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This document was created to assist advisors and graduate students in the Department of Educational Studies and Research with advisement issues. It does not replace nor supplant the Graduate Bulletin which contains the officially recognized university policies that govern graduate education at The University of Southern Mississippi.
1. Degrees Offered in ESR

**Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)**  
Higher Education Administration (HE)  
Education with emphasis in Research, Evaluation, Statistics and Assessment (RESA)  

**Master of Education (MEd)**  
Higher Education with emphasis in Student Affairs Administration (HE, SAA)  

**Master of Science (MS)**  
Master of Science in Education with emphasis in Educational Studies and Research  

2. Deadlines for Graduate Admission Application  
The admission application deadlines are posted on the Graduate School Web page www.usm.edu/graduateschool.  

3. Admission to Program  
To be considered for admission to a departmental degree program, potential candidates must submit an electronic application via the Graduate School website (http://www.usm.edu/graduate-school) and follow the directions regarding submitting previous transcripts, GRE Scores; upload the requested documents; and provide names and contact information for 3 people who have agreed to serve as references. The ESR master’s and doctoral admissions committees will review admissions files when they have been deemed complete by the Graduate School. Applications are closely reviewed and must be approved by the faculty admissions committee, department chair, college dean, and dean of the Graduate School. Each program has specific admissions criteria that are posted on the ESR homepage.  

4. Admission Status  
Students may be admitted on a regular or conditional status. Some students are admitted on a conditional basis and must meet the following criteria to have the conditional status changed to “regular” admission:  
   - A master’s student admitted conditionally must maintain a grade point average of at least 3.0 on the first nine (9) hours of coursework at or above the 500 level. *  
   - A doctoral student admitted conditionally must maintain a grade point average of at least 3.5 on the first nine (9) hours of coursework at or above the 600 level. *  

*Additional requirements may be imposed by the department. The student should meet with their assigned advisor to learn the details of any additional requirements.  

**Student responsibilities:** Upon completion of the first nine (9) hours of approved coursework and any additional requirements imposed by the department, the student on conditional status must schedule a conference with his/her advisor.  

**Advisor responsibilities:** The advisor should submit a “Change of Status Form” (available online http://www.usm.edu/graduateschool) indicating whether or not the student has met the criteria. If all requirements were not met the student will not be allowed to continue to seek the degree. At this point the advisor may not approve (flag) the student to register for additional coursework.
5. Non-Degree Graduate Students
Advisors do not flag non-degree students for registration. Non-degree graduate students must have the permission of the chair of the department offering the course, the dean, and the university dean of the graduate school to register for any graduate course. Permission to take courses as a non-degree graduate student may be granted for any of the following reasons:

A. The student did not meet requirements for conditional or regular admission before the deadline.
B. The student does not desire to work toward a graduate degree. For example, an individual may wish to take courses for licensure or to earn a certificate.
C. The student is enrolled in another university and desires to obtain credit from The University of Southern Mississippi to be transferred to the university in which he or she is seeking a degree.
D. Students who have been denied admission to a program, but who wish to take graduate courses, may request permission to take courses as a non-degree seeking graduate student.

* No more than nine (9) semester hours earned while classified as a non-degree graduate student will be accepted toward a master’s degree at The University of Southern Mississippi.
* No credit earned beyond the master’s degree while classified as a non-degree student may be applied toward the doctoral degree. Note: Once admitted into a program the student is no longer classified as “non-degree.” It is possible for a student to begin a semester as a non-degree student, be admitted into a degree program, and receive credit for coursework taken during that semester.

Note: Admission as a non-degree graduate student does not imply nor guarantee subsequent admission into any degree program within the department.

6. Advisement
When a student is admitted into a degree program s/he is assigned an advisor who is a full-time faculty member in the corresponding program. The student may request the assignment of a particular advisor with the approval of the program coordinator or department chair. In order to register for courses, the student must meet with the assigned advisor during the first semester of enrollment and during advisement periods each semester thereafter. (See registration activities listed in the Academic Calendar.)

