



School of Planning, Design  
and Construction  
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

# PDC PhD Student Handbook

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## 1. PDC Program Overview

The PhD in Planning, Design, and Construction (PDC) program prepares researchers and professionals to address the planning, design and construction of the built environment— buildings, facilities, interior spaces, infrastructure, neighborhoods, and communities— an integral part of our society. Every new space and structure defines and shapes a community’s personality. Poor planning, design and/or construction can compromise a community’s appearance and drain its resources. Conversely, well-planned, designed, and constructed environments sustain and enrich a community. PDC graduates will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to understand the effects of plans, regulations, design, materials, project management techniques, and construction systems on the economic, environmental, and social concerns of stakeholders and society.

The PDC program offers three concentrations for the PhD degree:

- Construction management (CM)
- Environmental design (ED)
- Urban and regional planning (URP)

## 2. Advising and Mentoring

### 2.1 Orientation

All new PhD students will attend the graduate orientation held at the start of your first semester. The orientation will overview the PDC degree as well as school policies and procedures. Most importantly, we want to familiarize students with the school and provide an opportunity to meet fellow graduate students. Students will be introduced to the graduate faculty within SPDC. The faculty will give an overview of their research interests and activities, as well as any special research opportunities that currently exist. The orientation session should help students develop a plan for their program and identify potential members for their PhD Guidance Committee.

### 2.2 Selection of Major Professor

PhD students shall identify a Major Professor (or two Co-advisors) from the regular faculty from SPDC in the first semester. Often, the Major Professors for PhD students are determined at admission. The responsibilities of the Major Professor include:

- Ensuring that graduate students receive information about requirements and policies of the graduate program
- Advising graduate students on developing a program plan, including appropriate course work, research or creative activity, and on available resources
- Advising graduate students on the selection of a thesis or dissertation topic with realistic prospects for successful completion within an appropriate time frame and on the formation of a guidance committee
- Providing training and oversight in creative activities, research rigor, theoretical and technical aspects of the thesis or dissertation research, and in professional integrity
- Conducting annual evaluation with graduate students per the Graduate School’s requirements by providing written reports
- Encouraging graduate students to stay abreast of the literature and cutting-edge ideas in the field
- Helping graduate students to develop professional skills in writing reports, papers, and



grant proposals, making professional presentations, establishing professional networks, interviewing, and evaluating manuscripts and papers

- Providing regular feedback on the progress of graduate students toward degree completion, including feedback on research or creative activities, course work, and teaching, and constructive criticism if the progress does not meet expectations
- Helping graduate students develop into successful professionals and colleagues, including encouraging students to participate and disseminate results of research or creative activities in the appropriate scholarly or public forums
- Facilitating career development, including advising graduate students on appropriate job and career options, as well as on the preparation of application materials for appropriate fellowship, scholarship, and other relevant opportunities
- Providing for supervision and advising of graduate students when the faculty advisor is on leave or extended absence

### ***Changes in the Major Professor***

PhD students are expected to stay with their Major Professor from start to finish of their degree. Changes in Major Professor require the agreement by the existing Major Professor and the new Major Professor. If the student was funded by their initial Major Professor, they will need to confirm that the work expected under the funding has been completed. The PhD Program Director and the School Director should be consulted for guidance. If all involved agree to the change, the student must submit a letter with the request (in GradPlan), including any applicable funding source considerations, to the PhD Program Director. If there is no agreement among the involved faculty, the PhD Program Director will work to come to an equitable solution. If the PhD Program Director is one of the faculty involved in the changes, then the Director will decide. If both the PhD Program Director and School Director are involved in the changes, a designated alternative administrator will be selected.

Changes in Major Professor may entail completion of additional required coursework. Students are required to retake their comprehensive exam if there is a change to their Chair. At any time, if the student has concerns about the treatment by the Major Professor, they can meet with the PhD Program Director and the School Director. If the Major Professor is also the PhD Program Director, the student should meet the School Director directly.

### **2.3. Formation of PhD Guidance Committee**

The PhD Guidance Committee shall be formed within the third semester of the PhD study. The PhD Guidance Committee should comprise a minimum of four members including the Major Professor (or co-advisors) who will serve as the committee chairperson (or co-chairs). The composition of the PhD Guidance Committee must meet the following requirements:

- Chairperson and one other committee member (or two co-chairs) are from the student's concentration area (CM, ED, or URP)
- A third member is from the school; and
- A fourth member is from outside the school.

The committee members are regular faculty of MSU or specialists that have been approved by the Graduate School to serve on PhD Guidance Committees. Check the Graduate School's policy about who can serve on PhD Guidance Committee. Committee members act as mentors, advisors, and evaluators for the student's program and research. They recommend the course plan and evaluate the comprehensive examination, the dissertation proposal, and the final defense.



### ***Changes in the PhD Guidance Committee Members***

PhD Students are expected to stay with their Guidance Committee from start to finish of their program. If a student needs to make a change to their committee membership, they should discuss the changes with their Major Professor first and inform the current PhD Guidance Committee Members of the reasons for the change. The student must submit the request in GradPlan to initial the change. In rare cases when a change is necessary the Major Professor will provide a rationale to the PhD Program Director. The acceptable justifications may include substantial change in the research area, or unavailability of the member.

## **3. Degree Requirements and Milestones**

### **3.1 Approval of the PhD Plan of Study (POS)**

Within Year 1, all PhD students must complete a POS in GradPlan. The plan must be approved by the Major Professor and the PhD Guidance Committee. Once submitted, all changes to the plan must be made with recommendation from the student's Major Professor and the PhD Guidance Committee. The subject matter and instructor must be specified for every independent study, special problems, or selected topics course that is included in the student's program. It is strongly suggested that all PhD students map out their coursework and requirements early because many courses are taught only one semester per year and others may have prerequisites.

