

GRADUATE PROGRAM POLICIES & PROCEDURES

DEPARTMENT OF FORESTRY



**College of Forest Resources
Forest and Wildlife Research Center
Mississippi State University**

September 2024

GRADUATE POLICIES & PROCEDURES HANDBOOK

Department of Forestry

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Department and Graduate Program Overview

The Department of Forestry (<https://www.cfr.msstate.edu/forestry/index.asp>) is one of three departments in the College of Forest Resources (CFR) at Mississippi State University (MSU). The Department's academic programs are funded through the CFR (<http://www.cfr.msstate.edu/>). Research programs are funded through the Forest and Wildlife Research Center (FWRC; <http://www.fwrc.msstate.edu/>), and Extension programs are funded through the MSU Extension Service (<http://www.cfr.msstate.edu/extension.asp>). The Department is housed in Thompson Hall (<https://www.cfr.msstate.edu/facilities/index.asp>) on the MSU main campus in Starkville, Mississippi.

The Department of Forestry's graduate programs aim to provide: (a) advanced academic study in forestry and natural resources beyond the baccalaureate degree, and (b) opportunities to engage students in independent research activities and/or projects. The Department strives to provide students and faculty with an environment conducive to learning and scholarly development.

Key individuals in the Department of Forestry's graduate program include:

Dr. Donald L. Grebner
George L. Switzer Professor of Forestry,
Department Head
105 Thompson Hall
662-325-1688
Don.Grebner@msstate.edu

Dr. Heidi Renninger
Graduate Coordinator
313 Thompson Hall
662-325-0792
heidi.renninger@msstate.edu

Dr. L. Wes Burger
Interim Dean, College of Forest Resources
Director, Forest and Wildlife Research Center
Bost Extension Center 211F
662-325-2953
w.burger@msstate.edu

Ms. Susan C. Blanton
Administrative Assistant I
Graduate Services Coordinator
105 Thompson Hall
662-325-2949
scb552@msstate.edu

The CFR Dean has final authority for approving successful completion of graduate programs and awarding of degrees. The Forestry Department Head and Graduate Coordinator administer graduate programs within the Department. The Graduate Services Coordinator provides administrative support for the Department's graduate programs and is generally the **first point of contact** for graduate students needing assistance.

This document provides department-specific information on the Department of Forestry's graduate programs for both students and faculty. Additional information is contained in the MSU *Graduate Catalog*, which can be found on the website of the MSU Office of Graduate School (<http://catalog.msstate.edu/graduate/>).

Graduate study in the Department of Forestry leads to a Master of Science (M.S.) in Forestry (thesis and non-thesis options) or a Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Forest Resources. Specialized areas of study in the Department include ecosystem process-based modeling, ecosystem services, forest biometrics, forest ecology, forest ecophysiology, forest fire, forest genetics, forest harvesting and operations, forest health, forest hydrology and soils, forest management and economics, forest mensuration, forest policy and law, forest recreation, forest regeneration, forest restoration, GIS and remote sensing in natural resource management, urban and community forestry, and wildlife/natural resource economics.

1.2. Graduate Student Responsibilities

Graduate students in the Department of Forestry are expected to be familiar and comply with university, college, and departmental requirements established for their degree program. **A student's major professor/advisor does not assume that responsibility.** Failure of a student to understand and complete all requirements can seriously delay graduation and, in some cases, lead to termination of an assistantship or dismissal from the graduate program. Any substitution, waiver, or exemption from established degree requirements requires approval of the appropriate faculty and/or Dean of the MSU Graduate School. University requirements can be found in the *Graduate Catalog* (<http://catalog.msstate.edu/graduate/>). Note that departmental requirements and standards are higher, and generally, more restrictive than university requirements.

1.3. The Graduate Faculty

Department of Forestry faculty holding an academic rank of assistant professor or higher are members of the Graduate Faculty of MSU. Graduate Faculty are considered to have superior expertise and professional accomplishment, so that they are appropriate for instruction and advising of students enrolled in graduate degree programs. Graduate Faculty members in the Department of Forestry are listed in the *Graduate Catalog* found on the MSU Graduate School website (<http://catalog.msstate.edu/graduate/faculty/#collegeofforestresourcestext>).

Responsibilities of Graduate Faculty members include:

- a) recruiting quality graduate students into the program,

- b) teaching graduate-level courses and seminars,
- c) advising graduate students,
- d) supervising/guiding graduate student research and study to its completion,
- e) serving on graduate committees for graduate students,
- f) remaining current and actively productive in scholarly/research/creative arenas,
- g) participating in the formulation of graduate curricula and policy,
- h) being eligible to serve on the MSU Graduate Council, and
- i) serving as Graduate School representatives on doctoral preliminary written and oral comprehensive examinations and thesis and dissertation final defenses.

2. ADMISSIONS INFORMATION

2.1. Application for Admission

Students interested in applying for admission to the Department of Forestry's graduate program should apply online through the MSU Graduate School (<http://www.grad.msstate.edu/>). See the *Graduate Catalog* for details related to the admissions process and requirements (<http://catalog.msstate.edu/graduate/>). **All graduate students accepted into the Department's M.S. thesis or Ph.D. graduate programs work under the supervision of a major professor.** Prospective M.S. thesis or Ph.D. students should contact individual faculty within their desired field of study, **prior to applying**, about the faculty member's willingness to mentor new graduate students (i.e., serve as their major professor) and the availability of assistantship (2.4. Graduate Assistantships) funding. Non-thesis M.S. students accepted into the program will be assigned a faculty advisor to assist in course selection and degree progress.

Prior to consideration for admission into the Department of Forestry's program, the applicant must: (a) meet requirements for admission (2.2. Admission Requirements), and (b) complete the online application (<https://apply.grad.msstate.edu/>). Once admission requirements are met, the MSU Graduate School will electronically forward the application materials to the Department, and the Graduate Coordinator and potential major professor(s) for prospective M.S. thesis and Ph.D. students will be notified that materials are available for review. A faculty member interested in serving as the student's major professor for thesis or dissertation students may make a request to the Department Head that an offer of a graduate research assistantship (GRA) be made to an applicant if departmental or grant-related funding is available. Alternatively, if all requirements are met, a faculty member may make a request to the Department Head/Graduate Coordinator to accept the student without any commitment of financial assistance. However, students agreeing to "self-support" must designate this at the time of application. **If no faculty member agrees to serve as major professor of an M.S. thesis or Ph.D. applicant, admission will be denied and the application returned to the MSU Graduate School.**

2.2. Admission Requirements

Applicants to the Department of Forestry's graduate program should hold a bachelor's degree

from a fully recognized four-year institution of higher learning having unconditional accreditation by the appropriate bodies. Applicants from a non-accredited institution may request consideration for admittance from the CFR Dean. In addition, in most cases, applicants for the Ph.D. degree should hold an M.S. degree (or equivalent) in a field of study that is relevant to the proposed area of doctoral study. If appropriate, the major professor in consultation with Graduate Coordinator may grant permission for a student to go directly from a bachelor's degree to the doctoral program.

Prior academic performance, as measured by Grade Point Average (GPA), is a primary factor used in determining admission (2.3. Admission Categories). Certified transcripts of prior studies must be supplied as part of the application to verify the student's GPA. Information about how to submit transcripts can be found in the *Graduate Catalog* (<http://catalog.msstate.edu/graduate/admissions-information/application-process/#applicationtext>).

Scores on the General Test of the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) are not required with initial applications for graduate study in the Department of Forestry. However, the Graduate Coordinator, or a faculty member interested in serving as the applicant's major professor, may request GRE scores before making a final decision on acceptance. When requested, average acceptable GRE scores for the verbal and quantitative combined typically range from 295-305. Therefore, the Department recommends that applicants inquire about the GRE requirements of individual faculty who may serve as the student's major professor prior to submission of their application packet.

International students are required to take either the "Test of English as a Foreign Language" (TOEFL) or the "International English Language Testing System" (IELTS) exam unless they are from the TOEFL/IELTS Exempt countries listed in the MSU *Graduate Catalog* (<http://catalog.msstate.edu/graduate/admissions-information/admission-requirements/international-students/>) or have earned prior degrees in the United States. TOEFL or IELTS scores are used as an indicator of English proficiency, and applicants who do not meet minimum scores might be provisionally accepted into the program and be required to take English as a Second Language (ESL) courses at MSU. For the TOEFL Paper-Based Test (PBT), applicants must score 550 or higher to be accepted for regular admission. For the TOEFL Internet-Based Test (iBT), applicants must score 79 or higher to be accepted for regular admission. For the IELTS, applicants must score 6.5 or higher to be accepted for regular admission. Applicants scoring between 477 and 549 on the PBT, 53 and 79 on the iBT, or 4.5 and 6.5 on the IELTS may be admitted conditionally, pending successful completion of the remedial English course(s) outlined in the MSU *Graduate Catalog* (<http://catalog.msstate.edu/graduate/>). International applicants who complete the Professional Mastery Program at the MSU ESL Center may submit a certificate of completion with their application in place of English language test scores. Applicants scoring below 477 on the PBT, or 54 on the iBT, or who score below 4.5 on the IELTS are not eligible for admission to the MSU Graduate School.

