

**2026-2027
MASTER'S 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 master's 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 M.S. 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 master's students, faculty, and staff so they will have a working knowledge of their opportunities, obligations, and responsibilities.

Within the field of Geography, master's 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 M.S. program

Our program is individualized to allow the student, working with their Advisor or Guidance Committee, to shape a program of study that is broad in scope yet consistent with specific student interests. The M.S. degree offers both a Thesis-based (Plan A) and Non-thesis (Plan B) option. The most up-to-date requirements can be found here:

https://reg.msu.edu/AcademicPrograms/ProgramDetail.aspx?Program=GEOGRAP_MS

1.2. Expected Academic Progress Timeline to Degree

An overview of the program of study for the master's program is provided in Figure 1.

Expected Progression for M.S. Plan A or Plan B

	Year 1		Year 2	
	Fall	Spring	Fall	Spring
Thesis-Based - Plan A	(A)	(B) (C) (D) (E)	(A) (E) (F) (G) (H) (I)	(E) (G) (H) (J)
Course-Based - Plan B	(A)	(C) (E) (F) (I)	(A) (I)	(E) (I)

- A.** Meet with advisor early in the fall to set annual goals and to discuss funding support needs for the current year (funding support is for thesis-based students).
- B.** Thesis-based: GEO 886: Research Design in Geography course
- C.** Complete Year 1 RECR required CITI Modules by March 15.
- D.** Thesis-based: Establish committee and enter into GradPlan by end of semester.
- E.** Submit Advisor Signed Annual Review Document and updated CV to SIS by March 31.
- F.** Meet with advisor/committee and establish Program of Study, enter courses in SIS's GradPlan: Course Plan and obtain advisor/committee approval by end of semester.
- G.** Thesis-based: Complete Year 2 RECR required CITI modules by March 15.
- H.** Thesis-based: Present first authored research at conference (one presentation required by graduation).
- I.** Complete 6 hours of discussion-based RECR training and make sure they appear in the RECR SIS module before graduation.
- J.** Thesis Defense. Email GEOGrad@msu.edu with date, time, title, copy of thesis or how it can be obtained, location &/or Zoom link **at least three weeks before the defense.**

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

Updated: August 2024

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 a 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.
- [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
- [Generative AI](#) - Graduate students are responsible for the content of any materials submitted to satisfy degree requirements. If AI is used, it must be disclosed. Graduate students are expected to comply with college and university policies about AI. The misuse of AI in graduate studies can result in disciplinary action, including program dismissal.

2. Program Components/Plan Options

2.1. Thesis-based (Plan A)

The Thesis-based option (Plan A) is research-intensive aimed primarily at students who intend to seek a Ph.D. later and/or work toward 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
- 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. Students will produce either a manuscript or thesis based on their committee's advice.

2.2. Course-based (Plan B)

The Non-thesis (Plan B) option allows a student to work with an advisor and develop a course-based plan of study most relevant to their interests and career goals. The program includes a minimum of 30 credits of coursework. The student is required to take a final examination as determined with their advisor and no thesis is required.

Plan B students must complete 30 credit hours of courses and maintain an average GPA of 3.0 or higher. No more than two courses can have course grades below a 2.0.

2.3. Graduate Certificates and Specializations

Students have the option to include graduate certifications and specializations 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
- For a complete list of available GC's and SPCG us the links below.
 - Graduate Certificate program:
<https://reg.msu.edu/academicPrograms/Programs.aspx?PType=GCRT>
 - Graduate Specializations:
<https://reg.msu.edu/academicPrograms/Programs.aspx?PType=SPCG>

Master's student are only eligible to participate in Graduate Certificate (GC) and Graduate Specializations (SPCG) whose description includes master's students. Read the descriptions carefully and discuss the options with your advisor.

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. 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 Master of Science (M.S.) – Thesis and Non-Thesis Students

3.1. General Requirements for the M.S. Program

Complete at least 30 credits of coursework as listed in the [Academic Programs catalog](#) for the semester and year the student started the program.

Courses below the 400-level may not be counted toward the 30-credit requirement for the M.S. degree but may be taken to get up to speed in an area they are less familiar with.

3.2. University Residency Requirement

Students must meet university residency requirements. A year of residence 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.

