

# **Departmental Graduate Handbook**

**Department of Kinesiology  
Mississippi State University**

**2025-2026**

**A supplement to the  
MSU Graduate Catalog**

**“This student handbook is intended as a guideline to departmental procedures and best practices and is subject to change at any time. All official policies and procedures are found in the Graduate Catalog of Mississippi State University which may be found at <http://catalog.msstate.edu/graduate/>.**

**Students must refer to the Graduate Catalog for the term in which they were admitted to their program.”**

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## INTRODUCTION

The Department of Kinesiology Graduate Handbook contains policies and procedures pertinent to graduate study in the Department of Kinesiology. Students and faculty should be aware that this publication is a supplement to the information contained in the MSU Graduate Catalog. All students and faculty should be aware of the university's policies and procedures outlined in the MSU Graduate Catalog, which is available online: <http://catalog.msstate.edu/graduate/>. Furthermore, students and faculty should be familiar with the graduate school calendar for each specific term. The graduate school calendar contains important information related to deadlines each semester for the following procedures: comprehensive exams, thesis defense, dissertation defense, application for graduation, and submission of a thesis or dissertation to the library. This calendar can be found at the following link: [Graduate School Calendar | The Graduate School - Mississippi State University \(msstate.edu\)](http://catalog.msstate.edu/graduate/).

**The primary responsibility for being knowledgeable of and adhering to university and departmental policies, regulations, deadlines, and degree requirements rests with the student.**

## **SECTION 1: GRADUATE PROGRAM AREAS IN THE DEPARTMENT OF KINESIOLOGY**

### **Master of Science Degree Concentrations**

The Department of Kinesiology offers four master's degree concentrations: disability studies, exercise physiology, sport administration, and sport pedagogy. The concentration in **disability studies** prepares students to become knowledgeable professionals who can address the physical activity and rehabilitation needs of persons experiencing disabilities. The concentration in **exercise physiology** prepares students for careers in fitness and allied health care professions. The concentration in **sport administration** prepares students for careers in the sport industry, including positions with professional, collegiate, and recreational sport organizations. The concentration in **sport pedagogy** prepares students for leadership roles as coaches, physical educators, and K-12 athletic directors. These concentrations also prepare students for advanced study at the doctoral level.

### **Doctor of Philosophy Degree Concentrations**

The Department of Kinesiology offers two doctoral degree concentrations: exercise science and sport studies. The focus of the **exercise science** concentration is the scientific study of how biological systems function during physical activity, exercise, and sport, emphasizing applications to both clinical and healthy populations. The **sport studies** concentration involves studying sport from an interdisciplinary perspective, encompassing such specializations as sport management, sport pedagogy, sport sociology, and sport philosophy, among others.

## SECTION 2: STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION OF THE DEPARTMENT

### Mission Statement

The mission of the Department of Kinesiology is to prepare aspiring professionals and emerging scholars, conduct and disseminate research, and provide service in the areas of physical activity, exercise, and sport.

### Organization

The Department is an administrative and programmatic unit within the College of Education at Mississippi State University. The Department is composed of two divisions: Exercise Science and Sport Studies. Together, these divisions house four master's degree concentrations and two doctoral degree concentrations:

- Disability Studies (M.S.) – Division of Exercise Science
- Exercise Physiology (M.S.) – Division of Exercise Science
- Sport Administration (M.S.) – Division of Sport Studies
- Sport Pedagogy (M.S.) – Division of Sport Studies
- Exercise Science (Ph.D.) – Division of Exercise Science
- Sport Studies (Ph.D.) – Division of Sport Studies

### Governance

- The **graduate faculty** of the Department administer the graduate programs within the Department. Appointment to the graduate faculty is administered by the Dean of the Graduate School. The necessary request forms for appointment to the graduate faculty can be found on the MSU Office of the Graduate School website (<http://grad.msstate.edu/forms/>).
- The **Departmental Graduate Committee** consists of a coordinator and five additional graduate faculty members.
- The **Graduate Coordinator** shall be appointed by the **Department Head** for an unspecified term of service.
- Should a graduate committee member depart the University or resign from the committee, the Department Head or the Graduate Coordinator shall appoint an interim member to complete the term of the vacated seat.

### Kinesiology Graduate Coordinator

The Chairperson of the Departmental Graduate Committee performs the following tasks:

1. Chairs the Department of Kinesiology Graduate Committee and graduate faculty meetings;
2. Maintains graduate student files with the assistance of the Academic Records Assistant;
3. Schedules and conducts at least two graduate faculty meetings per academic year (usually fall & spring semesters);

4. Conducts the daily business of the Department of Kinesiology graduate programs under the auspices of the Graduate Committee according to the Graduate Handbook of the Department of Kinesiology and the Graduate Catalog;
5. Conducts indoctrination sessions about policies and procedures related to the graduate degree programs for new faculty and students;
6. Acts as liaison between the Graduate Committee of the Department, the Executive Council of the Department of Kinesiology, and the Graduate School.

