

# Department of Community Sustainability



## Master's and PhD Graduate Handbook 2025-2026

### **Why and How to Use This Handbook**

This handbook provides the most recent policies and procedures (as of time of publication) that guide our graduate program expectations, requirements, rights, and responsibilities. They derive from a combination of the policies and practices of Michigan State University, the MSU Graduate School, the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, and the Department of Community Sustainability. Current and prospective students should familiarize themselves with the handbook and use it as a resource when questions related to specific policies, timelines, and procedures arise. Note that each student should follow the program requirements identified in the handbook version relevant to the year in which they started their program (unless one has officially changed their program). If there is a significant policy change during a student's program, in conversation with their advisor, students may choose to follow either the new or old policy. If there is a mistake in the handbook about program requirements, the university-approved academic program requirements supersede those in the handbook.

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## Introduction and Overview

The CSUS graduate program is designed for students interested in community sustainability issues in domestic and/or international contexts. Broadly speaking, CSUS faculty, academic staff, and graduate students focus our work on social, environmental, community, energy, and agricultural/food systems in order to strive for an ecologically and socially sustainable and just world. These themes are very broad, and they overlap not only with each other but also with issues around sustainable tourism and protected area management. We apply our work in these areas in domestic and international settings, with numerous faculty and graduate students working in the context of international development.

**Our vision** is to lead and aid in the development and revitalization of sustainable communities, thus enhancing the capacity of current and future generations to reach their potential.

**Our mission** is to assist the development of sustainable communities by conducting excellent scholarly research, teaching, and outreach in:

- education and civic engagement
- community, food, and agriculture
- natural resources, land use, and the environment
- recreation and tourism systems
- international development

**Our work** addresses critical issues at the interfaces of agriculture, natural resources, recreation, tourism, and communities. Our public scholarship of research, teaching, and outreach helps people in their roles as residents, landowners, businesses, and governmental and non-profit institutions to make informed decisions with a goal of not compromising future generations. Our work ranges from local to global. Students work closely with faculty advisors to identify course requirements and to define a research or professional project.

The Department of Community Sustainability offers four different graduate programs; three of which are guided by this handbook (the exception is the MA in AFNR Education, which has its own handbook): MS-A and MS-B master's degrees and a PhD in Community Sustainability. The MS-A is a research-focused degree, for which a thesis is required while the MS-B is a professional degree, for which a professional project is required. The Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Community Sustainability is designed to enable students to generate new knowledge and learn to apply their scholarship to practice in complementary fields responsive to rapidly changing social, natural, and agricultural conditions. Our programs allow flexibility within an interdisciplinary approach, and result in strong and marketable advanced degrees. Students may obtain positions or create professional careers in public, private non-profit, and private for-profit sectors. Some doctoral students will seek faculty positions and join the academy, both in the United States and abroad.

## Our Values

We value:

- the development of professional, technical, and specialized knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to help diverse individuals and communities improve their quality of life and the environments in which they live.
- the promotion of social responsibility and development of a broad understanding and awareness of education and civic engagement; community food and agriculture; natural resources, land use, and the environment; recreation and tourism systems; and international development.

- nurturing approaches that support positive and healthy relationships among diverse individuals, communities, and agricultural and natural resource systems
- respect for our environment
- a commitment to professionalism built around well-rounded engagement

### Scholarly Foundation

- Our faculty carries out research, teaching, and outreach focused on social, environmental, community and agricultural/food systems to strive for an ecologically and socially sustainable world. The faculty is committed to sustainable development that is integrative, inclusive, and systemic in nature; involves local-to-global restructuring; and promotes public health and wellness.
- Our faculty study management, planning, leadership, and policies that lead to transformational change to address complex and emerging issues in community, agriculture, recreation and tourism, and natural resource areas.
- Our faculty employs a holistic, interdisciplinary approach to understand and address complex and interrelated issues. The faculty's multidisciplinary expertise creates a unique synergy that drives the department's mission and places the department at the fore of this broad and critical area of scholarship.
- Our faculty work as scholar-practitioners. The scholar-practitioner model is built on critical discourse connecting theory and practice in endeavors of joint discovery and learning. The faculty supports a continuum of scholarship by conducting applied research, engaging in outreach and Extension initiatives, and developing curricula to balance the interests and demands of its students and stakeholders.

**CSUS is committed to creating a diverse faculty and student body, to include recruitment of ethnically diverse domestic students/faculty/staff and recruitment and acceptance of international students from countries worldwide.** The Department works closely with the Office of Culture, Access, and Belonging (CAB), Office of Minority Student Affairs (OMSA) and the Office of International Students and Scholars (OISS). We believe strongly in the value of cross-cultural sharing and multi-disciplinary approaches to education, research, and outreach. An additional aspect of diversity central to the CSUS Department is the wide variety of academic and professional backgrounds of both our students and faculty.

### Program Admission – for Prospective Students

Our graduate program follows an advisor-sponsored model of admissions. This means that to apply, you first need to find a faculty member who will agree to serve as your advisor throughout your graduate career at CSUS. However, we are aware that some funding agencies may not allow students to contact the faculty directly, in those cases, students should follow the funder guidelines and coordinate with the graduate student office. No applicant is admitted to the graduate program unless a faculty member has committed to advising the student. This ensures that every student admitted benefits from the expertise of our faculty and receives strong mentorship throughout their time here. After the application process is complete, an admissions and funding decision is emailed to the applicant by the Department and forwarded to the MSU Office of Admissions. The MSU Office of Admissions sends the final admissions decision to the applicant, based on its review.

Applications are submitted via Slate - <https://explore.msu.edu/apply/>

To increase their opportunities for acceptance and funding, applicants are encouraged to apply early in the fall semester in the year before they plan to start their program. To be considered for university-wide fellowships, applicants must apply to the department by November 1<sup>st</sup>.

### English Language Requirements & Provisional Acceptance

All international applicants to the Department of Community Sustainability whose first language is not English must meet minimum TOEFL (or other accepted English Language assessment) scores as required by Michigan State University. See MSU Graduate School guidelines at [English Language Proficiency](#).

Some specific conditions may make applicants eligible for automatic waivers of English Language Proficiency scores. The policy for when and how to apply for an English language waiver can be found here: [Procedure to Request a Waiver for English Language Competency](#).

### CSUS Graduate Courses

In addition to the standard CSUS [graduate course offerings](#) and requirements, there are a number of courses that are meant to fulfill specific purposes and have specific limitations.

- **Transfer Credits:** A maximum of 9 semester credits of graduate course work (excluding research and thesis) can be transferred from other accredited institutions or international institutions of similar quality, if the student receives a grade of 3.0 or higher into a graduate degree program.
- **400-level Courses:** By MSU policy, more than half of the credits of the total (30) required for a master's degree must be taken at the 800 and 900 levels, except as specifically exempted by the college dean. Courses at the 400 level may be applied to the master's degree program; however, when both 400- and 800-level courses are available that cover the same content, the 800-level course should be selected. No more than 9 credits of 400 level courses can be taken for PhD students.
- **CSUS 890: Independent Study in Community Sustainability – 1–6 credits, maximum of 6 total credits over a degree.** This independent study should cover material not covered by existing MSU classes
- **CSUS 891: Selected Topics in Community Sustainability – 1–9 credits (typically 3), maximum of 9 total credits over a degree.** This course is for more current events that are not the focus of existing CSUS courses.
- **CSUS 894: Field Practicum in Community Sustainability – 1–3 credits, maximum of 3 total credits over a degree.** This course allows students to earn credit for field-based experiences that integrate or add to a student's CSUS knowledge and training in domestic or international settings.
- **CSUS 898: Master's Professional Project – 1–3 credits, maximum of 9 credits over a degree.** These credits are for MS-B students to devote time to their final professional project.
- **CSUS 899: Master's Thesis Research – 1–6 credits, maximum of 18 total credits over a degree.** These credits are for MS-A students to devote time towards their master's thesis research.
- **CSUS 999: Doctoral Dissertation Research – 1–12 credits, maximum of 36 credits over a degree.** These credits are for PhD students to devote time towards their dissertation research.

