GRADUATE PROGRAM HANDBOOK TEMPLATE

The purpose of this document is to support departments in developing their own handbooks. Feel free to use this particular format, or some other format; these are the topics and policies we recommend you include. Departments should consider archiving handbooks for students if there are changes to program requirements while they are still in the program.

Introduction

I. Program overview

II. Program components or plan options

III. Degree requirements

IV. Selection of thesis or dissertation advisor

V. Formation of the student's supervisory committee

VI. Thesis/dissertation defense and final oral examination

VII. Departmental policies: academic performance

VIII. Departmental policies: Integrity and safety in research and creative activities

IX. Student conduct, conflict resolution, and grievance procedures

X. Work related policies

XI. University resources

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INTRODUCTION

Your department's graduate handbook should be provided to all entering graduate students, either as a hard copy or on a website. Students should be notified as to where they can access the online copy. It may be useful to have new students sign a statement that they have read and understood the handbook. If on a website, the handbook does not need to be public-facing, but we encourage it. We also encourage departments to give all entering graduate students an orientation session(s) organized by the department. Students entering off-cycle should be given the handbook at the time of entry, and should attend the next scheduled orientation. The manual should say who is advising entering students who have not yet affiliated with a faculty advisor. Usually, it's the Graduate Director. Departments should annually review their handbook to ensure the accuracy of information provided to new students.

Graduate program handbooks must be consistent with University, Graduate School and school/college policies. Departments should consult current versions of the following documents and may incorporate them in the different sections of the handbook; or reference them in an appendix with links to the appropriate documents or websites.

- Graduate School Orientation (this is a requirement for all new TAs/GAs): https://www.binghamton.edu/grad-school/admissions/new-graduate-students/orientation/index.html
- Graduate School Manual: https://www.binghamton.edu/grad-school/resources/policies-procedures/manual/index.html
- Bulletin: http://bulletin.binghamton.edu/
- Binghamton Student Handbook: http://studenthandbook.binghamton.edu/

This template is designed to include all of the important sections for a doctoral program, but all graduate programs must have a handbook. The template should be modified for course-based and/or thesis-based master's programs.

Section X, entitled WORK RELATED POLICIES is intended for graduate students with internships or employed in their academic department. When a graduate student has an internship or is employed in another unit, the policies of that unit apply. In all cases, units must follow contractual rules and University policies.

Departments developing or revising their handbook may wish to consult handbooks from units with a similar mission. The Graduate School can also provide advice and review drafts.

Organization of the Graduate Program Handbook Template:

This template contains sections that address fundamental topics and concerns about graduate education. Each section starts with a brief description of the intent of the section and includes a list of what to include, as well as policy recommendations that are endorsed by The Graduate School and by the Graduate Council. The majority of the policy recommendations are from the Graduate School's Graduate Manual posted on the Graduate School's web site.

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I.   PROGRAM OVERVIEW

<u>Intent</u>: To be successful, entering students must understand the goals and objectives of the graduate program and the expectations of the faculty. The program overview should serve as a road map for new graduate students. The program overview may also include a statement about the overarching mission of the department/school and a description of the organization of the department/school. In addition, the program overview provides an opportunity for the department/school to emphasize the importance of attracting and retaining a diverse group of graduate students and of the importance of diversity among staff and faculty for the professional development of all graduate students.

<u>What to include</u>:

- Explain how graduate training/education is provided by the program via courses, exams and experiences connected to the discipline's norms, practices and goals.
- State the expectations of the program, including:
    - timeline for choosing an advisor and a committee,
    - other important deadlines
    - time-to-degree,
    - qualifying exam schedules and implications for not passing them,
    - standards for dissertation proposal and defense presentations,
    - standards of professionalism in the discipline.
- State any expectations about demonstrating mastery of the subject matter at the different stages of the training program.
- For licensure programs, state what licensure/exams graduates will be eligible for after completing the program.

II.   PROGRAM COMPONENTS/PLAN OPTIONS

<u>Intent</u>: This section should explain the elements that constitute the degree program including any plan or track options and possible participation in interdisciplinary programs.

