

Michigan State University
Department of Plant Biology



Graduate Student Handbook
2026-2027

Table of Contents

I. Program Overview	4
A. Goals	4
II. Program Options	5
A. Master's of Science (MS) Degree	5
B. Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) Degree	5
C. Shared Programs – Undergraduate to Graduate	5
D. Readmission	6
III. Degree Requirements	7
A. Background Courses in Plant Biology	7
B. Course Registration	7
C. Teaching Requirements	7
D. Optional Rotations	7
E. Detailed Degree Requirements – MS	8
F. Checklist and Visual Timeline for Completing Master's Degree	13
G. Detailed Degree Requirements – PhD	15
H. Checklist and Visual Timeline for Completing PhD Degree	17
IV. Thesis/Dissertation Advisor and Major Professor	19
A. First Year Temporary Mentoring Committees	19
B. Selecting a Major Professor	19
V. Graduate Guidance Committee	20
A. Outside Committee Member Approval Process	20
B. Guidance Committee Function	21
C. Scheduling Committee Meetings	21
VI. Comprehensive Examination PhD (as of August 2021)	22
A. Comprehensive Exam Description	22
B. Timeline	22
C. Implementation	22
VII. Dissertation Defense PhD	25
A. Description and Implementation	25
B. Finalizing the Dissertation	26
C. Final Certification	26
VIII. Responsible and Ethical Conduct of Research (RECR) and Scholarship for Graduate Students: University Requirements	27

A. RECR CITI Modules	27
B. RECR Discussion-based training	28
IX. Department Policies	28
A. Academic Performance	28
B. Integrity and Safety in Research and Creative Activities	29
X. Graduate Student Academic Grievance Hearing Procedures for PLB	30
XI. Work Related Policies	36
A. Graduate Assistantships	36
B. Graduate Assistant Illness/Injury/Pregnancy Leave Policy	40
C. Outside Work for Pay	40
D. Language Requirements for International TAs	40
E. New Teaching Assistant Institute and International TA Orientation	40
XII. University Policies	41
XIII. Departmental Resources	41
XIV. University Resources	42
XV. TA Leave Policy	45
XVI. GA Leave Policy	46

This handbook provides graduate students in the Department of Plant Biology the information about our graduate program and guidelines for degree completion. Entering students receive a copy of this handbook and are responsible for the content. Please keep this hard copy and/or PDF as your official document during your tenure as a student. Note, changes made to this document after your entry into the Plant Biology Department may not apply to you. Also, please note that all requirements of the Graduate School and the College of Natural Science apply as well and are included herein.

I. Program Overview

A. Goals

The Graduate Program in the Department of Plant Biology strives to educate our students to achieve agility and innovation in research. The goals for our students are designed so they will demonstrate scientific creativity and expertise during their graduate program and be prepared to respond effectively to the rapidly changing field of plant biology in a complex society.

In 2019, as part of the PLB strategic plan, the Graduate Committee developed the following objectives for the program that are intended to guide the outcomes for each student.

Objective 1: Engage in and conduct excellent original research in plant biology. Research may encompass all dimensions and scientific themes from molecular and cell biology to ecology and evolution to biology education. An excellent researcher is an excellent communicator, rigorous thinker and conducts independent scientific investigations.

Outcomes: Graduate students will be able to

- Demonstrate an interconnected knowledge of fundamental concepts of plant biology.
- Ask novel research questions, conduct and complete research.
- Use quantitative reasoning, statistical analysis, and computational skills developed through appropriate course work or workshops as recommended by the Guidance Committee.
- Identify and find appropriate resources and information about scientific topics both familiar and unfamiliar.

Objective 2: Develop effective leadership and communication skills that are transferable to many professions. These skills include interactions with people, project management, lab management, and self-management.

Outcomes: Graduate students will be able to

- Communicate (oral and written) at multiple levels with diverse individuals and groups in their own and other disciplines and professions including with various stakeholders, the non-science community, and their graduate advisor and committee members.
- Work effectively in teams as both a leader and a contributing team member.
- Cultivate a culturally diverse environment by listening to community members and promoting inclusiveness in all dimensions of their work.

Students in this program can study all aspects of plant biology and are trained to integrate information among different hierarchies of biological organization. In addition to core requirements, each student's program is individually tailored depending on their interests and background. The Department of Plant Biology offers both an MS and a PhD degree, and it is possible for students to earn dual degrees or certifications by fulfilling requirements in various other programs offered by the University.

Essential web pages that graduate students should consult:

- [Plant Biology Website](#)
- [Academic Programs](#)
- [Student Information and Services, Rights and Responsibilities, and Regulations](#)
- [MSU/GEU Contract](#)
- [Guidelines for Graduate Student Advising and Mentoring Relationships](#)
- [Guidelines for Integrity in Research and Creative Activities](#)
- [Graduate Student Rights and Responsibilities](#)

II. Program Options

A. Master's of Science (MS) Degree

Two Types of Master's Programs are available:

- **Plan A:** (Thesis option) Consists of prescribed course work, seminar requirements, research, thesis, a teaching requirement and a final oral examination in defense of the Thesis. More detailed guidelines and descriptions of the requirements are given in Section III.E of this manual. The student's thesis is defended at the final oral examination. Details regarding the Final Examination are in Section III.E.10 of this manual.
- **Plan B:** (Non-thesis option) Consists of prescribed coursework, seminar requirements, an optional research project without thesis, a teaching requirement and a final certifying examination based on coursework. More detailed guidelines and descriptions of the requirements are given in Section III.E. The Final Examination is oral and based upon coursework, as detailed in Section III.E.10.

B. Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) Degree

The program of study consists of courses, seminars, a teaching requirement, research, a dissertation, and exams administered by the Guidance Committee, based around a dissertation topic as agreed upon by the Guidance Committee. The coursework will consist of courses required by the department plus courses established by the student's Guidance Committee and recorded in [GradPlan](#). Further details are given in Section III.G of this manual. A Comprehensive Exam and a Final Examination in defense of the dissertation are required. For details of these exams, see Section VI and VII.

C. Shared Programs – Undergraduate to Graduate

Shared Programs – Undergraduate to Graduate (also referred to as Shared Programs-UG2G) provide an opportunity for academically talented undergraduate students to enroll in graduate courses and conduct research towards a graduate degree while completing the last two

years of their bachelor's degree(s) programs.

To initiate interest in a Shared Program, students complete the Request for Shared Enrollment Status available on The Graduate School Web site (under [Forms, Shared Programs](#)). The form can be completed once the student has achieved 56 credits. The form must be submitted before a student may begin any shared course work. Upon entering their final year of their bachelor's program, students will then apply for admission to graduate study. Students must complete their first bachelor's degree prior to beginning their graduate degree. Completion of the form does not guarantee future admission into a graduate program.

There is no limit on the number of 400-level or above courses an undergraduate student can complete; however, only 30% of the total number of credits required for the graduate degree taken at the undergraduate level can be used for the graduate degree program requirements. Only graduate-level courses with a 3.0 grade or above will be eligible for sharing, however, colleges, departments, or schools may establish a higher minimum standard. Once credits are shared from any career, those same credits cannot be shared with any additional degree.

A student pays undergraduate tuition for courses counting towards their bachelor's degree, including credits shared with their graduate degree program (i.e. 30% of the total number of credits required for the graduate degree.) A student will be classified as an undergraduate until the first bachelor's degree is conferred.

A student pays graduate tuition for courses counting solely toward their graduate degree.

When a student is classified solely as a graduate student, eligibility begins for graduate assistantships, other forms of graduate student financial aid, and services reserved for graduate students.

In semesters when the student is sharing course work, federal financial aid designated for the first bachelor's degree (Federal Pell Grant, Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant, and subsidized and/or unsubsidized federal loans) will be determined based upon the number of undergraduate credits only, if eligible. Awards will be manually adjusted as necessary once the student is registered. Students may be eligible for institutional aid but are not eligible for federal financial aid as a graduate student until the first bachelor's degree has been conferred. The form is available [here](#).

Information regarding the requirements of the [College of Natural Science Dual Degree Program](#) or the [RO page about Shared Programs – Undergraduate to Graduate](#).

D. Readmission

If the student's program of study is interrupted for three or more semesters (including summer—i.e., for a calendar year or more) the student must apply for readmission. To reapply use the Readmission procedure through the [Registrar's Office website](#).

III. Degree Requirements

A. Background Courses in Plant Biology

The Graduate Committee may identify any courses that the student should take during their first year if the student's prior coursework does not have adequate background in plant biology. The committee may require the student to take up to two undergraduate or graduate courses (one per semester during the first year), in order to ensure that the student is prepared to undertake graduate training in plant biology. These course requirements will be stipulated as part of the offer of admission to the graduate program. The Committee will ensure that all incoming graduate students have or will take the equivalent of at least one undergraduate course in the areas of ecology/evolution/systematics and physiology/biochemistry/molecular biology.

B. Course Registration

Before registering for courses, the student should always confirm their plans with their First-Year Advisory Committee or Major Professor. This is especially important at the beginning of the academic program, before the student's formal Guidance Committee has been formed. Failure to meet with the Guidance Committee/Major Professor, or failure to follow the program of study prescribed by the Guidance Committee, may cause a delay in completing the program.

C. Teaching Requirements

All requirements must be accomplished in compliance with the current [MSU/GEU contract](#). Teaching and student learning is an essential component of graduate education regardless of whether the student will go on to work in academia, the public sector or private sector. Teaching experience, therefore, is among the academic requirements for the degree. This requirement is accomplished by (1) participating in the University TA orientation program to learn about pedagogy and student learning at Michigan State (during August of Year 1), and (2) serving as a teaching assistant in one course (lecture or lab). The goal of this experience is for the graduate student to develop skills in teaching and learning. This may include designing evidence-based instructional materials and assessments, developing, and implementing learner-centered pedagogical skills, and creating course-based undergraduate research experiences (CUREs).

D. Optional Rotations

During the first two semesters, students have the option of completing laboratory rotations with the goal of identifying, by mutual consent, an advisor and home laboratory by the middle of their second semester, if not before.

The policy governing rotations:

1. Rotations are optional for all students. Up to three rotations are allowed and all three rotations must be completed by the middle of the spring semester of their first year, or earlier.
2. Each student must rotate through at least one Plant Biology lab (the PI in the lab must have at least a partial or adjunct appointment in PLB).
3. Once an advisor is identified, by mutual consent, the student may choose to discontinue further rotations, as long as the requirement to rotate through at least one PLB lab has been met.

4. For students that start early (July 1), summer rotations can be of varying length but count towards the three-rotation maximum. Rotations beginning in the fall are limited to ½ semester, or approximately seven weeks.
5. By the middle of the spring semester, the student must identify an advisor and receive written consent for joining that laboratory. After an agreement is reached, the student must notify their First-Year Advisory Committee and the Academic Program Coordinator.
6. In exceptional instances, a fourth rotation during the last half of the spring semester may be allowed. The fourth rotation must be approved by the Graduate Director.
7. All students must identify an advisor by the end of their second semester or provide a rationale for not doing so to the Graduate Director because this could impact student subsequent funding.

Guidelines for setting up rotations:

1. The primary purpose of rotations is to identify an advisor. At any time in the process, students are encouraged to contact their First Year Advisory Committee about how to proceed.
2. Initiate the process at least several weeks before arriving on campus so that you can begin the rotation when you first arrive. You may wait to arrange your second and third rotations, but this should be done during your first few weeks of the fall semester.
3. To initiate your rotations, first ask potential faculty mentors if they are taking students, and if so, ask if and when they have openings for rotations in their labs during the coming year. Rotations should be through laboratories that have reasonable expectations of having space and resources to support the student's graduate work.
4. Arrange the order of rotations with the faculty supervisors and notify the First Year Advisory Committee and the Academic Program Coordinator.