#### ***Required Credits***

PhD students are required to complete at least 45 credits towards the degree, including:

- a. 21 Credits for Coursework, including
  - 6 Credits for two required PDC courses: PDC 901, PDC 992
  - 3 Credits for one advanced statistics/mathematics/computation course
  - 12 Credits of four elective courses related to the concentration
- b. 24 Credits for Dissertation Research (PDC999)
  - PhD students can enroll for a maximum of 36 dissertation credits. PhD students must conduct original research upon a dissertation that makes a significant contribution to knowledge.

#### ***Changes in Grades***

The Following changes are not permitted in the PhD POS:

- Adding or deleting a course for which a grade has already been assigned under any of the three grading systems (numerical, pass-no grade, or credit- no-credit).
- Adding or deleting a course for which grading was postponed by the use of DF- deferred or I- incomplete marker.
- Adding or deleting a course with the student dropped after the middle of the semester and for which "W" or "N" or "0.0" was designated.

#### ***Transfer Courses***

PhD Students may transfer no more than 9 approved semester credits of course work, excluding Dissertation research credits. Credits transferred are established through the POS as agreed upon by the PhD Guidance Committee. Credits must be verified through official transcripts. Transferred credits must have been graduate level courses and earned at a 3.0 or above, or equivalent as determined by chair (if not on a 4.0 scale), to be included.

#### ***Internships***

PhD students may have the option to participate in industry internships, but they are not allowed to use an internship for academic credit.



### 3.2. Written and Oral Comprehensive Examination

In Year 2-3, after required coursework are complete, PhD students will be eligible to take a comprehensive examination covering the major and related fields. At least one component of the comprehensive examination must be written and will expire after **three years** if there has been no progress toward the degree. Students must be enrolled in a minimum of 1 credit during the semester in which they take comprehensive examinations (current semester enrollment covers student until the day before classes start for the following semester).

A passing evaluation must be given by 2/3 of committee members for the student to pass. Students who fail the initial evaluation will work with their Major Professor and committee members for guidance on how to improve and may be re-evaluated the following semester. The student must meet the minimum enrollment requirement for the University during this additional semester.

**Students who fail a second attempt will be dismissed from the PDC program.**

The comprehensive examination must be completed before the dissertation proposal defense can be scheduled. Any change in the Major Professor after passing the comprehensive examination may require retaking and passing the comprehensive examination. **The comprehensive examination must be passed within five years of starting the degree.**

### 3.3 Dissertation Defense

In Year 3-4, PhD students will complete their research dissertation in writing and schedule oral examination for dissertation defense. A passing evaluation must be given by 2/3 of committee members for the student to pass. A dissertation defense can only be scheduled after the student meets the following requirements:

- Complete all required coursework with a minimum GPA of 3.0.
- At least of 9-month interval between the pass of the recent comprehensive examination and the scheduled date for dissertation defense.
- All requirements for the degree must be completed within eight years from the time a student starts in the PDC program.
- Submit at least one peer-review journal article led by the student as the first author or corresponding author (effective for fall 2023 students and after)
- Complete an oral research presentation in school events like seminar or symposium (effective for fall 2023 students and after)
- Good status from annual progress evaluations.

#### ***Certification for Graduation***

In order to be certified to graduate, students must verify their graduation status with the Graduate Secretary. Student should then proceed with applying for graduation with the Office of The Registrar by completing the [Application for Graduation Form](#). If the student does not graduate during the intended semester, a new application must be submitted for the semester of intended graduation. Following is detailed information on the Final steps to complete [Graduate Degree](#).

#### ***Commencement Ceremony***

The Graduate Advanced Degree ceremonies will be held at the end of fall and spring semesters. Students who will graduate in fall semester will participate in the December ceremony. Students who will graduate in spring or summer semesters will participate in the ceremony held at the end of the spring semester. To be listed in the ceremony program students who will graduate in fall, should apply for graduation at the beginning of September and spring/ summer Graduates should apply in January.



### ***Extension Request for Doctoral Study***

The time limit for completion of the requirements for the PhD degree is eight years. If the student cannot complete all requirements within eight years and has justifiable reasons, the student should work with the Major Professor to develop a plan to complete the study. Both the summary and the plan will be reviewed by the PhD Program Committee. The PhD Program Committee will make a recommendation to the School Director. If the School Director deems extension should be requested, he/she will send the request to the College. The Graduate School will make the final decision. The Office of the Registrar will confer with the Graduate School before considering the request for an exception. When an extension request occurs, requests for overrides to exceed the maximum 999 course credit is often needed. Requests for overrides to exceed the maximum of 36 credits of 999 must be directed to the Office of the Registrar. To do so, access the “Request for RNR Override” form online at the [Office of the Registrar Online Forms Menu](#). Should the total of number of credits go above 45, the student must submit a written summary detailing the reason for an exception. It is extremely rarely that second extension and beyond would be granted by the Graduate School.

## **4. Student Responsibilities and Expectations**

### **4.1. Academic Progress and Advising**

- Select a Major Professor and form a Guidance Committee that meets University and school requirements. These committee members should remain informed of the students’ academic progress throughout the length of their program.
- Learn and adhere to University and Academic Unit rules, procedures and policies, including those outlined in this handbook. The academic programs, [Graduate Student Rights and Responsibilities](#), and The Academic Freedom for students at MSU are all available at the [Graduate School Website](#).

### **4.2. Academic Standards**

- Grades: The student must earn a grade of 2.0 or higher in each course in the approved PhD degree plan. Any course in the approved PhD degree plan for which the grade earned falls below 2.0 must be repeated.
- Cumulative Grade-Point Average (GPA): The student must maintain a cumulative GPA of at least 3.0 in the courses listed in the approved POS. A PhD student will **be placed on probation** for one additional semester. If at the end of the additional semester the student’s cumulative GPA is 3.0 or higher, they will be placed on full graduate status for the PDC program; otherwise, they will **be dismissed** from the program.