### **Departmental Graduate Committee**

The Departmental Graduate Committee is responsible for the conduct and administration of the Department's graduate concentrations. The committee formulates policies and procedures relevant to the Department's graduate programs within the guidelines established by the Graduate School and the graduate faculty of the Department of Kinesiology. In addition, the Department's Graduate Committee is responsible for the following:

- Maintaining records and monitoring matriculation of each graduate student through graduation insuring compliance with established policies and procedures;
- Reviewing applications for admission into the different concentrations of the Department of Kinesiology graduate programs;
- Assisting in recruitment of graduate students to graduate concentrations;
- Reviewing new course proposals;
- Evaluating old and new areas of specializations;
- Evaluating and monitoring seminar course offerings;
- Assisting graduate faculty to maintain credentials appropriate for their graduate appointment and involvement in the graduate program.

## SECTION 3: ADMISSIONS PROCESS

### Admission to Doctoral Degree Programs

Prior to formally applying to the doctoral program, students should familiarize themselves with the research interests of graduate faculty members in the Department of Kinesiology and identify a faculty member whose research agenda aligns with their interests. A prospective applicant should then contact that faculty member to discuss his/her “fit” with the faculty member’s research interests. If possible, prospective applicants are encouraged to visit the MSU campus. When an informal understanding is reached regarding the student’s suitability to enter the doctoral program under the guidance of the faculty member, the student may then formally apply to the Graduate School. This does not guarantee a student admission to the doctoral program, but it is a necessary step prior to the formal application.

The following items are required in applying to doctoral degree programs in the Department of Kinesiology:

1. A completed MSU Graduate School application form
2. Official transcripts from all institutions attended since high school; students must have completed a master’s degree prior to being admitted to the doctoral program.
3. Graduate Record Examination (GRE) General Test scores (this requirement has currently been suspended by the graduate school)
4. Three professional letters of recommendation; **at least two letters should be from university professors from whom the student has taken courses or worked with in a research capacity.**
5. A written statement of purpose, which should clearly explain the applicant’s research interests and highlight how these interests align with faculty members in the department, particularly the faculty member who the applicant wishes to serve as his/her advisor.
6. An academic writing sample (e.g., a published research article, thesis, or other academic paper)
7. A curriculum vitae
8. TOEFL or IELTS scores (only required for international applicants whose native language is not English; refer to the MSU Graduate Catalog)

The admissions process is competitive. Applicants should be aware that faculty members only advise a small number of graduate students at a time, and more individuals apply to the program than the program can accept. Competitive applicants will generally have a GPA of 3.5 or better in their prior graduate coursework. Because of the competitive nature of admissions, it is recommended that individuals apply as far in advance of a deadline as possible.

Application deadlines for graduate study at Mississippi State University are as follows:

Applying for	Domestic Deadline	International Deadline
Fall Semester	August 1	May 1
Spring Semester	December 1	October 1
Summer Term	May 15	March 1

An international student applying for admission must score a minimum of 550 PBT (213 CBT or 79 iBT) on the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or a minimum of 6.5 on the International English Language Testing Systems (IELTS) in addition to meeting all other admission criteria.

### **Admission to Master's Degree Programs**

The following items are required in applying to master's degree programs in the Department of Kinesiology:

1. A completed MSU Graduate School application form
2. Official transcripts from all institutions attended since high school
3. Graduate Record Examination (GRE) General Test scores (this requirement has currently been suspended by the graduate school)
4. Three professional letters of recommendation; **at least two individuals providing letters should be able to specifically comment about the applicant's academic ability (e.g., former professors)**
5. A written statement of purpose, which should highlight the applicant's qualifications, abilities, and academic/professional background; the statement should reflect a strong sense of career direction relevant to the program the applicant is seeking to enter.
6. A resume/curriculum vitae

The admissions process is competitive. Positions within the programs are limited, and more individuals may apply than are able to be accepted. Competitive applicants will usually have a GPA of 3.0 or better in their final 60 undergraduate hours as well as scores of 145 or greater on the verbal and quantitative reasoning sections and 3.5 or greater on the analytical writing portion of the GRE exam. An applicant's statement of purpose, letters of recommendation, and professional experience are also considered in the admissions process.

Application deadlines for graduate study at Mississippi State University are as follows:

Applying for	Domestic Deadline	International Deadline
Fall Semester	August 1	May 1
Spring Semester	December 1	October 1
1st Summer Term	May 15	March 1

Because of the competitive nature of admissions, it is recommended that individuals apply as far in advance of a deadline as possible. Students who wait until near the application deadline to apply may find there are no remaining spaces available in the program.

An international student applying for admission must score a minimum of 550 PBT (213 CBT or 79 iBT) on the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or a minimum of 6.5 on the International English Language Testing Systems (IELTS) in addition to meeting all other admission criteria.

