

GRADUATE COORDINATOR HANDBOOK

Academic Year 2022-23

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The Graduate Program Coordinator at USM

The position Graduate Program Coordinator (GC) at The University of Southern Mississippi as defined in the [Academic Program Coordinator Policy](#) meets the criteria defined by SACSCOC standard 6.2c. A critical member of a school's graduate faculty, the GC is selected by the school director based on qualifications and credentials and approved by the Dean of the College, Dean of the Graduate School, and the Senior Associate Provost for Institutional Effectiveness. The GC provides informed leadership and oversight for the program(s) and serves as the liaison between the program faculty and students and the Graduate School. The GC must be familiar with Graduate School policies and procedures and willing to seek counsel from the Graduate School as needed to ensure accurate implementation. The GC communicates effectively with program faculty to ensure students receive appropriate guidance and have the opportunity for success.

I. Overview of Graduate Coordinator Responsibilities Expected by the Graduate School

Recruitment, Admission, and Enrollment:

- Leads a program's recruiting efforts; coordinates outreach to prospects
- Is familiar with the CRM; provides guidance and leadership to a program's review committee; ensures applications are reviewed and decisioned in a timely manner.
- Follows up with admitted applicants to encourage enrollment.

Policies and Procedures:

- Is familiar with Graduate School policies and procedures and/or how to find them in the Graduate Bulletin or website.
- Works with the school's budget manager to ensure graduate assistant hiring or termination paperwork is submitted prior to Graduate School deadlines; provides guidance to faculty on detailing job responsibilities in the offer letter.
- Reviews the program information in the Graduate Bulletin annually to provide updates and ensure accuracy in time for publication in the fall Graduate Bulletin; provides the Graduate School with a list of itemized program changes annually so degree progress reports (DPRs) can be updated as needed.

Student Success and Retention:

- Informs graduate faculty and graduate students of policies and deadlines; works closely with graduate degree auditor to ensure degree progress forms are completed and submitted electronically either in SOAR or to the Graduate School according to deadlines.
- Ensures advisors review their students' transcripts at the end of each semester to identify and remediate academic problems.
- Provides leadership for faculty in setting goals and expectations for their students enrolled in thesis or dissertation hours each semester.
- Encourages students to take advantage of professional development and career exploration opportunities.

Program Review

- Assists with periodic review and assessment of programs to evaluate market demand, relevance to the contemporary job market, high standards and quality, and effectiveness.

II. Graduate Admissions and Prospect/Applicant Communications

Graduate School Admissions staff coordinate the application process for all domestic graduate applicants. They answer prospect and applicant queries; lead campus tours; process all received transcripts, test scores, and other documents; calculate GPAs; and audit final decision recommendations. Additionally, they maintain all graduate applications and information on application requirements and admission terms. Application information and Graduate School staff contacts are included below.

A. Graduate Admissions Staff and Contact Information

Elisabeth McBride, M.S., Associate Director for Graduate Admissions
Room 146 J.B. George Building
E: Elisabeth.Mcbride@usm.edu
P: (601) 266-5184

Kentrice Easley, B.U.S., Admissions Evaluator
Room 145 J.B. George Building
Kentrice.Easley@usm.edu
P: (601) 266-6847

Juliana Rouse, M.S., Admissions Evaluator
Room 144 J.B. George Building
E: Juliana.Rouse@usm.edu
P: (601) 266-6867

Elizabeth Shoemake, Senior Associate Director for International Admissions
Room 401 International Center
E: Elizabeth.Shoemake@usm.edu
P: (601) 266-5645

Shaadi Shoubaki, M.A., Assistant Director for Professional Development and Outreach
Room 149 J.B. George Building
E: Shaadi.Shoubaki@usm.edu
P: (601) 266-4736

Main Admissions Office
E: graduateschool@usm.edu
P: (601) 266-5137

International Admissions Office
E: intladmissions@usm.edu
P: (601) 266-5645

Whom to contact for specific admission information:

- For CRM training, fee waivers, and any changes to application: Elisabeth McBride
- For other general domestic admissions questions: main admissions office

- For questions regarding specific international applicants: Elizabeth Shoemake
- For general international admissions questions: International Admissions
- For assistance with outreach and communication plans in Slate: Shaadi Shoubaki

B. Application Requirements

The following documents are standard requirements:

- Completed application with application fee payment (\$60)
- Official transcripts (Partial transcripts are accepted for review, but official transcripts must be on file for the student to matriculate)
- Official test scores (if required by the program)
- Letters of recommendation

All admission requirements are detailed in the [Graduate Bulletin](#), which is linked to specific programs under [Graduate Admissions](#). The Admission Requirements section within the program description of the Graduate Bulletin must include any additional program-specific requirements and/or documents needed to complete the application. These additional requirements must also be displayed prominently on the school website and in print materials.

