

GRADUATE POLICY AND PROGRAM HANDBOOK

**DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURAL, FOOD, AND
RESOURCE ECONOMICS**

202 Agriculture Hall

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

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I. PURPOSE

This document describes the graduate programs offered by the Department of Agricultural, Food, and Resource Economics and the criteria and procedures used for admitting students to them. The requirements of the master's and Ph.D. programs are set forth, along with policies and guidelines pertaining to student advising, evaluation of academic performance, research integrity, student conduct and conflict resolution, and graduate assistantships. Program timetables and a checklist of administrative forms and deadlines are also included. Additional information about the graduate program, about department faculty, and about other department and university programs and facilities can be found in the department's "Graduate Program Resource Book," which is distributed to all new students.

Appeals concerning interpretation of this document may be referred to the department chairperson for determination.¹ Under extremely unusual circumstances a student or a guidance committee may petition the Graduate Policy Committee of the department for a waiver or modification of these policies for the specific student, subject to approval by the department chairperson.

II. OVERVIEW

A. Introduction to Graduate Education

The graduate program is an important part of the Department of Agricultural, Food, and Resource Economics. Substantial physical and financial resources, as well as faculty effort, are devoted to the program and to the creation of an intellectual environment conducive to effective learning.

Students entering graduate school assume responsibility for their own academic and professional development with the support of the faculty. Formal learning situations such as classes and thesis research are important in the student's development and preparation for post-degree responsibilities. Additional development is expected through individual study and thought, interaction with other students and faculty and by taking advantage of other learning opportunities such as seminars and professional meetings.

To facilitate the personal development of graduate students, the department's program is flexible and permits some freedom of action by both students and faculty. Though some common requirements must be satisfied, a range of programs can be developed to fit individual interests and needs. Programs can emphasize agricultural economics theory, research methods, and measurement of economic variables. Programs can also emphasize the study of applied problems and the analysis of decision making by both private and public actors.

¹ The department chairperson may assign some of the duties described in this document to the associate chairperson.

It is important that the overall direction of the student's program be developed at an early date. To this end, students must select a major professor and guidance committee and submit a course program before the end of the second semester of enrollment.

B. Overview of Graduate Programs

1. Master's program. Two M.S. degrees in agricultural, food, and resource economics are offered: Plan A—minimum 30 credits with a 6-credit thesis and no minor field, and Plan B—minimum 33 credits with a 3-credit research paper and a 6-credit minor field. A final oral examination is required for both Plan A and Plan B programs.
2. Ph.D. program. The Ph.D. degree requires four fields: economics (courses in the Economics Department), a major field in agricultural, food, and resource economics (agribusiness strategy and management, agricultural markets and price analysis, environmental and resource economics, finance and production economics, and international agricultural development), and two minor fields. Students take written comprehensive examinations in microeconomic theory, statistics/econometrics, and their major field. They present a research proposal seminar, complete a dissertation and defend it at a final oral examination, and submit a research paper suitable for publication.
3. Specializations.
 - a. *Master's Specialization in Agribusiness*. This specialization is available as an elective to students enrolled in the master's degree program. The specialization is designed to serve students who are interested in careers in agribusiness, and is administered by the Department of Agricultural, Food, and Resource Economics. For the specialization, students must take four courses from a specified set of courses relevant to agribusiness. (Details are available from the department office or at <http://www.aec.msu.edu/agecon/grad/agbusspec.htm>.) The four courses may count towards the requirements of the master's degree. Students completing these courses successfully will receive a notation on their master's degree transcript stating "Master's Specialization in Agribusiness completed (date)."
 - b. *Interdepartmental Specializations in Environmental and Resource Economics*. These specializations are available as an elective to students enrolled in a master's or doctoral program in one of several departments of the College of Agricultural and Natural Resources, including the Department of Agricultural, Food, and Resource Economics. The specialization is administered by an interdepartmental coordinating committee of environmental and resource economics faculty from these departments. The requirements for these specializations involve completion of courses and, at the doctoral level, passing of a written qualifying examination (for details, see <http://grad.msu.edu/ere/erespecial.htm>). In most cases, the course requirements for a master's or doctoral degree in agricultural, food, and resource economics can be met in a way that also satisfies the requirements for

the resource economics specialization. Successful completion of the requirements for the specialization will be indicated by a notation on the student's transcript.

C. General Policies

University and College policies and guidelines are an important part of the context within which our departmental policies are developed. Important references to these broader policy documents include the following:

1. *Academic Programs 2002-04.*
<http://www.reg.msu.edu/UCC/AcademicPrograms.asp>
This document includes sections on:
 - Graduate Education
<http://www.reg.msu.edu/read/UCC/Updated/04graded.pdf>
 - Graduate Study in the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources
<http://www.reg.msu.edu/read/UCC/Updated/anrgrsty.pdf>
2. *Graduate Student Rights and Responsibilities (GSRR)*, available as part of the *Spartan Life Student Handbook and Resource Guide.*
<http://www.vps.msu.edu/SpLife/gradrights.htm>
3. *Guidelines for Graduate Student Advising and Mentoring Relationships.*
<http://grad.msu.edu/all/ris04relations.pdf>
4. *Guidelines for Integrity in Research and Creative Activities.*
<http://grad.msu.edu/all/ris04activities.pdf>
5. Student records include the academic file (grades, degree program forms, academic correspondence), the assistantship/fellowship file (appointment forms), and the "personnel file" (for students appointed as TAs under the terms of the GEU/MSU contract). Access to student records is governed by:
 - The provisions of FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act)
<http://www.reg.msu.edu/ROInfo/Notices/PrivacyGuidelines.asp> and by
 - MSU's *Guidelines Governing Privacy and Release of Student Records*
<http://www.reg.msu.edu/Read/UCC/Updated/privacy.pdf>

III. ADMISSIONS CRITERIA, REQUIREMENTS AND PROCEDURES

A. Admissions Criteria

Admission to the graduate program is based on three main criteria:

1. Ability to complete the degree requirements successfully and in a reasonable time period. This is evaluated based on the entire application, including:
 - a. Record of previous academic training and performance (course program, grades, length of time to degree, and date of degree).

- b. Statement of purpose.
 - c. TOEFL and GRE scores.
 - d. Letters of recommendation.
 - e. Previous research or work experience that is relevant to the applicant's proposed area of interest.
2. Match between the applicant's background, interests and educational objectives, and the department's research, teaching and outreach programs.
 3. The applicant's contribution to the diversity and balance of the department's graduate student body.

B. Specific Admissions Requirements

1. M.S. applicants must have already received the equivalent of a bachelor's degree. They are expected to have taken introductory economics, intermediate microeconomics, introductory statistics, and at least one semester of calculus. Successful M.S. applicants will generally have at least a 3.0 grade point average (where 4.0 is best) in their undergraduate program.
2. In most cases, Ph.D. applicants will have received or be close to finishing the equivalent of a master's degree. They are expected to have taken another semester of calculus or linear algebra beyond the M.S. admission requirements, and master's-level courses in mathematics for economists, microeconomics, statistics, and econometrics. Successful Ph.D. applicants will generally have at least a 3.5 grade point average (where 4.0 is best) in their master's program. In some cases, highly qualified candidates that have completed a bachelor's degree with sufficiently advanced coursework may be admitted directly into the doctoral program.
3. The university's minimum TOEFL scores for regular admission are 550 (paper version) and 80 (Internet-based version), with no sub scores below 52 (paper version) or 19 (Internet-based version; 22 for the writing section). The minimum scores for provisional admission are 520 and 68 for the paper and Internet-based exams, respectively.
4. While GRE scores must be submitted for review along with other application materials, the department has no minimum GRE scores required for admission.

