



# RHETORIC AND WRITING GRADUATE HANDBOOK

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## Introduction

Welcome to the Rhetoric and Writing graduate program in the Department of Writing, Rhetoric, and Cultures within the College of Arts and Letters at Michigan State University. We are excited about the possibilities that arise from each cohort's arrival in the program. We know that each of you has something important to contribute to our intellectual community and to the future of our discipline.

Entering and completing graduate school is an exciting time, filled with new opportunities. This Handbook is a key source of information for guiding students through their degrees. The Handbook will inform students, faculty, and staff on course and program requirements, on standards for professional conduct in that field, on the timetable for the selection of a faculty advisor and the formation of a guidance committee, on examinations and graduation requirements, and on policy for dismissal. Informing students of these requirements is required by [Graduate Students Rights and Responsibilities\(2.3.2\)](#). The [Handbook](#) is a crucial element for welcoming new students, supporting existing students, and ensuring the integrity and quality of the graduate program overall.

Should there be a conflict between this Handbook and the GEU contract, the contract supersedes this Handbook. The policies contained within the GEU contract for teaching assistants shall apply to research assistants in the Rhetoric and Writing graduate program.

## Select University Policies

All University policies override all inconsistent provisions of this handbook, including the following:

[Academic Programs Catalog](#)

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

[Code of Teaching Responsibilities](#)

[Disability and Reasonable Accommodation Policy](#)

[Digital Accessibility Policy](#)

[General Student Regulations](#)

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

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

[Integrity of Scholarship & Grades](#)

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

[MSU-GEU Contract](#)

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

## Mission and Structure

Our programs aim to provide a creative and energetic environment for research and teaching in rhetoric and writing. We offer a broad array of curricular, co-curricular, extra-curricular, and community engagement opportunities, and a nationally renowned faculty who enjoy working with students as they become our colleagues and peers. As a community of about 40 diverse graduate students and nearly 20 diverse and interdisciplinary graduate program faculty, we work together to develop knowledge that will contribute to Michigan State University's mission, advance our discipline, and transform the world in which we live.

In addition to our department's WIDE (Writing, Information, and Digital Experience) research center, we have strong interdisciplinary ties to other programs and research centers at MSU, especially to African American and African Studies; American Indian Studies; Asian Pacific American Studies; Chicano/Latina Studies; Cultural Heritage Informatics; Digital Humanities; the Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum; MATRIX (The Center for Humane Arts, Letters, and Social Sciences Online); the MSU Museum; the Native American Institute; the Residential College in the Arts and Humanities (RCAH); the Center for Gender in a Global Context (GenCen); and the Writing Center. Within these programs, our department, and across the university, there are numerous activities, committees, and organizations to participate in (see Article 6 of [GSRR](#)).

## A Brief History of Our Program

The graduate programs in the Department of Writing, Rhetoric, and American Cultures (WRAC) were founded in 2002 as an independent Rhetoric and Writing (RW) Program in the College of Arts and Letters (CAL). We marked our formal beginnings in Fall 2003, when our first five RW PhD students and seven Digital Rhetoric and Professional Writing (DRPW) MA students began their studies at MSU. In 2004, the English department's Critical Studies in the Teaching of English (CSTE) program joined us and became the Critical Studies in Literacy and Pedagogy (CSLP) MA and PhD concentration. Since 2010, the graduate programs have been housed in WRAC. Today, the graduate programs include an MA and a PhD in Rhetoric and Writing, and we will relaunch our PhD program in Fall 2025.

Our programs offer students a unique academic space to explore scholarly, intellectual, and pedagogical pathways in/outside the traditionally understood field of rhetoric and writing studies. Encouraging these kinds of risks requires a strong supportive network of colleagues and mentors, and we work hard to provide an intellectual community that seeks out and welcomes all individuals and that openly makes space for the broadest possible spectrum of diversity across categories of age, life experience, gender, abilities, race, ethnicity, class, religion, spirituality, sexual orientation, and geography.

After nearly 20 years, our programs are thriving. Collectives, research clusters, and writing groups are constantly being formed to promote collaborative scholarship among students and faculty. These collaborations have resulted in conference presentations, workshops, grant proposals, articles, book chapters, special issues of journals, technologies, policies, white papers, and books. Many members of our community have graduated and moved on to public-, private- and university employment; to work with nonprofits and with industry; and to other graduate programs. As we look forward to our future as a program, we remain invested in building and maintaining a visionary, innovative space for knowledge-making—a process of reflection and revision that includes our graduate students.

## Graduate Program Handbook

### 1. M.A. in Rhetoric and Writing

This section serves as a “road map” for graduate students to see the big picture for their degree program and to begin to understand the expectations of the faculty. Most students complete this degree program in two years, and some students complete the program over three years while they are working professionally in their field.

#### 1.1 M.A. Program Overview

The MA in Rhetoric and Writing is an innovative degree program focused on educating the next generation of leaders and thinkers who engage their work in both academic and professional contexts. The Master of Arts degree in Rhetoric and Writing serves both as:

- A professional degree for careers in technical and professional communication at corporations, nonprofits, government agencies, and educational institutions
- A preparatory degree for doctoral work in composition, and/or technical communication

This program provides students with a theoretically grounded and practical experience in rhetoric and writing studies. Master’s candidates are expected to:

- Know the theories, philosophies, and practices in Rhetoric and Writing
- Develop an area of expertise in keeping with their long-term goals
- Cultivate an understanding of the professional practices of rhetoricians
- Produce publishable work for academic and/or professional journals in the field
- Employ professional pedagogical methods for teaching and learning
- Contribute to the department by participating in events, joining research groups and practice teams, and attending department meetings.

## 1.2 M.A. Plan Options

This section explains the elements that constitute Plan A (thesis) and Plan B (portfolio) options. Each student must select an option by their first annual review meeting. Students interested in preparing for doctoral work often select Plan A, and students interested in pursuing a professional degree often select Plan B. The work of each plan's deliverables typically takes place in the second year of a two-year program.

Each plan includes the following milestones beyond coursework:

- Submit Proposal to Committee
- Submit Deliverable to Committee
- Pass Oral Certifying Examination

### Plan A: Thesis

A thesis project allows a graduate student the opportunity to practice their research, planning, synthesizing, and writing skills. The project is the culmination of the student's learning in the program, resulting in a deliverable appropriate to the size and scale of the intended audience. For some students, this project may be aimed at an academic audience in anticipation of further study in doctoral programs. For other students, this project may be aimed at a professional audience for publication. Students are encouraged to work with their advisor and committee to discuss the expectations of scope, audience, and length.

The following phases and steps outline the typical process for student's completing Plan A:

- Ideation
- Prospectus
- Research
- Deliverable
- Certifying Exam
- Filing / Launch

### Plan B: Portfolio

A portfolio project allows a graduate student the opportunity to collect, organize, and situate their work to demonstrate learnings across the program. The project is the culmination of the student's learning in the program, resulting in a public or private portfolio piece appropriate to the size and scale of the intended audience. For some students, this project may be aimed at a professional audience for workplace placement. For other students, this project may be aimed at an academic audience for future work in higher education. Students are encouraged to work with their advisor and committee to discuss the expectations of scope, audience, and length.

The following steps outline the typical process for student's completing Plan B:

- Ideation
- Proposal
- Research
- Deliverable
- Certifying Exam
- Launch

### 1.3 M.A. Degree Requirements

Students will complete an official plan of study in consultation with their advisor and committee members with the approval of the program director. This plan of study will outline the coursework, plan, experiences, and exam milestones.

#### Coursework

Typically, M.A. students are encouraged to take their core courses in their first year, focusing on either their thesis or portfolio in their second year. Graduate students may enroll in 800- and 400-level courses; no more than 12 credits of 400-level courses will count towards the degree.

#### Core (12 credits)

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- WRA 886: Master's Research Colloquium
- WRA 810: Writing, Composing, Designing, Making
- WRA 805: Rhetoric History and Theory *or* WRA 882: Contemporary Theories of Rhetoric

#### M.A. Plan Option

- Plan A: WRA 899: Master's Thesis Research (4-6 credits)
- Plan B: Additional elective coursework in the department (3-6 credits)

#### Concentration (21 Credits)

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#### Professional Writing and Technical Communication (PWTC)

- All of the following core courses (12 credits):
  - WRA 420: Content Management
  - WRA 453: Grant and Proposal Writing *or* WRA 483: Community Publishing
  - WRA 841: Professional Writing Theory and Practice
  - WRA 893B: Internship in Professional Writing

- Complete a minimum of 9 additional credits selected from program offerings or graduate offerings in other departments (with approval).

### Composition Studies and Writing Pedagogy (CSWP)

- All of the following core courses (12 credits):
  - WRA 870: Research Methodologies in Rhetoric and Writing
  - WRA 878: Composition Studies Theory and History
  - WRA 888: Methods of Teaching Writing
  - WRA 891: Writing Program Administration Theory and Practice *or* WRA 889: Writing Center Administration Theory and Practice
- Complete a minimum of 9 additional credits selected from program offerings or graduate offerings in other departments (with approval).

### Digital Rhetorics (DR)

- All of the following core courses (12 credits):
  - WRA 415: Digital Rhetoric
  - WRA 420: Content Management
  - WRA 841: Professional Writing Theory and Research
  - WRA 860: Multimodal Composing Theory and Practice
- Complete a minimum of 9 additional credits selected from program offerings or graduate offerings in other departments (with approval).

### Cultural Rhetorics (CR)

- All of the following core courses (12 credits):
  - WRA 882: Contemporary Theories of Rhetoric (cannot be counted twice if taken to fulfill the core program requirements; if counted toward core program requirements, a suitable replacement will be selected from program offerings or graduate offerings, with approval)
  - WRA 848: Cultural Rhetorics Theory and Methodology
  - WRA 891: Cultural Rhetorics Special Topics Seminars (two different offerings)
- Complete a minimum of 9 additional credits selected from program offerings or graduate offerings in other departments (with approval).

### Custom Emphasis (CE)

- Requirements for this concentration are discussed and determined in consultation with the assistant director, who serves as MA advisor.

