

## ***J. Jeffrey and Ann Marie Fox Graduate School Program Handbook Template***

This document defines the minimum elements for a graduate student handbook. *Programs are encouraged to add additional helpful information specific to their program.*

Students are held to the standards described in the handbook in effect at the time they matriculate. Programs must keep previous copies of their handbook readily available until all students in the relevant cohort have graduated or left the program.

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## **General Program Information**

- Program overview
  - a. List of all degrees, options, certificates, formal programs (IUGs, joint degrees, dual-title degrees), etc.
- Fox Graduate School and University Standards
  - a. Satisfactory Scholarship
    - Students enrolled in a graduate degree program must maintain a minimum grade-point average of 3.00 to remain in good academic standing.
    - [GCAC-404 - Satisfactory Scholarship](#)
  - b. Scholarship and Research Integrity
    - At least one CITI training course (RCR recommended)
    - A minimum of 5 hours of in-person discussion-based education
    - [SARI requirements](#)
  - c. Graduate Council Graduation Publication Requirements
    - PhD
      - The dissertation must be made available to the public through inclusion in the University Libraries.
      - [GCAC-607 - Dissertation - Research Doctorate](#)
    - Research Master's Degrees (MA, MS)
      - The thesis must be made available to the public as an official University record through inclusion in the University Libraries.
      - Graduate programs may require all students in the program to submit their scholarly paper or essay to an appropriate Penn State repository and/or may require one or more copies of the scholarly paper/essay for the program's library or files.
      - [GCAC-642 - Culminating Experience - Research Master's](#)
    - Professional Doctoral Degrees
      - The written portion of the professional doctoral culminating experience (non-performance-based programs) or the final performance (performance-based programs) must be deposited for inclusion in the University Libraries.
      - [GCAC-707 - Professional Doctoral Culminating Experience](#)
    - Professional Master's Degree
      - Graduate programs are strongly encouraged to have their students submit the product of their culminating experience to ScholarSphere, as appropriate to the program and discipline.
      - [GCAC-742 - Culminating Experience - Professional Master's](#)
  - d. Graduate Council defined time limits
    - A Ph.D. student is required to complete the program, including acceptance of the doctoral dissertation, within eight years after the date of successful completion of the qualifying examination, not including approved leaves of absence as outlined in GSAD-906.
      - [GCAC-610 - Time Limitation - Research Doctorate](#)

- All requirements for a research master’s degree, including acceptance of the culminating experience, must be met within eight years of the beginning of the first semester of enrollment to the graduate degree program.
      - [GCAC-632 Time Limitation - Research Master's](#)
    - A professional doctoral student is required to complete the program, including acceptance of the professional doctoral culminating experience, within eight years after the date of successful completion of the qualifying examination, not including approved leaves of absence as outlined in GSAD-906.
      - [GCAC-708 Time Limitation - Professional Doctorate](#)
    - All requirements for a professional master’s degree, including acceptance of the culminating experience, must be met within eight years of the beginning of the first semester of enrollment to the graduate degree program.
      - [GCAC-732 Time Limitation - Professional Master's](#)
  - e. Graduation deadlines
    - See [Academic Dates and Deadlines](#)
- Program standards and expectations
  - a. Academic standards
  - b. Integrity standards
  - c. Mentoring standards
  - d. Change of Advisor Procedures
  - e. Bridge funding (e.g., when a student changes advisers and other unexpected situations)
  - f. Accreditation or licensing standards (if relevant)
  - g. Student Conduct standards
  - h. Engagement expectations
- Links to Program resources
  - a. General information
  - b. Program professional staff
  - c. Students in need
  - d. Professional development opportunities
  - e. Career development opportunities
  - f. Conflict Resolution
  - g. Grievances/Appeals
- Links to College-Specific Resources for Graduate Students
  - a. Student Organizations
  - b. Financial aid
  - c. Research and Conference Travel Funding Opportunities
- Links to Fox Graduate School and University resources
  - a. General
    - [Graduate student resource library](#)
    - [University Libraries](#)
    - [Office of the Vice Provost for Graduate Education and Dean of the Fox Graduate School](#)