### **Changing Concentrations After Being Admitted to the Department**

If a student wishes to change concentrations after having been admitted to a master's degree program in the Department of Kinesiology, the student must write a new statement of purpose that provides a detailed rationale about why he/she wishes to change concentrations. The student must also obtain a letter of support from his/her current advisor and a prospective advisor in the new concentration the student wishes to enter. The new statement of purpose and letters of support should be submitted to the graduate coordinator via email. The student's request will be reviewed by the graduate committee at its next regularly-scheduled meeting.

### **Unclassified Admission**

Students may obtain unclassified admission status following the procedures outlined in the MSU Graduate Catalog (<http://catalog.msstate.edu/graduate/admissions-information/admission-procedure/status/>). Individuals admitted with unclassified status are able to take graduate courses, but they must obtain permission to receive an override from the instructor of any course they wish to take. Students should realize that faculty members are under no obligation to provide overrides to unclassified students. Further, students should realize that there is no guarantee that they will be officially admitted to a graduate program after spending one or more semesters as an unclassified student.

## **SECTION 4: SELECTING AN ADVISOR AND PROGRAM OF STUDY**

### **Selecting an Advisor and Committee – Master’s Students**

After being admitted to a master’s degree program, each student must contact a graduate faculty member to ask if he/she is willing to serve as his/her advisor (the advisor is also referred to as the “Major Professor”). Ideally, the student should select an advisor whose expertise and/or research agenda aligns closely with the student’s interests. Students should meet with their advisor regularly each semester to ensure that they are adequately progressing toward degree completion. A student may change his/her advisor if there is agreement between all parties involved (i.e., the student, the former advisor, and the new advisor). In some cases, students may have “Co-Major Professors”.

Master’s degree students must have at least three committee members (i.e., a “Major Professor” plus two additional committee members, or two “Co-Major Professors” and one additional committee member). The student’s advisor (“Major Professor”) and committee members will be noted on the “Committee Request” form, which can be completed electronically from the Graduate School website (<http://grad.msstate.edu/forms/>). It is the student’s responsibility to ensure that the form is completed correctly and that all necessary signatures are obtained.

### **Selecting an Advisor and Committee – Doctoral Students**

As noted in the admissions process for doctoral degree programs (see section 3 in this handbook), students must obtain approval to enter the doctoral program under the direction of a specific faculty member prior to being formally admitted. Once a student is officially admitted to the doctoral program, this faculty member will serve as the student’s advisor (the advisor is also referred to as the “Major Professor”). In some cases, students may have “Co-Major Professors”.

Doctoral degree students must have at least four total committee members (i.e., a “Major Professor” plus three additional committee members, or two “Co-Major Professors” and two additional committee members). At least 50% of the committee must be composed of graduate faculty members from the Department of Kinesiology. If the student is seeking a minor, then the student must have a minimum of five committee members, and at least one of the committee members must come from the student’s minor department. The student’s advisor (“Major Professor”) and committee members will be noted on the “Committee Request” form, which can be accessed on the Graduate School website (<http://grad.msstate.edu/forms/>). It is the student’s responsibility to ensure that the committee request form is completed correctly and that all necessary signatures are obtained.

### **Program of Study**

Each concentration at the master’s and doctoral level provides a curricular outline for a program of study. The student has the opportunity, in conjunction with his/her advisor and committee, to

make substitutions in the program of study. The student's official program of study will be maintained in their Degree Works record. Any substitutions must be approved by the student's major professor and their committee, and the changes should be sent via email to the department graduate coordinator for the changes to be made in Degree Works.

## SECTION 5: ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AND PROGRESS THROUGH THE PROGRAM

Students should be familiar with the academic performance guidelines outlined in the **MSU Graduate Catalog** (see the section entitled "Graduate School General Degree Completion Requirements" in the table of contents and, specifically, the subsection entitled "Grades and Degree Completion"), which is available online: <http://catalog.msstate.edu/graduate/>. **Students are expected to make progress toward their degree, which includes academic performance and requirements outlined in the graduate catalog, and specifically for doctoral students, with their research performance. Each student should discuss with their major professor the research expectations for them each semester and their academic plan of study. This includes the number of research projects they are expected to assist with, the number of research projects they are expected to lead, and the number of papers they are expected to submit for publication. It is not possible to progress towards a doctoral degree without fulfilling the research expectations outlined by the student's major professor and advisory committee. Students who do not meet the requirements for degree completion outlined in the Graduate Catalog or by their major professor/advisory committee will be dismissed from the graduate program.** Students who are dismissed may appeal their dismissal by following the appeal procedures outlined in the Graduate Catalog (see the subsection entitled "Academic Probation, Dismissal, and Appeal").

## SECTION 6: DEGREE COMPLETION – MASTER’S DEGREES

Each of the master’s degree concentrations in the Department of Kinesiology offer three concluding options: (1) a thesis, (2) a directed individual study, **or** (3) an internship. Each student should pursue a concluding option (in consultation with his/her advisor and committee members) that coincides with their academic/professional goals and interests. Students who pursue the directed individual study option or the internship option must also successfully complete comprehensive exams prior to graduation.