3.3. Mentoring and Faculty Expectations

The Graduate School has multiple resources to aid both student and faculty with maximizing the student's mentoring experience: [Professional Development](#). Much of the guidance is centered around research mentorship, but having good mentorship/advising is also important for Plan B students and some of the information is helpful for both. Plan B students will be assigned an initial advisor at the time of admission but may choose to change in their first semester. If they choose to make a change they must do so in writing with the new advisor's approval within the first year of study.

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.

3.4. Specific Requirements for the M.S. Program (Plan A and B)

3.4.1. Maximum Independent Study and Research Problems Course Credits

M.S. students may count no more than four 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. The exception is when these course numbers are used for new courses. Independent study courses taken in other departments also count toward this credit limit.

3.4.2. Breadth Requirements

Incoming master's students who do not have a prior degree in geography at the bachelor'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. Whether/which deficiencies must be met are at the discretion of the student's Advisor/Guidance Committee Chairperson.

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 their advisor and 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. It is recommended the course be 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.

3.4.2.1. 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, and lecture notes. A lack of suitable documentation may be grounds for refusal to grant the waiver.

Students should request a course waiver, with the appropriate documentation, 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 Academic Program Coordinator and recorded in the student's file.

3.4.3. University Approved Curriculum

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 master's program. If after admission and matriculation, the Geography faculty change the master's 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 or time limit to degree.
- They can voluntarily move to the new requirements by discussing their intentions with their advisor/guidance committee. This option is only available if the student's degree is not interrupted by a Leave of Absence (non-enrollment) of 3 semesters or more. The student must submit to the Graduate Program Coordinator, in writing, their intent to change (the request needs to include their advisor's signature). The student will not be granted additional time to complete their degree, if they choose to switch to new requirements. Their original time limit to degree will remain in effect.
- 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 advisor/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 one or two-year path to degree.

3.5. Course Requirements

Depending on the program plan option the student chooses and area of interest, the course requirements will vary. There are only a few required courses. The remaining coursework is determined between student and advisor/guidance committee. For the current requirements visit the [Academic Programs catalog \(AP\)](#).

Plan A	Plan B
1 Seminar Course (per AP catalog)	1 Seminar Course (per AP catalog)

GEO886 – Research Design	9 credits of GEO courses at the 800-level or above as approved by advisor (in addition to below)
GEO899 – 6 cr.	

Both Plan A and Plan B

- 9 credits from GEO courses at the 400 level or 800 level as approved by the student's advisor/guidance committee.
- 9 credits of additional coursework at the 800-level or above taken inside or outside of the Department of Geography, Environment and Spatial Sciences as approved by the student's advisor/guidance committee.

3.6. 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.

3.7. M.S. Coursework

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

CORE –

- Seminar Course (Plan A and B)
- GEO886 (Plan A only)

REQUIRED –

- 9 credits from GEO courses at the 400 level or 800 level as approved by the student's guidance committee. (Plan A and B)
- A minimum of 9 credits from 800-level or above courses taken inside or outside of the Department of Geography, Environment and Spatial Sciences as approved by the student's guidance committee/advisor. (Plan A and B)
- 9 credits from GEO courses at the 800-level or above as approved by the student's guidance committee. (Plan B Only)

ELECTIVE – Any courses taken above the 30-credit requirement, except those taken for an additional specialization or certificate. Courses for these two should be categorized to align with the program whose requirement they will be applied to.

3.8. 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 instructor and 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>.

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. Google search 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 request. They require College-level approval and permission from each faculty member who teaches the two 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.

3.9. Transfer Credit

In some circumstances, students may be allowed to transfer previous graduate level coursework into MSU and have it count toward their MS. A maximum of 9 credits are allowed in transfer. There is a 9-credit limit which includes "shared" credits from a master's degree at MSU, if the student moves on to the PhD program. 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 MS program may be considered for transfer only if taken within three years of matriculation into the Geography MS 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.

3.10. GradPlan

GradPlan was developed for graduate students to communicate their program of study (Course Plan), record their faculty committee (Advisor/Guidance Committee Chairperson, Guidance Committee members and Thesis Director), and track completion of degree requirements. It is part of the Student Information System (SIS) and stores degree relevant information for degree conferral.