International students who do not have a degree from a U.S. university will have their official transcripts evaluated by the Office of the Graduate School to determine whether the work is equivalent to a U.S. degree and meets minimum standards for regular admission to a graduate program. The applicant's official academic records should be provided to the Graduate School in its native language along with translated copies.

All on-campus international applicants must complete a Document of Support Form to be submitted to the MSU Graduate School and International Institute (<https://www.international.msstate.edu/>). If admitted, students will receive an email from the International Institute explaining how to access the online system and how to submit those required documents. This proof of funding is required in order to issue the I-20, which international students need to obtain a visa. If the student has been offered a graduate research assistantship by the Department of their major professor, the student will submit the assistantship offer letter along with the Support Form, and depending on the specifics of the assistantship, additional proof of funding in the form of a bank letter or other documents showing financial support may be required along with a copy of the student's passport.

All applicants (both on-campus and distance) must complete a Statement of Purpose describing why they would like to pursue a graduate education and their primary study area of interest. For prospective M.S. thesis and Ph.D. students, the Statement of Purpose must identify the faculty member that has agreed to serve as their major professor.

Three letters of recommendation are required to process applications and must be submitted electronically. While completing the online application, prospective students must register the names and email addresses of three individuals familiar with the applicant's academic and professional background and potential to succeed in graduate school. Once an application is submitted, each recommender will receive a URL link with instructions on how to proceed. Each letter must be written in English and, if submitted by a university staff or faculty member, be composed on official university letterhead. Once a letter of recommendation is submitted, the applicant will receive a notification by email. Applications without these letters will not be considered.

Note that meeting minimum requirements for admission does not guarantee admission into a program, as other factors are also considered, including the availability of assistantship funding and faculty willingness to serve as a student's major professor.

2.3. Admission Categories

2.3.1. Regular Admission – M.S. Degree Program

In addition to holding an undergraduate degree, and meeting English language proficiency requirements for international students, regular (unconditional) admission to a graduate program

leading to a M.S. degree in Forestry requires an applicant to satisfy at least one of the following minimum graduate admission requirements based on the level of work completed at the time of the application:

- a) 3.0 GPA on the last 2 years (approximately 60-70 semester hours or 90-100 quarter hours) of undergraduate academic coursework
- b) 3.0 GPA on 30 or more semester hours of undergraduate credit **after** earning the first bachelor's degree
- c) 3.0 GPA on the last 2 years (approximately 60-70 semester hours or 90-100 quarter hours) of undergraduate academic coursework **and** a 3.0 GPA on **fewer than** 24 hours graduate coursework
- d) 3.0 GPA on **24 or more** graduate hours, or
- e) An earned Master of Science degree or higher-level degree.

Note that all GPA requirements are based on a 4.0 scale and departmental minimum standards are higher than university minimums.

2.3.2. Provisional Admission – Master of Science Program

Students who have a GPA greater than or equal to 2.5 and less than 3.0 for the last 2 years (60-70 semester hours or 90-100 quarter hours) of undergraduate academic coursework may be admitted with a provisional status. Scores from the General Test of the GRE may be requested to evaluate the student's potential to successfully complete the graduate program.

M.S. students admitted on a provisional status must achieve a GPA of 3.0 or better in three graduate courses (minimum of nine graduate hours) of enrollment to be removed from a provisional status with no grade lower than a C on remaining courses during this semester. These courses must be on the student's Program of Study (5.3. The Graduate Program of Study). Courses with an S grade, transfer credits, or credits earned while in an Unclassified status cannot be used to satisfy this requirement. If a GPA of 3.0 is not achieved, the provisional student will be dismissed from the program following the first semester or following the first nine graduate hours of coursework for M.S. Distance Education Program students. Students admitted on a provisional basis are not eligible for graduate research assistantships while on a provisional status.

International students will not be admitted under a provisional status, but can be admitted on a "conditional" basis if they meet the GPA requirements for regular admission and their TOEFL or IELTS score falls between the MSU and departmental established minimums (2.2. Admission Requirements). These students are initially allowed to take only ESL classes and are placed on hold to prevent registration for other courses. The applicant can only receive full admission after completing ESL requirements. Conditionally-admitted students can be admitted only for a single semester to ensure completion of the required ESL within one academic year. Students admitted conditionally cannot receive graduate research assistantships until receiving full admission.

2.3.3. Regular Admission – Ph.D. Program

Regular admission to the Department of Forestry’s graduate program leading to a Ph.D. in Forest Resources requires a GPA of 3.1 or higher on all prior graduate studies, which must include at least 20 credit hours of courses, excluding research credits. GRE scores may be requested and evaluated before a decision is made by the student’s potential major professor concerning acceptance.

In rare situations, where a student wishes to go directly from a bachelor’s degree to a doctoral program, regular admission will require: (a) a GPA of 3.25 for the last two years (60-70 semester hours or 90-100 quarter hours) of studies (undergraduate), and (b) approval by the Graduate Coordinator.

2.3.4. Provisional Admission – Ph.D. Program

Doctoral applicants are not accepted on a provisional basis. International students may be admitted on a “conditional” basis if they meet the GPA requirements for regular admission and their TOEFL or IELTS score falls between the MSU and Departmental established minimums.

2.4. Graduate Assistantships

Graduate research assistantships (GRA) are often available from the Department. Individual faculty members with research funding, or those who are allocated departmental- or college-funded graduate assistantships, recruit graduate students for those positions. Faculty members generally offer assistantships based on an evaluation of the student’s GPA, letters of recommendation, and prior training/experience. GRE scores may also be used to aid in selection of students for assistantships.

To be eligible to receive an assistantship, a student must have "regular" or "conditional" admission status in the Department’s graduate program. Students on "provisional" or "probationary" status are not eligible to receive assistantships, nor are non-thesis students. An assistantship will continue throughout the student’s tenure as outlined in the assistantship offer letter, so long as the source of funding continues and the student maintains a satisfactory academic performance (i.e., ≥ 3.0 GPA) and satisfactory progress on their thesis or dissertation. A grade of Unsatisfactory for research credit courses (FO 9000) will result in the loss of an assistantship and dismissal from the graduate program. Graduate Research Assistants receive a tuition exemption of 100% of the assessed tuition and required fees and health insurance (3.5. Graduate Student Health Benefits). GRAs are responsible for paying other “non-required” fees.

Assistantships represent half-time positions based upon a 40-hour work week. Information on procedures, policies, and responsibilities can be found online from the MSU Graduate School at <https://www.grad.msstate.edu/tuition/assistantships/>. A student’s major professor has the

discretion of deciding how the 20 work hours will be assigned. Assigned work (i.e., research, teaching, service) may or may not be directly related to the student's specific thesis/dissertation research or professional paper/project. Students receiving assistantships do not earn leave time; however, they do follow the University's regular employee holiday schedule (<https://www.hrm.msstate.edu/benefits/holidays/>).

2.5. Summary of Departmental Admission Requirements

Before an applicant can be considered for graduate admission, they must have:

- a) completed appropriate bachelor's and/or Master of Science degrees,
- b) met minimum GPA standards,
- c) completed all application forms for the MSU Graduate School,
- d) provided certified transcripts or official academic records of all college studies,
- e) provided three letters of recommendation to the MSU Graduate School,
- f) provided a statement of purpose supporting their intentions to enter the graduate program,
- g) met English proficiency requirements (international students),
- h) provided documented evidence of financial support if not supported by Department assistantship (for international students),
- i) submitted scores for the General Test of the GRE (if requested by the Graduate Coordinator or tentative major professor), and
- j) identified a faculty member to serve as the student's major professor for M.S. thesis and Ph.D. students

Table 1: Summary of Admission Requirements
M.S. Program
<u>U.S. Students</u> Regular admission: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GPA ≥ 3.0 (based on a 4.0 scale) for last 2 years (60-70 semester hours or 90-100 quarter hours) of undergraduate study Provisional admission: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GPA ≥ 2.5 and < 3.0 for last 2 years (60-70 semester hours or 90-100 quarter hours) of undergraduate study • Evidence of acceptable verbal, quantitative, and analytical skills on the GRE (if requested by the Graduate Coordinator or tentative major professor)
<u>International Students</u> (additional English proficiency requirements): Regular admission: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TOEFL or IELTS score above Department minimum, a degree from a U.S. university, or home country is TOEFL/IELTS Exempt by MSU • Proof of financial support Conditional admission: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TOEFL or IELTS score between MSU and Department minimum • Proof of financial support
Ph.D. Program
<u>U.S. Students</u> Regular admission: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GPA ≥ 3.1 on all prior graduate courses (if ≥ 20 graduate hours) OR a GPA ≥ 3.25 for last two years (60-70 semester hours or 90-100 quarter hours) of undergraduate coursework
<u>International Students</u> (additional English proficiency requirements): Regular admission: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TOEFL or IELTS score above Department minimum, a degree from a U.S. university, or home country is TOEFL/IELTS Exempt by MSU • Proof of financial support Conditional admission: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TOEFL or IELTS score between MSU and Department minimum • Proof of financial support

2.6. Admittance

The Graduate Coordinator, in consultation with the major professor and Department Head, has the authority to grant or deny admission into the Department’s graduate program. Notification of

a decision on an application will usually be made to the applicant within 45 days after a complete application packet is received by the Department from the MSU Graduate School. The applicant will receive an e-mail message and/or a letter from the MSU Graduate School regarding acceptance or rejection.