E. Detailed Degree Requirements – MS

1. Credit requirements

- a. The MS degree obtained under either Plan A (with a thesis) or Plan B (without a thesis) has a minimum requirement of 30 credit hours beyond the Bachelor's Degree, including thesis or research credits. Undergraduate 300-level courses are applicable only if required by the Guidance Committee and approved by the Dean and the Graduate School. (See "Coursework and Seminars" below for information about enrollment.)
 - i. **Plan A:** Of the 30 credits total at the 400-level or above, a minimum of 16 credits must be at the 800-900 level, including a minimum of 4 and a maximum of 10 credits of PLB 899- Master's Thesis Research. The program of study consists of courses, professional career development requirements, and a thesis topic as agreed upon by the student and the Guidance Committee. An original thesis must be approved by the Guidance Committee.

- ii. **Plan B:** Of the 30 credits total at the 400-level or above, a minimum of 16 credits must be at the 800-900 level. No credits of 899 can count towards a Plan B degree. The program consists entirely of coursework (excluding 899), seminar requirements, and an oral exam. A majority of these courses should be selected in specialized fields of plant science at the 800-level to provide the candidate with advanced training that includes quantitative reasoning, statistical analysis, and computational skills. At least nine credits of course work approved for graduate credit should be selected from outside the PLB to provide a broader academic background. While no thesis is required under Plan B, research experience is desirable. The way to obtain this experience is to arrange a Special Problems (PLB 80X) under the guidance of a faculty member with appropriate interests.

2. Transfer Credits

- a. As many as 9 semester credits of graduate work (excluding thesis/research credits) may be transferred into a 30-credit Master's program from other institutions that are accredited within their respective geographic region upon approval of the Graduate Dean (CNS) and Graduate Director (PLB). Only courses in which a grade of 3.0 was achieved are acceptable for transfer.

3. Residency Credits

- a. Each student must meet a residency requirement, which is two consecutive semesters, involving the completion of at least six credits of graduate work each semester.

4. Master's Time Limit

- a. Many students complete the requirements for a Master's Degree in two years. To remain in good standing students must complete their Master's program within three years. The Department Chairperson may, in some cases, extend the time limit for a student to complete the requirements. The University time limit for completion of the Master's degree is five calendar years from the date at which the first course that applies to the degree was taken. So, if a student transfers a course that counts toward the degree that was taken 3 years prior to entering the program, the starting date is 3 years prior to entering the program.

5. Conversion to a PhD Program

- a. Students admitted to the Master's program may, following formal approval by their Guidance Committee, transfer directly to the PhD program, without completion of their Master's degree. Any current MS student wishing to bypass the MS degree and become a PhD candidate shall first obtain endorsement from their PI and Guidance Committee, then petition in writing the Graduate Director. They will then need to reapply to the PhD Program and receive a new offer letter from the Department Chairperson and Graduate Director.

6. Teaching Requirements

- a. Each Master's student must gain teaching experience by participating in the teaching of at least one course. Students are expected to participate in the University TA orientation program prior to teaching. Further details about the teaching requirement are given in section III.C.

7. Coursework and Seminars

- a. The courses that will be counted toward the required 30 credits will be decided upon by the student and Guidance Committee, with approval from the Departmental Chairperson, Dean, and the Graduate School. Required courses not applying to the degree will be designated as collateral. The program of study must be recorded in GradPlan <https://student.msu.edu> by the end of the second semester. The Report of the Guidance Committee – Master’s Program becomes the student's official program when it is approved and signed off in GradPlan by the Grad Director and CNS Graduate Dean. Changes in the program must be approved by the Guidance Committee and requested through GradPlan. If a student changes from a PhD program to a MS program, 999 credits may be changed to 899, but 899 credits cannot count towards a Plan B MS.
- b. MS students are required to complete:
 - i. **PLB 801 (3cr):** Core Concepts and Emerging Research Themes in Plant Biology
 - ii. **Computation, statistical and/or analytical modeling course/seminars (3cr minimum).** Each student will select interdisciplinary courses, seminars, workshops, or other means that allow them to achieve skills in quantitative reasoning, statistics, computation, analytical modeling. These courses are approved by the Guidance Committee of each student.
 - A. Example courses:
 - a. HORT 841– Foundations in Computational Plant Sciences
 - b. IBIO/PLB 830/831 – Statistical Methods in Ecology and Evolution I and II
 - c. CMSE 491/890 - Bioinformatics and Computational Biology
 - d. CMSE 801 - Introduction to Computational Modeling
 - e. CSS 893 – Frontiers in Computational Plant Science
 - iii. **Professional and career development:** A student must complete at least 3 activities throughout their program that represent growth in professional or career development. The professional and career development opportunities are intended to take you one step beyond traditional academia (conducting and communicating research through conference presentations, teaching as a GTA, and required coursework).

The activities to fulfill this requirement are agreed upon by each student and their graduate Guidance Committee.

The individual report for these three activities is found on the PLB Website under Graduate Student Forms. Upon completion of all three activities, students submit the form to the Academic Program Coordinator at least one month prior to graduation.

Example professional and career development opportunities:

- ☐ Workshops at conferences and professional societies
- ☐ Certification in College Science Teaching (CNS)
- ☐ FAST Fellows (Future Academic Scholars in Teaching)

- Internships or professional and career development courses offered through the training grants or other programs (PBHS, NSF NRT)

Additionally, each Plan A candidate is required to present a departmental seminar (for no credit) concerning their research within the 12 months preceding the student's graduation. This Master's Seminar is considered part of the final thesis defense.

Students must complete the Graduate School workshop series Responsible Conduct of Research.

8. Annual Review and Report

- a. Students must complete an Annual Progress Report by May 15 of each year they are in the program.
- b. There are four parts to the Annual Progress Report (see Annual Progress Report form for further details and instructions).
 - a. Part 1: Prepare Documents
 - b. Part 2: Student Self-Evaluation
 - c. Part 3: Major Professor Feedback
 - d. Part 4: Guidance Committee Feedback
- c. Meetings with Grad Director and Guidance Committee should be held annually as part of this process.
- d. Copies of these forms are stored in individualized Teams folders, accessible by Guidance Committee members.
- e. Once all parts are completed and signed, the graduate student must notify the Academic Program Coordinator and upload the completed report to GradPlan for that year's Annual Review by May 15.
- f. Timely annual completion of this report and the Key Benchmarks within it are required to remain in good standing.

9. Distribution of the Master's Thesis

- a. The Plan A Master's Student must present a publicly announced Thesis Seminar to the department, which is considered part of the thesis defense. The dissertation must be approved by the student's Major Professor, and considered to be in final form, before it is distributed to the Guidance Committee. The unbound dissertation or a digital copy, as preferred by the committee members, should be distributed at least two weeks prior to the Final Examination to all committee members.

10. Final Examination

- a. You must be enrolled at the time of your Final Exam. Students in Plan A are required to pass an oral examination in defense of the Thesis. For students in Plan B, the emphasis of the examination is on coursework and general knowledge of plant biology and related fields. Notify the Academic Program Coordinator two weeks in advance of the exam.

11. Finalizing the Master's Thesis

- a. After the student has passed the final oral examination in defense of the thesis, the student must incorporate any agreed-upon changes or corrections before presenting it to the Major Professor for final review and signature of the bookplate. MSU only accepts electronic dissertations submitted via ProQuest. The instructions for electronic submissions are available from <http://grad.msu.edu/etd/>. The target date for the FINAL APPROVAL of an electronic Thesis or Dissertation to the Graduate School for graduating the semester of that submission is set by the Graduate School ([see web site](#)) each year. Recommendation: Submit your thesis about two weeks in advance of the deadline. This will give you time to make edits before the ultimate deadline. Note, missing the deadline will delay graduation until the following semester and students will have to reapply for graduation.
- b. A submission via ProQuest does not mean that the document has been ACCEPTED. The review process is interactive, and final approval can take anywhere from a few hours to weeks, depending upon the extent of the necessary revisions and how diligent the author is when making the necessary revisions. Graduation on the semester of the electronic submission is only guaranteed if the document is APPROVED on or before the target date for that semester.

12. Final Master's Certification

- a. In order to graduate, you must:
 - [Submit an Application for Graduation online](#) very early in the semester of your intended graduation.
 - Inform the Academic Program Coordinator when you have submitted the application so they can monitor the process – this is helpful!
 - Review the Graduate School's expectations and deadlines at <http://grad.msu.edu/etd/> to ensure your Dissertation has met the Graduate School's guidelines.
 - A Final Certification form will be sent to the PLB departmental office by the Degree Certification Office. Our Academic Program Coordinator will examine your records to verify your completion of the requirements.

Before leaving MSU, please check with the Degree Certification Office to make certain that your credentials are in order. Their records are used to determine completion of the degree requirements. Discrepancies may delay your degree.

F. Checklist and Visual Timeline for Completing Master's Degree:

Year 1

- ☐ Meet with your First-Year Advisory Committee to determine which courses you should take the first semester and in subsequent semesters.
- ☐ Complete PLB 801
- ☐ Complete EHS Hazardous Waste Safety Training (before courses begin in the first semester of your academic program)
- ☐ Take courses advised by your First-Year Advisory Committee and/or Major Professor
- ☐ Designate Major Professor
- ☐ Complete [PLB Advisor-Student Expectations Form](#) with Major Professor
- ☐ Form Guidance Committee (by the end of the second semester and add to GradPlan)
- ☐ Complete [PLB Committee-Student Expectations Form](#) with Guidance Committee
- ☐ Students meet with their Guidance Committee once each year.
Required: [Part 4: Guidance Committee Feedback of the Annual Report](#) must be completed at the end of each Committee Meeting. A member of the Committee who is not the major professor should complete the report.
- ☐ File your coursework program in GradPlan (<https://student.msu.edu>). This report includes a list of all the courses that are required for the student to complete their degree. The student's Guidance Committee determines what courses are necessary and appropriate.
- ☐ Complete initial RECR training in SABA CITI modules: Introduction to the Responsible Conduct of Research; Authorship; Plagiarism; Research Misconduct.

Year 2

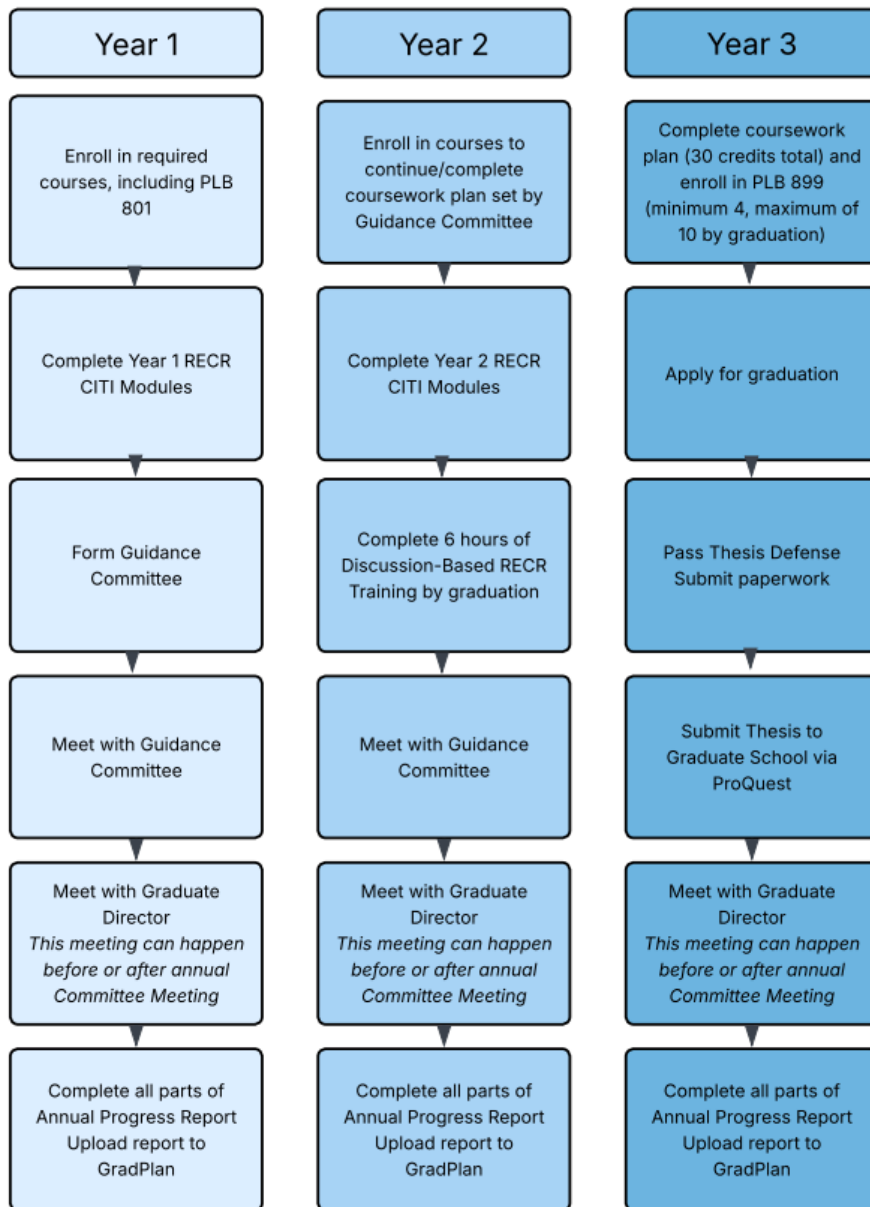
- ☐ 30 credits at 400-level or above.
- ☐ At least 16 of the 30 credits must be at the 800-900 level
- ☐ 4 to 10 credits of PLB 899 (Plan A only)
All remaining courses listed in student's Report of Guidance Committee
- ☐ Fulfill Teaching Requirement (one course)
- ☐ Complete RECR training in SABA CITI modules (any 3 of the following): Collaborative Research; Conflicts of Interest; Data Management; Financial Responsibility; Peer Review; Mentoring.
- ☐ Complete at least 6 hours of discussion-based RECR training by the end of their second year. The Graduate School and some PLB labs offer workshops to fulfill this requirement.
- ☐ Change Residency Status to In-State (only if anticipated funding is not available from a TAsip, Fellowship, or Research Assistantship) [MSU RO: Regulations for Qualifying for In-State Tuition](#)
- ☐ Professional and Career Development (2 activities)