### **4.3. Academic Records and Documentation**

- After consultation with the Major Professor a completed [academic progress report/annual evaluation](#) should be submitted to the Graduate Secretary **before April 10**, and upload the forms once approved to GradPlan in each spring semester.
- Use [GradPlan](#) to track their degree progress and committee approvals. GradPlan is the only way to process final degree certification for PhD students.
- Provide the school with copies of research related documents (such as permits, approvals, grant proposals, research proposals) within the prescribed deadlines.
- Each student will have an academic file on record containing submitted application materials, grade reports, academic program of study materials, and copies of official letters from the school and faculty. Students have the right to challenge the accuracy of academic files. This challenge, correction or inaccuracy is addressed by the student writing a letter that is to be placed in their academic file. Students can examine their file





by making an appointment with the Graduate Secretary. If a student is an employee of MSU, a separate employment file will be maintained by the employing office/program/department.

#### 4.4. Compliance

- Follow disciplinary and scholarly codes of ethics in course work, research, and professional activities found online at MSU Student Rights and Responsibilities.
- Follow high ethical standards in accordance with University and federal guidelines in collecting and maintaining data, including seeking regulatory approval for research before any research project begins.
- Residency Requirements. One year of residence on the campus after first enrollment for doctoral degree credit is required to permit the student to work with and under the direction of the faculty, and to engage in independent and cooperative research utilizing university facilities. A year of residence will be made up of two consecutive semesters, involving the completion of at least six credits of graduate work each semester.
- Grief Absence Policy. For all PhD students, it is the responsibility of the student to:
- notify their advisor/major professor and faculty of the courses in which they are enrolled of the need for a grief absence in a timely manner, but no later than one week from the student's initial knowledge of the situation
- Provide appropriate verification of the grief absence as specified by the major professor and faculty
- Complete all missed work as determined in consultation with the major professor and faculty

## 4. University Policies for Research

### 5.1 Integrity in Research and Creative Activities

The conduct of research and creative activities by faculty, staff, and students is central to the mission of Michigan State University and is an institutional priority. Faculty, staff, and students work in a rich and competitive environment for the common purpose of learning, creating new knowledge, and disseminating information and ideas for the benefit of their peers and the general public. The stature and reputation of MSU as a research University are based upon the commitment of its faculty, staff, and students to excel in scholarly and creative activities at the highest standards of professional integrity. As a partner in scholarly endeavors, MSU is committed to creating an environment that promotes ethical conduct and integrity in research and creative activities.

Students should refer to the MSU policies on research integrity:

<https://grad.msu.edu/sites/default/files/content/researchintegrity/guidelines.pdf>

Innovative ideas and advances in research and creative activities have the potential to generate professional and public recognition, and in some instances, commercial interest and financial gain. In rare cases, such benefits may become motivating factors to violate professional ethics. Pressures to publish, to obtain research grants, or to complete academic requirements also may lead to an erosion of professional integrity.

Breaches in professional ethics range from questionable research practices to misconduct (MSU Faculty handbook, chapter VI, "Research and Creative Endeavor—Procedures Concerning Allegations of Misconduct in Research and Creative Activities"). The primary responsibility for adhering to professional standards lies with the individual scholar. It is, however, also the responsibility of advisors and of the disciplinary community at large. Passive acceptance of improper practices lowers inhibitions to violate professional ethics. Students should also refer to MSU Graduate School's "Guidelines for Integrity in Research and Creative Activities." Integrity in





research and creative activities are 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.

Integrity in research and creative activities embodies a range of practices that include:

- Honesty in proposing, performing, and reporting research
- Recognition of prior work
- Confidentiality in peer review
- Disclosure of potential conflicts of interest
- Compliance with institutional and sponsor requirements
- Protection of human subjects and humane care of animals in the conduct of research
- Collegiality in scholarly interactions and sharing of resources
- Adherence to fair and open relationships between senior scholars and their coworkers

## **5.2 Environmental Health & Safety (EHS)**

The use of hazardous materials in research, teaching, or outreach activities are subject to State and Federal Laws and guidelines. The Vice President for research and graduate studies has been assigned responsibility to see that appropriate practices are followed where hazardous materials are involved, to maintain a safe environment for campus personnel, to protect the surrounding community, and to assure that MSU meets its obligations under the Law.

Oversight of activities involving hazardous substances is provided by EHS. EHS is assisted by faculty committees in radiation safety, chemical safety, and biological safety. The radiation safety committee has responsibility and authority under Federal Law for specific actions.

The EHS provides live and online training classes throughout the year to educate the employees and students of Michigan State University on safe work practices. Completion of these courses by MSU personnel ensures that the University is fulfilling Local, State and Federal regulations in radiation, chemical, biological, hazardous waste, and environmental safety. For more information about courses available, contact the EHS at (517) 355-0153.

## **5.3 Human Subjects Research**

A student whose research involves human subjects must receive approval for their project from the Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) prior to initiating data collection for their Pre-Dissertation Research, or Doctoral Dissertation. HRPP is an Institutional Review Board (IRB) and Federal and University regulations require that all research projects involving human subjects be reviewed and approved by an IRB before initiation. Under the regulations, research is defined as a formal investigation designed to develop or contribute to general knowledge. A human subject of research is an individual (1) from whom an investigator obtains data by interaction or intervention or (2) about whom the researcher obtains confidential information. Anyone who conducts a study that requires IRB approval must meet the training requirements for human subjects' research protection before submitting an IRB application. For training and education, please visit the HRPP website.

Depending upon the level of risk to subjects in the protocol, HRPP assigns the student's application to one of three review categories (exempt from full review, expedited review, and full review) and sends it to one, two or five reviewers, respectively. If the reviewer(s) is satisfied that the rights and welfare of the human subjects are adequately protected, he or she approves it. However, if the



reviewer has concerns, the reviewer returns written comments to the HRPP office for transmission to the investigator. The investigator must then send a response to each comment, in writing, to HRPP which will forward it to the reviewer(s). If the proposal is either an exempt or expedited proposal, an approval letter can be issued as soon as the reviewer(s) approves. When a proposal receives full (five member sub-committee) review, an approval letter is issued after the proposal is discussed and approved by vote of the full committee at its monthly meeting. More information can be found online at the [MSU Human Research Home Page](#).

