

DEPARTMENT OF MARINE SCIENCE
The University of Texas at Austin
Marine science, MSMarineSci, PhD



GRADUATE STUDENT HANDBOOK
2026-2027

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1. POLICIES and ADMINISTRATION

The graduate program in Marine Science at UT Austin is governed by the graduate studies committee (GSC). Members of the GSC are assistant professors, associate professors, and professors who are active in our graduate degree program. The GSC sets requirements for the Marine Science graduate degrees and in general, is responsible for assuring the quality of graduate education at UTMSI.

This Graduate Handbook includes policies specific to the Marine Science graduate degree programs. University policies are described in the Graduate Catalog (<https://registrar.utexas.edu/catalogs/graduate>) which contains degree requirements for all graduate programs, rules that affect graduate students, descriptions of graduate courses, and a list of Graduate Studies Committee (GSC) Members. The Graduate Catalog is the authority for all graduate students. The Graduate Catalog policies are supplemented by the rules of the University and the policies specific to the Department of Marine Science (DMS) GSC.

The Graduate Advisor (GA) is a member of the GSC appointed by the Graduate Dean to advise and register all graduate students, maintain records, and represent the Graduate School in most matters relating to graduate students. The GA is the person to contact for:

- Petitions (anything that requires an exception to a rule or policy)
- Graduation applications and programs of work
- Conditions on admission and petitions to extend conditions
- Change of grade status
- Petition for late registration
- Withdrawals & cancellations
- Reservation of course for graduate credit
- Scholastic status

The GSC chair serves a 3-year term, is elected by the GSC, organizes candidacy exams, and is authorized to approve actions for the GSC. The GSC Chair is the person to contact for:

- Doctoral candidacy applications
- Changes in doctoral committee
- Request for final oral exam
- Extensions of candidacy
- Annual student progress reviews/recommendations for termination
- Report of the Dissertation Committee
- Student academic grievances

The Graduate Coordinator (GC) is the liaison between graduate students, the GA, and the GSC Chair. Most questions concerning routine procedures should be addressed to the Graduate Coordinator. The GC is the person to contact for:

- facilitating degree processes
- student academic employment and fellowships
- registration questions

The following individuals currently administer the Marine Science graduate program:

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|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Department Chair: | Dr. Kenneth H. Dunton |
| Graduate Advisor: | Dr. Kenneth H. Dunton |
| Assistant Graduate Advisor: | Dr. Deana L. Erdner |
| Graduate Studies Committee Chair: | Dr. Zhanfei Liu |
| Graduate Program Administrator: | Jamey L. Pelfrey |
| Program Coordinator: | Kathryn Feingold |

2. STUDENT RECORDS

Official departmental records of student progress towards their degree are maintained on the secure UT Box system. Each student will have access to their own progress folder, and it is your responsibility to be sure that records are current. You have legal access to all materials in your file. Other people whose job responsibilities require it also have access. This includes all members of the Marine Science Graduate Studies Committee, any other person who is appointed to a dissertation committee, and the Graduate Coordinator. No other person has access without your written permission unless authorized by the Department Chair or the Graduate Advisor, who will only give authorization to staff members whose assistance is necessary to carry out administrative responsibilities.

Upon acceptance into the graduate program, you will be given access to a shared UT Box folder containing:

- the most updated version of this Handbook
- the handbook from the Graduate Student Association (GSA)
- blank Program of Work form
- other resource sheets (e.g. understanding and registering for classes)

When you start your first semester, after your EID is upgraded, you will be given access to your personal progress folder on UT Box. This folder is titled with your name and contains a copy of your offer letter, any scholarship letters, and a sub-folder for each academic year.

The following items should be uploaded by you to your main progress folder (titled with your name):

- (1) *Curriculum Vitae*. You should prepare a CV; an example format is in the shared UT Box folder. The CV will provide ready answers to many questions that come up during considerations of the Awards Committee. Your CV should be updated every year - or more often in the case of momentous events.
- (2) *Program of Work*. This is the official record of coursework for graduate students, and only courses that appear on the Program of Work (PoW) are counted towards the degree. Your

PoW is reviewed annually and must be certified in order to graduate. You will complete a proposed PoW during your first month in the program that makes a plan for when you will complete your degree requirements. After it is approved by the Graduate Advisor, you should upload it to your progress folder. As you complete your coursework, you should revise your PoW to reflect the actual course titles and semester completed.