Year 3 (or sooner)

- ☐ Submit Application for Graduation to the University.
- ☐ (Plan A only) Complete thesis and distribute to Guidance Committee. The thesis must be distributed to the Guidance Committee at least two weeks prior to the final examination.

- ☐ (Plan A only) Present a publicly announced Master's Thesis Seminar to the department - no credit. You must notify the Academic Program Coordinator two weeks before the seminar. The Academic Program Coordinator will announce the seminar to the department by email.
- ☐ Schedule and pass Final Examination (required for both Plan A and Plan B), file paperwork.
- ☐ (Plan A only) Submit final draft of Thesis and Abstract with all necessary corrections and required forms through ProQuest.
- ☐ Final Certification.

Visual Timeline for Completing Master's Degree:



*Complete TA Requirement at any time

G. Detailed Degree Requirements – PhD

1. Research Credit Requirements

- a. The minimum credit requirements for the University are 24 credits of doctoral dissertation research (PLB 999) in addition to credit for all the courses specified by the Student's Guidance Committee. The maximum number of doctoral dissertation research credits (PLB 999) is 36 credits.

2. Residency Requirement

- a. Each student must meet a residency requirement, which is two consecutive semesters, involving the completion of at least six credits of graduate work each semester.

3. Time Limits

- a. To remain in good standing, the Department of Plant Biology requires students to complete their Comprehensive Exams before the end of the first semester of their third year in the Doctoral Program. All requirements for the degree should be completed within five years. The Department Chairperson may, in some cases, extend the time limits for a student to complete the requirements. The University time limits dictate that the Comprehensive Exams must be passed within five years and all remaining requirements for the degree passed within eight years from the time that the first course taken at MSU that is a part of the student's doctoral plan. Thus, the first course taken "starts the clock" for university time limits. If an extension beyond eight years is approved by the Guidance Committee, the Department Chairperson, the Dean of Natural Science and the Dean of the Graduate School, the student's doctoral Comprehensive Exams must be re-taken and passed.

4. Teaching Requirement

- a. Each doctoral student must gain teaching experience by teaching at least one course. Further details about the teaching requirement are given in section III.C. Remember that students must participate in the University TA orientation program before they can teach. International students must score a minimum of a 50 on MSU's SPEAK test.

5. Coursework

- a. In addition to routine attendance at the Plant Biology seminar series, the following courses are required for the doctoral degree in Plant Biology:
 - i. **PLB 801 (3cr):** Core Concepts and Emerging Research Themes in Plant Biology
 - ii. **Computation, statistical and/or analytical modeling course/seminars (3cr minimum).** Each student will select interdisciplinary courses, seminars, workshops, or other means that allow them to achieve skills in quantitative reasoning, statistics, computation, analytical modeling. These courses are approved by the Guidance Committee of each student. Example courses include:
 1. HORT 841– Foundations in Computational Plant Sciences
 2. IBIO/PLB 830/831 – Statistical Methods in Ecology and Evolution I and II
 3. CMSE 491/890 - Bioinformatics and Computational Biology
 4. CMSE 801 - Introduction to Computational Modeling

5. CSS 893 – Frontiers in Computational Plant Science

- iii. **Professional and career development:** A student must complete at least 3 activities throughout their program that represent growth in professional or career development. The professional and career development opportunities are intended to take you one step beyond traditional academia (conducting and communicating research through conference presentations, teaching as a GTA, and required coursework).

The activities to fulfill this requirement are agreed upon by each student and their graduate Guidance Committee.

The individual report for these three activities is found on the PLB Website under Graduate Student Forms. Upon completion of all three activities, students submit the form to the Academic Program Coordinator at least one month prior to graduation.

Example professional and career development opportunities:

- ☐ Workshops at conferences and professional societies
- ☐ Certification in College Science Teaching (CNS)
- ☐ FAST Fellows (Future Academic Scholars in Teaching)
- ☐ Internships or professional and career development courses offered through the training grants or other programs (PBHS, NSF NRT)

6. Annual Review and Report

- a. Students must complete an Annual Progress Report by May 15 of each year they are in the program.
- b. There are four parts to the Annual Progress Report (see Annual Progress Report form for further details and instructions).
 - i. Part 1: Prepare Documents
 - ii. Part 2: Student Self-Evaluation
 - iii. Part 3: Major Professor Feedback
 - iv. Part 4: Guidance Committee Feedback
- c. Meetings with Grad Director and Guidance Committee should be held annually as part of this process.
- d. Copies of these forms are stored in individualized Teams folders, accessible by Guidance Committee members.
- e. Once all parts are completed and signed, the graduate student must notify the Academic Program Coordinator and upload the completed report to GradPlan for that year's Annual Review by May 15.
- f. Timely annual completion of this report and the Key Benchmarks within it are required to remain in good standing.

H. Checklist and Visual Timeline for Completing PhD Degree

Year 1

- ☐ Meet with your First Year Advisory Committee to determine which courses you should take the first semester and beyond.
- ☐ Complete EHS Hazardous Waste Safety Training.
- ☐ Complete PLB 801.
- ☐ Take courses stipulated by the Graduate Committee in your letter of admission to the University.
- ☐ Take courses advised by your First Year Advisory Committee and/or Major Professor.
- ☐ Designate Major Professor.
- ☐ Complete [PLB Advisor-Student Expectations Form](#) with Major Professor
- ☐ Form Guidance Committee (before the end of the first year in the doctoral program).
- ☐ Complete [PLB Committee-Student Expectations Form](#) with Guidance Committee
- ☐ Students meet with their Guidance Committee once each year.
Required: [Part 4: Guidance Committee Feedback of the Annual Report](#) must be completed at the end of each Committee Meeting. A member of the Committee who is not the major professor should complete the report.
- ☐ Complete initial RECR training in SABA CITI modules: Introduction to the Responsible Conduct of Research; Authorship; Plagiarism; Research Misconduct.
- ☐ File coursework program in GradPlan (<https://student.msu.edu>). This report includes a list of all the courses that are required for the student to complete their degree. Beyond the requirements below, the student's Guidance Committee determines what courses are necessary and appropriate for the student.
- ☐ Professional and career development - 3 activities during the entire doctoral program (see description above).

Year 2

- ☐ Finish course requirements (this may not be possible for all students before the end of the second year, but they should be finished as soon as reasonably possible).
- ☐ Pass all courses listed in student's GradPlan.
- ☐ Complete Year 2 RECR CITI requirements.
- ☐ Complete at least 6 hours of discussion-based RECR training by the end of the second year. The Graduate School and some PLB labs offer workshops to fulfill this requirement.
- ☐ Change Residency Status to In-State (only if anticipated funding is not available from a TAsip, Fellowship, or Research Assistantship) [MSU RO: Regulations for Qualifying for In-State Tuition](#)

Year 3 (or sooner) & Beyond

- ☐ Complete [Comprehensive Exam Expectations Form](#) with Guidance Committee
- ☐ Pass Comprehensive Exam (see p. 18).
- ☐ Fulfill Teaching Requirement.
- ☐ Earn at least 24, but no more than 36 credits of Doctoral Dissertation Research (PLB 999)
- ☐ Submit Application for Graduation to the University.

- ☐ Complete dissertation and distribute to Guidance Committee. The dissertation must be distributed to the Guidance Committee at least two weeks prior to the final examination.
- ☐ Present a publicly announced Dissertation Seminar to the department.
- ☐ Pass Final Examination, file Department and Graduate School paperwork.
- ☐ Submit the final draft of Dissertation and Abstract with all necessary corrections and required forms through ProQuest.
- ☐ Final Certification.

Visual Timeline for completing PhD Degree:



*Complete TA Requirement at any time

IV. Thesis/Dissertation Advisor and Major Professor

A. First Year Temporary Mentoring Committees

Graduate students are assigned to a First Year Mentoring Committee after they are accepted into our program. The First Year Mentoring Committee will consist of the Graduate Director, the Academic Program Coordinator, and a peer mentor, chosen from the peer mentoring program. The role of this committee is to guide the student in choosing coursework for the first and second semester, help coordinate rotations (if appropriate), and provide advice about successfully transitioning to graduate school. The committee will meet with entering students before courses begin in the fall, and later during the first year as needed.

B. Selecting a Major Professor

The graduate student should select their Major Professor within their first academic year in the program; this requires mutual consent between the professor and student, and many factors go into this important decision. It is the collective responsibility of our faculty to advise graduate students in their research and professional development. If the student has trouble finding a willing faculty member to serve as the Major Professor, they should consult the Graduate Director and/or the department chair to help find a suitable match.

The Major Professor shall, with the help of the student's Guidance Committee, advise and mentor the student in their research and professional development. The Major Professor should be a regular faculty member in the Department of Plant Biology at Michigan State. However, in some cases adjunct faculty will be granted approval by the Department Chairperson to serve as Major Professor. Adjunct faculty must also be approved by the College and the Dean of the Graduate School. In exceptional cases, a Major Professor can be a faculty member from outside the Department. This faculty member must request in writing approval from the Chair of Plant Biology to serve as Major Professor prior to committing to the student and indicate the sources of funding for the graduate student that are available from their lab. In these instances, 50% of the Guidance Committee must be regular faculty members from the Department.

In cases where the major professor leaves MSU before the student completes their degree program the student should consult the Graduate Director and Departmental Chairperson to identify a suitable Major Professor. It is the joint responsibility of the student and the Departmental Chairperson to decide on completion of the degree, and it requires mutual consent between the student and a Major Professor.

Graduate research, whether leading to a Master's Thesis or a Doctoral Dissertation, is usually related to the research interests of the Major Professor. A discussion with the Major Professor will often uncover unanswered problems of immediate interest. From these, an area of research develops.

The Major Professor, and the members of the student's Guidance Committee, are officially recognized by the University with entry and approval in. If the student desires a different Major Professor for any reason, the change should be requested as early as possible in the graduate training program. Any plans for changing to a different Major Professor should be discussed with the Graduate Director and the student's prospective Major Professor prior to initiation. Before relations with the Major Professor are severed, the student should be sure that another faculty member will serve in that capacity.