<u>What to include</u>:

- Describe what constitutes an official plan of study and how it relates to the program components. Some programs may wish to transform the official plan of study into a learning contract or individual development plan.
- State the goals and purpose of the qualifying and comprehensive exam, the required course work, and the thesis or dissertation. Be clear about deadlines for exams and consequences if the deadlines are not met.

- Describe any options for specializations or certificates. Specializations (or concentrations or tracks) and certificates must be registered with SUNY and NYSED.

III.   DEGREE/PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

Intent: Once the components of the degree program have been explained, the requirements necessary for successful completion of those components should be specified. It is important to distinguish between these two categories, and to keep all of the requirements in one location so that there are no hidden requirements.

What to include:

- Explain what is meant by conditional or provisional acceptance to the program, and identify any deadlines for completion of any required work referred to in the conditional/provisional acceptance. See the Graduate School definitions here: https://www.binghamton.edu/grad-school/resources/policies-procedures/manual/admissions.html

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- Explain what is meant by probationary status in the program, and identify any deadlines for completion of any work and standards of that work referred to in the probationary notification. See the Graduate School manual for information on graduate probation here: https://www.binghamton.edu/grad-school/resources/policies-procedures/manual/enrollment.html#probation

- Provide a comprehensive list of requirements for each program in the unit, including any laboratory rotations, internships or apprenticeships. Include here: admission and candidacy requirements, course requirements, language requirements, research/research credits requirements and teaching requirements. These requirements should match what is presented in the bulletin.
- Describe the English-language proficiency requirements for international students that are unique to your department (minimum requirements are described here: https://www.binghamton.edu/grad-school/admissions/requirements.html
- Provide an explanation of qualifying, field area and/or comprehensive exams (e.g., type and general content of the exam, how pass or fail is determined, number of times a student can repeat the test, definition of what constitutes a partial or conditional pass, deadlines for successful completion of the exam, number of times the exam can be retaken).

- Prepare a table that outlines the degree program requirements and their due dates and time limits. Provide a year-by-year synopsis of the degree program(s).
- Explain if gaining a master's degree along the way to the PhD is a customary or required component of the program.
- Explain any residency requirements. Link to: https://www.binghamton.edu/student-accounts/residency/apply.html
- Provide a checklist of university, Graduate School, college/school, department forms and deadlines, and explain how they relate to the procedures for graduation/degree certification. This includes declaring ones advisor, declaring ones committee. See also Section IV below.
- If you have a felony or child abuse conviction: Students who have a felony or child abuse conviction are advised that their prior criminal history may impede their ability to complete the requirements of some liscensure programs and/or to meet licensure requirements. If you have concerns about this, you are advised to contact the graduate program director.

IV.   SELECTION OF THESIS OR DISSERTATION ADVISOR

Intent: Initiation and successful completion of independent research or creative activity requires early and continued advice and oversight by a faculty advisor on behalf of the academic department. Particular attention must be devoted to mentoring students. The department must also develop the policies and procedures to ensure appropriate advising and mentoring for entering students that have not identified their official thesis or dissertation advisor.

Policy Recommendations:

- Appropriate advising, supervision and mentoring will be provided to entering students before an official faculty advisor is identified. The handbook should advise the graduate student about who to contact with what kind of question, including, but not limited to, the students' temporary or permanent advisor.
- The handbook should describe how the department helps graduate students affiliate with an official faculty advisor.
- The timeline for the selection of an official faculty advisor will be specified.
- Units should be particularly sensitive to the fit of advisor-student relationship; communication and background experiences play a significant role in the student's understanding of the expectations of the graduate program.
- The selection of the official faculty advisor will be submitted for approval to the graduate director of the academic department.
- The academic unit will establish guidelines and expectations for successful faculty advising.

- Suggested duties for both advisor and advisee. Including how often meetings should occur.

