

GRADUATE HANDBOOK TEMPLATE

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# Introduction

Entering and completing graduate school is an exciting time, filled with new opportunities. The program’s Graduate Handbook is a key source of information for guiding students through their degrees. Each academic unit offering a graduate degree must develop a Graduate Handbook containing the essential features of this Graduate Handbook Template, as well as information particular to the respective academic unit and/or college. The Graduate Handbook will inform students, faculty, and staff on course and program requirements, on standards for professional conduct in that field, on the timetable for the selection of a faculty advisor and the formation of a guidance committee, on examinations and graduation requirements, and on policy for dismissal. Informing students of these requirements is required by [Graduate](https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/about/handbook/graduate-student-rights-responsibilities/article-two-academic-rights-and-responsibilities-for-graduate-students.html)/[Medical](https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/about/handbook/medical-student-rights-responsibilities/article-two-academic-rights-and-responsibilities-for-medical-students.html)/[Law](https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/about/handbook/law-student-rights-and-responsibilities/article-two-academic-rights-and-responsibilities-for-law-students.html) Students Rights and Responsibilities (2.3.2). Timely, easy online access to the unit’s Handbook and information about this access must be provided for all current students, and it should be available for prospective students. The Handbook is a crucial element for welcoming new students, supporting existing students, and ensuring the integrity and quality of the graduate program overall.

All entering graduate students will participate in an orientation session(s) organized by the academic unit and/or college that will include an introduction to the program’s Handbook. Students entering “off-cycle” will be introduced by the appropriate faculty member or administrator to the Handbook at the time of entry and will be required to participate in the next scheduled orientation. Units will ensure that a faculty member, designated to act for the unit, will advise entering students who have not chosen a faculty advisor on course selection and degree requirements. Presentation and discussion of the Handbook should also be an integral part of new faculty and staff orientation programs at the unit level.

To ensure the accuracy of the information provided to students and faculty, units must review their Handbook annually and confirm this review as part of MSU’s Strategic Program Assessment process for reviewing all graduate programs. An out-of-date Handbook might violate University policy and students’ rights and add to the stress of entering students and the faculty and staff advising them. In contrast, an accurate Handbook can help uphold University policy, secure students’ rights and responsibilities, minimize stress, and ensure successful degree completion.

If a revision of the unit’s Handbook makes changes to the degree requirements or any aspect of the evaluation of students, returning students should be accommodated under the rules and guidelines of the version of the Handbook that was active when they were admitted to the program to the largest extent possible. Excluded from this policy are program changes adopted to comply with external accreditation demands. Make sure that your degree requirements match those printed in the [MSU Academic Programs](https://reg.msu.edu/AcademicPrograms/default.aspx) document. If they do not match, you must change either the Handbook or the Academic Programs entry. To change your Academic Programs entry, you must submit changes to the [curricular academic governance process](https://reg.msu.edu/ucc/ucc.aspx).

This Template is designed to include all the important sections for a Ph.D. program, but all graduate degree programs must have a Handbook. The Template should be modified for other types of graduate programs. A Handbook for such a program may be limited to a listing of course requirements, the nature of the certifying examination if required, the office where a student could petition for a course waiver or substitution and reference to the appropriate documents listed above.

Section 10, entitled “Work Related Policies” is intended for graduate students employed in their major academic unit. When a graduate student is employed in another unit, the policies of that unit apply. In all cases, units must follow contractual rules and University policies.

Units developing or revising their Handbook may wish to consult Handbooks from units with a similar mission and/or within the same college. The Graduate School can also provide advice and review drafts of Handbooks if requested. Annually, the Graduate School will notify the units about policy updates that impact graduate education at Michigan State University and will update this Handbook Template.

Graduate Handbooks must be consistent with University and college policies. Units should consult current versions of the following documents and may reference them in the different sections of the Handbook or in an appendix with links to the appropriate document. Graduate Handbooks must make explicit that University policies override all inconsistent provisions of the departmental Handbooks.