V. Graduate Guidance Committee

The Guidance Committee must be established within the student's first year in the program. The student's Guidance Committee is selected by the Major Professor together with the graduate student, subject to approval by the Graduate Director via GradPlan for both PhD and Masters students. The members of the Guidance Committee are normally selected based upon research and professional expertise, who are best suited to advise the student in their proposed research and professional development. Changes in membership on the committee may be made by the student in concurrence with the Major Professor and Graduate Director. Any changes in committee membership must be approved via GradPlan. The Guidance Committee determines which courses will be required for the student, advises the student with regard to the research project, and administers the Comprehensive (Doctoral only) and Final Examinations (Master's and Doctoral).

The Guidance Committees are composed of a minimum of three (in the case of a Master's Committee) or four (in the case of a Doctoral Committee) of Michigan State University regular faculty members, including the Major Professor. With the approval of the Graduate Director, an exception may be granted to allow an Emeritus faculty member to serve as one of the four required faculty members on a doctoral student's Guidance Committee; in addition, an Emeritus faculty member may continue to serve as chairperson of a Guidance Committee.

A. Outside Committee Member Approval Process

Special permission is required if you wish to have someone other than MSU tenure-stream faculty on your committee. Non-MSU scientists may not be the chairperson of the committee and the number of MSU tenure-stream faculty must be equal to or greater than the number of non-MSU scientists on all committees. There is a special process set up to approve these members, and you must follow the procedure below. Reach out to the Academic Program Coordinator for assistance with this process.

The [Graduate School Approved Committee Member for Individual Student form](#) should be submitted by a graduate program administrator (e.g., program director, academic program coordinator, or coordinator) before the new member assumes committee duties.

Upon submission, the form submitter and the student will receive a copy of the form responses and the form will automatically route in this order:

1. Graduate Program Director(s)

2. College Assistant/Associate Dean(s) of Graduate Studies
3. The Graduate School

The form submitter, the student, and any other individuals the submitter lists at the end of the form will receive an email with every change in status. The student's advisor/chairperson will also receive notification of the final decision. Upon final approval, the Graduate School will add the new member to the eligible committee members database and notify the student, who must then add the new member to their committee in GradPlan. Campus Solutions will send an email to the new committee member explaining how to create a guest account, if needed, and how to log into Campus Solutions.

B. Guidance Committee Function

- ☐ Assistance in planning the program of study and research.
- ☐ Formal approval of the program of the student (GradPlan)
- ☐ Advising and assisting in the research process
- ☐ Participation in the Comprehensive Exam (PhD only) and Final Examination (both Master's and PhD)
- ☐ Frequent consultation with all committee members is essential, and the annual meeting with the entire committee is intended to be helpful. The Guidance Committee can provide the student with valuable advice regarding the selection of courses, planning, conducting, and interpreting research. [Part 4: Guidance Committee Feedback of the Annual Report](#) must be completed at the end of each Committee Meeting. A member of the Committee who is not the major professor should complete the report.

C. Scheduling Committee Meetings

Scheduling meetings will be one of the most challenging tasks you face when it comes to interacting with your Guidance Committee.

1. Plan well ahead and meet with your advisor and identify 3-5 days and 3-5 time periods on those days when you and your advisor can meet. Avoid obvious conflicts like seminars.
2. Establish a poll (e.g., doodle, whenisgood) for those days/times, and indicate if this is face-to-face or zoom.
3. The first poll identifies a suitable day/time, then locate the building and room and get back to the committee members ASAP with the actual day/time /location OR Zoom link so they can lock down the time. Please understand that faculty often block out those days/times for other activities, or if they do not, other things may be scheduled during those time slots while you are waiting for confirmation.
4. If the first poll is unsuccessful, try another combination of days/times--but no more than 3-5 different dates. If there is one person who seems the most constrained, talk with them one on one to speed the process along.
5. Two days before the meeting, send a reminder to all the attendees with the date, time, and place of the meeting.
6. Following the meeting, Part 4: Guidance Committee Feedback of the Annual Report Form should be completed and signed by all committee members.

VI. Comprehensive Examination PhD (as of August 2021)

A. Comprehensive Exam Description

Students will create a dissertation proposal that is written, presented, and includes an oral defense. This is an excellent check point for students and their committee to evaluate the level of independence students are gaining for conducting scientific work. Their interconnected knowledge of literature and fundamental concepts of plant biology should be demonstrated in the literature background of their proposal and discussed in the oral defense of their proposal.

B. Timeline

Students schedule their comprehensive exam with the Academic Program Coordinator two weeks before the date and pick up the paperwork. In addition, the written proposal must be sent to the Guidance Committee at least one month prior to the formal proposal presentation and oral defense. To remain in good standing with the Plant Biology Department, doctoral students should complete the comprehensive exam before the end of the first semester of their third year in the program. If that limit is exceeded, the Graduate Director will consult with the student and their primary mentor/PI to review progress to date.

C. Implementation

The objectives of the comprehensive exam enable students to:

1. Describe the intellectual scaffolding for their work and current state-of-the-art in their chosen area of specialization, as defined by the current literature in that field.
2. Demonstrate general competence in the broad area of their research, and their ability to integrate factual information and training techniques learned through coursework and seminars as related to their research.
3. Demonstrate that they identified an important, challenging, and tractable research problem of sufficient scope, and that they have a substantial command of the relevant literature.
4. Communicate scientific goals, methods, and results in both the oral and written formats.

Implementation details:

The written proposal should be no longer than 15 pages (excluding the literature citations) and should include the following elements, with flexibility based on the format used):

- ☐ A literature survey describing the current state of their chosen area of specialization.
- ☐ Background and discussion of significance/importance of the proposed research.
- ☐ Clearly stated aims/objectives/goals/hypotheses.
- ☐ Discussion of the research they have done so far, including the experimental design, which should form the beginning of their dissertation research.
- ☐ Proposal for the rest of their dissertation research, including:
 - Scientific motivation and significance of this work.
 - Specific aims of the project that will be undertaken.
 - Timeline for completion of this work.

- A brief description of their post-PhD career goals and a description of the types of professional development opportunities that they will pursue to facilitate these goals.

Format of Dissertation Proposal: The student discusses the format of the proposal with their advisor, and they agree upon the format. In general, the format follows the NSF, USDA, or other discipline-specific proposals.

Students schedule their comprehensive exam with the Academic Coordinator two weeks before the date. In addition, the written proposal must be sent to the Guidance Committee at least one month prior to the formal proposal presentation and oral defense. Part 1 is the Dissertation Seminar, which is advertised and open to the public. Part 2 is the oral defense of the proposal before the student's Guidance Committee and is not open to the public.

1. Part 1:

Presentation on the first four aspects of the written proposal (see 1-4 above), which should be approximately 35-45 minutes long, using a research seminar style.

A public question and answer period moderated by the chairperson of the dissertation committee, which should be no longer than 15 minutes long. Members of the audience are allowed to ask questions.

2. Part 2: Following a 10-15 minute break

Private question and answer period comprised of only the student and Guidance Committee: The main goals of this questioning are to determine whether the student has gained the (1) knowledge and independent scientific thinking skills needed to undertake doctoral thesis research, (2) soundness and feasibility of the student's dissertation research, (3) understanding of the broader context within which their work is conducted, and to (4) evaluate the practicality of the students' professional development plan. The Committee is expected to provide constructive feedback about all aspects of the student's written and oral presentations.

Protocol for oral questioning part of exam (modified from BMB Grad Handbook). Here the goal is to use comparable protocols for each graduate student in PLB. Included are details to ensure equity among individual comprehensive exams -- especially on committees that have faculty members who are not in PLB.

For exams conducted via Zoom or hybrid, separate links should be created for the seminar and the closed oral questioning. Both should be password-protected.

At the start of the oral part of the exam, the student is excused from the room (or for Zoom formats, placed in a waiting room), during which time the committee discusses how the exam will proceed (see below). The major professor (chair of the committee) also asks the committee members whether there are any questions or concerns about the written portion of the exam or about the oral seminar.

The student is called back into the room/video conference and is told how the exam will proceed. Questioning proceeds in a round table format, with all members of the committee given equal opportunity to question the student. Generally, questions arise directly from the written proposal and oral seminar and may stem/follow up from prior questions asked by audience members or other committee members. Questions can deviate from immediate subject matter, but generally remain reasonably applicable to the topic of the student's proposal and seminar. If necessary, during a student's response, the PI may clarify the question for the student in instances when the student misinterprets the question in the context of their work. However, this aspect of questioning should be agreed upon by the committee prior to the closed meeting.

Typically, questioning by each committee member, including interjections, lasts for 15-20 minutes, but may last longer. There are usually two rounds of questioning from each committee member, but members are given the opportunity to ask a third round of questions as needed.

At the conclusion of questioning, the student is excused from the room/placed in a waiting room, and the committee discusses the student's performance. The committee votes on performance in the exam, each member submitting a Pass or Fail outcome.

The committee completes and signs the [Comprehensive Exam Form](#) and sends to the Academic Program Coordinator.

Pass: Students must be recommended for advancement to the degree by a positive vote by at least three-fourths of voting members, with no more than one dissenting vote from among the MSU regular faculty members on the committee.

Conditional Pass: A "conditional pass" outcome may include attention to material that the student needs to focus on to embellish their background, and/or revisions to the proposal. The outcomes (e.g., repeated oral exam, proposal revisions) and timeline for demonstrating competencies around material and/or revisions required by the student is set by the Committee/PI in writing and should not exceed six months. When the student completes the revisions, the PI/Committee approves (or recommends further revision) and sends the signed form to the Academic Coordinator.

Fail: The student has significant deficiencies in more than one of the outcomes described above. If a failure decision is reached by the committee, the committee will give specific recommendations for the remediation in writing. The student will be given the opportunity to repeat the exam within six months.

According to University policy, students must be registered during the semester in which the exam is administered. The date the exam is passed is the date on which the student officially passed the comprehensive exam and advances to degree candidacy.

VII. Dissertation Defense PhD

A. Description and Implementation

The Dissertation Seminar is a presentation of a student's doctoral research and is presented within the 12 months preceding the student's graduation. The Dissertation Seminar is considered part of the Final Examination (Dissertation Defense). Each seminar must be announced to the department by email and notices will be widely distributed by the Academic Program Coordinator.

The dissertation must represent original research and make a significant contribution to knowledge in the field of plant biology, including discipline-based educational research in plant biology. The Guidance Committee should approve the proposed research at the Comprehensive Exam. Any changes made to that research plan must be approved by the Guidance Committee to avoid any confusion about the final content of the dissertation or the amount of work that it comprises. The dissertation must include an abstract for a lay audience. This abstract must precede the conventional abstract and the formatting requirements are identical for both abstracts.

The dissertation must be approved by the student's Major Professor, and considered to be in final form, before it is distributed to the Guidance Committee. The unbound dissertation or a digital copy, as preferred by the committee members, should be distributed at least two weeks prior to the Final Examination to all committee members.

MSU only accepts electronic dissertations submitted via ProQuest. The instructions for electronic submissions are available from <http://grad.msu.edu/etd/>. The target date for the FINAL APPROVAL of an electronic Thesis or Dissertation to the Graduate School for graduating the semester of that submission is FIVE working days prior to the first day of courses for the next semester. Be aware that a submission via ProQuest does not mean that the document has been ACCEPTED. The review process is interactive and final approval can take anywhere from a few hours to weeks, depending upon the extent of the necessary revisions and how diligent the author is when making the necessary revisions.

Graduation the semester of the electronic submission is only guaranteed if the deadline dates are followed. [ETD Deadline Dates | The Graduate School](#)

Important note: You must be enrolled at the time you take your final exam. The final oral examination is in defense of the dissertation but may include general knowledge as well.

Three total hours should be set aside for the dissertation seminar and exam, and all members of the examining committee should participate during the entire period. Notice of the examination should be distributed by the Academic Program Coordinator two weeks in advance so that interested faculty may attend.