C. Admissions Procedures—see [details](#) on-line.

1. Most students enter the program in Fall Semester, but applications are also accepted for Spring Semester (January) and Summer Semester (mid-May).
2. Students may apply directly to the master's program.
3. Students may enter the doctoral program in one of three ways:
 - a. Students who have obtained or expect to obtain a master's degree from another department or from another institution may apply for direct admission to the doctoral program. (see III.B.2)
 - b. Students who have obtained or expect to obtain a bachelor's degree with coursework that is sufficiently advanced may apply for direct admission to the doctoral program.
 - c. Students currently enrolled in the department's master's program may request a transfer to the doctoral program by submitting a transfer request form, signed by the major professor. This request requires approval of the department and the college. Transfer should be requested no earlier than the end of the first year of the student's program. A decision on the request may be postponed until later in the student's second year in order to obtain additional information bearing on the student's likelihood of success in the doctoral program.
4. Provisional admission:
 - a. Students who lack preparation in a particular area but who are otherwise admissible may be admitted provisionally. Necessary remedial work and deadlines for completing it will be stated in the admissions letter. Regular status will be granted when the provisions have been completed.
 - b. Admission or transfer from the M.S. to the doctoral program will be provisional until all requirements for the master's degree are completed.

IV. ADVISING

Graduate students receive academic advising from a guidance committee of faculty members, including a major professor and (if the student so chooses) a research supervisor other than the major professor.

A. Eligibility of Faculty for Advising

1. Graduate student advising is normally the responsibility of "regular faculty" members. As defined in the *Faculty Handbook* (p. 7), "The 'regular faculty' of Michigan State University shall consist of all persons appointed under the rules of tenure and holding the rank of professor, associate professor, assistant professor, or instructor, and persons appointed as librarians. In addition, the principal

administrative officer of each major educational and research unit to the University shall be a member of the 'regular faculty.'"

2. Others who may serve in an advising role include the following:
 - a. An emeritus or nontenure stream faculty member may serve:
 - on a particular graduate student's guidance committee or M.S. oral examination committee as one of the required regular faculty members, or
 - as the chairperson (major professor) of the student's guidance or examination committee, or
 - as the thesis or dissertation advisor.

For emeritus and nontenure stream faculty, approval is required by the department chairperson. For nontenure stream faculty, approval by the college and the Dean of The Graduate School is also required. Nontenure stream faculty who has not been so approved may serve on a guidance committee or as a voting member of the examination committee in addition to the required number of regular faculty members.

 - b. An MSU faculty member who has been advising a student may continue in that role after leaving MSU for other employment, with the approval of the department.
 - c. Persons from other institutions may serve only as nonvoting members of the guidance or examination committee unless they have been approved by the Dean of the Graduate School using the same procedure applied to nontenure stream MSU faculty members.
3. The number of persons who are not MSU regular faculty may not exceed the number of regular faculty on the guidance or examination committee.

B. Major Professor

1. New students are assigned a temporary major professor by the department chairperson. A student may request a specific temporary major professor.
2. The student is responsible for selecting a permanent major professor by the end of the second semester of residence. The student's selection of a major professor is subject to approval by the department chairperson. If necessary, the student may request the department chairperson to assist in identifying a suitable major professor.
3. As outlined more fully in the *Guidelines on Advising and Mentoring of Graduate Students*, the major professor's role is to advise the student on developing a program plan, selecting a research topic and implementing and publishing the research, and developing professional skills. The major professor should provide intellectual

support and guidance to the student, give regular feedback to the student on his/her academic progress, and facilitate the student's career development.

4. A major professor who is unable or unwilling to continue in that role may resign. The student then selects a new major professor as soon as possible, subject to approval by the department chairperson. When feasible, the major professor who is unable to continue will assist the student in identifying a suitable replacement.
5. A major professor who is temporarily unable to serve in that role should, in consultation with the student, designate another person to act as major professor during the period, and notify the student and the department chairperson accordingly.
6. A student whose educational objectives change may request a different major professor, subject to approval by the department chairperson.

C. Guidance Committee

1. The guidance committee must be selected by the student, in consultation with the major professor, and submitted for the approval of the department chairperson by the end of the student's second semester.
 - a. For a master's student, the guidance committee consists of two or more Michigan State University regular faculty members. At least two must be from the Department of Agricultural, Food, and Resource Economics. As noted in section IV.D.1 below, the master's student's final oral examination committee consists of at least three regular faculty members, including the guidance committee and one faculty member from outside the department.
 - b. For a Ph.D. student, the guidance committee consists of four or more Michigan State University regular faculty members. At least two must be from the Department of Agricultural, Food, and Resource Economics, and at least one must be from outside the Department of Agricultural, Food, and Resource Economics.
 - c. For both M.S. and Ph.D. students, department faculty members who have a joint appointment in a unit other than the Department of Agricultural, Food, and Resource Economics are eligible to serve as the "outside" member of a guidance or examination committee.
 - d. The student may change the guidance committee at a later time, subject to approval by the department chairperson.
2. As outlined more fully in the *Guidelines on Advising and Mentoring of Graduate Students*, the guidance committee including the major professor counsels the student in the development of career objectives and a relevant program of study consistent

with the individual's career objectives, periodically assesses the student's progress and performance, and determines if the student has met the standards for the degree. Many students desire and could benefit from teaching, extension activities or research responsibilities in addition to their thesis or dissertation research. The guidance committee is responsible for encouraging or requiring such experience commensurate with the student's interests and professional goals.

D. Research or Dissertation Supervisor

1. The candidate and major professor may designate another faculty member to act as research supervisor (M.S. program) or dissertation supervisor (Ph.D. program), subject to approval by the department chairperson. The research or dissertation supervisor becomes a member of the guidance committee. Other faculty members may be added to the guidance committee, or the guidance committee may be reconstituted, for purposes of guiding and evaluating the student's research.
2. The research/dissertation supervisor, if one is designated, will have primary responsibility for advising the student during the development of the M.S. Plan B paper or thesis or Ph.D. dissertation. Otherwise, the major professor will fulfill this responsibility. Advice should be given on problem definition, data collection methods, analytic content, and structure and style of the final product. Where special help is needed, the research/dissertation supervisor or major professor should suggest how it can be obtained. He or she should also clarify with the student any specific needs for contract and Experiment Station reports and appropriate journal articles, as well as authorship of, and responsibility for, joint publications.

E. Professional Development

The major professor and guidance committee members should encourage and assist the student to take advantage of learning opportunities outside the classroom, and to develop professional skills that are important for a career in agricultural economics. Attendance at seminars and research proposal or thesis/dissertation presentations and participation at professional meetings provide important opportunities for learning about current research or policy issues and methods of analysis, for sharpening critical thinking, and for developing a network of acquaintances who can serve as future colleagues. Students are therefore expected to participate regularly in such learning experiences. In addition, the student's advisors should assist in creating opportunities for the student to develop writing, speaking, presentation and computer skills, and other skills and experiences that would contribute to effective teaching, if that is relevant to the student's intended career. Students are expected to be active in pursuing such skill-building opportunities. For many students, professional development opportunities may include travel abroad. Students traveling abroad are encouraged to use the following MSU resources:

- a. The MSU Travel Clinic can advise on health risks or recommended immunizations.
<http://www.travelclinic.msu.edu/>

b. The International Studies and Programs website provides information related to safety around the world. <http://keywords.msu.edu/viewpathfinder.asp?id=31>

c. Assistance with travel funding may be available via the Graduate School. If the Graduate School provides funding, they will also provide a MEDEX emergency card.

Students are also encouraged to take advantage of career and professional development resources available from the MSU Graduate School. A description of these resources is available at: <http://grad.msu.edu/cpd.htm>

F. Student Responsibilities

The responsibility of faculty to adhere to university and department policies and to provide effective advising and mentoring of graduate students is accompanied by a set of responsibilities incumbent on students. As outlined more fully in the *Guidelines on Advising and Mentoring of Graduate Students* and in the [GSRR](#), the responsibilities of students that contribute to good student-advisor relationships include learning and adhering to university and department policies, following principles of honesty, integrity, and collegial behavior during course work, research and publication-related activities, and keeping the major professor and guidance committee regularly informed of progress toward degree completion.