The student's Course Plan is considered a contract between the student and the University regarding what the student will do to meet their degree requirements. GradPlan also stores annual review documents and tracks milestones and RECR training.

GradPlan Contains the Following Tabs/Sections:

- Research Overview – due annually for all MS students
- Committee
 - MS- Plan A students must have an approved committee by the end of year one
 - MS Plan- B students do not need a committee
- Course Plan
 - MS - Plan A by the end of their third semester
 - MS – Plan B by the end of their first semester
- Annual Review – All MS students must upload their up-to-date resume/CV and their Annual Review Document by March 31 each academic year. The program will upload the student's departmental Annual Review Letter each year.

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

3.11. Final Exam or Evaluation

Both Plan A (with Thesis) and Plan B (without-thesis) student must produce a final written product.

Plan A students are required to orally defend their thesis to meet this requirement. More details on the oral defense for Plan A students is in the next section dedicated to thesis-based students.

For Plan B students, the final written product will be determined with your advisor at the start of the second year in the program.

Examples of possible written products include but are not limited to literature reviews, written answers to essay prompts provided by the guidance committee.

3.12. 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 them into SIS. 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 APC 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 thesis is accepted into ProQuest, the Graduate School will enter the title into the student's SIS milestones.

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

1. All four GradPlan tabs are up-to-date and fully approved, including the upload of annual review documents (GEO Annual Review form and updated CV).
2. The student's academic progress pie chart is at 100%.
3. Any Holds placed on the student's account are removed.
4. All milestones are entered in SIS.
5. All RECR requirements are complete.
6. 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:

1. completes an application for graduation
2. all degree requirements are met
3. Oral Defense form is filed
4. student has completed all Graduate School requirements
5. the thesis 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 thesis ACCEPTED into ProQuest before the [dates/times set by the Graduate School for that semester](#).

4. Thesis Option Requirements (Plan A Only)

4.1. Advising and Guidance Committee Formation

4.1.1. 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.

4.1.2. 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 and career goal discussions with several potential advisors, and consultation with the Graduate Program Director.

For Plan A (with thesis) students, 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 guidance 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 guidance committee chair's box next to the advisor's name on the Committee tab.

4.1.3. Guidance Committee Chair and Membership

For master's Plan A students, by the end of the first year of master's study, the student must establish their Guidance Committee. The student's Guidance Committee Chairperson is the student's lead advisor (major professor). Any regular faculty (with a Ph.D. and in the tenure stream) appointed in the Geography Department can serve as an Advisor for MS in Geography students. The additional members of the Guidance Committee are chosen by the student in consultation with their Advisor.

The MS Guidance Committee must consist of at least two student selected faculty members: the Advisor/Guidance Committee Chairperson and the person(s) who will be second and third readers of the thesis. It is recommended that the committee be composed of three regular MSU tenure stream faculty.

If the Guidance Committee consists of fewer than three people, one other member of the faculty will be selected by the Department Chairperson to serve as an additional member of the examining committee ('rotator'). The composition of the committee must be approved by the Chair of the Department and reported to the Graduate Program Director, Academic Program Coordinator, and College through entry and electronic approval in SIS-GradPlan.

At least half of the student's committee members must have Geography as their tenure home. People who are Specialists and Administrative Professionals may be included on the Committee but do not count toward the two student chosen minimum members required. They are, in essence, 'extras.'

4.1.3.1. Members from Outside of MSU or the MSU Tenure System

A student may request permission for a Fixed-term, Academic Specialist, Instructor, Support Staff, Faculty who recently left MSU, or faculty from another university to serve on their Guidance/Thesis Committee. 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. 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>

4.1.3.2. 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 thesis, participate in the oral part of the exam, and submit a report to the dean of the college.

4.2. Credit Sharing Policy

Master's students who are completing more than one graduate level program (Graduate Certificate, Graduate Specialization, Master's degree, or Ph.D. can share a limited number of courses to meet the requirements of a second program. Shared courses can only be used two times (e.g. once for the master's and once for a Ph.D., Graduate Certificate OR Graduate Specialization).

4.2.1. 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 plan to continue into a Ph.D. program after completing their master's degree. <https://reg.msu.edu/AcademicPrograms/Text.aspx?Section=111#s14265>. The courses selected for sharing cannot have already been used twice (e.g. counted toward their master's degree and a graduate certificate, specialization or second/dual master's degree program).