## Experiences

All students are encouraged to explore career pathways, attend department hosted talks and events, and grow their professional networks. Students may also pursue options for specializations, cognates, or certificates outside of the department. Students are especially encouraged to attend conferences, participate in internships, and engage with academic and/or professional organizations.

## Exam Milestones

In addition to the course work and deliverables required for Plan A and Plan B, M.A. students must complete a final project based on their area of expertise. There are three milestones for this final project, including a proposal, a deliverable, and an examination.

Given orally in the presence of the student's chair and committee, this certifying exam focuses on the student's deliverable (i.e., thesis or portfolio). It is usually held during the final semester of the student's degree program. The exam typically lasts one hour, in which the student summarizes their project. After the exam, the student leaves the room. The chair and the committee assess the exam and determine whether the student has passed or failed. The student is invited to return, and the chair shares the results of the exam, advising the student of any needed revisions before submitting the final deliverable.

## 2. Ph.D. in Rhetoric and Writing

This section serves as a “road map” for graduate students to see the big picture for their degree program and to begin to understand the expectations of the faculty. Most students complete this degree program in four years.

### 2.1 Ph.D. Program Overview

The PhD in Rhetoric and Writing is an advanced research degree program focused on educating the next generation of leaders and thinkers who engage their work in academic, administrative, and professional contexts. This program is grounded in methodological foundations and rhetorical practices as it is situated in academic, workplace, and civic contexts. The Doctor of Philosophy in Rhetoric and Writing serves as a research degree with leadership pathways for careers in academic, professional, nonprofit, and government settings.

This program provides students with a theoretically grounded and practical experience in rhetoric and writing studies. Ph.D. candidates are expected to:

- Know and apply the theories, philosophies, and practices in Rhetoric and Writing
- Develop an area of expertise in keeping with their long-term goals and culminating in a final dissertation project



- Build a portfolio of leadership experiences and mentorship practices
- Cultivate a deeper understanding of the professional practices of rhetoricians
- Produce publishable work for academic and/or professional journals in the field
- Employ professional pedagogical methods for teaching and learning
- Contribute to the department by serving on committees, participating in events, joining research groups and practice teams, and attending department meetings.

## 2.2 Ph.D. Degree Requirements

Students will complete an official plan of study in consultation with their advisor and committee members with the approval of the program director. This plan of study will outline the coursework, plan, experiences, and exam milestones.

The Ph.D. program is comprised of four major components:

- Coursework
  - Core Courses
  - Concentration Courses
- Comprehensive Exams
  - Core Exam: Written and Oral Defense
  - Concentration Exam: Written and Oral Defense
- Dissertation
  - Prospectus Exam
  - Dissertation Defense
- Language Requirement

This section will describe each component in more detail.

### Coursework

The PhD consists of a minimum of 27 credits of graduate course work beyond the MA degree, plus a minimum of 24 credits of dissertation research taking while working on exams and dissertation(WRA 999).

Students are expected to take all core courses and select at least one concentration area. The purpose of the concentration requirement is for students to develop a specialized area of study complementary to their rhetoric and writing degree. A concentration consists of at least nine credits of coursework in a specialized area at the graduate level.

Typically, Ph.D. students are encouraged to take their core courses in their first year, focusing on area courses in year two. However, given that some area courses alternate year to year, it is critical that students work with their advisor and committee to build a plan with this in mind.

Graduate students may enroll in 800- and 400-level courses; no more than 6 credits of 400-level courses will count towards the degree (see [reg.msu.edu](http://reg.msu.edu)). Students who have taken some of the required core courses as part of their MA program may petition the director to waive their requirement in the doctoral program.

### **Core (18 credits)**

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- WRA 885 Research Colloquium WRA 805 Rhetoric Theory and History
- WRA 870 Research Methodologies in Rhetoric and Writing
- WRA 878 Composition Studies: Issues, Theory, and Research
- WRA 882 Contemporary Theories of Rhetoric
- WRA 853 Workshop in Rhetoric and Writing

### **Concentration (9 Credits)**

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#### Critical Studies in Literacy and Pedagogy

- AL 881 Teaching with Technology
- One course in language, literacy, and culture:
  - WRA 877 Community Literacy
  - WRA 992 Seminar in Literacy Studies
- One additional course in research methodology:
  - CEP 931 Qualitative Methods in Educational Research
  - CEP 932 Quantitative Methods in Educational Research I
  - CEP 955 Research Design and Methods for Learning, Technology, and Culture
  - CEP 930 Educational Inquiry
  - WRA 872 Methods of Research in Rhetoric and Writing
  - ANP 833 Ethnographic Analysis
- Electives for concentration:
  - One or two courses in Reading, Linguistics, Literacy Development, Sociocultural Diversity, Educational Technology, Educational History or Policy, or Teacher Learning (AL, CEP, EAP, TE, ENG, LIN, LLT, or ANP), as approved by the director and the student's guidance committee. For a current listing of possible courses, contact the CSLP advisor.

#### Cultural Rhetorics Concentration

- Required for concentration (3 credits):
  - WRA 848 Cultural Rhetorics
- Electives for concentration (6 credits):
  - With the advice and approval of their guidance committee, students should assemble at least 6 credit hours in courses appropriate for the Cultural Rhetorics concentration. It is generally expected that students will take advantage of

courses offered by Rhetoric and Writing faculty before they search outside of the program and/or college for appropriate concentration coursework.

### Digital Rhetoric and Professional Writing Concentration

- Required for concentration (6 credits):
  - WRA 415 Digital Rhetoric
  - WRA 841 Professional Writing Theory and Research
- Electives for concentration; one of the following (3 credits):
  - WRA 410 Advanced Web Authoring
  - WRA 420 Content Management for Professional Writers
  - WRA 453 Grant and Proposal Writing
  - WRA 482 Information and Interaction Design
  - WRA 860 Multimodal Composing Theory and Practice
  - WRA 877 Community Literacy
  - WRA 893B Internship in Professional Writing
  - AL 881 Teaching with Technology
  - An STA graphic design course (in consultation with STA instructor)

### Self-Designed Concentration

In consultation with their guidance committee, a student must petition the Rhetoric and Writing Graduate Advisory Committee for approval to complete a self-designed concentration. The letter of petition should provide the committee with a list of courses to be taken (minimum of 9 credits), and a rationale for the concentration.

The rationale should address how the proposed concentration will assist the student's intellectual work and professional development in the field of rhetoric and writing. Although 9 credits are required for the self-designed concentration, most self-designed concentrations will require more than the minimum number of credits.

### Comprehensive Exams

Examinations are a moment for students to synthesize their knowledge and apply it in answering questions that allow them a moment to both showcase what they have learned, prepare them for their next exam moment, and/or ready them for the next stage in their professional careers.

## Core Exam

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The core exam is based on the core courses in the PhD program and should be taken as soon as possible after the student has completed the core course requirements in the program. The core exam consists of two parts:

- **Part 1: Portfolio and Reflective Essay (50%)**  
The student should submit a portfolio of work that draws from the core courses. This portfolio should provide samples of the student's learning in those core courses, typically 3–5 pieces. It must also include a reflective essay that shows the student synthesizing knowledge gained across the core courses. The student must submit a copy of the portfolio to both the chair of the guidance committee and the graduate secretary before they receive the questions for their exam.
- **Part 2. Exam (50%)**  
The examination consists of two essays in response to questions that engage and focus on the student's experiences in the core courses. The essay questions will be cooperatively developed by the student and their guidance committee. Each essay must be 15 pages each, double-spaced, not including works cited. The student has one week to complete the exam.

The process for taking the Core Exam is as follows:

1. **Several months before** taking the exam, the student should discuss the schedule for the core examination with the guidance committee. The ideal time for this discussion is during the student's annual review at the end of their first year. Students—and faculty—are encouraged to review existing past core exam questions and prompts (available on request from the graduate secretary).
2. **Early in the semester prior** to the scheduled date for the exam, the student develops a list of 6–8 questions or prompts arising from their PhD core coursework in the areas of history/theory, research/methodology, and pedagogy. The questions must show that the student is making connections across and between the core courses. This list will likely be revised and refined to a smaller list of, e.g., 4–6 questions, as the committee discussed the list with the student and the questions are refined.
3. After the chair and the student have revised the questions to the chair's satisfaction, the student submits this list to the guidance committee **6 weeks before the exam date**. The guidance committee provides feedback and a list of 4–6 finalized, appropriate, and answerable exam questions to the student. The student should then gather readings and prepare outlines for answering these questions in advance of their exam, consulting with their chair as appropriate.

4. **On the agreed-upon exam date**, the student submits their portfolio and, upon receipt, the guidance committee chair sends three of the questions (selected by the entire committee) to the student. This begins the clock for the week-long exam.
5. The student selects two of the three questions and has **seven calendar days to prepare responses**. Full bibliographical references should be included but do not count towards the 15-page limit per question. The student may consult notes, electronic materials, print readings (journals, books, etc.), in preparing their responses. The student may also consult directly with the chair of their committee, and with other committee members, to ask questions and determine the scope for their responses. The student submits their response to their guidance committee chair and to the graduate program secretary.
6. **Within two weeks** of receiving the student's exam responses, the guidance committee must submit a written assessment of the exams to the student and to the graduate secretary.
7. The guidance committee chair completes and signs the appropriate section of the Plan of Study.

### **Concentration Exam**

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The concentration exam is based on coursework the student has taken in one of the specialized areas described above and should be taken as soon as possible after the student has completed the concentration coursework. The exam itself consists of two parts:

- **Part 1: Portfolio and Reflective Essay (50%)**  
The student submits a portfolio of work that draws from the concentration coursework. This portfolio should provide samples of the student's learning in the concentration courses, typically, 3–5 products (course papers, syllabi and instructional materials, electronic material, conference presentations, any outside work that pertains to the student's development in the concentration, etc.). It must also include a reflective essay that shows the student synthesizing knowledge gained across the concentration courses and that narrates the products included in the portfolio.
- **Part 2: Literature Review Essay and Annotated Bibliography (50%)**  
The second half of the concentration exam consists of two parts: a literature review essay (25 double-spaced pages, maximum, not including works cited) and an annotated bibliography (40–70 sources) addressing the topic, issue, or question that has been designated as the focus of the review essay and vetted by the committee.