Graduate Coordinators should review the Graduate Bulletin annually and notify the registrar's office (Dawn Porter Dawn.Porter@usm.edu) if minor editorial changes are needed. Any modifications to a program's admission policies or curriculum requirements must be proposed through Curriculog for approval by Graduate Council and the Provost. The Graduate Bulletin is updated annually and published each fall.

C. Graduate School Application Deadlines

Deadlines are located on the Graduate Admissions [website](#). Programs may have earlier deadlines. If so, the deadlines must be displayed prominently on the school website.

D. Communications with Applicants

Graduate Admissions runs automated communication plans designed to move applicants through the application process. Post admission, admits are notified of their next steps. In the month prior to the start of the semester, a final set of reminder emails is sent to all admitted students. New admits who have not enrolled are prompted to enroll in classes. See diagram below for details.

In addition to applicant emails, prospects who have completed an inquiry request are contacted. This set of emails includes information about USM, including a program-specific email provided by the school to Graduate Admissions.

Graduate Coordinators who are interested in creating automated emails for prospects, applicants, or new admits, should contact Shaadi Shoubaki (shaadi.shoubaki@usm.edu) to schedule a meeting. If the program is an online program, the Office of Online Learning should be contacted to discuss prospective student communications.

Email Communications from Admissions (Prospects → New Students)

Prospect
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Message from the Dean• Program-specific Communication• Apply Now• Campus Visit• We're here to help• Apply Now
Applicant
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Submission Reminders• Pay Application Fee Reminders• Missing Requirements Reminders• Requirement Receipt Notifications• Application sent to Program• Application Decided
Admitted Student
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Getting Started Brochure• Contact Program for Advisement• Campus ID and Email• Payment Policy• Enrollment Response• Online Orientation• MMR reminder• Final Transcript Reminder• Off Campus Housing
New Students
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Classes starting soon• Student ID and Textbooks• Parking and Transit• Enrollment Reminders

E. Application Review

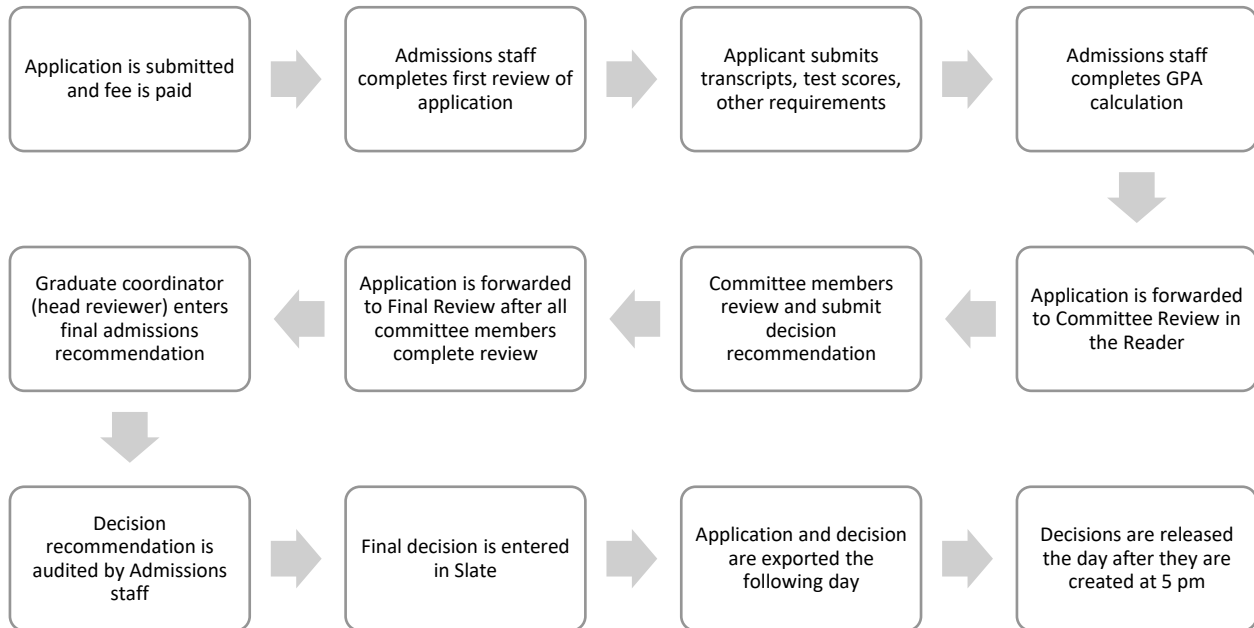
Slate (<https://graduateadmissions.usm.edu/manage/>) is the customer relationship management solution (CRM) for admissions and enrollment management. Slate is used for admission applications, applicant review, and communicating with prospects, applicants, and new admits. To obtain user access or schedule training, Graduate Coordinators should contact Elisabeth McBride (Elisabeth.Mcbride@usm.edu).