What to include:

- Describe the role and responsibilities of the thesis or dissertation advisor. Link to: https://www.binghamton.edu/grad-school/resources/policies-procedures/manual/policies-doctoral.html
- Describe the responsibilities of the student in this student-faculty advisor relationship.
- Describe the responsibilities of the student, the department/school and of the faculty advisor when the faculty advisor leaves Binghamton before the student completes their degree program. Link to: https://www.binghamton.edu/grad-school/resources/policies-procedures/manual/policies-doctoral.html
- Describe the responsibilities of the graduate director when a student and faculty advisor can no longer work together.
- Provide information about how to select an official faculty advisor, and how to change advisors if that becomes necessary.

V.   FORMATION OF THE STUDENT'S SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE

Intent: The graduate student's supervisory committee is expected to share responsibility for reviewing the graduate student's progress and guiding the student toward completion of course and program requirements. Academic departments will develop policies to ensure that the supervisory committee of each graduate student will be formed in a timely fashion and that its composition will ensure proper guidance of the graduate student and maintenance of high professional standards in the graduate student's studies and research or creative activity.

Policy Recommendations:

- The academic unit will establish a timeline for forming the supervisory committee. This timeline varies. Some programs require an advisor by the beginning of the fifth semester and a supervisory committee by the beginning of the sixth.
- The academic unit will establish procedures for the formation of supervisory committees, including advice to graduate students on how to choose members of their supervisory committee.
- The composition of the supervisory committee will be submitted to the graduate director of the academic department for approval.
- Outside examiners for doctoral defenses do not serve on the supervisory committee. Instead they serve for the dissertation defense. Link to: https://www.binghamton.edu/grad-school/resources/policies-

procedures/manual/policies-doctoral.html#205   The handbook should also include recommendations for an expected timeline to get an outside examiner. The Graduate School recommends at least two months before the defense and certainly not less than two weeks: https://www.binghamton.edu/grad-school/resources/policies-procedures/manual/policies-doctoral.html#206

What to include:

- Provide information about who can serve as members of supervisory committees, including faculty outside the student's program or department/school.
- Provide instruction on how to form a thesis or dissertation committee, including: deadline for approval, minimum number of faculty from inside the program, number allowed or required from outside the program, including a recommended time to start thinking about your advisor and the members of your committee.
- Provide information on how to change the composition of a constituted committee.
- Provide information about the responsibilities of the committee members.
- Edit as necessary for master's project and/or clinical doctorate requirements.

VI.   THESIS/DISSERTATION DEFENSE/FINAL PROJECT

Intent: The final master's or doctoral examination is the culmination of a student's graduate education and training and reflects not only on the accomplishments of the graduate student but also on the quality of the graduate program. Academic departments will develop policies and procedures that will ensure the maintenance of expected professional standards in the preparation of the written documents and in the oral defense of the thesis/dissertation. An approved thesis/dissertation that is accepted by the Graduate School becomes a single-author publication and contributes to the body of knowledge of the discipline.

Policy Recommendations:

- The graduate student will present the results of the thesis or dissertation in a seminar open to the campus and external community.
- For doctoral defenses, to ensure fairness in the examination procedure and maintenance of academic standards, the Dean of the Graduate School appoints an outside member to the examining committee. The outside member of the committee will read and critique the dissertation and will participate in the oral part of the exam. If in disagreement with the examining committee or otherwise finding noteworthy issues, the outside examiner will submit a report to the Dean of the Graduate School. Link to:

- Include final project/clinical doctorate requirements, if necessary

What to include:

- Define the nature and scope of the thesis and dissertation/final project.
- Minimum time necessary for committee review of thesis/dissertation.
- Make explicit any requirements and/or expectations concerning the publication or submission of research that constitutes or is part of a thesis or dissertation.
- If chapters of the thesis or dissertation may be published articles or submitted manuscripts, describe the format required.
- If chapters may be co-authored, describe how that should be reported in the thesis or dissertation.
- Provide a list of recent theses and dissertations accepted by the department and/or provide the location where they can be found.
- Indicate that a University requirement is publication of the thesis or dissertation, via ProQuest. Link to: https://www.binghamton.edu/grad-school/resources/graduation/submitting-thesis-dissertation.html

VII. DEPARTMENTAL POLICIES: ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

Intent: Graduate students should receive a periodic evaluation of their academic progress, performance, and professional potential. Academic departments will develop procedures to review the performance of each graduate student at least once a year. This section of the handbook should explain the evaluation procedures and should make explicit the policies for dismissal due to academic deficiencies.