The review essay should review and evaluate research/scholarship related to a question

or issue of significance to the discipline, and of interest to the student, related to the concentration; the essay should make an argument based on the student's use and understanding of the sources contained in the annotated bibliography; the essay should NOT merely summarize or survey those texts. It should function as an argument for the relevance of selected literature in understanding the chosen concentration area as an area. The review essay is not intended to be a comprehensive treatment of research and scholarship in the selected area, nor of all the texts on the annotated bibliography; instead, the essay should use a selection of those texts in a meaningful way.

The essay should draw research and scholarship primarily from the annotated bibliography. The annotated bibliography should be a list of 40–70 sources, include short (1–2 paragraph) annotations that describe and suggest the relevance of each entry to the guiding question/topic for the literature review; and be organized in a rhetorically meaningful way, suggesting possible themes or issues to be mapped out or taken up in the review essay.

The process for completing the concentration exam is as follows:

1. **When ready to begin the exam process** and in consultation with their guidance committee, the student develops a guiding topic, issue, or question on a focus topic within the concentration area. The guidance committee will consult with the student regarding the scope of the guiding topic, issue, or question to ensure it is narrow enough to be completed within the limits of the exam requirements. The guidance committee will respond to a draft of the student's list of sources to be annotated for the exam, and the committee chair reviews the student's proposed timeline for the exam. After the guiding topic, issue, or question has been approved by the guidance committee, students typically spend **12–15 weeks working on their exam**.
2. **During this exam time**, the student may pose questions to, share draft material, or otherwise work with their committee chair and committee at any time during the concentration exam preparation. Participating in a writing group is strongly recommended for students working on their concentration exams.
3. **When the review essay and annotated bibliography are completed**, the student submits all parts of the concentration exam (portfolio, literature review essay, and annotated bibliography) to the guidance committee chair and to the graduate secretary. The chair then shares these materials with the student's guidance committee.
4. **Within two weeks** of receiving the student's exam responses the guidance committee must submit a written assessment of the exams to the student and to the graduate secretary.

5. The guidance committee chair completes and signs the appropriate section of the Plan of Study.

## **Dissertation**

The final doctoral examination is the culmination of a student's graduate education and reflects on the accomplishments of the graduate student and the quality of the graduate program. Students defend a dissertation prospectus, which outlines the major theories, methods, and includes a project plan for the dissertation.

For Ph.D. students, 24 credits of dissertation coursework are required for graduation; students can enroll for a maximum of 36 credits. Students who have passed their exams (core, concentration, prospectus) only need to register for one credit to be considered full-time students.

## **Dissertation Prospectus Exam**

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The dissertation prospectus exam consists of an oral defense of the written dissertation prospectus with members of the guidance committee. The goal of the prospectus is to produce a working plan for the dissertation. The student should submit the dissertation prospectus as soon as possible after completing the core and concentration exams; in most cases, the prospectus exam should take place no later than six months after completing the concentration exam, preferably within three months.

The written prospectus should:

- be 10–15 double-spaced pages, not including a bibliography of key works
- address a significant question or issue in the discipline of rhetoric and writing, and include a written rationale for how the project will contribute to the specific field and/or sub-disciplinary area in which it is written
- include a workplan and a detailed timeline for completion of the dissertation
- include sections that elaborate on the dissertation's theoretical and methodological frame, as well as forms and methods of data collection and interpretation;
- include a rationale for making the project in a particular form or medium (traditional alphabetic print, video, multimedia, mixed media, performance, installation, software, website, etc.) as well as its genre (if applicable)
- for print-based dissertations, include a table of contents and a brief description of each chapter; for non-print dissertations, students should consult with their committee regarding how to best portray the sequence of their work in the prospectus

- include a process for communicating with and getting guidance from the Committee chair and members—this includes details like submitting chapters or drafts of other media for from the guidance committee chair and members
- be distributed to the guidance committee at least 2 weeks in advance of the oral defense of the prospectus

During the oral defense of the prospectus, the guidance chair and committee:

- asks questions, poses solutions, and gives feedback to the student concerning the focus and scope of the dissertation
- provides comments about the proposed work schedule and the timetable for communications during the dissertation writing process
- sets goals for revision of the project’s scope and production
- informs the student at the end of the oral defense whether they have passed the prospectus exam and the guidance committee chair completes and signs the appropriate section of the Plan of Study.

Any necessary revisions to the plans for the project (theoretical frame for the project, methods and methodologies, rationales for making the project in a particular form or medium, timelines, processes, etc.) should be made in writing and agreed to by the committee in their written form.

## **Dissertation Overview**

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At MSU, each doctoral student is expected to engage in “original research upon which a dissertation which makes a significant contribution to knowledge is to be prepared and published” ([reg.msu.edu/Research](http://reg.msu.edu/Research)). The Graduate School further requires that each program define what constitutes an acceptable dissertation for their doctoral students. The RW program places responsibility for this decision with the student’s guidance committee and requires that decisions about the form, format, and media in which the dissertation is produced be finalized as part of the process of finalizing the dissertation. These decisions should be the result of informed conversations between the student and their committee, taking into consideration the form of production that will best suit the student’s professional goals.

The dissertation:

- Is typically a 100–200 page (double-spaced) print work or its equivalent in non-print medium
- demonstrates in-depth knowledge of the field and discipline and creates new knowledge within that field
- has the potential for significant impact on the discipline (e.g., addresses questions of importance, develops new avenues of thought, challenges predominant assumptions)



- is produced at a level of quality appropriate for the public, either through traditional publication or through digital, performance, or other installation venues (this includes digital spaces where software or database projects would be available for viewing)

Students who are producing a dissertation a format other than traditional print should:

- Compose a written project synopsis, which can resemble a dissertation chapter or take a different shape. The project synopsis can/should address some or all of the following issues: theoretical framework for the project; methodology; rationale for making the project in its particular medium; argument for the need of this project in our field.
- Create a plan for preservation of the artifact they produce. In considering how their dissertation project can be preserved for future viewings, interactions or uses, the student may want to create a written preservation rationale.

### Stage 1: Preparation and Planning

We do not expect students to arrive at our program with a fully formed dissertation focus. Instead, we encourage students to take advantage of the many learning experiences available to them during their time in the program to craft a dissertation project about which they are committed. This takes time and it is best accomplished through intellectual exploration and collaboration with faculty chosen to guide the larger process of dissertating and finishing the PhD.

The role of the **dissertation prospectus** is, as outlined above, to engage members of your committee as a support network for producing a plan to accomplish your goals. Assembling a committee of faculty who can both support your work and help you accommodate the inevitable shifts that will occur during your research and production of the dissertation itself is critical to a student's success—finishing on time, defending, and the job search.

### Stage 2: Research and Drafting

During the research and drafting phase of the project, the candidate should expect to meet with their chair at least once per month, preferably every other week, to discuss findings, to go over rough drafts, to build chapter outlines or map out process ideas for non-print dissertations, or to address questions or issues during this phase of the project. It is certainly possible to consult other members of the committee as needed, but that consultation process should be worked out with the chair first.

In most cases, the chair and committee members should expect to take no more than 2 weeks to respond to a candidate's draft. The exception is when drafts are circulated during summer

months. It is the general policy of the program that faculty are not available May 15 through August 15. Candidates and their chairs should plan accordingly.

One of the most critical components during this phase of the project is finding a writing and/or feedback group of peers or colleagues who are not members of your guidance committee. Our most successful students find that working with their own writing/feedback group, as well as scheduling consultations at the Writing Center, help them produce drafts that the committee members can respond to more effectively.

### *Dissertation Completion Fellowships*

Students are expected to apply for a Dissertation Completion Fellowship (DCF) for their final year in the program. The DCF only pays for one credit of WRA 999 during the semester in which you take the fellowship, so plan your WRA 999 credits accordingly.

### Stage 3: Defending the Dissertation

During the semester in which the candidate plans to complete the dissertation, they should schedule a dissertation defense with the guidance committee. It is the responsibility of the candidate's chair to ascertain that all committee members agree that the dissertation is ready to be defended. If a committee member believes there are problems with the dissertation that are so significant that it will cause the candidate to fail the defense, the chair must work with the candidate until they produce a defensible draft of the project.

After a defensible draft of the project is produced, it is the candidate's responsibility to schedule the defense (a 2-hour block of time) at least one month in advance, and to deliver copies of the completed dissertation project to each committee member no later than two weeks before the scheduled defense date. The candidate must be enrolled in at least one credit hour in the semester in which they defend the dissertation. This is a policy of the university, and it cannot be waived. [Per MSU policy](#), the dissertation defense 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.

The dissertation defense is structured as follows:

1. The candidate begins by delivering a short presentation about the dissertation (10–15 minutes maximum). This presentation should not be a summary of the project; instead, it should address issues and/or questions raised by the project itself, by the candidate's engagement in the project, or that are anticipated in making the project available to the public.
2. Each committee member then raises questions and makes suggestions about the dissertation, allowing the candidate an opportunity to respond. Some chairs prefer to

allocate a certain amount of response time to each committee member; others prefer that the response period operate like a conversation and simply makes certain that all committee members have an opportunity to engage the candidate. Discussion of the dissertation usually lasts about an hour.

3. When all the questions have been discussed and addressed, the dissertation committee chair asks the candidate and any other attendees present to leave the room and allow time for the committee to deliberate about the dissertation project.

The committee discusses three questions in particular:

1. Is the dissertation project (deliverable and presentation) acceptable?
2. What revisions or amendments are necessary for final approval?
3. How should the candidate think about preparing the project for future publication?

Typically, this deliberation takes 15 minutes. According to the [policies of the Graduate School](#), the decision of the committee must be agreed upon by at least three-fourths of the committee members with not more than one dissenting vote among the MSU faculty on the committee.