If financial support will be provided by a graduate research assistantship (2.4. Graduate Assistantships), a letter from the Department Head will be sent to the student offering the assistantship. The applicant is requested to indicate acceptance or rejection of the offer, sign the letter, and return it to the Department Head within a two-week period of the letter's date. In special cases, this period may be extended with the written consent of the Department Head.

3. PROGRAM ORIENTATION AND ENROLLMENT

3.1. Student Advisement

Throughout a student's graduate study, faculty members in the Department will provide advising, mentorship, and other guidance. For M.S. thesis and Ph.D. students, this role will be served by a "major professor". The duties of a major professor include advising the student on their graduate committee and program of study, providing guidance on the student's thesis/dissertation research through the offering of FO 9000 research credits including providing comments on their study plan and thesis/dissertation, coordinating with a Ph.D. students' committee to develop the preliminary written exam, presiding over the student's thesis/dissertation defense, securing and archiving all data collected by the student. For non-thesis M.S. students, this role will be served by a "faculty advisor". The duties of a faculty advisor include advising the student on coursework and degree requirements to complete their degree in a timely manner and administering a student's final comprehensive exam.

3.2. Orientation

Students accepted into the M.S. thesis or Ph.D. graduate programs should immediately contact their major professor for information regarding program requirements, graduate committee composition (5.2. The Graduate Committee), and development of a Program of Study (5.3.1. Program of Study Overview). M.S. non-thesis students should contact their assigned faculty advisor about degree requirements, course registration and degree progress. Primary advising responsibilities for all graduate students resides with the student's major professor or faculty advisor, although the Graduate Coordinator, Department Head, faculty, and departmental staff will be available to help students throughout their tenure at MSU. New on-campus students should consult with the Department's Graduate Services Coordinator (105 Thompson Hall, telephone: 662-325-2949) for a briefing on departmental procedures and to complete employment paperwork if the student has been awarded an assistantship. All new on-campus students are required to attend the Graduate Student Orientation provided by the Department Head at the beginning of each semester. Students with a departmental assistantship may be required to serve as a teaching assistant during their tenure as needed. Whether a student will

serve as a teaching assistant should be discussed with the student's major professor. These students are required to participate in the Graduate Teaching Assistant Certification Program (<https://www.grad.msstate.edu/professional-development/graduate-students/gta-certification-program/>) offered by the MSU Graduate School prior to beginning their first assignment as a teaching assistant.

3.3. Course Registration

Prior to the first semester of their graduate program, students should communicate with their major professor/faculty advisor to determine what courses to enroll in. During the first semester of their graduate program, M.S. thesis and Ph.D. students should work with their major professor and their graduate committee to develop their Program of Study (5.3.1. Program of Study Overview), a list of courses that they plan to take over their entire graduate program. During each semester, students should communicate with their major professor/faculty advisor during the preregistration period to confirm courses to be taken. The major professor/faculty advisor will then release the student for registration in the Banner system. If a student has any problems during the registration process, they should contact their major professor/faculty advisor and/or the Department's Graduate Services Coordinator.

3.4. Minors

A minor is a block of approved coursework derived from a current MSU degree program or concentration other than the major program. The option of a minor is at the discretion of the major area in which the program is offered and must be approved by the student's major professor/faculty advisor. For M.S. thesis and Ph.D. students, minor coursework is designated on the student's Program of Study.

Up to one-third of the required hours for a minor may be transferred to MSU. Hours transferred toward fulfillment of a minor must be relevant in content to the graduate program.

A minor in a graduate program must meet the following requirements:

- At least nine hours of graduate coursework in the minor field of study **over and above** the required hours for the Master's degree program; at least 12 hours of graduate coursework in the minor field of study **over and above** the required hours for the doctoral degree program.
- Approval of the student's major professor/faculty advisor and graduate committee (if applicable).
- Approval of the Graduate Coordinator from the minor field of study.
- An MSU Graduate Faculty member from the minor area who serves as minor professor on the student's graduate committee.
- Fulfillment of any additional requirements as specified by the major and minor areas.
- A 3.0 GPA on the minor coursework.

3.5. Graduate Student Health Benefits

The University provides a health insurance subsidy for students receiving Graduate Assistantships who purchase the University-sponsored health insurance plan through the MSU Longest Student Health Center. Graduate students on an assistantship choosing to purchase the insurance plan pay for the health insurance plan through the Health Center at the beginning of each semester. The insurance subsidy will then be deposited into the student's account in October and February. Information about the University-sponsored health insurance plan can be found at http://www.health.msstate.edu/healthcenter/insurance_student.php.

4. DEGREE REQUIREMENTS FOR M.S. NON-THESIS GRADUATE STUDY

4.1. Coursework

MS non-thesis students will complete 30 hours of graduate coursework of which 12 hours must be composed of 8000-level coursework. Students are required to complete 15 hours of Forestry core coursework including a Forestry Overview course (FO 8803), and at least one course in each of the following categories: 1) Forest Ecology/Silviculture, 2) Forest Economics, 3) Forest Policy and 4) Forest Remote Sensing or Statistics. Table 2 provides acceptable courses in each category although others may apply if approved by the Graduate Coordinator.

Table 2: M.S. Non-thesis Coursework Requirements
FO 8803: Forestry Overview
One of the following courses in Forest Ecology/Silviculture
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FO 6123: Forest Ecology • FO 6463: Forest Hydrology and Watershed Management • FO 8533: Forest Stand Dynamics • FO 8323: Forest Ecophysiology • FO 8333: Silviculture for Multiple Ecosystem Services • FO 8433: Ecological Silviculture
One of the following courses in Forest Economics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FO 6113: Forest Resource Economics • FO 6323: Forest Resource Management • FO 8143: Advanced Forest Economics • FO 8163: Nonmarket Forest Values • FO 8243: Advanced Forest Resources Management and Planning • FO 8443: International Forest Resources and Trade
One of the following courses in Forest Policy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FO 6343: Forest Administration and Organization • FO 6353: Natural Resources Law • FO 6413: Natural Resources Policy • SBP 8133: Environmental Issues in Sustainable Bioproducts • WFA 8463: Human Dimensions of Wildlife and Fisheries Conservation
One of the following courses in Forest Remote Sensing or Statistics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FO 6213: Forest Biometrics • FO 8233 Advanced Forest Inventory

The remaining 15 hours can be composed of any graduate-level courses, keeping in mind that 12 credit hours of the program (4 courses) must represent 8000-level coursework. Course substitutions will be approved on a case-by-case basis. Students seeking a course substitution in any of the above categories should submit the syllabus of the course being considered for substitution to their faculty advisor and Graduate Coordinator for approval.

Distance Education students who are not registered for courses in two consecutive semesters, not including summer semesters, will need to reapply for admission to continue in the program.

4.2. Comprehensive Exam

At the end of the student’s final semester, they will complete an online comprehensive exam based on the courses completed in their core Forestry coursework. Students preparing to take their comprehensive exam should consult the MSU Graduate School calendar (<https://www.grad.msstate.edu/students/graduate-school-calendar>) to determine the deadline for non-thesis comprehensive exams for the semester they intend to graduate. Students must notify their faculty advisor at least three weeks prior to the date they plan to take the exam. Comprehensive exams must be completed at least two weeks prior to the Graduate School deadline.

In order to take the comprehensive exam, students must meet the following requirements:

- be in their last semester of coursework
- be enrolled in at least 1 hour in the semester the exam is given
- have a 3.00 or higher GPA

A student who fails the comprehensive exam can apply to schedule another examination after a period of three months has elapsed from the date of the original exam. Two failures result in the student’s removal from the program.