Student Responsibilities: Students should schedule an initial appointment with their assigned advisor shortly after being notified of admittance into their degree program. Students should schedule and attend appointments during the advisement period (see Academic Calendar) each semester. For each advisement session students should:

A. Provide an updated plan of study (available on the ESR website)
B. Provide an “unofficial” transcript (http://soar.usm.edu)
C. Review advising transcript (GRDII) regularly and be sure paperwork is up-to-date and accurate (http://soar.usm.edu)
D. Notify advisor of requests for transfer credits and/or change of admission status (i.e., conditional to regular status)
E. Be familiar with course offerings listed in the schedule for the upcoming semesters (http://soar.usm.edu) and submit for advisor approval a list of courses he or she wishes to take.
**Advisor Responsibilities:** Advisors should make themselves available for advisement purposes and should inform advisees of preferences regarding scheduling appointments. Advisors should post office hours, be aware of designated advisement periods (see Academic Calendar) and assist students with:

A. *Degree program selection:* The advisor will discuss degree options with the student in accordance with the student’s career path, aspirations, opportunities, qualifications, and/or abilities and advise student if they are pursuing an appropriate degree program.

B. *Plan of Study:* Students should submit a “Plan of Study” to the Graduate Studies Office during the first semester of enrollment, but no later than the end of the second semester. The advisor should advise the student regarding course sequence, timelines, degree requirements, internships, and answer questions the student may have. This plan should be reviewed and updated during advisement sessions; however, only the original plan of study needs to be filed with the graduate studies office unless major degree requirements change.

C. *Advisement and Registration:* During advisement periods, students should consult and gain approval from their advisors regarding course selection prior to registration.

D. *Dissertation Committee Chair:* Advisors do not necessarily chair dissertation/thesis committees for their advisees; rather, they assist students with the selection of their dissertation committee chair. Students may ask their advisor to chair their dissertation committee, however, they are not obligated to do so.

E. *Application for degree:* The semester prior to a student’s graduation date, the student must apply for degree/candidacy (deadlines are posted on the Graduate School website). The student should provide the advisor with an updated plan of study form and unofficial transcript. The advisor should verify that all degree requirements have been met to date and inform the student of any missing requirements (http://www.usm.edu/graduate-school).

F. *Other:* Other duties carried out by the advisor include submitting necessary paperwork such as forms for Change of Status (for conditionally admitted students) and Transfer Credit Approval.

**7. Course Registration**

Once students have been admitted they are responsible for obtaining an ID card and setting up a SOAR password. Students will register themselves in SOAR each semester. Until students have been advised and been flagged for registration, they will find an advisement hold on their accounts.

**8. Required Training**

All graduate students must complete training in Research and Scholarly Integrity. It is expected that this training be completed and documentation of such be submitted within the first semester in which a student is enrolled. See the Graduate School website for further information [http://www.usm.edu/graduate-school/research-and-scholarly-integrity-education](http://www.usm.edu/graduate-school/research-and-scholarly-integrity-education)
9. Grades
The university requires graduate students to maintain an overall GPA of 3.0 or higher with no grade below a “C”. Students whose GPA falls below 3.0 will be placed on academic probation.

*Retake policy:* On the recommendation of the student’s committee or major professor, a student may retake only one graduate level course in order to improve his/her GPA.

*Academic Probation:* A student whose cumulative GPA or whose program GPA falls below 3.0 will be placed on academic probation. That student must attain a cumulative 3.0 GPA by the end of the following (probationary) semester. A student who fails to achieve a 3.0 at the end of the probationary semester will be dismissed from the program.

10. ESR Department C Policy
The University of Southern Mississippi Graduate School requires that a student maintains a 3.0 GPA and receive no grade below a “B-” in order to demonstrate satisfactory academic progress toward graduation. Students in the Department of Educational Studies and Research who receive a grade of less than “B-” in their degree program will be required to meet with their program advisor and discuss a plan of action to ensure continued satisfactory academic progress. A student who receives two (2) or more grades of less than “B-” during the program will be subject to a formal departmental review. As a result of this review, a student may be placed on academic probation or dismissed from the program.

11. Time Limitation for Degree Completion
Degree requirements within each program must be completed within a designated timeframe. Petitions for exceptions should be directed to the department chair.

 Master’s Students: The student must complete the degree within six (6) calendar years from the date of initial enrollment. Six years is the maximum age allowed for graduate credits toward a master’s degree including approved transfer credits.

 Doctoral Students: The student must complete the degree within eight (8) calendar years from the date of initial enrollment in a doctoral program. Coursework (including approved transfer credits) and the comprehensive exam must be completed within six (6) years from the date of initial enrollment.