1. When the committee has concluded its deliberations, the committee chair invites the candidate back into the room to hear the decision, to discuss any needed revisions, and to get advice about future public circulation of the project.
2. All official university forms are signed by each member of the committee.
3. File the dissertation. See the [Graduate School Electronic Theses and Dissertation Submission guidelines](#).

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

### Language Requirement

In Rhetoric and Writing, we believe multiple literacies are important for researchers, scholars, and professionals. At every level, the experience of language/literacy/skill acquisition as a meta discourse activity is useful in understanding the complexities of multilingualism and multiculturalism.

Students must submit a plan to their chair for meeting this requirement within the first two years of coursework. There are two primary pathways for meeting this requirement:

- Coursework: If meeting that requirement requires completing language coursework, the language courses must be listed on the plan of study (note that these courses cannot

replace courses taken to fulfill core or concentration requirements for the degree).

Options include:

- Complete two courses in any language other than English
- Complete two courses in African American vernacular English and rhetoric
- Complete two courses in teaching English to speakers of other languages
- Experience: If meeting the requirement through experiences outside of language coursework, the student will need approval from their committee, documented in their plan of study describing the experience and providing a rationale for satisfying the language requirement. Options include:
  - Demonstrate second-year proficiency in a language other than English

### 3. Advising and Guidance Committee

#### 3.1 Intent

Initiation and successful completion of independent research or creative activity requires early and continued advice and oversight by a faculty advisor on behalf of the academic unit. Therefore, the RW program has policies and procedures to ensure that the faculty advisor of each graduate student will be selected in a timely fashion and that the relationship between the graduate student and the faculty advisor will foster a successful academic experience and preparation in research or creative activities.

Students should consult regularly with their advisors—meaning at a minimum of three times per academic year (or more often if circumstances warrant). Attention should be devoted to a particular student's needs based on their academic background, lived experiences, research activities, and short- and long- term professional goals.

Students are encouraged to collaborate first with their chair and their committee to generate individual development plans that consider the strengths and challenges of the student and the students' career goals. Faculty advisors and students are encouraged to review the materials available in [MSU Guidelines for Graduate Student Mentoring and Advising](#), paying particular attention to those mentoring and advising areas identified as the essential responsibilities of students, faculty, and units.

#### 3.2 Timing and Selection

In their first year of program, all graduate students will be advised by either the RW graduate director (Ph.D. students) or the RW assistant director (M.A. students) until they establish a guidance committee. During their second semester in the program, all graduate students must form a guidance committee by March 15<sup>th</sup>, including selecting a chair of their committee. The chair and committee will supervise their remaining coursework and will oversee their

comprehensive examinations. Students who fail to form an advisory committee by the end of their first year are considered to not be making satisfactory progress. (See section 6, Academic Performance Standards and Annual Review.)

Although students should select some faculty with whom they think they might want to work during the dissertation, students should also remember that the constitution of the committee can, and sometimes should, change as they approach each program milestone.

After the Ph.D. student is ABD, the student's guidance committee becomes a dissertation committee. At this time, the student may decide to add a fifth member to the committee (which may be a faculty member at another university).

In the event that a graduate student's guidance committee chair leaves MSU before that student completes their degree, the student will be required to find a new chair. Ideally, another member of the student's committee who is familiar with their project can fill this role. For PhD students, the departing faculty member may be retained as a member of the committee with the approval of the graduate director, College of Arts and Letters, and the Graduate School. All effort will be made to ensure the student's program proceeds as smoothly and efficiently as possible.

### 3.3 Committee Composition

For the Ph.D. program, the guidance committee consists of four MSU faculty. Of the four faculty members, the student will designate one faculty member as the chair; the chair must be a graduate faculty member in the RW program. The student's guidance committee must be approved by the RW graduate director. The student may make changes in their guidance committee at any time and for any reason with the approval of the RW graduate director.

For the M.A. program, the guidance committee consists of three MSU faculty, two of whom must be RW Faculty. Of the three faculty members, the student will designate one faculty member as the chair; the chair must be a graduate faculty member in the Rhetoric and Writing program. The student's guidance committee must be approved by the RW graduate director. The student may make changes in their guidance committee at any time and for any reason with the approval of the RW graduate director.

### 3.4 Committee Responsibilities

For Ph.D. students, the guidance committee does the following:

- Consults with the student about their work and progress throughout their time in the program
- Makes recommendations regarding the student's course of study, including needed coursework

- Reviews the student’s annual review portfolio each year, with the chair responsible for reporting the student’s progress to the RW program director
- Serves as the PhD comprehensive exam committee, developing the questions for the core exam; the prompt for the concentration exam; and evaluating the student’s responses to the core, concentration, and pre-dissertation exams
- Guides the student throughout the dissertation research process
- Offers comments and responds to dissertation drafts
- Sits as the dissertation defense examination committee, certifying the student’s work on both the dissertation and the defense exam

For M.A. students, the guidance committee does the following:

- Makes recommendations regarding the student’s course of study, including required coursework
- Reviews the student’s annual review portfolio each year, with the chair responsible for reporting the student’s progress to the RW program director
- Provides a written formative evaluation of the student’s work and progress each year
- Serves as the thesis committee for Plan A students, guiding and evaluating the student’s thesis project; or serves as the committee of the certifying portfolio or exam for Plan B students

#### 4. Departmental Program Policies: Academic and Professional Performance

##### 4.1 Academic Standards

Graduate students should take extreme care to make sure that they meet the minimum academic standards required by the Graduate School, by the College of Arts & Letters, and by the Rhetoric and Writing graduate programs. Failure to meet these minimum academic standards has a range of consequences, ranging from loss of travel support, to loss of teaching or research assistantship, to dismissal from the program. Below are listed the standards for the Graduate School, the College, and the WRAC graduate programs—and then the overarching standards for maintaining good academic standing.

##### **Graduate School Standards**

A 3.00 cumulative grade-point average in the degree program is the minimum university standard, but colleges, departments, or schools may establish a higher minimum standard; however, attainment of the minimum grade-point average is in itself an insufficient indicator of potential for success in other aspects of the program and in the field.

The guidance committee and academic unit are jointly responsible for evaluating the student's competency (as indicated by, e.g., grades in core and other courses, research performance, and development of professional skills) and rate of progress (as indicated by, e.g., the number of courses for which grades have been assigned or deferred).

Written evaluations shall be communicated to the graduate student at least once a year, and a copy of such evaluations shall be placed in the graduate student's file. A student whose performance does not meet the standards of quality will not be permitted to continue to enroll in the degree program, and appropriate action will be taken by the department or college.

### **Graduate Assistants in the College of Arts and Letters**

A graduate assistant in the College of Arts and Letters must:

- maintain a cumulative grade-point average of at least 3.25; and
- accumulate deferred grades (identified by the DF-Deferred marker) in no more than 8 credits of coursework (excluding 899 and 999 credits).

If, at the end of a semester, a graduate assistant fails to meet one or both of the requirements specified above, the graduate assistant shall receive a warning and be allowed to hold the graduate assistantship for one additional semester. If at the end of the additional semester, the graduate assistant has failed to meet one or both of the requirements specified above, the graduate assistantship shall be withdrawn.

### **WRAC MA Program Standards**

Students must maintain a cumulative GPA of at least 3.5 in all graduate courses. A student may accumulate no more than 6 credits with a grade below 3.0 in courses taken for the purpose of satisfying the degree requirements.

### **WRAC PhD Program Standards**

Students must maintain a cumulative GPA of at least 3.50 in all graduate courses. A student may count toward the degree only those courses in which the student has received a grade of 3.0 or higher. A student may accumulate no more than 6 credits with a grade below 3.0 in courses taken for the purpose of satisfying the degree requirements.

A student who fails the comprehensive examinations, the pre-dissertation prospectus examination, or the final oral examination in defense of the dissertation may repeat that examination only once, during the following semester.

## **4.2 Maintaining Good Academic Standing**

For students to remain in good academic standing, they must make satisfactory progress toward their degree completion. There are time limits for both MA and PhD programs.

### **Time Limits for the MA Degree**

The time limit for the completion of the requirements for the Master's degree is 6 calendar years from the date of enrollment in the first course included for degree certification.

### **Time Limits for the PhD Degree**

All three of the comprehensive examinations must be passed within 5 years and all remaining requirements for the degree must be completed within 8 years from the time a student begins the first class at Michigan State University that appears on their doctoral program of study.

Application for extensions of the 8-year period of time toward degree must be submitted by the department for approval by the dean of the College of Arts & Letters and the dean of the Graduate School. Upon approval of the extension, doctoral comprehensive examinations must be passed again.

### **Satisfactory Progress Toward Degree**

In addition to these time limits, students are expected to make “satisfactory progress” toward completion of their degree—that is, complete required coursework and exams, and complete the dissertation/thesis (if applicable) according to the general timelines established by the program. If a student falls too far behind the expected timeline for completion of a degree, the guidance committee should warn the student about this problem. Failure to make satisfactory progress could result in loss of teaching or research assistantships (which typically require satisfactory progress toward degree as a condition of employment).

### **Academic Standing for PhD Candidates (ABD)**

Good academic standing for doctoral students is assessed during the Annual Review process. We expect doctoral students to complete their degree in 4 or 5 years, depending in part on their funding arrangements and the nature of their dissertation research.

As part of the PhD pre-dissertation prospectus exam, it is expected that doctoral students will present a work schedule that will be approved by their guidance committee during the oral portion of that exam defense. This schedule will, at the very least, match research goals and dissertation production to specific milestones and dates.

Once doctoral students attain candidacy (after having successfully defended a dissertation prospectus) they should continue to make satisfactory progress toward completion of the



degree. To make “satisfactory progress,” candidates must meet the following minimum standards:

- maintain regular contact with the chair of their doctoral guidance committee and provide regular updates to the other committee members
- meet research and material-production deadlines as outlined in the timeline or file the appropriate amendments to the timeline with the guidance committee via the chair
- meet all requirements associated with their graduate assistantship (e.g., graduate teaching assistants must meet with mentor groups)
- meet a minimum standard of delivering at least one chapter per calendar year that is reviewed and approved by the guidance committee

### **Restoring Academic Good Standing**

If, at the end of a semester, a graduate student fails to meet the GPA requirement, or accumulates an excessive number of DF and I grades, or in any other way fails to meet the standards for progress and for academic good standing in the program (as determined by the graduate director or by the student’s committee), the student shall receive written warning that details the options for restoring good academic standing. Students may respond to this warning in writing to the chair of the committee and/or the graduate director. The student must remedy the problem within one semester following the one in which the problem occurred. (For example, if the student’s GPA falls below a 3.5 in spring, the student has until the end of the following fall semester to bring their GPA to the appropriate level).