4.3. Degree Requirements Timeline

Table 3: Summary of M.S. Non-Thesis Program Deadlines (subject to change)	
Tasks	Deadlines
Contact faculty advisor for program details and registration information	Prior to 1 st semester
Contact faculty advisor and register for classes	Prior to each semester
Complete coursework requirements	Within 8 years of program start date
Apply for Graduation	Mid-way through semester a student intends to graduate (see University’s Graduate Academic Calendar)
Contact faculty advisor to schedule comprehensive exam	At least three weeks prior to University deadline (see University’s Graduate Academic Calendar)

Take comprehensive exam	At least two week prior to University deadline (see University’s Graduate Academic Calendar)
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5. DEGREE REQUIREMENTS FOR M.S. THESIS OR PH.D. GRADUATE STUDIES

5.1. Program Forms

It is the graduate student’s responsibility to obtain and fill out all necessary forms during their tenure in the graduate program from the MSU Graduate School website (<https://www.grad.msstate.edu/admissions/forms/>). This ensures that the most recent version of any form is acquired when needed. The only exceptions are for those forms where only the major professor can gain access such as the form used for written preliminary and oral comprehensive examination, and M.S. or Ph.D. defense reporting.

5.2. The Graduate Committee

M.S. thesis or Ph.D. students should form a graduate committee by the end of their first semester. The role of a graduate student’s committee is to: (a) provide guidance on the student’s Program of Study, project development and implementation, and technical writing; and (b) evaluate the student’s performance to determine if, and when, requirements for the graduate degree have been successfully met.

Committee composition is determined through consultation between the student and major professor. The major professor serves as the chair of the student’s graduate committee. Membership on the committee is open to all MSU Graduate Faculty as well as persons not on the Graduate Faculty, but which are deemed qualified to serve on a student’s committee based on their academic background and experience. Committee members are selected on the basis of their interest in, and ability to assist in, the development and completion of the student’s graduate program. If the student has a minor field outside of the Department of Forestry, one member of the graduate committee must be from the department in which the minor is being sought and will serve as the student’s minor professor. Non-Graduate Faculty committee members (i.e., not members of the MSU Graduate Faculty) must have a graduate degree or commensurate expertise in the field of study. Non-Graduate Faculty committee members can serve as a co-major professor with a member of the Graduate Faculty but cannot serve as the sole major professor. Students who want to include a Non-Graduate Faculty member on their committee should have the potential committee member fill out a “Graduate Committee Participant Status Form” (obtained from Graduate Services Coordinator), mark as “initial appointment,” and submit this form and a Curriculum Vitae (CV) to the Graduate Services Coordinator for approval by the Department Head and Graduate Coordinator prior to the potential member being appointed to a committee.

A M.S. student’s graduate committee consists of at least three members; a doctoral student’s

graduate committee consists of at least four members if no minor or five members if there is a minor, with one member being from the minor program area. At least 50% of an M.S. or Ph.D. committee must hold an MSU Graduate Faculty appointment. All committee members will have full voting privileges, although there may be exceptions. For example, USDA Forest Service committee members cannot vote on defenses.

To officially form the committee, a “Committee Request Form” should be completed by the student, signed by the student and committee members, and submitted to the Graduate Coordinator for signature during the first semester of enrollment. The form will be forwarded by the Graduate Services Coordinator to the MSU Graduate School, with copies provided to the student and all committee members. A copy will be placed in the student’s file in the Department Head’s office. The MSU “Committee Request Form” can be obtained from the MSU Graduate School (<https://www.grad.msstate.edu/admissions/forms/>).

The Department recommends that students communicate with their graduate committee at least once each semester during the student’s tenure. Both the student and major professor are responsible for maintaining frequent communication with each other and with other committee members.

If the direction of a student’s degree program or research changes, or if a committee member leaves the University or retires during the course of the student’s graduate program, it may be necessary to change the graduate committee membership. To make such changes, the student fills out a “Committee Request Change Form” which is signed by the student and those persons being added to and/or deleted from the committee. The form is then submitted to the Graduate Coordinator who, upon signing, will have the Graduate Services Coordinator submit it to the Graduate School. Graduate Faculty who leave MSU, or retire, can remain on the student’s committee as Non-Graduate Faculty members as long as the committee composition remains within required guidelines. If, subsequent to the administration of the final defense or written preliminary or oral comprehensive examination, a student’s request to remove a member of the graduate committee is not met with the approval of that member, then the student must submit to the Dean of the MSU Graduate School a written request containing suitable justification for removal of the committee member. The Dean of the MSU Graduate School will then decide if removal is necessary and accordingly inform the student, committee member, major professor, and Graduate Coordinator.

5.3. The Graduate Program of Study

5.3.1. Program of Study Overview

For M.S. thesis and Ph.D. students, their major professor serves as the student’s advisor for their graduate education and will, along with the student’s graduate committee, assist the student in preparing a Program of Study consisting of all graduate-level courses required for degree completion according to University-approved program requirements and contributing to the

student's degree program. The Program of Study for a student serves two needs: (a) fulfilling the student's intellectual interests, and (b) providing the appropriate academic background required for their research and the awarding of an advanced degree in forestry.

The graduate student and their major professor will communicate prior to the start of the student's first semester to prepare a tentative graduate program of study for the student's enrollment in classes. Once the student's graduate committee has been selected, the committee will meet (in person or virtually) with the student, assess the student's academic background, and approve or modify the Program of Study. In addition, the Program of Study will be evaluated relative to the student's intended area of study.

The Graduate Program of Study is to be finalized on a Graduate "Program of Study Worksheet" (<https://www.cfr.msstate.edu/students/current/index.asp>), signed by all committee members and the Graduate Coordinator, and submitted to the Graduate Services Coordinator. Copies will be provided to the student and committee members, and the original copy will be retained in the student's graduate file in the Department Head's office. The Program of Study should be submitted no later than the end of the second semester of enrollment. This time frame may be extended for those pursuing a second Master's degree in another department or enrolled only part-time.

The specific set of courses ultimately taken by a student often changes from those listed on the original Program of Study due to scheduling conflicts, cancellation of courses, or development of new courses. Changes to the student's original Program of Study are to be documented on a "Change to Graduate Program of Study" form (<https://www.cfr.msstate.edu/students/current/index.asp>), signed by the student and committee, and submitted to the Graduate Coordinator for approval and signature. Changes made to the student's Program of Study will be updated in the Degree Works System as they occur by the Graduate Services Coordinator.

5.3.2. Course Requirements and Enrollment

For the M.S. thesis option, a minimum of 24 hours of GPA-graded (excludes courses that receive "Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory" credit) graduate coursework and 6 hours of FO 9000 research credits are required. Students are required to have a minimum of 9 hours of graded graduate coursework at the 7000 and 8000 level, exclusive of FO 9000 research hours and regardless of the total number of hours on the Program of Study. A maximum of six hours of 7000-level Directed Individual Studies courses are allowed, and they count towards the 8000-level coursework requirement. At least nine hours of approved courses (6000 level or higher) must be taken as courses offered by the Department of Forestry for a Master of Science degree in Forestry. If a minor is chosen, at least nine hours in the minor area must be taken **over and above** the coursework required for the major, but details regarding requirements for minors should be obtained from the department offering the minor. Transfer credits may not constitute more than nine semester hours of coursework unless approved by the Dean of the Graduate

School. A student who took a course at the 4000 level is not allowed to enroll in the same course for credit at the 6000 level.

Completion of a Ph.D. requires substantial academic work beyond the bachelor's level and includes both formal coursework and research (FO 9000 research credit hours). MSU requires that doctoral students earn at least 54 hours of graduate credit **beyond the bachelor's level**, which includes a required minimum of 20 hours of research credits (FO 9000). Of the 54 hours, at least 24 must be from GPA-graded graduate coursework with a minimum of 9 credit hours at the 8000 level or higher (excluding research credits). The remaining 10 hours can be earned with coursework credits, research credits, or a combination of both. A student who has taken a course at the 4000 level is not allowed to enroll in the same course for credit at the 6000 level.

M.S. and Ph.D. students enrolled in research credits (FO 9000 hours) will communicate with their major professors at the beginning of each semester to create a syllabus outlining expectations and requirements for the upcoming semester, which will be used by the major professor at the end of the semester to determine whether the student receives a “Satisfactory” or “Unsatisfactory” grade for the research credits. Students receiving an “Unsatisfactory” grade for FO 9000 research hours will be dismissed from the program.

Domestic graduate students **not on assistantship** are not required to maintain full-time status. International students on F1 or J1 visas must be enrolled full-time each fall and spring semester (or summer if it is their term of admission).

During the fall and spring semesters, Forestry graduate students **on assistantship** must be registered for 13 credit hours (including FO 9000 research hours) and may not enroll in more than 13 graduate credit hours in a given semester. Full-time status (at least nine credit hours) must be maintained throughout the entire semester. Therefore, no course(s) may be dropped if the resulting course load would be fewer than nine graduate credit hours, nor may any course(s) in the nine-hour load consist of, or be converted to, audit status. The nine-hour course load may not be composed of undergraduate courses unless the course is a program prerequisite. In such cases, the minimum graduate load required will be six credit hours and only one undergraduate course is permitted as part of the nine-hour load. During the summer, students on assistantship must be enrolled in at least six graduate credit hours with a maximum of 13 credit hours allowed. Audit hours may not be used to satisfy the full-time enrollment requirement.