- Please note that all applications must be decided in a timely manner, well in advance of the requested start semester. **No applicant may be left without a decision.**
- Following review of the application and a decision by the school, the decision will be reviewed by the Graduate School.
 - If the decision complies with graduate admissions policies, the applicant will receive official notification of acceptance from the dean of the Graduate School.
 - If the decision does not comply with graduate admissions policies, the graduate coordinator or head reviewer will be asked to change the decision to either conditional admission (if eligible) or deny.

- Schools **may not** inform applicants of admittance prior to the Graduate School’s review.

Note: To sign-up for training sessions, request access for a new user, or review training materials, please visit <https://www.usm.edu/graduate-school/internalportal/slate-faculty-resources.php>

Schematic Overview of the Application Process



F. Change of Start Requests by Admitted Applicants

Offers of admission are for a specific term. However, applicants may request to change their admission term, with program approval, for up to one semester (excluding Summer). The admitted student must complete a deferral request, located on the [graduate admissions webpage](#). After the request is submitted, a graduate admissions staff member will contact the graduate coordinator for approval through Slate. When approval is received, the office will coordinate with the student and the registrar’s office to drop any enrollments and update the admit term. Deferral requests can be time sensitive, as enrollments cannot be dropped after the 5th day of the term. Requests to defer cannot be processed if the student was enrolled in classes after the 5th day of the term. In those instances, the student must apply for readmission.

G. New Graduate Student Orientation

Graduate student orientation is fully online in Canvas and includes modules on Academic Integrity, Research Integrity, Title IX, Student Accessibility Services, and Progress to Degree. New students will receive notification of their enrollment in the orientation course during the first week of classes. After

reviewing the course modules, students should complete the required quiz, where they will acknowledge their review of the information and upload their CITI results. Students will not be eligible to enroll in their second semester of coursework until they have completed the required quiz.

III. Graduate Assistantships

The Graduate School allocates graduate stipend and tuition waiver budgets to deans of the colleges. Deans assess school needs to determine internal distribution of the stipend budget to schools. Assistance with undergraduate teaching is prioritized, followed by support for the research, clinical, and professional missions of each school. Ideally, an assistantship should strengthen the student's professional skills in alignment with their field of study. Hiring a GA to be a service assistant is strongly discouraged.

A. Contact Information

Shelby Flores, M.P.A., Assistant to the Dean for Finance and Administration
Room 148 J.B. George Building
E: Shelby.Flores@usm.edu
P: (601) 266-4733

B. Important Facts for Hiring GAs

1. Graduate assistantships cannot be offered to applicants before a positive **regular** admission decision is made and verified by the Graduate School. Applicants may be informed of the benefits of an assistantship and that *if accepted* they will be eligible for an assistantship (if they do, in fact, meet eligibility requirements).
2. Conditionally-admitted students **are not** eligible for an assistantship. Following a successful first semester (GPA of 3.0 on at least 9 credit hours), the student's status can be changed to regular, and they will become eligible for an assistantship.
3. **Minimum** Stipends are as follows, based on a 20 hour work week. GAs may be paid more than the minimum:
 - AY 2022-23: \$8,700 for a 9-month contract; \$4,350 per semester
 - AY 2023-24: \$10,200 for a 9-month contract; \$5,100 per semester
 - AY 2024-25: \$11,700 for a 9-month contract; \$5,850 per semester
4. Tuition Waiver: Full-time (0.5 FTE; 20 hours/week) will receive a full tuition waiver (covering 9-13 hours), including non-resident tuition if needed. Half-time (0.25 FTE; 10 hours/week) GAs will receive a 50% tuition waiver, including non-resident tuition if needed, and the student is responsible for the remaining 50%. Both full-time and half-time GAs are responsible for all additional fees.
5. Award Memorandum and Addendum: Templates for these documents are located on the [Advisor/Department Completion forms](#) webpage and must be used for all GAs. Supervisors must list specific duties assigned to the GA on the Award Memorandum. If additional award information is needed, it must be included on the Addendum template. No other types of award documentation will be accepted.
6. Hiring Paperwork:

- a. The deadline to submit summer 2023 paperwork is April 14, 2023, and the deadline for fall 2023 paperwork is June 30, 2023. Late paperwork may result in the student being unable to start work on time or delay of the first paycheck.
 - b. Hiring dates for summer 2023 are May 17, 2023 through August 16, 2023, and fall 2023 hiring dates are August 17, 2023 through May 16, 2024.
 - c. GAs may not begin working until all hiring paperwork, including award memoranda, tuition waiver request forms, background checks, I-9s, and PAFs are completed with HR. If it is discovered that a student did not complete the paperwork for which they are responsible prior to beginning work, they must cease working immediately. These students may be terminated, or stipend and tuition waivers may be prorated. A student working as a GA prior to clearance of all required hiring paperwork is a violation of federal law and renders the University subject to penalties and fines.
 - d. Fall/Spring tuition waivers will be prorated if a student is not on campus and ready to work by the 15th of the month after school starts (September 15 for fall; February 15 for spring).
7. Checklist for Tracking GA Hiring Paperwork: This checklist can be viewed by running a query that is available to budget managers upon request. It tracks the status of documents submitted to the Graduate School and/or HR by indicating whether the document has been received (complete) or not (incomplete).
 8. Tuition Waiver Request Forms: These forms may be saved to alleviate redundant paperwork each semester. Budget managers should save their student's forms, update enrollment and other changes, and submit each semester.
 9. Enrollment: GAs must remain enrolled in at least 9 **graduate level** credit hours (maximum 13 hours) for the fall/spring term. If receiving a summer tuition waiver, the student must enroll in 1 – 3 hours of graduate-level coursework. There is no guarantee of summer tuition support beyond 3 hours. GAs must contact the Graduate School **before** making any changes to their enrollment, including swapping/adding/dropping classes, as they may incur a financial obligation to the university.
 10. Work Hours: GAs are expected to work 20 hours per week as a full-time GA and 10 hours per week as a half-time GA. GA duties may not exceed the expected hours, but GAs generally need to work beyond expected hours on their own time to make progress on their research or creative activities. Any allowances for missed work during Spring Break, intercessions, or scheduled vacations are at the discretion of the supervisor and should be consistent with the unit's expectations.

C. Health Insurance

GA [Health insurance](#) is managed by Human Resources, and inquiries should be directed there by calling (601) 266-4050. Domestic GAs may choose to waive enrollment in the policy or they will be automatically enrolled. International GAs do not have the option to waive enrollment and will be automatically enrolled. Health insurance is subsidized at 50% for all GAs enrolled with USM's GA health insurance provider.

D. New Teaching Assistant (TA) Workshop

Prior to the start of the fall semester (typically during Faculty First Week), the Graduate School partners with the Center for Faculty Development to host two half-day teaching assistant workshops (generally). On day 1, new TAs attend CFD's workshop with new faculty on academic policies such as FERPA,

Academic Integrity, Student Accessibility Services, etc. On day 2, TAs hear presentations from ACUE-credentialed faculty on various aspects of course management, professional behavior in the TA role, and other topics that equip them for the classroom. Attendance is mandatory for new TA's, excluding those who receive comparable training from their home school. Dates and times are announced during early summer.

E. Policies for Graduate Assistants

1. **External Employment:** Any employment outside the University (external employment) is discouraged, and external full time employment is prohibited for GAs. GAs wishing to participate in external employment must complete the [Graduate Assistant External Employment Request Form](#) that requires justification, a time-management plan, and permission at multiple levels. If granted, this permission must be requested and approved annually.
2. **Leave of Absence Policy:** Under special circumstances (illness, family hardship, military service etc.) a student may request a leave of absence from a graduate program. A leave of absence may be granted for one semester or longer as circumstances warrant. Requests for a leave of absence must be submitted via the [Leave of Absence Request Form](#) to the school director. If approved, the director should forward the Leave of Absence Form to the Graduate School indicating the school's recommendation regarding leave.
3. **Maternity Leave for Graduate Assistants Policy:** This policy identifies ways a graduate assistant can access work release during and after pregnancy as needed. Completion of the [Leave of Absence Request Form](#) with appropriate approvals is required.