## **4.3 Pass–Fail Courses, Independent Studies, and Internships**

### **Pass–Fail Courses**

Courses that are being counted toward fulfilling the degree requirements may not be taken on a pass–fail basis (or credit–no credit basis) unless the courses are only offered on this basis.

### **Independent Study Courses**

Students may take an independent study course to explore a specialized topic for which there is no current MSU course. Independent study courses should not be used as substitutes for existing courses. The student needs to find a faculty member willing to sponsor the course, and the course material and number must be graduate level. Guidelines for independent study courses can be found online at the Registrar’s site.

The university-required independent study form is available on the WRAC website: <https://wrac.msu.edu/handbook-forms>. The independent study request must specify the number of credit hours, what work will be completed for the independent study, how it will be

evaluated and graded, how often the student and sponsoring faculty member will meet, etc. Students should save a copy of the form for their own records and must file a copy of the request form with the graduate secretary in order to be enrolled in WRA 890 credit. The request must be approved by the sponsoring faculty member, the student's academic advisor, the graduate director, and the associate dean of CAL.

## **Internships**

Frequently, graduate students enroll in internships as part of their plan of study. These can be both more traditional workplace internships to help MA students gain experience in the kinds of places they may someday find employment or special teaching internships to provide PhD students with teaching experiences they might otherwise not have access to during their program of study.

For both kinds of internships, a contract must be signed. The contract details the kind of work that the student will be engaged in during the internship and how this work will be evaluated. Additionally, the contract designates a work supervisor or project manager (who provides an evaluation of the student's performance in the internship to the faculty advisor) and a faculty advisor (who is responsible for recording the final grade based on the work supervisor's evaluation). The program teaching internship form/contract and the professional/community internship form/contract are available on the WRAC website. The contract must be signed by the student, the work supervisor, the faculty advisor, and the WRAC graduate director before the internship course can be created.

### **4.4 Grades of Deferred (DF) and Incomplete (I)**

Graduate students may not accumulate more than 8 credits total of DF and I (excluding 899 and 999 credits) and remain in good academic standing in the program. In general, the program discourages students and faculty from using the DF grade. The DF should only be used under extraordinary personal circumstances that prevent a student from completing course requirements. If a student simply needs extra time to complete a course, the grade of I should be used. See the university rules for use of the I ([https://reg.msu.edu/read/pdf/I\\_Agreement.pdf](https://reg.msu.edu/read/pdf/I_Agreement.pdf)).

Additionally, when a student takes a DF, the required coursework must be completed, and a grade reported within six 6 months (with the option of a single 6-month extension). If the required work is not completed within the time limit, the DF will become U-Unfinished and will be changed to DF/U under the numerical and Pass-No Grade (P-N) grading systems, and the DF/NC under the Credit-No Credit (CR-NC) system. This rule does not apply to graduate thesis or dissertation work.

## 4.5 MA Certifying Exam Assessment

### Assessment of the MA Certifying Exam

The final master's examination is the culmination of a student's graduate education and reflects on the accomplishments of the graduate student and the quality of the graduate program. The MA Plan options (Exam, Portfolio, or Thesis) will be assessed Pass, Revise and Resubmit, Fail. The advisory committee must provide the student with their evaluation of the certifying exam within 2 weeks of receiving it. Students are responsible for submitting the certifying exam to their advisory committee in an accessible format.

#### Pass

To receive a pass, the certifying exam should:

- show in-depth knowledge of the given topics or issues, as well as familiarity with the readings being discussed
- show that the student understands the relevant topics deeply and is acquainted with how the field approaches the topics
- show that the student has the ability to assess the relevant topics or issues critically, to evaluate and compare approaches, to synthesize diverse views, and/or to contribute to the field's understanding of the topics or issues
- be appropriate for its audience and its purpose
- be well-organized, well-designed, and clear across navigation, layout, and other aspects

#### Revise and Resubmit

A student may receive a result of revise and resubmit if the student's guidance committee concludes that the certifying exam does not live up to the standards for passing. In such cases, the advisory committee decides which portions of the portfolio must be revised and reports that decision to the graduate director. The revision must be completed by the end of the following semester; if the revision continues beyond the semester in which the student presented their certifying exam, the student will need to enroll in one credit for the additional semester. The student can only submit a revision once. There are no appeals in this process.

#### Fail

A student may receive a result of fail if the student's guidance committee concludes that the certifying exam does not live up to the standards for passing. In such cases, the advisory committee may allow for revisions and report that decision to the graduate director. If the committee allows, a new exam must be completed by the end of the following semester; if the revision continues beyond the semester in which the student presented their certifying exam,

the student will need to enroll in one credit for the additional semester. The student can only submit a new exam once. There are no appeals in this process.

#### **4.6 PhD Exam Assessment**

All PhD exams (core, concentration, and dissertation prospectus defense) will be graded on the scale of Pass, Revise and Resubmit, or Fail.

For the core and concentration exams, a student must pass all the components of each exam to pass the overall exam. A student who fails any of the comprehensive exams has the opportunity to retake the exam once during the following semester.

The guidance committee must provide the student with their evaluation of each exam within 2 weeks of receiving it. Students are responsible for submitting the exam to their guidance committee in an accessible format.

##### **Pass**

To receive a pass, the exam should:

- show in-depth knowledge of the given topic or issue, as well as familiarity with the readings being discussed
- show that the student understands the topic deeply and is acquainted with how the field approaches the topic (as prompted by the exam questions or topics)
- show that the student has the ability to assess the topic or issue critically, to evaluate and compare approaches, to synthesize diverse views, and/or to contribute to the field's understanding of the topic or issue
- be appropriate for its audience and its purpose
- be well organized and clear

##### **Revise and Resubmit**

A student's guidance committee may choose to ask them to revise and resubmit any portion of the exam that they feel does not live up to the standards for passing the exam but that also does not fail the exam completely.

A student who receives a "revise and resubmit" on an exam must submit a revision of that exam within a very specific time frame after the original exam deadline—no less than 6 weeks and no more than 12 weeks. While the exact deadline for a "revise and resubmit" revision is set by the student's guidance committee, it must fall within this 6–12 week time frame.

## Fail

A fail indicates that a portion of the exam is significantly flawed in the previously stated standards for passing.

A student who fails the core, the concentration, or dissertation prospectus defense must take advantage of the opportunity to retake it by the end of the following semester. For instance, if the student fails the exam in spring semester, the student would have until December of the following fall semester to make up the exam. In such cases, the guidance committee decides which portions of the exam must be retaken and reports that decision to the graduate director. There are no appeals in this process.

### 4.7 Dismissal from the Program

While we are willing to extend a second chance to students in violation of the program's academic standards and/or the program's ethical expectations (see details above and in section 7 Ethical Expectations), we are obligated by the Graduate School to provide explicit conditions for dismissal of graduate students in our program.

The conditions for dismissal from the Rhetoric and Writing program are as follows:

- a cumulative GPA below 3.5 for two consecutive semesters (as stated previously, students are warned when this occurs the first time and given one additional semester to remedy the problem)
- more than 8 credits total of DF or I grades for two consecutive semesters (as stated previously, students are warned the first time this occurs and are given one additional semester to remedy the problem)
- violation of the guidelines for appropriate professional conduct outlined in section 7; or,
- a second failure of the core, concentration, or, the pre-dissertation examination, or the oral defense of the dissertation
- failure to re-take a previously failed comprehensive examination, the pre-dissertation examination, or the oral defense of the dissertation examination in the semester following that initial failure
- failure to make satisfactory academic progress as articulated in the criteria suggested for evaluation in the Annual Progress Report section above
- the finding that a student is not making satisfactory progress is made by the student's advisor and/or guidance committee (students are warned after the first semester in which this occurs and are given one additional semester to remedy the problem)

After all the appropriate warnings and second-chance procedures have been exhausted, the student will be informed of their dismissal from the program by the graduate director. At that

time the University Registrar will be informed that the student is no longer enrolled in the program.

#### **4.8 Requirements for Formatting and Submitting Dissertations and Theses**

A list of requirements for submitting the thesis or dissertation is available on the Graduate School website (<http://grad.msu.edu/etd>).

The new publishing agreement for theses/dissertations with ProQuest now provides an Open Access Publishing Option as an alternative to the traditional publishing option available to our students. The Open Access option gives ProQuest the authorization to make the electronic version of the document accessible to all via the Internet, including the selling of the document by commercial retailers and accessibility to the work via search engines. A student selecting the Open Access option will not be eligible to receive royalties. The pros and cons of selecting this new option differ significantly across disciplines. For more information, go to the ProQuest website.

#### **4.9 Filing non-print thesis or dissertation projects**

The Graduate School has asked us to follow the following procedure when filing non-print materials to meet the requirements of thesis or dissertation projects.

You may use a non-print (for example, video) file for your document; however, you must have the same set of preliminary pages that would be included in a regular print document, all formatted according to the standard formatting guide requirements. This set includes:

- a title page
- an abstract
- a table of contents—link from this page to your non-print file; this link must always be maintained so that anyone who wants to see your non-print file in the future can do so
- a references/works cited section
- any other preliminary pages (dedication, acknowledgements, preface, etc.)

#### **4.10 Annual Review**

The primary purpose of the annual review process is to provide each graduate student with clear feedback on their progress in the program, to provide the student with guidance on making satisfactory academic and professional progress, and to help students understand how to prepare for evaluation in their professional lives. For PhD students, this annual review process is very similar to the annual review that all faculty are expected to do. See the WRAC website at <https://wrac.msu.edu/handbook-forms> for more information.