### Thesis Option

A thesis is an original research project of substantial complexity and quality completed by the student as the culmination of his/her master’s program of study. Students should select a research topic and conduct the study in close consultation with their advisor and committee members. The steps involved in completing a thesis include: (1) obtaining approval from the advisor and committee members for a research proposal, (2) obtaining any necessary approval from the university Institutional Review Board, (3) collecting data, (4) analyzing data, (5) writing the thesis, (6) public presentation of the thesis and defense before the supervisory committee, and (7) final submission of the approved thesis to the MSU Library. **At least three weeks prior to the defense, the student must provide the completed thesis manuscript to all committee members. The student should work with their major professor on the document prior to providing the document to the rest of the committee. The student’s committee will evaluate the document to determine if the document is satisfactory and that the student may progress to the thesis defense. The committee may also determine that the thesis document is not at an acceptable level, and therefore the student is not ready to progress to their thesis defense. If the student’s committee determines that the document is at a satisfactory level, the defense date and time should be announced to the graduate faculty and students at least one week prior to the defense. The student should be aware of the thesis defense deadline and library submission deadline of the semester in which they wish to defend their thesis by consulting the graduate school calendar: [Graduate School Calendar | The Graduate School - Mississippi State University \(msstate.edu\)](#).** Two negative votes from committee members will constitute failure for a student on the thesis defense (a student may still “pass” the thesis defense with one negative vote). A student who fails to defend the thesis successfully on his/her initial attempt can schedule another defense after a period of four months has elapsed from the date of the original defense. A second failure to defend the thesis will result in the student being dismissed from the graduate program. After the student has successfully passed the thesis defense, the student’s advisor should submit the “report of examination results” form to the departmental graduate coordinator (see <http://www.grad.msstate.edu/forms>). The student must also submit a final draft of the thesis manuscript to the MSU Library after it has been approved by the committee members (see the following link concerning the university’s thesis formatting guidelines: <http://guides.library.msstate.edu/td>).

### **Directed Individual Study (DIS) Option**

Like the thesis option, a DIS will also involve a student working with his/her advisor and committee members to conduct a research study. However, while still requiring a substantial level of rigor and quality, the DIS may be somewhat smaller in scale than a thesis. The steps involved in completing a DIS include: (1) obtaining approval from the advisor and committee members for a research topic prior to registering for DIS credits, (2) obtaining any necessary approval from the university Institutional Review Board, (3) collecting data, (4) analyzing data, and (5) writing/presenting the research results to the satisfaction of the student's advisor and committee members. Because the DIS may only constitute three graduate credit hours in the student's program of study (as opposed to six for the thesis), students who pursue the DIS option must complete three additional graduate credit hours (these hours must be approved by the student's advisor and committee). In addition, students who pursue the DIS option must successfully complete comprehensive exams prior to graduation.

### **Internship Option**

The internship option will involve a student gaining practical work experience in an area related to his/her professional goals and interests. The internship will require a minimum of 300 hours of documented work over a minimum of 10 weeks, completed in a position in which the student has not worked previously (i.e., if the student is currently working as a graduate assistant (GA), the internship must be done in an area that is different than the student's GA position). The specific duties to be performed during the internship must be approved by the student's advisor and committee members. The student will register for three credit hours of KI 8710 while completing his/her internship. For students in the exercise physiology, disability studies, and sport pedagogy concentrations, the KI 8710 hours will be supervised by the student's advisor. For students in the sport administration concentration, the KI 8710 hours will be supervised by the faculty member that is supervising SS 4396 undergraduate interns in that semester. The internship site must have a have an agreement in place with Mississippi State University before the internship can be approved. This process should begin at least a semester before the anticipated internship.

### **Comprehensive Examination**

Students who pursue the DIS option or thesis option must successfully pass written comprehensive exams prior to graduation. Students will select five courses from their program of study from which to receive comprehensive exams. The comprehensive exam session, which takes place once per semester (including once during the summer), begins at 8:00 AM and concludes at 5:00 PM. The exams may be administered virtually or in person. In order to successfully pass comprehensive exams, students must receive a passing evaluation on their responses from the exams in all five courses. As noted in the MSU Graduate Catalog, students must be within six hours of graduation or in their final semester of coursework (absent DIS or internship hours) to participate in the comprehensive exams. The application form to take

comprehensive exams can be found on the Kinesiology departmental website (<http://kinesiology.msstate.edu/comps/>). Students who fail the comprehensive examination must wait at least three months before retaking the examination. If a student fails the comprehensive examination twice, he/she will be dismissed from the graduate program.

## **SECTION 7: DEGREE COMPLETION – DOCTORAL DEGREES**

In addition to satisfactory completion of all coursework in the program of study, doctoral students must also satisfy the following requirements.