- (3) *Thesis or dissertation proposal.*
- (4) *Other items that provide a record of your activities and progress.* You are urged to place reprints of any published articles in your file. Information on awards, prizes, grants, etc., that do not come through the department should be added to the files, otherwise the Awards Committee will not know about your successes.

You should upload the following items to your sub-folder for the appropriate academic year:

- (1) *Documentation of annual progress meeting.* In the first year, your supervisor can provide documentation, e.g. an email, confirming the meeting. In subsequent years, you will meet annually with your advisory committee to review your progress towards your degree. Following this meeting, you must prepare a written summary of the discussion and recommendations from the meeting, and each member of your committee will indicate approval by signing the summary. The final approved summary must be uploaded to the appropriate AY sub-folder within one month after the meeting. The presence of annual reports documenting adequate progress is considered during reviews for internal awards.
- (2) *Documentation of annual IDP meeting.* Individual Development Plan (IDP) meetings are required for both Ph.D. and M.S. students during the fall semester. Annual meetings between your advisor and you are intended to help you take ownership of your training, develop short- and long-term goals of your research, identify resources to achieve the goals, and establish clear expectations and steps towards graduation etc.

3. DEGREES and REQUIREMENTS

The two degrees offered through the Marine Science graduate program are the M.S. and the Ph.D. The M.S. must be with a thesis and based on original research. It is not necessary to obtain an M.S. before starting the Ph.D.

Coursework outside of marine science and teaching assistantships are most often completed on the Austin campus. Core courses and advanced marine science courses are offered in person in Port Aransas. Students are located in Port Aransas for their research, with the exception of the Baker Lab which is on the Austin campus.

3.1. Requirements Common to M.S. and Ph.D. programs

Program of Work: Within your first month in the program, meet with your advisor to complete a proposed Program of Work. A blank PoW form that includes instructions for completing and maintaining your PoW is available in the shared UT Box. To include a course in the Program of Work for a graduate degree, you must earn a grade of at least C or better (*as per graduate school requirements*).

Annual meetings: All graduate students are required to have an annual meeting to review their progress. For first year students, this meeting will occur with your supervisor only in the fall. At this first meeting, you and your mentor should discuss your Individual Development Plan (required for both Ph.D. and M.S.) and Proposed Program of Work (due within one month of your first semester at UT). The IDP meeting should be conducted early enough in the semester to allow you to access resources on main campus. The Department has used the Stanford IDP although other options are available on the CNS site ([MyIDP](#)).

Advisory committee: Committee membership (Master's and Ph.D. Temporary Advisory Committee) should be established during your second year in the program. This should be done with sufficient advance notice to have your annual progress meeting with your committee during the fall or spring semester of your second year. After each annual meeting, you must submit a summary of the meeting to your committee members for their approval and signatures within one month. Annual committee meetings are required starting in your second year in the program, and every year thereafter. Failure to have this meeting can result in a decision of "failure to make adequate progress" and trigger GSC review of the student's progress. This can also result in delays in GRA or TA appointments. Details of committee membership and degree-specific requirements can be found in their respective sections.

Adequate progress: Your annual meeting is an important mechanism used to determine adequate progress. The GSC chair will examine student records each year to assure that both MS and PhD students have met the annual meeting requirement. Students may be dismissed from the program for lack of adequate progress or failure to maintain grade requirements. Students have the right to appeal dismissal. This information can be found in the University operating procedures (<http://policies.utexas.edu/policies/graduate-school>, section D. Graduate Students).

Coursework: All graduate students are required to complete the following coursework, which should be recorded on your PoW:

- (1) The three core courses (12 hours): Marine Ecosystem Dynamics (MNS 481C), Marine Biogeochemistry (MNS 482C), Adaptations to the Marine Environment (MNS 483C). You are required to pass each core course with a grade of B or better. You can retake the course to improve your grade. Only one retake is permitted.
- (2) A minimum of six hours of advanced graduate courses in Marine Science. You must achieve a grade of "B-" or better in each course. Undergraduate MNS courses offered with a graduate section (second digit of the course number is 8 or 9) may be used to fulfill this requirement. Courses graded CR/NC or P/F cannot be counted towards this requirement.
- (3) A minimum of two (six hours) in a supporting natural science or subjects outside of Marine Science. Courses graded CR/NC or P/F cannot be counted towards this requirement. Six hours of upper-division undergraduate courses (second digit of the course number is 2-7) may be counted toward the supporting course work.
- (4) Two semesters of MNS 191.

