GRADUATE FIELD OF
ATMOSPHERIC SCIENCES
STUDENT HANDBOOK

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Graduate Field of Atmospheric Sciences

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. **INTRODUCTION**

II. **GRADUATE FIELDS**

III. **SUBJECTS AND CONCENTRATIONS**

IV. **PROGRAMS AND DURATION**
   A. **M.S.**
   B. **PH.D.**
   C. **TIME-TO-DEGREE LIMITS**

V. **THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE**
   A. **SELECTION**
   B. **DEADLINES**
   C. **CHANGES TO MEMBERSHIP**
   D. **AD HOC MEMBERS**

VI. **EXAMINATIONS**
   A. **QUALIFYING EXAMINATION (Q EXAM)**
   B. **ADMISSION TO CANDIDACY EXAMINATION (A EXAM)**
   C. **FINAL EXAMINATION FOR THE DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY DEGREE (B EXAM)**
   D. **FINAL EXAMINATION FOR THE MASTER’S DEGREE**

VII. **ORIENTATION AND FIRST-SEMESTER COURSE**

VIII. **COURSEWORK**

IX. **RESEARCH**
   A. **COMPLIANCE**
   B. **RESPONSIBLE CONDUCT OF RESEARCH**
   C. **LAB SAFETY TRAINING**

X. **REVIEWS AND PROGRESS**
   A. **ANNUAL REVIEWS**
   B. **GUIDELINES FOR SATISFACTORY PROGRESS**

XI. **STUDENT STATUS**
   A. **REGISTERED STATUS**
      i. **FULL-TIME STUDY**
      ii. **IN ABSENTIA STUDY**
   B. **NON-REGISTERED STATUS**
      i. **LEAVE OF ABSENCE**
      ii. **WITHDRAWAL**

XII. **CHANGES IN PROGRAM**

XIII. **RESOURCES AND SUPPORT**

XIV. **AT A GLANCE**
   A. **M.S.**
   B. **PH.D.**
I. INTRODUCTION

Graduate school is a very different kind of educational experience than being an undergraduate. This is where you specialize, focus, and become an expert. In most programs the primary goal is the thesis, and coursework mostly exists to give you the preparation or background you need to get there. Because of that, Cornell’s graduate program has several features that may require some acclimation. These are described in more detail in the following sections.

• First, your program has no general course requirements set by Cornell University or the Department. Rather, each student has a Special Committee who decides upon the necessary preparation and coursework. Generally, coursework will become less important as your degree progresses, and instead your advisor and Committee are central to evaluating your progress.

• Second – and this is different than most other universities – the graduate programs are organized into fields that do not directly correspond to departments. Two fields are administered in the Department of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences (EAS), Geological Sciences and Atmospheric Sciences, but both fields include faculty in several other departments. Sometimes this can get confusing as resources generally come from departments while academic requirements are organized by fields.

• Third, although there are few requirements, graduate school requires commitment and drive. The Ph.D. program requires two exams including a thesis defense and thesis, and the M.S. requires a thesis and defense. Your success generally depends on getting research done, presenting and publishing that research, and generally learning how to be a scientist. While your advisor and committee will do what they can to help you on this path, ultimately it depends on you. Many students struggle at first with the transition to near-exclusive emphasis on long-term goals. Faculty and your fellow graduate students can be a great aid in navigating the transition.

There are many other specifics to your program, and this Handbook is designed to help you keep track of them. It is one of two important documents that describe the program, the other being the Code of Legislation of the Graduate Faculty. All Graduate Students are subject to the rules and regulations of the Code of Legislation of the Graduate Faculty (https://gradschool.cornell.edu/sites/gradschool.cornell.edu/files/field_file/Code%20of%20Legislation%20August%202017_0.pdf) and the legislation agreed upon by the faculty in the Graduate Field of Atmospheric Sciences. These rules and regulations are briefly summarized in this handbook; additional details can be found in the Code of Legislation of the Graduate Faculty.
II. GRADUATE FIELDS

At Cornell University, graduate study is governed by graduate fields, which are distinct from university departments. You are a student in the Graduate Field of Atmospheric Sciences. While the faculty of the field is mainly drawn from the department, it also includes faculty from the departments of Civil and Environmental Engineering and Mechanical and Aeronautical Engineering. A list of faculty in the Graduate Field of Atmospheric Science appears below. See also http://gradschool.cornell.edu/academics/fields-of-study/field/atmospheric-science.