## CSUS Graduate Program Requirements

### Student Information System and GradPlan

The Student Information System (SIS) acts as a gateway to academic records, resources, and tools at Michigan State University. SIS supports students throughout their academic journey at MSU as well as the staff who assist them. Both master's and doctoral students can find SIS at [student.msu.edu](https://student.msu.edu); all graduate students must use this platform for record keeping, accessing their transcripts, using GradPlan, fulfilling RCER requirements, changing their academic course plans, updating their committees and research plans, etc.

There are a number of resources available online, including a [self-paced training](#) for both students and staff, as well as job aids and overview material, which can be found within the GradPlan section of <https://sis.msu.edu/training/index.html>.

The Student Information System contains the tiles below, all of which are important to review to keep up with major milestones

- Tasks
- Classes
- My profile
- Academic Records
- Academic Progress
- Student Accounts
- Financial Aid
- GradPlan
- Resources

### GradPlan Outline

- All items are kept electronically within each student's GradPlan. When changes are made by the student, it follows a student driven workflow for approval. Log in to <https://student.msu.edu>. It is important to note that advisors **do not have access to this interface**, so collaborative meetings are essential! SIS has a [job aid](#) to help you use navigate GradPlan.

#### GradPlan consists of five core parts:

- 1) Research Overview – Grad students are required to complete each year they are active in their graduate program. There is a row for EACH academic year.
- 2) Committee - electronic submittal (done in first year for Master's and in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year for PhDs)
- 3) Course Plan - electronic submittal (done after committee in place)
- 4) Annual Review - electronic submittal, upload electronic file. Done with advisors each year.
- 5) Pending Requests. In case you need to make a major change in your GradPlan such as switch from master's to PhD, changing programs, requesting a Leave of Absence, etc. These changes should be communicated with your advisor as well as department head prior to finalizing in GradPlan.



## Master of Science Graduate Program

The Department of Community Sustainability offers **two Master of Science degrees** (MS A and MS B) that provide students with opportunities to engage in integrated and applied research and acquire professional skills.

### MS-A Degree

The Master of Science Plan-A option (MS-A) is a research-based degree that requires completion of a thesis. This option emphasizes the development of integrated and applied research skills which are the foundation of doctoral study or other research-related work.

### Overview of MS-A Graduate Program Timeline

#### MASTER'S DEGREE-A PROGRAM PROGRESS DEADLINES

Action	Grad School Suggested Deadline	"No Later Than" Deadline
Form Guidance Committee, have first committee meeting	End of student's first semester	End of student's second semester
Submit Course Plan to <a href="http://www.student.msu.edu">www.student.msu.edu</a>	End of student's first semester	End of student's second semester
Submit announcement for thesis proposal or project defense	2 weeks before proposal defense	2 weeks before proposal defense
Hold public proposal presentation, followed by closed committee proposal defense	After course plan is submitted; end of student's second semester	After course plan is submitted; early in student's third semester
Submit announcement for thesis or project final defense	2 weeks before final defense	2 weeks before final defense
Hold public final presentation defense, followed by closed committee final defense	End of student's second year	End of five years from the starting semester of degree program

### Other important information for Master's students

Time for Degree Completion: Master's programs must be completed in no more than 5 years from the semester of admission or the semester in which the first course used toward degree requirements was taken, whichever comes first. Because students are diverse and are working within even more diverse personal and academic contexts, there is some flexibility in timing. See table for "suggested" and "no later than" deadlines.

### MS-A Degree Requirements

A minimum of 30 credits and a final thesis are required for the degree under Plan A. The student's program of study must be developed in cooperation with and approved by the student's Guidance Committee and must include the requirements specified below.

### MS-A Required Courses

- CSUS 800 - Foundations of Community Sustainability I (3 credits), first fall semester

- CSUS 801 - Foundations of Community Sustainability II (3 credits), spring semester of every other year.
- CSUS 802 - Introduction to Interdisciplinary Inquiry (3 credits), first fall semester
- A minimum of 3 credits of quantitative or qualitative methods
- A minimum of 6 credits CSUS 899 – Master's Thesis Research

### MS-A Focus Area Courses

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In addition to the above required courses, each student must take a minimum of 12 credits of course work in a self-defined focal area, which may coincide with one of the department's themes, an interdepartmental specialization, or be developed in consultation with the student's Guidance Committee. At least 6 credits of this focus area must be in CSUS courses.

### MS-A Guidance Committee

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Students should work with their advisor to identify potential committee members and speak with several different potential committee members to determine if they are a good fit given their expertise, interest, availability, and advising style. Guidance Committees are entered into GradPlan, where they are approved and become part of your record.

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. Once designated, the Guidance Committee is responsible for meeting periodically to oversee the student's progress if they continue in good standing.

### Composition

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Guidance Committees must consist of MSU regular faculty members and (optionally) others having Graduate School faculty status. MS-A committees must have at least three total members, with at least two from the CSUS faculty. Requests for non-regular faculty must be made to the academic program coordinator or graduate program director.

### Timing

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Graduate students should form their committee by the end of their second semester. Even if student's thesis plans are not yet solidified, it is important for a committee to guide a student's course plan and general progress through the program.

### Changes to Committee

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Students always reserve the right to change any committee member. This is accomplished by talking with and getting approval from both departing and incoming committee members, requesting the change through GradPlan, and documenting the reason for the change. Committee members may be changed for a variety of reasons including: the student's research ideas have changed, a committee member has left the institution, etc.

### MS-A Thesis Proposal

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Students must prepare a written thesis proposal in consultation with their advisor and present the proposal to the Guidance Committee in a public forum. The thesis proposal may be scheduled, prepared, and presented after Guidance Committee chairperson has approved it.

The proposal should describe:

1. The purpose and objective of the proposed research

2. A review of the relevant literature
3. The proposed method of data collection and analysis

Students must submit the proposal to all Guidance Committee members at least two weeks prior to the public forum. The forum should be scheduled and announced to faculty and graduate students by submitting an announcement to the Graduate Coordinator for electronic distribution at least two weeks before the scheduled defense.

At a minimum, the announcement should include:

- Student's name
- Degree program and type
- Thesis proposal title
- Chairperson & committee member names
- Date, time, and location
- Zoom link + password for the proposal defense
- Abstract (see below)

**Abstract:** Write a short abstract, approximately one or two paragraphs, that succinctly presents the proposal's purpose, need/rationale, theoretical framework used or tested, context, methods and/or procedures, and any other information that is relevant to help others understand your work.

**Proposal Approval:** After the public presentation and a closed session, members of the Guidance Committee will discuss the suitability of the proposal and indicate their approval on the Thesis Proposal Approval form. Use the digitally fillable/signable version found on the CSUS Graduate Forms website. This form must be signed digitally (to be circulated in order of listing on the form) by the student, the Guidance Committee members, the Graduate Program Coordinator, and the Department Chairperson.

**Human Subjects/IRB:** Students must ensure compliance with the university requirements and guidelines pertaining to use of human subjects and vertebrate animals in research, and to safe use of hazardous materials. The necessary forms to secure approval from the Institutional Review Boards (IRB) may be obtained from the Human Research Protection Program (<http://hrpp.msu.edu> ; use the new CLICK™ Research Compliance System). Training is required in relevant human and/or animal research areas before submitting the IRB application and implementing data collection procedures.

## MS-A Completion and Public Defense of Final Master's Thesis

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A thesis is required for the MS-A degree. According to University regulations, each MS-A student must register for a minimum of 6 credits of CSUS 899 Thesis Research prior to awarding of the degree.

Students are required to write a thesis containing a contribution to knowledge, conforming to professional standards of evidence and argument. Students must submit the advisor approved thesis to all Guidance Committee members at least two weeks prior to the public forum. Also, two weeks before the defense, students should submit the final defense announcement to the Graduate Coordinator. (See announcement guidelines in the MS-B Project Proposal section.)

Upon completion of their final defense, the committee must complete the Master's Thesis Final Examination form and submit it to the Academic Coordinator.

Summer defenses are based on mutual agreement of committee members and students as faculty may not be available during the summer months.

Waiver of Summer Enrollment for Final Defense Note: By university policy, both Plan A and Plan B Master’s students must be registered during the semester in which the final examination or evaluation (defense) is administered. This requirement may be 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. This waiver is automatically approved as long as the student fits the criteria. No request is needed.