V. MASTER'S PROGRAM DEGREE REQUIREMENTS

A. Introduction

1. The M.S. degree program in agricultural, food, and resource economics reflects recognition that the background and post-degree plans of students vary widely. Despite this, all students are expected to obtain sufficient economic theory, mathematics and statistics to interpret economic data effectively and to obtain practical research results for themselves and others. They are also expected to develop a general familiarity with the content, approaches and historical development of agricultural economics and its supporting disciplines. The requirements of the M.S. degree are summarized in Table 1.
2. Students who plan to acquire a Ph.D. degree should develop the M.S. program as an integral part of their total graduate program. This is particularly important in areas of study where substantial prerequisites are required.

B. Course Program

1. Two broad programs are offered under the designations of Plan A and Plan B. With advice and consent of the guidance committee, the student develops and files with the department a Plan A or Plan B program of study, consistent with the guidelines below. The program of study must be filed by the end of the second semester of residence, and must be approved by the department chairperson and college dean.
2. The department recognizes that program changes may be necessary at a later date as the student and guidance committee re-examine the program. Requested changes in the program should be submitted in writing by the major professor to the department chairperson for department and college approval.
3. AEC 801 and AEC 805 are required.² In addition, a minimum of 12 other course credits in agricultural economics, with at least 9 at the 800-900 level, is required under both Plan A and Plan B (Table 1).
4. A second field of 6 course credits is designated for Plan B. This field is normally outside the Department of Agricultural, Food, and Resource Economics and is in addition to minimum credit requirements in economics.

Table 1: MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS FOR M.S. PROGRAM

Course Requirements	Semester Credits	
	Plan A	Plan B
Agricultural, Food, and Resource Economics Field		
AEC 800/900-level courses other than AEC 801 & AEC 805	9	9
Elective a/	3	3
Second Field (in or outside AEC)	0	6
Economics (AEC 805 or EC 812A)	3	3
Quantitative Methods		
Statistics (400-level or above)	3	3
Mathematics for economists (equivalent to AEC 801) b/	3	3
Elective quantitative methods course, as approved by the guidance committee and department b/	3	3
Research: Thesis for Plan A (AEC 899); research, case study, or problem-solving project paper for Plan B (AEC 898)	6	3
Total Credits	30	33

²Whenever a course number is specified it is understood that the phrase “or equivalent” applies.

Other Requirements:

- Minimum GPA of 3.0 in the student's approved course program, and 3.0 grades in each required quantitative methods course
- Minimum of 18 credits (excluding research) in courses at the 800- or 900-level
- Final oral examination

a/ Including suitable 400-level ABM, EEP, or FIM courses or courses in other departments as approved by the guidance committee and the department.

b/ Whenever a course number is specified it is understood that the phrase "or equivalent" applies. Students may substitute the two credit EC 811 for AEC 801 but must still meet the total credit requirements of 30 for plan A or 33 for plan B.

5. A minimum of 30 credits including research (33 credits if Plan B) with a grade point average of at least 3.0 is required. University regulations generally do not permit counting 300-level courses. The guidance committee may require collateral courses that are not included in the minimum credits or in the grade point average. A maximum of 9 semester credits of graduate course work (excluding research and thesis credits) may be transferred from courses taken at another institution, or in another master's degree program at Michigan State University.
6. A minimum of 18 credits (excluding research credits) must be in courses at the 800 or 900 level.
7. A minimum of 9 credits in quantitative methods courses, consisting of 3 credits of 400-level probability and statistics, 3 credits of mathematics for economists (equivalent to AEC 801), and one elective 3-credit quantitative methods course.
8. The student demonstrates competence in quantitative methods by achieving at least a 3.0 grade in each of the courses taken to satisfy the three quantitative methods requirements.

C. Research

1. The research requirement depends on the choice of Plan A or Plan B option.
 - a. Plan A requires a thesis, based on 6 credits of research earned in AEC 899. This option is appropriate for students who wish to emphasize research experience during the M.S. program.
 - b. Plan B requires a research paper, based on 3 credits of research earned in AEC 898. This option is appropriate for students who wish to emphasize course work during the M.S. program.
 - c. The guidance committee has latitude in determining what constitutes a Plan A thesis or Plan B research paper. In general, a thesis will make an original

contribution to the field and is likely to involve analysis of primary data, perhaps collected by the student. A Plan B paper may take many forms, including a case study of a firm or industry, or a literature review and research proposal, and is more likely to involve analysis of secondary data.

2. Students must ensure that they comply with the university requirements and guidelines pertaining to use of human subjects and vertebrate animals in research, and to safe use of hazardous materials.
 - a. Students whose master's Plan A or Plan B research will involve human subjects will need to apply on-line (<http://www.humanresearch.msu.edu/>) to obtain prior approval from the University Institutional Review Board (IRB). Examples of research involving human subjects include interviews, surveys, behavioral or educational testing, observation of individual or group behavior, or the use of existing data on human subjects, including publicly available data. In most cases, research based on primary or secondary survey data whose collection had the consent of those surveyed and did not place them under any risk, and whose use does not reveal their identities, will receive quick and favorable review. The IRB office should be contacted for more specific information about review procedures and the types of research requiring review. Examples of applications for IRB review are available from the department office.
 - b. Students whose research involves vertebrate animals should adhere to the guidelines of the Animal Use & Care Program (<http://www.aucauc.msu.edu/main.htm>).
 - c. Guidelines for the safe use of hazardous materials are available from the Office of Radiation, Chemical and Biological Safety (<http://www.orcbs.msu.edu/>).

D. Final Oral Examination

1. In accordance with College requirements, the examining committee for a master's student consists of a minimum of three regular faculty members, including the guidance committee and one member from outside the department who is approved by the department chairperson. The candidate is expected to provide members of the examining committee with a copy of the thesis or Plan B paper at least one week before the oral examination. The thesis defense should be announced to all faculty and graduate students at least a week in advance in the Ag Econ-O-Gram or by e-mail. The student must be registered for a minimum of one credit in the semester in which the final oral examination is taken.
2. The oral examination should be scheduled so that all members of the examination committee may attend. If necessary, other modes of faculty participation such as through conference telephone call or written questions and comments may be adopted with the approval of the department chairperson. If travel to participate in the defense represents a significant hardship for the student, the student may petition the examination committee and department chair for a remote defense.

Approved remote defenses are subject to the following conditions:

- i. The student must present a seminar that is viewable (either recorded or in person) by the examination committee and other people on the MSU campus.
 - ii. The student must be interactively examined.
 - iii. Logistical arrangements for the defense are the responsibility of the student and committee
3. The oral examination is a comprehensive evaluation of the candidate's qualifications for the M.S. degree. At the discretion of the major professor, the examining committee may give a written examination in addition to the oral. Since masters' programs vary markedly, the oral examination will vary, but in each case the examination will attempt to determine if the candidate has achieved a minimum level of competence in the general area of agricultural, food and resource economics and a comprehensive knowledge of the major area of emphasis. The examination will normally begin with a public presentation by the student of his/her thesis or Plan B paper, but the examination is not limited to a defense of the thesis or the Plan B paper. Consistent with College policy, interested faculty members not on the examination committee may participate without vote during the examination that follows any public presentation of the student's research. Graduate students may not attend this examination, however.
4. A majority vote to pass is sufficient for successful completion of the examination requirement for a Plan A master's degree. In the event of a tie vote on the examination for a Plan B master's degree, the department chairperson will arrange for another assessment to break the tie. If the student is required to make revisions in the thesis or Plan B paper, the faculty member designated by the examining committee to review the revised work is expected to do so in a timely manner, normally within four weeks following the date the revised work is delivered to the faculty member. If the student does not receive a response within four weeks, the student should contact the faculty member or major professor, and if necessary may request assistance from the department chairperson in obtaining a timely decision on the acceptability of the proposed revisions.
5. The examining committee also evaluates the candidate's potential for performance in a Ph.D. program. The major professor is responsible for transmitting this recommendation to the department chairperson.