Copies of the HRPP application form and the official notification of HRPP approval must be kept in the student's academic file maintained by the school's Graduate Secretary and in the files maintained by the student's Major Professor. The student also should keep copies in his or her own personal files. Failure to satisfy the University standards and HRPP regulations is considered grounds for dismissal from the program. A copy of the approval must be included as an appendix in the Thesis/Dissertation.

#### **5.4 Michigan State University Guidelines on Authorship**

Refer to the University Research Council on January 2013, is available online at [Vice President for Research and Graduate Studies](#).

#### **5.5 Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution**

The University expects student conduct and behavior to reflect qualities of good citizenship. The out-of-classroom activities of Michigan State University students should reflect favorably upon the institution and should indicate the personal integrity of the individual. See Spartan Life: student handbook and resource guide for specific policies, ordinances and regulations that define some of the relevant University expectations. Students planning to use the Human Ecology Building after normal building hours must sign a code of conduct agreement available at the SPDC school office, Room 101 Human Ecology.

Conflicts involving a graduate student may be handled informally, or at the request of a party or parties, formally. Student's rights and responsibilities, including grievance procedures, are detailed in the document: Student Rights and Responsibilities. Procedures more specifically designed for graduate students are to be found in the Publication [Graduate Student Rights and Responsibilities](#) available in the Graduate School Office

Grievance procedures outlined in these documents shall be followed and the College Advisory Council shall be responsible for the interpretation and execution of these procedures in the College. Students also have access to the University Ombudsperson for help with conflict resolution. A template and additional information on grievance procedures and resources available to students may be found online at the [Office of the University Ombudsperson](#).

#### **5.6 Travel Authorization**

All travel by graduate students for academic or research project purposes requires prior approval through submission and signing of a [Travel Authorization form](#). Unapproved travel is not covered by University insurance. All travel forms should be completed through the online system [Concur](#). Rules regarding travel can be found at the [MSU Travel Office website](#). Please contact the SPDC secretary for assistance in creating your online profile and travel authorization forms.

Students traveling internationally for MSU-related work (professional conferences, research data collection, or other academic business) must consult enter themselves into the [Travelers Abroad](#)



[Database](#) (even if they are not being reimbursed for travel). Registration in the MSU Travelers Database allows the University to share important health and safety information pre-departure, and to provide emergency services if necessary.

## 5. Graduate Assistantships & Work-Related Policies

Graduate assistantship (GA) is a generic term referring to financial support of graduate students that results in a stipend and compensation and for which performance of defined duties is expected. Specific graduate assistant appointments are made in one of three categories: research assistants, teaching assistants represented by the Graduate Employees Union, and teaching assistants not represented by the MSU - Graduate Employees Union Collective Bargaining Agreement.

Graduate assistants are enrolled students whose primary association with MSU is directed toward advance degree completion. Satisfactory progress toward earning a degree is a condition of maintaining the assistantship.

Graduate assistants are covered under MSU policies, including those regarding laboratory and campus safety, Drug and Alcohol-Free Workplace, policy on Religious Observance, Procedures for Handling Allegations of Misconduct in Scholarship, MSU Anti-discrimination Policy, and the policies on Sexual Harassment and Conflict of Interest in Educational Responsibilities Resulting from Consensual Amorous or Sexual Relationships.

If you have an assistantship, you are required to enroll for a minimum of 3 credits at the PhD level during the semester in which they hold the assistantship. Once you complete your comprehensive exams, the following semesters you need to only be enrolled for a minimum of 1 credit. (This information is important in reading this document.)

### Expectations

**Graduate Teaching Assistants (TAs)** play a vital role in the educational mission of MSU.

Disciplinary knowledge and instructional skills are key requisites for being a successful teacher, but TAs are also expected to conform to ethical and professional standards described in the MSU code of teaching responsibility. TAs must treat students with respect, deal with conflict fairly and promote a classroom atmosphere that encourages free and meaningful exchange of ideas. Teaching Assistants (TAs) are subject to [collective bargaining agreement](#) with the Graduate Employees Union (GEU). Contract terms are determined by negotiation between the University and the union.

Teaching assistants will be provided information about the GEU and their membership options when they are first appointed, and annually thereafter.

International students whose first language is not English are required to pass the SPEAK test offered by MSU's English Language Center (ELC) and achieve a score of 50 or better before they can be assigned teaching work that involves oral communication with undergraduate students. If a student does not achieve a score of 50 or better, they may enroll in English 097 (the TA Speaking and Listening class) and subsequently achieve a score of 50 or higher on the ITA Oral Interview (ITAOI). The ITAOI is given by the ELC.

**Graduate Research Assistants (RAs)** at Michigan State University play a vital role in the research and outreach missions of MSU. Disciplinary knowledge and research/laboratory skills are key requisites for conducting research, but RAs are also expected to conform to ethical and professional standards described in the MSU faculty handbook section IV: Research and Creative Endeavors. This section includes information on working with animal and human subjects, radiation, chemical, and biological safety, and adherence to federal guidelines on data generation,



management and control. Sections of the academic freedom report for MSU students and the graduate student Rights and Responsibilities document also contain valuable information. Research Assistants are not represented by the GEU.

**Normal workload, averaged over the entire period of the appointment is:**

- 10 hours per week for a quarter-time stipend
- 20 hours per week for a half-time stipend
- 30 hours per week for a three-quarter-time stipend.

Periods of Employment

Graduate Research and Teaching Assistants Employment are as follows:

- Fall semester: August 16 - December 31
- Spring semester: January 1 - May 15
- Summer session: May 16 - August 15

Stipends are compensation for completion of the entire body of work associated with a TA appointment, which includes through the submission of grades when that dates falls outside the employment period.

