts/index.html> or reference <http://grad.msu.edu/>.

Assistantships are classified by Level, which is determined by a student's degree(s) earned, previous assistantship or teaching (for TA's only) experience, and number of semesters of continued employment. Stipend rates are set by the MSU Board of Trustees in the late spring and summer and become effective on August 15 annually. Levels and rate ranges can be found on the HR webpage: <https://hr.msu.edu/employment/graduate-assistants/stipend-ranges.html>.

### 12.1 Assistantship Levels

<https://reg.msu.edu/AcademicPrograms/Text.aspx?Section=111#s357>

The Department of Geography, Environment, and Spatial Sciences requires 6 semesters of assistantship in our department or successful completion of the Comprehensive Exam requirement before a graduate assistant is advanced to Level 3.

### 12.2 Enrollment Requirements

If you have an assistantship you are REQUIRED to enroll for a minimum of 6 credits at the master's level and 3 credits at the Ph.D. level during Fall/Spring semester and 3 credits in Summer semester for both Master's and Ph.D. degrees. At the Ph.D. level, once you complete your comprehensive exams, you need to only be enrolled for one credit to be considered full-time.

### 12.3 Graduate Assistant Payroll

Paydays are on Fridays on a bi-weekly basis, unless there is a university holiday on a payday Friday. The payroll schedule can be found here: <http>



[//www.ctrlr.msu.edu/COPayroll/](http://www.ctrlr.msu.edu/COPayroll/) (click on Payroll Schedules, then select the correct calendar year and make sure the Status box is set to Biweekly). Graduate assistantship stipends are not subject to Social Security (FICA) taxes. Stipends are subject to income taxes with few exceptions.

It is highly recommended that GA's and hourly student employees set up Direct Deposit through the Payroll system. This is different than direct deposit for their student account. To set up payroll direct deposit, follow the steps below:

[www.ebs.msu.edu](http://www.ebs.msu.edu)

- click the EBS Portal Login
- sign in with your MSU Net ID and password (same as MSU email)
- complete multi-factor authentication
- choose the ESS tab and then the Payroll sub tab (may be a tile under "My Time & Payroll" called "Bank Information")
- enter Direct Deposit Information from your financial institution

Note that the PayCard option, results in the student getting a "pre-paid" debit card loaded with the student's pay for the pay period. If the card is lost, the funds are easily accessible and can be used by the person who finds it. Direct Deposit into a bank account is highly recommended.

## **12.4 Human Resource Policies, Mandatory Training, and Critical University Policies to Know**

All graduate students are required to know university policies pertinent to all students. Some mandatory training is also expected. Incomplete training may result in loss of SIS functionality and holds placed on the student's account. Some training is customized to address the unique experiences of graduate students. Please note that graduate students who are employed as graduate teaching assistants or research assistants are required to complete additional online education programs for employees.

<https://hr.msu.edu/policies-procedures/>

<https://poe.msu.edu/>

<https://civilrights.msu.edu/>

### **12.4.1 Relationship Violence and Sexual Misconduct (RVSM)**

One of the on-line trainings is to better understand the policies related to Relationship Violence and Sexual Misconduct Policy. All students must complete mandatory training.

<https://civilrights.msu.edu/policies/>



#### 12.4.2 MSU Anti-Discrimination Policy

<https://msu.public.na2.doctract.com/doctract/documentportal/08DC8FCBBBEF7442AC7BAA37AB09F817>

#### 12.5 Graduate School and University Assistantship Policies

- [Assistantships](#)
- Teaching Assistantships: [Graduate Employees Union Contract](#) (GEU - for graduate Teaching Assistants – TA - only)
- [Code of Teaching Responsibilities](#)
- [Research Assistantships](#)

#### 12.6 Tuition Waiver

A waiver of the out-of-state tuition rate is granted to out-of-state students during the semester of appointment, and for full academic year appointees, for the summer session that precedes or follows an appointment for an entire academic year. A nine-credit tuition waiver is granted each semester while holding an appointment. For summer session assistantship appointments, the waiver is five credits. More information is here: <https://grad.msu.edu/out-state-tuition-waiver-external-fellowships-traineeships-and-internships>

#### 12.7 Leave

The University has medical leave and family leave policies in place: <https://reg.msu.edu/AcademicPrograms/Text.aspx?Section=111#s351> and as listed in the [GEU contract](#) for Teaching Assistants. The department currently handles Leaves of Absence informally on a case-by-case basis. However, we must ensure that each student progresses in a coherent manner, and leaves do NOT stop the clock on degree completion timelines. Also, generally speaking, if a student is not registered for three consecutive semesters (including summer terms), then the student must formally reapply for admissions into the university and program.