12. Transfer Credit and Credit for Non-degree Coursework
Credit for as many as six (6) semester hours of graduate credit from other accredited institutions may be transferred to the student’s program with the approval of the program chair, advisor, department chair and dean provided that the coursework transferred falls within the six-year period allowed (see 10. Time Limitations). Such coursework may not have counted toward another degree and must carry a letter or numeric grade of “B” or better (cannot be a pass/fail course). A total sum of no more than nine (9) semester hours of transfer work and non-degree work may be applied toward a master’s degree. No non-degree hours may apply toward a doctoral degree.

The student must provide the advisor a copy of an official transcript indicating the course(s) the student wishes to transfer. The student’s advisor may ask for additional information including course syllabi and/or other information to ascertain the appropriateness of the course. The student’s advisor should submit a *Transfer Credit Approval Form* (available from the Graduate School) along with a copy of the student’s transcript to the department chair.
13. Continuous Enrollment

Unless a student has been approved for a leave of absence (see Graduate Bulletin), students are expected to enroll continuously after admission until they complete their degree. **Failure to enroll for the appropriate hours will result in the student being discontinued from the university. The student will be required to reapply for admission to the program. Students who do not enroll in summer semester will not be required to reapply for readmission.**

A. **Master’s or Specialist’s Students:** Students must enroll for at least one (1) hour each semester if they are taking coursework, using university services, e.g., library and/or technology services, or consulting with their advisor.

B. Master’s students working on a thesis or capstone/project must register for three (3) hours thesis/project hours during the semester they expect to complete the thesis/project. All required coursework must be completed before the semester in which the student defends the thesis.

C. Students must register for one (1) hour of ADE/HE/REF 797 or capstone/project the next semester if they have not deposited the thesis in the dean’s office or submitted the final project to their department.

**Doctoral Students:**

A. Students must register for three (3) hours of coursework during the semester in which they take their comprehensive examinations.

B. After a doctoral student completes his or her comprehensive examination, continuous enrollment in at least one (1) semester hour must be maintained during each fall and spring semester until the student successfully defends the dissertation.

C. A student may petition the Graduate School for an exemption from the continuous enrollment policy in accordance with policies outline in the Graduate Bulletin.

D. Students must register for three (3) hours of ADE/HE/REF 898 during the semester in which they propose their dissertation. All required coursework and the comprehensive exams must be completed before the semester in which the dissertation is proposed.

E. Students must register for three (3) hours of ADE/HE/REF 898 during the semester they defend the dissertation. All required coursework must be completed before the semester in which the dissertation is defended.

F. If a student does not submit copies of his or her dissertation in a form acceptable to the Graduate Reader prior to the deadlines established in a given semester, or if the student’s degree will not be awarded until the next term, then the student must register for one (1) hour of 898 (dissertation) during the semester or term in which the degree will be awarded.

14. Comprehensive Exam

Comprehensive exams will be administered each semester for each degree program and should be taken by students **during or after their last semester of coursework.** A student whose response is deemed unsatisfactory may be given a second opportunity to pass the exam. However, this student may not retake the examination until its next regular administration and **may repeat the examination only once.**

**Doctoral Students:** The comprehensive examination should be successfully completed either before the first formal prospectus meeting or before substantial research is completed for the dissertation and within six years from initial enrollment.
15. Residency (Doctoral programs only)
The purposes of academic residency are to provide students with significant time for extensive involvement with faculty, professional colleagues, and peers and to provide a period of time for concentrated study and course work. It is structured as a full-time experience.

Doctoral: The following are options for satisfying the residency requirement: (a) two consecutive terms of 12 hours each, (b) two consecutive summer terms of 12 hours each with continuous enrollment during intervening terms, or (c) three consecutive terms of 9 hours each, or (d) four consecutive terms of 6 hours each. Approved by the Graduate Council (1/28/02)

16. The Doctoral Committee
The student’s work toward the doctoral degree is supervised by a departmental committee composed of a chair and at least three members approved by the department chair and the dean of the Graduate School. The majority of committee members must be qualified faculty members from the Department of Educational Studies and Research (ESR). Qualified individuals from outside ESR and the university may serve if they have specialized knowledge needed by the student and are approved by Graduate Council. The Graduate Committee Request Form should be sent to the Graduate School before the student submits a pre-proposal. The form is located on the Graduate School website at http://www.usm.edu/graduate-school

Although the department chair formally appoints the committee, it is customary for ESR students to ask a faculty member within the department (with R3 chair status) to serve as dissertation chair and to participate in the selection of committee members (who have graduate faculty status of R3, R2, or A3). Committees should be constituted to reflect the expertise needed for the topic under study and the methodology likely to be used. The student, with guidance from the prospective dissertation chair, submits the Graduate Committee Request Form to the department chair requesting approval. A dissertation committee exists only after being formally appointed by the Graduate School.