### ETD - Electronic Thesis Submission

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Each semester has a final deadline by which students must have all required paperwork turned in, all milestones completed, and their thesis accepted by the Graduate School. Students should access the resources available by the Graduate School. All ETD information is available here: [MSU Grad ETD Page](#).

### MS-A Thesis Timeline Summary

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6 Weeks Prior to CANR & GRAD School Final Deadline (note, this changes annually) and 2 Weeks Prior to Final Thesis Defense	Submit final defense announcement to the CSUS Graduate Secretary and submit a draft copy of your thesis to your committee.  Note. The defense may not occur any less than two weeks after the committee has received your draft.
4 Weeks Prior to CANR & GRAD School Final Deadline	Hold final defense with your committee; allow about 2 weeks to make committee-recommended revisions/edits.
2 Weeks Prior to CANR & GRAD School Final Deadline	Submit committee-approved draft of your thesis to the graduate school for review, comments, editorial, and formatting requirements.
CANR & GRAD School Final Deadline	Last date to submit final thesis draft to graduate school.

## MS-B Degree

The Master of Science Plan-B option (MS-B) focuses on the acquisition of well-defined professional skills, appropriate as a terminal degree and for professional employment. The MS-B degree requires completion of a professional project and associated paper. **The MS-B degree does NOT require completion of a research-based thesis.**

## Overview of MS B Graduate Program Timeline

### MASTER'S DEGREE -B PROGRAM PROGRESS DEADLINES

Action	Grad School Suggested Deadline	"No Later Than" Deadline
Form Guidance Committee, have first committee meeting	End of student's first semester	End of student's second semester
Submit Course Plan to <a href="http://www.student.msu.edu">www.student.msu.edu</a>	End of student's first semester	End of student's second semester
Submit announcement for project defense	2 weeks before proposal defense	2 weeks before proposal defense
Hold public proposal presentation, followed by closed committee proposal defense	After course plan is submitted; end of student's second semester	After course plan is submitted; early in student's third semester
Submit announcement for project final defense	2 weeks before final defense	2 weeks before final defense
Hold public final presentation followed by closed committee final defense	End of student's second year	End of five years from the starting semester of degree program

## MS-B Degree Requirements

The student's program of study must be developed in cooperation with and approved by the student's Guidance Committee and must include the requirements specified below.

A minimum of 30 credits is required for the degree under Plan B. The student's program of study must be developed in cooperation with and approved by the student's Guidance Committee and must include the requirements specified below.

## MS-B Required Courses

- CSUS 800 - Foundations of Community Sustainability I (3 credits), first fall semester
- CSUS 801 - Foundations of Community Sustainability II (3 credits), spring semester of every other year.
- CSUS 802 - Introduction to Interdisciplinary Inquiry (3 credits), first fall semester
- A minimum of 3 credits of a techniques or skill-building course relevant to the student's academic and career goals
- A minimum of 3 credits of Community Sustainability 898 - Master's Professional Project

## MS-B Focus Area Courses

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Take at least 15 credits of course work in a self-defined focal area, which may coincide with one of the department's themes, an interdepartmental specialization, or be developed with the student's Guidance Committee. At least 6 credits of this focus area must be in CSUS courses.

## MS-B Guidance Committee

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Students should work with their advisor to identify potential committee members and speak with several different potential committee members to determine if they are a good fit given their expertise, interest, availability, and advising style. Guidance Committees are entered into GradPlan, where they are approved and become part of your record.

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. Once designated, the Guidance Committee is responsible for meeting periodically to oversee the student's progress if they continue in good standing.

### Composition

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Guidance Committees must consist of MSU regular faculty members and (optionally) others having Graduate School faculty status. MS-B committees must have at least two members from the CSUS faculty (optional additional committee members may come from inside or outside of CSUS). Requests for non-regular faculty must be made to the academic program coordinator or graduate program director.

### Timing

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Graduate students should form their committee by the end of their second semester in CSUS. Even if a student's project plans are not yet solidified, it is important for a committee to guide a student's course plan and general progress through the program.

### Changes to Committee

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Students always reserve the right to change any committee member. This is accomplished by talking with and getting approval from both departing and incoming committee members, requesting the change through GradPlan, and documenting the reason for the change. Committee members may be changed for a variety of reasons including: the student's research ideas have changed, a committee member has left the institution, etc.

## MS-B Project Proposal

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A professional impact project is required for the MS-B degree. Because the project emphasizes professional development, the student designs and completes a significant project that helps to further their professional goals. Because this project is for an advanced degree at an academic institution, the project must be informed by the current literature as this will: 1) ensure that the work is current, and 2) help students learn how to conduct their professional work as scholar practitioners. The project should be an important and relevant training experience and should contribute to developing specific professional skills and knowledge. Although the project may have practical research applications, the applicability of the results is likely to be local and targeted

(e.g., to an organization, a location, or a particular situation) rather than general or generalizable (e.g., contribute to the literature or theory-building).

Students must prepare a written proposal in consultation with their advisor and present the proposal to the Guidance Committee in a public forum. The proposal should consist of: 1) a statement of professional and learning goal 2) a statement indicating how the project is designed to address professional and learning goals; 3) a narrative about how the project is informed by current literature or state-of-the-art practice in terms of subject matter, techniques, or practice; and 4) an outline detailing proposed procedures, products, and potential significance and application of the project results. Examples of Plan B projects include:

- An internship with a community organization, authoring a large grant proposal on behalf of (but in collaboration with) the organization.
- An applied research project for a community organization, with write up, and community presentation with implications and recommendations based on project results.
- Work in a classroom developing or adapting a curriculum for a specific audience.
- An extensive literature review and applied practicum on a new area/topic that they plan to explore and/or apply in their career.
- Applied research written up as a professional bulletin or other outlet useful to a practitioner community, manual for practitioners, or another useful project.
- The student prepares instructional media resources appropriate for stakeholders or professionals.

Students must submit the proposal to all Guidance Committee members at least two weeks prior to the public forum. The forum should be scheduled and announced to faculty and graduate students by submitting to the Graduate Coordinator some information for electronic distribution at least two weeks before the scheduled proposal defense.

At a minimum, the announcement should include:

- Student's name
- Degree program and type
- Project proposal title
- Chairperson & committee member names
- Date, time, and location (contact Grad Coordinator for room reserve if needed)
- Zoom link + password for the proposal defense
- Abstract (see below)

**Abstract:** Write a short abstract, approximately one or two paragraphs, that succinctly presents the proposal's purpose and need/rationale.

**Proposal Approval:** After the public presentation and in a closed session, members of the Guidance Committee will discuss the suitability of the proposal and indicate their approval on the Thesis Proposal Approval form; use digitally fillable/signable version found on the CSUS Graduate Forms website. This form must be signed digitally (to be circulated in order of listing on the form) by the student, the Guidance Committee members, the Graduate Program Coordinator, and the Department Chairperson.

The final project defense meeting serves as the student's final certifying examination for the MS-B degree. It is a public seminar open to faculty, staff, and students. A Plan B project can take many forms and should be based on the goals of the student. Ideally the Plan B project should be significant in scope and build on the student's scholarship and experience.

Because the final project can take many forms, the Guidance Committee will determine the type of final product and format.

Students must submit the advisor-approved copy of the project to all Guidance Committee members at least two weeks prior to the public forum. Also, two weeks prior to the defense, students should submit the final defense announcement to the Graduate Coordinator. The final defense announcement must meet the same minimum requirements listed above for the thesis proposal. Upon completion of their final defense, the committee must complete the Master's Thesis Final Examination form and submit it to the Academic Coordinator. (See MS-A Completion section for guidance about summer defenses and waiver of summer enrollment for final defense.)

### Program Change from MS-B to MS-A, or MS-A to MS-B Master's

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Students thinking about changing from Plan A to Plan B, or from Plan B to Plan A, must wait until after they have completed at least one semester of coursework and grades have been submitted. Such a change requires a letter of explanation from the student as to why they are wanting the change, and a supporting letter from the student's advisor indicating why they support the change and how the student is prepared for the different degree program. These documents should be attached to the Change of Program form.