All M.S. thesis and Ph.D. students must register for ETD Format and Submission (LIB 9010) during the semester they defend and submit their thesis/dissertation.

5.3.3. Required Coursework

All new M.S. thesis and Ph.D. students in the Department of Forestry are required to enroll in FO 8112 – Graduate Seminar during the first spring semester of their tenure. FO 8112 is designed to introduce students to graduate study including research methods and their

presentation. Students who have completed FO 8112 as a Master's student will not be expected to repeat the course if they continue in the Department for a doctoral degree.

5.4. Study Plans for Thesis or Dissertation Research

5.4.1. Study Plan Overview

A study plan is required from each student working on M.S. thesis or Ph.D. degrees in the Department of Forestry. This plan, to be developed in consultation with the student's graduate committee, details the proposed thesis or dissertation research. Development of the study plan is intended to fully acquaint the student and the student's committee with the tasks to be accomplished, and ensure that the student has formulated sound techniques for obtaining and processing materials and data required for the completion of their research. The plan should be prepared by the student, reviewed and assessed by the student's graduate committee, and submitted and approved by the Graduate Coordinator by the end of the student's second semester of enrollment. The original plan will be kept in the student's graduate file in the Department Head's office. Changes to the study plan can be made (and are expected) as the student's knowledge of the subject increases, but a time schedule for the main activities and research/development tasks must be developed and followed as outlined in the plan for the student to satisfy degree requirements in a timely manner.

5.4.2. Study Plan Content and Assessment

The information contained in a study plan will vary depending on the nature of a student's project. Expectations for formatting and content are at the discretion of the student's major professor and committee. Sections commonly included in a study plan include: Cover Page, Table of Contents, Introduction/Overview, Literature Review/Background, Methods/Approach, Expected Results, Dissemination of Results/Broader Impacts, and Timetable for thesis/project completion. Suggestions for formatting and content are discussed in Graduate Seminar (FO 8112), which is usually taken during the student's first year.

The student's graduate committee will assess the study plan using the "Study Plan Evaluation" form found on the College of Forest Resources website and based on the rubric found in Table 4. Once completed, this evaluation will be sent to the Graduate Coordinator. If greater than 50% of the student's graduate committee score any individual category in the rubric as "Needs Improvement", the student will revise the study plan and resubmit it along with a study plan evaluation form marked as "revised" to their committee and the Graduate Coordinator for final approval and signature.

Table 4: Rubric for study plan evaluation for MS Thesis and PhD students.

Category	Score	Criteria
1. Depth and breadth of the appropriate forestry background covered in their literature review relative to their thesis or dissertation topic	Exceptional/Superior	Exceptional understanding of the forestry literature and critical synthesis towards developing a new understanding relative to their thesis topic
	Exceeds Expectations	Shows understanding of the forestry literature and ability to make some connections across literature topics relative to the thesis
	Satisfactory	Includes basic synopsis of each forestry literature cited that adequately covers the depth and breadth of appropriate forestry background for the thesis topic
	Needs Improvement	Fails to address fundamental forestry literature relative to the thesis topic
2. Inclusion of research aims/questions and associated hypotheses, where applicable, that are scientifically sound, reasonable, specific, and relevant to their field of forestry	Exceptional/Superior	High level of novelty, has potential to contribute greatly to the body of knowledge of the literature, closes a large research gap with very broad application beyond region
	Exceeds Expectations	Potential to make some contribution to the body of knowledge
	Satisfactory	Scientifically sound, reasonable, specific and relevant to the field
	Needs Improvement	Research aims are not feasible, scientifically sound, or relevant to the field of forestry
3. The research methodology and subsequent analyses are well thought out to achieve tangible outcomes appropriate to the goals and outcomes of the research.	Exceptional/Superior	Multiple approaches and data types well targeted to answer the research question, develops novel analytical approaches that are appropriate to the research question, methods/analyses are new or applied in novel ways and have potential to be broadly utilized in other applications
	Exceeds Expectations	Clear understanding of limitations of the data and analyses are discussed and ways to mitigate these limitations are provided; use of more than one type of data/analytical approach to address research question; expands on conventional use of methodology and analyses
	Satisfactory	Clear research methods, type of data collected and subsequent analyses are appropriate and likely to lead to the goals of the research
	Needs Improvement	Proposed data collection method does not align with proposed analytical approaches and/or research question
4. Dissemination of Results/Broader Impacts and applications of the research are appropriately identified and discussed.	Exceptional/Superior	Specific plan for dissemination and application of a study with broad ranging impacts on society, could also include a plan to develop patents/applications
	Exceeds Expectations	Strong connection between research and its potential impact; specific plan to deliver research results at professional meetings and in peer reviewed publications
	Satisfactory	Logical connection for how the research and results can impact society; includes justification for the why the research is broadly important
	Needs Improvement	Connections for how research and results impact society are unreasonable and/or unclear; no consideration for dissemination of research results

5.5. Ph.D. Program Requirements

5.5.1. Written Preliminary and Oral Comprehensive Exams

Written preliminary and oral comprehensive examinations for admission to candidacy for the doctoral degree may be taken when the student is within six credit hours of completing their coursework and has an approved research study plan. A student must be enrolled during the semester in which the examinations are administered and must have a GPA of 3.0 or higher on all courses attempted for graduate credit after being admitted to the degree program.

Examination dates are determined by the student and their major professor after consultation with the student's graduate committee. The examination dates must meet the deadlines posted on the MSU Graduate Academic Calendar.

The student's graduate committee serves as the examining committee. A written preliminary examination comprised of questions from each member of the student's graduate committee will be administered by the major professor before the comprehensive oral examination. Questions will be submitted by committee members to the major professor, who will distribute them to the student on an agreed upon schedule. Upon completion of a set of questions, the student will return their responses to the major professor who will then return them to the appropriate committee member for grading. Graduate committee members should notify the major professor of the results of the written examination at least one week prior to the oral exam. The student must pass the written portion of the preliminary examination (no more than one dissenting vote from the graduate committee) prior to taking the comprehensive oral examination. The student should reserve a conference or classroom for the oral examination, which typically lasts two to four hours. During the oral examination, the student will be asked questions by their committee members relating to the student's research area and general topics related to forestry and other forest- or natural resource-related disciplines. After the question-answer session, the committee will ask the student to leave the room, and each committee member will vote on whether or not the student passed the oral examination. The oral examination will be passed if not more than one dissenting vote is received. The student or a committee member may request that the Graduate School appoint an outside observer or the Graduate Coordinator to attend the oral examination.

The student's major professor is responsible for completion of the "Report of Examination Results/Admission to Candidacy" form. Exam results must be submitted to the Graduate School by the major professor within one week of the oral examination. Prior to submittal, the form must be signed by all members of the student's graduate committee, indicating pass or fail, and forwarded to the Graduate Services Coordinator who will forward it to the Graduate School. A copy of the form is kept in the student's graduate file in the Department Head's office.

A student who fails the oral comprehensive examination cannot apply to retake the exam until three months have elapsed from the date of the original oral examination. The student will be

instructed by their committee on the reasons for failure and asked to review relevant material before retaking the examination. Only the closed oral part of the examination will be retaken. Two failures on the comprehensive oral examination (i.e., the original and the retake) will result in the student being dismissed from the doctoral program.

5.5.2. Admission to Candidacy for the Ph.D. Degree

A student will be admitted to candidacy for the Ph.D. degree under the following conditions:

- a) the dissertation topic has been selected and the research study plan approved by the student's graduate committee,
- b) graduate coursework has been satisfactorily completed with a GPA of 3.0 or above (all graduate coursework except remaining Research/Dissertation hours),
- c) research skills (if required) have been completed prior to taking the preliminary written and oral examinations,
- d) preliminary written and oral comprehensive oral examinations have been passed

5.6. M.S. Theses/ Ph.D Dissertations

5.6.1. Overview

All candidates for a M.S. thesis degree must submit a thesis. A Master's thesis represents the student's contribution to knowledge within their discipline based on research conducted by that student. All candidates for the Ph.D. must submit a dissertation. A Ph.D. dissertation should demonstrate the student's mastery of research techniques and represent an original contribution of knowledge to the field of study. The student will develop a thesis/dissertation topic in consultation with their major professor and graduate committee. The final written thesis/dissertation must be approved by the major professor, graduate committee, Graduate Coordinator, and CFR Dean on the Committee Acceptance Form.