## Links to Select University Policies

[Academic Programs](https://reg.msu.edu/AcademicPrograms/) Catalog

[Anti-Discrimination Policy (ADP)](https://civilrights.msu.edu/_assets/documents/ADP%20Users%20Manual%20-%20Updated%202020.02.171.pdf)

[Code of Teaching Responsibilities](https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/about/handbook/regulations/student-group-regs-rulings-policies-ordinances/code-of-teaching-responsibility/index.html)

[Disability and Reasonable Accommodation Policy](https://civilrights.msu.edu/policies/disability-and-reasonable-accommodation-policy.html)

[Digital Accessibility Policy](https://webaccess.msu.edu/policy)

[General Student Regulations](https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/about/handbook/regulations/general-student-regulations.html)

[Graduate Students Rights and Responsibilities (GSRR)](https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/about/handbook/graduate-student-rights-responsibilities/index.html)

[Guidelines for Integrity in Research and Creative Activities](https://grad.msu.edu/researchintegrity)

[Integrity of Scholarship & Grades](https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/about/handbook/regulations/student-group-regs-rulings-policies-ordinances/integrity-of-scholarship-and-grades.html)

[Law Student Rights and Responsibilities (LSRR)](https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/about/handbook/law-student-rights-and-responsibilities/index.html)

[Medical Student Rights and Responsibilities (MSRR)](https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/about/handbook/medical-student-rights-responsibilities/index.html)

[MSU Guidelines for Graduate Student Mentoring and Advising](https://grad.msu.edu/optimizing-mentoring)

[MSU-GEU Contract](https://hr.msu.edu/contracts/documents/geu-2019-2023.pdf)

[Policy on Relationship Violence and Sexual Misconduct](https://civilrights.msu.edu/policies/rvsm.html)

## Organization of the Handbook Template

This Template contains ten sections that address fundamental areas of graduate education. Each section starts with a brief description of the “Intent” of the section and includes a list of “What to Include” as well as “Policy Recommendations” that are endorsed by the Graduate School and by the University Committee on Graduate Studies (UCGS). The lists of what to include reflect input from the Ombudsperson, the Office of International Students and Scholars, the Graduate Associate/Assistant Deans, and graduate students from several different colleges. When appropriate, “Policy Notes” provide additional links to current, approved policy descriptions. When developing or updating the sections on “Selection of Advisor (4)” and “Formation of Guidance Committee (5)”, incorporate [the recommendations of the Task Force for Graduate Mentoring and Advising](https://grad.msu.edu/optimizing-mentoring). In particular, address those mentoring and advising areas identified as the essential responsibilities of students, faculty, and units.

# Graduate Handbook Template

## Program Overview

### Intent

It is essential that entering students understand the goals and objectives of the graduate program. This section should serve as a “road map” for graduate students to see the big picture in their degree programs and to begin to understand the expectations of the faculty. To give context, this section may also include a statement about the overarching mission of the overseeing unit(s) and a description of their organizational structure.

Opportunities for student participation in different departmental/school activities (including ad hoc and standing committees) could be explained in this section, in reference to Article 6 of [GSRR](https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/about/handbook/graduate-student-rights-responsibilities/article-six-academic-governance.html)/ [MSRR](https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/about/handbook/medical-student-rights-responsibilities/article-six-academic-governance.html).

This section provides an opportunity for the department/school to underscore the importance of attracting and retaining a diverse group of graduate students and of the importance of diversity among peers and faculty for the professional development of all graduate students.

### What to Include

* Present the program in context; explain how the graduate training/education provided by the unit is connected to the practices and goals of the field, both nationally and globally, when there is such a context.
* Make explicit the expectations of the program, including attendance at “brown bags,” dissertation proposal and defense presentations, and professional meetings.
* Make explicit any expectations about demonstrable mastery of the subject matter at the different stages of the program.
* Provide a year-by-year synopsis of the program as “program highlights.”

## Program Components/Plan Options

### Intent

This section should explain the elements that constitute the degree program including any plan options (such as Plan A or Plan B Masters options) and possible participation in interdisciplinary programs and/or dual-degree programs.

### What to Include

* Explain comprehensive exams, Plan B final exams, and any other exams such as qualifying exams (e.g., type and general content of the exam, how pass or fail is determined, number of times a student can repeat the test, definition of what constitutes a partial or conditional pass, deadlines for successful completion of the exam, number of times the exam can be retaken, and deadlines for retakes).
* Describe the participation of faculty in the generation and evaluation of the comprehensive or qualifying exams. Include in the description the rules for faculty participation in the process including the role of adjunct professors and/or faculty from other units.
* State the goals and purpose of the comprehensive/qualifying exams, the required course work, and the thesis/dissertation.
* Describe any options for specializations, cognates, or certificates.
* Describe what constitutes an official plan of study and how it relates to the program components.
* Make explicit the pertinent components from each unit for dual- and joint-degree programs or dual doctoral majors; **Policy Note:** See current University policies:
* [Dual degrees](https://reg.msu.edu/academicprograms/Text.aspx?Section=111#s11082)
* [Joint degrees](https://reg.msu.edu/academicprograms/Text.aspx?Section=111#s11083)
* [Second, joint, or dual master’s degrees](https://reg.msu.edu/AcademicPrograms/Text.aspx?Section=111#s387)
* [Shared Programs – Undergraduate to Graduate](https://reg.msu.edu/academicprograms/Text.aspx?Section=111#s328)
* [Joint master’s and medical degree](https://reg.msu.edu/AcademicPrograms/Text.aspx?Section=111#s389)
* [Dual major doctoral degrees](https://reg.msu.edu/academicprograms/Text.aspx?Section=111#s407)