Responsibilities

Graduate Research and Teaching Assistants are responsible for understanding the weekly workload expectations during the entire period of their appointments. This includes work assigned and the time frame within which the work must be completed, essential duties and responsibilities, work conditions and vacation opportunities, if any.

Appointed Levels

- Level I: Students with less than one year of experience as a Graduate Research and Teaching Assistant or a full support fellow. They conduct research, perform administrative tasks or other supervised duties such as reading and grading papers.
- Level II: Students with a master's degree or equivalent and/or one year of experience as a Graduate Research and Teaching Assistant or a full support fellow in the School of Planning, Design and Construction or in a department/unit considered relevant by the Director of the school. They conduct research, grade papers, or perform administrative tasks with moderate supervision. Advancement from Level I to Level II is usually routine. The advancement is accompanied by an increase in stipend at least to the minimum of the Level II range established by the University.
- Level III: Successful completion of doctoral comprehensive exams, as defined by the School of Planning, Design and Construction in which the student is enrolled, and six semesters of experience as a Graduate Research and Teaching Assistant or a full support fellow in the School of Planning, Design and Construction or in a department/unit considered relevant by the Director of the school. The definition of equivalent experience is left to the discretion of the school Director, but it is expected that only experience in research-oriented or teaching-oriented assignments will count toward the six semesters of experience as a Graduate Research and Teaching Assistant or full support fellow. (Consistent with current practice, ¼ time and ¾ time appointments count the same as ½ time appointments, and summer semesters count the same as fall and spring semesters.)

Mandatory Training on Relationship Violence and Sexual Misconduct

All TAs and RAs must complete the online training about the [Relationship Violence and Sexual Misconduct Policy](#).. To access the training, login to the [Regulatory Training](#).

Click "Register," "Complete Registration" and then "Launch" to begin the Relationship Violence and



Sexual Misconduct (RVSM) Policy - faculty, staff training. (If it indicates that you have already registered, use "In Progress Training", then "Launch."). You will want to reserve approximately 30 minutes to complete all assignments. If you need assistance, contact the Helpdesk at [train@ora.msu.edu](mailto:train@ora.msu.edu) or call (517) 884-4600.

### Evaluation

Graduate Teaching Assistants (TAs) are evaluated at the end of each semester by the faculty on record for the course to which the TA has been assigned. Graduate Research Assistants (RAs) are evaluated by the faculty member who hires the graduate student. Graduate Research and Teaching Assistants are given specific assignments by their Faculty supervisor for the semester for which the student is being funded. The faculty supervisor evaluates the student's performance based on assignments given at the beginning of the semester.

### Termination

Graduate Research and Teaching Assistantships can be terminated if:

- The student does not maintain an overall 3.0 GPA (or higher if set by concentration).
- The student is not making satisfactory progress toward his or her degree.
- Work performance is determined to be inferior.
- Funding is no longer available.

### Health Coverage

Michigan State University offers Graduate Research and Teaching Assistants health insurance coverage. 'Student only' coverage is automatically provided at no cost to the students. Michigan State University will provide a full twelve-month coverage for assistantship appointments of at least nine months. Students may also enroll a legal spouse, or other eligible individual (OEI), and/or children. Questions regarding enrollment, premium payment and coverage should be directed to the Aetna Student Health, (800) 859-8452. Questions or issues that cannot be resolved with Aetna Student Health may be directed to the MSU Benefits office at 1407 South Harrison Road, Room 140, Nisbet Building, or call (517) 353-4434 extension 170 or 144.

### Right to Work

The payment of union dues and fees is now consistent with the Michigan Rights to Work legislation. Nothing in the application of Michigan Right to Works Laws impact the daily terms and conditions of employment of TA's. Union membership is voluntary; meeting the definition of a TA under the GEU contract is independent of union membership. One can be a TA covered by the contract and enjoy all the rights and responsibilities of the agreement but not be a member of the union. Union membership is not tied to the employment relationship and is a private matter between the employee and the union.

### Leave Time

A graduate assistant unable to fulfill the duties of his/her appointment because of illness, injury, or pregnancy shall notify the PhD Program Director as soon as circumstances permit. The graduate assistant shall have the right to return to the assistantship, within the original terms of the appointment, at such time as he/she is able to resume the duties of the position.

GEU CBU Article 18 now provides for possible medical disputes where TA's may not be able to perform their employment responsibilities due to physical or mental conditions. In addition, adoptions and parental leave time provides for pay during the first work week of applicable leave. The language on jury duty has been refined about payment for lost time and reporting back to work after jury duty.

## **6. Funding Opportunities**





### Travel and Research Funding

Reimbursement for research-related travel expenses should be discussed with the student's major professor before any travel expenses are incurred. If you are presenting your research at a professional conference, you may apply for a [Travel Funding](#) fellowship through the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources. If you need financial assistance with your research experience, such as data collection, short courses, attending a workshop for learning new techniques or ideas, you may apply for [Research Enhancement](#) funding through the Office of the Vice President for Research and Graduate Studies and administered by the Graduate School.

### Scholarships and Fellowships

The School of Planning, Design, and Construction offers various competitive scholarships/fellowships for students, which encompass a range of different topics and requirements, including study abroad, financial need, leadership, and underrepresented students in a particular major.

Scholarships require a completed application submitted before the due date every spring semester. Awards are good only for the following school year. Students are expected to use the [SPDC website](#) to find the appropriate application and to watch for deadlines.

International students are taxed on fellowship funds and other awards that are above and beyond tuition and fees. More information on fellowships can be found at the Graduate School's website.

### Other Financial Aid Resources

Students are encouraged to be proactive in searching for funding opportunities. Not all opportunities are presented in this document.