17. Documentation Requirements for Graduation
Before a student is awarded his/her degree, the following documents must be on file in the graduate studies office. Students should check the “milestone” section of their advising transcript (GRD11) via SOAR to verify these documents have been received by the Graduate Studies Office. Directions and deadlines are posted on the Graduate School website.

Documents required for all graduate degrees:

A. Plan of Study Form. Students must submit a “plan of study” form to the Graduate Studies Office by the end of their first semester of enrollment. An up-to-date Plan of Study must be submitted with the Application for Degree.

B. Qualifying Exam Results Form. The department chair should submit the form to the graduate degree auditor indicating that the student has completed the qualifying exam if it is required. Some programs within the department do not require a Qualifying Exam.

C. Comprehensive Exam Results Form. The doctoral committee chair should submit the results of the comprehensive exam form to the graduate degree auditor.

D. Application for Degree. The student should present two copies of the Application for Degree Coversheet, stamped by the Business Office to verify payment of fees during the
semester preceding that of graduation. Directions are posted on the Graduate School homepage. Students not graduating in the semester for which they applied must contact the graduate degree auditor to defer their graduation date.

E. Other required documents (where appropriate) include: Transfer Credit Approval, memo from minor advisor, Request for Graduate Certificate, and Change of Status

Additional documents required for doctoral degrees:

G. Graduate Committee Request Form. The department chair should submit the form to the graduate studies office indicating who will serve on the student’s committee. A letter of appointment will be sent to the committee members and advisor.

H. Dissertation Proposal/Prospectus Approval Form. After completing all the requirements for the doctoral degree other than the dissertation and after the dissertation prospectus has been approved at least one semester prior to graduation, the student must file two copies of the form with the graduate degree auditor and one copy with the advisor, before or at the time the application for degree is filed. Students are reminded to secure approval of the Institutional Review Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects before proceeding with his/her study.

I. Results of Oral Defense of Dissertation Form. The doctoral committee chair should submit the Results of Oral Defense of Dissertation Form to the graduate reader immediately following defense. A copy of the dissertation title page should also be submitted. Final copies of the dissertation must be deposited in the Graduate School office. (See deadlines set by Graduate School)

18. Graduate Appeals and Grievance Process
The right of each student to appeal decisions of the graduate academic units is affirmed and specific appeal procedures are hereby established to ensure timely and appropriate consideration of each appeal to the Graduate Appeals Committee. Specifically, the Graduate Appeals Committee reviews decisions on the following issues: admission decisions, revocation of admission, comprehensive exams, thesis and dissertation prospectus, dismissal from a program, and any other issues the Dean of the Graduate School deems appropriate. This committee does not review grade appeals or disciplinary actions taken by the Dean of Students. The grade appeals process is listed below.

The Appeals/Grievance Process has five steps:

- Step 1: Department or School Level.* The chair or director receives a written signed letter from the student within ten (10) working days that states what action the student is appealing, reviews the pertinent materials, meets with the student and faculty if appropriate, and resolution of the appeal is sought at the department or school level.

- Step 2: Dean of the College Level.** An appeal of the department or school decision must be made in writing within ten (10) working days to the dean of the college that has jurisdiction over the department or school. The dean will review the appeal and render a decision on the appeal in writing.

- Step 3: Dean of the Graduate School Level. Should the student desire to make further appeal, the written appeal should be sent within five working days to the Dean of the Graduate School. The Dean will confer with the student and refer the matter to the Graduate Appeals Committee which will hold an official hearing on the appeal. The hearing will be held within ten (10) working days of receipt of the written appeal letter as
long as the university is in session or within ten (10) working days of the university beginning a session. The student may attend the hearing and a representative of the department or school may also attend the hearing or respond to the appeal in writing. The Dean of the Graduate School will send the student a letter indicating the Committee’s decision.

- Step 4: Provost Level. Should the student desire to make further appeal, the written appeal should be sent within ten (10) working days to the Provost. The Provost will review all appeal materials and render a decision in the appeal normally within ten (10) working days of receipt of the appeal.

- Step 5: President Level. If the student is not satisfied with the decision of the Provost, he or she may appeal to the President of the University in writing. The President will render a final decision in the appeal normally within ten (10) days of receipt of the appeal.

*If the appeal concerns the chair, director, or college dean, the student should appeal to the next level.