IV. Degree Progress and Audits

Graduate degree auditors are responsible for archiving supporting documentation of graduate student degree progress and verifying that all requirements for the degree are met prior to awarding the degree. The auditor performs a preliminary audit after a student applies for graduation, prior to the semester of anticipated graduation, to determine if a student is on track for graduation. The degree auditor performs a final audit to verify completion of all Graduate School and program requirements prior to posting the degree. The Registrar awards diplomas. Graduates typically receive diplomas 6-8 weeks after the end of the semester.

A. Contact Information

Brittney Hawkins, B.S., Assistant Director for Graduate Program Management
Room 151 J.B. George Building
E: Brittney.M.Hawkins@usm.edu
P: (601) 266-4181

Areas of responsibility:

College of Arts and Sciences (including the following schools only)

- Center for STEM Education
- School of Biological, Environmental, and Earth Sciences
- School of Computing Sciences and Computer Engineering
- School of Criminal Justice, Forensic Science, and Security
- School of Mathematics and Natural Sciences

- School of Ocean Science and Engineering
 - School of Polymer Science and Engineering
- College of Business and Economic Development
College of Nursing and Health Professions

Erica Brock, B.S.B.A., Degree Auditor

Room 150 J.B. George Building

E: Erica.Brock@usm.edu

P: (601) 266-5136

Areas of responsibility:

College of Arts and Sciences (including the following schools only)

- School of Coastal Resilience
- School of Humanities
- School of Interdisciplinary Studies
- School of Media and Communication
- School of Music
- School of Performing and Visual Arts
- School of Social Science and Global Studies

College of Education and Human Sciences

B. Policies and Resources Associated with Academic Standing and Progress to Degree

These policies are included or linked in the [General Degree Requirements](#) and [General Academic Information](#) sections of the Graduate Bulletin. The following forms may be accessed via the Graduate School website. Some forms are password protected. Graduate Coordinators may contact their degree auditor for the password.

1. [Resources](#) and Forms for Faculty and Staff

- The following forms are currently located on the Graduate School website in [Advisor/Department Completion Forms](#). All required signatures must be collected electronically and the forms submitted electronically to the appropriate degree auditor. The timely submission of forms is extremely important to the work of degree auditors and the documents specialist. See the “When to Complete It” column of the forms table for deadlines.
 - Change of Emphasis/Degree Change
 - Course Waiver
 - Course Substitution
 - Dismissal
 - Oral Defense Results
 - Revalidation Verification
 - Thesis/Dissertation/Doctoral Project Document Approval
 - Transfer Credit Approval
- The following forms are located in SOAR and are accessible via the Graduate School Forms tile. See [Instructions](#) for completing forms.
 - Comprehensive and Qualifying Results

- Thesis, Dissertation, Doctoral Project Proposal Approval
 - Committee Request Form
2. [Progress to Degree and Graduation Forms](#) for student use during the degree program
- The following [forms](#) are located on the Graduate School website
 - Commencement Request and Program Form
 - Course Retake
 - Embargo Agreement
 - Leave of Absence Request
 - Survey of Earned Doctorates
 - Graduate Out of Career Course Request
 - The following forms are accessible through the student's SOAR account
 - Application for Graduate Degree/Certificate
 - Graduation Deferment Request
 - Committee Request
3. Frequently-Used Policies (See the [General Degree Requirements](#) section of the Graduate Bulletin for accompanying policies)
- Academic Integrity: Academic and research integrity are critical to high standards in graduate education. Incidents of academic or research misconduct will incur sanctions. Students are responsible for understanding the policy and sanctions as defined in the [Academic Integrity Policy](#).
 - Course Grade Requirements and GPA: A minimum of 3.0 GPA in coursework is required for graduation. No grade below a C is acceptable in **any** graduate-level coursework attempted. No more than two grades of C+ or C across six credit hours is allowable in any graduate-level coursework. Some programs require a higher GPA and further restrict the number of allowable C grades for graduation. Students who fail to meet these requirements and remain in good academic standing will be placed on probation.
 - Continuous Enrollment: Continuous enrollment through the semester of graduation is required for doctoral students only following completion of all coursework required for the degree program and passing the comprehensive exam. The complete policy is located in the [Graduate Bulletin](#).
 - Course Retake Policy: On the recommendation of a student's graduate committee or advisor, a student may retake one course throughout the entire degree program to improve the grade point average (GPA). The original grade in the course will remain on the transcript, but it will be excluded from the calculation of the GPA once the retake has been recorded. The [Course Retake Form](#) must be submitted to the Graduate School during the semester the course is retaken. If a student intends to retake a course to raise the GPA and/or be removed from probation, the course must be retaken as soon as possible (at the next opportunity). The course retake policy does not apply to the grade XF, which differs from an F. An XF is a sanction indicating violation of the Academic Integrity Policy, and it cannot be removed from the transcript. A