4.2.2. GEO886 Use for Both MSU Geography MS-Plan A and PhD Degrees

Students who earn their M.S. degree from MSU and continue, with no break between, on to the Ph.D. program following degree conferral, may use their MS GEO886 requirement to meet their PhD requirements 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 reuse.
- That the approved reuse of GEO886 is noted in the Notes box in the student's GradPlan Course Plan.
- The student include the 3 credit GEO866 course in their 9-credit shared/applied credit total.
- And GEO866 was not used twice previously for any other graduate level program (graduate certificate, graduate specialization, second master's degree).

4.3. Research Presentation

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

4.4. Thesis Defense and Final Oral Examination

4.4.1. Completing a Thesis

Only Master's Plan A students must complete a thesis. 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 thesis must be submitted according to regulations prescribed for Thesis formatting. The Graduate School offers workshops and an online formatting guide: <https://grad.msu.edu/etd>. An abstract not exceeding 600 words must be included.

4.4.2. Pass an Oral Examination in Defense of the Thesis

At least three weeks before the final oral examination, the student is required to submit the thesis 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 thesis must be in completed form, typed with complete illustrative material and acceptable to the major professor.

- The defense will consist of two steps; a 30-60 minute uninterrupted presentation by the student summarizing the thesis 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 thesis will be determined by a majority vote of the thesis committee.
- 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 thesis, participate in the oral part of the exam, and submit a report to the dean of the college.

4.5. Thesis Submission to ProQuest

- The Graduate School will certify the acceptance of thesis final format using the [thesis/dissertation formatting](#) guide.
- MSU only accepts electronic theses submitted via ProQuest. The instructions for electronic submissions are available from <https://grad.msu.edu/etd/>.
- When submitting an electronic thesis 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 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.

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

4.6. Dissemination of the Thesis

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 grant agency's refusal to consider any future grant applications by that individual.

An electronic finalized copy of the thesis must be submitted to your Advisor and Guidance Committee.

4.7. Exit Surveys

- Graduating Students are required to complete two Graduate School surveys before their thesis is 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 thesis submission page: <https://grad.msu.edu/etd> complete the two linked surveys.

Post-graduation Placement Information (All MS Students)

Email the following information to 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.)
- The type of job (select from the descriptions in the chart below)
- Position location, include full address or at the least, the city and state/province/territory.
- Start Date

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

4.8. Requests for hold/embargo on publication of documents submitted to ProQuest

Sometimes students may wish to put a hold/embargo on the online publishing of their thesis 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 thesis is submitted and approved by the Graduate School. See the Requests for hold/embargo section below for more information.

Students submitting a thesis to ProQuest now can request a hold/embargo of publication by ProQuest by contacting the Graduate School at 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.

4.9. 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>

5. Course-based Requirements (Plan B only)

5.1. Advising

Plan B students will be assigned an initial advisor at the time of admission. If during their first year (two semesters) they would like to change advisors to someone better aligned to their career goals and interests, they can by emailing the GPC at geograd@msu.edu. Assistance in the selection process is available by scheduling an appointment with the Graduate Program Director (GPD).

Plan B students do not need to enter a guidance committee or chairperson into GradPlan as long as the student is coded in SIS as Plan B. If they are not, email geograd@msu.edu to get the correct coding on the student's record.

5.2. Final Exam or Evaluation

For Plan B students, the final written product will be determined with your advisor at the start of the second year in the program.

The product can be a final written examination or another type of written product that demonstrates domain knowledge in the student's area of study. The final product(s) should be documented and be approved by the Graduate Program Director by the start of the second year.

6. Student Involvement and Leadership

All Geography students are encouraged to get involved in student groups inside and outside of the department. Some of the groups are listed below, but many more student organizations exist across campus: <https://msu.campuslabs.com/engage/> (Involve@State).

6.1. Department of Geography, Environment, and Spatial Sciences Graduate

6.1.1. Organizations

6.1.1.1. TripleG (or GGG - Geography Graduate Group)

Copied from 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, D2L (Desire to Learn) 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.

6.1.1.2. SWIG (Supporting Women in Geography) - geo.swig@msu.edu

Support Women in Geography (SWIG), a student organization that promotes the participation of women in geospatial sciences. We provide regular opportunities for women and supporters of women to come together for academic, professional, and personal support. For more information, see the Geography website.