### **Academic Symposium Attendance**

Throughout their tenure in the Department of Kinesiology, doctoral students are expected to attend and actively participate in departmental symposiums. These symposiums will be held approximately once a month during the academic year. Academic symposiums are designed to provide graduate students a vehicle whereby they can participate in the life of the department. These symposiums: (1) provide graduate students an avenue in which to present their research, (2) provide a forum for graduate students to critique the research of others, (3) provide a forum for graduate students to interact with professionals from outside the university, and (4) enrich the academic culture of the department. Active participation may include: (1) evaluation of research presentations, (2) participating in symposium organization, and (3) presenting research proposals and the results of completed research. **Students should make every effort to attend these symposiums.** If a student cannot attend a symposium, they should alert their major professor and the chair of the Academic Culture Committee as far in advance as possible. Students must provide documentation/evidence to justify their absence in advance of the symposium. An alternative assignment may be given to a student missing a symposia by their major professor or the chair of the Academic Culture Committee.

### **Directed Individual Study Requirement**

As noted in the PhD curriculum, students must complete at least three credit hours of directed individual study (DIS), the outcome of which should be a manuscript suitable for submission to a peer-reviewed journal. These DIS hours must be supervised by the student's advisor, who will judge the manuscript's suitability for submission. The student must have submitted the manuscript, as the first author, for review to a peer-reviewed journal prior to taking his/her comprehensive exams. Proof of this submission should be sent to the graduate coordinator. To improve their prospects of gaining employment, PhD students are encouraged to be active researchers and submit multiple manuscripts during their time in the doctoral program.

## **Preliminary/Comprehensive Examination**

Prior to beginning the comprehensive examination, a student should discuss his/her potential dissertation topic with all supervisory committee members. In addition to testing the student's knowledge of his/her program of study, an important purpose of the comprehensive examination is to assess the student's readiness to begin the dissertation. The comprehensive examination will consist of both a written and oral component. A student who fails either the written or oral comprehensive examination must wait at least three months before retaking the examination. If a student fails the comprehensive examination twice, he/she will be dismissed from the graduate program.

### *Written Examination*

After a student has successfully fulfilled the DIS requirement outlined above, he/she may schedule the written comprehensive examination with his/her supervisory committee. The student must be in his/her final semester of coursework (excluding dissertation hours) or within six hours of completing coursework (excluding dissertation hours) in order to take the comprehensive examination. The written examination may consist of either (1) a "closed-book" examination in which the student sits down in a computer lab to write answers to a question(s) in a set period of time, (2) an "open-book" examination in which the student reviews literature and writes an answer to a question(s) over the course of multiple days, or (3) some combination of "closed-book" and "open-book" examinations. The specific structure of a given student's written examinations will be determined by the student's supervisory committee. It is expected that each member of the supervisory committee will provide at least one question(s) to the student. Ideally, the comprehensive examination should serve an important role in helping prepare the student for the dissertation process.

### *Oral Examination*

After passing the written examination, the student will schedule an oral examination with his/her committee members. The oral examination provides the student an opportunity to address weaknesses from the written examination and orally communicate knowledge pertinent to his/her program of study. At this point, the student should be close to having a coherent outline of his/her dissertation proposal. Thus, the oral examination also provides the committee members an opportunity to ask background questions pertinent to the student's potential dissertation topic. Once the student passes both aspects of the doctoral comprehensive exam, their major professor/committee should complete the "examination results/admission to candidacy form" and submit it to the graduate coordinator. The student is not allowed to handle this form.

## **Dissertation Proposal**

After passing the written and oral examinations, the student will schedule a dissertation proposal meeting with his/her committee members. At least two weeks prior to the proposal meeting, the student must provide a written draft of his/her proposal to all committee members. The written proposal should typically include chapter 1 (introduction), chapter 2 (review of literature), and

chapter 3 (methods) of the dissertation. The dissertation proposal meeting provides the opportunity for the student to orally present the proposal to the committee and for the committee to discuss the proposal with the student. Ideally, the proposal meeting should result in a consensus between the committee members and student regarding the direction of the student's dissertation.