graduate student cannot graduate with an XF on the transcript and must be dismissed from their graduate program. A student receiving an XF has a right to appeal the sanction by following the procedure in the Academic Integrity Policy.

- Time Limits for Degrees and Courses: Students who exceed the time limit for their degree program will be dismissed by the Graduate School. These students, like all others, have the right to [appeal the dismissal](#). The time limits for degrees and courses are listed below. Transfer credit will not be awarded for courses that will “time out” before the degree is completed.
 - Doctorate (all) = 8 years
 - Specialist (EdS) = 6 years
 - Master’s (all) = 5 years
 - MLIS + LIS certificate (simultaneous enrollment) = 6 years
- Transfer Credit: Students may transfer up to 33% of the required credit hours from accredited institutions. However, transfer credit is subject to time limitations on coursework (see above), and other stipulations listed in the policy.
 - *Note that if a student is using a transfer course for a course substitution, both the [Transfer Credit Approval Form](#) (password protected) and the [Request for Graduate Program Course Substitution Form](#) must be submitted together to the degree auditor.*
- Extensions after Exceeding Time Limit for a Degree: Extensions of time on a degree program are not automatic. The Dean of the Graduate School will consider requests for a brief time extension (typically up to one year) for students who exceed the time limit if the request is well justified, includes substantial evidence of recent degree progress, and is supported by the committee chair, graduate coordinator, and school director. The request must be accompanied by a completion plan.
- Completion Plan: When a student is within one year of their time to degree expiring, the Graduate School will request a completion plan from the student’s advisor. The completion plan will be developed in consultation with the student and must be signed by the student. It must outline a specific step-by-step timeline for timely degree completion. The completion plan must be approved by the Dean of the Graduate School. A completion plan template and instructions will be provided upon request by the degree auditor.
- Course Revalidation: A student who successfully petitions for an extension of the time limit for graduation must revalidate (up to 50%) or repeat (any courses above 50%) graduate courses taken at USM that are outside their time limit. The [Course Revalidation Policy](#), which provides explicit details and an explanation of fees, must be consulted before a revalidation plan is devised. Over-age transfer courses cannot be revalidated. A [Revalidation Verification of Graduate Course\(s\) form](#) must be submitted to the degree auditor when revalidations are completed.

- Incomplete (I) Grade Policy: An incomplete (I) may be assigned when a student is unable to complete course requirements by the end of the term because of extraordinary circumstances beyond their control. Poor performance or unexplained absences are not justification for the assignment of an I, nor should the I be used to lengthen the semester for a student who fails to meet deadlines. If an I has not been removed by the end of the next full semester (excluding summer term), it automatically becomes an F and the student must repeat the course (if they have an available retake).
 - Grade changes are not accepted once the I becomes an F.
 - Students may not enroll in any course for which their current grade is I.
 - The I grade is not used for thesis or dissertation hours.

- Satisfactory (S), Unsatisfactory (U), and Pass (P) Grades: S, U, and P grades are assigned to reflect student performance in thesis/dissertation (698, 798, 898) courses.
 - Advisors should provide students with a syllabus outlining expectations for satisfactory performance. If a student does not meet the expectations of satisfactory performance, a U must be assigned. (A [template](#) for such a syllabus is located on the Graduate School website).
 - A student who receives a U will be placed on probation. The probation hold will be removed if the student earns an S the following semester. If a student earns two consecutive semesters of S, the instructor may request a grade change to replace the U with an S.
 - A second U earned at any point in the student's program will result in automatic dismissal from the program.
 - The P is reserved for the terminal semester or semester in which the thesis or dissertation is defended, finalized, and submitted in final form to Aquila.

