

# GRADUATE HANDBOOK



Department of Geography, Environment, and Spatial Sciences

673 Auditorium Road  
116 Geography Building  
Michigan State University  
East Lansing, MI 48824-1117 USA

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## Contact information

**Ms. Joni Burns**

Academic Program Coordinator [geograd@msu.edu](mailto:geograd@msu.edu)

Phone 517.355.4650

**Dr. Nathan Moore**

Graduate Program Director [moorena@msu.edu](mailto:moorena@msu.edu)

Phone 517.884.0546

Fax 517.432.1671

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Email [geo@msu.edu](mailto:geo@msu.edu)  
Website <http://www.geo.msu.edu/>

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## 1. PROGRAM OVERVIEW

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Welcome to the Graduate Program in Geography 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 program's Graduate Handbook is a key source of this information. This document is an important source of information that will answer many of your questions about our graduate programs. This handbook is intended to serve as a guide to the basic policies and procedures of the graduate programs for Geography graduate students, faculty, and staff so they will have a working knowledge of their opportunities, obligations, and responsibilities.

The graduate program in the Department of Geography, Environment, and Spatial Sciences at MSU offers M.S. and Ph.D. degrees in Geography. The M.S. degree in Geography is a 'Plan A' or thesis degree and involves independent research. Students interested in continuing their studies toward the doctorate should pursue this degree. The Ph.D. degree is a research-intensive doctorate aimed primarily at students seeking careers in academia.

Within the field of Geography, graduate students are able to devise a program of study that fits their particular areas of interest; we encourage students to take coursework outside of GEO. However, our academic strengths, and hence, most of our students are in the following academic areas:

- physical geography, especially climatology, geomorphology, biogeography and soils;
- economic/urban geography and regional science;
- geospatial technologies (GIS, remote sensing and cartography); and
- 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 Global Urban Studies Program (GUSP), the Michigan Agricultural Experiment Station (MAES), and Environmental Science and Policy Program (ESPP).

### 1.1. Goals and objectives of the graduate program

The graduate programs in Geography at Michigan State University are designed to develop the student's ability to conduct original research and to provide a thorough, in-depth learning experience. As such, the programs foster:

- understanding of scientific inquiry;
- knowledge of the discipline of Geography, its history, issues, methods and trends;

- depth of knowledge in an area of specialization, including an understanding of important research questions;
- proficiency in appropriate analytical and technical skills;
- Skills in communicating the results of research and experience.

Our programs are 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.

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

Links to Select University Policies:

[Academic Programs Catalog](#)

[Anti-Discrimination Policy \(ADP\)](#)

[Code of Teaching Responsibility](#)

[Disability and Reasonable Accommodation Policy](#)

[General Student Regulations](#)

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

[Guidelines for Integrity in Research and Creative Activities](#)

[Integrity of Scholarship & Grades](#)

[Law Student Rights and Responsibilities \(LSRR\)](#)

[Medical Student Rights and Responsibilities \(MSRR\)](#)

[MSU Guidelines for Graduate Student Mentoring and Advising](#)

[MSU-GEU Contract](#)

[Policy on Relationship Violence and Sexual Misconduct](#)

## 2. PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

### 2.1. General Requirements for All Degree Programs

For all degree programs it is strongly suggested that students map out their coursework and requirements early as many crucial courses are taught only one semester per year; others may have prerequisites.

The department will create a file for each student containing financial information, grades, program of study, activity in [GradPlan](#), and performance reviews when applicable. An overview of the programs of study for the master's program is provided in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Milestones for M.S. and PhD students progress. (Figure by Raechel A. Portelli)

### Suggested Progression for M.S. or Ph.D.

	YR1		YR2		YR3		YR4	
M.S.	A	C D	E	F G				
Ph.D.	A	B C D	E			H I		J
	FA	SP	FA	SP	FA	SP	FA	SP

- A.** Meet the Faculty Series
- B.** GEO 986 Theories and Philosophies in Geography Course
- C.** GEO 886 Research Design in Geography Course
- D.** Must have completed RCR Requirements Yr. 1
- E.** Complete GradPlan and obtain approval from your Committee
- F.** Must have completed RCR Requirements Yr. 2
- G.** M.S. Thesis Defense. (You must report date and time to the Academic Program Coordinator 2 weeks before the date)
- H.** PhD Comprehensive Exam: Written and Oral components
- I.** PhD proposal Defense (You must report intention to the Academic Program Coordinator 2 weeks before the date)
- J.** PhD Defense. (You must report date and time to the Academic Program Coordinator 3 weeks before the date)

### 2.1.1. GEOcamp

*GEOcamp* is a required residential field camp for all incoming graduate students held for about 3 days in an off-campus location in Michigan prior to the start of the fall semester. It serves as part of the departmental orientation, a way for graduates to get to know each other, and to help new students begin to think as geographers.

### 2.1.2. Meet the Faculty Course

*Meet the Faculty* is a no-credit course that is required for all new graduate students and is part of the procedure to help incoming students select a faculty advisor.. The class meets once per week (typically on Fridays) for 50 minutes for most of the fall semester and is designed to orient the students to our entire faculty. We have a very large faculty and it is important for new students to be aware of the members of the faculty and what they teach and conduct research on. Students will be asked to attend the weekly meetings, read the assigned publications by faculty, and to participate in the discussions. Evaluation is based on attendance and participation.

### 2.1.3. Selecting the Advisor and Guidance Committees

Initiation and successful completion of independent research, technical competency, and/or creative activity requires early and continued advice and 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.

Students should select their Advisor ideally by the end of first semester, but definitely by the end of their second semester. This selection should be based on research fit, discussions with several potential advisors, and consultation with the Graduate Program Director.

The specific responsibilities of the thesis/dissertation Advisor include:

- advising students on preparing for and selection of a thesis or dissertation topic with realistic prospects for success within an appropriate time frame;
  - providing training and oversight regarding the conduct of research, theoretical and technical aspects of the student's research, and professional integrity;
  - providing regular feedback on student progress, including providing constructive criticism if the student's progress does not meet expectations; and
  - helping students develop into successful professionals and colleagues.
- Students should seek out not only their major Advisor for advice, guidance and mentoring, but should regularly consult with their guidance committee and others

from the faculty for help, as needed. Geography faculty are willing to provide as much mentoring as graduate students need; students are viewed as young professionals and junior colleagues. Working together with faculty in a mentoring situation can be highly beneficial and is encouraged.

- [GSRR 2.4.2.1](#) states, “For graduate students in doctoral programs, the guidance committee shall be formed within the first two semesters of doctoral study, or within two semesters beyond the master’s degree or its equivalent.” However, [GSRR 2.4.2.2](#) also states that the composition of the graduate committee may change with concurrence of the student and unit, and the committee may establish a distinct dissertation committee to guide dissertation research specifically. While guidance committees are essential from early in the student’s career, their composition may change with the student’s developing needs.

Selection of the permanent faculty advisor will be submitted for approval to the Graduate Program Director.

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

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 of the committee will read and critique the thesis/dissertation, will participate in the oral part of the exam, and will submit a report to the dean of the college. **Policy Note:** See Academic Programs policy on [doctoral examinations](#).

#### **2.1.4. Breadth Requirements**

Incoming graduate students who do not have a prior degree in geography may be required to take one or more courses to make up ‘breadth requirements’ in geography. These may be at the 100, 200 or 300 level, and therefore do not count towards degree credit totals. The student may, with the permission of the instructor, take a course at the 400 level (as Geo 490). However, the student may do this with only *one* course (3 or 4) credits. Whether or which deficiencies are ‘bumped up’ is at the discretion of the student, their Advisor, and the instructor of the course. It is recommended to be a course in the student’s area of focus. This is not a requirement; merely a way to do upper level work in a course which is a breadth requirement and thus making it count towards their degree credit totals. What extra work is required of the student is up to the instructor teaching the course.



## Course Waivers for Breadth Requirements

Student 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.

### 2.1.5. Tool Courses Requirement

A *partial list* of acceptable tool course appears below. See specific programs for more detailed requirements.

#### Calendar of Progress

Program	Advisor Selected	Form Guidance Committee	Program of Study/ GradPlan filed	Comprehensive Exams completed	Dissertation Proposal defended
MS	2 <sup>nd</sup> semester	2 <sup>nd</sup> semester	End of 2 <sup>nd</sup> sem.	NA	NA
Ph.D.	2 <sup>nd</sup> semester	2 <sup>nd</sup> semester	3 <sup>rd</sup> semester	6 <sup>th</sup> semester	6 <sup>th</sup> semester

Generally, the non-language tool course must *advance the level of competency*, via coursework, while in the MSU program. Research techniques used to satisfy the tool requirement must be in the fields of cartography, GIS, remote sensing, computer science, statistics, mathematics, or social or physical science research methods. Coursework in combinations of these areas is permitted.

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

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

### 2.1.6. Responsible Conduct of Research and Scholarship (RCR)

Training in the Responsible 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 Regulatory Affairs: <https://ora.msu.edu/train/rcr/index.html>

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. Suggested training programs from the Graduate School webpage are shown below.