E. Preparation and Submission of Final Research Paper or Thesis

1. For both the Plan B research paper and Plan A thesis:
 - a. The document should be prepared using the master's thesis formatting guidelines prescribed by the Graduate School (<http://grad.msu.edu/format.htm>).
 - b. A bound copy is required for the Department's Elton R. Smith Conference Room, the major professor, the research supervisor (if different from the major professor), and any other members of the guidance committee indicated by the major professor. The Elton R. Smith Conference Room (Rm. 219A, Agriculture Hall) contains recent theses and Plan B papers. A complete list can be found at <http://www.aec.msu.edu/agecon/theses/index.htm>.
 - c. An electronic copy of the abstract of the research paper or thesis must be provided to the Department Office.
2. For the Plan A thesis, an unbound copy must be submitted to the Graduate School.
3. For the Plan B research paper, a complete electronic copy must be provided to the Department Office in the format required for submission to Ag Econ Search.

F. Recognition of Outstanding M.S. Thesis/Plan B Research Paper

Each year the Department selects the outstanding M.S. thesis or Plan B research paper and recognizes the student's research efforts by placing his/her name on a plaque displayed in the department. In addition, the student honored will receive a monetary award of at least \$250, the amount to be adjusted periodically by the department on the recommendation of the Graduate Policy Committee.

VI. PH.D. PROGRAM DEGREE REQUIREMENTS

A. Introduction

1. University regulations require students to be in residence on campus for two consecutive semesters after first enrollment for doctoral degree credit. Students must complete at least six credits of graduate work in each of the two resident semesters. Students must also register for and successfully complete 24 credits of doctoral dissertation research (AEC 999). The requirements of the Ph.D. degree are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Minimum Requirements for Ph.D. Program

Course Requirements a/	Semester Credits
Economics field	9
Major field in agricultural, food, and resource economics b/	9
Minor field in agricultural, food, and resource economics	6
Second minor field (may be outside AEC)	6
Research methodology (AEC 978)	3
Mathematical economics (EC 811A)	2
Statistics & econometrics (EC 820A and 820B)	6
Additional course in quantitative methods	3
Dissertation research (AEC 999)	24
Total Credits	68

Other Requirements:

- Minimum GPA of 3.0 in the student's approved course program, and in EC 813A
- Successful completion of comprehensive examinations in microeconomic theory, statistics/econometrics, and the major field in agricultural, food, and resource economics
- Presentation and successful defense of the research proposal
- Presentation and successful defense of the dissertation at the final oral examination
- Preparation of a research paper suitable for journal publication

a/ Where a specific course is listed, the phrase "or equivalent" applies.

b/ Including at least one of several specified 900-level courses.

2. Students who enter the master's program in agricultural, food, and resource economics and who subsequently transfer to the doctoral program will be expected to complete the master's degree in agricultural economics. To make satisfactory academic progress, such students must complete all requirements for the master's degree within one year after first enrollment in the doctoral program.
3. Prior research experience is helpful in preparing a doctoral student to complete the dissertation successfully. Students entering the doctoral program without having completed a master's thesis, research paper, or equivalent, will be encouraged to identify, in consultation with their guidance committees, ways of obtaining

appropriate research experience prior to beginning their doctoral dissertation research.

B. Course Program

1. The student is responsible for filing a course program by the end of the second semester of residence. The course program must be approved by the guidance committee, department chairperson, and college dean. The program may be modified later to respond to changing academic opportunities or career interests. Requested changes in the program should be submitted in writing by the major professor to the department chairperson for department and college approval.
2. A grade point average of 3.0 in the student's approved course program is required before the student can be certified for graduation. Collateral courses are not included in this calculation.
3. Graduate credits may be transferred from other accredited institutions of similar quality if they are appropriate to a student's program. Only graduate-level courses in which a 3.0 (B) grade was received will be considered for transfer, except in the case of dual degree programs involving the College of Law, where grades of 2.0 are accepted. There is no maximum number of course credits that may be transferred.
4. Course work is organized around four required fields: economics, major and minor fields in agricultural, food, and resource economics, and a second minor field that may be outside agricultural economics. In addition, a minimum level of competence is required in quantitative methods, mathematics and research methodology. Courses cannot be used to meet more than one field or competency requirement. The field requirements are discussed below in the order shown in Table 2.
5. The economics field is intended to provide Ph.D.-level training in microeconomic theory (two courses) and graduate-level training in macroeconomics (one course). Minimum requirements in economic theory consist of 9 credits. The recommended courses are EC 812A (Microeconomics I), 812B (Microeconomics II), and EC 813A (Macroeconomics I). Students demonstrate competence in economic theory by passing a written comprehensive examination in microeconomics (see VI.G below), and by achieving a minimum grade of 3.0 in EC 813A.
6. The major field in agricultural, food, and resource economics provides a specialization within agricultural, food, and resource economics, normally related to the student's probable dissertation area. A minimum of 9 credits, including at least two core courses and one of several specified 900-level courses, is required. The five fields are:³

³See the document "[Fields of Study in Agricultural, Food, and Resource Economics](#)" for details on relevant courses for each field.

- a. Agribusiness Strategy and Management
 - b. Agricultural Markets and Price Analysis
 - c. Environmental and Resource Economics
 - d. Finance and Production Economics
 - e. International Agricultural Development
7. The minor field in agricultural economics consists of 6 credits chosen from an AEC minor field other than the student's major field. A list of minor fields and corresponding course options can be found in the document "[Fields of Study in Agricultural, Food, and Resource Economics.](#)"
 8. The second minor field of 6 credits consists of courses chosen from agricultural, food, and resource economics or from another field outside of agricultural, food, and resource economics. The student has wide latitude in selecting these courses, but they should be logically related.
 9. Minimum requirements in quantitative methods consist of 11 credits. Students demonstrate competence in quantitative methods by passing a written comprehensive examination in statistics and econometrics (see VI.C below):
 - a. EC 811A (Mathematical Applications in Economics).
 - b. EC 820A (Econometrics IA) and EC 820B (Econometrics IB).
 - c. One additional 800- or 900-level quantitative methods course on a topic such as operations research, systems science, dynamic analysis, or econometrics.
 10. All students are expected to have a knowledge of research methodology and philosophy of inquiry. AEC 978 satisfies this requirement as do some courses in other departments.
 11. Additional courses may be required by the guidance committee, particularly to remedy deficiencies or to assure the student's competence in view of career objectives relative to previous academic study and work or other learning experiences.

C. Comprehensive Examinations

1. Comprehensive examinations are designed to test the student's competence as a professional agricultural, food, and resource economist. Written examinations are required in microeconomic theory, statistics and econometrics, and the major field in agricultural, food, and resource economics. Students satisfy the first two examination

requirements by taking the microeconomics and statistics/econometrics parts of the Economics and Economic Methods (EEM) examination, which is prepared and graded by the Economics Department.⁴ These parts of the EEM exam are based on EC 811A, EC 812A, EC 812B, EC 820A, and EC 820B.

2. The written examination in the major field of agricultural, food, and resource economics will be prepared by an examination committee appointed by the department chairperson. Whenever possible, the chairperson of each examination committee shall not be the major professor of any student taking the exam. At least half of the examination shall consist of common questions; the remainder may be tailored to individual programs. A majority vote of the examination committee is required to pass. The examination chairpersons will give a written report of the examination results to the department chairperson, who will notify the students and their major professors.
3. The written comprehensive examinations are scheduled twice annually, near the beginning of Summer and Fall Semesters. Students must be registered in the semester in which written comprehensive examinations are taken. The microeconomic theory and statistics/econometrics parts of the EEM exam are normally taken together following completion of the relevant course work (see IV.G.1), but students may elect to take these exams at different times. See section VI.C.4.b for academic progress guidelines and requirements related to taking and passing the written comprehensive examinations.
4. The written comprehensive examinations will be evaluated as follows:
 - a. The microeconomics and statistics/econometrics parts of the EEM exam are graded A, B, or F. Doctoral students in Agricultural, Food, and Resource Economics must receive a grade of at least B (including B minus) on both parts.⁵
 - b. The written examination in the major field in agricultural economics will be graded pass with distinction, pass, or fail.