- Probation: Each semester degree auditors run a "low grade" report that pulls grades of C+ and below, U grades, and GPAs to identify students whose academic performance requires probation. The degree auditor places the student on probation, places a block on next term registration, and contacts the graduate coordinator. The graduate coordinator should have a conversation with the student prior to requesting the block be removed.
 - *Note the graduate coordinator should contact students who are placed on probation each semester to inform them of restrictions while on probation, requirements to be removed from probation, and the consequences of not returning to good academic standing.*

- Dismissal from a Degree Program: Dismissals are the appropriate sanction for unsatisfactory academic progress under a number of circumstances.
 - Please see the Graduate Student Dismissal [Policy](#) for grounds for dismissal, the protocol for dismissal of a student from a graduate program, and a link to the Dismissal Form.
 - *Note a **termination review** between the student's advisor/school director and the student to discuss the reasons for the dismissal is the first step of the protocol and is frequently overlooked.*

- All dismissed students have the right to appeal using the Graduate School Appeal and Grievance Process.
- [Graduate School Appeal and Grievance Process](#): Graduate Students may use this detailed process to appeal dismissals or other academic decisions made by their major school or the Graduate School. To initiate an appeal, the student must notify the school director by letter or email and notify the Graduate School concurrently via a link to a form that is provided in the dismissal letter.
- Change of Status for Conditionally-Admitted Students: The first semester of enrollment is a probationary semester for conditionally-admitted students. A conditionally-admitted student must earn a 3.0 GPA on the first 9 hours of graduate coursework.
 - If the GPA requirement is met, the Graduate School will change the student's status to regular admit.
 - If the GPA requirement is not met, the student must be dismissed from the degree program.

C. Preliminary Audits

Preliminary audits are triggered by the student's submission of an application to graduate and are completed by the degree auditor prior to the beginning of the anticipated graduation semester. The preliminary audit may reveal deficiencies in the student's degree progress that must be completed prior to graduation. Thus, the graduate coordinator should review preliminary audits, paying particular attention to the following:

- "I" grades
- Missing course retake forms
- Incomplete coursework
- Completion of CITI training

D. Additional Concerns Noted by Degree Auditors

The following are frequent areas of concern recognized by degree auditors:

1. Timely submission of forms (See "When Should You Complete It" on the [Advisor/Department Completion Forms page](#)). The following are examples of frequently tardy forms:
 - Results of Comprehensive/Qualifying exam and Oral Defense Results. (These results should be submitted immediately after the exam).
 - Graduate Committee Requests and changes. (Requests to add external members should be submitted after the committee is entered in SOAR).
2. Awareness of student progress
 - Graduate coordinators should work with faculty advisors to ensure each graduate student's academic progress is monitored each semester to prevent fatal academic problems and to devise remediation plans as necessary.
3. Misinformation about policies
 - Misinforming students about academic policies can mislead and create erroneous expectations, thus necessitating exceptions to academic policy that devalue quality. If

unsure of an academic policy or procedure, graduate coordinators should contact the degree auditor for information rather than providing incorrect information to students.

V. Theses, Doctoral Projects, and Dissertations

Theses, dissertations, and doctoral projects are the culminating documents presented to the University to record and archive research, creative works, and professional projects completed in the partial fulfillment of the requirements of master's, specialist, and doctoral degrees. The Graduate School assists students in formatting and finalizing their documents for submission to the USM Libraries digital repository, *Aquila*.

A. Contact Information

Dr. Jon Snyder, Documents Specialist
Room 141 J.B. George Building
E: Jonathan.Snyder@usm.edu
P: (601) 266-4372

B. Instructions and Formatting

The Graduate School [Current Students](#) webpage includes information to assist graduate students in completing a thesis, doctoral project, or dissertation. The site includes three sections:

1. Instructions: contain Document Guidelines, Turnitin and Aquila instructions, Final Submission Checklist, etc.
2. Templates: contain four Word templates and a separate title page template. Students are required to use one of the Word templates to format their thesis, doctoral project, or dissertation (excluding students in the School of Mathematics and Natural Sciences or others who use LaTeX templates).
3. Steps to Completion: is an overview of items students must complete to finalize their document.

C. Other Helpful Information

1. Students are required to check their document for originality using Turnitin and share the results with their committee chair. The committee chair must complete the [Thesis/Dissertation/Doctoral Project Document Approval Form](#), including the student's Turnitin score, and email it to the Documents Specialist to confirm they have reviewed the report. Submission of the Approval Form alerts the Documents Specialist that the document is ready to be reviewed. Committee chairs should always evaluate documents carefully for originality, but if the Turnitin originality report exceeds 25%, the committee chair must scrutinize the report to determine the reason.
 - If, after review, the chair is certain the student did not commit plagiarism, the chair must provide an explanation for the score. (For example, the student may have used material they published previously, or they may have used terms or phrases common to the field to express a well-accepted concept).
 - If, after review, the chair believes the originality score is a result of plagiarism, the committee chair should consult the [Student Academic Integrity Policy](#) for guidance on reporting and sanctions.