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A full list of graduate fields can be found at http://gradschool.cornell.edu/academics/fields-of-study/fields.

III. SUBJECTS AND CONCENTRATIONS

Each graduate field is composed of one or more subjects of study, which are broad categories that may actually be the same as the field itself. For instance, the Graduate Field of Atmospheric Sciences offers only one subject: Atmospheric Sciences. Each subject may then be divided into specialized areas called concentrations. A faculty member in a graduate field represents one or more concentrations within that graduate field, and a student elects a specific concentration by adding a faculty member who represents that concentration to their Special Committee. The chairperson represents the major subject and concentration and minor members represent minor subjects and concentrations. The faculty member who represents a concentration on a Special Committee determines the specific requirements that the student must complete related to that concentration.

The Graduate Field of Atmospheric Sciences currently does not have concentrations, but is petitioning to add concentrations.
IV. PROGRAMS AND DURATION

The Graduate Field of Atmospheric Sciences offers two graduate degree programs: the Master of Science (M.S.) and the Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.). The M.S. requires a written thesis, but the degree CAN be awarded for coursework alone or by taking the Admission to Candidacy Exam as part of the Ph.D. program. Of course, the Ph.D. also requires a thesis of substantially different scope.

A. M.S.

The M.S. requires only two semesters of registered full-time study, but typically takes two years to complete. The M.S. requires the completion of a written thesis. Additional requirements and expectations are developed in conjunction with your Committee. Financial support is generally offered for two years, contingent upon adequate progress of the student and on the availability of funds.

B. PH.D.

The Ph.D. requires only six semesters of registered full-time study, but typically takes at least five years beyond the B.S. (or three years after the M.S.) to complete. The Ph.D. requires the completion of a written thesis. Coursework, including that required for a minor concentration, is typically an early focus (i.e. years 1-3), with thesis research occupying a progressively larger portion of the student’s time over the course of his or her program. Specific requirements and expectations are developed in conjunction with your Committee. Financial support is generally offered for five years, contingent upon adequate student progress and the availability of funds.

C. TIME-TO-DEGREE LIMITS

Graduate School legislation imposes a time limit on degree programs, counting from the date of the student’s first registration in the program to the awarding of the degree: four years for the M.S. and seven years for the Ph.D. To request an extension, students may, with the approval of the field, petition the Graduate School.

The Graduate Field of Atmospheric Sciences strongly encourages students to complete their degree programs in a timely manner.
V. THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE

The special committee, under the leadership of the chairperson, is responsible for overseeing the student’s course of study and progress. Among other things, the special committee administers examinations, oversees the thesis, assures itself that the student is well prepared in his or her field, sees to it that all degree requirements have been satisfied, and recommends that the degree be awarded.

The special committee will also meet and set requirements tailored to individual student needs, typically including course work and other program goals. There are no regulations of the Graduate School governing the number of courses, grades, or specific content of instruction to which special committees must subscribe, so the committee has a good deal of freedom to work with the student in establishing an appropriate program. Special committees may impose any requirements over and above the requirements of the Graduate School that they deem educationally sound. Also, students must remain in good standing and make satisfactory progress by both doing well in course work and making progress in research toward the thesis, as discussed in Section IX below.

The Graduate Field of Atmospheric Sciences (and the Graduate School) considers regular meetings between the student and his or her special committee important to ensure proper communication and urges the student to take the initiative in holding such meetings at least twice a year. These meetings may take the form of individual meetings with each advisor or a group meeting of the entire committee; most students also meet much more regularly with their advisor. It is recommended that students be proactive to set up such meetings regularly, for example at the start of each semester.