⁴M.S. students are free to take this exam. A failing grade will count as an attempt should the student later request transfer into the PhD program, irrespective of the date of transfer. A passing grade will not guarantee admission or transfer to the Ph.D. program, but will count as meeting the requirements for the exam provided the student applies and is admitted into the PhD program within eighteen months of the exam date. Students who are admitted or transfer to the PhD more than eighteen months after a successful attempt will need to retake and pass the exam.

⁵Students may demonstrate the same level of competence as that required of doctoral students in Economics by taking the full EEM exam and earning a Major Pass, as defined by the EEM exam unless they have taken EC 811B, EC 813A, and EC 813B in preparation for the macroeconomics part of the exam.

- c. Following all written comprehensive exams, students will receive written notification of their results from the department chairperson.
 - d. A passing grade, as defined above, must be earned on each written comprehensive examination. A maximum of two tries is allowed on each examination. Two failures of a given examination constitutes unsatisfactory academic progress and normally leads to termination of the student's program (see section VII.C.6). A student may petition the Graduate Policy Committee to be allowed to take an exam a third time if there is evidence that special circumstances (serious medical conditions or other extraordinary circumstances outside the student's control) have directly and adversely affected his/her comprehensive examination performance.
5. When the student has completed the comprehensive examinations in accordance with 4.d above, the student's major professor reports the results (pass or fail for each examination) by submitting the university form entitled "Record of Comprehensive Examinations" to the department chairperson. After signature at department and college level, copies of this form are provided to the student and major professor.
 6. Students may elect to write additional comprehensive examinations. These additional demonstrated competencies may assist the student in future professional work.

D. Full Time Status and Registration for Comprehensive Exams

1. Full time status for doctoral students is defined as a minimum of 1 credit for those students who:
 - a. Have successfully completed all comprehensive examinations and are actively engaged in dissertation research: or
 - b. Are doing department-approved off-campus fieldwork related to preparation of their dissertation.
2. For students who were enrolled in the Spring and are taking **their comprehensive exams** during the immediate Summer semester, the department can request a waiver of the requirement that the student be enrolled for at least one credit the semester of **the comprehensive exam**. These requests are to be directed to the Graduate School and must be endorsed by the student's department and college. All students defending their thesis or dissertations in the Summer need to be registered for at least one credit during that Summer, regardless of their being enrolled in the preceding Spring semester.

E. Research Proposal and Seminar Requirement

1. Each Ph.D. candidate is required to circulate a written dissertation research proposal and to present a department seminar on the proposed research at an early stage in the research process, normally at the beginning of the fourth academic year, where academic year is defined as Fall, Spring, and Summer Semesters. The principal purpose is to help gain feedback from the guidance committee, other faculty and graduate students, and to ensure that the proposed research problem and methodology are appropriately specified. The candidate must be physically present at a location on the MSU campus for the proposal seminar; remote presentation of proposals is not allowed.
2. Following the seminar, the research proposal must be approved by majority vote of the guidance committee. If the proposal is not approved, the student must present a revised proposal, also for approval by majority vote. A maximum of two tries is allowed, and approval must be obtained by the end of Fall Semester of the student's fourth academic year. The major professor should report the guidance committee's evaluation of the proposed research by submitting a completed copy of the Ph.D. Research Proposal and Seminar Report Form to the department office.

F. Doctoral Dissertation

1. A doctoral dissertation is required for the degree. By University regulation, each student must register for a minimum of 24 credits of AEC 999–Doctoral Dissertation Research prior to awarding of the degree. The guidance committee and student have wide latitude in determining the design and format of the dissertation, but in any case the dissertation should be designed so as to facilitate publication of the results. A common alternative to the traditional dissertation is a set of three related essays written in journal article format and combined in one volume with an introduction and concluding chapter that highlight the essays' common research focus and principal findings. Essays that the student has co-authored while in the doctoral program may be included providing they have been certified by the major professor to be substantially the work of the student.
2. Students must ensure that they comply with the university requirements and guidelines pertaining to use of human subjects and vertebrate animals in research, and to safe use of hazardous materials (see section V.C.2).

G. Research Paper Requirement

During the doctoral program, each student must prepare a research paper suitable for submission to a professional journal. This paper will normally be based on the doctoral dissertation, but it may be based on other research conducted during the candidate's graduate program. The draft research paper must be approved by the student's guidance committee as a condition of degree certification, but need not be accepted for publication.

H. Final Oral Examination

1. Upon completion of the dissertation research, the major professor schedules and chairs a two-hour final oral examination for the student's defense of the dissertation. The thesis defense should be announced to all faculty and graduate students at least a week in advance in the Ag Econ-O-Gram or by e-mail.
 - a. The examination should be scheduled to permit attendance of all guidance committee members. If a member other than the major professor or the dissertation supervisor cannot attend the examination, other modes of faculty participation such as through conference telephone call or written questions and comments may be adopted with the approval of the department chairperson. A minimum of four regular faculty members of the guidance committee must attend the examination. If travel to participate in the defense represents a significant hardship for the student, the student may petition the examination committee and department chair for a remote defense. Approved remote defenses are subject to the following conditions:
 - i. The student must present a seminar that is viewable (either recorded or in person) by the examination committee and other people on the MSU campus.
 - ii. The student must be interactively examined.
 - iii. Logistical arrangements for the defense are the responsibility of the student and committee.
 - b. The final oral examination cannot be conducted before the dissertation is in final draft form unbound. The student should submit the draft dissertation to guidance committee members at least two weeks prior to the examination date. The student must be registered for a minimum of one credit during the semester in which the final oral examination is taken.
 - c. **Research Presentation Requirement.** Each candidate is required to make a twenty- to thirty-minute presentation of his/her research prior to the normal two-hour period of the final oral examination. The research presentation is open to all. Consistent with College policy, interested faculty members not on the guidance committee may participate without vote during the examination that follows the public presentation of the student's research. Graduate students may not attend this examination, however.
2. On the basis of the dissertation and the student's defense of it, the guidance committee either approves or rejects the dissertation. Approval may be subject to conditions. A three-fourths majority vote of the voting examiners, with not more than one dissenting vote from among the Michigan State University regular faculty members of the guidance committee, is sufficient to approve the dissertation and pass the candidate. The candidate may be passed subject to additional work that must be approved by one or more members of the examining committee and the

major professor. If the student is required to make revisions in the dissertation, the faculty member designated by the examining committee to review the revised work is expected to do so in a timely manner, normally within four weeks following the date the revised work is delivered to the faculty member. If the student does not receive a response within four weeks, the student should contact the faculty member or major professor, and if necessary may request assistance from the department chairperson in obtaining a timely decision on the acceptability of the proposed revisions.

I. Preparation and Submission of Final Dissertation

1. The dissertation must be prepared according to the formatting guidelines prescribed by the Graduate School (<http://grad.msu.edu/format.htm>).
2. A bound copy of the dissertation is required for the Department's Elton R. Smith Conference Room, the major professor, the dissertation supervisor (if different from the major professor), and any other members of the guidance committee indicated by the major professor. The student must also submit an unbound copy to the Graduate School. The Elton R. Smith Conference Room (Rm. 219A, Agriculture Hall) contains recent dissertations. A complete list can be found at <http://www.aec.msu.edu/agecon/theses/index.htm>.
3. The student is responsible for distribution of the dissertation abstract to all department faculty. The abstract should indicate the name of the dissertation supervisor, if any, and the name of the major professor. An electronic copy of the abstract must be provided to the Department Office.

J. Recognition of Outstanding Ph.D. Dissertation

Each year the Department selects the outstanding Ph.D. dissertation. The student's recognition and monetary award are the same as for the author of the outstanding M.S. thesis or Plan B research paper (see section V.F).

VII. DEPARTMENT POLICIES: ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

A. Introduction

Careful screening during the admissions process results in selection of students who are well prepared for the program. The faculty and department staff strive to support them and facilitate their success in every way possible. Consequently, only a small number of students encounter significant academic difficulty. At the same time, the integrity of the program and the rights of the student require clear and equitable criteria and procedures for evaluating academic performance. These criteria and procedures are set forth in the rest of section VII.