5.6.2. Preparation

The graduate student is responsible for the preparation of all drafts and final copies of their thesis or dissertation. Graduate students are strongly encouraged to obtain a copy of "*Standards for Preparing Theses and Dissertations*" available online from the MSU Mitchell Memorial Library (https://ir.library.msstate.edu/bitstream/handle/11668/14613/ETD_Standards_7th_Edition.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y) and to work with the Office of Thesis and Dissertation Format Review at the MSU Library (<http://lib.msstate.edu/thesis>). The MSU Library also holds workshops designed to assist students in properly formatting their thesis or dissertation and provides details of the submission process (<http://lib.msstate.edu/thesis/process/>).

Students should recognize that their thesis or dissertation will require multiple revisions, both before and after submission to the major professor, graduate committee, and following the defense of the student's final written document. The major professor will determine if the thesis

or dissertation is properly organized, correctly stated and interpreted, and written in an acceptable style to be distributed to the graduate committee. When the major professor is satisfied that the draft is ready for review, a copy will be distributed to each committee member. Students are encouraged to provide portions of the draft thesis or dissertation to committee members for comments prior to completion of the overall document. Committee members must be provided with a complete copy of the thesis or dissertation at least two weeks prior to the defense. Earlier submissions to committee members may allow time to receive comments and make revisions prior to the defense.

All M.S. thesis or Ph.D. students must register for the LIB 9010 course during their graduating semester. This is a zero-credit hour course delivered through Canvas that does not affect the number of hours for which a student is registered. Students upload their final approved thesis/dissertation as a word file, and then complete various modules in the Canvas course. Details of the process can be found here: <http://lib.msstate.edu/thesis/process/>. Students must have their major professor, committee members, Graduate Coordinator, and Dean of CFR sign a committee acceptance form obtained from the Graduate Services Coordinator. The completed thesis/dissertation should also contain a properly formatted title page, which includes a list of the names of individuals approving the document (i.e., major professor, committee members, Graduate Coordinator, and CFR Dean).

5.6.3. Defense

A final defense is required of all M.S. thesis and Ph.D. students. An examination date will be set by the student's major professor after consultation with the student and graduate committee members. As stated above, the student must provide their committee members with a copy of the thesis or dissertation **at least two weeks prior** to the exam. This document should already have been reviewed and approved for distribution to the committee by the major professor and revised (as needed) by the student.

To be eligible for the final examination and defense, a graduate student must: (a) have an overall GPA of 3.0 or higher on all graduate courses attempted after admission to a degree program including courses that comprise the Program of Study as well as other non-program courses, (b) be within 6 credit hours or in the terminal semester of coursework, and (c) be enrolled in at least one credit hour at MSU during the semester when the examination/defense occurs. The defense must occur by the deadline posted on the Graduate Academic Calendar.

There are two parts to the final examination/defense. The first consists of an oral presentation by the student that is open to the public, including the graduate committee, faculty, staff, students, and other interested persons. **The graduate student is responsible for providing presentation details (i.e., title, location, date) at least two weeks prior to the scheduled date to the Graduate Services Coordinator for advertising to the campus community and public.**

The second component of the examination/defense consists of a closed oral examination of the

student by their graduate committee. The Department's Graduate Coordinator may attend all or part of the oral examination at their discretion. The examination will consist of questions concerning coursework and the thesis/dissertation. The student's major professor will be responsible for completing the "Report of Examination Results" form, which must be signed by all members of the student's graduate committee who indicate their vote for pass or fail. The form must be completed within one week of the pass/fail decision and is then forwarded to the Graduate Services Coordinator who, upon approval by the Graduate Coordinator, will submit the form to the Office of the Graduate School. A copy will be retained in the student's file in the Department Head's office.

One negative vote **will not** constitute failure for a student on a thesis or dissertation defense, while **two or more negative votes will constitute failure** of the defense. A student who fails the final examination/defense cannot apply to take another examination until at least three months from the date of the original examination. The student will be informed by their committee of the reasons for failure and asked to review course notes or re-analyze/rewrite sections of the thesis/dissertation prior to re-taking the examination. Only the closed oral portion of the defense will be conducted for a re-take. Two failures on the defense (i.e., the original and one re-take) will result in the student being dismissed from the graduate program without further consideration for the M.S. or Ph.D. degree.

5.6.4. Submission

The student's graduate committee will often require revisions/changes to the thesis or dissertation following the defense before approving the final document. Once these changes are made to the satisfaction of the major professor and committee members, the "final" copy of the document is submitted to the Graduate Coordinator for review and approval prior to the established deadline. This deadline commonly occurs during the first third of a semester and comes at least two weeks prior to the deadline for submission to the CFR Dean. The specific due dates can be obtained from the Graduate Services Coordinator. The Department's deadline allows time for review by the Graduate Coordinator and corrections (if needed) by the student. The Graduate Coordinator will not approve the document if there are corrections to be made; therefore, it is the responsibility of the student, student's major professor and committee to ensure that the thesis or dissertation is complete and correct. Once all corrections from the Graduate Coordinator are made, the thesis/dissertation and signed committee acceptance form should be sent to the Graduate Coordinator and Graduate Services Coordinator to be forwarded to the Dean's office for final approval before submission to the library.

Once a thesis or dissertation is approved by the Graduate Coordinator and CFR Dean, the document will be submitted electronically as part of the LIB 9010 course to the Office of Thesis and Dissertation Format Review in the Mitchell Memorial Library to be checked for format and content. The Committee Acceptance Form must be submitted in print (or via an e-mail attachment) to the Mitchell Memorial Library (<http://lib.msstate.edu/about/departments/index.php#otd>) before the thesis or dissertation will be

reviewed by the Library. A list of required corrections will be sent to the student. This process will continue until an acceptable copy of the thesis or dissertation is submitted to the Library, at which time a final submission of the thesis or dissertation will be requested. Instructions for submission of a thesis or dissertation to the Library can be found on the Library's website (<http://lib.msstate.edu/thesis>).

The student, upon final approval of the thesis or dissertation will be responsible for making copies for personal distribution. An electronic copy and a hard-bound copy (if requested) of the thesis or dissertation should be prepared for the student's major professor and committee members. Copies may also be required by sponsors of the student's research.

5.7. Publication of Research

No research project is complete until the results are disseminated and publicly available. M.S. thesis and Ph.D. students are expected to prepare technical and scientific manuscripts promptly based on their research. Publication should proceed in cooperation with the major professor who should be included as a co-author on manuscripts or papers when they have made a substantial contribution. Some or all committee members may be included as co-authors on papers when they also have made substantial contributions. Similarly, other individuals not on the student's graduate committee (e.g., other faculty, outside scientists) may be included as co-authors when they have made substantial contributions to the manuscript, paper, or project. Students should consult with their major professor to determine who should be included as co-authors and the order of authorship. Students should recognize all funding sources and the Forest and Wildlife Research Center (FWRC) in the Acknowledgements section of all publications and presentations using wording provided by the FWRC.

5.8. Ownership of Data

Data collected and developed by graduate students or associated personnel are the property of Mississippi State University. The student and major professor have joint responsibility to ensure that all original data sheets and computer files are documented and deposited with the major professor before the student defends. The major professor (and/or principal investigator) is responsible for maintaining these data in a secure, documented location for the University and research sponsors (if appropriate). Students should consult with their major professor and graduate committee to determine procedures and timelines for submitting data generated throughout the course of their research project to the major professor. Failure to submit data prior to defense will result in delayed graduation. **The major professor and committee members will not sign the Committee Acceptance Form without prior submission of data.**

5.9. Degree Requirements Timeline

Tasks	Deadlines
Contact major professor for program details and registration information	Prior to 1 st semester
Meet with Graduate Services Coordinator to fill out paperwork, obtain office and/or laboratory keys	Prior to 1 st semester
Register for classes	Prior to each semester
Attend Department's Graduate Orientation	Beginning of 1 st semester
If serving as a Teaching Assistant, attend Graduate Teaching Assistant Certification Program	Prior to semester teaching
If driving a MSU vehicle, apply for Fuelman card # with Departmental Administrative Assistant	Beginning of semester requiring vehicle use for teaching/research
Discuss and/or take training courses required for conducting research (e.g. Responsible Conduct of Research, Working with Human Subjects)	Beginning of 1 st semester
If needed, apply for Student Health Insurance at MSU Longest Student Health Center	Beginning of each semester
Take Graduate Seminar (FO 8112)	1 st spring semester
Attend and Co-Host Departmental Seminars	Every other week during fall/spring semesters
Form Graduate Committee and fill out graduate committee request form; if Non-Graduate faculty on committee, fill out Request for Participant Appointment for Graduate Studies and submit form and CV/resume of a potential committee member to Graduate Services Coordinator	End of 1 st semester
Submit Program of Study	End of 1 st semester
Meet with Graduate Committee	Once each semester (minimum)
Submit Study Plan to Major Professor	End of 1 st semester (on-campus); end of 3 rd semester (Distance Program)
Submit Study Plan to Graduate Committee with Major Professor Approval	End of 2 nd semester (on-campus); End of 4 th semester (Distance Program)
Ph.D. students take Written Preliminary and Oral Comprehensive Exams	Within 6 credit hours of completing coursework; see <i>Graduate Catalog</i> for semester deadlines
Register for ETD Format and Submission (LIB 9010)	Beginning of semester of defense
Submit thesis/dissertation to Major Professor	Beginning of last semester
Submit thesis/dissertation to Committee with Major Professor Approval	Two weeks prior to defense
Submit research project data to Major Professor	Prior to defense
Apply for Graduation	Mid-way through semester a student intends to graduate (see