## **Process**

There are three components to this process:

1. preparation and submission of the annual review portfolio
2. the annual review meeting itself
3. the committee chair files the annual progress report form with the WRAC graduate director

### **The Annual Review Portfolio**

The student should be collecting relevant portfolio materials throughout the year in preparation for this part of the annual review process. This portfolio (which can be print, electronic, or a combination) should include samples of the student's work completed during the previous year: representative work done in courses (the student should include good, excellent, and even not-so-good work); professional work done outside courses (e.g., conference presentations, consultations or collaborations with community partners); and teaching material (e.g., course evaluations, syllabi, instructional materials).

Each year, the portfolio should also include a short essay that provides evidence of reasoning about and reflection on how the student's progress towards their research, teaching, and professional goals. The student must submit the portfolio to both the guidance committee members and the graduate program secretary. The student should then arrange with the guidance committee chair the exact procedure for the annual review.

### **The Annual Review Meeting**

All members of the guidance committee review the student's portfolio, curriculum vita or resume, and short essay. The committee provides the student with a written evaluation of the past year's work. The student meets with entire guidance committee to discuss the evaluation of the student's work. The annual progress report is due by committee chairs to the graduate director by May 1. This means that students must hold their annual review meeting with their committee no later than April 20.

### **Exceptions to the Review Process**

Students should talk with their committee chair about making the exceptions discussed below and the entire committee should be consulted before the exception is granted. Even if an exception is granted, the student must still submit their short essay and their chair is still responsible for submitting the annual progress report.

MA students actively engaged in the process of preparing an MA thesis, exam, or portfolio do not need to submit a separate portfolio to their guidance committees (most MA students only prepare an annual review portfolio their first year in the program).

PhD students may request that their core exam portfolio may substitute for their annual review during year 2; they may also request that their concentration exam portfolio substitute for an annual review during year 3.

PhD students who have completed their exams, defended their dissertation prospectus, are ABD, and are engaged in the process of dissertation research and writing may submit a brief progress report in lieu of an annual review.

#### **4.11 Requirements for Completing the Degree**

Degree candidates must complete an Application for Graduation early in the semester in which they plan to graduate. The online graduate application form is available at <http://www.reg.msu.edu/StuForms/GradApp/GradApp.asp>. For further instructions and information about ceremonies, regalia, etc., see <http://grad.msu.edu/graduation>.

### **5. Departmental Policies: Integrity and Safety in Research and Creative Activities**

#### **5.1 Ethical Expectations: Integrity in Research and Professional Conduct**

When you enter the WRAC graduate program at MSU, you enter an intellectual community in which integrity in professional, research, and creative activities is highly valued. Faculty in the program believe that the best way to ensure the integrity of our collective efforts is to create a climate of care and ethical expectations in which graduate students are taught, advised, mentored, and supported in their teaching and research activities.

That climate includes several components:

- a shared understanding of what constitutes appropriate professional conduct, and explicit criteria for dismissal of students who violate those professional standards;
- a shared understanding of what constitutes unethical or dishonest behavior, and explicit criteria for dismissal of students who practice unethical or dishonest behavior while engaged in research, scholarly, and creative activities;
- a shared understanding of what constitutes ethical mentoring and advising, and explicit guidelines and policies for mediating conflicts and handling grievances/appeals between students and mentors, and between students and students.



Graduate students should follow the MSU Guidelines on Authorship, available at <https://rio.msu.edu/authorship>, and MSU's Institutional Data Policy, available at <https://tech.msu.edu/about/guidelines-policies/msu-institutional-data-policy/>.

## 5.2 Appropriate Professional Conduct

As faculty in an academic program, we share some common standards about what constitutes appropriate professional conduct, and it is our responsibility to share these standards with graduate students. Our collective understanding of these professional standards comes from our own practices as professionals in the disciplines and fields that constitute rhetoric and writing, and from our common belief that humans in general should treat each other decently, with respect, care, and generosity.

In general, we believe that appropriate professional conduct includes:

- respect for others' personhood and diversity of personhood, including but not limited to race, color, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, style of dress, manner of speaking, political viewpoint, etc.
- a shared commitment to basic values such as fairness, equity, honesty, and respect
- honest and accurate representation of one's identity, credentials, and professional background (e.g., no inflation of status or experiences on one's vita; accurate representation of contributions to committee work or to collaborative projects and publications)
- awareness that appropriate professional conduct does not entail the transfer or appropriation of the work of others without shared decision-making, credit, and benefits—a standard for how to work appropriately within a community and to collaborate professionally
- acknowledgement of the collaborative and social nature of the scholarly enterprise, which extends beyond use of formal scholarly citations to an acknowledgement of how fellow scholars have helped one to form ideas, review drafts, suggest revisions, etc.
- respect for one's intellectual ancestors, especially for those who created the discipline within which one works
- actively and respectfully listening to and engaging with people, their ideas, and how they experience (and represent) cultural and intellectual institutions
- respect for human subjects involved in research
- explicit training of graduate students in sound disciplinary practices (including appropriate methodological instruction) in core courses and in the interactions that we have with one another as colleagues

Faculty in the WRAC graduate program believe that any of the following constitute unethical and/or dishonest scholarly and/or research practices:

- violation of policies outlined in the current MSU Graduate Programs catalog (<https://reg.msu.edu/academicprograms/>) and in the MSU Graduate Student Rights and Responsibilities (GSRR; <https://grad.msu.edu/gsrr/>)
- violation of policies outlined in the Guidelines for Integrity in Research and Creative Activities published by the MSU Office of Research Ethics and Standards in the Research Integrity Newsletter (Spring 2004, pp. 12–14)
- violations of the provisions of the MSU Human Research Protection (HRP) Manual, available on the Human Research Protection Program website (<https://hrpp.msu.edu/>)
- violation of policies outlined in the University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (UCRIHS) Handbook
- violation of ethics and research integrity guidelines developed and published by professional organizations such as NCTE, CCCC, AAA, ASA, AHA, STC, as applicable according to stated field of study
  - **NCTE**: National Council of Teachers of English
  - **CCCC**: Conference on College Composition and Communication
  - **AAA**: American Anthropological Association
  - **ASA**: American Sociological Association
  - **AHA**: American Historical Association
  - **STC**: Society for Technical Communication
- violations of the above that include but are not limited to misrepresentation, falsification, fabrication, and plagiarism
- violation of the above-mentioned standards of appropriate professional behavior

### **5.3 Reporting Unethical or Dishonest Scholarly and Research Practices and/or Inappropriate Professional Conduct**

To report inappropriate professional conduct, contact the WRAC graduate director. If you are uncomfortable doing so or believe there is a better venue to express concerns, please see the “issues and reporting guide” available on the WRAC web site, which describes potential problematic behaviors and issues and ways in which students can seek institutional support, including reaching out to the University Ombudsperson (<https://ombud.msu.edu/>).

### **5.4 Consequences of Unethical or Dishonest Scholarly and Research Practices**

For dishonest scholarly practices in a course, the instructor will follow the university regulations found in the Graduate Student Rights and Responsibilities (GSRR) Handbook. The instructor will also inform the graduate director and the guidance committee.

The student's guidance committee and the graduate director will determine the severity of any scholarly/research infraction and will meet with the student to help them understand the situation and learn from the event; an informal annotation of the event will be kept on file by the student, the guidance committee, and the program director. Severe violations will result in immediate dismissal.

First instances of some practices may be dealt with as a learning moment. Second instances will result in a formal letter of warning placed in the student's permanent file; this letter will outline the violation, cite it as a second instance of such behavior, and warn that continued inappropriate behavior could result in dismissal from the program. Repeat instances will trigger the dismissal process.

Refer to MSU's Procedures Concerning Allegations of Misconduct in Research and Creative Activities for further information: [https://hr.msu.edu/policies-procedures/faculty-academic-staff/faculty-handbook/misconduct\\_procedures.html](https://hr.msu.edu/policies-procedures/faculty-academic-staff/faculty-handbook/misconduct_procedures.html)

### **5.5 Mandatory Reporting, Discrimination, and Harassment**

Faculty are considered mandatory reporters. This means that they are required to report incidents of sexual harassment, sexual violence, sexual misconduct, stalking, credible threats of harm to oneself or others, and relationship violence that they learn about or observe in their professional capacity. Professional capacity includes information learned in classroom contexts; at individual meetings; in research contexts; and in spaces outside of the university, including on social media.

Similarly, if you have a teaching assistantship at MSU, in our department or elsewhere, you are considered a mandatory reporter. Workshops are offered through the Graduate School so that TAs can better understand their roles and possible actions as mandatory reporters. If you have a research assistantship through the Writing Center @ MSU, you are also considered a mandatory reporter, and may be considered a mandatory reporter in other research assistant roles as well.

**MSU's Office for Civil Rights and Title IX Education and Compliance (OCR)** reviews concerns related to discrimination and harassment based on age, color, gender, gender identity, disability status, height, marital status, national origin, political persuasion, race, religion, sexual orientation, veteran status, and weight under the University's Anti-Discrimination Policy (ADP) and Policy on Relationship Violence and Sexual Misconduct (RVSM). OIE staff is available to provide information on the policies, connect MSU community members to resources, investigate complaints, and provide training. More information is available at <https://civilrights.msu.edu/>.

**The University Policy on Relationship Violence and Sexual Misconduct** is available at <https://civilrights.msu.edu/policies/rvsm.html>

**Restorative Justice @ MSU** provides an alternative source of trainings, information, and resources on issues dealing with harassment, discrimination, and violence. This includes support-based resources for counseling, advocacy, and guides to navigating both MSU and legal systems of reporting. You can access more information at <https://www.deanofstudents.msu.edu/restorative-justice>

## 5.6 Campus Safety

**General MSU Safety Resources** are available at <https://msu.edu/state-transparency-reporting/campus-safety-information-resources>

**The MSU Travel Clinic** promotes safe and healthy travel by providing counseling to travelers about appropriate vaccines and preventive medication. More information is available at <https://travelclinic.msu.edu/>

**Safety Guidelines for an Active Shooter Situation** are available at <https://comartsci.msu.edu/sites/default/files/documents/resources/safety-guidelines-for-active-shooter1.pdf>

## 5.7 Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Training

All students, faculty, and staff must complete MSU's online DEI training. Visit the [Training page](#) from MSU's Office of Research Regulatory Support for FAQs and the link to take the training.