- Both employer and student will swiftly communicate to determine how the student's responsibilities will be covered during their absence.
- Graduate teaching assistants (TAs) should refer to the bereavement policy found in the MSU GEU Collective Bargaining Agreement, Article 18: <https://hr.msu.edu/contracts/index.html>. Students who believe their rights under this policy have been violated should contact the University Ombudsperson. <http://www.msu.edu/unit/ombud/>

#### 12.8 Jury Duty



Please refer to MSU policies on jury duty for students on a Teaching Assistantship, please refer to the [GEU contract](#).

## 13. Assistantship Expectation

### 13.1. University Expectations for TAs

As a Michigan State University teaching assistant, you play a vital role in the educational mission of MSU. Disciplinary knowledge and instructional skills are key requisites for being a successful teacher, but teaching assistants are also expected to conform to ethical and professional standards described in the [MSU Code of Teaching Responsibility](#). Treat your students with respect, deal with conflict fairly and promote a classroom atmosphere that encourages free and meaningful exchange of ideas. Familiarize yourself with the MSU Code of Teaching Responsibility as you strive to achieve educational excellence, for both yourself and your students. If you hold a ¼ time appointment, you are expected to work 10 hours per week; for a ½ time appointment 20 hours per week. Please note that these are average hours and that due to the nature of teaching there may be weeks with more work and weeks with less work.

Desire2Learn (<https://d2l.msu.edu/d2l/login/>) is an online learning repository used by many Geography faculty for course work, lecture distribution, and communication. Training is available regularly on campus and also at <https://help.d2l.msu.edu/training>.

### 13.2. English Language Proficiency for Teaching Assistants

Current Policy: MSU candidates for TA appointments who were required to demonstrate English proficiency as a condition for regular admission to Michigan State University must also demonstrate that they meet a minimum standard of proficiency in spoken English before they can be assigned teaching work that involves oral communication with undergraduate students.

Those international teaching assistants (ITAs) may meet this requirement in one of the following ways:

- Presenting a TOEFL iBT speaking section score of 27 or higher.
- Receiving a score of 50 or higher on the [MSU Speaking Test](#)
- Taking [AAE 451](#) or [AAE 452](#) (ITA language support courses) and receiving a score of 50 or higher on the [ITA Oral Interaction Test \(ITAOI\)](#).

Those ITAs who received a waiver of the TOEFL or of other accepted tests of English proficiency for admission, must also meet the requirement of proficiency in spoken English before they are assigned to teaching work that involves oral communication with undergraduate students. To meet this requirement, ITAs may use any of three options listed above. Individual exceptions from these requirements (on a case-by-



case basis in rare circumstances) will be considered by the Graduate School in consultation with the ELC upon the request of the department and with the endorsement of the Associate Dean of the College.

### **13.3. University Expectations for RAs**

As a Michigan State University research assistant, you play a vital role in the research and outreach missions of MSU. Disciplinary knowledge and research/laboratory skills are key requisites for conducting research, but research assistants are also expected to conform to ethical and professional standards described in the MSU Faculty Handbook Section IV Research and Creative Endeavors. This section includes information on working with animal and human subjects, radiation, chemical, and biological safety, and adherence to federal guidelines on data generation, management and control. Sections of the Academic Freedom Report for MSU Students and the Graduate Student Rights and Responsibilities document also contain valuable information as you strive to achieve research excellence. If you hold a ¼-time appointment you are expected to work 10 hours per week; for a ½-time appointment 20 hours per week. Please note that these are average hours and that due to the nature of research there may be weeks with more work and weeks with less work.

### **13.4. Graduate Employees Union (GEU)**

The Graduate Employees Union (GEU) is the legal collective bargaining unit for all graduate employees designated as teaching assistants at MSU. The University is obligated to bargain a contract with GEU concerning pay, benefits (including health insurance and tuition waivers), and working conditions. The current contract guarantees yearly wage increases, protection from overwork, a grievance procedure that addresses a variety of issues arising in the work place, University contributions for family health coverage, and many other benefits and protections. The current contract for 2024-2028 can be found here: [Union Contracts](#).