## PhD Graduate Program

### PhD Degree Requirements for Community Sustainability (CSUS)

All PhD applicants must complete an MS degree prior to beginning the PhD program. Credits used for the MS degree may not be counted toward the PhD degree. At least 60 credits are required for the degree, 24 of which are allocated to dissertation research. The student's program of study must be developed in cooperation with and approved by the student's Guidance Committee and must include the requirements specified below.

General Registration Requirements: By university policy, all students using University services (faculty consultation included) for graduate work must be registered each semester, unless explicitly waived. Minimum registration is one course of 1 credit.

International students also should pay attention to visa requirements; contact OISS for details.

### Overview of PhD Program Timeline

#### DOCTORAL DEGREE MAJOR MILESTONES

Action	Grad School Suggested Deadline	"No Later Than" Deadline
Form Guidance Committee	End of student's second semester	Beginning of student's third semester
Submit Course Plan to GradPlan	End of student's second semester	Beginning of student's third semester
Hold first committee meeting	After the course plan is submitted; end of student's second semester or early in the third semester	After course plan is submitted; early in student's third semester
Submission of Comprehensive Program Statement (CPS)	After coursework is substantially complete (at least 80% of non-999 coursework) to be approved by committee no later than three weeks before Day 1 of written comprehensive exam	5 years after first semester of degree program
Written & Oral Comprehensive Exam	The written exam takes place no sooner than 3 weeks after CPS is approved by committee and distributed to all CSUS faculty; the oral exam takes place no earlier than one week after the student submits their written comprehensive exam to their committee, and no later than two weeks after their written exam	5 years after first semester of degree program

Submit announcement for dissertation proposal defense	After passing comprehensive exam. 2 weeks before proposal defense	After passing comprehensive exam. 2 weeks before proposal defense
Hold public dissertation proposal defense	After passing comprehensive exam	Varies
Submit announcement for dissertation defense	2 weeks before final defense	2 weeks before final defense
Dissertation Defense	End of program Most students end in 4-6 years	End of year 8 from the starting semester of degree program  Maximum of 8 years from beginning of the program (first course counted toward degree requirements)

Time for Degree Completion: Doctoral programs must be completed in **no more than 8 years** from the semester of admission or semester in which the first course used toward degree requirements was taken, whichever comes first. Because students are diverse, and are working within even more diverse personal and academic contexts, there is some flexibility in timing.

### PhD Required Courses

- CSUS 800 - Foundations of Community Sustainability I (3 credits), first fall semester
- CSUS 801 - Foundations of Community Sustainability II (3 credits), spring semester of every other year.
- CSUS 802 - Introduction to Interdisciplinary Inquiry (3 credits), first fall semester

If a student already has credit in any of these courses, these credits must be replaced by a comparable number of credits of relevant coursework chosen in consultation with their advisor.

### PhD Research and Methods Courses

Complete a minimum of 9 credits of advanced research methods, to be selected in consultation with the student's Guidance Committee; at least 3 credits must be taken in each of quantitative and qualitative methods, plus another 3 credits selected from statistics, quantitative, qualitative, or other advanced research methods. The research methods/methodology/statistics course requirements cannot be waived.

### PhD Focal Areas

Complete a minimum of 18 credits across two self-defined focal areas (minimum of 9 credits each). Of these, at least 3 credits in each focal area must be selected from Community Sustainability (CSUS) courses. Focal areas may coincide with one of the department's themes, an interdepartmental specialization, dual programs such as ESPP or be developed in consultation with the student's Guidance Committee.

### PhD Independent Research

Complete a minimum of 24 credits of Community Sustainability 999 – Doctoral Dissertation Research.

### PhD Guidance Committee

Students should work with their advisor to identify potential committee members and speak with several different potential committee members to determine if they are a good fit given their expertise, interest, availability, and advising style. Guidance Committees are entered into GradPlan, where they are approved and become part of your record.

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. Once designated, the Guidance Committee is responsible for meeting periodically to oversee the student's progress if they continue in good standing.

### PhD Guidance Committee Composition

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Guidance Committees must consist of MSU regular faculty members and (optionally) others having Graduate School faculty status. Committees must have at least four total members, at least two members from the CSUS faculty, at least one MSU faculty member external to CSUS, and an additional committee member.

To request a non-regular faculty as a committee member, consult the Graduate School's relevant policy and fill out the appropriate form to be reviewed by the CSUS Academic Program Coordinator.

### PhD Timing

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Graduate students should form their committee by the end of their second semester in CSUS. Even if student's thesis/dissertation plans are not yet solidified, it is important for a committee to guide a student's course plan and general progress through the program.

### PhD Changes to Committee

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Students always reserve the right to change any committee member. This is accomplished by talking with and getting approval from both departing and incoming committee members, requesting the change through GradPlan, and documenting the reason for the change. Committee members may be changed for a variety of reasons including: the student's research ideas have changed, a committee member has left the institution, etc.

### PhD Comprehensive Program Statement and Comprehensive Exams

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The comprehensive examination is a university-level requirement for all PhD programs. In CSUS, the comprehensive examination process entails three different milestones: the preparation (and approval) of the comprehensive program statement, the written exam, and the oral exam. The comprehensive examination is the basis for admitting a student to candidacy for the PhD degree. It is the process by which a student demonstrates 1) what they have learned from their coursework, research undertaken to date, and related work, 2) their ability for synthesis and analysis, and 3) that they are prepared to proceed to their dissertation research.

The student works with their Guidance Committee to define the scope of their examination. The examination is designed to test a student's ability to synthesize, apply, and coherently discuss the interdisciplinary nature of their area of study and to situate it within the main elements of the CSUS graduate core curriculum, as appropriate: wicked problems, systems thinking, ethics, community engagement, sustainability, and interdisciplinarity. Students must provide evidence of independent scholarly analysis of the literature in the selected focus areas, knowledge of relevant research methods and their epistemological bases, and knowledge of literature associated with the issues, principles, concepts, and methods presented in the department's core curriculum.

## Timeline

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During the semester before the Comprehensive Program Statement (CPS) is finalized, relevant committee members should provide feedback on drafts. This process is intended to result in a solid CPS draft 60 days prior to the comprehensive exam to eliminate any surprises.

- 7 weeks before Day 1 of written exam:
  - Submit full draft of Comprehensive Program Statement (CPS) to student's committee
- 5 weeks before Day 1 of written exam:
  - Committee submits any comments or recommendations for additional reading or writing of CPS to student
- 3 weeks before Day 1 of written exam:
  - Committee approves CPS; advisor sends approved CPS to all CSUS faculty, and submits CPS form to CSUS Graduate Office
- Before Day 1 of written exam:
  - Schedule oral comprehensive exam within 14 days of final/Day 5 of written comprehensive exam
- Written exam:
  - 5-day written exam
- Oral comprehensive exam (within 2 weeks of completion of written exam):
  - Opportunity for clarifications, additional questions

**Students should aim to take the comprehensive exam during Year 3 of their degree program and, according to MSU policy, must complete it no later than the end of Year 5.** The comprehensive examination, both written and oral parts, must be completed successfully (passed) before the dissertation proposal defense can be scheduled.

## PhD Comprehensive Program Statement (CPS)

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### What is the purpose of the Comprehensive Program Statement?

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The purpose of the CPS is for the student to define themselves as a scholar, speak to their professional and personal preparation up to that point, identify their background and plans for the future, and to identify their areas of scholarly focus. The CPS is a scholarly document used to prepare students and their Guidance Committees for the comprehensive examination. A CPS should create a narrative that presents the student's learning and professional background and goals, synthesizes the literature that underpins students research interests and presents a summary of the state of knowledge in the focus areas chosen by the student and is intended to be broader than the anticipated scope of the dissertation. The CPS is prepared in consultation with the student's Guidance Committee and is presented to the full faculty for review. The committee will use the CPS to inform them of their questions for the written portion of the exam.

### CPS required components

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The CPS should follow a narrative thread to show how the student's areas of study align with their interests and are informed by their academic experiences in the Department of Community Sustainability. Each CPS must include:

1. **Research Interests:** a description and discussion of the student's research interests, with emphasis on the rationale for the two chosen focus areas and how they support the student's academic and professional goals. This should include an overview of how the student's research interests are informed by elements of the CSUS graduate core curriculum, as appropriate: wicked problems, systems thinking, ethics, community engagement, sustainability and interdisciplinarity.