6.2. External Organizations

Below is a small sample of some of the 100s of organizations across MSU that graduate students can become involved in. Visit [Involve@State](#) for additional organizations). You can also start your own Registered Student Organization at MSU.

- COGS (Council of Graduate Students) - office@cogs.msu.edu (Note that TripleG has a representative who serves on COGS)
- African Graduate Students Association - rso.agsa@msu.edu
- Association of Latino Professionals for America - msu.alpfa@gmail.com
- Black Graduate Student Association - msubgsa@gmail.com
- Department of Community Sustainability Graduate Student Organization - rso.CSUSGSO@msu.edu
- Ducks Unlimited Chapter - ducksunlimited.msu@gmail.com
- Ecology, Evolution, and Behavior Graduate Group - eeb@msu.edu
- Family Medicine Interest Group – Flint - fmigflint@gmail.com
- GO>CONNECT - goconnectmsu@gmail.com
- Graduate Recruitment Initiative Team (GRIT) - rso.msugrit@msu.edu
- Graduate Women in Science Mid-Michigan Chapter - midmichigan@gwis.org
- Indigenous Graduate Student Collective - msu.igsc@gmail.com
- Student Parents on a Mission - steedkim@msu.edu

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:

- 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.
- Expected to meet stated progress toward the degree milestones on time, based on their chosen track (Plan A or Plan B).
- Strive for superior performance in academic coursework.
- 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: <https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/rso-s/RSO%20Resource%20Hub/regulations/graduate-student-rights-responsibilities/index.html>.
- Select an Advisor and form a Guidance Committee (Plan A only) 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.
- 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](#).

GEO graduate students are required to meet and maintain certain academic standards while enrolled in their Geography graduate program. Per University policy, courses with grades below a 2.0 cannot be used to fulfill graduate program course requirements; see the [University Policy on Minimum Grades](#).

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 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 and are grounds for dismissal.

7.3.2. Cumulative GPA Requirement

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 Expected Progression chart (see 1.2, page 4). 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.

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 thesis", more specific and better milestones would be to list thesis chapters to be completed with associated completion dates.

If progress is inadequate, the department can withhold financial support, assistantship offers, office space, copying privileges, and other similar department resources. A series of unsatisfactory progress letters can lead to dismissal from a program.

7.4.1.1. Annual Review Process and Timeline

Every February the Graduate Program Coordinator will send an email with the current academic year's Annual Review Report template document with instructions (aka Graduate Student Annual Academic Progress Report). The .pdf document must be downloaded, so that it contains textboxes for entering information. No handwritten documents will be accepted.

The student will complete the document and update their CV/Resume.

The form includes items to be included on the student's website bio. If nothing has changed, type "no changes" in the section, so the department knows that the student reviewed their bio.

Student will email the form and updated CV to their advisor/Guidance Committee Chairperson, without signing the form.

By the beginning of March, the student must schedule a meeting with their advisor to discuss the items listed. The items included must only be for the current academic year (Fall-Spring).

At the end of the meeting, the student and advisor must sign the form electronically and the advisor must email it back to the student.

All changes must be made before adding signatures.

By March 15 the student must upload the signed document and advisor reviewed CV to their GradPlan Annual Review Tab in SIS (student.msu.edu). Documents must remain as two distinct documents (Report and CV) when uploaded.

- *Tip for uploading: Upload one document at a time and after receiving notification that the upload was successful, click the "Save" button at the bottom of the page. Go back up and load the second document and repeat the save process.*
- *Make sure two documents are saved. If the student can see them, the Graduate Program Coordinator can too.*
- *Students who graduate at the end of fall semester are not required to complete the Annual Review process for their final semester.*
- *Students who will graduate in spring or summer must complete the Annual Review process.*

Between March 15 and 30, the Graduate Program Coordinator will review the documents, make them available to the Graduate Program Director, and prepare a summary spreadsheet with every student's progress.

March 31-April 15, the Graduate Program Director will review student progress and consult the student's advisor and/or committee members, graduate assistantship supervisor(s), and faculty who taught the courses the student took, when applicable, to gather feedback.