**Master's Plan A students**

**Doctoral students**

<p>CITI Modules Year 1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction to the Responsible Conduct of Research</li> <li>• Authorship</li> <li>• Plagiarism</li> <li>• Research Misconduct</li> </ul>	<p>CITI Modules Year 1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction to the Responsible Conduct of Research</li> <li>• Authorship</li> <li>• Plagiarism</li> <li>• Research Misconduct</li> </ul>
<p>6 hours discussion-based training (by completion of the degree)</p>	<p>6 hours discussion-based training (by completion of the degree)</p>
<p>CITI Modules Year 2 Complete 3 additional from specific list</p>	<p>CITI Modules Year 2 Complete 3 additional from specific list</p>
	<p>Year 3 forward 3 hours of annual refresher training</p>

Figure 2. Responsible Conduct of Research Requirements ([grad.msu.edu/rcr](http://grad.msu.edu/rcr))

## Documenting Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) training:

Students should be logging into the ABILITY information management system at <http://ora.msu.edu/train/> to complete their on-line RCR training. This is the system that must be used for proper documentation of training. This system has replaced SABA effective December 2018.

### **Initial Training**

**Year 1** All new graduate students and postdocs will complete 4 CITI online modules within the first year of enrollment in their program. These courses are listed as CITI Modules Year 1 above.

**Year 2** Within the first 2 years of enrollment in their program, masters and doctoral students as well as postdoctoral researchers will complete 3 additional MSU online training modules, to be selected from the following list. Specific requirements for course selection may be defined in the individual department/program or college plan.

- CITI Collaborative Research
- CITI Conflicts of Interest
- CITI Data Management
- CITI Financial Responsibility
- CITI Mentoring
- CITI Peer Review
- IACUC Tutorial for Animal Care Training (in [http //Train.ORA.msu.edu](http://Train.ORA.msu.edu))
- Human Research Protection/ IRB Certification (in <http //Train.ORA.msu.edu>)
- Rigor and Reproducibility Course (in production)

### **Discussion-Based Training**

All graduate students must complete a minimum of 6 hours of discussion-based training prior to receiving their degrees. These hours can be completed at any point in the graduate program, including during the first 2 years (e.g., as part of a course), or as part of the ongoing training requirement (for doctoral students). For masters and PhD students, completion of this requirement will be recorded by the department in [GradInfo](#) as “Initial” training.

- *Graduate School RCR workshops.* See <http //grad.msu.edu/rcr/> 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 and postdoctoral members complete the entire Graduate School RCR workshop series.

- *Department of Geography Professional Development series (RCR)*. In the spring semester 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 RCR 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 an RCR subject, a participant's report to a faculty member about an RCR subject based on material from the MSU RCR website, IRB training modules, or an extended discussion on an RCR subject with an academic advisor.
- Training activities may include workshops provided by the Graduate School, the Human Research Protection Program, the Department of Geography, and others. Approval for other events may be obtained from the Graduate Program Director and the student's advisor.

## Refresher Training

After their first year in the Department, graduate students and postdoctoral researchers need to refresh and extend their training in RCR.

## Ongoing Training

For PhD students only, starting in year three, doctoral students must complete 3 hours of annual refresher training. This training can include discussion-based training and online courses beyond the 7 required in basic training, or it may include other RCR related activities, as described previously.

### 2.1.7. Specializations, Cognates, and Certificates

- Student have options to include degree 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
  - Global Urban Studies Program (GUSP)
- A complete list of programs at the university is available at
  - Certificates  
<https://reg.msu.edu/academicPrograms/Programs.aspx?PType=GC>
  - Specializations  
<https://reg.msu.edu/academicPrograms/Programs.aspx?PType=SPCG>

### 2.1.8. Credit Sharing Policy

The University Committee for Grad Studies revised the credit sharing policy for Master's programs if your program includes more than 30 credits, then you may share up to 30% of the total with another Master's program. Credits cannot be shared between Master's and PhD programs.

## 2.2. Requirements for the Masters of Science (M.S.)

- The minimum number of credits required beyond the Bachelor's for a Master of Science (M.S.) degree in Geography is 30, with at least 20 credits in Geography. At least 16 credits must be taken at the 800 and 900 levels, leaving at least 14 elective credits which can be selected from a wide variety of offerings given at the 400 level in Geography and cognate disciplines.
- Master's students may count no more than four credits of coursework in 'Independent Study' or 'Research Problems' toward their degree, unless these credits were from classes taught as a regular course. Independent study courses 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.

**NOTE:** courses below the 400 level may not be counted toward the 30-credit requirement for the M.S. degree but may be used to fulfill tool course requirements (e.g. second year language competency).

### 2.2.1. Specific Requirements for the M.S. degree

#### Course Work

- Breadth requirement If a student does not have a prior degree in Geography, they must complete a course in
  - physical geography
  - human geography
  - quantitative methods
  - geospatial technology (e.g., introductory cartography, GIS, or remote sensing)
- GEO 886 – Research Design in Geography (3 credits)
- One Geography seminar (3 credits)
- Two advanced level tool/methods courses (6 to 8 credits)
- One tool must be in the ‘spatial technology’ area from courses listed below
  - GEO 424     Advanced Remote Sensing (4)
  - GEO 425     Geographic Information Science (3)
  - GEO 426     Thematic Cartography (4)
  - GEO 428     Digital Terrain Analysis (4)
  - GEO 802     Geospatial Technologies (3)
  - GEO 824     Monitoring the Biosphere from Space (4)
  - GEO 825     Geoprocessing (4)
  - GEO 826     Geocomputation (3)
  - GEO 827     Digital Image Processing and Analysis (4)
- The second tool course can be taken from those listed above, from courses listed below, or the table on p. 15
  - GEO 865     Advanced Quantitative Methods in Geography (4)
  - GEO 866     Spatial Data Analysis (4)
  - GEO 868     Spatial Regression and Modeling (3)
  - GEO 869     Human-Environment Modeling (3)
  - An approved qualitative methods course
  - An approved second-year or equivalency language course An approved programming course

## GradPlan

All M.S. students are required to complete GradPlan by the end of your second semester. GradPlan can be accessed via the Student Information System (SIS) at <https://student.msu.edu/> and a self-paced training module is available at <https://sis.msu.edu/training/index.html> to help get set up. Your GradPlan will house all necessary documents for completion of your degree.

## Research Presentation

- Present a research paper or poster at a professional meeting.
- This presentation can be oral or poster format and must be approved by the Advisor. This requirement must be met prior to the awarding of the degree.

## Electives (10-14 credits)

- Elective courses may be taken in or outside the department.

## GEO 899 Thesis credits (4-6 credits)

- All M.S. in Geography students must complete a thesis. The student's Advisor and Guidance Committee will supervise the research and writing of the thesis. Thesis credits are included in the 16 credits required at the 800- 900 level. An abstract of the thesis not exceeding 150 words must also be prepared as specified in the *Graduate School Guide to the Preparation of Master's Theses and Doctoral Dissertations*.
- Students should contact the MSU Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) *before* beginning any research that involves human subjects. If you are dealing with human subjects in any way you must gain approval from this program before starting your research. HRPP clearance takes at minimum one month and should be started well in advance of data collection <https://hrpp.msu.edu/>. Students working with hazardous substances should refer to University policies regarding safety Environmental Health & Safety <http://www.orcbs.msu.edu>

**NOTE:** Once you complete your degree, a maximum of 6 credits will be changed from DF (deferred) to P (pass). Additional thesis credits, taken beyond the 6 that count towards your degree, will remain as DF and will show up on your transcript as DF.

## Pass the final examination

- After completion of departmental requirements above, the candidate will be given a final oral examination. The student must be registered for at least one

credit during the semester in which the examination is taken. The examining committee shall consist, at a minimum, of the student's Advisor and Guidance Committee. 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 candidate will provide each member of the examining committee with a curriculum vita and a cleanly typed and illustrated copy of the finished thesis at least two weeks prior to the exam.

- The Academic Program Coordinator must be notified at least two weeks prior to the final examination so that required paperwork can be completed.
- The defense will consist of two steps: (1) a 30-60 minute uninterrupted presentation by the student summarizing the thesis research; and (2) 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. Graduate students and other non-committee members (e.g., family and friends) are not permitted during the second questioning; it is closed. Successful completion of the defense and approval of the thesis will be determined by a majority vote of the thesis committee. Passing the student only on portions of the examination is not permitted. A student who fails the examination may repeat it no sooner than three months from the time of failure and not more than once.

### **2.2.2. M.S. in Geography Guidance Committee**

The MS's Guidance Committee consists of at least three persons: the Advisor, who chairs the committee, 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 and Academic Program Coordinator. Any regular faculty (with a Ph.D. and in the tenure stream) appointed in the Geography Department can serve as a major Advisor for MS in Geography students. At least half of the student's committee members must have Geography as their tenure home. Persons who are Specialists and Administrative Professionals may be included on the Committee but do not count toward the minimum of two members required. They are, in essence, 'extras.' The Guidance Committee must be formed no later than the end of the second semester following entry into the program.

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



- In order to be admitted directly to the Ph.D. program students must have completed a master's thesis.
- Complete at least 56 credits in the courses and areas listed below. Courses below the 400 level may not be counted toward the 56 credit requirement for the Ph.D. degree, but may be used to fulfill tool course requirements (see below). Ph.D. students may count no more than six credits of coursework in independent study or research problems toward their degree. Geography courses covered under this requirement include, but are not limited to, GEO 490, 492, 495, 890, and 892. The exception is when these course numbers are used for new courses.
- Ph.D. students who do not have a prior degree in geography (either at the bachelor's or master's level) must have completed 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 been taken previously, they must be taken while in the degree program at MSU.