- b. Academic Resources
  - [Fox Graduate School Academic resources](#)
  - [Master's Thesis and Doctoral Dissertation Requirements](#)
  - [Graduate Writing Center](#)
  - [Fox Graduate School Ombudsperson Office](#)
  - [Avenues for addressing graduate student concerns](#)
- c. Career and Professional Development
  - [Graduate Exhibition](#)
  - [Three Minute Thesis](#)
- d. Funding
  - [Financial aid including Office of Student Aid](#)
  - Research and Conference Travel Funding Opportunities
    - [International Travel Grants](#)
- e. Health and Well-being
  - [Health Insurance / SHIP](#)
  - [Graduate Student Parental Leave](#)
  - [Mental health support](#)
  - [Child Care at Penn State](#)
  - [Students in crisis](#)
- f. Special Populations
  - [Adult Learner Programs & Services](#)
  - [Student Disability Services](#)
  - International Students
    - [Penn State Global ISSA](#)
    - [English for Professional Purposes Intercultural Center \(EPPIC\)](#) - support for language skills
  - [Military students](#)
- g. Clubs and Organizations
  - [Graduate and Professional Student Association](#)
  - [Discover](#) – for finding graduate student organizations

***Details for Each Academic Plan Offered by the Program***

For each graduate degree plan, provide details about:

- Degree requirements
- Identifying an adviser
- Curriculum Roadmap including required coursework/credit hours
- Details about the culminating experience selection and approval process as relevant
- Internships/apprenticeships if relevant
- Information about securing and renewing Graduate Assistantships (research and /or teaching) if relevant
- Other funding Information
- Program timelines
- Expectations upon failure of required course or benchmark examination
- *It is useful to have a checklist of required steps and milestones for quick reference.*

***Checklist of major milestones for each degree program offered***

***Handbook Elements required by Graduate Council - See Appendix A.***

## **Appendix A. Graduate Council-defined Elements Required to be in the Graduate Program's Student Handbook**

Over the years the Graduate Council has defined the following elements that are **required** to be described in the graduate program's *Student Handbook*.

### **DETAILS FROM POLICIES REQUIRING HANDBOOK ELEMENTS**

#### **A. [GCAC-208 - Dual-Title Graduate Degree Programs](#)**

- Process statement 2.a

2.a Graduate programs that have adopted a dual-title degree must add sections to their graduate student handbooks that outline the nature of the dual-title degree, stipulate the array of courses typically taken, and detail other structural and practical requirements of the dual-title degree. The various formal requirements for achieving a dual-title degree should be stated in the graduate program's student handbook, along with a rational way to satisfy these requirements while also satisfying the requirements for the graduate major in a timely manner.

#### **B. [GCAC-210 - Integrated Undergraduate-Graduate \(IUG\) Degree Programs](#)**

- Process Statement 1.

1. Proposals to create IUG degree programs should include a draft version of a student handbook that will provide guidance for prospective students.

#### **C. [GCAC-211 Joint Degree Programs](#)**

- Process statement 6.

6. Proposals for joint degree programs should include relevant sections of the graduate program's student handbook with language included that will provide guidance for prospective students for the joint program including:

- a. Admission to the joint program should be detailed, i.e., whether the student must be admitted to the professional degree program first, the graduate degree program first, etc.
- b. Joint admission process and criteria, i.e., students must apply to and meet admission requirements of both the graduate program in which they intend to receive their graduate degree and the professional degree program.
- c. Statement of the student's option of receiving the graduate degree if for some reason he/she cannot complete the professional degree program.

#### **D. [GCAC-604 Qualifying Examination - Research Doctorate](#)**

- Policy statement 2a.

2. Content

- a. The student's major program must establish guidelines for the Qualifying Examination that are uniformly applied to all students. These guidelines and evaluation criteria must

be presented in the graduate program's handbook, which must be provided to the student upon matriculation. These guidelines must include:

- i. The timing and the format of the examination.
- ii. Clear criteria for evaluation.
- iii. The program's policy describing the student's options in case of failure. The policy must include:
  1. If retaking the examination after failure is allowed.
  2. If retaking the examination after failure is permitted, whether there is a limit to the number of attempts and a timeline under which the retakes must be completed.
  3. If students who have failed the final attempt will be dismissed from the program or may be allowed to change to the master's degree.

- Policy statement 2.b.ii

2.b.ii The means of establishing proficiency in the dual-title area must be defined in the major program proposal adopting the dual-title degree and must be included in the student handbook for each dual-title program.

- Responsibility Statement 1.b.

1.b Larger programs or programs with distinct subdisciplines may use multiple committees, but will undertake measures to ensure that the evaluation criteria are equally applied across all examinations or consistently within each distinct subdiscipline; a description of such measures will be included in the program's handbook (e.g., the evaluation criteria will be listed in the handbook).

- Responsibility Statement 2.b.

2.b Graduate programs will undertake measures to ensure that conflicts of interest are managed; a description of such management measures will be included in the program's handbook.

E. [GCAC-605 English Competence - Research Doctorate](#)

- Policy statement 1

1. Every graduate program shall have a formal mechanism for assessing and improving English language competence of both domestic and international students. This mechanism, to include guidelines and evaluation criteria, must be presented in the graduate program's handbook, which must be provided to the student upon matriculation. If English language competence is assessed contemporaneously with another assessment, it should not be conflated with the assessment of disciplinary knowledge, analytical thinking, or other skills.