## Degree Requirements

### Intent

Once the various aspects/components of the degree program have been explained, the requirements necessary for successful completion of those components should be specified. It is very important to distinguish between these two categories (what and how). It is important to keep all of the requirements in one location, so that there are no hidden requirements ([GSRR](https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/about/handbook/graduate-student-rights-responsibilities/article-two-academic-rights-and-responsibilities-for-graduate-students.html)/[MSRR](https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/about/handbook/medical-student-rights-responsibilities/article-two-academic-rights-and-responsibilities-for-medical-students.html)/[LSRR](https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/about/handbook/law-student-rights-and-responsibilities/article-two-academic-rights-and-responsibilities-for-law-students.html) 2.3. and 2.4).

### What to Include

* Describe the appropriate enrollment strategy for 999 credits. **Policy Note**: 24 credits are required for graduation; students can enroll for a maximum of 36. Requests for overrides to exceed the maximum of 36 (30 in the College of Education) credits of 999 must be directed to the Office of the Registrar (RO). To do so, access the “Request for RNR Override” at the [Registrar's Online Forms Menu](https://www.reg.msu.edu/Forms/FormsMenu.aspx). Should the total number of credits go above 45 the RO will confer with the Graduate School before considering the request for an exception.
* Provide a comprehensive list of requirements for each program in the unit, including any laboratory rotations, internships, or apprenticeships. Include here: admission and candidacy requirements, course requirements, language requirements, research/research credits requirements, and teaching requirements.
* Prepare a table that outlines the requirements and their due dates and time limits.
* Explain what is meant by provisional acceptance to the program and identify any deadlines to completion of any remedial work referred to in the provisional acceptance.
* Describe the English language proficiency requirements for international students; **Policy Note**: Program requirements may only tighten not loosen [MSU requirements for English language proficiency](https://reg.msu.edu/academicprograms/Text.aspx?Section=111#s335).
* Explain any residency requirements and residency fees. **Policy Note:** 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.
* Describe the unit’s policy for Shared Programs – Undergraduate to Graduate Programs (Shared Programs-UG2G). A key change from the previous dual-enrollment policy is that students must complete their first bachelor’s degree program prior to beginning any graduate degree program. Also, students must complete the Shared Programs-UG2G Request Form on the Graduate School website through the Forms [link](https://forms.office.com/r/BKAcNASLK2) before beginning any shared course work.
* Define what constitutes an acceptable thesis or dissertation for the field represented by the unit. Address the issue of using reprints, including those with multiple authors, as chapters of the thesis or dissertation. **Policy Note**: The Academic Programs Catalog [describes a doctoral dissertation](https://reg.msu.edu/AcademicPrograms/Text.aspx?Section=111#s399) as “original research upon which a dissertation which makes a significant contribution to knowledge is to be prepared and published.”
* Explain the policy for accepting supplemental materials for a thesis or dissertation. **Policy Note:** In addition to the main body of a thesis or dissertation, the Graduate School now permits the submission of supplementary materials to ProQuest. These supplemental materials will not be reviewed by the Graduate School for formatting requirements, but they must be acceptable by ProQuest and comply with ProQuest’s criteria and storage limits. All supplementary materials need the approval of the thesis/dissertation committee chair on the ETD approval form.

## Selection of Thesis/Dissertation Advisor

### Intent

Initiation and successful completion of independent research or creative activity requires early and continued advice and oversight by a faculty advisor on behalf of the academic unit. Therefore, academic units will develop policies and procedures to ensure that the faculty advisor of each graduate student will be selected in a timely fashion and that the relationship between the graduate student and the faculty advisor will foster a successful academic experience and preparation in research or creative activities. Attention should be devoted to a particular student’s needs based on their academic background, lived experiences, research activities, and short- and long- term professional goals. The unit must also develop the policies and procedures to ensure appropriate advising and mentoring for entering students that have not identified a permanent thesis/dissertation advisor; this is of particular importance for programs that require several short-term rotations during the first year in the program.

### Policy Recommendations

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 and the students’ career goals. For templates, see [myIDP (Biological & Physical Science fields)](http://myidp.sciencecareers.org/) and [ImaginePhD (Humanities & Social Science fields)](https://www.imaginephd.com/).