- The Graduate School maintains a website dedicated to [funding opportunities](#) for graduate students.
- [The Office of Financial Aid](#)
- [The Council of Graduate Students](#) (COGS) offers short-term interest-free loans

## **7. School Facilities**

### Mailboxes, Addresses, and E-Mail

The School of Planning, Design, and Construction maintains a Graduate Student listserv which is used to send notices to graduate students by email. Official correspondence from MSU will be sent to your MSU email address so it is suggested that you check this email on a regular basis. All Graduate Students are provided with an on-campus mailbox in room 111 Human Ecology. These mailboxes are for departmental correspondence. Personal correspondence should be directed to the student's home address. It is the student's responsibility to check their mailbox.

### Research and Office Space

The School of Planning, Design, and Construction provides graduate students with a work/lounge space in Human Ecology room 405. It is the students' responsibility to keep this room clean. Drawers are available for students to store their materials in while not in use. Drawers must be kept locked while not in use. Students must provide their own locks. SPDC is not responsible for any missing possessions from unlocked storage drawers. Students may choose their own drawer from any unassigned/unlocked drawers available but must inform the SPDC office staff which drawer they are using. Keys to the Grad lounge/office are available from the main office.





### 24/7 Access

Access to the Human Ecology building is available for students involved in studio, design, and research production courses, or employed on a graduate assistantship. Instructors will provide a list of names of those approved to have 24/7 access due to course enrollment. To be granted 24/7 access, students must sign a Code of Conduct form and turn it in to Erin Klavon in 101 Human Ecology. You will use your MSU ID card to access the building outside normal building hours (excluding football Saturdays).

### Computer Labs

Graduate students can use the computers in HE 105, 106, or 309 whenever the rooms are not being used for a class or other scheduled activities. Students are expected to clean up after themselves and not to cause any damage to the equipment.

### Copies

Graduate students are not allowed to use the department copy machines. Graduate Assistants who require use of copy machines for their research activities should obtain a copy code from their supervising professor.

## **8. MSU Responsible Conduct of Research Training**

Training in the Responsible Conduct of Research is essential in the preparation of future scholars and professionals. An understanding of the issues concerning the conduct of research in an increasingly complex world has become critical in successfully navigating the research landscape. To help prepare graduate students for their future scholarly work, a plan for providing the foundation of responsible conduct has been developed in coordination with the Graduate School, the Vice President for Research and Graduate Studies Office, and college associate deans for graduate education. The plan is predicated on the principles that a basic understanding of issues is necessary through didactic training and a periodic reinforcement of the principles through discussion. It is the belief that this plan will provide a foundation for all graduate students as well as others pursuing a career in research and will offer the basic information to meet most, if not all, federal agency granting requirements.

The plan below represents the minimum university-level and School requirements

The Graduate School RCR Workshop series may be used to help fulfill both the annual refresher and discussion-based training requirements.

- Students who are supported by NSF, NIH, or USDA grants may be required to complete additional specific training; they must meet the timeline and content requirements of training for that grant.
- Students engaged in research involving human subjects or animal use must complete the Michigan State University training modules for those subjects before submitting IRB or IACUC approvals. These modules may be completed as part of the training requirements below, or in addition to them, depending on the department/program or college plan.

### Requirements

- Year 1. All new graduate students will complete 4 CITI online modules within the first year of enrollment in their program: Completion of this requirement will be tracked in SABA and included in the annual student progress review submitted to the School.
  - Introduction to the Responsible Conduct of Research
  - Authorship



- Plagiarism
- Research Misconduct
- Discussion-Based Training. All graduate students must complete a minimum of 6 hours of discussion-based training prior to receiving their degrees. This is through completion of the required course: PDC 901 and PDC 992 for Planning, Design & Construction PhD degree.
- Year 2. Within the first 2 years of enrollment in their program, doctoral students will complete 3 additional MSU online training modules, to be selected from the following list as determined by the instructor for the required research methods course PDC 992. Completion of this requirement will be tracked in SABA and included in the annual student progress review submitted to the School.
  - CITI Collaborative Research
  - CITI Conflicts of Interest
  - CITI Data Management
  - CITI Financial Responsibility
  - CITI Mentoring
  - CITI Peer Review
  - IACUC Tutorial for Animal Care Training (in <http://Train.ORA.msu.edu>)
  - Human Research Protection/ IRB Certification (in <http://Train.ORA.msu.edu>)
  - Rigor and Reproducibility Course (in production)
- Annual Refresher Training. Starting in year 3, all doctoral students must complete 3 hours of annual refresher training; this can include discussion-based training, CITI refresher training and online courses beyond the 7 required in basic training. Selection is in consultation with the Major Advisor. Completion of this requirement will be tracked in SABA and included in the annual student progress review submitted to the School. Doctoral students who have completed an MSU Master's degree which included the basic RCR training requirements: The required PDC 901 and PDC 992 RCR activities will meet the annual refresher training in the first two years of academic study.

#### Record-Keeping and Accountability

Written documentation of completion of RCR requirements should be included in the annual evaluation conducted between a student and their Major Professor, and once signed, submitted to the Graduate Secretary to be filed in the student's academic folder.

#### Links & Resources

Ability (MSU's Training Compliance System): <https://ora.msu.edu/train/>

Office of Regulatory Affairs <https://ora.msu.edu/index.html>

RCR information through Office of Regulatory Affairs: <https://ora.msu.edu/train/rcr/rcr-tracking.html>

RCR information through Graduate School: <https://grad.msu.edu/researchintegrity>

CITI Training: <https://ora.msu.edu/train/programs/citi.html>



## Appendix A. Example of PDC Calendar & Progress Checklist

### Prior to attending the first semester of classes

- Attend the required SPDC graduate student orientation. Students are encouraged to participate in orientation activities offered by the Graduate School (and, for international students, by the Office of International students and scholars).
- Formalize Assistantship expectations and paperwork (if relevant). If you have been awarded an Assistantship or are otherwise employed on campus, contact your supervisor immediately to complete employment paperwork, discuss your assignment and schedule, and address any issues related to your employment.
- Register for classes.
- Doctoral students must be enrolled for a minimum of 6 credits per semester to be considered “full time.” (After the student has completed his or her comprehensive exam(s), he or she may be considered “full time” with 1 credit as long as record of passing comprehensive exams is recorded in GradPlan.)
- Doctoral students must register for PDC 901 during their first fall semester:

### First Semester

- Take PDC 901, the required core SPDC course (offered fall semester).
- Prepare a draft of the report of the Guidance Committee which should outline courses to be taken during the doctoral program to meet degree requirements. Discuss your draft report of the Guidance Committee with your Major Professor to identify when you might take each of the courses and modify the draft accordingly.
- Discuss potential Guidance Committee members with your Major Professor (see previous section for further information):
- Begin [Responsible Conduct of Research and Creative Activities \(RCR\)](#) training..