The Graduate Employee Union can be contacted via phone: 332-2824

- Teaching Assistants Nothing in the application of Michigan Right to Work Laws affects the daily terms and conditions of employment of TAs. Union membership is voluntary; meeting the definition of a TA under the GEU contract is independent of union membership. One can be a TA, covered by the contract and enjoy all the rights and responsibilities of the agreement but not be a member of the union. Union membership is not tied to the employment relationship and is a private matter between the employee and union.
- Research Assistants If you have been awarded a RA, you have the *option* to become part of the collective bargaining unit of GEU or to join as a 'dues paying member.

### **13.5. Courses for International Teaching Assistants (AAE 451, 452, and 453)**



- Enrollment in any of these courses requires approval of the English Language Center (ELC). Approval is granted by the Director of the ELC.
- Only students who have failed to achieve a passing score of 50 on the MSU Speaking Test or the ITAOI may enroll in 451 or 452. Students who score a 45 are eligible to enroll. A student with a 40 may be eligible with permission of the ITA Program Coordinator.
- Students need referrals from their departments to enroll in any of these courses.
- A student who has received a partial waiver on appeal may request enrollment in 451 or 452. A student with an unconditional waiver may not request enrollment in 451 or 452.
- AAE 453 is an in-service course. Any ITA with an appointment involving oral communication with undergraduates may request enrollment in 453.
- A student may take each course only once (unless he or she has received a grade of “N” in the course).
- There is no required sequence of courses for 451 and 452, but any ITA eligible for 453 is no longer eligible to take either 451 or 452.
- Receiving a grade of “P” in 451 or 452 (based on assignments, tests, and other measures) does not qualify a student to serve as a TA. A student must pass the ITAOI (administered separately by the ELC Testing Office) or receive a score of 50 on the MSU Speaking Test to be cleared for TA duties involving oral communication with undergraduate students.
- The decision about whether to place a student in 451 or 452 will be made by the ITA Program Coordinator in consultation with the ELC’s Head of Testing, as necessary.
- For further information about ITA courses, contact one of the ITA Program <https://elc.msu.edu/programs/ita/>
- For further information about the MSU Speaking Test or the ITAOI, contact the ELC: [ITAprgram@elc.msu.edu](mailto:ITAprgram@elc.msu.edu)

## 14. University Resources

### 14.1. Resources provided by the Graduate School

- [Graduate Career Development](#)
- [Diversity, equity, & inclusion programs](#)
- [Events](#)
- [Forms](#)
- [Funding](#)
- [Graduate Educator Advancement and Teaching \(GREAT\)](#)
- [Graduate School Office of Well-Being \(GROW\)](#)
- [Mentoring](#)
- [Out-of-State tuition waivers](#)
- [Policy information](#)



- [Professional development](#)
- [Research integrity](#)
- [Traveling scholar opportunities](#)
- [University Committee on Graduate Studies](#)

#### **14.2. Resources provided by university-level units**

- [OISS](#) – Office of International Students and Scholars
- [RCPD](#) – Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities
- [Office of Spartan Experiences](#)
- [Libraries](#)
- [Olin Health Center](#)
- [Institutional Diversity and Inclusion](#)
- [The Burgess Institute for Entrepreneurship & Innovation](#)
- [The Writing Center](#)
- [University Outreach & Engagement](#)

#### **14.3. Resources provided by the Student Life & Engagement Division**

- [Student Parent Resource Center](#)
- [Gender and Sexuality Campus Center](#)
- [Student Veterans Resource Center](#)
- [Women’s Student Services](#)

#### **14.4. Parking on Campus**

If you own a motor vehicle and want to use it on campus, you must register it with the University Vehicle Office. This office is located in the Public Safety Building, 87 South Red Cedar Road. To register a vehicle, you need the vehicle registration, proof of insurance, and if you have an assistantship a copy of your signed appointment form which is given to you by the Academic Program Coordinator. If you have a graduate assistantship you can also register your car on-line at <http://www.dpps.msu.edu/>. Parking on campus for graduate students is limited.

#### **14.5. Bicycles**

The University maintains bicycle racks throughout the campus. Bikes should be locked to these racks when parked. Bikes are not permitted in campus buildings. Improperly parked bikes are subject to impoundment by the Department of Public Safety. Bicycle registration through the [MSU Department of Public Safety – Bike Index](#) is required. You can register your bike on-line at <https://parking.msu.edu/permits/bicycles-scooters>

#### **14.6. Graduate School**



The Graduate School at MSU, 466 W. Circle Drive, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Chittenden Hall offers many workshops and other programs for graduate students. Examples are the Graduate Student Resource Fair, the Activities Fair and workshops on completing a thesis/ dissertation, dealing with conflict, teaching issues, etc. For more info <https://grad.msu.edu/> or call 517 355-0300.