The timeline for the selection of a permanent faculty advisor will be specified.

Appropriate advising, supervision and mentoring will be provided to entering students before a permanent faculty advisor is identified.

Units should be particularly sensitive to the cultural fit of the advisor-student relationship; communication and background experiences play a significant role in the student’s understanding of the expectations of the graduate program.

The academic unit will establish procedures to help incoming graduate students select a faculty advisor.

The selection of the permanent faculty advisor will be submitted for approval to the chair/director of the academic unit, or the director of graduate studies, or a committee of the academic unit.

The academic unit will establish guidelines and expectations for successful faculty advising consistent with the [MSU Guidelines for Graduate Student Mentoring and Advising](https://grad.msu.edu/optimizing-mentoring).

### What to Include

* Describe the unit’s policy on who can serve as the thesis/dissertation advisor. Describe the role and responsibilities of the thesis/dissertation advisor. **Policy Note:** See the Graduate School’s [procedure for approving fixed-term MSU faculty, academic specialists, support staff, and non-MSU individuals as committee members](https://grad.msu.edu/non-regular-faculty-committees).
* Describe the responsibilities of the student, the academic unit and of the major professor when the major professor leaves MSU before the student completes their degree program.
* Describe the mechanisms available to change advisors and any policy regarding the role of co-advisors/major professors.
* Describe the responsibilities of the unit administrator when a student and/or faculty advisor can no longer work together.
* Provide information about how to select a permanent advisor and how to change advisors if that becomes necessary.

## Formation of The Guidance Committee

### Intent

The guidance committee is expected to share responsibility for reviewing the graduate student’s progress, guiding the student toward completion of course and program requirements, and preparing the student for professional success after graduation. Therefore, academic units will develop 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.

### Policy Recommendations

The academic unit will establish a timeline for forming a guidance committee. **Policy Note**:[GSRR 2.4.2.1](https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/about/handbook/graduate-student-rights-responsibilities/article-two-academic-rights-and-responsibilities-for-graduate-students.html) 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](https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/about/handbook/graduate-student-rights-responsibilities/article-two-academic-rights-and-responsibilities-for-graduate-students.html) also states that the composition of the graduate committee may change with concurrence of the student and unit, and that 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.

The academic unit will establish procedures to advise graduate students on how to choose the members of their guidance committee.

The composition of the guidance committee will be submitted to the chair/director of the academic unit for approval. To ensure uniform standards across the academic unit, the chair/director may add one appropriate member to the guidance committee.

### What to Include

* Provide instruction on how to form a thesis/dissertation committee (including: deadline, minimum number of faculty from inside the program/major and number allowed or required from outside the program/major).
* Provide information on how to change the composition of a constituted committee **Policy Note:** See also [GSRR 2.4.2](https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/about/handbook/graduate-student-rights-responsibilities/article-two-academic-rights-and-responsibilities-for-graduate-students.html).
* Provide information about who can serve as members of guidance committees, including faculty outside the student’s program or department/school and the responsibilities of the committee members.
* Describe the policy of the unit for non-tenure and emeritus faculty serving on guidance committees.

**Policy Notes:**

* See university-wide rules about the composition of guidance committees for [master’s](https://reg.msu.edu/AcademicPrograms/Text.aspx?Section=111#s381) and [doctoral](https://reg.msu.edu/AcademicPrograms/Text.aspx?Section=111#s394) students.
* The graduate program needs to prevent conflicts of interest in the context of students’ committees. Of particular concern are situations in which a voting member of the committee is from outside MSU and is, in some fashion, connected with the sources of funding for the student’s project.

## Thesis/Dissertation Defense and Final Oral Examination

### Intent

The final master’s or doctoral examination is the culmination of a student’s graduate education and reflects on the accomplishments of the graduate student and the quality of the graduate program. Therefore, academic units will develop policies and procedures that will ensure the maintenance of expected professional standards in the preparation of the written documents and in the oral defense of the thesis/dissertation.

### Policy Recommendations

For dissertations, a public or lay audience Abstract is recommended, in addition to the traditional one.

To ensure fairness in the examination procedure and maintenance of academic standards, the dean of the college may appoint an outside member to the graduate committee, who would have voting rights as per college policy. The outside committee member will read and critique the thesis/dissertation, participate in the oral part of the exam, and submit a report to the dean of the college. **Policy Note:** See Academic Programs policy on [doctoral examinations](https://reg.msu.edu/AcademicPrograms/Text.aspx?Section=111#s401).

Provide access to recent theses/dissertations accepted by the department.