2. **Description of Focus Area 1:** a description and discussion of the student’s intellectual interests in the focus area and a synthesis of the associated literature, including theories and empirical models related to the focus area.
3. **Description of Focus Area 2:** a description and discussion of the student’s intellectual interests in a second focus area, including the components listed above for Focus Area 1.
4. **Research Statement:** this section includes 1) a discussion of the student’s epistemological position, how it is informed by their experiences in CSUS 800, 801, 802 and other readings and study, and how it influences the way they approach research, and 2) a discussion of research methodologies relevant to the student’s focus areas. This discussion is not intended to be exhaustive of all relevant methodologies or methods; however, it should be broader than individual methods or techniques the student anticipates using in their dissertation research.
5. **Program Plan:** an outline of the student’s curricular program plan, including required core courses, research methods, focus areas, and dissertation course credits; may include information about additional certifications, specializations, and dual degrees as relevant to the individual student.
6. **Curriculum vita:** See the [Graduate School’s CV Guide](#) for guidance.
7. **Proposed plan for the comprehensive exam:** a brief outline of the organization, nature, and scope of the comprehensive exam process: e.g., number of questions to be answered, any flexibility in the choice of questions, what time questions will be delivered, whether questions are delivered all together or one per day, and other relevant procedural information. This should be discussed between the Guidance Committee and the student prior to the exam. Subsequent changes must be mutually agreed upon by the student and advisor. As a general guideline, the student and the committee should approach the written exam as a 40-hour activity over five days and agree upon what is feasible over this period.

Some students formulate some questions at the end of each of their CPS focus areas to inspire their committee members to think about what questions the student finds interesting.

Given the diversity among CSUS students and their areas of interest, and the need for flexibility in adapting the CPS to their interests, a fixed length for the CPS is not established. However, each focus area description should cite roughly 30-50 references. Generally, students write 5 to 15 pages for each focus area (not including citations). The work that CSUS students do varies greatly, and the amount of writing necessary to adequately address a focus area will vary as well. A student and their advisor should explicitly discuss expectations about the amount of writing to be done for the CPS and how it will influence preparation for the exam.

## Approval

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The Guidance Committee has two weeks to provide comments, recommendations, and additional readings to the student. This gives the student time to make revisions prior to final approval. After all committee members approve the CPS, the chairperson will send the approved version to all tenure stream faculty in CSUS. Sharing the CPS with faculty informs our community of students’ interests and goals and establishes norms regarding acceptability and quality of Comprehensive Program Statements. Any time after 3 weeks from the time the advisor submits the CPS to the department, the student can schedule their written and oral examinations.

## PhD Written exam

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### What is the purpose of the Written Examination?

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Doctoral programs have long required students to take written qualifying exams, typically around the time students begin to think about their own contributions to independent research. Although a potentially nerve-racking experience, it is a helpful step along the PhD pathway and provides skills in making arguments in written form that will serve you well as an independent scholar.

Comprehensive examinations are tailored to match the unique scholarly interests of each student as described in the Comprehensive Program Statement (CPS). The Guidance Committee will use the theories, methods, and readings cited in the CPS to design questions for the comprehensive examination. Examination questions should be answerable based on the literature cited in the CPS; the student is not expected to look for other literature during the exam period. The comprehensive examination will be conducted in both written and oral formats. All guidance committee members will be involved in the exams.

*As a general guideline, the student and the committee should approach the exam as a 40-hour activity over five days.* If there is an extenuating circumstance or emergency that would require changing the exam format, communicate this with your advisor.

The committee chairperson will email the questions to the student according to the structure laid out in the proposed plan for the comprehensive exam. Shortly after the student receives the email, when they have had time to read all the exam questions, the student and advisor should go over the questions together to ensure that they understand all the questions in the same way. At any time during the exam, the student may ask their advisor questions of clarification.

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## Process

At the end of the 5th day, the student should email the written exam to the advisor who will distribute it to the Guidance Committee. The oral examination should be scheduled within 2 weeks of the written examination, so it is important to schedule both the written and oral exams at the same time.

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## PhD Oral exam

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### What is the purpose of the Oral Examination?

Once the student has completed the written examination, the oral examination can take place. This is a closed examination with just the student and the Guidance Committee. Like the written examination, the oral examination is a helpful step along the PhD pathway and provides an opportunity for the student to supplement, clarify, and/or elaborate on written examination responses, demonstrating oral synthesis and analysis skills. If there are shortcomings in the written exam, the oral exam is an opportunity to address those. Like the written exam, the oral exam should not address content that is outside the material in the CPS.

The duration of the oral examination varies typically lasting 1.5-2 hours. Like the written examination, the structure of the oral examination can vary slightly. Most often, the committee will take turns asking clarifying, qualifying, or follow-up questions mostly based on the answers provided in the written exam. After the committee has finished asking their questions, the student is asked to leave the room while the committee discusses the examination. At that point, the student is invited back into the room.

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## Decision

If a student does not pass both oral and written comprehensive exam components in full, they may re-take the exam but must wait between 45 and 120 days after conclusion of first attempt (to allow time for additional preparation).

**Assessment of Comprehensive Examination.** Following the oral exam, the Committee members will offer their assessment of the student's performance on the comprehensive exam as a whole: "pass" or "not pass." There is no "pass with conditions"

option. If there is a unanimous “pass,” the committee chairperson will complete the Record of Comprehensive Exam Form, obtain digital signatures from the Committee members showing PASS, and inform the student about the written comprehensive exam results. The committee chairperson will submit the Record of Comprehensive Exam Form to the Academic Program Coordinator.

**Retaking the Comprehensive Examination.** If there is no unanimous “pass” or the student does “not pass” part of the exam, the student is entitled to retake the exam one time. The student and the Guidance Committee Chairperson (in consultation with Committee members) must jointly decide how to proceed to give the student a reasonable and fair opportunity to pass on the second attempt (e.g., by strengthening their understanding of key areas, adjusting the focal areas, etc.). The student must wait a minimum of 45 days and a maximum of 120 days after the previous examination before re-taking it. If this timeline is not followed, a student may be asked to withdraw from the program.

### PhD Assessing the Second Attempt at the Comprehensive Examination.

The second attempt at the exam proceeds in the same way as the first – a written exam followed by an oral exam. After the oral portion of the exam, if there is a unanimous “pass” on the entirety of the second comprehensive exam, the student passes.

If there is disagreement among the committee members after assessment of the second comprehensive exam, exam results are “in dispute.” In this case, the Guidance Committee Chairperson will send an “exam results dispute” memorandum to the Department Chairperson. This memorandum should summarize the entire comprehensive exam process, explain the results of the first and second comprehensive exams, describe the dispute, and request external readers of the student’s comprehensive exam.

The CSUS Chairperson will select two external readers, who will remain confidential. The two readers submit their separate evaluations of the student’s comprehensive exam, including a “pass” or “not pass” recommendation, to the CSUS Chairperson. The CSUS Chairperson will share the results of the external readers with the student’s Guidance Committee Chairperson and the Graduate Program Coordinator. The Department Chairperson, in collaboration with the Graduate Program Coordinator and the student’s Guidance Committee Chairperson, will decide how to reconcile the dispute and determine whether or not the student passed the comprehensive exam on the second try.

If the doctoral student does not pass the comprehensive exam on the second attempt, they will be withdrawn from the PhD program. A PhD student who does not pass the comprehensive exam may be eligible to earn a master’s degree in the unit (Plan A or Plan B). Such students may be able to work with a faculty member to complete requirements for a Masters Plan A or B, including the preparation, writing, and defense of an appropriate thesis or project, registering for Plan A thesis or Plan B project credits, and submitting the requisite paperwork and documentation for the program change, program plan, MS-A or B proposal approval, and MS-A or B final defense approval. The student will receive written notification of doctoral program withdrawal and will be presented with the option and implications of completing a MS rather than PhD degree (student must meet that degree’s requirements). Following MSU guidelines, all comprehensive exams (with answers and committee decision) will be kept in student’s permanent file in the CSUS Graduate Office for at least three years.

### PhD Dissertation Proposal

Students must prepare a written dissertation proposal in consultation with their advisor and present the proposal to the Guidance Committee in a public forum. The public dissertation proposal presentation may be scheduled, prepared, and presented only after successful completion of the comprehensive examination.