The Chair is the most important member of a special committee, and typically is the research advisor. It is important to maintain a good working relationship with the Chair, as he or she will be more heavily invested in your success than anybody else, and will put a tremendous amount of time, thought and energy into your education. The Chair will be working hard to secure resources needed for your research and support during your time in the program, and will be helping you professionally for a long time, writing recommendation letters and related activities. The Chair also the primary person evaluating your progress and success in the program. For these reasons, it is important that you have in-depth discussions with your advisor about expectations and commitments early in your program. The relationship is voluntary on both ends, in the sense that you have some leeway to switch advisors, and the Chair or any committee member can resign in which case you have to select a new chair; see Section C below. Either of these options is complicated, so a best first step will be to work out any issues as best you can. You can find information on where you go if you encounter problems in Section XII below.
A. SELECTION

An M.S. student is required to have at least two members on his or her special committee: a chairperson representing a concentration within the Graduate Field of Atmospheric Sciences, and a minor member representing a subject and concentration outside the Graduate Field of Atmospheric Sciences.

A Ph.D. student is required to have at least three members on his or her special committee: a chairperson representing a concentration within the Graduate Field of Atmospheric Sciences, and two minor members who each represent a concentration in an additional subject outside the Graduate Field of Atmospheric Sciences.

(Once concentrations have been added to the Field of Atmospheric Sciences, one member can be within the Field, but with a different concentration).

Additional members may be added to the special committee of M.S. and Ph.D. students to cover other areas of interest.

B. DEADLINES

A student must submit the name of his or her special committee chair or temporary advisor to the Graduate School no later than three weeks after first registration.

A M.S. student must select his or her full committee (chairperson and minor member) by the end of the second semester of registration.

A Ph.D. student must select his or her full committee (chairperson and two minor members) no later the end of the third semester of registration.

C. CHANGES TO MEMBERSHIP

A student may change his or her special committee with the approval of all the members of the newly constituted committee. Notice of such change must be filed immediately with the Graduate School.

For M.S. students, no change may be made during the three months prior to the Final Examination, except with the approval of the Dean.

For Ph.D. students, no change may be made after passing the A Exam, except with the Dean's approval. In addition, no Ph.D. student may schedule a B Exam within three months of a change of committee, except with the Dean's approval.
D. AD HOC MEMBERS

Although members of a student's special committee are normally drawn from the currently active graduate faculty at Cornell University, committee members from outside that body (ad hoc members) may be added under special circumstances. Such a member should either have special expertise in the student's subject area, or should have a close working association with the student and his or her research. An example would be a faculty member at another institution with whom the student is working or who has expertise in the student’s sub-specialty.

To be nominated, the individual must be recommended for ad hoc membership by the field’s Director of Graduate Studies. The individual’s curriculum vitae and the student’s petition requesting the ad hoc member, including the signature of the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS), must be submitted to the Dean of the Graduate School for final approval. The student and advisor can work with the Department to generate this request.

Ad hoc special committee members serve in addition to the two required committee members on an M.S. student’s committee and three required committee members on a Ph.D. student’s committee.

VI. EXAMINATIONS

For M.S. students, the Graduate School requires the Final Examination for the Master’s Degree. For Ph.D. students, the Graduate School requires the Examination for Admission to Candidacy (A Exam) and the Final Examination for the Doctor of Philosophy Degree (B Exam).

A. QUALIFYING EXAMINATION (Q EXAM)

The Atmospheric Science Field does not require a Q exam, but this information is provided because other fields do (e.g. Geological sciences). The Q Exam is intended to determine a Ph.D. student’s aptitude for advanced study and scientific research, and will enable the Special Committee to propose a program that will help the student accomplish his or her objectives. The examination is administered by the Special Committee and attendance is generally limited to that body. The exam format—which can be written, oral, or both—is typically oral. Because it is a Graduate Field requirement, rather than a Graduate School requirement, there is no paperwork to complete to schedule the Q Exam; the student must arrange the examination date and location in consultation with the members of his or her Special Committee. On the basis of the student’s performance, the Special Committee may pass the student, require that the examination be retaken (in the same or different format), not allow continuation in the Ph.D. program but allow the student to change to the M.S. program, or fail the student. The Chairperson of the Special Committee must report the results of the Q Exam to the student in a letter, copying all members of the Special Committee, the DGS, and the Graduate Field Assistant (GFA). The Qualifying Examination is typically taken in the second semester and must be taken by the end of the third semester.
B. ADMISSION TO CANDIDACY EXAMINATION (A EXAM)