### What to Include

* Make explicit any requirements and/or expectations concerning the publication or submission of research that constitutes or is part of a thesis or dissertation.
* Provide information about [thesis/dissertation formatting](https://grad.msu.edu/etd) and exit surveys.
  + 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)
* Describe the requirements and expectations of the unit for oral defenses of theses and dissertations. **Policy Note:** [Per MSU policy](https://reg.msu.edu/AcademicPrograms/Print.aspx?Section=401), for dissertations, the final oral defense/examination must consist of two parts. The first is a presentation that must be open to faculty members and members of the public without a vote. Only dissertation committee members may attend the second part, which is the examination portion of the defense per individual department/program/school’s guidelines.

## Departmental Policies: Academic and Professional Performance

### Intent

Graduate students have a right to periodic, written evaluation of their academic progress, performance, and professional expectations ([GSRR 2.4.8](https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/about/handbook/graduate-student-rights-responsibilities/article-two-academic-rights-and-responsibilities-for-graduate-students.html); [LSRR 2.4.1](https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/about/handbook/law-student-rights-and-responsibilities/article-two-academic-rights-and-responsibilities-for-law-students.html); [MSRR 2.4.1](https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/about/handbook/medical-student-rights-responsibilities/article-two-academic-rights-and-responsibilities-for-medical-students.html)). Therefore, academic units will develop procedures to review the performance and professional conduct of each graduate student at least once a year. To ensure a comprehensive assessment of the student’s performance as well as the student’s satisfaction in the graduate program, academic units are advised to consider a two-tier review system; namely, a review by the guidance committee and faculty advisor and a review by an independent third party, such as chair/director of the academic unit, the director of graduate studies, or a committee. This section of the Handbook should explain the evaluation procedures and should make explicit the policies for dismissal due to academic deficiencies. The unit must make explicit expectations of professional behavior and the consequences of failure to meet those professional standards ([GSRR 2.3.2 and 2.4.7](https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/about/handbook/graduate-student-rights-responsibilities/article-two-academic-rights-and-responsibilities-for-graduate-students.html); [LSRR 2.3.2 and 2.3.15 and 2.4.1.1](https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/about/handbook/law-student-rights-and-responsibilities/article-two-academic-rights-and-responsibilities-for-law-students.html); [MSRR 2.3.2 and 2.3.15 and 2.4.1.1](https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/about/handbook/medical-student-rights-responsibilities/article-two-academic-rights-and-responsibilities-for-medical-students.html)).

### Policy Recommendations

The guidance committee will review at least once a year the graduate student’s progress in their research or creative activity and plans for work in the coming year ([GSRR 2.4.8](https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/about/handbook/graduate-student-rights-responsibilities/article-two-academic-rights-and-responsibilities-for-graduate-students.html)). A report on the results of this review will be signed by members of the guidance committee and by the graduate student. This report will be filed with the chair/director of the academic unit and will be placed in the graduate student’s file, together with any response that the graduate student may attach to the report of the guidance committee.

Once a year, the faculty advisor and the graduate student will complete the appropriate portions of an annual progress report form, [such as the one prepared by the UGC in 2000 and adopted by the Graduate School](https://grad.msu.edu/annual-evaluation-forms). The faculty advisor and graduate student will meet to discuss this evaluation and, if applicable, sources of funding. The faculty advisor and the graduate student will sign the completed annual progress report, which will be submitted to the chair/director of the academic unit or the director of graduate studies and will be placed into the graduate student’s file. The annual evaluation by the advisor should be coordinated with the review of the student’s progress by the guidance committee; the two reports may be combined to avoid duplication. Graduate students who wish to appeal any part of the faculty advisor’s evaluation may do so in writing to the chair/director of the academic unit or the director of graduate studies, and this appeal will be filed together with the annual progress report.

Academic units are advised to institute as policy a meeting of the unit chair/director, or the director of graduate studies, or a faculty committee with each graduate student to review all aspects of the annual progress report. At this occasion, the graduate student can discuss with the chair/director of the academic unit, the director of graduate studies, or the committee any aspects of their studies that seem relevant for successful completion of the graduate program, including problems that may hinder progress, and any appeal of the faculty advisor’s evaluation (see above). Recommendations based on this review will be communicated in writing to the faculty advisor and the graduate student within two weeks of the meeting, and that report will be placed in the graduate student’s file.

All policies concerning access, maintenance, and release of students’ records must follow University guidelines in the [MSU Access to Student Information policy](https://reg.msu.edu/AcademicPrograms/Text.aspx?Section=112#s542).