#### **14.7. The Writing Center**

Located at 300 Bessey Hall 517 432-3610. This center offers writing consultation to graduate as well as undergraduate students. One on one consultations are best for small papers or projects like vitas, abstracts and cover letters, while peer response writing groups offer help developing drafts of larger projects like research and conference papers, and even theses and dissertations. The center also has a library with books on resumes, vitas and cover letters, and examples of all of the above. Call 432-3610 to make an appointment, or email [grammar@msu.edu](mailto:grammar@msu.edu) for grammatical questions. You can also see their web site at (<https://writing.msu.edu>) for more information. This is an excellent place to have one more set of eyes offering advice on important writing assignments.

#### **14.8. Career Services Network**

Located at 113 Student Services Building, 517 355-9510. The Career Services and Placement office assists students in career advising and seeking employment upon graduation. Their office is located in 113 Student Services Building. Their staff does workshops, classes and individual advising on topics such as how to interview successfully and steps to creating a well-written resume or C.V. You may also interview for internships or full-time employment through the Career Placement office. The Career Information Center, located in room 6 Student Services Bldg (353-6474) provides up-to-date information on career possibilities, self-evaluation tools, and resource material on career choice, planning and strategy. Reference: <https://careernetwork.msu.edu/>

#### **14.9. Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities**

Located at 120 Bessey Hall, 517 884-RCPD (4-7273); TTY 517 355-1293. Staff specialists available to respond to mobility, visual, hearing, alternative learner, and other handicapper populations to enable their involvement in University activities. Other resources are available to students with special needs. Reference <http://www.rcpd.msu.edu/>

[Disability and Reasonable Accommodation Policy](#)

#### **14.10. Counseling and Psychiatric Services (CAPS)**



3rd Floor of Olin Health Center, 517 355-8270. Students should feel free to contact CAPS for personal concerns and crises. Professional counseling and psychological services are offered to assist with personal, as well as career concerns. All services are confidential. Initial consultations are free of charge Reference <https://caps.msu.edu/>

#### **14.11. MSU Student Food Bank**

COGS and ASMSU jointly established a Student Food Bank to address the problems of students and their families with financial hardship. The SFB is located at Olin Health Center. For distribution hours check website or email [foodbank@msu.edu](mailto:foodbank@msu.edu) Reference <https://foodbank.msu.edu>.

#### **14.12. Center for Statistical Training and Consultation (CSTAT)**

Offers consulting help on commonly-used statistical programs and ‘helps students help themselves.’ It refers students elsewhere if User Services cannot offer enough assistance. CSTAT will help students short of doing the job for them. There is a significant charge for the consulting service. Consultants from the Department of Statistics and Probability are available on an appointment basis to consult about design problems, appropriate statistical design, etc. <https://cstat.msu.edu/>

#### **14.13. Council of Graduate Students (COGS)**

316 Student Services 517-353-9189, (353-COGS). COGS is the official graduate student organization at Michigan State University. [http //cogs.msu.edu/](http://cogs.msu.edu/).

#### **14.14. IT Support and Digital Accessibility Policy**

The Department of Geography, Environment, and Spatial Sciences has several onsite IT support staff. You can consult one of them for assistance or MSU provides basic computer support through IT Services for your laptop, desktop, or other machines on campus: <https://tdx.msu.edu/TDClient/32/Portal/Home/>

Support can be reached at [ithelp@msu.edu](mailto:ithelp@msu.edu) or the phone numbers below. For one-on-one computer assistance, please visit the Computer Store in 120 Computer Center.

|                                    |              |
|------------------------------------|--------------|
| IT Services Support Desk           | 517 432-6200 |
| Computer Store 120 Computer Center | 517 432-0700 |

[Digital Accessibility Policy](#)

#### **14.15. The Institute for Cyber-Enabled Research (ICER)**

ICER provides high-performance computing to researchers across campus. Support, Training, and Research Support are available at <https://icer.msu.edu/>



### 15.1. Summary of Dismissal Policies for Graduate Students in the College of Social Science

To remain in good academic standing, graduate students in the College of the Social Science are expected to:

- Adhere to the expectations and responsibilities outlined in the Spartan Life Policies and General Student Regulations, the Graduate Student Rights and Responsibilities, and the College of Social Science Community Code of Conduct.
- If also employed by Michigan State University, graduate students must adhere to University Policies stipulated in the Employee Handbook, including Rules Governing Personal Conduct of Employees.
- Adhere to University, College and program guidelines for academic integrity.
- Maintain a semester and cumulative grade point average of 3.0 or higher.
- Accumulate no more than two required courses of two or more credits each that fall below a 3.0 grade.
- Complete all degree requirements for the master's degree within the 6-year time period starting from the date of the first course counted in the master's plan of work (Master's Degrees).
- Make satisfactory progress towards degree completion each semester.
- Complete program milestones in a timely manner according to the timelines set by the graduate program.
- Complete all qualifying or comprehensive exams no later than Year 5 from date of the first course counted in the doctoral plan of work (PhD Degrees)
- Complete all degree requirements for the doctoral degree no later than Year 8 from the date of the first course counted in the doctoral plan of work (PhD Degrees)

Each semester, the College of Social Science generates End of Semester Review letters for students whose course grades, semester grade point average, and/or cumulative grade point average fall below 3.0 or there is a pattern of academic performance that suggests the student is not meeting College or graduate program standards. These letters are sent to the student's unit Chair/Director and Graduate Program Director and require a formal response back to the College about the results of the unit's academic review with the student. Units should communicate to students in writing about these



concerns and when appropriate, notify them that they are on academic probation or if necessary, will be dismissed from the program.

Academic dishonesty reports filed by members of the faculty trigger additional review at the program, College, Graduate School and University levels. At a minimum, the College will contact the program to trigger a review of the allegation. Repeat offenses require consequences that exceed the penalty or failing grade options.

Academic misconduct outside of the classroom trigger additional review at the program, College and Graduate School levels. Academic misconduct allegations are reviewed using the policies and procedures identified in the Graduate Student Academic Hearing Procedures for the College of Social Science, Article 5 of the Graduate Student Rights and Responsibilities and June 2009 Procedures for Allegations of Misconduct in Research.

#### **Article 2.4 Academic Programming (from Graduate Student Rights and Responsibilities)**

**2.4.8.1** When determination is made that a graduate student's progress or performance is unsatisfactory, the student shall be notified in writing in a timely matter, and a copy of the notice shall be placed in the student's academic file.

**2.4.8.2** When a graduate student's status in a program has been determined to be in jeopardy, the graduate student shall be informed in writing in a timely matter, and a copy of the notice shall be placed in the student's academic file.

**2.4.9 Dismissals and Withdrawals.** Each department/school and college shall establish criteria for the dismissal or withdrawal of students enrolled in its programs. Such criteria shall be published and given to students at the time they begin their programs. Should a decision to dismiss a student be made, the affected student shall be notified in writing in a timely manner. All information regarding the decision is to be held in strict confidence between the student and those faculty and administrators with responsibility for the student, on a need to know basis; release may be only with the written consent of the student involved unless the decision becomes the substance for a grievance procedure, in which case such information shall be released to the grievance committee. All records and information created under this article shall be released only in accordance with the University's published policies governing privacy and release of student records. The same privacy is to be accorded the reasons for a student's temporary or permanent withdrawal from the University. **Should a**



**decision to dismiss be held in abeyance, pending completion of the stipulated conditions, these conditions must be communicated in writing in a timely matter to the student.**

#### **Article 4: Graduate Student Support (Graduate Student Rights and Responsibilities)**

**4.0 The term “graduate assistant” in this Article refers to graduate assistants who are not covered by the Graduate Employees Union (GEU) collective bargaining contract.** Employment policies and the issues that are encompassed by employment and involve students who are included in the collective bargaining unit shall be covered by the GEU contract.

#### **4.1 Classes of Support**

- 4.1.1** Students receiving support through the University primarily constitute three groups:
- (a) graduate assistants
  - (b) University employees
  - (c) fellowship, scholarship and/or grant recipients

#### **4.2 Graduate Assistants**

**4.2.1** Graduate assistants are graduate students currently enrolled in degree programs who are appointed through established University procedures and in accordance with University policies governing graduate assistantships. Duties assigned to graduate assistants may include (but are not limited to) classroom instruction, student advising, writing supervision, reading of papers and examinations, and research. The responsibilities delegated to a graduate assistant must be performed under the supervision of an appropriate faculty member or administrator.