The purpose of the A Exam is to certify that the student is sufficiently prepared to undertake thesis research. The A Exam may be taken after the student has completed two semesters of successful full-time study and, unless special permission is obtained from the Dean, must be attempted before the beginning of the student’s seventh semester of registration in the Ph.D. program. The successful completion of the exam implies that formal coursework is nearly or fully complete. In the Graduate Field of Atmospheric Sciences, the exam format—which can be written, oral, or both—typically includes both oral and written parts. This exam is sometimes considered a thesis proposal defense. The oral section of the examination must be scheduled with the Graduate School and must also be announced to the faculty in the Graduate Field by the DGS at least seven days in advance of the examination. There can be a public presentation, describing the thesis proposal and/or work completed so far, which might last 30 minutes, to which the graduate students in the field, graduate field members and other people can be invited. After the public presentation, there is a closed session that ordinarily only members of the Special Committee attend and question the student, but other graduate faculty members are welcome to attend and are permitted to question the student. The determination of the outcome of the examination rests exclusively with the Special Committee. The Special Committee may pass, conditionally pass, or fail a student. For a student to pass an examination, all members of the Special Committee must approve. If a student fails the examination, reexamination is allowed only upon approval of the Special Committee, but not earlier than three months after the failed exam.

C. FINAL EXAMINATION FOR THE DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY DEGREE (B EXAM)

A doctoral candidate takes the B Exam, also known as the thesis defense, upon completion of all requirements for the degree but no earlier than one month before completion of the minimum number of registered semesters. Furthermore, a minimum of two semesters of successful full-time study must be completed between passing the A Exam and scheduling the B Exam. The examination must be scheduled with the Graduate School and must also be publicly announced by the DGS at least seven days in advance of the examination. This oral exam covers the general subject of the dissertation and, in the Graduate Field of Atmospheric Sciences, takes the form of a public thesis defense with open questioning, followed by private questioning by the Special Committee. A doctoral candidate must submit a complete draft of his or her thesis to all members of the Special Committee at least six weeks before the B Exam, unless the requirement is modified by the Special Committee. At least five business days before the B Exam, a student must also give each member of the Special Committee the thesis, complete in all respects and editorially acceptable for final approval. The thesis, following any revisions after the B Exam, must be submitted to the Graduate School within 60 days of the B Exam, and must receive final approval from the Graduate School (for formatting purposes) and all members of the Special Committee.
D. FINAL EXAMINATION FOR THE MASTER’S DEGREE

An M.S. student takes the final examination upon completion of all requirements for the degree but no earlier than one month before completion of the minimum number of registered semesters. The examination must be scheduled with the Graduate School and must also be publicly announced by the DGS at least seven days in advance of the examination. This oral examination covers the topic of the master’s thesis and, in the Graduate Field of Atmospheric Sciences, takes the format of a public thesis defense with open questioning, followed by private questioning by the Special Committee. For a student to pass an examination, all members must approve. If a student fails the examination, reexamination is allowed upon approval by the Special Committee but not earlier than three months after the failed exam. An M.S. student must submit a complete draft of his or her thesis to all members of the Special Committee at least six weeks before the Final Examination, unless the requirement is modified by the Special Committee. At least five business days before the Final Examination, a student must also give each member of the Special Committee the thesis, complete in all respects and editorially acceptable for final approval. The thesis, following any revisions after the Final Examination, must be submitted to the Graduate School within 60 days of the Final Examination, and must receive final approval from the Graduate School (for formatting purposes) and all members of the Special Committee.

VII. ORIENTATION AND FIRST-SEMESTER COURSE

During the first week of classes, all new students should participate in orientation meetings held by the Graduate School, and the short orientation session within the Field. The purpose of the session is to provide overviews of the field and the Cornell system, to start to get to know your peers and faculty, and to have a first chance to ask questions about this Handbook or any other aspect of graduate student life.

All first-year students are recommended to take a one-credit fall-semester course in EAS, designed to introduce Geological Sciences and Atmospheric Sciences students to the department and to acclimatize students to graduate life. The course has three elements: how to be successful as a graduate student; discussions of ethical and practical issues as a student in science; and a proposal writing element where students get training and feedback to write an National Science Foundation-style graduate fellowship proposal. This course is timed to be early in the semester when you are adapting to being a graduate student, and synchronized with major graduate fellowship proposal deadlines.
VIII. COURSEWORK

The Graduate School has no specific requirements related to the number of or level of courses that students must complete in order to obtain the M.S. or Ph.D. degree. Instead, the Special Committee determines which courses the student must complete. Also, satisfactory progress must be maintained, described in the next section. In the Graduate Field of Atmospheric Sciences, a student typically takes one or two courses related to his or her major program each term during the first couple of years of registration. Additionally, students often need to complete coursework in order to fulfill requirements related to their minor concentrations. The faculty member on the Special Committee representing the minor concentration determines which courses the student must take in order to fulfill the minor.