For the Final Examination on the Dissertation the student should be prepared to review briefly:

- ☐ Reasons for the study.
- ☐ Methods used.

- ☐ Important findings and their significance.
- ☐ Unanswered problems suggested by the research.

To pass the defense, the student must be recommended for the degree by a positive vote by at least three fourths of the voting members, with no more than one dissenting vote from among the MSU regular faculty members on the committee. In the event that a student does not pass, they will have the opportunity to repeat the defense within six months. The decision of the Guidance Committee will be recorded on the "Record of Dissertation and Oral Examination Requirements for Doctoral Degree Candidate." Collect the form prior to defense from the Academic Program Coordinator.

The final examination must be scheduled not earlier than two weeks after the dissertation and abstract has been submitted to the Guidance Committee. The student must be registered during the semester in which the final oral examination is taken.

B. Finalizing the Dissertation

After the student has passed the final oral examination in defense of the dissertation, the student must incorporate any agreed-upon changes or corrections before presenting it to the major professor for final review and signature of the bookplate. MSU only accepts electronic dissertations submitted via ProQuest. The instructions for electronic submissions and required paperwork and surveys are available at <http://grad.msu.edu/etd/>. The target date for the FINAL APPROVAL of an electronic Thesis or Dissertation to the Graduate School for graduating the semester of that submission is set by the Graduate School ([see web site](#)) each year.

Recommendation: Submit your dissertation about two weeks in advance of the deadline. This will give you time to make edits before the ultimate deadline. Note, missing the deadline will delay graduation until the following semester and you will have to reapply for graduation.

C. Final Certification

In order to graduate, you must:

1. [Submit an Application for Graduation online](#) early in the semester you intend to graduate.
2. Review the Graduate School's expectations and various deadlines at <http://grad.msu.edu/etd/> to ensure your Dissertation has met the Graduate School's guidelines.
3. Before leaving MSU, you should check with the Academic Program Coordinator to make certain that your credentials are in order. Their records are used to determine completion of the degree requirements. Discrepancies may delay your degree.

By University rule, you must complete the dissertation, and all the other requirements, within 8 years of entering the doctoral program. The Department of Plant Biology expects doctoral students to finish all the requirements in 5 years, but the Department Chairperson can grant extensions up to, but not exceeding, the University time limit. As of 2018, program extensions are granted one-time only.

VIII. Responsible and Ethical Conduct of Research (RECR) and Scholarship for Graduate Students: University Requirements

Training in the Responsible and Ethical Conduct of Research is essential in the preparation of future scholars and professionals. An understanding of the issues concerning the conduct of research in an increasingly complex world has become critical in successfully navigating the research landscape. It is the Department's belief that this plan will provide a foundation for all graduate students, as well as others pursuing a career in research, and will offer the basic information to meet most, if not all, federal agency granting requirements.

Note that for some students additional training above the Department minimum may be necessary. Students who are supported by NSF, NIH, or USDA grants may be required to complete additional specific training; they must meet the timeline and content requirements of training for that grant. Students engaged in research involving human subjects or animal use must complete the Michigan State University training modules for those subjects before submitting IRB or IACUC approvals. These online modules may be completed as part of the CITI Modules Year 2 requirements below.

Compliance with these requirements will be monitored via CITI (for online modules) and on annual reports of graduate students (for discussion-based training).

RCRSCA Basic Education Program Requirements

Master's plan B and grad professional	Master's Plan A students	Doctoral students
CITI Modules Year 1 • Introduction to the Responsible Conduct of Research • Authorship • Plagiarism • Research Misconduct	CITI Modules Year 1 • Introduction to the Responsible Conduct of Research • Authorship • Plagiarism • Research Misconduct	CITI Modules Year 1 • Introduction to the Responsible Conduct of Research • Authorship • Plagiarism • Research Misconduct
6 hours discussion-based training (complete before graduation)	6 hours discussion-based training (complete before graduation)	6 hours discussion-based training (complete before finishing comprehensive examination and entering candidacy status, doctoral students starting in Fall 2020 or later)
	CITI Modules Year 2 Complete 3 of 6 possible RCR Basic modules: • Collaborative Research • Conflicts of Interest • Data Management • Mentoring • Peer Review • Financial Responsibility	CITI Modules Year 2 Complete 3 of 6 possible RCR Basic modules: • Collaborative Research • Conflicts of Interest • Data Management • Mentoring • Peer Review • Financial Responsibility
		Year 3 forward 3 hours of annual refresher training

A. RECR CITI Modules

Year 1: Assigned CITI Modules

- ☐ Introduction to the Responsible and Ethical Conduct of Research
- ☐ Authorship
- ☐ Plagiarism
- ☐ Research Misconduct

Year 2: Complete 3/6 CITI modules

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

Year 3 and on:

- ☐ Complete 3 hours of refresher training annually
- ☐ Any additional CITI modules
- ☐ One-on-one or group discussions with advisor

B. RECR Discussion-based training

Each student will be required to participate in at least three hours of discussion-based training each year. This training may occur in one-on-one meetings with their faculty advisor, during lab meetings, during the Responsible and Ethical Conduct of Research Workshop Series sponsored by the Graduate School, or a combination of these options. These discussions should focus on the topics listed in items 1-5 above.

Every student (Master's Plan A and Plan B and PhD students) must have completed at least 6 hours of face-to-face discussion-based workshops.

Compliance will be documented in the annual reports of graduate students. Each student will be required to submit an explanation of how they received their discussion-based training (one-on-one meetings with their faculty advisor, during lab meetings, or during the Responsible Conduct of Research Workshop Series), the amount of time spent in discussion, and the topics covered. This statement will be certified by their faculty advisor in the student's annual report. The annual report will be kept on file in the Department of Plant Biology office. For each student, the Academic Program Coordinator will record compliance into GradPlan, with the first two years' training recorded as "Initial Training" and later years' training recorded as "Annual Training."

IX. Department Policies

A. Academic Performance

When a student is admitted into our graduate program it is with the full expectation that they will thrive academically as developing scientists and scholars. However, sometimes a student's academic performance does not meet the expectations of the student and our faculty. This section deals with problems and standards for academic performance.

A 3.0 cumulative grade point average is the minimum University standard. Research credits are not considered in determining the grade point average. Attainment of the minimum GPA, however, is an insufficient indicator of potential for success in other aspects of the program and in the field. The student's Guidance Committee is responsible for evaluating the student's competency and rate of progress.

To assist in evaluation of progress, each student is required to file an Annual Progress Report by May 15. Timely annual completion of this report and the Key Benchmarks within it are required

to remain in good standing. This report can be found within each student's individual folder in Teams. Detailed instructions for completing this form are provided in the Annual Progress Report document and outlined in Section III.E.6 (MS) Section III.E.8 (PhD).

Students not in good standing will be at a lower priority for departmentally administered funding (e.g. Teaching Assistantships, Paul Taylor funds, Rodman Fellowships, etc.).

The accumulation of grades below 3.0 in more than three courses of three or more credits or "deferred" in more than three courses of three or more credits at any given time, or a combination of the above in excess of four courses automatically removes the student from candidacy for the degree. Until the official program of study is filed, all courses on the student's record are considered part of the required program.

If a student is not making timely and reasonable progress towards their degree in terms of completing coursework or taking the necessary exams, within 30 days following the 5/15 deadline for submitting the annual report, the student should receive a letter from the Department Chair specifying the deficiencies and describing the expected steps, with a timetable, to get back in good standing. There will be a space on this letter for the student to respond in writing if they disagree either with the deficiencies listed or with the steps and timetable for remediation. Their response will then become a part of the student's file.

If a graduate student is not adequately achieving the intended goals and outcomes of the PLB graduate program (see p. 4), judgment regarding retention is made by the student's Major Professor and Guidance Committee. To facilitate a decision, the committee may consult the Graduate Director and the Department Chairperson. If a majority of the Guidance Committee decides that a student is not meeting the program goals, they may be asked to withdraw or be dismissed according to the procedures as defined in the [Graduate Student Rights and Responsibilities Document](#).

The student has a right to receive a warning when academic performance is judged to be unsatisfactory (GSRR 2.4.8.1 and 2.4.8.2). The student has a right to access their educational records including the academic file that the department keeps on them (GSRR 3.2.3). Requests to view and/or copy the file should be made through the departmental Academic Program Coordinator.

Comprehensive examinations and Final Examinations for the Master's and Doctoral Degrees are pass/fail. A student who fails either the written or oral Comprehensive Examination, Master's Defense or Dissertation Defense will be given one opportunity to repeat the exam within three months to six months, as determined by the Guidance Committee. If the student fails one of those exams a second time, they will be dismissed from the program.

Further information on rights and responsibilities of graduate students can be found at the website of the Office of the Ombudsman, <https://ombud.msu.edu/>.

B. Integrity and Safety in Research and Creative Activities

Each faculty advisor and graduate student should be aware of the [Guidelines for Integrity in Research and Creative Activities](#).

Graduate students must complete the Office of Radiation Chemical and Biological Safety (EHS) Hazardous Waste Safety Training before courses begin in the first semester of their academic program. They must also complete a refresher course each year.

Information on safety training and regulations can be found at <https://ehs.msu.edu/training/index.html>

Further Safety Training may be required by the lab that the student does research in, whether on a rotation or as a regular member of the laboratory. If unsure, the student should ask the faculty member in charge of the lab as to what additional safety training is required.

Consideration of scientific ethics and integrity is a part of certain courses within the required course (PLB 801) and the workshop series offered by the Graduate School: Responsible Conduct of Research.

Criteria for dismissal due to unethical or dishonest behavior is described in Guidelines for Integrity in Research and Creative Activities.

Students and faculty should be aware that the Academic Council and Academic Senate approved a revision of the Integrity of Scholarship and Grades Policy. This document should be consulted when revising the department/unit policy on penalty grades and other issues related to academic dishonesty. <https://ombud.msu.edu/resources-self-help/academic-integrity>

X. Graduate Student Academic Grievance Hearing Procedures for PLB

Each right of an individual places a reciprocal duty upon others: the duty to permit the individual to exercise the right. The student, as a member of the academic community, has both rights and duties. Within that community, the student's most essential right is the right to learn. The University has a duty to provide for the student those privileges, opportunities, and protections which best promote the learning process in all its aspects. The student also has duties to other members of the academic community, the most important of which is to refrain from interference with those rights of others which are equally essential to the purposes and processes of the University. (GSRR Article 1.2)

The Michigan State University Student Rights and Responsibilities (SRR) and the Graduate Student Rights and Responsibilities (GSRR) documents establish the rights and responsibilities of MSU students and prescribe procedures to resolve allegations of violations of those rights through formal grievance hearings. In accordance with the SRR and the GSRR, the Department of Plant Biology (PLB) has established the following Hearing Board procedures for adjudicating graduate student academic grievances and complaints. (See GSRR 5.4.)