### What to Include

* Define what is considered “acceptable academic standing” ([GSRR 2.4.9](https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/about/handbook/graduate-student-rights-responsibilities/article-two-academic-rights-and-responsibilities-for-graduate-students.html)) and what is considered as “making satisfactory progress toward a degree.”
* Inform the students of their right to receive a warning when academic performance or progress is judged to be unsatisfactory ([GSRR 2.4](https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/about/handbook/graduate-student-rights-responsibilities/article-two-academic-rights-and-responsibilities-for-graduate-students.html); [LSRR 2.4.1](https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/about/handbook/law-student-rights-and-responsibilities/article-two-academic-rights-and-responsibilities-for-law-students.html) and [MSRR](https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/about/handbook/medical-student-rights-responsibilities/article-two-academic-rights-and-responsibilities-for-medical-students.html) 2.4.1).
* Provide an inventory of the typical content of a student’s departmental file. **Policy Note:** Note that for teaching assistants a separate “personnel file” is prescribed by the GEU-MSU contract. This must be separate from the academic file.
* Inform the students of their right to access their educational records ([GSRR](https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/about/handbook/graduate-student-rights-responsibilities/article-three-student-records-at-michigan-state-university.html), [LSRR](https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/about/handbook/law-student-rights-and-responsibilities/article-three-student-records.html), and [MSRR](https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/about/handbook/medical-student-rights-responsibilities/article-three-student-records.html) 3.2.3) and explain the procedures to follow to view those records.
* Explain the policy for grading comprehensive/qualifying examinations and the policy for any remediation in case the student fails the exam or part of the exam.
* Provide explicit criteria used for dismissals due to academic deficiencies, including number of grades below 3.0 and number of failed attempts to pass qualifying exams and comprehensive exams that result in dismissal from the program.
* Explain deferred and incomplete grades and their consequences, including timelines for completion of these grades to maintain satisfactory progress toward a degree.

## Departmental Policies: Integrity and Safety in Research and Creative Activities

### Intent

Integrity in research and creative activities is based on sound disciplinary practices and 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. This section of the Handbook should state the program’s expectations for the responsible conduct of research and creative activities of graduate students ([GSRR 2.4.7](https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/about/handbook/graduate-student-rights-responsibilities/article-two-academic-rights-and-responsibilities-for-graduate-students.html)) and should present 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.

### Policy Recommendations

The academic unit will develop as part of its academic program mechanisms for communicating and discussing standards of professional integrity appropriate for the field.

The academic unit will inform students of MSU policy related to the involvement of [human subjects](http://hrpp.msu.edu/) and [vertebrate animals](https://animalcare.msu.edu/iacuc/) in research.

The academic unit will inform the student about the [Office for Environmental Health and Safety (EHS)](https://ehs.msu.edu/lab-clinic/index.html) regulations and policies related to laboratory safety and security.

The academic unit will provide students with information about safety when traveling for departmental/university purposes and will inform them about the [MSU Travel Clinic](http://travelclinic.msu.edu/).

The academic unit will provide students with information about [general MSU safety resources](https://msu.edu/state-transparency-reporting/campus-safety-information-resources).

The academic unit will provide information about safety in the classroom [including information about active shooters’ situations](https://comartsci.msu.edu/sites/default/files/documents/resources/safety-guidelines-for-active-shooter1.pdf).

The academic unit will provide information about [Relationship Violence and Sexual Misconduct (RVSM) policy and training](https://civilrights.msu.edu/policies/).