## 5.8 Responsible and Ethical Conduct of Research (RECR)

MSU's Graduate School has put into place requirements for all graduate students requiring responsible research. WRAC's RECR requirements are available on the WRAC website: <https://wrac.msu.edu/handbook-forms>. There are annual requirements and expectations, and progress must be documented and filed with the graduate secretary using the form available on the WRAC web site. Failure to comply with the RECR requirements will affect degree completion. PhD students will begin work to complete their MSU/RW RECR in WRA 885. MA students will begin work to complete their MSU/RW RECR in WRA 886. The module-based RECR requirements are completed and tracked through the system at <https://orrs.msu.edu/train>; students must track their overall progress using the Plan of Study.

## Research with Human Subjects

Students whose research for the PhD dissertation or MA thesis will involve human subjects must submit an IRB (the University Committee on Research in Human Subjects) application to the MSU Human Research Protection Program. Examples of research involving human subjects include interviews, telephone or email surveys, behavioral or educational testing, and

observation of individual or group behavior. Surveys, case studies, ethnographies, usability studies, and observations of human action all require approval by IRB.

Approval of the research protocol must be received before beginning to collect data from subjects. The student's advisor or committee chair will be designated the responsible project investigator on the IRB application, and the student will be designated an additional investigator for the project. All graduate students are required to complete and report Responsible and Ethical Conduct of Research training whether or not they pursue research with human subjects.

### 5.9 Ethical Mentoring

Mentors are faculty members who take a special interest in helping students develop into successful members of the profession by helping them optimize their education experiences, assist their socialization into disciplinary culture, advance their personal growth as professionals, and help them find a job when their degree is finished.

Effective mentoring is characterized by mutual trust, understanding, and respect for students' professional and personal needs. A successful mentor is prepared to deal with population-diversity issues, including those peculiar to ethnicity, culture, gender, sexual orientation, and disability.

Good mentoring practices include the following:

- careful, patient listening
- building a relationship with a student beyond the classroom
- using authority ethically
- nurturing self-sufficiency
- establishing focused time for one-on-one mentoring engagement
- sharing work and professional ethics
- providing introductions to important scholars in the field
- offering constructive feedback
- providing personalized training and advice about the formation of a professional profile and the formation of a professional ethos in the student's chosen field/discipline

Additionally, mentors should regularly reference and review the graduate school's guidelines on mentoring and mentorship: <https://grad.msu.edu/msu-guidelines-graduate-student-mentoring-advising>.

## 6. Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution

The University has established a judicial structure and process for hearing and adjudicating alleged violations of recognized graduate student rights and responsibilities, outlined in the Graduate Student Rights and Responsibilities handbook, article 5:

<https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/about/handbook/graduate-student-rights-responsibilities/article-five-adjudication-cases-involving-graduate-student-rights-and-responsibilities.html>

### 6.1 Conflicts and Grievances

The Graduate Program follows the university's Anti-Discrimination Policy, which can be found here: <https://civilrights.msu.edu/assets/documents/ADP%20Users%20Manual%20-%20Updated%202020.02.171.pdf>.

If a student has a disagreement or a conflict with an instructor, administrator, or another student, or feels that in some way their academic rights have been violated, they should attempt to resolve that conflict directly with the person(s) involved through informal discussion. If you have questions, concerns, issues with committee members or committee make-up, or any other conflicts, please initiate a discussion with your committee chair first. If need be, your next point of contact should be the graduate director.

Every graduate program on campus is required to have a formal, written grievance policy for graduate students. The WRAC Academic Grievance Hearing Procedures for Graduate Students may be found in the WRAC Bylaws. The College of Arts and Letters policy may be found on the ombudsman's website. Each of these policies stipulates that at any point the student may file a formal, written grievance for consideration by a hearing board at the appropriate level. For disputes about a final grade received in a course, students must initiate the process by speaking to the instructor no later than the midpoint of the semester following the one in which the grade was received (excluding summer terms).

If a student finds themselves in this situation and has exhausted the internal resources for resolving the issue, they may contact the Office of the University Ombudsperson. The Office of the University Ombudsperson provides assistance to students, faculty, and staff in resolving 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.

## 7. Work Related Policies

### 7.1 Graduate Assistantships

Graduate assistantship 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. A variety of graduate assistantships, fellowships, and funding opportunities are available to graduate students in the Rhetoric and Writing program, depending on the student's level of professional and instructional experience.

Typically, PhD students are admitted with the promise of at least a 4-year assistantship or fellowship package. MA students are usually admitted without an assistantship package; however, the program can help MA students locate support for their studies. Assistantship reappointments are based upon satisfactory academic performance, position performance, and availability of funding.

For a list of the assistantship information provided by the Graduate School, access <https://grad.msu.edu/assistantships>.

For a link to your Graduate Employee Union Contract, access <https://hr.msu.edu/contracts/documents/geu-2019-2023.pdf>

### 7.2 Appointment Responsibilities

According to the Graduate Employees Union contract, the academic year encompasses two appointment periods: August 16–December 31 and January 1–May 15. During each appointment period, a graduate assistant's responsibilities require an average of 10 hours per week for a quarter-time appointment and 20 hours per week for a half-time appointment. For more information on Graduate Student's Rights and Responsibilities, access <https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/about/handbook/index.html>.

Graduate students with a half-time appointment may, with permission of the grad director, work hourly for no more than 9 hours per week during the academic year.

Anticipated distribution of duties over the weeks of a semester should be communicated to the graduate assistant by the appointing unit at the time of appointment. To the extent that current policies and procedures contain provisions about wages, benefits, or other terms and conditions of employment, they are, for teaching assistants included in the collective bargaining unit, subject to negotiations with the Graduate Employees Union and the American Federation of Teachers.

Summer appointments are determined under a different budget category, are fewer, and are advertised by the department in early spring on the department email lists.

### 7.3 Disability Accommodations for Graduate Students

Graduate assistants (RAs, TAs, and TEs) are both students and employees. They are thus eligible for disability accommodations in both of these roles, and these accommodations are provided through distinct documents coordinated by RCPD. Graduate assistants can register for both situations using RCPD's MyProfile portal.

### 7.4 Allowable Reasons for Leave

- **Illness, Injury, or Pregnancy:** In the event that a graduate student is unable to attend courses because of illness, injury, or pregnancy. Graduate teaching assistants (TAs) should refer to the medical leave policies in GEU contract Article 18 and other graduate assistants [refer to Academic Programs](#).
- **Religious Observance:** It is university policy to allow graduate students to observe those holidays set aside by their chosen and practiced religious faith.
- **Professional Conferences:** It is the policy of the program to encourage graduate students to attend professional and scholarly conferences.
- **Adoption and Parental Leave:** In the event that a graduate student is unable to attend courses because they adopt a child or become a parent by birth.
- **Bereavement:** In the event that a graduate student is unable to attend courses because they experience a death in their immediate family.
- **Jury Duty:** Refer to MSU policies on jury duty covered by the GEU contract.
- **Military Service:** In the event that a graduate student is unable to attend courses because they are called to do military service.

### Personal Leave Policy

This policy is designed to address leave from coursework and scholarly obligations required by the program. Graduate students, who also hold teaching assistantships, should consult Article 18 of the GEU Contract for policies governing them as employees of Michigan State University.

### General Guidelines

If a student will miss a class (for any of the allowable reasons referenced below), they should inform their guidance committee chair and all course instructors as promptly as possible so that arrangements for completing missed coursework may be made. Every effort will be made to assist the student in making up missed work, but the final responsibility for completing missed work in a timely fashion rests with the student. If a student will be missing from the program for more than a week, they should also inform the program director and request a formal leave of absence from the program. In the event of such a leave, the student shall have the right to return to the program, within the dates of the current appointment, at such time as they are able to resume the required program of study. If a leave occurs while a student is taking a



comprehensive examination, the student's Guidance Committee chair should consult with the program director about how to best restart that component of the exam process.

### **Grief Absence Policy**

For master's (Plan A), master's (Plan B) with research responsibilities, and doctoral students, it is the responsibility of the student to: a) notify their advisor/major professor and faculty of the courses in which they are enrolled of the need for a grief absence in a timely manner, but no later than one week from the student's initial knowledge of the situation, b) provide appropriate verification of the grief absence as specified by the advisor/major professor and faculty, and c) complete all missed work as determined in consultation with the advisor/major professor and faculty. It is the responsibility of the advisor/major professor to: a) determine with the student the expected period of absence – it is expected that some bereavement processes may be more extensive than others depending on individual circumstances, b) receive verification of the authenticity of a grief absence request upon the student's return, and c) make reasonable accommodations so that the student is not penalized due to a verified grief absence. If employed as an GA or TE, the graduate student must also notify their employer. Both employer and student will swiftly communicate to determine how the student's responsibilities will be covered during their absence. Graduate teaching assistants (TAs) should refer to the bereavement policy in GEU contract Article 18.

### **Research Leaves**

Leaves of absence in order to pursue scholarship and research directly pertaining to a graduate student's thesis or dissertation may be granted in some circumstances. Recommendations for such leaves originate in a request letter from the graduate student and a supporting letter from that student's guidance committee chair. Leaves from the program do not generally extend for more than one year.

### **7.5 Assistantship Levels**

The following levels of assistantships have been contractually established by the Graduate Employees Union (GEU):

**Graduate Assistants, Level 1.** These graduate students have a bachelor's degree and have less than one year's experience as graduate assistants or as full-support fellows. They teach, do research, or are assigned supervised duties such as reading and grading papers.

**Graduate Assistants, Level 2.** These graduate students have a relevant Master's degree, or equivalent, and/or one year's experience as graduate assistants or as full-support fellows in the appointing department or school, or in a unit considered relevant by the chair of the appointing

department or school. They teach, do research, or perform administrative tasks with moderate supervision.