The proposal should describe:

1. The purpose and objective of the proposed research
2. A review of the relevant literature
3. The proposed method of data collection and analysis
4. Outlines of each of the proposed chapters

Students must submit the proposal to all Guidance Committee members at least two weeks prior to the public forum. The forum should be scheduled and announced to faculty and graduate students by submitting an announcement to the Academic Program Coordinator at least two weeks before the scheduled defense.

At a minimum, the announcement should include:

- Student's name
- Degree program and type
- Dissertation proposal title
- Chairperson & committee member names
- Date, time, and location (contact Grad Coordinator for room reserve if needed)
- Zoom link + password for the proposal defense
- Abstract
- **Proposal Approval.** After the public presentation, and in a closed session, members of the Guidance Committee will discuss the suitability of the proposal to move forward, or agree on a list of edits that are necessary first. After the proposal is approved by the committee, the Dissertation Proposal Approval form must be signed digitally (to be circulated in order of listing on the form) by the student, the Guidance Committee members, the Graduate Program Coordinator, and the Department Chairperson.

**Human Subjects/IRB.** Students must ensure compliance with university requirements and guidelines regarding the use of human subjects and vertebrate animals in research and the safe use of hazardous materials. The necessary forms to secure approval from the Institutional Review Boards (IRB) may be obtained from the Human Research Protection Program (<http://hrpp.msu.edu> ; use the new CLICK Research Compliance System). Training is required in relevant human and/or animal research areas before submitting the IRB application and implementing data collection procedures.

## PhD Final Dissertation & Defense

Students are required to write and successfully defend in a public forum a dissertation containing a contribution to knowledge, conforming to professional standards of evidence and argument, and using clear and correct English language. The Guidance Committee and the student have wide latitude in determining the design and format of the dissertation, but the dissertation should be designed so as to facilitate publication of the results. One common alternative to a conventional dissertation format is a set of related papers written in a format and style that is acceptable for publication in peer-reviewed journals

The dissertation defense is a public seminar open to faculty, staff, students, and other invited guests. Students must submit the advisor-approved copy of the dissertation to all Guidance Committee members at least two weeks prior to the public forum. In addition, two weeks prior to the defense, students should submit the final defense announcement to the Graduate Coordinator.

**Description and Announcement of Dissertation Defense.** The dissertation defense is a public seminar open to faculty, staff, students, and other invited guests. Defense announcements should be distributed at least two weeks prior to the seminar. The announcement should follow the same format and procedures as for the proposal defense, but with the title “Final Defense.” Doctoral students must provide Guidance Committee members with a copy of the dissertation (marked “DRAFT”) at least two weeks prior to the defense seminar. The defense may not occur any less than two weeks after the committee has received the draft.

### PhD Dissertation Timeline Summary

Timeline	Action/Step
6 Weeks Prior to CANR & GRAD School Final Deadline (note, this deadline changes annually) and 2 Weeks Prior to Final Dissertation Defense	Submit a final defense announcement to the CSUS Graduate Secretary and submit a draft copy of your dissertation to your committee. <i>Note:</i> The defense may not occur less than two weeks after the committee has received your draft.
4 Weeks Prior to CANR & GRAD School Final Deadline	Hold final defense with your committee; allow about 2 weeks to make committee-recommended revisions/edits.
2 Weeks Prior to CANR & GRAD School Final Deadline	Submit a committee-approved draft of your dissertation to the graduate school for review, comments, editorial, and formatting requirements.
CANR & GRAD School Final Deadline	Last date to submit final dissertation draft to graduate school.

**Note.** By university policy, doctoral students must be registered for at least one credit during the semester in which the final defense/oral exam is taken (including summer semester).

**Decision:** At the end of the dissertation defense, the committee will identify **one of three outcomes**, to be marked on the PhD Examination/Defense Form.

- **Accepted:** Student has passed the oral defense, and the written document is approved “as is” and can be submitted to the Graduate School.
- **Rejected:** Student does not pass the oral defense; committee may request significant additional work be done before student attempts to defend again.
- **Accepted Subject to Revisions:** Student has passed the oral defense, but revisions and/or editing are required in the written document (i.e., detailed within the PhD Examination/Defense Form). This is the most common outcome. In this instance, the student will make revisions, as requested by the committee, and when the committee members are satisfied with the modifications, they will provide final approval. The committee chairperson will sign and date the “revisions approved” line on the PhD

Once approved by the committee, the student should format the dissertation following the specific instructions in the Graduate School Formatting Guide. Dissertations are submitted electronically in accordance with Graduate School policies. In addition, students should review the target dates for final approval of electronic dissertations to the Graduate School for graduating in the semester of that submission. The submission to the Graduate School **does not** mean the document has been approved. The review process is iterative; final approval can take a few hours to a few weeks, depending on the extent of the necessary revisions.

### ETD - Electronic Thesis & Dissertation Submission

Each semester has a firm submission deadline set by the Graduate School by which students must submit their thesis/dissertation to ProQuest, have all milestones completed, and their dissertation accepted by the Graduate School. Students should access the resources available by the Graduate School formatting outline: [ETD Formatting Guide](#). Sample template: [ETD Printable Sample Pages](#). All ETD information is available here: [MSU Grad ETD Page](#).

### Additional CSUS Information & Expectations

#### Responsible & Ethical Conduct of Research –RECR

As an MSU Spartan, research integrity is so important to our development as scholars and creators that the Graduate School has developed minimum education requirements for all graduate students regarding the Responsible and Ethical Conduct of Research (RECR). Not only is it required by federal and state policy, but research integrity is also essential for our work to have legitimacy and impact. **The Graduate School will assign service indicators (holds) on students' records if they have not completed their annual RECR requirements.**

The Graduate School's RECR education program consists of two parts.

- basic or foundational education (Years One and Two, for all Master's and PhD. students)
- annual refresher education (Years three and beyond, for PhD. students only)

The basic education program consists of the following:

- **Four specified online Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) training modules.** To be completed by the end of the student's first year. These are incorporated into your first semester here in your CSUS 802 course.
- **A minimum of 6 hours of face-to-face, discussion-based education.** To be completed by the time of graduation for master's students and prior to completing the comprehensive examination and entering candidate status for doctoral students.
- Three additional on-line CITI modules for Master's Plan A and Doctoral students. To be completed by the end of the student's second year.

**RECR Basic Education Program Requirements**

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

CITI Modules Year 1

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

6 hours discussion-based education (complete before graduation)

**Master’s Plan A students**

CITI Modules Year 1

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

6 hours discussion-based education (complete before graduation)

CITI Modules Year 2

Complete 3 of 6 possible RECR Basic modules:

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

**Doctoral students**

CITI Modules Year 1

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

6 hours discussion-based education (complete before finishing comprehensive examination and entering candidacy status, doctoral students starting in Fall 2020 or later)

CITI Modules Year 2

Complete 3 of 6 possible RECR Basic modules:

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

Year 3 forward

3 hours of annual refresher education

- CITI modules not previously taken to fulfill Year 1 or 2 or another refresher year’s requirements
- Department/College Workshops, brown-bag luncheons, group discussions that cover RECR related topics
- Graduate School RECR workshops not previously taken
- One-on-one discussions between the student and their advisor
- Other RECR related courses (non-CITI modules, Academic courses, etc.)

- RECR Resources:
  - [RCR Research Integrity - Requirements](#)
  - <https://grad.msu.edu/recr>
  - [RCR Student Job Aid Instructions](#)

## Faculty Mentorship

CSUS has developed a [Mentorship Agreement](#) so that the student and advisor can develop a mentorship plan. This plan includes things like the appropriate number of meetings, expecting the frequency and format will vary by student, faculty, and across the student's academic career. The plan should meet the needs of both parties. The Major Professor's role is to mentor graduate students and be their academic advisor. To ensure the advisor can mentor the student effectively, the student should clearly communicate any accessibility needs they have from the beginning.

A student's graduate experience is much more than "taking courses," and students are encouraged to make their graduate experience as rich as possible. Students are strongly encouraged to attend seminars, engage in active scholarly debate outside the classroom, read broadly, get involved in research and outreach activities (paid or volunteer), participate in professional conferences, and (when ready) begin drafting professional articles for submission to professional magazines and journals.