### **Dissertation Defense**

Students must complete a public presentation of their dissertation research (dissertation defense) to their supervisory committee that is also open to all members of the Department of Kinesiology. **Each student should be familiar with the deadline to defend a dissertation and the deadline to submit their dissertation to the library for the term in which they plan to perform these actions. These dates can be found in the graduate school calendar at the following link: [Graduate School Calendar | The Graduate School - Mississippi State University \(msstate.edu\)](http://Graduate School Calendar | The Graduate School - Mississippi State University (msstate.edu)). The dissertation document will also need to be submitted to a designated person in the Dean's Office AT LEAST ONE WEEK prior to the deadline to submit the dissertation to the library. Due to these deadlines, the student's dissertation document should be sent out to all members of the student's advisory committee at least THREE weeks prior to the anticipated defense date. The student should work with his major professor or co-major professors on their document to ensure it is in an acceptable state before it is sent to the rest of the advisory committee. After a two-week review period by the entire committee, the student's committee will make one of the following decisions: One, the student's dissertation document is satisfactory, and the student may proceed to their dissertation defense. This decision indicates that the dissertation document may still need to undergo some revisions, but overall, it is in acceptable shape, and the student is ready for their dissertation defense. Two, the student's dissertation document is unsatisfactory, and the student may not proceed to the dissertation defense until improvement has been made to the document. This decision indicates that the document needs a large amount of work and editing, and that the student is not ready for their dissertation defense. Three, the student's dissertation document is unsatisfactory, but the student may proceed with the dissertation defense. This decision indicates that substantial work must be done to the dissertation document, and the student will not meet the College and library submission deadlines for the current term, but the student is ready for their dissertation defense and may proceed with that action. A FAILURE TO FOLLOW THESE PROCEDURES AND GUIDELINES WILL RESULT IN A DELAYED DEFENSE**

**DATE AND GRADUATION.** The dissertation defense date and time should be announced to the graduate faculty and students at least one week prior to the defense. The student's committee members will evaluate the content and style of the completed dissertation document and their dissertation defense. Two negative votes from committee members will constitute failure for a student on the dissertation defense (a student may still "pass" the dissertation defense with one negative vote). A student who fails to defend their dissertation successfully on his/her initial attempt can schedule another defense after a period of three months has elapsed

from the date of the original defense. A second failure to defend the dissertation will result in the student being dismissed from the graduate program. After the student has successfully passed the dissertation defense, the student's major professor should submit the "report of examination results" form to the departmental graduate coordinator after it has been signed by the student's advisory committee (see <http://www.grad.msstate.edu/forms>). The student is not allowed to handle this form. The student must also submit a final draft of the dissertation manuscript to the MSU Library after it has been approved by the committee members (see the following link concerning the university's dissertation formatting guidelines: <http://guides.library.msstate.edu/td>). This document must also be reviewed by the College of Education prior to the library submission.

## **GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIPS**

Graduate research, teaching, and service assistantships are available on an annual or nine-month basis. **The Department of Kinesiology typically awards assistantships on a nine-month basis, and typically we award graduate teaching assistantships.** A graduate assistant's work schedule is a maximum of 20 hours per week. The minimum stipend rate is \$600.00 per month. **The Department of Kinesiology expects that students on graduate assistantships will gradually become effective teachers and achieve their academic goals under the direct supervision of a graduate faculty member.**

**Graduate Research Assistantship (GRA)** - Many of the University's academic, research, and administrative offices employ Graduate Research Assistants. This opportunity provides an excellent means for students to learn new techniques and methods as well as expand their knowledge by association with research-oriented responsibilities, whether employed by a unit within the student's academic discipline or in another department. Duties and stipends vary from program to program and are dependent upon the nature of assigned duties.

**Graduate Service Assistantship (GSA)** - Graduate Services Assistant is the title given to students employed to aid faculty and staff members with administrative functions within a unit. Many academic and non-academic unit service assistantships are available. Duties vary, depending on administrative needs of the unit making the award. Stipends vary according to the nature of assigned duties.

IRS Code states that graduate students who are hired in non-teaching/non-research assistantships can receive non-taxed tuition remission of \$5,250.00 per calendar year at MSU; these assistantships are titled Graduate Service Assistants. Amounts in excess of \$5,250.00 per calendar year are taxable.

**Graduate Teaching Assistantship (GTA) – This is the most common type of assistantship offered in the Department of Kinesiology.** Graduate Teaching Assistants normally serve in an instructional capacity and are selected on the basis of past teaching experience or academic promise as effective instructors in their field of study. **The workload of a graduate teaching assistant will not exceed 20 hours per week. In the Department of Kinesiology, GTA's will typically not be assigned to teach more than six credit hours per semester. In addition to primary teaching responsibilities, GTA's may also be assigned other duties related to instruction such as assisting in the preparation of lectures, leading discussion sections, conducting laboratory exercises, and keeping class records. Any GTA that is assigned to teach six credit hours will only be given additional duties under the guidance of their major professor, and their total workload will not exceed 20 hours per week.** Most academic units offer a graduate work budget for one or more teaching assistants each year. All prospective teaching assistants are required to participate in the appropriate Teaching Assistant Workshop(s) prior to beginning their first assignment as a teaching assistant. During the Teaching Assistant Workshops, students are certified at one of the following levels that correspond to the responsibilities and duties of the assistantship appointment:

- **Teaching Assistant 1 (TA1):** Graduate assistant will perform such tasks as preparing examinations, grading papers, preparing class lectures, maintaining records, and tutoring students outside formal classes. This position does not require classroom certification.
- **Teaching Assistant 2 (TA2):** Graduate assistant may have some of the same duties as TA1 in addition to making presentations in laboratories or classrooms, conducting lectures, and leading discussion groups but not as the teacher of record. These tasks involve direct contact with students. This position requires classroom certification.
- **Teaching Assistant 3 (TA3):** Graduate assistant will have the same duties as TA1 and TA2 and will teach classes for credit as the instructor of record and/or as the person primarily responsible for assigning grades. This position requires classroom certification.