Policy Recommendations:

- The department must have procedures in place for evaluating academic dishonesty cases.
- The graduate student's advisor or supervisory committee will review at least once a year the graduate student's progress in his or her research or creative activity as well as plans for work in the coming year. We recommend that a report on the results of this review will be signed by the advisor and members of the supervisory committee and by the graduate student. This report will be filed with the graduate director of the academic department and will be placed in the graduate student's file, together with any response that the graduate student may attach to the report of the supervisory committee. The purpose of this recommendation is to provide feedback to the student and also to maintain a record of the student's progress.

- The faculty advisor and graduate student will meet to discuss this evaluation and, if applicable, sources of funding.
- Some academic departments should consider a policy that the graduate director meets with each graduate student to review all aspects of the annual progress report. Recommendations based on this review should be communicated in writing to the faculty advisor and the graduate student within two weeks of the meeting, and that report will be placed in the graduate student's file. This can serve as useful documentation for the department and the student. It also provides a check that all students are making sufficient progress. Alternatively, or in addition, there could be standardized mechanisms for graduate directors to have graduate student meeting times available. Note that DegreeWorks also tracks graduate student progress.

What to include:

- Provide the school/college academic honesty code.
- Define what is considered acceptable academic standing and what is considered as making satisfactory progress toward a degree.
- Inform the students of their right to receive a warning when academic performance or progress is judged to be unsatisfactory.
- Note that for students on internal or external fellowships, the file must include the student's written plan for the fellowship semester, approval by the graduate director and end-of-semester review by the graduate director.
- Inform the students of their right to access their educational records and explain the procedures to follow to view those records.
- Explain the policy for grading qualifying, field area and comprehensive examinations and the policy for any remediation in case the student fails the exam or part of the exam.
- Provide explicit criteria used for dismissals due to academic deficiencies, including number of grades below 3.0 and number of failed attempts to pass qualifying exams, field area and comprehensive exams that result in dismissal from the program.

VIII. DEPARTMENTAL POLICIES: INTEGRITY AND SAFETY IN RESEARCH AND CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

Intent: Integrity in research and creative activities is based on sound disciplinary practices as well as on a commitment to basic values such as fairness, equity, honesty and respect. Students learn to value professional integrity and high standards of ethical behavior through interaction with members of their academic unit and their faculty advisor and by emulating exemplary behavior. This section of the handbook should state the program's expectations for the responsible conduct of research and creative activities of graduate students and should present explicit criteria for dismissal for reasons other than academic

deficiencies, including research misconduct, dishonesty with respect to grades or academic records and scholarship, and violations of professional standards.

Policy Recommendations:

- The academic department will develop as part of its academic program a mechanism for communicating and discussing standards of professional integrity appropriate for the discipline.
- The academic unit will emphasize Binghamton policy on academic and research conduct as needed. For example, policies and processes for responsible conduct for animal or human subjects research..
- The academic unit will inform students about the Environmental Health & Safety Office regulations and policies, especially related to laboratory and studio safety and campus security.