B. Grades

1. Following university policy, a minimum cumulative grade point average of 3.0 in the student's approved course program is required. A grade of 3.0 or better is required in each course used to satisfy the minimum quantitative methods requirements for the M.S. program (see V.B.9), and in the course used to satisfy the Ph.D. macroeconomics requirement (see VI.B.5).
2. Department and college approval is required to repeat any course in which a grade of 2.0 or 2.5 is earned. When a course is repeated, the last grade replaces the previous grade in computing grade point averages. A course may be repeated only once.
3. A student may have no more than two deferred course grades (identified as DF-Deferred) outstanding at any one time, other than for research credits (AEC 898, 899, and 999).
4. **DF-Deferred grades: The required work must be completed and a grade reported within 6 months with the option of a single six-month extension.** If the required work is not completed within the time limit, the DF will become U-Unfinished and will be changed to DF/U under the numerical and Pass-No Grade (P-N) grading systems, and to DF/NC under the Credit-No Credit (CR-NC) system. This rule does not apply to graduate thesis or dissertation work.

C. Academic Progress: Review Procedures and Criteria

1. All graduate students are entitled to evaluation of "their academic progress, performance, and professional potential" ([GSRR 2.4.8](#)). Regular meetings of students with their guidance committees are encouraged as a constructive and effective means of providing this information, and of addressing any concerns which the student may have.
2. A formal annual review of all graduate students will also be conducted. The procedures for this review are as follows:
 - a. Each student should meet with his/her guidance committee (or major professor if a committee has not yet been designated) to discuss progress, achievements, concerns, and plans for the future. For students with assistantship appointments, the relationship between the student's assistantship assignment and academic program should be discussed. Among other information, the review will take into account the following indicators of student progress:
 - grade point average
 - course load
 - number of deferred courses

- program completion progress (see section C.4 below)
 - b. The results of the review, including comments from both the student and faculty members involved, must be recorded on the appropriate form and submitted to the department chairperson by March 1. The department chairperson may discuss the results of the review with the student's guidance committee in order to reach a joint agreement on the assessment.
 - c. The results of the review will be communicated to the student in writing by the department chairperson, with copies for the major professor and the student's educational record. If the student wishes to challenge the results of the review, he/she may send the challenge in writing to the department chairperson, for inclusion in the student's educational record. Students have the right to inspect their own educational records ([GSRR 3.2.3](#)).
3. The academic progress and performance of a student may also be evaluated at other times of the year, e.g., following the written comprehensive examinations.
4. Detailed program timetables and progress milestones for both master's and doctoral students are contained in Annex A. University time limits are contained in the document *Academic Programs*. The department's progress milestones are intended to encourage timely degree completion by students, and to permit clear and equitable evaluation of students' academic progress. Satisfactory academic progress is defined as progress that meets the following criteria, where "academic year" is defined as Fall, Spring, and Summer Semesters:⁶
- a. Master's students will:
 - 1) complete the Plan A thesis or Plan B research paper within two years after first enrollment.
 - 2) if applicable, complete all M.S. degree requirements within one year after first enrollment in the doctoral program.
 - b. Doctoral students will:
 - 1) pass the written comprehensive examinations in microeconomic theory and statistics/econometrics prior to the beginning of the third academic year, with a limit of two tries on each examination;

⁶For students entering the doctoral program in Spring or Summer Semester, the academic progress clock will not start until Fall Semester of that year.

- 2) pass the written comprehensive examination in the agricultural, food, and resource economics major field by Fall Semester of the fourth academic year,⁷ with a limit of two tries on the examination;
 - 3) present and obtain guidance committee approval of the dissertation research proposal by the end of Fall Semester of the fourth academic year, with a limit of two tries on the research proposal presentation.
 - 4) complete the dissertation and the research paper by the end of Fall Semester of the fifth academic year.
5. Adjusting the Academic Progress Timetable. The above schedule of academic progress may be adjusted to accommodate students with special circumstances. Examples are serious medical conditions, pregnancy, or an approved part-time plan of study. Students may also request a leave of absence either to address matters unrelated to their academic program (military service, family obligations, financial difficulties) or to accept professionally related employment for an extended period away from the university. Time spent during approved leaves of absence will not be counted when evaluating academic progress. University time limits continue to apply. Decisions regarding special circumstances or leaves of absence shall be made by the department chairperson after consultation with the student's guidance committee. A written record of any approved adjustments to a student's academic progress timetable will be placed in the student's academic file.
6. Unsatisfactory Academic Progress.
- a. Occasionally a student may fail to meet one of the academic progress milestones. These cases fall into two categories:
 - 1) Category 1: cases where the student will be given a written warning by the department chairperson in which the condition(s) and the time period for resolving the problem are spelled out. If the conditions are not met within the specified time period, the student will receive an evaluation of unsatisfactory academic progress, and the student will no longer be eligible for departmental assistantship or fellowship support. An illustrative but not exhaustive list of academic difficulties of this type follows:

⁷Ph.D. students with recent master's-level courses in economics, mathematics, and statistics, especially students transferring from MSU master's programs in agricultural economics or economics, will often be able to prepare themselves to pass the microeconomics and statistics/-econometrics exams at the end of their first academic year, and the AEC major field exam at the end of their second academic year.

- a) The student's cumulative grade point average in his/her approved course program falls below 3.0. The student will be given two semesters in which to bring his/her GPA up to 3.0.
 - b) The student needs to retake a course, either because a grade below 2.0 was earned, or because a grade below 3.0 was earned on a course used to satisfy the quantitative methods requirements. The student will be given an appropriate period, based on course scheduling, in which to retake the course.
 - c) The student accumulates three deferred (DF) course grades. The student will be required to convert the deferred grades to satisfactory numerical grades (2.0 for graduate credit; 3.0 for the specified courses in mathematics, statistics, and econometrics) within an appropriate period, normally one semester, based on instructor or course availability.
 - d) A master's student does not complete all M.S. degree requirements within one year of the effective date of enrollment in the doctoral program.
 - e) A student does not complete the M.S. thesis or Plan B paper, or the doctoral dissertation, or the doctoral research paper, by the deadlines stated in section VII.C.4.
- 2) Category 2: cases where the student has two tries to meet a particular requirement, or must do so within a given time period. An exhaustive list of these cases is given below. Students are responsible for knowing these requirements and how to meet them. No warning letters will be sent to students who fail to meet such a requirement on the first try, or who delay action to the point that a second try cannot be completed within the stipulated deadline. The academic difficulties indicated below will lead directly to an evaluation of unsatisfactory academic progress, and ineligibility for departmental assistantship or fellowship support.
- a) A doctoral student does not pass a written comprehensive examination by the deadline stated in section VII.C.4.b.
 - b) A doctoral student does not succeed in passing a required comprehensive examination in two tries.
 - c) A doctoral student does not obtain approval for his/her research proposal by the deadline stated in section VII.C.4.b.
 - d) A doctoral student does not succeed in gaining approval for his/her research proposal in two tries.
- b. Students whose academic progress is unsatisfactory will be given a written warning. The student's situation will then be reviewed by the department

chairperson, in consultation with the student's guidance committee.⁸ This review will have one of two possible outcomes:

- 1) Unless special circumstances are sufficient to justify continuation, the student's program will be terminated. Special circumstances include serious medical conditions, or extraordinary situations outside the student's control, that directly and adversely affect academic performance.
 - 2) If special circumstances are sufficient to provide a legitimate explanation for the student's unsatisfactory performance, and if there is a reasonable prospect that the student will regain a satisfactory level of academic performance, the student will be given a written notice of condition(s) to meet and a time period in which to meet them. The student's unsatisfactory progress evaluation and ineligibility for departmental assistantship or fellowship support will remain in force during this period. Successful completion of these conditions will restore the student's good academic standing and eligibility for departmental assistantship or fellowship support. Failure to meet these conditions will result in termination of the student's program without further review.
7. Dismissal from the Program. While such cases are expected to be infrequent, a student with unsatisfactory academic performance or progress may be dismissed from the program at the end of any semester, based on the procedures discussed in section 6 above. In the event of a dismissal, the department chairperson will notify the student, the student's major professor, and the dean of the college. A student who is dismissed from the doctoral program will have the option of switching to the master's program. In such cases, the department chairperson will inform the student in writing of the time period in which the master's degree requirements must be completed.