**Graduate Teaching Assistants who have the primary responsibility of teaching a course/laboratory section for credit (TA2) and/or for assigning final grades (TA3) for such a course/laboratory section must have earned at least 18 graduate semester hours in the teaching discipline, be under the direct supervision of a faculty member experienced in the teaching discipline, receive regular in-service training, and be regularly evaluated.**

**Teaching Assistant Workshops** - The Teaching Assistant Workshops are designed to introduce students to the techniques and skills necessary to be effective instructors in the University environment and promote excellence in undergraduate education at Mississippi State University. Additional information on the Teaching Assistant Workshops is available online at [www.grad.msstate.edu/workshop/](http://www.grad.msstate.edu/workshop/).

- **General Teaching Assistant Workshop** is offered in August and January prior to fall and spring semesters. All prospective GTAs, both domestic and international, are required to attend the General Teaching Assistant Workshop. Failure to complete the General Workshop will render a student ineligible for a teaching assistantship award. The General Workshop provides new teaching assistants with an introduction to effective teaching methods and tools and serves to educate GTAs about University policies and resources. The workshop emphasizes the importance of providing high-quality instruction at Mississippi State University.
- **Classroom Certification Workshop** is offered in August and January prior to fall and spring semesters immediately following the General TA Workshop. The evaluation for Classroom Certification is the tool used to ensure that GTAs are equipped with the skills needed to deliver high-quality instruction to undergraduate students at Mississippi State University. In a 10-minute micro-teaching presentation followed by a 5-minute question/discussion session, prospective Graduate Teaching Assistants for TA2/TA3 certification present to an evaluative panel of graduate faculty members an abbreviated lecture that would be presented to students as part of an assigned course. Classroom Certification is required for all teaching assistants whose responsibilities involve direct contact with students such as giving presentations in lectures or laboratories, conducting lectures, and leading discussion groups. A Teaching Assistant who initially received assignment to a TA1 level may later complete the evaluation for Classroom Certification in anticipation of a change in duties that require direct contact with students. A GTA who has already received assignment to a TA1 level is not required to attend the General Workshop again. Waivers to allow classroom teaching (TA2/TA3) without successful completion of

the International Workshop and/or General Workshop and Classroom Certification will not be issued.

- **International Teaching Assistant Workshop** is offered in August prior to fall semester only. The International Teaching Assistant Workshop, offered in collaboration with the Office of International Education, provides teaching assistants who are international students with the cultural education and communication skills necessary to achieve effective performance of their duties. The workshop also serves as a tool for evaluating international students' teaching and language skills. The training, evaluation, and certification of international GTAs are essential to ensure that undergraduate students receive a high quality of instruction. The International TA Workshop consists of the following three parts: classroom culture (60%), presentation and pronunciation skills (20%), and teaching evaluation and English certification (20%). International students with a bachelor's degree from an accredited US institution are not required to complete the International TA Workshop.

- **International Students Beginning Assistantship Appointment in the Fall Semester:**

Students who are not successful in meeting the required standards during the August evaluation for classroom English Certification cannot proceed to the evaluation for Classroom Certification for the fall semester. They must enroll in ESL 5313 (Classroom Communication and Presentations) during the fall semester. These students are still required to complete the General TA Workshop in August for TA1 certification. After successful completion of ESL 5313 and reevaluation of classroom English in December, the student can be evaluated for Classroom Certification in January prior to the beginning of the spring semester to be certified at the TA2/TA3 level. Participation in the spring General TA Workshop is not required.

- **International Students Beginning Assistantship Appointment in the Spring Semester:**

International TAs beginning their assistantship appointment in the spring semester are only allowed to hold a TA1 level assistantship and must complete the General TA Workshop in January. These students may enroll in ESL 5313 (Classroom Communication and Presentations) during the spring semester and be evaluated for classroom English Certification in May. If successful, these TA1s will be temporarily allowed to hold a TA2/TA3 level assistantship during summer terms and then must successfully complete the evaluation for Classroom Certification in August to continue at the TA2/TA3 level in the fall. International students beginning their assistantship appointment in the spring semester may opt to participate in the International TA Workshop the following August instead of enrolling in ESL 5313 during the spring semester. These students will only be allowed to hold a TA1 level appointment prior successfully completing the International TA Workshop and evaluation for Classroom Certification in August.

**Eligibility for an Assistantship** - To be eligible for an assistantship appointment, a student must have "regular" or "contingent" admission status to a specific graduate degree program. However, a student with "contingent" status must, within the first award enrollment period, satisfy "regular" admission requirements. A student with "provisional" or "unclassified" admission status is not eligible for an assistantship appointment. An assistantship award will be terminated when these requirements are not met. A student's admission status may be verified by calling The Graduate School at (662) 325.7400.