Other considerations:

- (1) Research in Marine Science courses (MNS 180, 380, 680) will not count toward the 30-hour course requirement.
- (2) The GPA for each semester must meet the Graduate School requirement of 3.0.

- (3) You are expected to attend departmental seminars whenever possible.

Teaching: All graduate students are required to complete the following requirements:

- (1) Prior to, or at the same time as, your teaching assistantship, complete Fundamentals for Teaching Assistants (GRS 097) or Introduction to Evidence Based Teaching (NSC 088L). These classes do not count toward the 32-hour course requirement. Note the NSC 088L is the first of a three-seminar requirement leading to a Concentration in Teaching and Mentoring.
- (2) Teach a minimum of 20 hours a week for one semester. Foreign students should consult the TexasGlobal website on international teaching assistants:
<https://global.utexas.edu/english-language-center/resources/international-teaching-assistants> to understand the requirements for international graduate students to hold teaching assistantships.
- (3) Students who cannot enroll in GRS 097 or NSC 088L may complete the following combination of classroom and mentored teaching activities, which are chosen to provide equivalent contact hours, activities, and practice to GRS 097 and provide the students with the tools for effective teaching engagement. In order to receive credit for GRS 097, required training includes having the [STEMx canvas course](#), or the [Center for Teaching and Learning's \(CTL\) Teaching Prep Series](#). Required topics include:
 - [FERPA](#)
 - [Title IX and mandatory reporting](#)
 - Lab Safety
 - [Ethical behavior](#)
 - Conflict of interest
 - Impartiality and fairness in teaching
 - Sexual harassment
 - Boundary control
 - [Reporting student behavioral concerns to the instructor](#)
 - Clear communication with instructor of job expectations

For students wishing to move beyond the first level of TA training, or those requiring the title of Assistant Instructor (AI), the college offers a [Concentration in Teaching and Mentoring](#) through STEMx. This concentration is free of charge and can be fulfilled in various ways. In addition to reinforcing many of the topics above, the concentration trains students in:

- How people learn
- Different learning styles
- How to infuse soft skills and study skills training
- How to write an assessment

3.2. Policies specific to Master of Science

The purpose of the Master's program is to prepare students for careers in government, industry, and as research assistants. The Master's is not a terminal degree, and students who want careers in teaching and research can prepare for a Ph.D. at a later time.

3.2.1. Other requirements for the M.S.

- (1) Thesis research (MNS 698 A and B) will count for six hours of the total program.
- (2) You may petition the major professor, the Graduate Advisor and the GSC Chair to accept non-UT graduate courses with a grade of A or B for their supporting course work.
- (3) However, no course counted toward another degree may be counted towards a Master's degree in Marine Science.
- (4) You must write a thesis proposal and have it approved by your Temporary Advisory Committee.
- (5) You must present a seminar based on your thesis research before graduation.
- (6) You must submit a copy of the final thesis to the Marine Science Library.
- (7) All requirements for a Master's degree must be completed within one six-year period. Under normal circumstances, the M.S. degree should be completed within three years.

3.2.2. Master's Temporary Advisory Committee

A Master's Temporary Advisory Committee must be formed before the end of your second-long semester. The committee is required to have three members: the supervising professor and two other faculty members in appropriate fields. The supervisor (also called 'first reader') must be a member of the Marine Science GSC. In general, all committee members should be members of a Graduate Studies Committee. Occasionally, scholars who hold nonfaculty appointments at the University — research scientists, research engineers, or adjunct faculty members — or off-campus scholars are appointed because their expertise would be valuable to your progress. Membership of the committee should be discussed with the Supervising Professor and Graduate Advisor and is subject to the approval of the Graduate Dean. Formation and composition of the Advisory Committee shall be documented in writing to the GSC Chair and Graduate Coordinator by the end of the 2nd year in the program.

3.2.3. Registration for Thesis 698A and 698B

You must register for both of these courses during your M.S. You must first register for the A course for one semester upon your arrival and then for the B course every semester until your degree is completed. Registration for an A course and a B course in the same semester is not permitted; the courses must be taken over at least two semesters. Registration for thesis course counts toward the 9-hour registration requirement for teaching assistants, assistant instructors, or fellowship holders, although 698A and 698B only count as three hours during a semester. You must be registered for 698B in the semester you apply to graduate.