Annual review/evaluation letters will be generated once all feedback is received and letters are edited. Letters will be sent to students no later than June 1.

The graduate student has the right to submit a written response to the Annual Review letter. It must be submitted to the Graduate Program Director and the Graduate Program Coordinator (geograd@msu.edu) to be included in their materials to be uploaded into SIS-GradPlan Annual Review.

By July 1, the Graduate Program Coordinator will upload each student's Annual Evaluation Letter to the student's SIS GradPlan Annual Review tab.

Any student not making adequate academic progress will receive a follow-up warning letter. A student who receives a warning letter is required to meet with their advisor and develop a corrective action plan to submit as a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) document to the Graduate Program Director. The MOU must include anticipated dates the student will complete the deficiency(ies) and any future milestones.

The Graduate Program Director will review the MOU and provide feedback if needed. In the middle or end of the next academic semester, the GPD will review the MOU and reach out to the student and/or advisor for a progress update.

If no progress was made, a second warning letter will be issued to the student and a new MOU will be required.

Personal issues impacting progress should not be included on the MOU document but instead should be discussed in-person with the student's advisor and/or GPD, when comfortable sharing and within the allowable university and [FERPA](#) privacy requirements.

Students who receive two warning letters and who do not return to good standing within the MOU specified period after will be terminated from the program (see the section on Warnings and Dismissals for more information).

Access to student records will follow University policies:

<https://reg.msu.edu/AcademicPrograms/Text.aspx?Section=112#s542>.

Deferred and incomplete course grades must be resolved with the university allowed timeline for completion. A completion schedule must be included on the MOU document.

7.4.2. Timeline Extensions

Extensions (Masters Plan A) Only

The graduate school policy affords up to 6 years to complete a master's degree. Students experiencing extraordinary difficulty in completing degrees within this time frame can request an extension.

Extensions must be approved by the department before requesting approval at the graduate school. Department approval will be rendered for students who have experienced extraordinary events or circumstances that prevent them from completing their degree (e.g., health issues, caregiver responsibilities). Any student requesting an extension must meet the following requirements to have the extension approved at the department level:

1. Have completed courses that are no more than 7 years old,
2. Be near completion of the thesis,
3. Have an advisor and committee members who will continue to advise them,
4. A committee review of courses indicate they are still applicable for proposed area of study,
- 5 . Submit a committee and GPD-approved plan for completing work.

Students not meeting the above conditions will not receive department approval for extensions to degree work.

Extensions (Masters Plan B) Only

The graduate school policy affords up to 6 years to complete a master's degree. Students experiencing extraordinary difficulty in completing degrees within this time frame can request an extension.

Extensions must be approved by the department before requesting approval at the graduate school. Department approval will be rendered for students who have experienced extraordinary events or circumstances that prevent them from completing their degree (e.g., health issues, caregiver responsibilities). Any

student requesting an extension must have completed courses no more than 7 years old.

Students not meeting the above conditions will not receive department approval for extensions to degree work.

7.5. Degree Interruption & Readmission

Students not enrolled in courses for 3 or more consecutive terms (fall, spring and summer semesters) must apply for readmission. To apply for readmission, students must have the following:

1. An advisor and committee who are willing to continue to serve on the guidance committee,
2. An approved plan by the guidance committee and GPD for completing degree requirements in a timely fashion. This plan must be submitted with the application for readmission.

In making department level decisions about readmission, the following elements will be considered: the currency of coursework, prior evidence of progress to degree, disciplinary and probationary history. The department may request documentation about the above items to arrive at a determination as to whether the department approves a readmission request. Department approval does not guarantee approval by the college or the graduate school. www.reg.msu.edu.

7.6. Warnings and Dismissals

In rare instances, the department is faced with the potential dismissal of a student. In matters where dismissal of a student becomes a potential issue due to failure to perform required tasks or maintain the appropriate academic standing, the student will initially be informed by a letter from the Graduate Program Director of Departmental concerns. If the required changes are not made within six months of receipt of the letter, the Graduate Program Director will review the student's performance and a second letter will follow. If problems remain after this second letter for another six-month span, then the Graduate Program Director will deliver a third and final letter that outlines the Department's next course of action, which may include dismissal.