### 2.3.1. Specific Requirements for the Ph.D. degree

#### Coursework

- GEO 886 Research Design in Geography (3 credits)
- GEO 986 Theory and Methods in Geography (3 credits)
- Two Geography seminars (6 credits)
- One advanced level tool course (800 or 900 level) (3-4 credits)
- Electives (17 credit minimum) as approved by the student's Guidance Committee
- GEO 999 Dissertation credits
  - All doctoral students must register for and successfully complete a minimum of 24 credits and no more than 36. 24 credits are required for graduation; students can enroll for a maximum of 36.

#### GradPlan

- Student must complete this by the end of your third semester. **GradPlan** was developed for Ph.D. students to lay out their Ph.D. program of study, record faculty approval, and make notes on all the degree requirements as they are completed. [GradPlan](#) is part of the Student Information System (SIS) and incorporates all relevant documentation including the Report of the Guidance Committee, Record of Comprehensive Exam, and the Dissertation Final Defense form and the final certification form. The Graduate School will certify the acceptance of each dissertation final format using the [thesis/dissertation formatting](#) guide. The Academic Program Coordinator or other department or

college level designee submits the Department/College sign off. The Office of the Registrar and the Social Science Dean's office will access Degree Audit to complete degree certification once a student completes an application for graduation and all degree requirements are met. GradPlan, and other helpful guides may be found at <https://student.msu.edu/>

### **Research Presentation**

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

### **Peer-Reviewed Manuscript**

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

### **Comprehensive examination**

- The comprehensive exam tests a student's mastery of geographical subject matter, knowledge of related geographic literature, and an understanding of research theory and methodology. It is recommended that students complete their comprehensive examination by the end of their 6<sup>th</sup> semester in the Ph.D. program. This examination consists of both a written and oral component.

#### *Written portion*

- The questions for the exam will be formulated by the student's Advisor and Guidance Committee. The length of the written examination will be no fewer than 2 days, and no more than 3 days (8 hours maximum per day).
- The written examination must be taken on consecutive days. Questions for each day will be provided only on that day and not before. The Guidance Committee will determine the mechanics of the examination, e.g. open or closed book, use of computer with access to the internet, use of a personal vs. a departmental computer. These mechanics will apply to the entirety of the written examination and must be clearly communicated to the student. It is the responsibility of the student to ensure that legible copies of his/her responses to the exam questions are made available to all members of the Guidance Committee. The Department shall be notified of the examination at least at least one week before it is taken. Please contact the Academic Program Coordinator a minimum of two weeks prior to exam to schedule a room.

#### *Oral portion*

- The oral examination, like the written, examination, will broadly examine the student's general knowledge in geography and their field(s) of specialization, together with related theory, methodology, literature, and research. The oral examination, not to exceed 4 hours, is also an opportunity for the student to defend his or her answers to the questions in the written test, and for faculty to examine the student further should some responses to the written examination need clarification. Under no circumstances should the oral comprehensive examination focus on the student's dissertation proposal; the proposal defense is a separate examination (see below). The oral examination will be taken within two academic calendar months of the written exam (August 15-May 15) but cannot occur until the student has advanced to this portion of the exam (see below).
- Notice of the oral examination will be given to the Department at least one week in advance of the date of the examination. All Geography faculty may attend and participate in the oral examination. Geography graduate students and other non-committee members (e.g., family and friends) may attend with prior permission of the student being examined.

### **Assessment of the Comprehensive Examination**

After the student completes the *written examination*, their Guidance Committee will decide whether the student should

- advance, or not advance, to the oral portion of the examination.
- A decision to advance reflects that the Guidance Committee judges that the student satisfactorily responded to the questions on the examination or that concerns regarding the responses could potentially be addressed during the oral portion of the examination. The student will be considered as having 'advanced to the oral examination' provided that no more than one member of the Guidance Committee votes not to advance.
- The Guidance Committee will officially notify the student and the Academic Program Coordinator of their decision within ten working days from the date when the written examination answers were given to the Guidance Committee. Decisions to advance the student on portions of the examination are not permitted. Prior to evaluating the student's answers to the written examination, the Guidance Committee will agree as to which members will evaluate which answers.
- The Advisor will then inform the student of the Guidance Committee's decision regarding the outcome of their written examination.

- If the answers to the written examination are not considered to be adequate for advancement, the written examination may be repeated but not more than once. Scheduling of the 'retake' of the written examination is left to the Advisor and the Guidance Committee but should not exceed one year from the date of the original written examination.
- After the examination, regardless of outcome, a copy of all questions and the student's responses to them will be placed in the student's departmental file. The questions the student was asked will be kept in a file of comprehensive examination questions. This file will be maintained by the Academic Program Coordinator and may be consulted by Graduate students upon request.
- The Guidance Committee will meet immediately after the *oral examination* to determine whether (1) the comprehensive examination has been passed in full; (2) the oral exam has to be retaken; or (3) the entire exam (oral and written) must be retaken. The student will be considered as having 'passed' the Comprehensive Examination provided that no more than one member of the Guidance Committee votes to fail on either portion of the examination. If the student does not perform satisfactorily on the oral portion of the examination, this portion of the examination may be repeated only once. Scheduling of the 'retake' of the oral examination is left to the Advisor and the Guidance Committee but should not exceed one year from the date of the original oral examination. Under no circumstances should there be a modification of the format of the examination (e.g. a student being asked to write further essays of clarification).

At the completion of the oral examination, Guidance Committee members must sign the Record of Comprehensive Examination Form indicating pass or fail for the written and the oral portions of the examination.

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

**NOTE:** The semester after you have passed your comprehensive exams you only need to register for one credit to be considered a full-time student.

**NOTE:** The entire examination needs to be retaken if a student switches Advisor after the comprehensive exam has been taken.

**NOTE:** The comprehensive examination expires if no further progress is made towards the degree

### **Dissertation Proposal Defense**

The student must prepare a written dissertation proposal in consultation with the Guidance Committee. The content of the proposal will be orally presented and defended before the Guidance Committee and other interested faculty and graduate students by the end of the student's sixth semester. The primary purpose is to facilitate high-quality dissertation research by providing a forum for student-faculty interaction on this critical part of the student's Ph.D. work. The session gives the student access to evaluation of the research by the committee, other faculty, and students. At least two weeks before the presentation, copies of the written proposal must be made available to each member of the committee and to the Academic Program Coordinator for distribution. It is the responsibility of the student to ensure that copies of the proposal are made available by the deadline.

- Two hours will be allowed for the presentation and subsequent questioning. An initial uninterrupted presentation of the proposed research should be 20-30 minutes in length. Anyone, including faculty, students, and staff, is welcome to attend the presentation. The question session that follows will be moderated by the student's Advisor, and all Guidance Committee members will actively participate. However, all persons attending may ask questions and offer comments. Following the session, the student's Guidance Committee will meet to determine whether the proposal must be revised and presented again. A student may present and defend a proposal only twice.
- When approved by the student's committee, the proposal becomes a written understanding that sets forth the committee's expectations and the student's obligations. A dissertation that deviates significantly from the approved proposal may be found unsatisfactory.
- Students should contact the MSU Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) before beginning any research that involves human subjects. If you are dealing with human subjects in any way, you must gain approval from this program before starting your research. HRPP clearance takes at minimum one month and should be started well in advance of data collection <https://hrpp.msu.edu/>. Students working with hazardous substances should refer to University policies regarding safety Environmental Health & Safety <http://www.orcbs.msu.edu>

### **Complete a dissertation.**

All doctoral students must complete a dissertation.

This is a written document of research that makes an original contribution to knowledge. The research is performed under the guidance of the student's Advisor and the Guidance Committee and must be acceptable to them. The student, however, is responsible for the quality and design of the research, including any fieldwork, statistical analysis, and

graphics. The dissertation must be submitted according to regulations prescribed in the Formatting Guide for Master's Theses and Doctoral Dissertations (available from the Graduate School). An abstract not exceeding 600 words must be included.

### **Pass an oral examination in defense of the dissertation.**

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

The Academic Program Coordinator must be notified at least 3 weeks prior to the final oral examination so that required paperwork can be completed. The student should, however, check the Graduate School website <https://grad.msu.edu/etd> for exact deadlines. The dissertation must be in completed form, typed with complete illustrative material and acceptable to the major professor. At this stage, it should be bound only by spiral, or other loose types of binding.

- The defense will consist of two steps a 30-60 minute uninterrupted presentation by the student summarizing the dissertation research, and a subsequent two-stage questioning session. Anyone, including faculty, students and staff, is welcome to attend the presentation and to participate in the initial portion of the question session, which will be moderated by the Advisor. The Advisor and Guidance Committee will ask questions in the second stage of this session. Faculty are welcome to stay for this stage. Graduate students and other non-committee members (e.g., family and friends) **cannot attend** the second questioning stage. Successful completion of the defense and approval of the dissertation will be determined by a majority vote of the dissertation committee.