**Application for Graduate Assistantships** - **Application for an assistantship appointment must be submitted to directly to the Department of Kinesiology graduate coordinator. Please use the following form: <http://www.kinesiology.msstate.edu/admissions/>. The deadline for priority consideration for a graduate assistantship is March 1<sup>st</sup> each year. You must also be admitted as a graduate student in the Department of Kinesiology to be considered for a graduate assistantship. The review process for graduate school applications typically takes approximately two weeks. Therefore, if you are applying for a graduate teaching assistantship, your graduate school application should be completed at least two weeks prior to the March 1<sup>st</sup> deadline. This includes all materials being submitted to the graduate school, including transcripts, statement of purpose, resume, letters of recommendation, and a writing sample for doctoral program applicants.**

**Required Course Load for Fall and Spring Semesters** - Graduate assistants must be full-time students (registered in at least 9 graduate credit hours) and may not enroll in more than 13 graduate credit hours. The required full-time status must be maintained throughout the entire semester. **Therefore, no course may be dropped if the resulting course load would be fewer than the required 9 graduate credit hours, nor may any course in the 9-hour load consist of or be converted to audit status.** The 9-credit hour course load may not be composed of undergraduate courses unless the course is a program prerequisite. In such case, the minimum graduate load required will be 6 credit hours and only one undergraduate course will be permitted as part of the 9-credit hour load (per Graduate Council, March 2001). Some international students are required by the University to take ESL 5323 and/or ESL 5313. Both are considered prerequisites, and a graduate student may enroll in one of the courses and 6 credit hours of degree-program courses while holding an assistantship. ESL 5323 and ESL 5313 may not be taken concurrently.

**Required Course Load for Full-and Half-Summer Awards** - Full-summer awards require an enrollment in at least 6 graduate credit hours with a maximum allowed of 13 credit hours. Any combination may be used to make up the 13-credit hour maximum; however, enrollment in either 5-week term must be at least 3 graduate credit hours with a maximum allowed of 7 credit hours. Additionally, a student holding a half-summer graduate assistantship must be registered for courses scheduled during the term of the assistantship.

**Termination of Assistantship** - If the assistantship is terminated prior to the specified ending date, the assistant's duties, stipend, and tuition exemption will cease. The student will be required to pay a prorated portion of the previously applied tuition exemption.

**Distance Education Courses** - A student enrolled in a total of 9 credit hours: Six graduate credit hours and 3 Distance Education credits are treated as the student's required full-time load. Tuition will be assessed at the current University rate. The full-time tuition exemption credit will be applied to a student's account covering the basic tuition of the Distance Education course. Tuition exemption does not cover the Distance Fee.

A student enrolled in a total of 10 or more credit hours: Additional tuition will be charged at the current University credit rate for any graduate student's course schedule that includes Distance Education or ESL courses if the total credit hours exceed 9. Therefore, graduate assistants should

note that the graduate assistant tuition waiver does not cover the cost of Distance Education or ESL courses when a student is enrolled in more than 9 credit hours.

**Course Overload** - Graduate assistants wishing to schedule more than a full-time course load may, with the approval of his/her major professor, department head, graduate coordinator and dean, register for more than 13 hours. The student must submit an Overload Form to his/her major professor. The dean's office sends the approved form to the Registrar's Office. Such transmission will allow application of additional tuition exemption consistent with current policy.

**Satisfactory Progress** - To retain an assistantship, a student must demonstrate satisfactory progress in the academic program. Failure to do so may result in a termination of the assistantship.

**Unsatisfactory Progress** - Unsatisfactory progress may be defined as the failure to maintain a B average in graduate courses attempted after being admitted to a specific program, a grade of U, D, or F in any course, more than two grades below a B, failure of the comprehensive/preliminary examination, an unsatisfactory evaluation of a thesis or dissertation, failure of a research defense, or any other failure of a required component of one's program of study. Any of these, or a combination of these, may constitute the basis for the termination of a student's graduate study in a degree program. Individual programs have the right to establish their own criteria; however, the preceding definition should be considered the minimum standard for continuation in graduate programs of study and holding graduate assistantships. In the case of dismissal, a student's assistantship will be terminated.

**Stipends** - Stipends are paid semimonthly on the fifteenth and the last working day of each month. When employment begins during a pay period, stipends are calculated on a pay-period basis. The employing department must be contacted to obtain specific information regarding paycheck delivery or pickup.

**Matriculation Fees** - Assessment of tuition and required fees is made on an equal basis for all students classified at the graduate level. Graduate Teaching Assistants and Graduate Service Assistants receive an exemption equal to approximately 71% of assessed tuition. Graduate Research Assistants receive an exemption of 100% of assessed tuition. Graduate Assistants who are not Mississippi residents will receive a 100% exemption of the additional charges assessed for non-resident tuition. All students are personally responsible for paying any student account charges in excess of the tuition exemption.