The department has the option to dismiss students from a program. Dismissal from a program is based on one of the following:

- Grades below the minimum academic standards (see above);
- Academic misconduct;
- Lack of progress toward degree;

- Student conduct that violates University policy or professional expectations/ethics.

The College of Social Science Dismissal Policy can be found in the appendix Graduate Student Rights and Responsibilities are outlined by the Graduate School as part of broader GSRR resources: <https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/rso-s/RSO%20Resource%20Hub/regulations/graduate-student-rights-responsibilities/index.html>

Academic misconduct is defined by the University Ombudsperson at <https://ombud.msu.edu/resources-self-help/academic-integrity>. The consequences of academic misconduct can include dismissal from the program. For more information, see [MSU's Integrity of Scholarship & Grades policy](#).

7.7. Voluntary Withdrawal

If a student decides to withdraw from the graduate program, he or she is required to inform the Graduate Program Director and Coordinator in writing, in a timely manner, outlining the reasons for withdrawal and the timing of departure from the unit. If they would like to discuss the reasons in person, they must schedule a meeting with the Graduate Program Director.

The student's program code will be ended with an incomplete degree.

The student must return all university equipment and keys and clean out any office space(s) assigned.

The student must schedule a meeting with the Graduate Program Coordinator to do a final check of space and to collect keys.

If the student decides to return to their studies at a later date, they must reapply to the program through the regular admission process. The readmission process is not available.

7.8. 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.

- Leave of Absence: see the Work-Related Policies section.

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 master's 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.

7.10. Traveling on MSU Business

7.10.1. 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 APC for the form at 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.
- Students traveling abroad must obtain permission to travel on University business. Student are 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.

7.10.2. 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.

7.11. 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.

7.12. 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.

7.13. 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.). You are advised to check your MSU email several times a day, so you don't get overwhelmed by the volume and miss time sensitive messages.

8. Graduate School and University Academic Policies

Below is hyperlinked text to each of the policies websites

[Policies and Procedures](#)

[Academic Integrity/Standards](#)

[Integrity of Scholarship & Grades](#)

[Student Rights and Responsibilities](#)

[Graduate Students 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 and Scholarship (RECR)

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

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.

Per the College of Social Science, Responsible and Ethical Conduct of Research (RECR) training must be current at the time a graduate student completes each program milestone (e.g., comprehensive exams, qualifying papers, proposal defenses, or final defenses). “Current” means a) the student has completed and documented (in Campus Solutions) all required RECR training hours for each academic year through the end of the semester immediately prior to the milestone; or b) the student has completed and documented (in Campus Solutions) all required RECR training hours for each prior academic year and has identified the workshops to complete required training for the current academic year.

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

Each year, the department will offer some RECR training to students. In addition, M.S. Plan A students who take GEO886 will receive group discussion-based training during the class that will be entering into the Ability system and viewable in SIS. This training time does meet the University discussion-based training requirements. Student must monitor how much time is recorded to determine if additional RECR discussion-based training is needed to meet graduation requirements. Non-thesis (Plan B) students will need to review the Graduate School website to see when training is available.

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

RECR Basic Education Program Requirements

Master's plan B (including online) and grad professional (including medical students)

CITI Modules Year 1

- Introduction to the Responsible Conduct of Research
- Authorship
- Plagiarism
- Research Misconduct

6 hours discussion-based education
(complete before graduation)

Master's Plan A students

CITI Modules Year 1

- Introduction to the Responsible Conduct of Research
- Authorship
- Plagiarism
- Research Misconduct

6 hours discussion-based education
(complete before graduation)

CITI Modules Year 2

Complete 3 of 6 possible RECR Basic
modules:

- Collaborative Research
- Conflicts of Interest
- Data Management
- Mentoring
- Peer Review
- Financial Responsibility

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 (Thesis-based students only)- During the student's 2nd year of enrollment in their program, 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. MS students must complete them before they graduate. These hours can be completed as part of a course or through participation in Graduate School discussion-based training sessions.

- *Graduate School RECR workshops*. See <https://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.

9.3. 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 thesis-based 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 thesis will be accepted for publication. The letter will either say "exempt" or will contain an IRB number.

9.5. IRB Approval of Human and Animal Subjects or Exemption (Plan A only)

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 (Plan A only)

- [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](#)).