M.S. and Ph.D. students are each required to enroll in at least 12 credits each term. If a student is taking fewer than 12 credits of coursework or is no longer completing coursework, he or she will be automatically enrolled in an appropriate research course (i.e. GRAD 9012 Master’s Thesis Research, GRAD 9010 Graduate-Level Research, or GRAD 9011 Doctoral Dissertation Research) by the Graduate School for the remaining number of credits up to 12.

IX. RESEARCH

A. COMPLIANCE

Students in all programs, especially research-degree programs, must be aware of federal, state, and local regulations and guidelines applying to student research. Regulations and guidelines apply to student research, including research not supported by federal funds or any outside sponsor. Cornell University has agreements (administered by the Office of Sponsored Programs) with the federal government to assure compliance with federal and state regulations.

B. RESPONSIBLE CONDUCT OF RESEARCH

Every graduate student pursuing a research degree is required to complete appropriate training in the responsible conduct of research. Each student must complete online training through Cornell Office of Research Integrity and Assurance (ORIA) in authorship, peer review, and avoidance of research misconduct. Required training must be completed prior to the end of the student’s second registered semester. Graduate fields and/or special committees may require additional training beyond these minimum requirements. There are additional requirements for graduate students whose research involves human participates or live vertebrates. See the Code of Legislation for additional information.

C. LAB SAFETY TRAINING

Depending on the student’s research, the student may be required to complete lab safety training. The student should check with their faculty advisor for information on which lab safety training to complete.
X. REVIEWS AND PROGRESS

A. ANNUAL STUDENT PROGRESS REVIEWS

Each year toward the end of the spring semester the field conducts a review of all students. Each student fills out the Student Progress Review. This review gives you a chance to reflect on your progress and identify goals for the coming year. Your advisor may provide constructive written feedback, offer encouragement, or signal if there are any areas in need of improvement. These are a basis for annual reviews within the field, where they become one opportunity for evaluating satisfactory progress.

B. GUIDELINES FOR SATISFACTORY PROGRESS

M.S. and Ph.D. students are expected to maintain a B (3.0) or better grade point average. Grades of C+ to D-, while passing, do not normally constitute satisfactory progress. Progress will be evaluated by the Special Committee, or the DGS in cases where that committee has not yet met. Satisfactory progress will be continually evaluated by the Special Committee Chair in coordination with the DGS, as coursework and examinations are completed.

XI. STUDENT STATUS

A. REGISTERED STATUS

University registration is the official recognition of a student’s relationship with the university and is the basic authorization for a student’s access to campus resources. To become registered each term, a student must settle all financial accounts with the university, satisfy New York State and university health requirements, and have no holds from his or her college, the Office of the Judicial Administrator, Health Services, or the Bursar.

i. FULL-TIME STUDY

An individual is considered a full-time student if he or she is registered, enrolled in courses or engaged in thesis work, and is in conformity with limitations on assistantships, hourly student appointments, and/or outside employment as specified in the Code of Legislation of the Graduate Faculty.

ii. IN ABSENTIA STUDY

In absentia status provides an opportunity for graduate students to engage in approved study during the academic year in a location at least 100 miles away from campus while continuing to work under the guidance of the Special Committee. An extended field season that overlaps a significant part of the semester is a typical reason for applying for in absentia status. A student may
apply for in absentia status by submitting a petition to the Graduate School. An M.S. student must have completed at least one semester of registration and a Ph.D. student must have completed at least two semesters of registration in full-time study on the Ithaca campus or at a satellite location to be eligible for in absentia status. A graduate student who is approved to register in absentia pays in absentia tuition (currently $200/semester) instead of regular tuition.