### **2.3.2. Doctoral Guidance Committees**

The guidance committee shall be formed no later than the second semester of doctoral study.

- The department will create a file for each student upon formation of a committee containing financial information, grades, program of study, activity in [GradPlan](#), and performance reviews when applicable.
- The doctoral program Guidance Committee consists of at least four regular Michigan State University faculty. The professor with whom the student works most closely is the Advisor. The additional members of the Guidance Committee are chosen by the student in consultation with their Advisor. Any Ph.D. regular faculty (under the rules of tenure) appointed in the Geography Department can serve as Advisor for Geography Ph.D. students. At least half of the members of a student's guidance committee must have Geography as their

tenure home. The University has several requirements governing the composition of a student's doctoral guidance committee: [https://hr.msu.edu/policies-procedures/faculty-academic-staff/faculty-handbook/guidance\\_committee.html](https://hr.msu.edu/policies-procedures/faculty-academic-staff/faculty-handbook/guidance_committee.html)

Persons who are Specialists and Administrative Professionals may be included on the Committee but do not count toward the minimum of four (or more) members required. They are, in essence, 'extras.' The composition of the committee must be approved by the Chairperson of the Department and reported to the Graduate Program Director and Academic Program Coordinator. An Advisor and the Guidance Committee should be formed no later than the end of the second semester following entry into the program.

### Residency status

A year of residence will be made up of two consecutive semesters, involving the completion of credits at the level of full- time status of graduate work each semester.

### Dual major doctoral degrees

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

All dual major doctoral degrees must be approved by the units, Associate Deans of Graduate Studies of the participating Colleges, and the Dean of the Graduate School. A request for the dual major degree must be submitted within one semester following its development and within the first two years of the student's enrollment at Michigan State University. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) must be completed and fully signed by each participating unit, the Associate Deans of Graduate Studies in each unit's College, and by the Dean of the Graduate School. The MOU serves as a contract between these participants and the students that outlines the requirements.

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

A list of steps for the dual major doctoral degree is here: <https://reg.msu.edu/AcademicPrograms/Text.aspx?Section=111#s407>

## Thesis and Dissertation Copies

- MSU only accepts electronic theses and dissertations submitted via ProQuest. The instructions for electronic submissions are available from [http //grad.msu.edu/etd/](http://grad.msu.edu/etd/).
- When submitting an electronic thesis or dissertation to ProQuest, a student has the option to open the document to searches using Google, Google Scholar and Google Books. The option to block such searches continues to be available.
- The target date for the FINAL APPROVAL of an electronic Thesis or Dissertation to the Graduate School for graduating the semester of that submission is FIVE working days prior to the first day of classes for the next semester(see future target dates below). 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.

## Electronic Submission's Approval Target Dates

Graduate School Submission Deadlines: <https://grad.msu.edu/etd/etd-deadline-dates>

Fall 2021 - December 20, 2021

Spring 2022 - May 11, 2022

Summer 2022 - August 24, 2022

Fall 2022 - December 19, 2022

Spring 2023 - May 10, 2023

Summer 2023 - August 23, 2023

**NOTE** Graduation the semester of electronic submission is only guaranteed if the document is APPROVED on or before the target date for that semester AND all requirements met.

## Dissemination

- The **Department** requires one unbound hard copy of the full final thesis or dissertation, upon completion of the degree. The hard copy should be given to the Academic Program Coordinator when completing the final paperwork for the degree. The department will not certify completion of the degree until the hard copy has been turned in.
- **Funding agencies** sometimes also require that students submit a copy (hard copy or electronic) of a thesis or dissertation resulting from funded research. Students should check with the agencies or organizations involved. Failure to adhere to the granting



agency's requirements may result in the granting agency's refusal to consider any future grant applications by that individual.

- A finalized hard or electronic copy of the thesis or dissertation must be submitted to your **Advisor and Guidance Committee**. The student should check with members of the Guidance Committee whether they want an electronic or hard copy version.
- **Courtesy copies of the dissertation.** It is a professional courtesy for the student to provide a copy (hard copy or electronic) of the thesis or dissertation to any individual, agency, or organization that facilitated the dissertation or thesis research. While the student may feel that this extra effort represents an unneeded expense, attention to these professional courtesies is an important part of professional behavior.
- The policy for embargos of thesis and dissertations has been changed but continues to be restricted to requests involving potential patents. The period of the embargo is now restricted to six months and the holding of the document is now done by ProQuest after the electronic thesis/dissertation is submitted after the approval of the Graduate School. <https://grad.msu.edu/etd/electronic-submission-to-proquest>

**NOTE:** There are fees of several hundred dollars associated with filing your dissertation (copyright, copying, binding, etc.). [COGS currently offers small lottery-based grants to cover these expenses, for information on COGS see Appendix II].

#### 2.4. Exit Survey

- A new short online exit survey for all students graduating with a Plan A or Plan B masters or with a Doctoral degree was introduced May 9<sup>th</sup> of 2011. Only students who have applied for graduation will have access to the survey. The survey asks questions about educational experiences in MSU graduate programs, as well as about immediate professional plans. The Graduate School uses data from this survey 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. The students will receive an e-mail message from the dean of the graduate school with a link to the survey. However, students do not need to wait for that e-mail message to complete the survey after applying for graduation. It takes about 5-10 minutes to complete the online survey. Below are the instructions for completing the survey and they are also available from [http //grad.msu.edu/etd/](http://grad.msu.edu/etd/)

*Instructions for students*

- Access the following website
  - Doctoral Students <https://www.egr.msu.edu/doctoral/survey/>
  - Master's Students <https://www.egr.msu.edu/masters/survey/>
  - Enter your MSU NetID (Login Name) and Password
  - Complete all the items on the survey. When finished, click *Submit*.
  - For doctoral exit surveys, direct questions to [ExitSurvey@grd.msu.edu](mailto:ExitSurvey@grd.msu.edu)
  - For master's exit surveys, direct questions to [CareerServices@csp.msu.edu](mailto:CareerServices@csp.msu.edu)
- If you cannot open this survey, email [destination-survey@egr.msu.edu](mailto:destination-survey@egr.msu.edu) include your name, student ID #, degree level (PhD, MA/MS) and semester of graduation. You will then be notified when you are able to complete the survey.

### **1) Requests for hold/embargo on publication of documents submitted to ProQuest:**

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

### **2) 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>

### 3. DEPARTMENTAL POLICIES: ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL PERFORMANCE

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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.

- The Department will provide for the student:
  1. An environment in which scholarly attainment and conduct of meritorious scientific research can be achieved.
  2. Responsiveness to valid academic needs and desires.
  3. Support and encouragement of creative original study and research.
  4. A periodic evaluation of their program and a willingness on the part of the faculty to make changes when warranted.

#### 3.1. Student Expectations

##### **Students have the following responsibilities and goals:**

1. To demonstrate a clear aptitude for the various aspects of scientific research and technical proficiency, including knowledge of relevant literature, formulation of hypotheses, experimental tests of hypotheses, analysis of data and the ability to clearly present those data in both oral and written form.
2. At various mileposts through each of the three graduate programs the student is expected to meet stated expectations about progress toward the degree.
3. To strive for superior performance in academic coursework.
4. To participate in the academic culture of the department, including attendance at departmental and institutional presentations, brown bags and colloquia, thesis and dissertation defenses, as well as at relevant professional meetings.
5. Learn and adhere to University and academic unit rules, procedures and policies, including those outlined in this Graduate Handbook, in Academic Programs: <https://reg.msu.edu/AcademicPrograms/> and Graduate Student Rights and Responsibilities and Academic Freedom for Students at MSU: <http://splife.studentlife.msu.edu/graduate-student-rights-and-responsibilities>.  
These publications are available on the Department and Graduate School web sites and the links above.
6. Select an Advisor and form a Guidance Committee that meets University and Department requirements, and keeping the members of their Committee informed regarding their academic activities and research progress;
7. Develop a timeline with actionable dates;

8. 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;
9. Exhibit the highest standards of professionalism in teaching, research, and scholarship;
10. 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;
11. Provide the Department with copies of research-related documents (such as permits, approvals, grant proposals, research proposals) within the prescribed deadlines; and
12. Give the Department your thesis or dissertation as an unbound hard copy (can be printed double-sided) and on a disc
13. Meet University and Department requirements for degree completion in a timely manner.

Regular progress toward the degree is critical. Forms to help in achieving these goals are available to help scaffold progress.

Consequences for inability to maintain adequate progress towards degree will be in the form of warning letters for each missed deadline from the GPD.

### **3.2. Faculty Expectations**

The Graduate School has two foundational documents covering mentoring and advising.

- [The MSU Guidelines for Graduate Student Mentoring and Advising](#)
- [Foundational Values for Graduate Student and Faculty Mentoring Relationships](#)

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 over advisorship of a student. Because of the significant time invested in mentoring students, questioning the authority of the advisor in public can be harmful to the student-advisor relationship.

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.

If a single faculty member threatens a student's visa status due to productivity concerns, the student should file a complaint with OIE under the Anti-Discrimination Policy. Faculty members found to have violated OIE policies face serious consequences up to termination.

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.