### What to Include

* State the program or college Responsible and Ethical Conduct of Research policy, plan, and training requirements of the unit and provide information on documenting and tracking these requirements. **Policy Note:** See MSU guidelines about [RECR training and unit-specific RECR plans](https://grad.msu.edu/researchintegrity).
* Link to the [MSU Guidelines on Authorship](https://rio.msu.edu/authorship) and include information on authorship norms related to the field.
* Link to [MSU’s Institutional Data Policy](https://tech.msu.edu/about/guidelines-policies/msu-institutional-data-policy/) and describe any additional norms or expectations guiding the use of data in the unit and/or field.
* Link to [MSU’s Procedures Concerning Allegations of Misconduct in Research and Creative Activities](https://hr.msu.edu/policies-procedures/faculty-academic-staff/faculty-handbook/misconduct_procedures.html).
* Provide explicit criteria for dismissal due to unethical or dishonest behavior while engaged in research, scholarly, and creative activities ([GSRR 2.4.9](https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/about/handbook/graduate-student-rights-responsibilities/article-two-academic-rights-and-responsibilities-for-graduate-students.html); [LSRR 2.4.1.5](https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/about/handbook/law-student-rights-and-responsibilities/article-two-academic-rights-and-responsibilities-for-law-students.html); [MSRR 2.4.1.5](https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/about/handbook/medical-student-rights-responsibilities/article-two-academic-rights-and-responsibilities-for-medical-students.html)).
* Define and explain the consequences of academic misconduct and include a link to MSU & college procedures after an academic dishonesty report (ADR) is filed. **Policy Note:** See MSU’s [Integrity of Scholarship & Grades](https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/about/handbook/regulations/student-group-regs-rulings-policies-ordinances/integrity-of-scholarship-and-grades.html) policy, [GSRR 8.1.2](https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/about/handbook/graduate-student-rights-responsibilities/article-eight-definitions.html), and [GSRR](https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/about/handbook/graduate-student-rights-responsibilities/article-five-adjudication-cases-involving-graduate-student-rights-and-responsibilities.html)/[LSRR](https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/about/handbook/law-student-rights-and-responsibilities/article-five-adjudication-of-cases.html)/[MSRR](https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/about/handbook/medical-student-rights-responsibilities/article-five-adjudication-of-cases.html), Article 5.
* Provide explicit criteria for what constitutes a violation of professional standards. Expectations about professional conduct should be set by the unit based upon the prevailing disciplinary standards and when appropriate by the standards demanded by external accrediting agencies.
* Provide instructions on how to obtain approval from the appropriate Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the respective involvement of [human subjects](http://hrpp.msu.edu/) and [vertebrate animals](https://animalcare.msu.edu/iacuc/) in research.
* Provide instruction on how to comply with regulations monitored by the EHS.

## Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution

### Intent

The University has established a judicial structure and process for hearing and adjudicating alleged violations of recognized graduate student rights and responsibilities ([GSRR](https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/about/handbook/graduate-student-rights-responsibilities/article-five-adjudication-cases-involving-graduate-student-rights-and-responsibilities.html)/[LSRR](https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/about/handbook/law-student-rights-and-responsibilities/article-five-adjudication-of-cases.html)/[MSRR](https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/about/handbook/medical-student-rights-responsibilities/article-five-adjudication-of-cases.html), Article 5). The first venue to resolve such conflicts informally or formally rests within the academic unit. Because the faculty advisor-graduate student relationship is so important, special attention should be given to the resolution of conflicts between a graduate student and their faculty advisor.

### Policy Recommendations

The academic unit will establish hearing procedures for the resolution of conflicts between a graduate student and their faculty advisor or guidance committee.

**Policy Notes**

* Units must have adopted a grievance procedure by January 1,2016 that conforms at least to [the template provided by the Ombudsperson](https://ombud.msu.edu/resources-self-help/conflict-grievance-systems), and it must be approved by the Ombudsperson’s office. If no specific grievance procedure is adopted, after January 1, 2016, the Ombudsperson’s template will default become the unit’s procedure.
* The academic unit will establish procedures for the timely change of the faculty advisor when such a change would best serve the progress of the graduate student in their program.
* When steps for conflict management between advisors and students are described, and the Chair or Graduate Program Director is identified as the mediator/arbitrator, make sure the policy also identifies options open to students whose major professors are in those administrative positions.

### What to Include

* Provide explicit expectations for graduate students’ professional behavior and explicit criteria for dismissal for failure to display professionally accepted behavior.
* Provide and explain the departmental/school policy for handling grievances and appeals.
* Provide explicit guidelines for dealing with conflicts of interest between students and faculty and between students.

## Work Related Policies

### Intent

This section should make explicit the units expectations concerning graduate students’ work related to graduate assistantships. All policies related to graduate assistantships must be consistent with [Article 4 of GSRR](https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/about/handbook/graduate-student-rights-responsibilities/article-four-graduate-student-support.html). For graduate assistants appointed as teaching assistants, the policy also must conform to the specifications of [the current MSU-GEU Contract](https://hr.msu.edu/contracts/documents/geu-2024-2028.pdf).

### Policy Recommendations

Provide a mechanism to inform teaching assistants about their rights and responsibilities under the current version of the contract between MSU and the GEU.

Make sure that any teaching experience required for graduate students, outside of TA assignments, are described and implemented within the constraints of the current GEU contract.

Provide a mechanism to inform all graduate students about their health insurance options.