F. [GCAC-606 Comprehensive Examination - Research Doctorate](#)

- Policy statement 5.a.

5. Content

- a. The student's major program, or program area in programs with distinct subdisciplines, must establish guidelines for the Comprehensive Examination that are uniformly applied to all students in that program or within each subdiscipline. These guidelines and evaluation criteria must be presented in the graduate program's handbook, which must be provided to the student upon matriculation. These guidelines must include:
  - i. The timing and the format of the examination.
  - ii. Clear criteria for evaluation.
  - iii. The program's policy describing the student's options in case of failure. The policy must include:
    1. If retaking the examination after failure is allowed, and if so under what conditions.
    2. If retaking the examination after failure is permitted, whether there is a limit to the number of attempts and a timeline under which the retakes must be completed.
    3. If students who have failed the final attempt will be dismissed from the program or may be allowed to change to the master's degree.

- Process statement 6.b

6. Comprehensive Examination Mode

- b. Graduate programs must define standard modes for conducting the Comprehensive Examination in their program in their graduate program handbook. This can include one or more of the following three modes:
  - i. Fully in-person: the entire committee and the student are physically in the same room.
  - ii. Fully remote: the entire committee and the student participate via University-licensed interactive audio-video technology.
  - iii. Hybrid: individual members of the committee and/or the student may participate in person or via University-licensed interactive audio-video technology.
  - iv. Individuals taking part in the Comprehensive Examination in-person must participate at the campus location of the graduate center offering the program to ensure the technological reliability, confidentiality, and safety of all participants.
  - v. Those participating via distance must use University-licensed interactive audio-visual technology. If unable to connect with video, audio-only participation is allowed.

G. [GCAC-608 Final Oral Examination - Research Doctorate](#)

- Policy Statement 5.a.

5. Content

- a. The student's major program, or program area in programs with distinct subdisciplines, must establish guidelines for the Final Oral Examination that are uniformly applied to all students in that program or within each subdiscipline. These guidelines and evaluation

criteria must be presented in the graduate program's handbook, which must be provided to the student upon matriculation. These guidelines must include:

- i. The timing and the format of the examination.
- ii. Clear criteria for evaluation.
- iii. The program's policy describing the student's options in case of failure. The policy must include:
  1. If retaking the examination after failure is allowed with the approval of the Ph.D. committee, and if so under what conditions.
  2. If retaking the examination after failure is permitted, whether there is a limit to the number of attempts and a timeline under which the retakes must be completed.
  3. If students who have failed the final attempt will be dismissed from the program or may be allowed to change to the master's degree.

- **Process Statement 5.b.**

5. Final Oral Examination Modes

- b. Graduate programs must define standard modes for conducting the Final Oral Examination in their program in their graduate program handbook. This can include one or more of the following three modes:
  - i. Fully in-person: the entire committee and the student are physically in the same room.
  - ii. Fully remote: the entire committee and the student participate via University-licensed interactive audio-video technology.
  - iii. Hybrid: individual members of the committee and/or student may participate in person or via University-licensed interactive audio-visual technology.
  - iv. Individuals taking part in the Final Oral Examination in-person must participate at the campus location of the graduate center offering the program to ensure the technological reliability, confidentiality, and safety of all participants.
  - v. Those participating via distance must use University-licensed interactive audio-visual technology. If unable to connect with video, audio-only participation is allowed.

H. [GCAC-704 Qualifying Examination - Professional Doctorate](#)

- **Policy statement 2.a**

2. Content

- a. The student's major program must establish guidelines for the Qualifying Examination that are uniformly applied to all students. These guidelines and evaluation criteria must be presented in the graduate program's handbook, which must be provided to the student upon matriculation. These guidelines must include:
  - i. The timing and the format of the examination.
  - ii. Clear criteria for evaluation.
  - iii. The program's policy describing the student's options in case of failure. The policy must include:
    1. If retaking the examination after failure is allowed.