## Minimum Academic Standards

- GEO graduate students are required to meet and maintain certain academic standards while enrolled in their Geography graduate program. These are
  - No more than two courses with grades of 2.5 or lower, and
  - No more than eight credits with grades of 2.5 or lower.

They must also meet College of Social Science academic standards.

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

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

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

- It is vital that students make adequate progress in their graduate programs as outlined in the Calendar of Progress. Lack of satisfactory progress toward the degree may jeopardize the student's funding status and other graduate student benefits. Faculty conduct an annual review of all active graduate students (defined as those enrolled for credits during the Academic Year in which the annual review is conducted) and they are sent a letter stating their level of progress in their degree. If progress is inadequate, the department can withhold financial support, assistantship offers, office space, copying privileges, and other similar department resources. A series of unsatisfactory progress letters can lead to dismissal from a program.
- The University, Graduate School, and College of Social Science have set the following requirements:
  - The time limit for completion of the requirements for the master's degree is **six years** from the date of enrollment in the student's first course in the master's degree program.
  - The PhD Comprehensive Examination must be taken within **five years** of initial acceptance to the program, and **expire after three years** if there has been no progress toward the degree;
  - An extension request must be filed for exceeding **five years** to complete the comprehensive exam. This section should be linked back to the Graduate School's website about time extensions. <https://education.msu.edu/academics/graduate-forms/>
  - All remaining requirements for the Ph.D. degree must be completed within **eight years**, from the time when a student begins the first class at MSU that appears on the GradPlan. Applications for extensions of the eight-year period of time toward degree must be submitted by the department/school for approval by the Dean for Graduate Studies of the College of Social Science and the Dean of The Graduate School. Should the degree requirements not be completed within this eight-year period, all of the doctoral comprehensive exams must be passed again.
- Master's and Ph.D. students whose enrollment at MSU is interrupted for any reason so that they have not been enrolled for three consecutive semesters, including Summer Session, are automatically dropped from their program and must reapply for readmission via the Web at [www.reg.msu.edu](http://www.reg.msu.edu).

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

- Additional requirements for an advanced degree are also set by the Graduate School and the College of Social Science. All Geography graduate students should become thoroughly familiar with these requirements by consulting the *Academic Programs* guide which can be viewed on the web at <http://www.reg.msu.edu/AcademicPrograms/Index.asp>.

### **3.4. Code of Ethics**

Disciplinary and scholarly codes of ethics in course work, research, and professional activities are a crucial part of successful research. The MSU Academic Council and Academic Senate approved a revision of the Integrity of Scholarship and Grades Policy. This document is available at <http://splife.studentlife.msu.edu/regulations/selected/integrity-of-scholarship-and-grades>

#### **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.

### **3.5. 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 <http://www.vps.msu.edu/SpLife/default.pdf>. The University Ombudsman is another resource for problem solving, <http://www.msu.edu/unit/ombud/>
- Other resources are *Academic Programs* (for both undergraduate and graduate programs) can be viewed on the web at <https://reg.msu.edu/AcademicPrograms/>.

### 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. <http://splife.studentlife.msu.edu/graduate-student-rights-and-responsibilities/article-5-adjudication-of-cases-involving-graduate-student-rights-and-responsibilities>
- 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. These procedures are documented in a report available from both the Academic Program Coordinator and the Department webpage.

### 3.6. Jury Duty

- Please refer to MSU policies on jury duty: [https://hr.msu.edu/policies-procedures/support-staff/support-staff-policies-procedures/jury\\_duty.html](https://hr.msu.edu/policies-procedures/support-staff/support-staff-policies-procedures/jury_duty.html)  
For students on a Teaching Assistantship, please refer to the GEU contract: <https://hr.msu.edu/contracts/documents/geu-2019-2023.pdf>

### 3.7. Dismissals and Withdrawals

- In rare instances, the Department is faced with the potential dismissal or withdrawal of a student. If a student decides to withdraw from the graduate program, he or she is required to inform the Department in writing and in a timely manner outlining the reasons for withdrawal and the timing of departure from the unit. 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 be 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 desire to dismiss the student.

- 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.
- [Graduate Student Rights and Responsibilities](#) are outlined by the Graduate School as part of broader GSRR resources: <https://grad.msu.edu/gsrr>
- Leave of Absence: see the Work Related Policies section.
- 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.

### **3.8. Traveling on MSU business**

- 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 (see Ms. Joni Burns for form [burnsjo@msu.edu](mailto:burnsjo@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, Ms. Burns, 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 Ms. Joni Burns ([burnsjo@msu.edu](mailto:burnsjo@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-malarials) as determined by the MSU Travel Clinic <http://www.travelclinic.msu.edu/>. Students may include those costs in applications for funds from the Research Enhancement or Travel Grant programs administered by the Graduate School.

### ***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: <http://oihs.isp.msu.edu/international-travelers/registration/>  
Students not registered will be responsible for paying any expenses if there is an emergency.

### **3.9. Grief Absence Policy**

- MSU has a Grief and Bereavement Policy for graduate students, here: <https://reg.msu.edu/ROInfo/Notices/GriefAbsence.aspx>
- For master's with research responsibilities, and doctoral students, it is the responsibility of the student to
  - notify their advisor/major professor and faculty of the courses in which they are enrolled of the need for a grief absence in a timely manner, but no later than one week from the student's initial knowledge of the situation,
  - provide appropriate verification of the grief absence as specified by the advisor/major professor and faculty, and
  - complete all missed work as determined in consultation with the advisor/major professor and faculty.
- 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, and

- 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.
- 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/documents/geu-2019-2023.pdf>
- Students who believe their rights under this policy have been violated should contact the University Ombudsperson. <http://www.msu.edu/unit/ombud/>

## 4. DEPARTMENTAL POLICIES: INTEGRITY AND SAFETY IN RESEARCH

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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. MSU's Graduate School has a policy on Integrity and Research: <https://grad.msu.edu/researchintegrity>

### 4.1. 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/>

### 4.2. Human Subjects Research

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

interaction or intervention or about whom the researcher obtains confidential information.

Depending upon the level of risk to subjects in the protocol, HRPP assigns the student's application to one of three review categories (exempt from full review, expedited review, and full review) and sends it to one, two or five reviewers, respectively. If the reviewer(s) is satisfied that the rights and welfare of the human subjects are adequately protected, he or she approves it. However, if the reviewer has concerns, the reviewer returns written comments to the HRPP office for transmission to the investigator. The investigator must then send a response to each comment, in writing, to HRPP which will forward it to the reviewer(s). If the proposal is either an exempt or expedited proposal, an approval letter can be issued as soon as the reviewer(s) approves. When a proposal receives full (five-member sub- committee) review, an approval letter is issued after the proposal is discussed and approved by vote of the full committee at its monthly meeting. Reference <https://hrpp.msu.edu/>

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.

### **4.3. Plagiarism**

The number of cases of scientific misconduct due apparently to unintentional plagiarism can be an issue. There is anti- plagiarism software that is available on Desire 2 Learn (D2L) <https://d2l.msu.edu/> 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/>

University definitions and policy on plagiarism:

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

## 5. GRADUATE ASSISTANT WORK RELATED POLICIES

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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/documents/geu-2019-2023.pdf>

Reference <http://grad.msu.edu/>.

There are four classes (and three levels) of graduate assistantships Level 1- Master's Level, Level 2 - Master's Level and Level 2-Doctoral Level and Level 3-Doctoral Level. In any one semester, the stipend per assistantship unit is the same for all assistantships that level. Actual stipend rates are set by MSU in the summer and become effective on August 15.

### 5.1. Assistantship Levels

- Level 1 – graduate student, bachelor's degree and less than one academic year's experience as a graduate assistant or as full-support fellow
- Level 2 – graduate student, relevant master's degree (30 semester credits or equivalent) and/or two semesters' experience as a graduate assistant or as full-support fellow in the employing unit.
- Level 3 –Either (a) Six semesters of experience as a graduate research assistant or teaching assistant and a relevant master's degree or equivalent. The definition of equivalent experience as a research assistant or teaching assistant should be left to the discretion of the chairperson of the appointing unit, but it is expected that only experience in research-oriented assignments would count toward the six semesters of experience as a research assistant. (Consistent with current practice, 1/4- time and 3/4-time appointments count the same as 1/2-time appointments, and Summer Semesters count the same as Fall and Spring Semesters.) *or* (b) Successful completion of doctoral comprehensive exams, as defined by the department in which the student is enrolled. NOTE Masters "equivalency" shall be defined as the requirements set forth in the University Guide to Academic Programs for the department in which the employee is enrolled. If no Master's degree is offered by that department, then the MSU minimum requirement (30 credits) for the Master's degree will apply.
- Graduate Assistants are paid on Fridays on a bi-weekly basis. You can find the Graduate Assistant Payroll schedule on the Payroll website <http://www.ctrl.msu.edu/COPayroll/> (see Payroll schedules). Graduate assistantship stipends are not subject to Social Security (FICA) taxes. Stipends are subject to income taxes with few exceptions.

## 5.2. Mandatory Training: Relationship Violence and Sexual Misconduct (RVSM).

All TAs and RAs must complete the on-line training about the Relationship Violence and Sexual Misconduct Policy.