B. NON-REGISTERED STATUS

iii. LEAVE OF ABSENCE

A leave of absence can be granted for personal or health reasons. Leaves run for a period of up to 12 months and may be renewed annually to a maximum of four calendar years. Time spent on leave of absence does not count toward time-to-degree limits. The field and the Graduate School jointly determine whether a personal Leave of Absence will be granted. If a Health Leave of Absence is recommended for a student by University Health Services, the Graduate School, in consultation with the field, determines whether a Health Leave of Absence will be granted. A student who takes a leave of absence relinquishes access to campus facilities and services that normally accompany student status.

iv. WITHDRAWAL

Students may withdraw voluntarily at any time. Withdrawal is appropriate for a student who does not intend to resume studies or to complete his or her M.S. or Ph.D. at Cornell University. Any interruption of registration is considered a withdrawal unless the student has been granted a leave of absence.

XII. CHANGES IN PROGRAM

An M.S. student wishing to change to the Ph.D. program, who has the endorsement of his or her Special Committee Chairperson to do so, should submit the Application for Student Program Change form to the Graduate Field Assistant for the Graduate Field of Atmospheric Sciences for consideration by the field. As part of the consideration process, the DGS will consult with the Special Committee Chairperson and other members of the student’s Special Committee. If approved, the Application for Student Program change form will be forwarded, along with an admit letter, to the Graduate School and the student will be officially changed to the Ph.D. program.

A Ph.D. student may elect to change to the M.S. program by submitting an Application for Student Program Change form to the GFA for the Graduate Field of Atmospheric Sciences. A student’s Special Committee may also recommend that the student change from the Ph.D. program to the M.S. program at any time (for a variety of reasons), and can decide to allow such a change as an alternative to failing an exam. If such an action is taken, the Special
Committee must inform the Graduate School, and the DGS and GFA for the Graduate Field Atmospheric Sciences.

XIII. RESOURCES AND SUPPORT

There are many resources for both academic and non-academic assistance at Cornell.

For any academic issues, your advisor and Special Committee are the natural first place to turn. Advisors can be surprisingly helpful and understanding, and the rest of the Committee can be very valuable for providing other perspectives. The DGS and the GFA are always available as well, including in situations where you may not want to approach your advisor. You should feel free to approach any faculty, including the Department Chair, in EAS about other concerns. Finally, should those avenues not work for you, the Graduate School has a variety of people devoted to student academic support, depending on the nature of concerns. You should be aware that in many situations, there will communication between advisor, DGS, and Graduate School regardless of who you approach and usually it is best to start with your advisor.

Cornell also provides excellent support for a wide variety of non-academic issues that affect graduate students. The Office of Student Life at the Graduate School is a source of support and advocacy for graduate students and also serves as a coordinating hub of services that facilitate the student life experience at Cornell. You can find additional information on the Office of Graduate Student Life at http://gradschool.cornell.edu/life-cornell/office-student-life.

You can find additional information on resources, both academic and non-academic, for graduate students at http://gradschool.cornell.edu/student-life/help-and-support.
XIV. AT A GLANCE

A. M.S.

- **Type of Degree:** Research
- **Duration:** At least two semesters of registration; typically two years
- **Areas of Concentration:** Two areas, one from within the graduate field and one from outside the graduate field
- **Special Committee:** Two-member committee consisting of chair and one minor member
- **Required Examinations:** Final Examination for the Master’s Degree
- **Deadlines:**
  - Chair Nomination—3rd week of 1st semester
  - Special Committee Selection—end of 2nd semester
  - Master’s Examination and Thesis Submission—as soon as degree requirements have been met; no later than 8 semesters

B. PH.D.

- **Type of Degree:** Research
- **Duration:** At least six semesters of registration; typically five years after the B.S.
- **Areas of Concentration:** Three areas, one from within the graduate field, two from outside the graduate field.
- **Special Committee:** Three-member committee consisting of chair and two minor members
- **Required Examinations:** Admission to Candidacy (A Exam); Final Examination for Doctor of Philosophy Degree (B Exam)
- **Deadlines:**
  - Chair Nomination—3rd week of 1st semester
  - Special Committee Selection—end of 3rd semester
  - Admission to Candidacy Examination—before beginning 7th semester
  - Final Examination for Doctor of Philosophy Degree and Thesis Submission—as soon as degree requirements have been met; no later than 14 semesters