

New Graduate Students – Common Questions Answered

Welcome to Montana State University and the Department of Plant Sciences and Plant Pathology (PSPP)! The mission of the Graduate School (GS) and PSPP is to develop, nurture and sustain high quality programs of post-baccalaureate study, set and maintain standards for graduate courses and programs, develop the resources to recruit and support quality graduate students, and guide MSU's graduate program into the twenty-first century. While you will get a general overview of how your program of study will work from your advisor, ultimately it is your responsibility to understand and follow the policies of the GS. Please carefully review the GS catalog and ask questions of any information you do not understand. Here is a list of common questions and concerns of new graduate students:

1. How do students establish in-state residency?

This issue is of particular concern for primary investigators who support graduate students since resident students naturally require fewer funds for tuition assistance than do non-resident students. In-state admission and fee status is granted to persons who demonstrate that their permanent residence is Montana and that they have paid appropriate taxes over a period of time. To qualify, students must meet six basic requirements, which can be found at: http://www.montana.edu/gradschool/cat_res&fees.html. Students initially classified as out-of-state or non-residents must live and pay taxes in Montana for one year, while taking no more than six credits a semester, to successfully petition for residency. Students that come to Montana based on a verifiable offer of full-time employment may be eligible for residency in less than the standard one-year minimum.

2. Can students transfer courses taken at another university to MSU?

Yes. The number of semester hours transferred from other institutions (non-degree or degree status) combined with credit(s) taken as a non-degree graduate at MSU may not exceed nine (9) credit hours on a Program of Study. Individual departments may have stricter standards on the number of credits to be transferred. There are a number of conditions on the credits that can be transferred, which can be reviewed at: http://www.montana.edu/gradschool/cat_trans_credits.html.

3. Before taking a semester off, what do students need to do?

MSU has a continuous enrollment policy. The full details can be reviewed at: http://www.montana.edu/gradschool/cat_continuous_enrollment.html. Students wishing to take time away from their programs should inform their advisors and departments of their plans. Students must understand that the six and ten year limits for the completing Master's and Doctoral degrees are calculated from the start of their programs. Time away from a program is not considered a valid reason for extending deadlines. When students wish to return, they will need to submit an "Intent to Register" form to the Registrar's Office.

4. What is difference between master's "A" and "B" Plans?

Master's programs in many fields may be taken under either of two plans. Plan "A" requires a thesis and is recommended for the students whose goals make early research experience desirable. Plan "B" requires a professional paper or project and is designed to serve those taking course work en route to a doctoral program who wish to defer original research until they formally begin their doctoral programs or those in terminal degree programs where original research is not necessary.

5. What is required or what can be included in a program of study?

The Program of Study is intended to allow graduate students to individualize their route to an advanced degree. There are, however, numerous requirements and limitations that individual departments and the GS have set to ensure that all degrees represent a minimum level of academic achievement. Once approved, this document becomes a contract with the GS that defines the work students must complete before receiving a degree. Programs may be revised and updated to reflect the availability of classes and shifts in academic foci.

6. What are the requirements of a graduate committee?

For master's students, three to five committee members are needed. The majority of members must be MSU faculty from the major department. Adjunct faculty, faculty affiliates, faculty of other institutions, and non-academic experts may serve as members but may not chair a committee. Off campus and non-faculty appointees must submit a curriculum vitae to the GS for approval. For doctoral students, departments have the choice of appointing either four or five committee members. Three or four members must

be within a student's major and at least one, but not more than two, must represent the student's supporting area or minor (if applicable). The GS appoints a Graduate Representative to all doctoral committees. Adjunct faculty, faculty affiliates, faculty of other institutions, and non-academic experts may serve as members but not as a committee chairs. Off campus and non-faculty appointees must submit a Curriculum Vitae to the GS for approval.

7. When do students need to submit a Graduate Program of Study and Committee Form?

This important planning tool must be submitted to the GS by the end of the second term of study for master's students and by the third term for doctoral students. Failure to do so will result in the student being placed on academic probation for failing to make satisfactory progress toward a degree.

8. How can students change their programs of study?

A student must submit the changes on a "Change of Program" form with the signatures of the advisor and department head. Completed courses may not be removed and students must repeat any course in a program where a grade below a C- was earned. More information can be found at <http://www.montana.edu/wwwdg>.

9. How can students change their graduate committees?

Students must submit a "Graduate Committee Revision" form with the changes, reasons, and signatures of the faculty being added or removed.

10. What are the formatting requirements for theses and dissertations?

The requirements for formatting theses and dissertations are found in the "Style and Composition Guide" on the GS Electronic Thesis and Dissertation (ETD) Website at: <http://www.montana.edu/etd/>. These guidelines supersede all departmental and discipline standards and must be followed if students wish to have their work accepted by the GS. Although it is the students' responsibility to see that their theses or dissertations conform to GS requirements, advisors should ensure that students do not submit work with significant formatting errors. Please be aware of the specific deadlines for submitting a thesis or dissertation each semester.

11. How do students set up their comprehensive exams or defenses?

After an advisor agrees that a student is ready, the student needs to schedule a comprehensive exam or defense so ALL members can be present. The time and location of the public presentation portion of a thesis or dissertation defense should be announced within the department at least two weeks in advance. Please email Jill Scarson at jscarson@montana.edu at least two weeks in advance with the details of your defense. A flier will be created and sent to you to be approved before being distributed. The GS asks that doctoral students submit this information to GS for inclusion on the "What's New" section of its web-site. Students must be registered for at least three credits, or have filed a one-credit extension, for these events to take place and must meet comprehensive examination deadlines each semester.

12. Can students change their committees if they have trouble scheduling their comprehensive exams or defenses to include all members?

The GS frowns on any practice where expediency outweighs the quality of graduate education. The committee that advises a student from the beginning of his/her graduate career and was presumably selected based on their ability to support the student's program should be the same committee that examines the student. Students should schedule all committee meetings as far in advance as is practical to coordinate all members' schedules in time to satisfy all deadlines.

13. How does a student arrange to graduate?

Again, students need the agreement of their advisors. Then, assuming that students will complete ALL degree requirements by semester deadlines and are registered for a least three credits, they can file an "Application for Advanced Degree" with the GS by September 20 for Fall Semester, February 5 for Spring Semester and June 10 for Summer Semester. Failure to meet these deadlines will result in a student having to register for three credits the following semester in order to graduate.

If you have additional questions, please contact Jill Scarson at 994-4832, 324 Leon Johnson Hall or jscarson@montana.edu or the Graduate School at 108 Montana Hall, 994-4145