- Jurisdiction of the PLB Hearing Board

- The Hearing Board serves as the initial Hearing Board for academic grievance hearings involving graduate students who allege violations of academic rights or seek to contest an allegation of academic misconduct (academic dishonesty, violations of professional standards or falsifying admission and academic records). (See GSRR 2.3 and 5.1.1.)
- Students may not request an academic grievance hearing based on an allegation of incompetent instruction. (See GSRR 2.2.2)
- Composition of the Hearing Board
 - The Department of Plant Biology (PLB) Hearing Board pool shall consist of all regular faculty and current graduate students. Hearing Board members serve one-year terms with reappointment possible. The Hearing Board pool should include both faculty and graduate students. (See GSRR 5.1.2 and 5.1.6.)
 - The Chair of the Hearing Board shall be the PLB Associate Chairperson who shall vote only in the event of a tie. In addition to the Chair, the Hearing Board shall consist of three faculty members (the members of the PLB Graduate Committee except the Graduate Director) and three graduate students (the student members of the PLB Department Advisory Committee (DAC), the PLB Graduate Committee, and the President of the PLB Graduate Student Organization), constituting an equal number of voting graduate students and faculty. (See GSRR 5.1.2, and 5.1.5.)
 - The Department of Plant Biology will train hearing board members about these procedures and the applicable sections of the GSRR. (See GSRR 5.1.3.)
- Referral to the Hearing Board
 - After consulting with the instructor/advisor and PLB Graduate Director, graduate students who remain dissatisfied with their attempt to resolve an allegation of a violation of student academic rights or an allegation of academic misconduct (academic dishonesty, violations of professional standards or falsifying admission and academic records) may request an academic grievance hearing. When appropriate, the Department Chair, in consultation with the Dean, may waive jurisdiction and refer the request for an initial hearing to the College Hearing Board. (See GSRR 5.3.6.2.)
 - At any time in the grievance process, either party may consult with the University Ombudsperson. (See GSRR 5.3.2.)
 - In cases of ambiguous jurisdiction, the Dean of The Graduate School will select the appropriate Hearing Board for cases involving graduate students. (See GSRR 5.3.5.)
 - Generally, the deadline for submitting the written request for a hearing is the middle of the next semester in which the student is enrolled (including Summer). In cases in which a student seeks to contest an allegation of academic misconduct and the student's dean has called for an academic disciplinary hearing, the student has 10 class days to request an academic grievance to contest the allegation. (See GSRR 5.3.6.1 and 5.5.2.2.)
 - If either the student (the complainant) or the respondent (usually, the instructor or an administrator) is absent from the university during that semester, or if other appropriate reasons emerge, the Hearing Board may grant an extension of this deadline. If the university no longer employs the respondent before the grievance hearing commences, the hearing may proceed. (See GSRR 5.4.9.)

- A written request for an academic grievance hearing must (1) specify the specific bases for the grievance, including the alleged violation(s), (2) identify the individual against whom the grievance is filed (the respondent) and (3) state the desired redress. Anonymous grievances will not be accepted. (See GSRR 5.1 and 5.3.6.)
- Pre-Hearing Procedures
 - After receiving a graduate student's written request for a hearing, the Chair of the Department will promptly refer the grievance to the Chair of the Hearing Board. (See GSRR 5.3.2, 5.4.3.)
 - Within 5 class days, the Chair of the Hearing Board will:
 - Forward the request for a hearing to the respondent and ask for a written response.
 - Send the names of the Hearing Board members to both parties and, to avoid conflicts of interest between the two parties and the Hearing Board members, request written challenges, if any, within 3 class days of this notification. In addition to conflict of interest challenges, either party can challenge two hearing board members without cause (GSRR 5.1.7.c);
 - Rule promptly on any challenges, impanel a Hearing Board and send each party the names of the Hearing Board members. If the Chair of the Hearing Board is the subject of a challenge, the challenge shall be filed with the Dean of the College, or a designee (See GSRR 5.1.7.). Decisions by the Hearing Board chair or the College Dean (or designee) on conflict of interest challenges are final;
 - Send the Hearing Board members a copy of the request for a hearing and the respondent's written response and send all parties a copy of these procedures.
 - Within 5 class days of being established, the Hearing Board shall review the request, and, after considering all requested and submitted information:
 - Accept the request, in full or in part, and promptly schedule a hearing.
 - Reject the request and provide a written explanation to appropriate parties; e.g., lack of jurisdiction. (The student may appeal this decision.)
 - The GSRR allows the hearing board to invite the two parties to meet with the Hearing Board in an informal session to try to resolve the matter. Such a meeting does not preclude a later hearing. However, by the time a grievance is requested all informal methods of conflict resolution should have been exhausted so this option is rarely used. (See GSRR 5.4.6.)
 - If the Hearing Board calls for a hearing, the Chair of the Hearing Board shall promptly negotiate a hearing date, schedule an additional meeting only for the Hearing Board should additional deliberations on the findings become necessary, and request a written response to the grievance from the respondent.
 - At least 5 class days before the scheduled hearing, the Chair of the Hearing Board shall notify the respondent and the complainant in writing of the (1) time, date, and place of the hearing; (2) the names of the parties to the grievance; (3) a copy of the hearing request and the respondent's reply; and (4) the names of the Hearing Board members after any challenges. (See GSRR 5.4.7.)

- At least 3 class days before the scheduled hearing, the parties must notify the Chair of the Hearing Board the names of their witnesses and advisor, if any, and request permission for the advisor to have voice at the hearing. The chair may grant or deny this request. The Chair will promptly forward the names given by the complainant to the respondent and vice versa. (See GSRR 5.4.7.1.)
- The Chair of the Hearing Board may accept written statements from either party's witnesses at least 3 class days before the hearing. (See GSRR 5.4.9.)
- In unusual circumstances and in lieu of a personal appearance, either party may request permission to submit a written statement to the Hearing Board or request permission to participate in the hearing through an electronic communication channel. Written statements must be submitted to the Hearing Board at least 3 class days before the scheduled hearing. (See GSRR 5.4.9c.)
- Either party to the grievance hearing may request a postponement of the hearing. The Hearing Board may either grant or deny the request. (See GSRR 5.4.8.)
- At its discretion, the Hearing Board may set a reasonable time limit for each party to present its case, and the Chair of the Hearing Board must inform the parties of such a time limit in the written notification of the hearing.
- Hearings are closed unless the student requests an open hearing, which would be open to all members of the MSU community. The Hearing Board may close an open hearing to protect the confidentiality of information or to maintain order. (See GSRR 5.4.10.4.)
- Members of the Hearing Board are expected to respect the confidentiality of the hearing process. (See GSRR 5.4.10.4. and 5.4.11.)
- The Hearing will proceed as follows:
 - Introductory remarks by the Chair of the Hearing Board: The Chair of the Hearing Board introduces hearing panel members, the complainant, the respondent and advisors, if any. The Chair reviews the hearing procedures, including announced time restraints for presentations by each party and the witnesses, and informs the parties if their advisors may have a voice in the hearings and if the proceedings are being recorded. Witnesses shall be excluded from the proceedings except when testifying. The Chair also explains:
 - In academic grievance hearings in which a graduate student alleges a violation of academic rights, the student bears the burden of proof.
 - In hearings in which a graduate student seeks to contest allegations of academic misconduct, the instructor bears the burden of proof.
 - All Hearing Board decisions must be reached by a majority of the Hearing Board, based on a "clear and convincing evidence." (See GSRR 8.1.18.) (See GSRR 5.4.10.1 and 8.1.18.) For various other definitions, see GSRR Article 8.)
 - If the complainant fails to appear in person or via an electronic channel at a scheduled hearing, the Hearing Board may either postpone the hearing or dismiss the case for demonstrated cause. (See GSRR 5.4.9a.)
 - If the respondent fails to appear in person or via an electronic channel at a scheduled hearing, the Hearing Board may postpone the hearing or, only in unusual circumstances, hear the case in the respondents absence. (See GSRR 5.4.9-b.)
 - If the respondent is absent from the University during the semester of the grievance hearing or no longer employed by the University before the grievance procedure concludes, the hearing process may still proceed. (See GSRR 5.3.6.1.)

- To ensure orderly questioning, the Chair of the Hearing Board will recognize individuals before they speak. All parties have a right to speak without interruption. Each party has a right to question the other party and to rebut any oral or written statements submitted to the Hearing Board. (See GSRR 5.4.10.2.)
- Presentation by the Complainant: The Chair recognizes the complainant to present without interruption any statements relevant to the complainant's case, including the redress sought. The Chair then recognizes questions directed at the complainant by the Hearing Board, the respondent and the respondent's advisor, if any.
- Presentation by the Complainant's Witnesses: The Chair recognizes the complainant's witnesses, if any, to present, without interruption, any statement directly relevant to the complainant's case. The Chair then recognizes questions directed at the witnesses by the Hearing Board, the respondent, and the respondent's advisor, if any.
- Presentation by the Respondent: The Chair recognizes the respondent to present without interruption any statements relevant to the respondent's case. The Chair then recognizes questions directed at the respondent by the Hearing Board, the complainant, and the complainant's advisor, if any.
- Presentation by the Respondent's Witnesses: The Chair recognizes the respondent's witnesses, if any, to present, without interruption, and statement directly relevant to the respondent's case. The Chair then recognizes questions directed at the witnesses by the Hearing Board, the complainant, and the complainant's advisor, if any.
- Rebuttal and Closing Statement by Complainant: The complainant refutes statements by the respondent, the respondent's witnesses and advisor, if any, and presents a final summary statement.
- Rebuttal and Closing Statement by Respondent: The respondent refutes statements by the complainant, the complainant's witnesses and advisor, if any, and presents a final summary statement.
- Final questions by the Hearing Board: The Hearing Board asks questions of any of the participants in the hearing.
- Post-Hearing Procedures
 - Deliberation: After all evidence has been presented, with full opportunity for explanations, questions and rebuttal, the Chair of the Hearing Board shall excuse all parties to the grievance and convene the Hearing Board to determine its findings in executive session. When possible, deliberations should take place directly following the hearing and/or at the previously scheduled follow-up meeting.
 - Decision:

- In grievance (non-disciplinary) hearings involving graduate students in which a majority of the Hearing Board finds, based on "clear and convincing evidence," that a violation of the student's academic rights has occurred, and that redress is possible, it shall recommend an appropriate remedy to the Department Chair or School Director. Upon receiving the Hearing Board's recommendation, the Department Chair or School Director shall implement an appropriate remedy, in consultation with the Hearing Board, within 3 class days. If the Hearing Board finds that no violation of academic rights has occurred, it shall inform the Chair or Director. The Chair of the Hearing Board shall promptly forward copies of the final decision to parties and the University Ombudsperson. (See GSRR 5.4.11.)
- In grievance (non-disciplinary) hearings involving graduate students in which the Hearing Board serves as the initial hearing body to adjudicate an allegation of academic dishonesty and, based on "clear and convincing evidence," the Hearing Board finds for the student, the Hearing Board shall recommend to the Department Chair or School Director that the penalty grade be removed, the Academic Dishonesty Report be removed from the student's records and a "good faith judgment" of the student's academic performance in the course take place. If the Hearing Board finds for the instructor, the penalty grade shall stand and the Academic Dishonesty Report regarding the allegation will remain on file, pending an appeal, if any to the College Hearing Board within 5 class days of the Hearing Board's decision. If an academic disciplinary hearing is pending, and the Hearing Board decides for the instructor, the graduate student's disciplinary hearing before either the College Hearing Board or the Dean of The Graduate School would promptly follow, pending an appeal, if any, within 5 class days. (See GSRR 5.5.2.2 and 5.4.12.3)
- Written Report: The Chair of the Hearing Board shall prepare a written report of the Hearing Board's findings, including recommended redress or sanctions for the complainant, if applicable, and forward a copy of the decision to the appropriate unit administrator within 3 class days of the hearing. The report shall indicate the rationale for the decision and the major elements of evidence, or lack thereof, that support the Hearing Board's decision. The administrator, in consultation with the Hearing Board, shall then implement an appropriate remedy. The report also should inform the parties of the right to appeal within 5 class days following notice of the decision, or 5 class days if an academic disciplinary hearing is pending. The Chair shall forward copies of the Hearing Board's report and the administrator's redress, if applicable, to the parties involved, the responsible administrators, the University Ombudsperson and the Dean of The Graduate School. All recipients must respect the confidentiality of the report and of the hearing board's deliberations resulting in a decision. (See GSRR 5.4.12 and 5.5.2.2)
- Appeal of the Hearing Board Decision

- Either party may appeal a decision by the Hearing Board to the College Hearing Board for cases involving (1) academic grievances alleging violations of student rights and (2) alleged violations of regulations involving academic misconduct (academic dishonesty, professional standards or falsification of admission and academic records.) (See GSRR 5.4.12.)
- All appeals must be in writing, signed and submitted to the Chair of the College Hearing Board within 5 class days following notification of the Hearing Board's decision. While under appeal, the original decision of the Hearing Board will be held in abeyance. (See GSRR 5.4.12, 5.4.12.2 and 5.4.12.3.)
- A request for an appeal of a Hearing Board decision to the College Hearing Board must allege, in sufficient particularity to justify a hearing that the initial Hearing Board failed to follow applicable procedures for adjudicating the hearing or that findings of the Hearing Board were not supported by "clear and convincing evidence." The request also must include the redress sought. Presentation of new evidence normally will be inappropriate. (See GSRR 5.4.12.1, 5.4.12.2 and 5.4.12.4.)
- Reconsideration
 - If new evidence should arise, either party to a hearing may request the appropriate Hearing Board to reconsider the case within 30 days upon receipt of the hearing outcome. The written request for reconsideration is to be sent to the Chair of the Hearing Board, who shall promptly convene the Hearing Board to review the new material and render a decision on a new hearing. (See GSRR 5.4.13.)
 - The Chair of the Department shall file a copy of these procedures with the Office of the Ombudsperson and with the Dean of The Graduate School. (See GSRR 5.4.1.)