**Graduate Assistants, Level 3.** These graduate students have a relevant Master's degree, or equivalent, and have at least 2 years' experience as graduate assistants (or equivalent experience at the faculty level) in the appointing unit or in a unit considered relevant by the chair of the appointing unit. They teach, do research, or perform administrative tasks with minimum supervision.

Advancement to the rank of Graduate Assistant Level 3 is on a merit basis, with the above prerequisites being considered minimal. The office of the registrar further requires that Level 3 be granted only to graduate students who have successfully completed doctoral comprehensive exams, as defined by the department in which the student is enrolled, and have experience as a graduate RA/TE at Michigan State University, or equivalent.

Within the range established for the university, the stipend depends on the qualifications of the individual and on the availability of funds in the appointing unit.

### 7.6 Graduate Assistantship Eligibility Policy

The College of Arts and Letters mandates that each graduate program in the College will have in practice a policy that limits the total number of semesters of Graduate Assistantship eligibility, and that ties eligibility for assistantships to progress toward the degree. Students are encouraged to review the MSU rules and GEU contract.

#### **For MA students in WRAC:**

- Students are eligible for graduate assistantships within the program for a maximum of four semesters (not including summer).
- Students who have exhausted their assistantship eligibility may be given an assistantship if such are available after assistantships have been given to all normally qualified and eligible candidates.
- Students who are not making satisfactory progress toward the degree are not eligible for an assistantship.
- Academic-year funding provided by fellowships or other achievement awards will not count towards the number of eligible semesters.

#### **For PhD students in WRAC:**

- Students are eligible for graduate assistantships within the program for a maximum of six semesters (not including summer) prior to passing their comprehensive exams (core and concentration). Students who do not pass their comprehensive exams at the end of six

semesters are not eligible for assistantships within the program again until the semester following successful completion of exams.

- Upon successful completion of comprehensive exams (core and concentration), students are eligible for graduate assistantships within the program for an additional four semesters.
- Students who have exhausted their assistantship eligibility may be given an assistantship if such are available after assistantships have been given to all normally qualified and eligible candidates.
- Students who are not making satisfactory progress toward the degree are not eligible for an assistantship.
- Academic-year funding provided by fellowships or other achievement awards will not count towards the number of eligible semesters.

### 7.7 Outside Work for Pay

Graduate students who hold half-time graduate assistantships (either teaching assistantships or research assistantships) at MSU may not hold full-time employment elsewhere.

At times, students may find it necessary to work additional hours beyond their assistantship assignments. TA and RA assignments typically require 20 hours of work per week. Working too many additional hours beyond the assistantship can interfere with progress toward the degree. For this reason, we strongly recommend that students limit the number of extra hours they work while they are holding an assistantship so as not to jeopardize their performance in courses or their progress toward the degree.

### 7.8 WRAC Graduate Program Expectations for Graduate Assistants (GAs)

GAs are subject to the policies and evaluation procedures of the units in which they are appointed. GAs are expected to observe the following norms of professional behavior established by the WRAC graduate committee and enforced by the graduate director:

#### Expectations of GAs

- The faculty member(s) with whom a graduate assistant is working should clearly specify the assistant's duties and responsibilities at the start of the semester, or at a time sufficiently in advance of the date of expected completion
- Assistants should be available for work for the number of hours specified from the start of the contract to the end of the semester (the last day of the final exam week)
- Assistants should report to the person(s) to whom they are assigned at the start of their contract
- Assistants have the responsibility of reporting to the person(s) to whom they are assigned at least once per week

- The student will receive a written evaluation from the supervising faculty at the end of each semester
- Inability to perform assigned duties should be communicated immediately to the faculty member directly or through the department main office
- For TAs specifically:
  - Compliance with the University Code of Teaching Responsibilities
  - D2L systems support instruction; tutorials on how to use the system are available

### **Expectations of TAs in the First-year Writing Program**

- Participate in an orientation workshop
- Teach a version of the first-year writing curriculum that aligns with program learning outcomes
- Participate in weekly mentoring meetings in the first year of teaching
- Work with a mentor to design an individualized mentoring program after the first year of teaching
- Attend curriculum and teaching workshops
- Contribute to the knowledge of their colleagues as they gain experience by leading conversations and workshops
- Observe and be observed by mentors and colleagues periodically
- Comply with the provisions of the University Code of Teaching Responsibility (<http://splife.studentlife.msu.edu/regulations/selected/code-of-teaching-responsibility>)
- Submit a teaching portfolio at the end of the year
- Receive a letter of evaluation from the program director or mentor at the end of the year

### **Violations of These Expectations**

Violations of the above expectations and norms will be detailed in written evaluations of the students at the end of each semester. The WRAC graduate director will review these evaluations when making decisions regarding the recommendation of students to assistantship positions. The director may at that time write a warning that indicates the violations of expectations, or may choose not to forward a recommendation for retention in that position.

### **7.9 English Language Proficiency for International TAs**

International teaching assistants who are not native speakers of English are required to demonstrate that they meet a minimum standard of fluency in spoken English before they can be assigned teaching work that involves oral communication with undergraduate students. TAs may meet this requirement by achieving any one of the following:

1. A score of 50 or higher on the Test of Spoken English (TSE), given by the Educational Testing Service. Any person who signs up and pays a fee to the Educational Testing Service is eligible to take the TSE. The TSE is given regularly on campus and internationally. At their own expense, students may take the TSE as many times as they wish. Test dates, registration procedures, and a TSE practice test are posted on the Educational Testing Service website (<http://www.ets.org>).
2. A score of 50 or higher on SPEAK, given by the English Language Center (ELC). SPEAK is given free of charge to eligible students at MSU by the ELC. To be eligible to take SPEAK on campus, students must have regular admission and must have proof of TA status. Students who are being considered for a teaching assistantship must submit a SPEAK request form to the ELC signed by their department or program. Students who do not receive a sufficient score on SPEAK in a given attempt must wait at least 2 months before re-testing. A SPEAK test practice tape and booklet are on reserve at the Audio Visual Library (4th floor west wing, Main Library).
3. A score of 50 or higher on the ITA Oral Interview (ITAOI) after taking English 097 (the ITA Speaking and Listening Class). The ELC gives the ITAOI free of charge to eligible students at MSU. Students have four opportunities to meet the university's requirement on the ITAOI.

### **Appeal Procedure by Review Board**

If a student obtains a 45 on SPEAK or a 45 on the ITAOI and the student's department feels the test result inaccurately reflects the student's speaking ability, the department may ask a Review Board to independently evaluate the student's spoken English.

This Board will consist of (a) a departmental representative, (b) two ELC representatives, and (c) a representative of the Graduate School. The graduate director of the student's department or program must request the review on the student's behalf. The Review Board may grant interviewees a full or partial waiver to teach. They may also refuse to allow interviewees any waiver.

### **Assignments for TAs Who Fail to Meet the University English Requirement**

If a TA does not receive the minimum university score on SPEAK or the ITAOI, the student's department has the option of giving the TA a work assignment that does not involve direct oral communication with undergraduates.

### **7.10 Teaching Assignments Other Than First-Year Writing**

Occasionally, opportunities to teach courses other than first-year writing arise—these usually include teaching in WRAC's Public and Professional Writing program, the Experience Architecture program, the English department, or teaching the Writing Center undergraduate

course. Decisions about assigning graduate students to courses other than first-year writing are made jointly by the chair and associate chairs of the department and are based on a number of factors, including current progress toward the degree, previous experience, availability of mentors, etc. If you have questions about this process, please consult the graduate director.

### 7.11 Fifth-year Graduate Assistantships for PhD Students

Typically, admitted doctoral students receive a graduate assistantship package providing them with 4 years of support. Exceptions to this general rule are University Distinguished Fellowship (UDF) and University Enrichment Fellowship (UEF) packages and Writing Center fellowship packages, which provide 5 years of support.

If a student has not yet completed their degree work after 4 years of funding, the program will make every effort to assist that student in securing a graduate assistantship for the fifth year. Funding priority will be given to those who have been doing excellent professional and academic research and teaching, and who are closest to finishing their degree work; however, fifth-year students are only considered after those students in their first through fourth years. To be considered for fifth-year funding, a student must make a written request to the WRAC graduate director no later than December 1 of their fourth year.

### 7.12 Departmental Resources

WRAC provides the following support for RW GAs assigned to work in the department: office space, a mailbox, a desk, and a desk chair, and access to a computer and software necessary for teaching. GAs have access to copying services to support this work. The graduate director also works with WRAC to provide space for those graduate students who hold AAGA Fellowships in the first year of their program, and for University Fellows in the first and final fellowship year of their doctoral program.

## 8. University Resources

Resources provided by the Graduate School:

- [Graduate Career Development](#)
- [Diversity, equity, & inclusion programs](#)
- [Events](#)
- [Forms](#)
- [Funding](#)
- [Graduate Educator Advancement and Teaching \(GREAT\)](#)
- [Graduate School Office of Well-Being \(GROW\)](#)
- [Mentoring](#)
- [Out-of-State tuition waivers](#)
- [Policy information](#)
- [Professional development](#)
- [Research integrity](#)
- [Traveling scholar opportunities](#)
- [University Committee on Graduate Studies](#)

Resources provided by university-level units: [OISS](#), [RCPD](#), [The Office of Spartan Experiences, Student Affairs](#), [the Libraries](#), [the Olin Health Center](#), [Institutional Diversity and Inclusion](#), [the Burgess Institute for Entrepreneurship & Innovation](#), [the Writing Center](#), and [University Outreach & Engagement](#), and [the Ombudsperson's Office](#).

Resources provided by the Student Life & Engagement Division such as the [Student Parent Resource Center](#), the [Gender and Sexuality Campus Center](#), the [Student Veterans Resource Center](#), and [Women's Student Services](#).

Opportunities for leadership development, community building, and service to the unit (graduate student organizations including [COGS](#), committees, etc.).

Additional funding resources include: Department, [CAL support and funding](#), [Graduate School research support](#), [Graduate School travel funding](#), [COGS conference awards](#), [COGS professional development awards](#).