**4.2.2** With the participation of graduate student representatives, each unit appointing graduate assistants shall develop policies and make available current information covering, but not limited to, the following:

- (a) criteria for selecting new graduate assistants
- (b) criteria for renewing and/or continuing graduate assistantships
- (c) stipends (see 4.2.4)
- (d) stipend advancement and promotion
- (e) tax status of stipends (according to IRS policy)
- (f) procedures for evaluating performance (see also 2.5.2–2.5.2.4)
- (g) length of term of appointment, including continuance and renewal of graduate assistantships
- (h) workload, duties, and vacation schedules



- (i) grievance procedures

**4.2.3** By April 15th of each calendar year, units shall advise each graduate assistant in writing of one (or more) of the following: (a) the assistantship will be renewed for the following academic year or a portion thereof; (b) the assistantship will be renewed provided the assistant is able to meet certain specified conditions; (c) the assistantship will be renewed provided the unit is able to meet certain specified conditions; (d) the assistantship will not be renewed for the following academic year. If the assistantship is not renewed, the reasons shall be indicated. When citing (b) above, the unit shall include the date by which the student must satisfactorily complete the specified criteria and the date by which the unit will notify the student about its decision to renew the assistantship for the appropriate semester(s). When citing (c) above, the unit shall include the date by which it will notify the student about its decision to renew the assistantship for the appropriate semester(s). Evaluative judgments about students should be communicated in accordance with guidelines in 2.4.8. (See all Sections 2.5.2- 2.5.2.4.)

**4.2.4** The Office of the Provost shall establish a campus-wide policy for graduate assistant stipends, taking into account (a) the amount of stipend adequate in relation to the current cost of living, (b) the need to be competitive with other universities, and (c) the availability of resources for graduate assistant stipends. (The Office of the Provost shall consult with the Dean of The Graduate School and the University Committee on Graduate Studies on graduate assistant stipend levels.)

**4.2.5** Graduate assistants are entitled to all benefits normally accorded to full-time graduate students, except as specified under policies established in accordance with 4.2.7.

**4.2.6** All graduate assistants are entitled to such clerical-secretarial help and supplies as are commensurate with their assigned responsibilities and the resources of the unit.

**4.2.7** The Office of the Provost, in consultation with the Dean of the Graduate School and the University Committee on Graduate Studies and other appropriate, duly authorized authorities, shall review and publish policies for graduate assistants relating to (a) sick leave, (b) parking



privileges, (c) bus privileges, (d) travel off campus, (e) insurance, (f) health care, and (g) tuition waivers.

**4.2.8** Within the constraints of their training, experience, and responsibilities, graduate assistants have a right to the same professional respect as that accorded to regular faculty.

### **4.3 University-Employed Graduate Students**

**4.3.1** The University's student employment office shall publish annually minimum and maximum salaries and hourly wages for University-employed graduate students. This office shall have the authority to approve unit requests for all payments above the established maximums.

**4.3.2** The University shall not deny a regular employee's fringe benefits solely because the person also is registered as a student.

**4.3.3** University employees who are pursuing graduate study are bound by collective bargaining agreements or other applicable University personnel policies and agreements.

**4.3.4** Employment-related grievances of graduate students employed in non-academic positions should be filed with the employing units under their respective procedures.

### **4.4 Fellowship, Scholarship, and Grant Recipients**

**4.4.1** A graduate student supported by a fellowship, scholarship and/or grant shall have a right to such information as (a) the responsibilities and performance required for retention of support, (b) the privileges and status associated with support, and (c) grievance procedures.

### **4.5 University Policies Relating to Graduate Student Support Recipients**

**4.5.1** Michigan State University is an Affirmative-Action, Equal-Opportunity Employer. Therefore, employment appointment policies shall be consistent with anti-discrimination policies of Michigan State University.

**4.5.2** Graduate students shall be informed of all employment policies when a position is tendered.



**4.5.3** The University retains the right to demote, suspend, terminate, or otherwise discipline graduate students receiving support through the University for cause and for failure to meet their responsibilities. The University also retains the right to terminate graduate students' participation in an academic program, which in turn may terminate the graduate student's assistantship or other financial support. Graduate students who believe they have a grievance under this article may utilize the judicial procedures outlined in Article 5.

**4.5.3.1** In cases where the graduate student contends that action of the University may cause irreparable harm, the student may appeal to the appropriate judiciary for an expedited hearing.

## **Policies for Dismissal from Teaching Assistantships Article 12 GEU Contract**

### **Section IV. Procedure for Unsatisfactory Performance**

When employment performance is unsatisfactory, the employment duties may be reduced and employment fraction and pay may be reduced correspondingly, or employment may be terminated. In cases of unsatisfactory employment performance, the matter will first be discussed with the Employee prior to any action being taken. If the Employer determines that the existing situation can be corrected by the Employee and is of such a nature that correction is appropriate, the Employee will be given not less than one calendar week from date of discussion to make the correction. A written summary of such a discussion will be available at the written request of the Employee provided the request is received within forty-eight (48) hours of the discussion. When allowed by law, a copy of this summary will be provided to the Union.