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 of the Graduate School](#)). 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:

<https://ossa.msu.edu/academic-integrity>

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/rso-s/RSO%20Resource%20Hub/regulations/graduate-student-rights-responsibilities/article-five-adjudication-cases-involving-graduate-student-rights-and-responsibilities.html>. The University Ombudsman is another resource for problem solving, <https://ombud.msu.edu/>.
- 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 Procedure

- 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/rso-s/RSO%20Resource%20Hub/regulations/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 Plagiarism

University definitions and policy on plagiarism:

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

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 <http://tech.msu.edu/ithenticate/>.

11. Graduate Student Funding

11.1 Graduate Assistantships

Graduate Assistantship funding is limited to 4 semesters for master's 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 count towards the 4-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 procedure below to apply for an extension of your semester limit.

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.

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.

11.1.1 Evaluations of Assistantship Performance

Students receiving funding from a grant administered by the department or from department funds 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.

11.1.1.1 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 this 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.

11.1.1.2 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.

11.1.2 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.

11.1.3 Assistantship benefit 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>

11.1.4 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.

11.2 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/Thesis Chair. They will submit a funding request to the Academic Program Coordinator on a department form and provide rationale with budget and prioritize their requests. The department has limited funding to support student's requests.

11.2.1 Fellowship Awards

- Fellowships are part of a student's Financial Aid package per Federal law, even for international students. 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 can set up Direct Deposit on their Student Account in SIS, so that any fellowship awards can be deposited in the student's bank. It is highly recommended students set up this additional Direct Deposit (besides through EBS for employment). Typically, the student will receive the funds more quickly.

11.3 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 and Mandatory Training

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 to advance 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 during Fall/Spring semester and 3 credits in Summer semester. Master's students without an assistantship must enroll in 9 credits in fall and spring to

be considered full-time. International students should verify their visa requirements using the [OISS website](#).

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:

<https://www.ctrl.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:

<https://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>
- **Michigan Indian Tuition Waiver Program**
For eligible individuals, MSU also participates in the Michigan Indian Tuition Waiver Program: <https://finaid.msu.edu/mitw.asp>.

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

12.8 Jury Duty

For students on a Teaching Assistantship, please refer to the [GEU contract](#).

12.9 Outside Work for Pay

Students who plan to seek outside work in addition to a graduate assistantship are strongly encouraged to consult with the Graduate Program Director for guidance. While outside work is not prohibited, seeking advice can be helpful. International students are also strongly encouraged to consult OISS to discuss student visa implications.

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. Desire2Learn (D2L)

Desire2Learn (<https://d2l.msu.edu/d2l/loginh/>) 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>. As a teaching assistant or grader, you are expected to know how to use the system.

13.3. English Language Proficiency for Teaching Assistants (ITA)

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.

13.4. Courses for International Teaching Assistants (AAE 451, 452, 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: ITAProgram@elc.msu.edu

13.5. 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 workplace, 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.

13.6. 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.

14. University Resources

14.1. Resources provided by the Graduate School

- [Graduate Career Development](#)
- [Community 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](#)
- [RCPD](#)
- [Office of Spartan Experiences](#)
- [Libraries](#)

- [Olin Health Center](#)
- [Inclusive Excellence and Impact](#)
- [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 and Scooters

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 or scooter on-line at <https://parking.msu.edu/visitors/bike-registration>

14.6. Graduate School

The Graduate School at MSU, 466 W. Circle Drive, 2nd 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 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.

If you are a student or employee at MSU, and you have a disability that substantially limits a major life activity, you can register with the RCPD and you may be eligible to receive academic and/or employment accommodations. This information is kept strictly confidential and self-identification is voluntary. However, if you have a disability, not registering with the RCPD may delay or compromise the availability of accommodations. As many reasonable accommodations require significant pre-planning, *registration with the RCPD prior to situations requiring accommodations is essential*. Reference [http://www.rcpd.msu.edu/Disability and Reasonable Accommodation Policy](http://www.rcpd.msu.edu/Disability%20and%20Reasonable%20Accommodation%20Policy)

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 Reference <https://foodbank.msu.edu>.

14.12. Center for Statistical Training and Consulting (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://tech.msu.edu/support/help/>.

Support can be reached at 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. Appendix

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 degree requirements for the degree no later than Year 6 from the date of the first course counted in the plan of work

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.