Approved by Faculty (19 Nov 2015)

XI. Work Related Policies

A. Graduate Assistantships

The University wide criteria for awarding, renewing and terminating graduate Teaching Assistants, including length of eligibility, and the process used to evaluate the students' performance can be found in the [MSU/GEU Contract](#) with regard to Teaching Assistants, the policies below are subservient to new contract agreements and critical dates determined by HR <https://www.hr.msu.edu/ua/hiring/graduate-assistants/index.html> that are posted on the HR website above. PLB will set the due dates for TA applications to be one month in advance of the HR deadlines.

The rights and responsibilities of Teaching Assistants, health insurance options, and salary criteria can also be found under the current version of the contract between MSU and the GEU.

Plant Biology Departmental policies for Maintenance/Termination of Assistantships are as follows:

Graduate assistants may be on a $\frac{1}{4}$ (10 hours per week), $\frac{1}{2}$ (20 hours per week) or $\frac{3}{4}$ (30 hours per week) time basis. Assistantship appointments may be for one semester, for one academic year, or for one calendar year. The stipend, activities, and enrollment are proportional to the percentage of time designated by the assistantship. Assistantships, whether established by use of general university or research contract funds were at three levels: Level-1- Assistants with B.S. (or equivalent degree) and no graduate experience; Level 2- Assistants with MS (or equivalent degree) and/or one year of graduate experience; Level-3 – Assistants with MS (or equivalent degree), two years of graduate experience, and successful completion of their Comprehensive Exam. An increase in stipend may accompany an increase in level. Tuition was waived for up to nine credits in the Fall and Spring Semesters (four credits in Summer). Also, all matriculation fees were waived. These guidelines could change in the future.

Advancement: New Teaching Assistants will be hired at Level 1. After two regular semesters, TAs will be advanced to Level 2. TAs will be advanced to Level 3 after six semesters of teaching and after passing their comprehensive exams.

The minimum course credits required to retain an Assistantship are shown in the table below, but this changes frequently, so it is a good idea to check with the Academic Program Coordinator if you have questions.

Minimum & Maximum Credit Load for Graduate Assistants

Assistantship Appointment		University Minimum Credit Enrollment	Federal (IRS) Minimum Enrollment per Semester	Maximum Enrollment per Semester (excluding 899/999 credits)
1/4 time	Master's Students	6 in Fall & Spring; 3 in Summer	5 Credits	16 credits
	Doctoral Students	3 (any semester)	3 Credits	16 credits
	PhDs who have passed comps	1 (any semester)	1 Credit	16 credits
1/2 time	Master's Students	6 in Fall & Spring; 3 in Summer	5 Credits	12 credits
	Doctoral Students	3 (any semester)	3 Credits	12 credits
	PhDs who have passed comps	1 (any semester)	1 Credits	12 credits
3/4 time	Master's Students	3 (any semester)	5 Credits	8 credits
	Doctoral Students	3 (any semester)	3 Credits	8 credits
	PhDs who have passed comps	1 (any semester)	3 Credits	8 credits

The responsibilities for graduate assistantships will vary. Enrollment in courses, credit load per semester, training activity, etc., should have prior approval of the Major Professor before registration occurs. Before departing on a vacation, or other leave, the student should clear their desires and plans with their Major Professor. All students, whether financially supported or not, should be actively engaged in research, literature reviews, or some other phase of program even during semester breaks. Keep in mind the fact that the graduate program is a “full-time” program.

Assistants who have teaching responsibilities are also responsible to the instructors of the courses in which the student is assisting. Assignments are made, normally, at least two weeks before the beginning of the semester. As soon as the student receives a teaching assignment, they should check with the instructor to learn what is expected of them. There is a University Orientation program offered prior to Fall semester. All Assistants are expected to participate once prior to teaching in the Department (whether on an RA or a TA). The student is expected to be available during the entire semester of the appointment unless released by the Department Chairperson in consultation with the faculty member to whom the student is assigned. Fall semester is defined as beginning August 16 and ending December 31; Spring semester, January 1 to May 15, Summer semester, May 16 to August 15. The student may very well have to start preparing materials, plants, etc., for the next semester before the end of the current semester.

A student must meet the requirements for Academic Standards and Guidelines for Retention to retain their assistantships.

Any student who is accepted into the Department with financial support and chooses a faculty member in the Department of Plant Biology as their Thesis or Dissertation Advisor should have a reasonable expectation that such support will continue until they have completed their degree, provided they make reasonable progress towards completing all requirements. However, providing financial support for graduate students is the joint responsibility of the department and of the faculty member with whom the student's research is conducted.

For students who have not exceeded a five-year tenure as a doctoral graduate student (three years in the case of masters students):

Departmental funds for the graduate Teaching and Research Assistantships are most useful if used to recruit outstanding students into our graduate program. However, Departmental Assistantship support is not restricted to the beginning of a student's graduate program. Current Department Assistantship incumbents are reviewed by the Graduate Director to determine if students are in good academic standing. Those desiring reappointment for the next year and who are otherwise well qualified by ability and maintenance of scholarship and who have not exceeded a five-year tenure as a doctoral graduate student (three years in the case of masters students) will be reappointed as long as they maintain good standing in the Department (i.e., have met the requirements for Academic Standards and Guidelines for Retention).

For students who have exceeded a five-year tenure as a doctoral graduate student (three years in the case of masters students):

Students within their first five years are the top priority for TA support; however, the department will continue to support students making good progress past their fifth year, to the extent possible given financial constraints. For students past their fifth year seeking TA support, the Major Professor (signature of the graduate student included) may submit a request to the Departmental Chairperson and/or Associate Chairperson for additional Teaching Assistantship support on a semester-by-semester basis by one month prior to the critical dates for hiring TAs that are set by Human Resources (<https://www.hr.msu.edu/ua/hiring/graduate-assistants/index.html>). The request should include 1) justification for the need of extra support, and 2) the expected date of graduation.

Requests will be reviewed by the Graduate Director to ensure that the student is making reasonable progress toward completion of their degree and by the Chairperson and/or Associate Chairperson to determine if a position and funding are available within the Department for the Assistantship. When funds for Assistantships are limited, the Chairperson and/or Associate Chairperson and Graduate Director will consult to determine which students will receive priority funding. Criteria considered in the evaluation of funding requests include, but are not restricted to, the following:

- Good standing in the Plant Biology Graduate Program
- Sources of prior support (e.g., extent of departmental support vs. fellowships, grants)
- Evidence of excellence in scholarship to date (e.g., publications, presentations, awards)
- Time in program with respect to accomplishments and likelihood of completion
- Extenuating circumstances that resulted in delays or barriers to progress.

Within three weeks, the Department Chair will respond in writing to a request for extended Teaching Assistantship support with either (1) the Assistantship will be renewed for the following semester, or (2) the Assistantship will not be renewed.

The renewal of an Assistantship represents a commitment by the student to fulfill the obligations of the position. If the Assistantship is not renewed, the reasons shall be indicated.

Termination of Appointment:

The Assistantship will terminate upon degree completion. A student who wishes to terminate an Assistantship prior to that time should notify the supervisor and Department office.

Substandard Performance: The Department may terminate a graduate Assistantship for substandard performance or inability to perform expected duties. Substandard performance may be brought to the attention of the Department Chairperson by the Assistantship supervisor or by the normal annual review of Assistantship performance. Academic difficulty will result in a review of the student's overall situation by the Department.

Violations: The Department may also terminate an Assistantship in cases of violation of the General Student Regulations contained in the [Student Rights and Responsibilities Document](#). This action may be initiated by the Department Chairperson or by the student's Major Professor.

Budget Constraints: The Department may also terminate Assistantships for budgetary reasons. Should this be necessary, continuing Graduate Assistants will be given some priority over new appointees depending on their qualifications to perform the required activities.

B. Graduate Assistant Illness/Injury/Pregnancy Leave Policy

A Graduate Assistant unable to fulfill the duties of their appointment because of illness or injury shall notify an administrator of their major unit as soon as circumstances permit. Similarly, a graduate assistant unable to fulfill the duties of their appointment because of pregnancy shall notify the administrator of their major unit as soon as circumstances permit.

During the illness, injury, or pregnancy, the major unit shall adjust (reduce, waive, or reschedule) the Graduate Assistant's duties as the Assistant's physical circumstances reasonably dictate. If total absence from duties becomes necessary, the major unit shall maintain the stipend of the appointment, provided the graduate assistant is still enrolled, for a period of two months, or to the end of the appointment period, or of the semester, whichever should occur first.

The Graduate Assistant shall have the right to return to the Assistantship, within the original terms of the appointment, at such time as they are able to reassume the duties of the position.

C. Outside Work for Pay

The Assistantship represents an obligation for the student to perform various duties of benefit to the Department in return for financial assistance. It is assumed that these duties, in combination with the normal course of studies, will amount to a full-time load.

Outside work for Graduate Assistants is discouraged. Before beginning outside employment the assistant should discuss with the Assistantship supervisor the outside employment and how the Assistantship obligations will be fulfilled.

D. Language Requirements for International TAs

Foreign students who wish to hold Teaching Assistantships are required to meet higher English language standards than the minimum required for graduate study. Any appointment of a person who is not a native speaker of English shall be provisional until the applicant provides passing scores on the TOEFL or English Language Center (ELC) exam (no additional English language courses required). After admission to the University, all international Graduate Assistants are still required to demonstrate their mastery of spoken English to the satisfaction of the English Language Center by passing the SPEAK test. A minimum score of 50 or waiver by interview is required. Inquire to the English Language Center for specific information about the tests <https://elc.msu.edu/tests/msu-speaking-test/>.

E. New Teaching Assistant Institute and International TA Orientation

The New Teaching Assistant Institute is a university-wide orientation for all First-Time TAs, in partnership with academic and support units on campus. The Plant Biology Department requires all students to attend the orientation in their first year, which is scheduled before classes begin.

The International TA Orientation is meant to specifically welcome and support International Teaching Assistants here at MSU. As such, at this orientation, participants will work closely with trained facilitators in engaging in a variety of topics related to the unique needs of international graduate students teaching at MSU (including their transition to the MSU teaching and learning context and broader MSU and US culture). Scheduled before classes begin.

International TAs are encouraged to participate in both the Teaching Institute and International TA Orientation.

XII. University Policies

- [Academic Programs Catalog](#)
- [Anti-Discrimination Policy \(ADP\)](#)
- [Code of Teaching Responsibilities](#)
- [Disability and Reasonable Accommodation Policy](#)
- [General Student Regulations](#)
- [Graduate Students Rights and Responsibilities \(GSRR\)](#)
- [Guidelines for Integrity in Research and Creative Activities](#)
- [Integrity of Scholarship & Grades](#)
- [MSU Guidelines for Graduate Student Mentoring and Advising](#)
- [MSU-GEU Contract](#)
- [Policy on Relationship Violence and Sexual Misconduct](#)

XIII. Departmental Resources

- The **Graduate Student Lounge** is currently located in room 240 Plant Biology Labs (PLB). Graduate students also have access to a private study room located in room S302.
- **Mailboxes** are on the first floor of PLB in room 142. They should be checked periodically.
- The Graduate Student **Listserv** regularly distributes notices concerning funding opportunities, departmental activities, and other information of interest.
- **Copier** – A copier for use by Plant Biology students, faculty and staff is located in room 142 Plant Biology Labs. A copy code is needed to use copier. You can ask the main office or your major professor for their code.
- **Supplies** – Paper, pencils, pens and other office supplies are available for faculty, staff, and graduate students. Other supplies for graduate students must be procured through bookstores and/or procurement worked out with the student's Major Professor. Procedures for purchasing and charging supplies on or off campus to a student's Major Professor's account can be obtained by consulting with the accountant in the office.
- **Computers** – A student computer facility is available in room 137. A coordinator is in charge of the equipment in this room. DO NOT tamper with or LOAD programs on the hard drive!
- **Travel** –All official MSU travel requires an approved Travel Request. To submit a Travel Request: log into EBS and click the Travel and Expense Tile.
 - o Please note some students may not have access to the Travel System. If you find you cannot submit your request, please contact the main office prior to your travel date.