	University's Graduate Academic Calendar)
Submit public defense announcement to Graduate Services Coordinator and post it on the announcement board (Thompson Hall, third floor)	Two weeks before defense
Defend Thesis or Dissertation	Two weeks prior to Graduate Coordinator signature deadline
Obtain committee member signatures (Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Committee Acceptance form)	Before library deadline
Submit thesis/dissertation to the Mississippi State University's Library	Before library deadline
Publish Research	Within 1-year following graduation

6. OTHER POLICIES AND REQUIREMENTS FOR ALL GRADUATE PROGRAMS

6.1. Time Period to Complete Graduate Program

Students in the M.S. program (both thesis and non-thesis) must complete all coursework and an approved thesis (if in the M.S. thesis option) within eight years of beginning their enrollment. A student in the Ph.D. program must complete their graduate program within five years following the passing of the student's Written Preliminary/Oral Comprehensive Examinations. A student may submit a request for a one-year extension of time if needed under well-justified, extenuating circumstances. The request must be approved by the major professor/faculty advisor, Graduate Coordinator, CFR Dean, and Dean of the Graduate School. In the rare circumstance that a second request is made, additional approvals are required, including approval of the Provost. Failure to complete all required benchmarks within the allotted timeframe will result in the student being terminated from the degree program.

6.2. Transfer of Graduate Credit

Transferred credits are defined as those credits earned in graduate work at another university, whether or not they were used to satisfy the requirements of a previously earned degree. Transfer credit hours from other U.S. universities, international universities, or military educational programs may be used to fulfill requirements for graduate degrees in the Department of Forestry provided the credits: (a) were earned in programs accredited by appropriate regional and national accrediting bodies, and (b) contributed to the current graduate program of study in the Department of Forestry. Grades lower than "B" will not be accepted for transfer credit. A maximum of nine hours of transferred course credit will be accepted toward fulfilling requirements for a Master's degree. No more than one-half of the required course credit hours will be accepted toward fulfilling requirements for a doctoral program. A student with a minor may transfer up to one-third of the required hours for a minor. Students who transition from an Unclassified admission status into a degree program may apply up to nine hours of Unclassified graduate coursework in addition to any credits being transferred from another institution.

Transferred courses are to be listed on a “Transfer Approval Form,” (<https://www.grad.msstate.edu/admissions/forms/>) and an official transcript listing courses to be transferred must be sent to the Graduate School. A separate, official transcript is not needed if the official transcript was submitted with the student's admission application. The form is to be signed by the student and their major professor/faculty advisor and submitted to the Graduate Coordinator for approval. Following approval, the Graduate Services Coordinator forwards the form to the MSU Office of the Graduate School, and a copy of the form is retained in the student’s file in the Department Head’s office. For additional information concerning the applicability of transfer credit, students should consult the MSU *Graduate Catalog* <http://catalog.msstate.edu/graduate/>.

6.3. Continuous Enrollment

The continuous enrollment policy applies when a graduate student has completed all coursework but has not met other requirements (typically the thesis/dissertation defense or thesis/dissertation submission). If employment, illness, or other extenuating circumstances necessitate that a student takes a leave of absence, they are still obligated to meet all requirements for completing the degree. A request for leave of absence form can be found online (<https://www.grad.msstate.edu/files/RequestLeaveOfAbsence.pdf>). A graduate student who has completed all coursework, but lacks completion of other degree requirements must be registered for at least one credit hour during the fall semester, and at least one credit hour in either the spring or summer semester of each academic year until all degree requirements are met. This includes: (a) doctoral students who have completed their coursework, passed their preliminary/comprehensive examinations, and are working on their dissertations; (b) Master's students, including Distance Education students, who have completed their coursework, successfully defended their thesis, and are still revising their thesis; and (c) Master's students, including Distance Education students, who have completed their coursework, but have not successfully defended their thesis. Graduate students, including Distance Education students who are obtaining a Master’s thesis, who have passed all thesis/dissertation defense examinations by the end of a semester, and have met all other requirements for graduation but failed to meet thesis/dissertation Library submission deadlines must enroll in a one credit hour course (GRD 9011) the following semester. End of semester is defined as the last day of final examinations. The one credit hour course shall have an associated fee of \$100. Students are allowed to enroll in the one credit hour course only one time. Any student enrolled in the one credit hour course must meet all of that semester’s Library submission and graduation application deadlines required for that course. Students who fail to maintain continuous enrollment will be required to pay tuition and registration fees for missed terms at the current rate.

6.4. Academic Performance, Repeat Policy, and Probationary Policies

6.4.1. Academic Performance and Academic Probation

Students must maintain satisfactory academic performance during their graduate program, or

they will be placed on academic probation. Probationary students include those on “provisional admission” for a GPA deficiency at the time of application; and those placed on “probationary status” for failing to maintain a GPA above a 3.0, receiving a grade of D or F, or failing to maintain satisfactory progress on assigned tasks.

If a student’s cumulative GPA falls below a 3.0 at any time after the start of their graduate program, they will be placed on academic probation. However, a Master's student admitted under “provisional admission” must maintain a semester 3.0 GPA continuously and will not be allowed another academic probation semester after the start of their program. A student admitted under “provisional admission” who’s cumulative GPA falls below 3.0 will be dismissed from the graduate program.

A student placed on academic probation because their cumulative GPA falls below 3.0 must regain a cumulative GPA of 3.0 within the next two subsequent semesters or within nine credit hours of graduate coursework, whichever comes first (providing that the student attains a minimum GPA of 3.0 in all semesters during which they are on probation). Failure to regain a cumulative GPA of 3.0 after two semesters (or nine credit hours of coursework) will result in the student being dismissed from the graduate program and losing eligibility for readmission. Students in the M.S. Distance Education program will be allowed nine credit hours of coursework to bring their cumulative GPA back up to 3.0, regardless of the number of semesters. A student whose cumulative GPA falls below 3.0 for a second time will be dismissed from the graduate program.

Any grade of D or F received in any course taken after admission to the graduate program will result in the student being placed on academic probation. A student receiving a D or F will be required to maintain satisfactory academic performance in all subsequent semesters of their graduate program (minimum 3.0) or they will be dismissed from the graduate program and lose eligibility for readmission. A student receiving a thesis/dissertation research credits grade of Unsatisfactory will be dismissed from the graduate program and lose eligibility for readmission.

6.4.2. Academic Dismissal

If one or more of the following conditions occur, a graduate student shall be dismissed from the program if they:

- receive a second course grade of D or lower,
- receive a third course grade of C,
- receive an Unsatisfactory in FO 9000 research hours,
- violate the Student Honor Code for a second time,
- are placed on academic probation and fail to meet the requirements for release from probationary status,
- fail a comprehensive examination two times in pursuit of an academic degree, and

- fall short of any standards established by his or her academic unit, and the Department recommends dismissal with approval of the CFR Dean and the Dean of the Graduate School.

A graduate student in the Department of Forestry who has been dismissed from the graduate program has the right to appeal that dismissal. See the MSU *Graduate Catalog* for details of the appeals process.

6.4.3. Course Retake Policy

With the approval of the major professor, Graduate Coordinator, Department Head, and the CFR Dean, a student may request to retake a course (http://www.grad.msstate.edu/forms/pdf_forms/request_to_retake_a_course.pdf). A student may only repeat one course per degree program. The grade earned in the second completion is included in the student's Program of Study. Once the course is retaken, the original grade is no longer subject to the University criteria for academic dismissal or degree completion. However, a record of both courses taken will remain on the permanent transcript, and both grades will be included in the computation of the final GPA.

6.5. Administration of Program

6.5.1. Deadlines

The student bears responsibility for correct and timely submission of forms and reports, and for accomplishment of program requirements. Failure to meet deadlines may result in placement of the student on probationary status for one semester. If the required tasks have not been completed by the end of the probationary semester, the student may be dismissed from the Department's graduate program. **While students will generally receive assistance from their major professor and graduate committee, they should not rely on them for deadline reminders.**

6.5.2. Required Forms

Many required forms for graduate students are available online at the MSU Office of the Graduate School website (<https://www.grad.msstate.edu/admissions/forms/>). If a student cannot find a required form, they should check with the Department's Graduate Services Coordinator.