3.2.4. The Thesis Proposal

Each M.S. student is required to write a thesis proposal, which should include a short review of the literature, a description of the goals, hypotheses to be tested, procedures, and methods to be used to analyze the results. Typically, the proposal is no longer than ten double pages. Consult with your Supervising Professor regarding the most appropriate presentation format.

Approval of the proposal should occur no later than the end of the second year in the program and at least one semester prior to graduation. When the thesis proposal has been accepted by the committee, the faculty supervisor should notify the GSC Chair. A copy of the approved proposal should be uploaded to the main section of your personal UTBox folder. In addition, you should

distribute a final detailed proposal for the thesis research to the Advisory Committee at least two weeks (10 business days) prior to meeting with your committee for the final thesis review.

3.2.5. Certification of Academic Credentials for Graduation

Program of Work: Your completed Program of Work is submitted to the graduate school by the Graduate Advisor and Graduate Coordinator when you apply to graduate. The Program of Work must:

- Meet all requirements established by the Graduate Studies Committee and Graduate School.
- Include only courses taken within the past six years; and
- Include coursework sufficient in academic breadth/depth.

3.2.6. Seminar and Final Thesis

Each M.S. student is required to present a seminar based on your thesis research before graduation (the seminar is not a defense). The seminar can occur either before or after the thesis submission. Your final thesis needs to be signed off by all your committee members. You must give your committee members enough lead time to read your thesis, typically 2-4 weeks beforehand, and you also need time to incorporate their comments and edits before submitting your final thesis. It may be helpful to have a committee meeting before graduation (or during your latest annual committee meeting) to get approval/advice that you are ready to write your thesis and prepare your seminar.

Final semester registration: You are required to be registered for 698B in the semester in which you graduate. Once the Application for Graduation is submitted, you will be required to successfully complete your degree requirements, or you will be required to re-register and submit a new Application for Graduation.

Thesis Advisory Committee: When you apply to graduate, you must officially specify the membership of your Thesis Committee. The Graduate School requires a CV/resume for committee members who are not on the program's Graduate Studies Committee. Degree plan evaluators will search for them, but in cases where a CV/resume cannot easily be found online, it is the student's responsibility to provide this information. One of the degree plan evaluators will contact the student should a CV/resume be required. Changes to committee membership require approval by the Graduate Advisor, so students should be certain that the membership is complete and correct before initiating the application. Questions should be directed to the Graduate Coordinator, Graduate Advisor, or GSC Chair.

3.2.7. Changing from the M.S. Program to the Ph.D. Program

The Supervising Professor must contact the GSC Chair to inform the chair of your wishes. You must submit a letter to the GSC faculty addressing your reasons for requesting the change and summarizing your research progress. The Supervising Professor will also submit a letter of support for you, summarizing your strengths, progress and accomplishments, along with the professor's recommendation for action. The GSC chair will arrange to have a file available for faculty members to review which will include these letters, your transcripts, and other information that might support your application. Your request will be considered by the Graduate Studies

Committee once the completed file has been available to faculty for at least one week (5 working days). The GSC faculty will discuss the qualifications and vote on your request.

3.3. Requirements specific to Doctor of Philosophy

The purpose of the Ph.D. program is to train students for a career in research. Demonstration that the purpose has been achieved is by submission of a dissertation, which should be a major contribution to knowledge, indicating not only that you have mature knowledge of your particular field but also that you can design and execute original studies. Under normal circumstances the Ph.D. degree should be completed within six years. You must give a copy of the approved dissertation to the Marine Science Library and present a seminar based on the research before graduation.

The Graduate School has two formal course requirements for the Ph.D.: 1) a minimum of 30 hours of advanced course work is required including dissertation hours and 2) no more than six hours of course work may be waived from other institutions without special permission by the GSC and the Graduate School. The Department of Marine Science has several additional requirements, which include acceptable graduate work in Marine Science and related science disciplines, original research, and practical experience as a Teaching Assistant.

3.3.1. Additional Requirements

1. Ph.D. students are required to prepare a [Milestones Agreement](#) after the proposed Program of Work is approved.
2. Dissertation research (MNS x99W) will count for six hours of the total program.
3. All coursework, including any waived coursework from another institution, that is included in your Program of Work at the time of admission to candidacy must have been completed within the previous six years.
4. Both Dept. of Marine Science core course and advanced courses taken at UT for an M.S. degree can be counted towards the Ph.D.
5. Additional course requirements will depend on the student's educational background and performance in graduate school and will be recommended by the GSC, Supervising Professor, or examination committee and subject to approval by the Graduate Advisor.