### **Section V. Discipline**

The parties recognize the authority of the Employer to suspend, discharge, or take other appropriate disciplinary action against Employees for just cause. Discharge may result from an accumulation of minor infractions as well as for a single serious infraction.

Whenever it is appropriate, the Employer shall give the Employee advance notice of its intent to hold an investigatory interview. An Employee shall be entitled to the presence of a Union Representative at



an investigatory interview if he/she has reasonable grounds to believe that the interview may be used to support disciplinary action against him/her, and he/she requests representation. If any discipline is taken against an Employee, the Employee will receive a copy of the disciplinary action. In the event that an Employee is discharged, the Employee will receive a copy of the notice of discharge, including a summary of the reasons for the discharge. When allowed by law, the Union will be provided a copy of any notice of discharge. An Employee may appeal a suspension or discharge beginning at Step Two of the Grievance Procedure.

## **Section VI. Appeals**

If a determination results in a discharge or a reduction in fraction of employment and pay during the term of employment, a grievance may be submitted beginning at Step Two of the Grievance Procedure, provided the grievance is submitted in writing within the fifteen (15) calendar day period following notice of the discharge or reduction. In the event of an arbitration, if the Arbitrator does not find for the Employer, the Arbitrator may only make a finding of fact and award pay but not reinstatement. Such pay shall not exceed an amount that the Employee would have earned from the date of discharge to the end of the term of employment.

## **Requirements for Requesting School and Work Accommodations**

If you are a MSU student or employee and you have a disability, you can register with the RCPD and you may be eligible to receive accommodations. RCPD recognizes that accommodations may be required in order to assist individuals in maximizing their educational and workplace experience. While the university provides reasonable accommodations, we do not change essential academic requirements or job functions. Accommodation determinations are based on documentation and individualized needs assessments. See <https://www.rcpd.msu.edu/services>

MSU employees, including student employees, can request reasonable accommodations for the workplace. The Statement of Employee Accommodation Determination (SEAD) is the primary method of documentation that enables employees to validate and communicate their needs to supervisors.



Reasonable employee accommodations are determined through a partnership between RCPD, MSU's Office of Employee Relations (OER) Accommodations Specialist, the employee, and the supervisor. See <https://www.rcpd.msu.edu/get-started/employee-accommodations>

The SEAD is individualized and cannot be generated until the employee completes the following steps:

1. Identify and Register a Disability. This includes self-identifying through the RCPD MyProfile and submitting sufficient medical documentation.
2. Request Accommodations
3. Participate in the employee accommodation review process, including a needs assessment meeting with RCPD and OER and submission of a current position description.

The OER Accommodations Specialist also engages with the supervisor regarding the accommodation requests prior to determination and production of the SEAD. For a comprehensive overview of the employee accommodation process, please see

the MSU Disability and Reasonable Accommodations Policy.

Supervisors are responsible for maintaining confidentiality and for facilitating the granted accommodations outlined on the SEAD. The SEAD should be held in a confidential place separate from the employee's primary file.

### **Early Termination or Resignation of Assistantships**

If a graduate assistant resigns an assistantship or the assistantship is terminated early during a semester, such that the appointment does not meet minimum duration standards (53 calendar days in Fall and Spring; 46 calendar days in Summer), the student will be assessed tuition for all credits carried, and those who are not Michigan (in-state) residents will be assessed out-of-state tuition.

### **15.2. University Withdrawal Policy** (<https://reg.msu.edu/roinfo/notices/withdrawal.aspx>)

**Effective Fall 2024**



A withdrawal from the university occurs when a student drops all their courses within a semester. A student may voluntarily withdraw from the University through the Class Ends date. This date is displayed in the student information system Class Search. When a student withdraws from a semester, their tuition and fees are subject to refund according to the Refund Policy.

**15.2.1. From the Class Begins date through the Last Date to Drop with No Grade Reported**

Students may drop individual courses or withdraw themselves from the Class Begins date through the Last Date to Drop with No Grade Reported using the online enrollment system, or in person at the Office of the Registrar. Courses withdrawn during this period will not appear on the official transcript.