In their role as mentors, faculty should model and provide encouragement for working as scholar-practitioners; discuss the nature and practicalities of research ethics and academic integrity; discuss University policies and procedures; involve students in extracurricular professional activities; review Department expectations; and discuss professional ethics and responsibilities. The advisor-advisee relationship is a critical part of the success of graduate students. As a department, we expect both faculty and students to support effective mentoring. Below is a set of expectations for how faculty and graduate students can achieve an effective mentoring relationship.

The Conflict Resolution and Grievance Procedure section of the Handbook describes the formal process that students may engage if they believe appropriate mentoring procedures have not been followed. Faculty can record grievances during the student's annual review if they believe appropriate mentoring procedures have not been followed.

## Expectations of Faculty

1. Be the advisee's advocate and commit to mentoring the student from the time they receive their letter of acceptance into CSUS, through their time in the program, and after graduation.
2. Facilitate the entry of the advisee into the University culture, including the structures, processes, and interpersonal climate of the University.
3. Enhance the supportive academic environment for the graduate studies of the advisee.
4. Facilitate the development of appropriate skills and approaches related to the conduct and evaluation of research and scholarship, as well as facilitating training in complementary skills needed to be a successful scholar, such as oral and written communication skills, grant writing, project management, mentoring, and professionalism.
5. Enhance decision-making and other skills related to the advisee's career development and advancement.
6. Provide opportunities for developing and working on mentored and independent interdisciplinary research projects.
7. Develop, with the advisee, clearly delineated and specific milestones, and timelines for achieving program goals.
8. Know the policies, deadlines, and requirements of the CSUS graduate program, the Graduate School, and the University. Comply with all institutional policies and participate in semesterly/annual evaluations and assessments.
9. Be available for regular meetings with the advisee, show up on time, and be prepared for meetings. Advisors should discuss with the advisee preferred styles of communication and schedule.
10. Meet agreed-upon deadlines and communicate when unable to do so.
11. Be mindful of constraints on the advisee's time.
12. Respond to advisee emails promptly.

## Expectations of Student

1. Acknowledge that you have the primary responsibility for the successful completion of your graduate degree. This includes commitment to work in classrooms and independently, and maintaining high levels of professionalism, self-motivation, engagement, scholarly curiosity, and ethical standards.
2. Actively cultivate your own professional development. Share career plans with your advisor, recount initiatives on behalf of your professional development, ask for advice, and reflect on your advisor's observations.
3. Engage in collaborations beyond the advisor and be a good collaborator – this requires effective and frequent communication, mutual respect, trust, and shared goals.
4. Develop, with your advisor, clearly delineated and specific milestones and timelines for achieving program goals.
5. Know the policies, deadlines, and requirements of the graduate program, the graduate school, and the university. Comply with all institutional policies and participate in semesterly/annual evaluations and assessments.
6. Conduct regular meetings with your advisor to provide updates on progress. Use this time to communicate new ideas and challenges they are facing – remember, your advisor cannot address or advise about issues not brought to their attention. Discuss with your advisor preferred styles of communication and schedule.
7. Be responsive to advice and constructive criticism.
8. Meet agreed-upon deadlines and communicate when unable to do so.
9. Be mindful of constraints on your advisor's time.
10. Respond to emails from your advisor promptly and be on time and prepared for meetings.

## Student Involvement Opportunities

Graduate students are encouraged to be active contributors to the continuing development of the Department and its work. Student perspectives, values, and ideas are considered valuable input into the Department's evolution.

**Formal channels** for providing input to the department include:

- Graduate Student Organization (GSO)
- Graduate Student Representative to the Department's Graduate Affairs & Curriculum Committee (GACC), ex officio and Faculty Liaison
- Annual student progress assessment packet
- Course evaluations
- Exit interview (at the time of graduation)

Graduate student representatives are also included in time-bounded task forces, faculty recruitment committees, and other task-specific ad hoc committees, as needed. Additionally, other opportunities for graduate student involvement exist at the University level (see the Graduate School website or talk with the current CSUS GSO Coordinator).

**Informal channels** for providing input, or simply conversing about the work of the Department or asking questions, include open-door access to the following individuals:

- Academic Program Coordinator
- Graduate Program Director
- Student's major advisor

- Associate Chairperson of the CSUS Department
- Chairperson of the CSUS Department

Additionally, all students are welcome to participate in CSUS academic governance through participation (non-voting) in staff meetings and faculty meetings.

### Graduate Students as Representatives of MSU

Graduate students engaged in professional activities – whether at the University, working with communities, engaged in international travel and work, participating in professional conferences, attending meetings and public hearings, or other relevant scholarly or practitioner activities – are representatives of Michigan State University. Consequently, as an MSU student, you are expected to behave in a professional manner. Some examples (provided only as examples, not intended to be comprehensive) of appropriate behavior are:

- When attending professional conferences or meetings, especially when funded in whole or part by university funds, you are expected to actively participate in conference sessions and events.
- In doing all your work, you should behave with academic and professional integrity. (Review all the Research Integrity Resources: <https://grad.msu.edu/researchintegrity>)
- When engaging in scholarly debate, treat others with respect and be an active listener.
- In making professional presentations or writing journal articles, acknowledge and cite all work and ideas of others, as they contribute to your own ideas and work.

### Permanent Academic Advising Files

The CSUS Department maintains electronic academic files for each graduate student within the SLATE/SIS systems. The student may have access to all records in their personal file, except letters of recommendation for which they waived their right of access. If a student wants to review their file, they should schedule an appointment with the Academic Coordinator.

If the student wishes to challenge the validity of any of the records, they may present a written challenge explaining the perceived inaccuracies, along with supporting documentation. The written challenge should be submitted to the Academic Coordinator, who will review the challenge and the file. The Academic Coordinator may consult with the Graduate Program Director, the student's major professor, and the Chair of the Graduate Affairs and Curriculum Committee. The Academic Coordinator will provide a written response to the student's challenge. If the student does not believe the issue has been resolved appropriately, they may file an official Grievance (see separate Conflict Resolution and Grievances section of this Handbook.). Items kept in the electronic file (SLATE/SIS) may include:

- All original application materials (application, letters of reference, former degree transcripts, academic and personal statement essays, and resumé).
- Correspondence between student and department faculty and staff
- Copies of fellowship and scholarship applications or nominations, plus award letters/forms
- Copies of all other paid work records, as relevant
- Annual written progress assessment packets (including student's written self-assessment), used as the basis for student review each calendar year
- Written plan describing how the student will address deficiencies, or improve their GPA (if it falls below 3.00), if needed because of the annual review (or semester GPA check resulting in a probation letter)
- Copies of critical correspondence between the University and student

- Copies of any other MSU forms submitted on behalf of the student during their study
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### Student Status: Good Standing, Probation & Termination of Program

Students not making adequate progress, or earning a cumulative GPA of less than 3.00, or engaging in unethical behavior may be placed on probation. Such a determination can be made after an unacceptable annual review, after a semester-by-semester review of GPA, expiration of university deadlines, or violation of university standards of academic integrity. Specific examples of conditions or actions that may result in probation are:

- Cumulative Grade Point Average (GPA) falling below 3.00.
- Violation of scholarly ethics and/or University policies. (Depending on the nature of the violation, the result may be probation or dismissal from the program/University.)
- Repeated failure to make academic progress, such as expiration of university deadlines for comprehensive examinations or program completion.

Additional conditions for being in “good standing” (as related to eligibility for special funding or awards) include:

- Meeting requirements for and submitting annual assessment documents on time (by each January 31 for previous calendar year); and
- Meeting requirements for and submitting annual RCR training documents on time (training completed and documentation submitted by December 31 each year).
- Submitting in a timely manner required post-event/funding use reports for things such as GOF funds (within 30 days after completion of GOF-funded project), fellowships, and scholarships, as relevant to your situation.

Students will receive a letter from the Academic Program Coordinator and chairperson at the beginning of the first semester in which they have been placed on probation, explaining the requirements that must be met to return to good standing. The requirements must be met by the end of the semester. If the student fails to address the deficiencies, the student’s graduate program will be terminated within fourteen days of the end of the semester.