3.3.2. Waiver of Credit for Previous Graduate Courses and Teaching Experience

PhD students who have completed graduate-level courses from another university may be eligible for a waiver of course credit as described below. The waiver of credit must be approved by the Graduate Advisor and Graduate Studies Committee Chair. To request the waiver of credit, your supervisor must provide, via email to the Graduate Advisor and the GSC Chair, an explanation of the request plus documentation of the content and completion of the previous course with a grade of B or above. This documentation must include an official transcript and official explanation of the course numbering and grading systems at the school at which the credit was earned; other information, e.g., a syllabus, is optional and may be requested by the GA or GSC Chair. The Graduate Advisor and GSC Chair will return a decision on the petition within one month of receipt of these materials; please submit requests with enough lead time for the decision.

1. MNS 191: Exemptions from one or two semesters of MNS 191 may be requested on the basis of comparable graduate coursework at another institution.

2. You may petition to be exempted from a maximum of six additional hours of courses from within the 30 hours required for the degree, as follows:
 - a) Exemptions are not permitted for the three Core Courses or MNS x99W.
 - b) Exemption petitions can include up to six hours of supporting natural science or subjects outside of marine science. The petition does not need to specify analogous courses at UT but solely needs to provide the documentation described above for graduate coursework in a subject outside of marine science equivalent to the number of credit hours requested in the exemption.
 - c) Exemption petitions can include up to three hours of advanced marine science coursework. The petition does not need to specify analogous courses in the Department of Marine Science. The petition must include the documentation described above of graduate coursework in a marine science subject equivalent to the number of credit hours requested in the exemption. The Graduate Advisor and GSC Chair may request additional information, if needed, to make a decision.
 - d) The total hours exempted under (b) and (c) combined may not exceed six.
 - e) You may petition for exemption from GRS 097 and/or the one-semester TA requirement based on equivalent coursework and experience. For GRS 097, the petition must include evidence of sufficient coursework in the theory of teaching; this can be an organized course or similar, if there is supporting documentation. For the one-semester TA, you must provide certification that you served as a teaching assistant for the equivalent of at least 20 hours per week for one full semester.

3.3.3. Selecting a Temporary Advisory Committee

You must form your Temporary Advisory Committee and have your first committee meeting by the end of your second year in the program. The role of the committee is to provide general guidance, help in formulating a dissertation proposal, and advise on preliminary research until the dissertation committee is formed. It also serves as the Examination Committee for both the written and oral candidacy exams.

The committee consists of four members – the Supervising Professor and three additional faculty members in appropriate fields. One of these members may be from outside the Department. Individuals serving as a member of a dissertation committee are generally expected to hold a terminal degree in the field and have an earned degree equivalent to or higher than the degree being pursued by the candidate. An equivalent record of exceptional professional accomplishment within the field may be considered in lieu of the terminal degree requirement. Committee members must hold a Ph.D. to serve on the Candidacy Exam Committee (see below).

You must propose faculty to be members of the Temporary Advisory Committee in consultation with your Supervising Professor and with the approval of the Graduate Advisor. You then contact faculty members and obtain written consent to serve on your Temporary Advisory Committee. Please also read section [3.3.6](#) below on the composition of your Doctoral Dissertation Committee, the conditions are slightly different and may impact your choice of Temporary Committee members.

Ordinarily, the Supervising Professor must be a member of the GSC. However, a person who is academically qualified, but not a member of the MNS GSC, may be appointed to co-chair the

dissertation committee and act as the research supervisor. Students who are considering that possibility should consult with the Graduate Advisor.

3.3.4. Eligibility for Admission to Candidacy for the Ph.D.

Recommendation for admission to candidacy by the Graduate Studies Committee is based on successfully passing both the written and oral candidacy exams. You may apply for admission to candidacy after passing each of the three core courses with a grade of B or better and must apply before the end of your 3rd year in the program. Within this time frame, the timing of the candidacy exams is determined by you and your advisor. Exceptions to these time limits must be approved by the Graduate Studies Committee (GSC). When you are planning on taking the candidacy exams, you should notify the GSC Chair at least 3 months in advance of your written exam date to ensure time to appoint an exam Chair and compose the exam. You should keep the Graduate Advisor and GSC Chair advised as to your progress toward taking the exams.