D. Appeal Process

As noted in section I, under extremely unusual circumstances a student or a guidance committee may petition the Graduate Policy Committee of the department for a waiver or modification of these policies for the specific student, subject to approval by the department chairperson. Students may also follow the grievance procedure specified in section IX below and further elaborated in section 5.3 of the [GSRR](#).

VIII. DEPARTMENT POLICIES: RESEARCH INTEGRITY

⁸In the case of a student who has petitioned the Graduate Policy Committee (GPC) for permission to take a comprehensive examination a third time, the review will be conducted by the GPC.

- A. The document [Guidelines for Integrity in Research and Creative Endeavors](#) is provided to all faculty members and new graduate students. The concepts and principles contained in this document are reviewed during the orientation program for new students. Students and faculty members share responsibility for ensuring adherence to these guidelines.
- B. The above guidelines (p. 12) outline and discuss eight key principles for research integrity:
1. Honesty in proposing, performing, and reporting research, including storing and documenting primary data.
 2. Recognition of prior work.
 3. Confidentiality in peer review.
 4. Disclosure of potential conflicts of interest.
 5. Compliance with institutional and sponsor requirements.
 6. Protection of human subjects and humane care of animals in the conduct of research.
 7. Collegiality in scholarly interactions and sharing of resources.
 8. Adherence to fair and open relationships between senior scholars and their coworkers.

Principles 1, 2, 6, and 7 are most commonly relevant for graduate students. Section V.C.2 above contains more information on guidelines for protection of human subjects and vertebrate animals in the conduct of research.

- C. Violations of the principles of responsible conduct of research may range from questionable research practices to misconduct. As defined in the research integrity guidelines (p. 14), misconduct includes “fabrication (making up data and recording or reporting them), falsification (manipulating research materials such that the research is not accurately represented in the record), and plagiarism (appropriation of another person’s ideas, processes, results, or words without giving appropriate credit).”
- D. Disciplinary action associated with a finding of misconduct may include dismissal of a student or revocation of a degree.

IX. DEPARTMENT POLICIES: STUDENT CONDUCT AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

- A. The [GSRR](#) (1.2) notes that graduate students have both rights and responsibilities. Rights include the right to learn. Responsibilities include the responsibility to refrain from interfering with the rights of others, harassing other students, faculty or staff, or misusing department resources.
- B. Students share with faculty the responsibility to maintain an atmosphere conducive to teaching and learning, to maintain the integrity of scholarship and grades, and to maintain standards of professional behavior and relationships based on mutual trust and

civility ([GSRR 2.3](#)). Failure on the part of a student to meet these responsibilities may result in dismissal from the program.

- C. The procedure for resolving conflicts between a graduate student and his/her major professor or guidance committee, or between the student and another faculty member or department administrator, is outlined in general in Article 5 of the [GSRR](#) and more specifically in the Department By-Laws, Article VI, Section 3.a.7. Essential elements of the procedure are as follows:
1. It is recommended that the student first seek resolution and redress informally through discussion with the appropriate individual(s). Students are also encouraged to contact the University [Ombudsman](#), who can provide independent and confidential advice.
 2. If informal resolution cannot be obtained, a formal written grievance may be sent to the department chairperson, who will convene a department hearing board that consists of two faculty and two student members of the Graduate Policy Committee plus the department chairperson or representative.
 3. The findings of the department hearing board may be appealed to the college-level hearing board ([GSRR 5.4.12](#)).

X. GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIP POLICY⁹

A. Basis for and Terms of Appointment

1. Types of Assistantships

Departmental assistantships include teaching or research assistantships. Assistantship responsibilities are differentiated by the type of assistantship received. Assistantships, regardless of type, are expected to provide a learning experience that will contribute to the student's total graduate program.

a. Teaching Assistantships

Teaching assistants assist a faculty member to present a course. In so doing the assistant gains an understanding of the teaching process. Assistants may take major responsibility for a course or a section of a course. In such a case a faculty member will be responsible for the grade distribution and will also be available to provide advice and guidance to the graduate assistant. Alternatively, a teaching assistant may assist students, develop exercises and/or examinations, and grade papers under the direction of the faculty member. Various intermediate arrangements may be specified for any particular teaching assistantship.

b. Research Assistantships

Research assistants work on approved and funded projects in the department. The student is expected to perform whatever reasonable research tasks the assistantship supervisor may assign. A student may transfer from one assistantship supervisor to another if such a transfer is acceptable to both the new supervisor and the department. The assistantship activities may contribute directly or indirectly to the preparation of a Plan B paper, M.S. thesis, or Ph.D. dissertation.

c. Other Assistantship Responsibilities

Regardless of the source of funding, graduate assistants are expected to contribute to the professional activities of the department. This means that

⁹This policy covers only research assistants and teaching assistants who by virtue of their duties are excluded from the Graduate Employees Union (GEU) bargaining unit (coded on the appointment form as R and TE, respectively). Excluded categories of graduate assistants are listed in Article 4 of the GEU contract at <http://grad.msu.edu/geu/agree.pdf>. Union teaching assistants (coded as T) are governed entirely by the policies and procedures set forth in the GEU contract.

graduate assistants will perform such duties as assisting at Ag Expo, conferences and other similar duties.

2. Criteria for Selection

Assistantship recipients are selected from those submitting applications based on the needs of the department, the applicant's previous academic record, work experience, letters of recommendation and Graduate Record Examination scores. To be employed as a TA, international students must meet a minimum standard of English language fluency (see <http://www.msu.edu/~taprog/info/testing.html>). In addition to these criteria, the department takes into account the quality of the previous educational institution, the potential of the student with respect to research accomplishment and future professional achievement, and the student's area of research interest relative to the availability of funds for specific research projects.

3. Stipends

Stipends are established each year prior to Fall Semester. Stipend information can be obtained in the Department office. Stipends are subject to taxation in accordance with Federal and State laws.

4. Assistantship Obligation of the Student

Acceptance of a graduate assistantship creates an obligation to perform research, teaching or other activities in furtherance of departmental programs. For example, students with a one-half time appointment are expected to spend one-half time (20 hours per week) on these activities. The department attempts to allow the student flexibility in meeting this obligation. If the student puts greater emphasis on course work during a given semester, then more time on assistantship duties at other times is required to discharge the assistantship obligation.

Before leaving Michigan State University, graduate assistants are to deliver draft publications as appropriate, given the assistantship duties. These draft publications may be journal articles, extension leaflets, computer software documentation, etc. The assistant and the supervisor should agree on the nature of appropriate publication and the designation of authorship as part of the assistantship planning process. Students who publish assistantship-related research after leaving campus are expected to appropriately acknowledge the sources of financial support for that research.

5. Assistantship Obligation of the Department

The duties of the assistant will be supervised by a qualified person. The graduate assistant is provided a desk and office space (to the extent permitted by the space available to the department) and access to a computer as needed for assistantship

work. Specific desk assignments are made by the Graduate Student Organization. Supplies for use in fulfilling assistantship responsibilities are also furnished.

The graduate assistant is allowed 14 days (10 working days) of vacation time annually, plus University holidays. Semester breaks are considered duty time. The assistantship supervisor should be informed of vacation plans and may request rescheduling if the timing interferes with fulfillment of assistantship obligations.

6. Duration of Appointment

This section applies to graduate assistants who are officially enrolled as students in agricultural economics and funded by the department. Students in other departments may be appointed as graduate assistants. Their appointments terminate as stated on the appointment form. Requests for extension must be in the department office at least four weeks prior to the end of an appointment.

The annual review of assistantship performance is conducted during March. The purpose of this review is to assess performance of graduate assistants and to review funding availability for the next academic year. Each graduate assistant's accomplishments and concerns, and the assistantship supervisor's evaluation of the student's assistantship performance, will be reported on the graduate student annual review form and submitted to the department chairperson by March 1. Graduate assistants are notified by March 31 of the status of their assistantships for the next year.