If the student does not agree with the decision of the Department, they may file an official grievance in accordance with the University’s Grievance Procedures. (See separate Conflict Resolution and Grievances section of this Handbook.)

Courses receiving a grade below 2.0 are not counted toward the degree. Grades are reviewed at the end of each semester by the Graduate Program Coordinator. If a student’s program-based GPA falls below 3.00, the student is placed on probation. Students placed on GPA-based probation will have a maximum of two semesters to raise their GPA to at least 3.00. If this minimum is not achieved, the student is counseled by their major professor and may be required to withdraw from the MS program.

### Annual Academic Performance & Progress Assessment

As required by the MSU Graduate School, students will complete a performance and progress assessment, including a meeting with her/his academic advisor, for the preceding calendar year. The purpose of this process is for the student and advisor to review the student’s performance and progress, lay out plans for the next year, discuss ways to facilitate the student’s success, and enable the student to request additional help, if needed. This process is to be initiated by the student, using the form found on the CSUS website: [Annual Grad Student Assessment Form](#)

The entire process, including your individual meeting with your advisor, should be completed no later than January 31. Steps in the assessment process, which is to begin with the student, are to include the following:

- 1) Complete the Annual Student Assessment Form
- 2) Faculty advisor will review your report and write their assessment of your progress.
- 3) After you receive advisor's written assessment, meet with your advisor to review the assessment.
- 4) When student and advisor have met and understood each other's comments, both sign the signature page.
- 5) Compile cover form, student's written assessment, advisor's written assessment, and signature page into a single document.
- 6) Submit the entire assessment packet to the Academic Program Coordinator for placement in your permanent file.

### Academic Research & Integrity

Academic integrity is a strong value adhered to by the University, and all students and faculty members are expected to behave and conduct their work with integrity, adhering to general professional ethical standards and University [policies](#) and [guidelines](#). Students may be dismissed from the CSUS Graduate Program for violating University academic integrity and research ethics. Additional information can be found within the [Graduate Student Rights and Responsibilities](#).

As is the rest of the University, CSUS is diligent in its efforts to maintain the highest levels of ethical scholarly practice. Faculty, specialists, and students are expected to adhere to the standards and processes of Michigan State University's institutional review board, the University Committee for Research Involving Human Subjects (IRB). You are required to receive IRB approval PRIOR TO BEGINNING any data collection. The faculty member identified as principal investigator of your research will work with you to develop and submit the required application. Detailed information regarding IRB and its procedures can be found at the Human Research Protection Program's [website](#).

"Breaches in professional ethics range from questionable research practices to misconduct . . . Integrity in research and creative activities is based not only on sound disciplinary practice, but also on a commitment to basic personal values such as fairness, equity, honesty, and respect. These guidelines are intended to promote high professional standards by everyone – faculty, staff, and students alike" (MSU, Research Integrity, Vol. 7 No.2 Spring 2004, pg. 12). If a student violates academic integrity and research ethics, the circumstances and actions will be reviewed. A decision will be made about whether to terminate the student, place them on probation, or permit them to continue in their program. Depending on the review outcome, the case

**Note: IRB and RCR are two separate requirements!**

IRB training is required by MSU before you can conduct research involving human subjects. IRB training can be used for 2 hours of your annual RCR training but is not sufficient to meet RCR training requirements.

**IRB training** is required by MSU’s Office of Contracts and Grants every 2 years

**RCR training** is required by the MSU Graduate School (4 Modules and 6-hours of discussion- based training).

could be referred to the Dean of Graduate Studies for CANR (See Grievance Procedures on pages 34-35 below for guidelines for disputing a department decision).

**Additional Student Resources**

Following is a list of websites that graduate students may find useful as they pursue their graduate education:

Academic Programs Catalog	<a href="#">MSU Academic Programs/</a>
Graduate Student Rights & Responsibilities	<a href="#">Graduate Student Rights and Responsibilities   Office of Spartan Experiences   Michigan State University (msu.edu)</a>
MSU/Graduate Employees Union Contract	<a href="#">MSU Union Contracts</a>
Code of Teaching Responsibility	<a href="#">Graduate Student Rights &amp; Responsibilities</a>
Office for International Students and Scholars	<a href="#">MSU OISS</a>
Guidelines for Graduate Student Advising and Mentoring Relationships	<a href="#">MSU Graduate Student Advising &amp; Mentoring</a>
Research Integrity	<a href="#">MSU Grad Research Integrity</a>

Policy on Relationship Violence, Sexual Misconduct, and Anti-Discrimination Policy (ADP)	<a href="#">MSU Office of Civil Rights</a>
Active Shooter Guidelines	<a href="#">MSU Active Shooter Guidelines</a>
MSU Health & Safety Resources	<a href="#">MSU Resources</a>
MSU Safety When Traveling/ MSU Travel Clinic	<a href="#">MSU Travel Clinic</a>
Certification in College Teaching	<a href="#">Certificate in College Teaching</a>

## Conflict Resolution & Grievance Procedures

### Conflict Resolution

Conflicts, disagreements, and issues sometimes arise during a graduate program. To assist students and faculty confronting a conflict, the University has developed a program of support. The [Conflict Resolution Program](#) provides tools that aid in preventing and resolving interpersonal conflict. The CSUS Department Chairperson, Associate Chairperson, and Graduate Program Coordinator are also available to consult with students who need assistance in resolving conflicts.

### Office of the University Ombudsperson

If you have exhausted the internal resources for resolving the issue and the issue remains, you may contact the Office of the University Ombudsperson.

The Office of the University Ombudsperson helps students, faculty, and staff resolve University-related concerns. Such concerns include student-faculty conflicts; communication problems; concerns about the university climate; and questions about what options are available for handling a problem, according to Michigan State University policy. The University Ombudsperson also provides information about available resources and student/faculty rights and responsibilities. The office operates as a confidential, independent, and neutral resource. It does not provide notice to the University – that is, it does not speak or hear for the University.

Contact the Ombudsperson at any point during an issue when a confidential conversation or source of information may be needed. The Ombudsperson will listen to your concerns, give you information about university policies, help you evaluate the situation, and assist you in making plans to resolve the conflict.

Contact information:

[Office of the University Ombudsperson](#) 129 N. Kedzie Hall, 354 Farm Lane (517) 353-8830  
[ombud@msu.edu](mailto:ombud@msu.edu)

### Grievance Procedures

If you have an issue that rises to the level of formal grievance, the University, College, and Department [provide procedures for this](#). Resolution of cases involving graduate student rights and responsibilities will be carried out according to Article 5 of the Graduate Student Rights and Responsibilities (G.S.R.R.) document. Prior to initiating the College and University grievance procedures, students should explore all channels and grievance procedures within their home department. The CSUS Department procedures (informal and formal) are outlined on the next page, as specified in the Department's Bylaws.

## CSUS Bylaws Related to Grievance

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### 6.1. Preamble

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All faculty and students shall have the right to due process in settling grievances which may arise (CANR Bylaws 7.1.).

### 6.2. Procedures

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6.2.1. Procedures for resolving faculty grievances may be found in Appendix D of the CANR Bylaws as well as in the Faculty Grievance Procedure in the Faculty Handbook. The practices followed by the Department will be those set forth in the document "Model Academic Unit Grievance Procedure," approved by the University Council for Faculty Affairs, 30 April 1991 (appended).

6.2.2. Procedures for resolving student grievances are outlined in the University documents Academic Freedom Report for Students at Michigan State University and Graduate Students Rights and Responsibilities, and in the Bylaws of the Student Senate. A student or students may take complaints relative to instruction directly to the Department Chairperson. If the Chairperson is unable to resolve the matter to the student's satisfaction, the Chairperson shall refer the unresolved complaints in writing to either the Undergraduate Affairs Committee or Graduate Affairs Committee who will conduct a hearing. A hearing shall be scheduled within 2 weeks involving the student(s), the involved faculty or staff member(s), and the Undergraduate/Graduate Affairs Committee. A written report of the action or recommendations of the Undergraduate/Graduate Affairs Committee will be forwarded to the Dean, Department Chair, the involved faculty or staff member(s), student and university Ombudsman within ten working days of the receipt of the complaint. Students wishing to appeal the Department's action or recommendation may do so as outlined in provisions of the above referenced documents and guidelines for procedures for resolving student grievances.