### Link to University Policy on Violence and Sexual Misconduct

[https://www.hr.msu.edu/policies-procedures/university-wide/RVSM\\_policy.html](https://www.hr.msu.edu/policies-procedures/university-wide/RVSM_policy.html)

More information can be found here: <https://oie.msu.edu/policies/rvsm.html>

### Link to Title IX website and Online Education Programs

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

<https://poe.msu.edu/programs/index.html>

MSU protects Title IX as part of its [Office of Civil Rights](#) : “All graduate students are required to complete an annual online training program, which has been customized to address the unique experiences of graduate students. Students will not be able to access important academic information in the StuInfo system, including grades, until they complete this training. Please note that graduate students who are also employed as graduate teaching assistants or research assistants are also required to complete an online education program for employees.”

## 5.3. Graduate Student Funding

- Graduate Assistantship funding is limited to 4 semesters for master’s students and 6-8 semesters for PhD students. Assistantship funding found outside the department count towards the 4 and 6-8 semester limits. The Chair is authorized to handle extended time requests. See procedure below to apply for an extension of your semester limit.
- If a student joins the department with funding from a grant, the faculty member will discuss with the student their expected role as advisor vs. supervisor during the first month. If requested, both parties will develop written expectations 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.
- 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 should be no sooner than one week. 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.

### **If you wish to be considered for an assistantship**

- The Awards Committee makes recommendations to the Chair once per year (usually at the end of February or early March) regarding who will receive Departmental Funding. If you have not been awarded a multi-year Graduate Assistantship, or your term is set to expire, and you wish to be considered for Departmental Funding, write a letter to the Graduate Program Director requesting consideration for a one semester or one-year Graduate Assistantship. This letter should reach the GPD by February 1. This letter should come from the applicant (i.e. the graduate student) not the advisor.

### **Direct Deposit**

- It is recommended that everyone set up Direct Deposit For
  - STUDENT ACCOUNTS (fellowships) through [student.msu.edu](https://student.msu.edu/)
  - PAYROLL ACCOUNTS (assistantships, hourly pay) Through the EBS Portal [www.ebs.msu.edu](http://www.ebs.msu.edu)
    - click the EBS Portal Login
    - the first time you sign into EBS you must set up two-factor authentication
    - sign in with your MSU Net ID and password
    - choose the ESS tab and then the Payroll sub tab
    - click Direct Deposit Information
- International students must visit the Payroll Office (room 350 Hannah Administration Building) to pick up an information packet to complete and return. The taxability of stipends is subject to review by the Internal Revenue Service. Please call the Payroll office for more information, at 355-5010.

### **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>

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

## 5.4 Enrollment Requirements

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

- Michigan State University offers graduate assistants health insurance coverage. 'Student only' coverage is automatically provided at no cost to graduate assistants. Michigan State University will provide a full twelve months of coverage if your appointment is at least nine months. <https://hr.msu.edu/benefits/graduate-assistants/health/index.html>

If you have questions about your MSU Student Health Plan, please contact:

MSU Human Resources Benefits Office  
800-353-4434  
E-mail: [solutionsCenter@hr.msu.edu](mailto:solutionsCenter@hr.msu.edu)

Blue Care Network: <https://www.hr.msu.edu/benefits/graduate-assistants/documents/bcn-ga-health-plan-highlights.pdf>

LEAVE: The University has medical leave and family leave policies in place: <https://reg.msu.edu/AcademicPrograms/Print.aspx?Section=341>. 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.

## 5.5 Funding Requirements

### 5.5.1 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/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 <help.d2l.msu.edu/training>.

### **English Language Proficiency for Teaching Assistants**

**Current Policy:** (<https://grad.msu.edu/tap/speak>) 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.

### **5.5.2 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.

### 5.5.3 Graduate Employees Union (GEU)

The Graduate Employees Union (GEU) is the legal collective bargaining unit for all graduate employees designated as teaching assistants at MSU. The University is obligated to bargain a contract with GEU concerning pay, benefits (including health insurance and tuition waivers), and working conditions. The current contract guarantees yearly wage increases, protection from overwork, a grievance procedure that addresses a variety of issues arising in the work place, University contributions for family health coverage, and many other benefits and protections. The current contract for 2019-2023 is here:

<https://hr.msu.edu/contracts/documents/geu-2019-2023.pdf>

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.

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

- Enrollment in any of these courses requires approval of the English Language Center (ELC). Approval is granted by the Director of the ELC.
- Only students who have failed to achieve a passing score of 50 on the MSU Speaking Test or the ITAOI may enroll in 451 or 452. Students who score a 45 are eligible to enroll. A student with a 40 may be eligible with permission of the ITA Program Coordinator.
- Students need referrals from their departments to enroll in any of these courses.

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

### **5.6. MSU Anti Discrimination Policy**

Michigan State University’s scholarly community-building efforts occur within the context of general societal expectations, as embodied in the law. The University, consistent with its policies and governing law, promotes institutional diversity and pluralism through mechanisms such as affirmative action, within an over-arching strategy promoting equitable access to opportunity. The University’s commitment to non-discrimination is the foundation for such efforts. [https://hr.msu.edu/policies-procedures/university-wide/ADP\\_policy.html](https://hr.msu.edu/policies-procedures/university-wide/ADP_policy.html)

## 6 TRIPLE G - THE 'GEOGRAPHY GRADUATE GROUP

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The broad goals of the organization, Triple G (or the Geography Grad Group), are to build strong ties within the graduate student's 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 Triple G include:

- Exchanging stories and giving support about the unique experience of being a graduate student and more specifically a Geography graduate student at MSU. Triple G provides times and spaces for this. In addition, by knowing each other it builds a friendly more productive work environment. For example, Triple G 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, Triple G 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 graduates and new faculty to build status and influence as a department. For example, getting information that is helpful to potential student, and new grad students to them allowing for a much smoother transitions and a more informed decision-making process.
- To document all the work Triple G 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.
- Triple G 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 website](#)

### 7.4 APPENDIX I Departmental Resources

- **The Geography Department Office.** The office (rooms 116, 117, and 118) is open and staff is available to assist you from 8 00 a.m. to 12 00 noon, and from 1 00 p.m. to 5 00 p.m. on every day that the University is open. The Geography office is closed on weekends and on University holidays.
- **Mail.** Please check your physical mailboxes each day for personal mail, departmental notices, etc. The mailboxes are located in room 118 Geography Building.
- **Keys and Building Access.** The Geography building is closed evenings and weekends, the hours are posted on exterior doors. So that you can access the building after hours, give the 6 digit number on the back of your ID card to the Academic Program Coordinator. It will take about 24 hours for ID card to be activated. You can check that your card is working correctly by testing your card at the handicap access door, if the doors automatically open, you know your card is activated. You will receive keys for the mailroom, copy room, conference and computer rooms, and if assigned, an office key. To avoid penalty, return all keys when you leave MSU.
- **Email accounts.** All students should obtain email accounts on the MSU email system as soon as they are established MSU students. These are available at no cost and serve as the primary means of communicating. Once you have obtained your account, please inform the Academic Program Coordinator of your email address so that it can be added to the various Departmental mailing lists. If you also obtain an account on the Sun workstations, you will also be able to send and receive mail with that account.

**NOTE:** ALL university communication (e.g. when you are a TA or RA) MUST be done using the MSU account.

- **Telephone.** Personal long-distance telephone calls CANNOT to be placed on departmental phones (phones in graduate student area are secured from long distance calls). If you MUST make a long-distance call that is work related, please check with your major professor to see if and how your need can be accommodated. For personal calls please use a calling card or cell phone.
- **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.

- **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.
- **Proctoring.** Additional proctors are frequently needed to help supervise large section exams. Proctors are paid per exam and are paid on the Student Payroll. Signup sheets are in the mailroom (room 118).
- **Miscellaneous funding opportunities.** To support graduate student research, the department offers Graduate Office Fellowships (GOFs) on an annual competitive basis. These awards, usually between \$500 and \$2,000, are used to recruit high-ranking students as well as to support fieldwork or to purchase data for research. GOFs are taxed for international students. The tax rate is Federal 14% and State .0435%. Note that depending on where you live your income may be subject to local income taxes as well (e.g. Lansing). Limited funds are also available on a competitive basis to defray costs of attending professional meetings. In addition, the department offers support to defray the expenses of attending a professional meeting such as the annual or regional meetings of the American Association of Geographers.