2. If retaking the examination after failure is permitted, whether there is a limit to the number of attempts and a timeline under which the retakes must be completed.
  3. If students who have failed the final attempt will be dismissed from the program or may be allowed to change to a master's degree, if applicable.
- Policy statement 2.b.ii
    - 2.b.ii The means of establishing proficiency in the dual-title area must be defined in the major program proposal adopting the dual-title degree and must be included in the student handbook for each dual-title program.
- I. [GCAC-705 English Competence - Professional Doctorate](#)
- Policy Statement 1.
    1. Every graduate program shall have a formal mechanism for assessing and improving English language competence of both domestic and international students. This mechanism, to include guidelines and evaluation criteria, must be presented in the graduate program's handbook, which must be provided to the student upon matriculation. If English language competence is assessed contemporaneously with another assessment, it should not be conflated with the assessment of disciplinary knowledge, analytical thinking, or other skills.
- J. [GCAC-706 Comprehensive Examination - Professional Doctorate](#)
- Policy statement 5.a
    5. The student's major program must establish guidelines for the Comprehensive Examination that are uniformly applied to all students. These guidelines and evaluation criteria must be presented in the graduate program's handbook, which must be provided to the student upon matriculation. These guidelines must include:
      - a. The timing and the format of the examination.
      - b. Clear criteria for evaluation.
      - c. The program's policy describing the student's options in case of failure. The policy must include:
        - i. If retaking the examination after failure is allowed, and if so under what conditions.
        - ii. If retaking the examination after failure is permitted, whether there is a limit to the number of attempts and a timeline under which the retakes must be completed.
        - iii. If students who have failed the final attempt will be dismissed from the program or may be allowed to change to a master's degree, if applicable.
  - Process statement 3a.
    3. The Comprehensive Examination may not occur before:
      - a. the completion of all, or a substantial portion of, the course work required by the program (excluding any coursework associated with the culminating experience) and the Professional Doctoral Committee (this does not preclude the Professional Doctoral

Committee from requiring additional education, including course work, as defined in [GCAC-703](#)); the program should define the timing of the Comprehensive Examination, and include that information in the program handbook.

K. [GCAC-707 Professional Doctoral Culminating Experience – Professional Doctorate](#)

- Policy statement 2
- 2. The format of the culminating experience is to be defined by the program and indicated in the program handbook.

Policy Statement 5.a.ii.

5. Content

a. General

ii. Content

The student's major program, or program area in programs with distinct subdisciplines, must establish guidelines for the Final Oral Examination or Final Performance that are uniformly applied to all students in that program or within each subdiscipline. These guidelines and evaluation criteria must be presented in the graduate program's handbook, which must be provided to the student upon matriculation. These guidelines must include:

1. The timing and the format of the examination or performance.
2. Clear criteria for evaluation.
3. The program's policy describing the student's options in case of failure.

The policy must include:

- a. If retaking the examination or performance after failure is allowed, and if so under what conditions.
- b. If retaking the examination or performance after failure is permitted, whether there is a limit to the number of attempts and a timeline under which the retakes must be completed.
- c. If a candidate fails the examination or performance, it is the responsibility of the Professional Doctoral Committee, in consultation with the program head, to determine whether the student will be granted a second opportunity, provided it is allowed by the program.

L. [GCAC-642 Culminating Experience - Research Master's](#)

- Policy statement 5.c.i

5. Requirements for a thesis

c. Approval of Thesis

- i. Each graduate program must specify in their handbook the structure of their program's thesis approval process, including (but not limited to):
  1. Whether a formal committee of Graduate Faculty members will be appointed to oversee the thesis, including the structure of the committee, membership, and responsibilities of each member.

2. Whether additional readers, beyond the necessary approvers, are required if there is no committee.
  3. Whether there is a master's thesis defense and what, if any, portions of the defense are public.
  4. Whether there is a separate required public presentation of the work.
- Policy Statement 6.d
6. Requirements for a scholarly paper or essay
    - d. Approval of scholarly paper or essay:
      - i. Each graduate program must specify in their handbook the structure of their program's scholarly paper or essay approval process, including (but not limited to):
        1. Whether a formal committee of Graduate Faculty members will be appointed to oversee the scholarly paper or essay, including the structure of the committee, membership, and responsibilities of each member.
        2. Whether additional readers, beyond the necessary approvers, are required if there is no committee.
        3. Whether there is a scholarly paper or essay defense and what, if any, portions of the defense are public.
        4. Whether there is a separate required public presentation of the work.

**M. [GCAC-742 Culminating Experience - Professional Master's](#)**

3. Policy statement 3.
3. The student's major program must establish guidelines for the culminating experience that are uniformly applied to all students in that program. These guidelines and evaluation criteria must be presented to the student prior to the student initiating the culminating experience. These guidelines must include clear criteria for evaluation and an evaluative tool (e.g. a rubric).
    - a. These guidelines also must include the program's policy describing the student's options in case of failure, including:
      - i. If retaking the capstone course or redoing the culminating experience is permitted, and if so under what conditions.
      - ii. If retaking the capstone course or redoing the culminating experience is permitted, if there is a limit to the number of attempts or a time limit on completion.
      - iii. If students who have failed the final attempt will be terminated from the program.