### What to Include

* Explain the criteria for awarding, renewing, and terminating graduate assistantships, including length of eligibility, and the process used to evaluate the students’ performance. As appropriate, explain how summer semester processes might differ from academic year processes. (Cite MSU/GEU Contract, where appropriate.)
* Explain the English-language proficiency level (e.g., minimum score in [the SPEAK test](https://elc.msu.edu/tests/msu-speaking-test/)) expected of international teaching assistants. (See Academic Programs for [the minimum all-University standard of English proficiency](https://reg.msu.edu/AcademicPrograms/Text.aspx?Section=111#s335)).
* Explain the unit’s policy for graduate assistant leave and expectations about vacations and leave to attend professional meetings. One particular issue to address are work expectations outside of the academic year but within the contract dates, a common source of conflicts due to conflicting expectations. For example, you may want to add text specifying that the graduate assistant should clarify with their supervisor expectations for work in such periods.
* Explain any policies related to outside work for pay.
* Explain any policies concerning the use of departmental resources such as computers, offices, copy-machines, office supplies, mailboxes, and telephones.
* Explain policies related to medical leaves. Graduate teaching assistants (TAs) should refer to the medical leave policies in GEU contract Article 18 and other graduate assistants [refer to Academic Programs](https://reg.msu.edu/AcademicPrograms/Text.aspx?Section=111#s351).
* Refer to MSU policies on jury duty for TAs covered by the GEU contract.
* Explain the D2L system to support instruction and opportunities for tutorials on how to use the system.
* Explain the different graduate assistant levels; explain the policy for assigning levels and stipends within levels and explain enrollment requirements.
* Explain the [grief absence policy](https://reg.msu.edu/roinfo/notices/griefabsence.aspx). **Policy Note** (as approved by University Council): For master’s (Plan A), master’s (Plan B) with research responsibilities, and doctoral students, it is the responsibility of the student to: a) 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, b) provide appropriate verification of the grief absence as specified by the advisor/major professor and faculty, and c) 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: a) 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, b) receive verification of the authenticity of a grief absence request upon the student’s return, and c) make reasonable accommodations so that the student is not penalized due to a verified grief absence. If employed as an GA or TE, 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 in GEU contract Article 18.

## University Resources

### Intent

This section should provide a list of university resources available to all graduate students, particularly to those that apply to the field/mission of the unit. This section provides an opportunity for the unit to demonstrate their holistic commitment to graduate student success by highlighting university resources that support personal and professional development and students’ overall wellbeing (physical, mental, emotional, financial, and social health).

### What to Include

* Resources provided by the Graduate School:
* [Graduate Career Development](https://grad.msu.edu/gradcareerdevelopment)
* [Diversity, equity, & inclusion programs](https://grad.msu.edu/diversity)
* [Events](https://grad.msu.edu/calendar)
* [Forms](https://grad.msu.edu/forms)
* [Funding](https://grad.msu.edu/funding)
* [Graduate Educator Advancement and Teaching (GREAT)](https://grad.msu.edu/great)
* [Graduate School Office of Well-Being (GROW)](https://grad.msu.edu/GROW)
* [Mentoring](https://grad.msu.edu/optimizing-mentoring)
* [Out-of-State tuition waivers](https://grad.msu.edu/out-state-tuition-waiver-external-fellowships-traineeships-and-internships)
* [Policy information](https://grad.msu.edu/policies-and-procedures)
* [Professional development](https://grad.msu.edu/professional-development)
* [Research integrity](https://grad.msu.edu/researchintegrity)
* [Traveling scholar opportunities](https://grad.msu.edu/traveling-scholar)
* [University Committee on Graduate Studies](https://grad.msu.edu/UCGS)
* Resources provided by university-level units such as [OISS](https://oiss.isp.msu.edu/), [RCPD](https://www.rcpd.msu.edu/), [Office of Spartan Experiences](https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/index.html), [the Libraries](https://lib.msu.edu/), [the Olin Health Center](https://olin.msu.edu/), [Institutional Diversity and Inclusion](https://inclusion.msu.edu/), [the Burgess Institute for Entrepreneurship & Innovation](https://entrepreneurship.msu.edu/), [the Writing Center](http://writing.msu.edu/), and [University Outreach & Engagement](https://engage.msu.edu/), and [the Ombudsperson’s Office](http://ombud.msu.edu/).
* Resources provided by the Student Life & Engagement Division such as the [Student Parent Resource Center](https://studentparents.msu.edu/), the [Gender and Sexuality Campus Center](https://gscc.msu.edu/), the [Student Veterans Resource Center](https://veterans.msu.edu/), and [Women’s Student Services](https://wss.msu.edu/).
* Resources provided by the unit, the college, and field-specific professional societies. For example, explain your department procedure for how students might apply for various funding opportunities including travel funds or research enhancement funds.
* Opportunities for leadership development, community building, and service to the unit (graduate student organizations including [COGS](https://cogs.msu.edu/), committees, etc.).