## 7.5 APPENDIX II University Resources

- **Student ID Cards.** All students must have a valid student ID card and student number. Student IDs can be obtained in Room 170 International Center – 427 N. Shaw. To have access to the Geography Building, please see the Academic Program Coordinator with your new ID card.
- **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.
- **Bicycles.** The University maintains bicycle racks throughout the campus. Bikes should be locked to these racks when parked. Bikes are not permitted in campus buildings. Improperly parked bikes are subject to impoundment by the Department of Public Safety. Bicycle registration through the MSU Department of Public Safety or the cities of East Lansing or Lansing is required. You can register your bike on-line at <http://www.dpps.msu.edu/>
- **Student Services.** Michigan State University provides extensive student personnel services to assist students and enhance the educational experience. Michigan State University recognizes that the total development of the individual, personal, social, and physical, as well as intellectual, is of equal importance. Important telephone numbers include
  - Graduate Record Examination sign-up - 207 Student Services, 517 355-8385  
<http://www.testingoffice.msu.edu/>
  - Graduate Employees Union - 517 332-2824  
<http://www.geuatmsu.org/>
  - Financial Aid/Student Loan - 259 Student Services, 517 353-5940  
<http://finaid.msu.edu/>
  - University Housing 1205 S. Harrison Rd, 517 355-9550  
<https://liveon.msu.edu/>
- **Graduate School.** The Graduate School at MSU, 466 W. Circle Drive, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Chittenden Hall offers many workshops and other programs for graduate students. Examples are the Graduate Student Resource Fair, the Activities Fair and workshops on completing a thesis/ dissertation, dealing with conflict, teaching issues, etc. For more info <http://grad.msu.edu/> or call 517 355-0300.
- **PREP Program.** The Graduate School at MSU also provides a professional development program, PREP, which “focuses on four professional skills that are key to career and professional development. Planning throughout the graduate career to identify and successfully achieve career goals; developing Resilience and tenacity to thrive through



personal and professional stages; practicing active Engagement in making important life decisions and in acquiring the skills necessary to attain career goals; and attaining high standards of Professionalism in research and teaching.” See the Graduate Student Career and Professional Development website for more details <http://grad.msu.edu/>.

- **Michigan State University Library.** It is strongly suggested that you take advantage of the library tours in order to more thoroughly familiarize yourself with all the available resources. <http://www.lib.msu.edu/>. There are also a number of branch libraries on campus.

- Information Desk 517 353-8700
- Library Hours 517 432-6123
- Map Library 3rd floor Main Library 517 432-6123 x 249

- **Office for International Students and Scholars**, 103 International Center 353-1720, The Office for International Students and Scholars (OISS) serves international students and international faculty. OISS is a resource center for information and consultation on matters related to international students and faculty/scholars. The staff is prepared to help in any of the various areas of concern, including academic problems, immigration questions, social health, employment or financial matters. The office also organizes seminars and workshops on topics of interest to the broad university community. These have included immigration regulations, cross-cultural communication, pre-departure programs for graduating students and various training programs. They also publish a very informative handbook called Welcome to Our Community that answers questions you may have about living and going to school in our community. A copy of this handbook can be picked up in the OISS. <http://www.oiss.msu.edu/>

- English Language Center 1 International Center, 517 353-0800  
<http://www.elc.msu.edu/>
- International Students & Scholars 103 International Center, 517 353-1720  
<http://www.oiss.msu.edu/>
- Office of Study Abroad 109 International Center, 517 353-8920  
<http://studyabroad.msu.edu/>
- International Studies & Programs, Deans Office 209 International Center, 517 355-2350  
<http://www.isp.msu.edu/>

- **Collaborative Learning Center**, 202 Bessey Hall 517 355-2363. This is a self-paced, individualized learning center that offers free assistance to students who want to improve their study skills. Its goal is to help you develop the strategies and techniques you need to be successful student. Workshops on specific study skills are offered throughout the year. Reference <http://lrc.msu.edu/>
- **The Writing Center**, 300 Bessey Hall 517 432-3610. This center offers writing consultation to graduate as well as undergraduate students. One on one consultations



- **Student Insurance Questions** - 800-353-4434, [solutionsCenter@hr.msu.edu](mailto:solutionsCenter@hr.msu.edu)
- **Recreational Sports and Fitness Services**, 517-355-5250. Students have access to equipment and facilities in the intramural facilities located in the IM West, IM East, and IM Circle. Students must present a current MSU student ID in order to be admitted to these facilities and borrow the equipment. Use of most of the facilities is free to currently enrolled students, although there are a few exceptions, such as a fee for the use of the weight room in IM East and IM West. Reference <http://recsports.msu.edu/intramural-sports/index.html>
- **MSU Student Food Bank**. COGS and ASMSU jointly established a Student Food Bank to address the problems of students and their families with financial hardship. The SFB is located at Olin Health Center. For distribution hours check website or email [foodbank@msu.edu](mailto:foodbank@msu.edu) Reference <https://www.msu.edu/~foodbank/>
- **Council of Graduate Students (COGS)**, 316 Student Services 517-353-9189 (353-COGS). COGS is the official graduate student organization at Michigan State University. Officers and departmental representatives (one representative per department for the entire University) are voting members. The primary objective is improvement of the academic, social, and economic position of graduate students at MSU. The organization has official delegates to the Graduate Council, the Academic Council and standing committees thereof, and several all-university and presidential committees. Through membership in these and other bodies, COGS participates in decisions on such matters as tuition and fees, the grading system, traffic regulations, academic and extracurricular programs of the university, graduate assistant stipends, improvements in on and off campus student living conditions, academic freedom and responsibilities, student representation in university government, and the selection of principal administrative officers. Meetings are open to all graduate students. For further information, contact the department for the name of your representative. <http://cogs.msu.edu/>
- **The 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/>
- The Institute for Cyber-Enabled Research (ICER) provides high-performance computing to researchers across campus. Support, Training, and Research Support are available at <https://icer.msu.edu/users>
- MSU provides basic computer support through IT Services for your laptop, desktop, or machines on campus: <https://tech.msu.edu/support/help/>

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

- IT Services Support Desk 517 432-6200
  - Computer Store 120 Computer Center 517 432-0700
- **Graduate Funding Opportunities.** In addition to GOF and Departmental conference report (see item H in Appendix I), Area Studies Centers, the Graduate School, and the College of Social Science, offer limited funds to offset travel to conferences and to conduct fieldwork. Dissertation Completion Fellowships are also available on a competitive basis. Information on additional graduate student funding opportunities can be found on the Graduate School website at <https://grad.msu.edu/funding>.

### **Tax Form/Direct Deposit**

- DIRECT DEPOSIT- STUDENT ACCOUNTS (fellowships)  
  
Through the Student Information System: <https://student.msu.edu/>
- DIRECT DEPOSIT- PAYROLL ACCOUNTS (assistantships, hourly pay)
  - Through the EBS Portal [www.ebs.msu.edu](http://www.ebs.msu.edu)
  - -click the EBS Portal Login
  - the first time you sign into the EBS portal you will need to set up two-factor authentication
  - -sign in with your MSU Net ID and password
  - -choose the ESS tab and then the Payroll sub tab
  - -click Direct Deposit Information
- International students must visit the Payroll Office (room 350 Hannah Administration Building) to pick up an information packet to complete and return. The taxability of stipends is subject to review by the Internal Revenue Service. Please call the Payroll office for more information, at (517) 355-5010.
- Anyone who does not have a social security card or whose card is lost, stolen or destroyed must apply for a card from the Social Security Administration. Their local office is Social Security Office, 5210 Perry Robinson, Lansing MI 48911 – Office phone (800) 772-1213 or (517) 393-3876 or TTY (800) 325-0778.

### **English Language Center.**

- The ELC conducts applicant-screening interviews via Skype and Zoom jointly with senior representatives from participating departments. The aim of the interview is to determine the likelihood of the applicant passing the MSU Speaking Test upon arrival

on campus. Departments may obtain more information and request this service by sending an email to [testing@elc.msu.edu](mailto:testing@elc.msu.edu) . Website <http://elc.msu.edu>

- **Other Important Contact Information**

Dean's Office, College of Social Science  
203 Berkey Hall, 517-355-6676  
<http://socialscience.msu.edu/>

Admissions and Scholarships  
250 Admin. Bldg, 517-355-8332  
<http://admissions.msu.edu/>

Registrar's Office  
150 Admin. Bldg, 517- 355-3300  
<http://www.reg.msu.edu/>

Student Accounts  
142 Admin. Bldg, 517- 355-3343  
<http://www.ctrl.msu.edu/COStudentAccounts/>

Payroll 350 Admin. Bldg, 517- 355-5010

Transcripts 50 Admin. Bldg, 517- 355-3300  
<https://reg.msu.edu/Transcripts/Transcript.aspx>

## 7.6 APPENDIX III. Frequently Asked Questions

### **How can I apply for funding if I was not awarded a Departmental Graduate Assistant or my term has expired?**

The Awards Committee makes recommendations to the Chair once per year (usually at the end of February or early March) regarding who will receive Departmental Funding. If you have not been awarded a multi-year Graduate Assistantship, or your term is set to expire, and you wish to be considered for Departmental Funding, write a letter to the Graduate Program Director requesting consideration for a one semester or one year Graduate Assistantship. This letter should reach the GPC by February 1. This letter should come from the applicant (i.e. the graduate student) not the advisor.

### **What happens if I go over my 1000 free copies per semester limit?**

You will be notified that you have reached your 1000 copies and your copy code will be suspended until the beginning of the next semester.

### **How do I call outside of campus from an on-campus phone?**

Press 8 first. No long-distance calls are possible so you will need a phone card.

### **How do I change my Major Advisor?**

According to the MSU student handbook, graduate students are members of the academic community at the university and therefore have certain rights. Within that community, the graduate student's most essential right is the right to learn. The Department of Geography, Environment, and Spatial Sciences shares this view. In this context, one of the most important relationships a student will develop in the Department is with his or her Major Advisor. In rare circumstances, the student will choose to change advisors in the middle of his or her academic program. If such a situation arises, the student should first discuss options with the Graduate Program Director in the Department. If the student chooses to proceed with a change of Advisor, he or she will write a letter outlining the desire to make such a switch. This letter should include a discussion of reasons for the change and a plan for how to proceed with the selection of a new Major Advisor. This letter should be addressed to the Graduate Director and Department Chair. If the Department Chair approves the request, the student will proceed with the selection of a new Major Advisor.