- Financial support for the travel of graduate students is considered in the categories of internal and external support. External support is from grants and contracts and will be at the discretion of the principal investigator. Internal support will be from MSU funds and requires approval of the department Chairperson. Some travel funds are available from the Graduate School, the College of Natural Sciences, from certain graduate programs such as EEB, MPS, or from PLB endowment funds.
- When students appointed as TAs or RAs travel outside the U.S. to conduct required thesis or dissertation research or to collaborate with investigators conducting research abroad, the department or research grant supporting the work will be required to pay for all needed vaccinations and or medications (e.g., anti-malarial) as determined by the MSU Travel Clinic. Students may include those costs in applications for funds from the Research Enhancement or Travel Grant programs administered by the Graduate School.
- **Graduate Awards** - In recognition of graduate students whose research and/or teaching is considered meritorious by the Graduate Committee the following are awarded annually to commemorate the work of outstanding members of our department.
<https://plantbiology.natsci.msu.edu/about-plant-biology/awards.aspx#graduate>
- **Plant Biology Graduate Student Organization (GSO)** - The objectives of the GSO are to promote communication, to foster an understanding of departmental policies and procedures, and to define the role of graduate students in the Department. All graduate students in the Department of Plant Biology are members of GSO. The GSO appoints graduate students to departmental committees. The GSO also provides academic and social interaction among students and faculty within our department. The club sponsors guest speakers, field trips, social events and other activities. Beginning in 2020, a subcommittee of the GSO worked with the Graduate Director to launch the Mentoring Program for incoming graduate students.
- **Keys** – Appropriate keys may be obtained from the Department office. Some may require a deposit.
- **Cold and prep rooms** – these rooms are for departmental use. Students should use the room located on their floor. All material must be labeled with the student's name, lab room number, and date.
- **Reserving rooms** in PLB – Contact the main office (PLB 166)

XIV. University Resources

- **Campus mail service** – designed to expedite the delivery of items pertaining to university business.
- **Council of Graduate Students (COGS) Office** - a valuable source of information regarding graduate student policies and opportunities. Their office is located at 466 W. Circle Dr. Room 120 Chittenden Hall, and their website is: <https://cogs.msu.edu/>. This is the official graduate student organization at MSU. The primary objective of COGS is improvement of the academic, social, and economic position of graduate students at MSU.

- **Financial Aid** - Recent information on scholarships and other financial aid can be obtained in the Financial Aid Office in the Administration Building. Graduate Assistants can use the services of the MSU Federal Credit Union to obtain loans to pay for tuition. COGS, in conjunction with the Financial Aids Office, offers loans to graduate students. Information can be obtained in the Financial Aid Office.
- **Graduate School** - The graduate school office is in Chittenden Hall. Their website, <http://grad.msu.edu/> is invaluable for providing information about graduate student rights, responsibilities and opportunities at Michigan State, as well as considerable information about professional development. Resources provided by the Graduate School include:
 - [Graduate Career Development](#)
 - [Community programs](#)
 - [Events](#)
 - [Forms](#)
 - [Funding](#)
 - [Graduate Educator Advancement and Teaching \(GREAT\)](#)
 - [Graduate School Office of Well-Being \(GROW\)](#)
 - [Mentoring](#)
 - [Out-of-State tuition waivers](#)
 - [Policy information](#)
 - [Professional development](#)
 - [Research integrity](#)
 - [Traveling scholar opportunities](#)
 - [University Committee on Graduate Studies](#)
- **International Students** - The English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses at Michigan State University seek to help international students improve their English language abilities through credit-bearing language courses taught by English Language Center faculty. EAP students include advanced students who have not met MSU's minimum proficiency requirement in English or advanced students who are not seeking a degree at MSU, but who want to improve their academic English skills.
 - EAP courses:
 - Help prepare international students for the demands of university-level work in English and offer skills-based instruction at an advanced level
 - AAE 220 – English Grammar and Composition for Non-Native Speakers of English (6 credits)
 - AAE 221 – English Composition for Non-Native Speakers of English (3 credits)
 - AAE 222 – Listening and Speaking for Academic Purposes for Non-Native Speakers of English (3 credits)
 - AAE 223 – Reading for Academic Purposes for Non-Native Speakers of English (3 credits)
 - Allow qualified students to take academic coursework while enrolled in this program.
 - Courses for International Teaching Assistants (AAE 451, 452, and 453):
 - Enrollment in any of these courses requires approval of the English Language Center (ELC). Approval is granted by the Director of the ELC.

- Only students who have failed to achieve a passing score of 50 on the MSU Speaking Test or the ITAOI may enroll in 451 or 452. Students who score a 45 are eligible to enroll. A student with a 40 may be eligible with permission of the ITA Program Coordinator.
- Students need referrals from their departments to enroll in any of these courses.
- A student who has received a partial waiver on appeal may request enrollment in 451 or 452. A student with an unconditional waiver may not request enrollment in 451 or 452.
- AAE 453 is an in-service course. Any ITA with an appointment involving oral communication with undergraduates may request enrollment in 453.
- A student may take each course only once (unless he or she has received a grade of “N” in the course).
- There is no required sequence of courses for 451 and 452, but any ITA eligible for 453 is no longer eligible to take either 451 or 452.
- Receiving a grade of “P” in 451 or 452 (based on assignments, tests, and other measures) does not qualify a student to serve as a TA. A student must pass the ITAOI (administered separately by the ELC Testing Office) or receive a score of 50 on the MSU Speaking Test to be cleared for TA duties involving oral communication with undergraduate students.
- The decision about whether to place a student in 451 or 452 will be made by the ITA Program Coordinator in consultation with: the ELC’s Head of Testing, as necessary and the student.
- For further information about ITA courses, review their website: <https://elc.msu.edu/programs/eap/>
- For further information about the MSU Speaking Test or the ITAOI, contact elc@msu.edu.
- **English Language Center** - The ELC conducts applicant screening interviews via Skype and Zoom jointly with senior representatives from participating departments. The aim of the interview is to determine the likelihood of the applicant passing the MSU Speaking Test upon arrival on campus. Departments may obtain more information and request this service by sending an email to elc@msu.edu.
- **OISS (Office for International Students and Scholars)** – www.oiss.isp.msu.edu
- **University Ombudsperson** -Conflicts, disagreements, and issues sometimes arise during the course of a graduate program. If you find yourself in this situation and have exhausted the internal resources for resolving the issue, you may contact the Office of the University Ombudsperson.
 - The Office of the University Ombudsperson provides assistance to students, faculty, and staff in resolving University-related concerns. Such concerns include: student-faculty conflicts; communication problems; concerns about the university climate; and questions about what options are available for handling a problem according to Michigan State University policy. The University Ombudsperson also provides information about available resources and student/faculty rights and responsibilities. The office operates as a confidential, independent, and neutral resource. It does not provide notice to the University - that is, it does not speak or hear for the University.

- Contact the Ombudsperson at any point during an issue when a confidential conversation or source of information may be needed. The Ombudsperson will listen to your concerns, give you information about university policies, help you evaluate the situation, and assist you in making plans to resolve the conflict.
- Contact information: Office of the University Ombudsperson 129 N. Kedzie Hall, (517) 353-8830, ombud@msu.edu <https://ombud.msu.edu/schedule-appointment-contact>
- **Parking permits** – Information for permits can be obtained from the Department of Public Safety. Graduate Assistants may obtain parking permits by presenting a copy of their current appointment form. Students on fellowships of \$1,000 or more may also obtain a parking permit.
- **RCPD (Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities)** – www.rcpd.msu.edu

XV. TA Leave Policy

Current Leave Policies for TAs from GEU Contract Article 18 for 2024-2028. Additional information found: <https://geuatmsu.org/about/geu-contract/>

- **Medical Leave**
 - In the event an Employee is unable to meet employment obligations because of illness, injury, pregnancy, or childbirth, the Employee will, when possible, notify the appropriate immediate supervisor (or employing unit designee) as promptly as possible so that arrangements for the absence can be made by the employing unit.
 - During a medical leave, the employing unit shall adjust (reduce, waive or reschedule) the Employee's duties as those duties and their physical circumstances reasonably dictate. If total absence from duties becomes necessary and the Employee is still enrolled, the employing unit shall maintain the stipend of the appointment provided for a period of two (2) months or to the end of the appointment period, whichever occurs first. Additional unpaid leave may be arranged on an ad hoc basis.
 - The Employee shall have the right to return to employment, provided there is no medical dispute, within the dates of the current appointment, at such time as they are able to resume duties.
- **Adoption and Parental Leave**
 - An Employee who adopts a child shall be entitled to adoption leave of up to eight (8) weeks, the first week of which will be paid by the Employer and the balance which will be unpaid, to commence on or before the date of adoption as determined by the Employee.
 - An Employee who becomes a parent by birth and is not otherwise covered by section one of this article, shall be entitled to parental leave of up to eight (8) weeks, the first week of which will be paid by the Employer and the balance which will be unpaid to commence on or before the date of birth as determined by the Employee. Additional unpaid leave may be arranged on an ad hoc basis.
 - To be eligible for adoption leave or parental leave:
 - It may not extend beyond the Employee's previously scheduled appointment end date; and

- It must be requested in writing, where possible, no less than four (4) weeks prior to the scheduled start of the leave.

XVI. GA Leave Policy

Graduate Assistant (not covered by the Graduate Employees Union Contract) Illness, Injury, and Pregnancy Leave Policy

A graduate assistant unable to fulfill the duties of their appointment because of illness or injury shall notify the administrator of their major unit as soon as circumstances permit. Similarly, a graduate assistant unable to fulfill the duties of their appointment because of pregnancy shall notify the administrator of their major unit as soon as circumstances permit.

During illness, injury, or pregnancy the major unit shall adjust (reduce, waive, or reschedule) the graduate assistant's duties as those duties and the assistant's physical circumstances reasonably dictate. If total absence from duties becomes necessary, the major unit shall maintain the stipend of the appointment, provided the graduate assistant is still enrolled, for a period of two months, or to the end of the appointment period or of the semester, whichever should occur first.

1. The graduate assistant shall have the right to return to the assistantship, within the original terms of the appointment, at such time as he or she is able to reassume the duties of the position.
2. A graduate assistant planning to take a leave under this policy shall notify the administrator of their major unit as soon as circumstances permit.
3. A graduate assistant who adopts a child shall be entitled to adoption leave of up to two (2) months, the first week of which will be paid by the major unit and the balance of which will be unpaid, to commence on or before the date of adoption as determined by the graduate assistant.

A graduate assistant who becomes a parent by birth and is not otherwise covered by the pregnancy leave policy, shall be entitled to parental leave of up to two (2) months, the first week of which will be paid by the major unit and the balance of which will be unpaid to commence on or before the date of birth as determined by the graduate assistant. Additional unpaid leave may be arranged on an ad hoc basis, as mutually agreed with the major unit.

Eligibility for adoption leave or parental leave is determined under the following conditions: (1) It must be completed within six (6) weeks of the birth or adoption of a child under the age of six (6); (2) It may not extend beyond the graduate assistant's previously scheduled appointment end date; and (3) It must be requested in writing no less than four (4) weeks prior to the scheduled start of the leave.