### Second Semester

- Select Guidance Committee members in consultation with your Major Professor.
- Schedule and hold an official meeting with your Guidance Committee to discuss your academic and professional goals and the courses you intend to take. You may also wish to discuss preliminary dissertation topics with your committee at this time.
  - It is the student’s responsibility to find a date appropriate for all Guidance Committee members, to schedule a room, prepare an agenda (in consultation with Major Professor), and prepare the room as needed (suggestions include providing appropriate audio-visual aids, written agenda, preparing relevant written plans and forms [as appropriate to the meeting agenda]).
- Finalize your program plan; complete and submit it via the [GradPlan](#) website. Complete paper academic program of study form signed by full committee and submit to Graduate Secretary.
- A copy of your completed, approved form will be placed in your permanent academic files.

### Third Semester

- Take PDC 999 (fall semester). Many faculty members are on academic appointments (nine-month) rather than annual appointments (all year), so be sure to schedule committee meetings and other committee activities (including reading of proposals and thesis/project drafts) when they are officially on duty. Exceptions can be made with the approval of all committee members; however, you should plan your work with respect for faculty appointments. Often they are involved in field research, Study Abroad programs, or otherwise away from the University during the time outside of their appointments. Most often this is during the summer; however, some faculty have non-traditional schedules. Be sure to find out appointments and schedules of your Guidance Committee members.



#### End of Third Semester

- Meet with your Major Professor to discuss procedures for and scope of your comprehensive program statement and the comprehensive examination.

#### Fourth Semester - Comprehensive Examination

- Prepare and submit your comprehensive program statement to your Major Professor. (See previous section for detailed description.) Be prepared to make revisions based upon feedback.
- Submit your comprehensive program statement to your Guidance Committee for approval. Be prepared to make revisions according to their suggestions.
- Secure the approval of your comprehensive program statement by your Guidance Committee no less than 60 days before the date of the comprehensive examination. Your Major Professor will subsequently send it to the department faculty for review.
- Schedule your written and oral comprehensive examination with your Guidance Committee. The oral examination should be held within 14 days of the completion of the written comprehensive examination.
- Complete your comprehensive examination no less than 60 days after final approval of your comprehensive program statement. Submit a record of comprehensive exam in [GradPlan](#).

#### Dissertation Proposal

- Prepare a written draft of your dissertation proposal. Discuss it with your Major Professor revise/edit and secure his or her approval prior to submitting it to your Guidance Committee.
- Make necessary corrections in your proposal (based on the feedback from your Major Professor, and committee members, as they elect to be involved).
- Provide each member of your Guidance Committee with a copy of your proposal at least two weeks prior to the proposal defense.
- Schedule a public presentation of your dissertation proposal with your Guidance Committee.
- Present your dissertation proposal, to be followed by a closed meeting in which Guidance Committee members will review and assess the proposal.
- Obtain signatures of the members of your Guidance Committee on the Thesis/Dissertation proposal approval form.
- Secure approval from the Institutional Review Boards (IRB), as appropriate to your research by submitting the application form through the [Human Research Protection](#) website.
  - Students should have peers (and, if needed, professional editors) review and provide editorial recommendations for your dissertation prior to submission to your Major Professor and Guidance Committee.

#### Preparing for Dissertation Defense

The following must be satisfied to schedule the Dissertation Defense

- Check deadline dates for dissertation defense, final submission, and commencement at [The Graduate School website](#).
- Complete and submit the [online application for graduation](#) early in the semester of planned graduation, form available at the Office of the Registrar.
- The student must be enrolled for a minimum of 1 credit during the semester in which the defense takes place (current semester enrollment covers student until the day before classes start for the following semester).
- The student MUST provide their Major Professor and Guidance Committee a copy of the dissertation at least two weeks prior to the exam.



- Check STUINFO to be sure all DFs (deferred grades) have been converted to grades and that your GPA is at least 3.0. You cannot graduate unless these two conditions have been met.

Once a student has confirmed a date and time, they must contact the Graduate Secretary to reserve a conference room. At this time, the student will provide the title of his or her dissertation so the appropriate announcements can be sent out. This MUST be done at least two weeks prior to the exam, no exceptions.

For dissertations, the final oral defense/examination must consist of two parts. The first is a presentation that must be open to faculty members and members of the public without a vote. Only dissertation committee members may attend the second part, which is the examination portion of the defense per individual department/program/school's guidelines.