What to include:

- Compliance training mandated by federal funding agencies
- Provide explicit criteria for dismissal due to unethical or dishonest behavior while engaged in research, scholarly and creative activities.
  https://www.binghamton.edu/research/division-offices/research-compliance/responsible-research.html
- Provide explicit criteria for what constitutes a violation of professional standards. Expectations about professional conduct should be set by the unit based upon the prevailing disciplinary standards, and when appropriate, by the standards demanded by external accrediting agencies.
- If appropriate for the discipline, provide instructions on required training for and how to obtain approval for human subjects/animal research.
  https://www.binghamton.edu/research/division-offices/research-compliance/human-subjects/index.html
  https://www.binghamton.edu/research/division-offices/research-compliance/lar/index.html

IX. STUDENT CONDUCT, CONFLICT RESOLUTION, AND GRIEVANCE PROCEDURES

Intent: The first venue to resolve conflicts informally or formally rests within the academic department. Because the faculty advisor-graduate student relationship is deemed so important, special attention should be given to the resolution of conflicts between a graduate student and his or her faculty advisor. If a conflict cannot be resolved within the student's academic unit, it may be appropriate to seek resolution through the University hierarchy. The University has a structure and process for grievances.

Policy Recommendations:

- The academic department will establish grievance procedures for the resolution of conflicts between a graduate student and a faculty member and will communicate these procedures to each graduate student. The initial task of conflict resolution may rest with the chair/director of the academic department, the graduate director, or an *ad hoc* or standing committee. No faculty who are involved in the grievance should be included in the grievance process.
- The academic department will establish procedures for the timely change of the faculty advisor when such a change would best serve the progress of the graduate student in his or her program.
- Check with the Ombudsman's office and/or the Graduate School to ensure that the policies conform to Binghamton policy.

What to include:

- Provide guidelines for dealing with conflicts of interest between students and faculty and between students.
- Provide expectations for graduate students' professional behavior and explicit criteria for dismissal for failure to display professionally accepted behavior.
- Provide and explain the departmental/school policy for handling grievances and appeals. For example, the department should form a committee to review the grievance. That committee should exclude anyone who is a subject of the grievance. The department may wish to have a student representative on the grievance committee. The department may also wish to follow their undergraduate grievance procedure, if one exists.

X.   EMPLOYMENT-RELATED POLICIES

Intent: This section should explain the department's expectations concerning graduate student's effort and work related to all fellowships, internships and assistantships (teaching assistantships, graduate assistantships, research assistantships). All policies must be consistent with University and Graduate School policy. For graduate assistants appointed as teaching assistants, the policy also must conform to the specifications of the current GSEU contract.

Policy Recommendations:

- Inform teaching assistants about the expectations of them professionally and in terms of quality and quantity of work.
- Inform teaching assistants/graduate assistants employed by the state of mandatory annual training.
- Provide a mechanism to inform teaching assistants about their contractual rights under the current version of the GSEU contract.

- Inform students on fellowships and tuition scholarships about the expectations of them professionally and in terms of quality and quantity of their progress to degree. While these students are not required to perform services such as teaching, they are required to work full-time on their research and degree program. If the fellowship covers summer, then that requirement is also applicable to summer.
- Provide a mechanism to inform all graduate students about their health insurance options.

What to include:

- Explain the criteria for awarding, renewing and terminating graduate assistantships, including length of eligibility, and the process used to evaluate the students' performance.
- Explain the policy for graduate assistant leave and expectations about vacations and leave to attend professional meetings.
- Explain any policies related to outside work for pay. For international students this may include language about consultation with the ISSS office.
- Explain any policies concerning the use of departmental resources such as computers, offices, copy-machines, office supplies, mailboxes and telephones.
- Explain the English-language proficiency level (e.g., minimum score in TOEFL/IELTS/ESL tests) expected of international teaching assistants
- Note that for teaching assistants, the file must include an evaluation by the instructor of record or teaching supervisor for each semester that student is a teaching assistant.

XII.   UNIVERSITY RESOURCES

Intent: This section should include a list of university resources available to all graduate students with particular attention to those that apply to the discipline/mission of the unit.

Include suggestions here with links:
GS Forms
Directory exclusion forms
MRC
VARCC
SSD
Dean of Students
Application for Leave of Absence
Application for Semester Withdrawal
Application for Transfer Credit
Directory Exclusion Authorization Form
Directory Exclusion Removal Form
Federal Graduate Work Study
Graduate School Travel Grant Application Independent Study Approval Form
International Students and Scholar Services (ISSS) Release of Student Records
Request for Late Add / Withdraw / Delete / Change