**15.2.2. After the Last Date to Drop with No Grade Reported through the Class Ends date**

Students may request to drop an individual course, now considered a late drop, or initiate a withdrawal after the Last Date to Drop with No Grade Reported through the Class Ends date using the Withdrawal Initiation/Late Drop Request. Courses dropped during this period will appear on the official transcript and receive “W” grades.

To request a late drop or to initiate a withdrawal after the Last Date to Drop with No Grade Reported through the Class Ends date, the following steps are required:

**Step 1: Student Explores Options and Impacts of Request**

Undergraduate students are expected to contact their academic advisor or advising office to learn how a late drop or withdrawal could affect their time to degree and determine if supportive options are available to help maintain their enrollment.

Graduate students are expected to contact their major advisor or graduate program director to discuss how a late drop or withdrawal could affect their time to degree, determine if supportive options are available to help maintain their enrollment, and discuss impacts if the student is an appointed graduate assistant.

International students must meet with the Office for International Students and Scholars to discuss immigration status impacts if they request a late drop or initiate a withdrawal.



NCAA student-athletes must meet with Student-Athlete Support Services to discuss scholarship and/or eligibility impacts if they request a late drop or initiate a withdrawal.

Students who are working with the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) to receive late drop or withdrawal supportive measures or modifications for pregnancy, childbirth, pregnancy-related condition and/or parenting must connect with the Office of Support and Intake in OCR before completing the Withdrawal Initiation/Late Drop Request.

Students who receive federal, state, or institutional financial aid are strongly encouraged to connect with the Office of Financial Aid to learn how a late drop or withdrawal could affect their aid package. The Financial Aid Refund Policy provides additional information about the impact of dropping credits and withdrawing, including an example of a Title IV return of funds calculation.

Students who receive Veterans Education Benefits are strongly encouraged to connect with the Registrar's Office to learn how a late drop or withdrawal could affect their benefits.

### **Step 2: Student Completes Request**

Students must complete a Withdrawal Initiation/Late Drop Request, available within the student information system dashboard.

### **Step 3: MSU Routes Request**

The Withdrawal Initiation/Late Drop Request will be routed to the appropriate office for review and to instructors to gather applicable last dates of attendance.

### **Step 4: MSU Processes Request**

When all appropriate offices and/or instructors have provided approval and/or information, the student's request will be processed.

### **15.2.3. After the Class Ends date**

Requests for retroactive drops or withdrawal after the Class Ends date are available for specific reasons and require approval.



- To petition for a retroactive drop or withdrawal based upon an error in enrollment, students must contact their academic advisor, advising office of their college, or University Advising if an exploratory major.
- To petition for a retroactive withdrawal based upon a student's medical condition that prevented the initiation of a withdrawal during a term of instruction, students must contact the Office of Student Support & Accountability.
- To petition for a retroactive drop or withdrawal based on any other unique and unexpected circumstance, students must contact the Office of the Registrar.

#### **15.2.4. Unofficial Withdrawal**

Students who leave the university during a semester or summer session without withdrawing will be assigned their earned grades for all enrolled courses and will forfeit any fees or deposits paid to the university for that term.

#### **15.2.5. Withdrawal for Medical Reasons**

Students who withdraw for their own medical reasons must submit the Withdrawal Initiation/Late Drop Request and within it, select "Personal Medical Leave." Doing so will notify staff in the Office of Student Support & Accountability who coordinate the Medical Leave and Return Process (MLRP). The MLRP is available to most MSU students, except those in the College of Human Medicine, College of Law, and College of Osteopathic Medicine. Students within the aforementioned colleges may seek leave information directly from their college student affairs office.

Once withdrawn from the term of instruction, a student is expected to pursue a Medical Leave and provide the proper documentation to verify the condition's impact on their enrollment. Medical Leave is a university-verified designation, determined after the withdrawal has been processed. Medical Leaves are subject to the Medical Withdrawal Policy for Class Tuition and Fees Refund Policy. If approved for Medical Leave, a student may need to provide documentation of readiness to return to MSU before they will be able to reenroll at MSU.

#### **15.2.6. Academic Recess or Academic Dismissal**

If a student is academically recessed or academically dismissed, courses for which the student is enrolled in future terms are administratively dropped. Tuition and fees are subject to refund according to the Refund Policy.



#### **15.2.7. Non-Academic Suspension or Dismissal**

If a student is suspended or dismissed through the non-academic student conduct process, the student will be administratively withdrawn from the current semester and forfeit their tuition and fees. Depending upon the implementation timing of the suspension or dismissal, courses may not appear on the official transcript or may appear with “W” grades. Any enrollment in future semesters will be administratively dropped.