#### Completion of Dissertation

- Complete all required forms in the Thesis/Dissertation submission packets available at [The Graduate School ETD](#).
- Submit a draft of your dissertation to your Major Professor (and Guidance Committee members, if requested).
- Edit your draft, as needed. See the [format guidelines](#) online at The Graduate School.
- Register for a minimum of 1 credit for the semester in which you plan to defend your dissertation.
- Complete and submit the [online application for graduation](#) at the beginning of the semester. You must apply for graduation even if you do not plan to attend the ceremony. This will circulate the appropriate paperwork to the Graduate Secretary that is needed to approve and confer your degree.
- Schedule a time with your Major Professor and Guidance Committee for defending or presenting your work. This will be an open session to which students and faculty in the School of Planning, Design and Construction may attend.
- Once student has confirmed a date and time that will work for their Major Professor and Guidance Committee they should contact the Graduate Secretary to reserve a conference room at least two weeks before the intended Defense date. At this time the student will also provide the title of their Dissertation so the appropriate announcements may be sent out to SPDC faculty and students.
- Provide your Major Professor and each member of your Guidance Committee a copy of your Dissertation at least two weeks prior to the defense or presentation.
- Orally defend your dissertation.
- Modify your dissertation as required by your Guidance Committee.
- Obtain signatures from the members of your Guidance Committee on the record of dissertation and oral examination requirements for doctoral degree candidate form.
- Prepare the final copy of your dissertation according to the guidelines at [Theses and Dissertation Submissions](#).
- Enter the official dissertation title and IRB number (if applicable) in GradPlan.
- Prepare an abstract of your PhD dissertation to be filed with "Dissertation Abstracts."
- Electronically submit your dissertation to [The Graduate School ETD](#).

#### Electronic Submission of Thesis /Dissertations

The dissertation should be finalized according to the layout and specifications of the MSU Graduate School, see [Thesis and Dissertation Formatting Guide](#) and conform to "[Guidelines for Integrity in Research and Creative Activities](#)," which is available online from The Graduate





School. The student must provide the Graduate School with a copy of the dissertation via the process described at [The Graduate School ETD](#). Students must submit a copy to their Major Professor and Committee Members, either bound or electronic as the respective faculty member prefers.

When submitting an electronic Thesis/Dissertation to ProQuest, a student now has the option to open the document to searches using Google, Google Scholar, and Google Books. The option to block such searches continues to be available. The target date for the FINAL APPROVAL of an electronic Thesis/Dissertation to the Graduate School for graduating the semester of that submission is FIVE working days prior to the first day of classes for the next semester (see future target dates below). Be aware that a submission via ProQuest does not mean that the document has been ACCEPTED. The review process is interactive and final approval can take anywhere from a few hours to weeks, depending upon the extent of the necessary revisions and how diligent the author is when making the necessary revisions.

#### Electronic Submission's Approval Target Dates

The [ETD Deadline Dates](#) can be found at The Graduate School. Graduation on the semester of the electronic submission is only guaranteed if the document is approved on or before the target date for that semester. Provide a PDF file of your dissertation to your Major Professor and Guidance Committee members (Individual committee members may request an alternative format, such as a soft-bound, unbound, or digital copy).

#### Final Logistics

- Read and comply with the MSU's exit check list to ensure that you have all requirements and submitted all appropriate forms and other paperwork.
- Submit your online exit survey.

#### Exit Surveys

Only students who have applied for graduation will have access to the survey. The survey asks questions about educational experiences in MSU graduate programs, as well as about immediate professional plans. The Graduate School uses data from this survey when reviewing graduate programs and to guide decisions about services and initiatives for graduate students. The identity of all respondents will be kept confidential and only aggregate (group) information will be made available to faculty and administrators. The students will receive an e-mail message from the dean of the graduate school with a link to the survey. However, students do not need to wait for that e-mail message to complete the survey after applying for graduation. It takes about 5-10 minutes to complete the online survey. Instructions for completing the survey are available online from [The Graduate School ETD](#).

#### Instructions for Students:

- Doctoral students should access the following website for [Graduate School Exit Survey](#).
- Enter your MSU NetID (Login Name) and password.
- Complete all items on the survey- when finished, click submit.
  - If you cannot open this survey, please email [exitsurvey@grd.msu.edu](mailto:exitsurvey@grd.msu.edu) and include your name, student ID #, degree level (PhD, MA/MS) and semester of graduation. You will be notified when you are able to complete the survey.
- Complete all final forms/ questionnaires required by the Graduate School.
- Pay final fees.
- Prepare for [commencement](#); see guidelines and checklists provided by the University.





## Appendix B. Other University Resources

### The Graduate School

The Graduate School offers many resources for graduate students in a variety of areas including academic, career, funding, and student life. Some other Graduate School resources have been described in other sections of this document.

- [MSU Graduate Student Career and Professional Development](#)
- [Graduate Student Rights and Responsibilities](#)
- [Code of Teaching Responsibilities](#)
- [General Student Regulations](#)
- [Graduate Students Rights and Responsibilities \(GSRR\)](#)
- [Guidelines for Integrity in Research and Creative Activities](#)
- [Integrity of Scholarship and Grades](#)

### Academic Resources

- [Vice President for Student Affairs and Services](#)
- [Office for International Students and Scholars \(OISS\)](#)
- [Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities](#)
- [MSU Writing Center](#)
  - Multiple locations on campus, with the main office located in Bessey Hall.
  - Offers writing consultations, workshops, and writing groups related to papers, projects, even theses and dissertations.
- [Career Services Network](#)
- [MSU Libraries](#)
  - There are many branch libraries on campus, as well as a large number of electronic resources. Students are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the large number of available resources, which include periodicals, journals, computers, copying/scanning/printing, a Passport Acceptance Facility, study rooms, and research guides
- [Technology at MSU](#)
  - Offers a variety of services including [technology support](#) and the [MSU Tech Store](#),
- Bookstores
  - [Spartan Bookstore](#), the on-campus book store, located in the International Center.
  - Several off-campus bookstores are located in downtown East Lansing, across from campus.

### Student Life

- [Counseling Center](#)
- [Olin Health Center](#)
- [Center for Service-Learning and Civic Engagement](#)
- [Recreational Sports and Fitness](#)
- [MSU Student Food Bank](#)
- [MSU Safe Place](#)
- [Council of Graduate Students \(COGS\)](#)
- [The State News](#)
- [Spartan Student Life Handbook](#)
- [Parents Resource Center](#)

### Parking

Any vehicle parked on campus must be registered with [MSU Police Office](#).