### **What if my Advisor leaves MSU prior to completing my degree?**

If the advisor leaves MSU prior to degree completion, the student will be responsible for indicating to the Graduate Program Director their interest in continuing or changing their major professor. The Department and major professor shall meet with the student and develop a path forward. The department will be responsible for arranging an alternative advisor if desired, and creation of a plan to complete the degree.

## When should I begin to sign up for 899 or 999 credits?

You can sign up for thesis or dissertation credits whenever you like, as long as you can justifiably say that you are working on your thesis or dissertation during that semester. Often, students will sign up for these types of credits in a semester when they have an assistantship (which covers up to 9 credits) and are taking less than 9 credits of formal coursework. MS in Geography students need 4-6 credits of Geo 899 credits and PhD students need 24 credits (maximum allowed 36) of Geo 999. The department prefers that you not sign up for more than the maximum thesis credits, but if you need to for logistical or other acceptable reason, it is permitted. Overall try to use your thesis credits carefully taking them into special consideration when mapping out your program.

- **THESIS CREDITS** Once you complete your master's degree, a maximum of 6 thesis credits will be changed from DF (deferred) to P (pass). Additional thesis credits, taken beyond the 6 that count towards your degree, will remain as DF and will show upon your transcript as DF.
- **DISSERTATION CREDITS** A maximum of 36 dissertation credits are allowed. At the completion of your degree, dissertation credits will change from DF (deferred) to P (pass).

## How many credits represent 'full time' for a graduate student

There are several definitions of 'full-time.' For academic purposes - full-time is 9 credits at the master's level and 6 credits doctoral level. BUT, if you have a 1/2 time graduate assistantship then full-time is 6 credits master's and 3 credits doctoral. For doctoral students who have completed their comprehensive exams and defended their proposal or are doing field work - 1 credit is full-time. For financial aid purposes the credits can be different and depends on the type of funding you receive. You need to check with Financial Aid to determine what is considered full-time for their situation. These rules do not include the summer sessions, just Fall and Spring.

What if I have a graduate assistantship? How many credits do I have to register for? What is the minimum? What is the maximum?

For a half-time assistantship, you must have 6 credits if you are a master's student, or 3 credits if you are a doctoral student. Maximum enrollment is 16 credits of coursework, but additional credits of GEO 899 are allowed. There are two exceptions. In the summer semester, the minimum enrollment, with a graduate assistantship, is 3 credits (for either master's or doctoral students). If you are receiving your degree during the semester in which you have a graduate assistantship, the minimum enrollment is one credit.

**NOTE:** You must contact the academic coordinator prior to the beginning of the semester you defend and have a graduate assistantship to make arrangements for less than 6 credits (M.S.) or less than 3 credits (Ph.D.).

**I am in the doctoral program and I am writing my dissertation. I have already taken 24 credits of GEO 999. Can I quit registering for credits now?**

No. Remember that the University requires that you register for at least one credit for every Fall and Spring semester from the time that you are a doctoral candidate until you defend your dissertation in order to be considered a full-time student. This is called 'continuing enrollment.' The Graduate School allows you to skip enrolling for three consecutive semesters (say, Fall, Spring, Summer) to do fieldwork. However, if you skip enrolling for more than three semesters, you have to apply for readmission. Also, do not forget that you have to be registered for at least one credit in order to take your comprehensive exams or defend your dissertation. An exception: if you take your comprehensive exam or defend your thesis during the summer semester, it is not necessary to be enrolled. If you are an International student and it is your last semester, you need to be enrolled full-time. Contact OISS to confirm enrollment requirements. <https://oiss.isp.msu.edu/>

**A 'full time' student in graduate school usually takes 6-9 credits each semester. Does that change once I am a doctoral candidate and I am not taking regular courses?**

Yes. The semester after you pass your comprehensive exams (including the written exam and its oral defense); you need to be enrolled in one credit to be considered enrolled full time.

**What does full-time status mean?**

Some students wish to be classified officially by the University as a "full-time student" because of their student loans, employment status, or some other reason. Be aware that your financial institution may have other criteria for being a 'full-time student.' The University also requires that graduate students register for at least one credit (usually 999) each semester between the time they become a doctoral candidate and the time that they defend the dissertation. The university allows only three consecutive semesters of non-enrollment during this time, e.g., you might be out of state or out of the country doing fieldwork at some point. If you are not enrolled for more than three consecutive semesters (Fall or Spring or Summer), you must re-apply for admission.

**What does it mean to be a resident for the university residency requirements?**

Residency means that you are "here on campus," using the library, interacting with faculty, and using the University facilities and so forth. A year of residence will be made up of two consecutive semesters, involving the completion of credits at the level of full-time status of graduate work each semester.

**What is a CIC Scholar?**



The CIC is the Committee on Institutional Cooperation, a group of Midwestern universities (the Big Ten universities plus the University of Chicago and the University of Illinois at Chicago. CIC Traveling Scholars are doctoral students (students who have been admitted to the doctoral program) who have applied and been accepted as a CIC scholar.

The Traveling Scholar Program enables doctoral students at any CIC university to take advantage of educational opportunities--specialized courses, unique library collections, laboratories--at any other CIC university without change in registration or increase in tuition. See the CIC Scholar website at

<http://www.cic.net/Home/Projects/SharedCourses/TScholar/Introduction.aspx>

**NOTE:** First-year students may not be CIC scholars.

### **Can I count credits accumulated at another University toward my MSU graduate degree in Geography?**

Yes, but only 9 at the master's level (unlimited at the PhD level) and then only if they were NOT counted toward another degree program, and with approval of your MSU Guidance Committee. The only credits that can transfer are those earned in another degree program but not used to graduate, or those earned in a non-degree-seeking degree. And of course, the credits must be at the graduate (400-level MSU equivalent) level to count.

### **At what date do I have to drop a class and still get a 100% refund?**

You have until the fourth week of class (during Fall and Spring Semesters) to drop a class and still get a 100% refund. If you have an assistantship and go beyond the fourth week of class and then drop the class, you will be billed for the class. If you add credits beyond the fourth week and still have some of your 9 credits covered under your assistantship, you will be billed for those credits. The important thing to remember is to make any changes to your program within the first four weeks of class.

### **How many 'lifelong education' credits can I transfer into a degree program?**

Up to 9 credits can be transferred from Lifelong Education to a regular Geography degree program with approval of your Guidance Committee.

### **What is onGEO and how can I obtain an instructorship?**

onGEO is the shorthand we use for onGEO Virtual University (i.e. online) courses the department offers during all sessions of the school year. During the regular Academic Year (Fall and Spring Semesters) some TA appointments are onGEO instructorships. During the Summer Semester (two 7-week intensive sessions) the department offers many online sections, and these offer additional teaching opportunities for qualified graduate students since all of these course sections are run by graduate instructors and are overseen by the onGEO Course Coordinators and a faculty member in the Geography Department. Selection is competitive and foreign students must meet TOEFL and SPEAK score levels for

regular TA appointments. A call for instructors is made early in the Spring Semester; selection and training occur mid semester.

### **What does a grade of 'DF' mean?**

A grade of 'DF' indicates the grade has been deferred, which can occur for a number of reasons. Dissertation and thesis credits remain DF until completion of the degree.

### **How long can a grade remain deferred ('DF') on my transcript**

All required work for a DF grade must be completed, and a grade reported within six months with the option of a single six-month extension. If the work required to attain a final grade is not completed within the time limit, the DF grade will become U-Unfinished and will be changed to DF/U under the numerical and Pass-No Grade (P-N) grading systems, and to DF/NC under the Credit-No Credit (CR-NC) system.

**NOTE** this rule *does not apply to graduate thesis or dissertation credits* as the DF grade is changed upon completion of the degree.

How long do I have to complete a course in which I received an 'I' (Incomplete) grade?

The required work for an Incomplete grade ('I') must be completed, and a grade must be reported to the Office of the Registrar, no later than the *middle of the student's next semester in attendance* (summer session excluded). Failure to complete the required work by the due date will result in an *automatic* grade of I/O.0 or I/N depending on the grading system under which the student was enrolled. Incomplete grades should be completed as soon as possible and avoided as much as possible.

### **I am an out-of-state graduate student and received an externally funded fellowship is it possible to receive in-state tuition rates?**

Receipt of externally funded fellowships by students who have written their own grant applications and with a value of at least \$20,000 (direct costs) renders a student eligible for in-state tuition rates. The in-state tuition rate applies only to the semesters during which the student is supported by the fellowship. This policy applies only to grants funded through a competitive process by a U.S. institution/agency/foundation. Funds obtained through non-competitive processes (e.g., need-based fellowships) or from international sources do not qualify a student for in-state tuition rates.

### **I think I might need to defend my thesis or take my comps in the Summer; do I have to register for classes?**

The enrollment requirement for a thesis examination or comprehensive exam is waived if the examination is administered during the summer session immediately following a spring

semester during which the student was registered and/or prior to a fall semester in which the student will be registered.