2. Submission to Aquila: When the student submits to Aquila for Graduate School review, the document is expected to be polished (including committee revisions and grammar), and the document should be in the appropriate template. The [Thesis/Dissertation/Doctoral Project Approval Form](#) also serves to confirm the committee chair has **reviewed** the document and **approved** the formatting, grammar, content, bibliography, and originality.

Faculty must understand that Aquila is an open access digital repository, and the quality of the thesis or dissertation reflects on both them and the University.

Progress to Degree and Graduation Deadlines

Spring	Deadlines (Deadlines do not change, even if the date falls on a weekend)
Thesis, Dissertation, or Doctoral Project Proposal Form	November 1; semester before graduation
Application for Degree	November 1; semester before graduation
Commencement Form (Doctoral and MFA candidates only)	February 25
Results of Oral Defense	March 20
Thesis/Dissertation/Project Approval Form	March 27
Aquila Submission	March 27
Final Aquila Submission	April 29
Survey of Earned Doctorates	April 29
Comprehensive Exam Results	Masters students: Friday of Exam Week
	Doctoral students: Immediately following completion of coursework
Summer	Deadlines (Deadlines do not change, even if the date falls on a weekend)
Thesis, Dissertation, or Doctoral Project Proposal Form	April 1; Semester before Graduation
Application for Degree	April 1; Semester before Graduation
Commencement Form (Doctoral and MFA candidates only)	September 20 (Summer graduates participate in Fall commencement ceremony)
Results of Oral Defense	June 14
Thesis/Dissertation/Project Approval Form	June 21
Initial Aquila Submission	June 21

Final Aquila Submission	July 24
Survey of Earned Doctorates	July 24
Comprehensive Exam Results	Masters students: Friday of Exam Week
	Doctoral students: Immediately following completion of coursework
Fall	Deadlines (Deadlines do not change, even if the date falls on a weekend)
Thesis, Dissertation, or Doctoral Project Proposal Form	July 1; semester before graduation
Application for Degree	July 1; semester before graduation
Commencement Form (Doctoral and MFA candidates only)	September 20
Results of Oral Defense	October 11
Thesis/Dissertation/Project Approval Form	October 18
Initial Aquila Submission	October 18
Final Aquila Submission	December 1
Survey of Earned Doctorates	November 28
Comprehensive Exam Results	Masters students: Friday of Exam Week
	Doctoral students: Immediately following completion of coursework

VI. Professional Development

The Graduate School, partnering frequently with the [Center for Faculty Development](#) and other campus offices, provides many opportunities for students to develop their professional skills beyond the requirements of their degree programs. The goal is to help students develop skills that will set them apart in the increasingly-competitive job market and position them for successful careers.

A. Contact Information

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B. Professional Development Opportunities

Opportunities currently offered by the Graduate School include skills development in communication and grant-writing, travel support, teaching assistant training, the Professionals in Preparation microcredential, and others. Some of these are listed as [Opportunities for Professional Development](#) on the Graduate School website. Other opportunities are announced via email as they arise. Graduate Coordinators should inform their students about the importance of professional development and encourage students to participate in opportunities available to them.

VII. McNair Scholars Program

The Ronald E. McNair Post-baccalaureate Achievement Program (McNair Scholars Program), a U.S. Department of Education-funded TRiO program, aims to increase the number of Ph.Ds. in academia who are from minority and first generation/low income backgrounds. USM's McNair Program recruits eligible, high-achieving students in the junior or senior year of undergraduate study from all disciplines who aspire to earn a Ph.D. and pursue an academic career. McNair Scholars receive instruction and mentorship designed to prepare them for research and to "demystify" graduate school so they make an easier transition and understand the expectations of graduate school.

A. Contact Information

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McNair Classroom: Room 142 J.B. George Building

B. Program Highlights

Scholars in the McNair Program receive a stipend and participate in:

- Mentored research
- Summer McNair coursework
- Professional conferences
- Site visits to graduate schools at other universities

A call for applications is issued each fall semester. Any assistance graduate coordinators can provide to identify prospective Scholars from their undergraduate population is welcomed.

AT-A-GLANCE CONTACT INFORMATION

Graduate School Website: <https://www.usm.edu/graduate-school/>

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