Assistantships supported by general Agricultural Experiment Station (AES) research funds will typically be of short duration (1-3 semesters). Such assistantships are used primarily to support students during their first year, with the expectation that subsequent appointments will be funded under a specific contract- or grant-funded research project, or to support students who are in transition from one specific research project to another, or whose specific research funding has run out towards the end of their program.

Teaching assistantships are normally offered on a one-semester only basis with no plans for renewal. All assistantships awarded on contracts and grants are subject to the availability of funding from that particular contract or grant and may terminate earlier than the number of semesters specified below.

To ensure that funds are used effectively, and that assistants move toward completion of their programs, the department limits the number of semesters (including Summer Semester) a student can hold a graduate assistantship or fellowship. For the student on an M.S. program, the limit is six semesters. For the student embarking on a Ph.D. program, the limit is twelve semesters. For a student on a program leading to both an M.S. degree and a Ph.D. degree at Michigan State University, the limit is 15 semesters.

Graduate assistantships awarded to M.S. students are not automatically extended if a student is permitted to transfer to the Ph.D. program. Continuation of the assistantship should be requested in writing by the student. The department will confirm the extension in writing, if approved.

A student who is unable to complete the program in the allotted time may request an extension of the assistantship. The request will be reviewed by the department chairperson. Each case will be considered individually, taking into account the recommendations of the assistantship supervisor, the quality of the student's graduate course program, the amount of work involved in a thesis project, the productivity of the graduate assistant and other pertinent factors.

7. 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.

B. Termination of Appointment

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

2. 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 (see section VII.C, Academic Progress: Review Procedures and Criteria).

Whenever questions of assistantship performance arise, the department chairperson will consider each case on its merits, giving consideration to the student's assistantship productivity, course pattern and grades, recommendations of faculty, number of deferred or repeat credits and any other pertinent evidence. If a student's academic program is terminated, the assistantship is terminated.

3. Violations

The department may also terminate an assistantship in cases of violation of the General Student Regulations contained in the Spartan Life handbook, or of the provisions concerning graduate student responsibilities contained in the document "Graduate Student Rights and Responsibilities." This action may be initiated by the department chairperson or by the student's major professor or assistantship supervisor.

4. Budgetary 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.

C. Grievance Procedure

Graduate assistants may follow the normal department grievance procedure as specified in the document "Graduate Student Rights and Responsibilities."

D. External Fellowships

Receipt of externally funded fellowships by students who have written their own applications worth at least \$20,000 (direct costs) now makes the students eligible to be considered for an in-state tuition rate. The in-state tuition rate applies only to the semesters during which the student is supported by the fellowship. This policy applies only to grants funded through a competitive process by a US institution, agency, or foundation. Funds obtained through non-competitive processes (e.g., need-based fellowships) or from international sources do not qualify the students for in-state tuition rates. For more information contact the MSU Graduate School (<http://www.msu.edu/user/gradschl/>) or the department's Director of Graduate Studies.

ANNEX A: GRADUATE PROGRAM TIMETABLES

The following are milestones to be used for degree program planning. Specific criteria for determining satisfactory academic progress are contained in Section VII, Academic Performance.

M.S. Program

Year 1

- Fall and Spring Semesters: course work, including mathematics, statistics, and economics requirements
- Summer Semester:
 - . course work or internship

Year 2

- Fall Semester: course work
- Spring Semester: final course work and start of Plan A thesis or Plan B research paper
- Summer Semester:
 - . completion of Plan A thesis or Plan B research paper

Ph.D. Program

Year 1

- Fall and Spring Semesters: course work, including mathematics and statistics requirements
- Summer Semester:
 - . beginning of semester (May): Ph.D. students may take the microeconomics or statistics/econometrics exam for the first time¹⁰
 - . course work or internship
 - . retake of microeconomics or statistics/econometrics exam in August, if desired

Year 2

- Fall and Spring Semesters:
 - . completion of mathematics, statistics, and microeconomic theory course work
- Summer Semester:
 - . End of May: take microeconomic theory and statistics/econometrics exams, if not taken in Year 1
 - . internship or prelim preparation
 - . retake, if necessary, of microeconomics and statistics/econometrics exams in August

¹⁰Ph.D. students with recent master's-level courses in economics, mathematics, and statistics, especially students transferring from MSU master's programs in agricultural, food, and resource economics or economics, will often be able to prepare themselves to pass the microeconomics and statistics/econometrics exams at the end of their first academic year.

Year 3

- Fall Semester: course work
- Spring Semester:
 - . course work, including AEC 978
- Summer semester:
 - . AEC major field prelim at the beginning of semester (May)¹¹
 - . meeting with guidance committee to discuss dissertation research plan
 - . preparation of research proposal
 - . preparation, if necessary, for retake of AEC major field prelim

Year 4

- Fall Semester:
 - . retake, if necessary, of AEC prelim at beginning of semester
 - . research proposal presented early in semester
 - . second presentation, if necessary, completed successfully by end of semester
 - . initiation of research
- Spring and Summer Semesters: continued work on dissertation

Year 5

- Fall Semester: completion of dissertation by end of Fall Semester

Total Elapsed Time = four years (48 months) plus 1 semester, i.e., roughly 4.5 years.

¹¹Students who pass their microeconomics and statistics/econometrics exams in their first year will generally be able to pass the agricultural, food, and resource economics major field exam at the end of their second year.

ANNEX B: CHECKLIST OF FORMS AND DEADLINES a/

[Forms in brackets are needed only in the situation indicated]

Semester	M.S. Program	Ph.D. Program
Year 1		
Fall		
Spring	<input type="checkbox"/> Major professor <input type="checkbox"/> Guidance committee <input type="checkbox"/> Course program <input type="checkbox"/> Grad. student annual review (March 1)	<input type="checkbox"/> Major professor <input type="checkbox"/> Guidance committee <input type="checkbox"/> Course program (Report of Guidance Committee) <input type="checkbox"/> Grad. student annual review (March 1)
Summer	<input type="checkbox"/> [Request to transfer to Ph.D. program]	
Year 2		
Fall		
Spring	<input type="checkbox"/> [M.S. research supervisor] <input type="checkbox"/> IRB application, if needed b/	
Summer	<input type="checkbox"/> Grad. student annual review (March 1)	<input type="checkbox"/> Grad. student annual review (March 1)
Summer	<input type="checkbox"/> Final oral exam report <input type="checkbox"/> Bound copy of thesis/Plan B, electronic abstract, electronic Plan B, to Dept. <input type="checkbox"/> [Specialization certification] <input type="checkbox"/> Application for graduation <input type="checkbox"/> Forwarding address	
Year 3		
Spring		<input type="checkbox"/> Grad. student annual review (March 1)
Summer		<input type="checkbox"/> Record of comprehensive examinations
Year 4		
Fall		
Spring		<input type="checkbox"/> Research proposal and seminar report <input type="checkbox"/> [Ph.D. dissertation supervisor] <input type="checkbox"/> IRB application, if needed b/
Spring		<input type="checkbox"/> Grad. student annual review (March 1)
Year 5		
Spring		
Spring		<input type="checkbox"/> Grad. student annual review (March 1) <input type="checkbox"/> Final oral exam for Ph.D. <input type="checkbox"/> Research paper certification <input type="checkbox"/> [Specialization certification] <input type="checkbox"/> Thesis & electronic abstract to Department <input type="checkbox"/> Application for graduation <input type="checkbox"/> Forwarding address

a/ Forms are available on-line (<http://www.aec.msu.edu/agecon/grad/forms/index.htm>) or from the Graduate Secretary, Rm. 202, Ag. Hall. Forms in **bold** are available from the Graduate School On-line Forms Web site: <http://www.msu.edu/~gradschl/forms.htm>

b/ Application available from the IRB office (202 Olds Hall) or Web site at link indicated below: <http://www.humanresearch.msu.edu/>