6.6. Application for Graduation

To be eligible for graduation at the next graduation date (i.e. May, August, or December), a student must formally apply for graduation by the deadline published in the University's Graduate Academic Calendar. There is a graduation application fee, which is to be paid by the student. If the student fails to complete all degree requirements by the designated due dates in the semester, they must reapply for graduation (and pay another fee) in a subsequent semester when the student will complete their degree requirements. A student must be enrolled in at least one credit hour in the semester they are graduating.

The Office of the Graduate School provides a “GRADUATION CHECK LIST” to the Department’s Graduate Coordinator for the student after that office has received the student’s application for graduation. The Graduate Services Coordinator will complete this checklist and the Graduate Coordinator will sign it. The Graduate Coordinator will return the form to the Office of the Graduate School, which will use the checklist to audit the student and notify the University Registrar that the student is eligible for graduation.

6.6.1. GRD 9011 Graduate Degree Completion

Graduate students **who intend to defend by the end of a semester and who meet all other graduation requirements except the deadlines for thesis/dissertation submission to the Library** should adhere to the following procedure:

- Defend their thesis no later than the end of the semester. End of semester is defined as the last day of final examinations. This date is posted each semester on both the Graduate Academic Calendar and the University Calendar.
- Enroll in a one-credit hour course (GRD 9011) the following semester. The one-credit hour course has an associated fee of \$100. Students are allowed to enroll in this one-credit hour course only one time. Students enrolled in the one-credit hour course must meet all of that semester's Library submission and graduation application deadlines.

7. OTHER DEPARTMENTAL POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR ON CAMPUS STUDENTS

7.1. Seminars

The Department hosts the Forestry and Natural Resources Seminar Series, and the University offers numerous opportunities for students to attend other seminars across campus. On campus students are required to attend the Department seminars and are strongly encouraged to attend seminars of interest throughout campus, especially those organized by the CFR. Students are also encouraged to initiate seminars on topics of interest.

7.2. Employment and Professional Responsibilities of Graduate Students

Graduate students may be asked to broaden their experience by assisting with undergraduate courses or research programs as approved by their major professor. A professor may ask a student to assist with teaching classes or laboratories, or a student may be called upon to assist other graduate students on their research projects. Students should be aware of, and are encouraged to participate in, research endeavors of other graduate students and faculty within the Department. Graduate students are also encouraged to participate in professional/scientific societies and organizations related to their field of study. Additionally, professional development is not limited to coursework, research activities, and participation in professional/scientific

organizations. Reading of important publications in forestry and related fields, both recent and historic, is strongly encouraged. A list of suggested readings has been prepared by the Department and may be modified by the major professor in consultation with the graduate committee and provided to the student for study at the beginning of the student's tenure in the graduate program. This reading list can be acquired from the student's major professor.

Graduate students on assistantship are expected to maintain regular employee hours. Holidays for graduate students on assistantship are the same as University employee holidays for regular employees (<https://www.hrm.msstate.edu/benefits/holidays/>). A graduate student's major professor must approve other absences at least 2 weeks prior to the date of absence. In the case of family emergencies that require a full day or more of absence, the student should notify the major professor immediately to make arrangements for coverage of work responsibilities.

7.3. Equipment Use by Graduate Students

Cars and trucks, ATVs, boats, cameras, computers, field equipment, and other research and teaching tools that are the property of MSU/FWRC (State of Mississippi) or research sponsors are not to be borrowed for recreational or other personal use. Students requesting such equipment for teaching and research purposes are responsible for proper use and care of the equipment. A "Hand Receipt" must be completed (see Ms. LaShanda Logan, Thompson Hall Room 371) if equipment other than a departmental vehicle is taken off campus. If the equipment is lost or damaged, the student may be responsible for its repair or replacement.

7.4. Parking and Vehicle Use by Graduate Students

A graduate student's personal vehicle may only be parked in areas on campus designated for student parking. These areas require parking permits and students will be responsible for paying fines for tickets received for illegal parking or moving violations on campus. A hold on grades and graduation will result from failure to pay these fines.

Use of departmental vehicles is a privilege and should be treated as such. The driver of a MSU vehicle should immediately report accidents, tickets, or malfunctions to the professor in charge of the vehicle. The user of any MSU vehicle should leave the vehicle in clean condition and filled with gas, so that it is ready for use by the next person. Abusive use, poor maintenance, or untidiness by a student may result in loss of departmental vehicle privileges.

Departmental vehicles are to remain parked on campus or at the Blackjack shop/greenhouse area when not in use. The CFR/FWRC has an established parking policy to provide direction for parking of vehicles used by employees, students, collaborators, and guests. The main parking lot of Thompson Hall is reserved for faculty, staff, and guests. **Departmental vehicles SHOULD NOT be parked in the main Thompson Hall parking lot**, except for temporary loading and unloading activities. State and federally owned vehicles (i.e. Departmental vehicles) should be parked behind the Pace Seed Technology Building, in the gravel parking lot behind Thompson

Hall, or at the Acorn Building. Additional parking is available at the Blackjack shop/greenhouse area.

If the student will be responsible for driving an MSU vehicle, they should request a Fuelman driver number from a Departmental administrative assistant. This number is unique to each individual and should be kept confidential. When filling university vehicles with fuel, the student must obtain the “Fuelman card” that is associated with the vehicle being driven from an administrative assistant. To use the Fuelman card to obtain gasoline, the student will need to supply their unique Fuelman number and the current mileage of the vehicle into the gasoline pump station. The student must obtain a receipt for the transaction, log the purchase into the vehicle logbook, and return the receipt and the Fuelman card to the appropriate administrative assistant.

7.5. Office Procedures

7.5.1. Copiers

Graduate students may not personally use the photocopiers in the mailroom (i.e., 110A Thompson Hall). They may, for official business and with the permission of their major professor, use the copier on the third floor in 350 Thompson Hall using their major professor’s access number.

7.5.2. Mail

A graduate student’s mail is delivered daily to their mailbox in 224 Thompson Hall. Each graduate student should check their mailbox daily, as this is one of the methods for the Department, faculty and staff to get messages and information to students.

7.5.3. Graduate Student Offices

Graduate student offices are located primarily in 224 Thompson Hall, and in other designated spaces in Thompson Hall, as well as in the Acorn Building located south of Thompson Hall. Workstations in these offices are assigned to students by the Department’s Graduate Services Coordinator when a student enters the program.

Workstations are to be kept clean, neat, and professional in appearance. Outdoor equipment, plant or animal specimens, and/or muddy boots should not clutter the office area. Inspections may be made by the Department Head or their staff, and failure to maintain a clean and neat workstation may result in loss of the privilege to have a workstation. Only one workstation is allowed per student; however, students are required to occupy one workstation.

7.5.4. Computers

Two CFR computer laboratories and several research laboratories in the Department have desktop computers, printers, and other hardware available for use by graduate students in the Forestry Department. The computers in these CFR laboratories are available for student use on a first-come, first-served basis when they are not in use by scheduled classes or CFR advising and orientations. Computers in the various research laboratories are under the control of research faculty who supervise those laboratories, and approval to use these computers must be obtained from the responsible faculty member. Use of CFR and research-lab computers is a privilege, and any abuse or unauthorized/ inappropriate use of these computers may result in loss of user privileges.

7.5.5. E-mail and Other Electronic Information for Graduate Students

All MSU students are assigned a University e-mail address. E-mail is the official means of communicating with students at MSU, and departmental notices and other announcements will be sent to the student's MSU e-mail address. Students are expected to check their e-mail daily.

Students will be required to provide updated information on their local address, phone number, and other relevant information as requested when registering for classes. Personal information, class schedules for the current semester, and transcripts of previous courses taken at MSU are stored in the MSU computer system. Information is secure and only available to the student and MSU faculty and staff with appropriate privileges.

7.5.6. Scheduling of Conference Rooms

Scheduling of rooms for committee meetings and presentations is arranged by the student and/or their major professor through the Department's Graduate Services Coordinator in 105 Thompson Hall (662-325-2949).

7.6. Other Information

7.6.1. Blackjack Facilities

The Department of Forestry maintains a greenhouse for research, head houses for sample preparation, and storage buildings for equipment and supplies at the CFR's Blackjack shop/greenhouse area on Blackjack Road adjacent to the campus. Use of these facilities by a graduate student should be arranged through the student's major professor.

7.6.2. Maroon Alert

Maroon Alert is the university's emergency notification platform and uses texts, emails, phone calls, and more to inform the university community of imminent or existing dangers. At the beginning of their first semester, new students should register for Maroon Alert and verify their contact information in Banner using the guidelines provided at:

<https://www.emergency.msstate.edu/maroon-alert>.

7.6.3. Research Training Courses

All M.S. thesis and Ph.D. students should complete the Responsible Conduct of Research training for “Other Project Personnel” offered through the Office of Research Compliance (<https://www.orc.msstate.edu/rcr/training>) at the beginning of their first semester. Students may also need additional training (e.g., Human Subjects Training) depending on their project and funding source. Students should consult with their major professor about required training courses at the beginning of their first semester.