3.3.5. The Candidacy Examinations

The Candidacy Examination is a significant step in the progression towards earning a Ph.D. It is a test of both general and specific knowledge as well as an evaluation of critical thinking skills appropriate for a Ph.D. The examination will determine if you have adequate scholarly preparation in your field and the ability to conceive and execute rigorous, novel scientific research. In the Department of Marine Science (DMS), the examination consists of two parts: a written examination taken over two days and an oral examination.

The Candidacy Examination Committee (CEC) will consist of all members of a student's Temporary Advisory Committee that hold a Ph.D. Should the CEC have less than four members, the GSC Chair, in consultation with the Graduate Advisor and Supervising Professor, will appoint additional examiners to bring the number of examiners up to four. The GSC Chair will appoint a CEC Chair, who must be a member of the Marine Science GSC and your CEC but is not your advisor.

A. Written Candidacy Examination

The CEC Chair is charged with soliciting questions from all CEC members, curating the questions to reduce redundancy, and composing a single exam that is intended to take eight hours to complete. All CEC members must approve the final exam and agree on any resources that the student can use in the exam. The written exam will be administered in two parts on two successive days. Each day the student will receive half of the exam and have eight hours to complete it, although it is intended to take only four hours each day. The CEC has considerable latitude in this written examination, and you are encouraged to discuss the scope of the examination with your CEC. Each CEC member is expected to submit questions for possible inclusion in the examination, along with a reading list. The reading list should be provided within two weeks after the CEC is notified of the date of the written candidacy exam. The written examination will be graded by all CEC members, who will determine the final grade on the written exam and determine if you may move on to the oral examination. The grade may be one of the following:

- (1) advancing to the oral exam with no conditions.
- (2) advancing to the oral exam with specific conditions, such as additional course work.

- (3) re-examination at a later date.
- (4) termination from the pre-doctoral program with approval to pursue a master's degree.
- (5) dismissal from the graduate program.

The written candidacy exam grade must be agreed upon by a majority of the CEC members, and any minority votes must be accompanied by written feedback along with the exam certification form. If the CEC votes for a conditional pass (#2 above), no condition can be imposed where failing to pass the oral exam results in a retroactive failure of the written exam. If a conditional pass is granted, the CEC must identify the time frame for completion of the requirements and whether they must be fulfilled before the student may take the oral exam.

Results will be reported to the GSC Chair using the document "Written Examination Candidacy Certification" ([Appendix A](#) in this handbook). You may be allowed two attempts to pass the written examination. If a retake is allowed, you must retake the entire written examination. The timing of the retake exam is decided in consultation with the CEC. Any student who is unsuccessful after two attempts will not be permitted to advance to candidacy.

After receiving notice from the CEC that you have passed the exam or fulfilled the conditions imposed by the CEC, the GSC Chair will request that you schedule your oral examination. The oral examination must be taken within six weeks of this notice. The Supervising Professor may request an extension from the Graduate Advisor and GSC Chair.

B. Oral Candidacy Examination

The CEC will also be responsible for the conduct of the oral candidacy exam, with the CEC Chair leading the examination. Any GSC member from the Department of Marine Science is allowed to attend and ask questions. However, only members of the CEC may vote on the outcome of the examination.

Two weeks prior to the exam (10 business days), you must provide the CEC with a 10-15-page dissertation research proposal which includes a review of relevant literature, a statement of the purpose of the research, questions or hypothes(e)s to be tested, experimental approach, and an expected approach to analysis of results. In general, the format of the oral exam is that you make a brief (15 minutes or so) presentation on the proposed work, after which each member will ask a series of questions, then pass the questioning on to the next member. This continues until all members of the committee are satisfied that their examination is complete. The oral exam is intended to allow you to demonstrate that they can conceive, design, and interpret a research project suitable for a Ph.D. dissertation. You should expect to be questioned in considerable depth on the topic of the proposed research as well as on the relationship of the research topic to related aspects of marine science.

After the oral exam, the CEC will report the results to the GSC Chair using the document "Oral Candidacy Exam Certification" ([Appendix B](#) in this handbook). The exam results must be one of the following:

- (1) admission to candidacy with no conditions.
- (2) admission to candidacy with specific conditions, such as additional course work. Any conditions must have a timeline for completion.
- (3) re-examination at a later date.
- (4) termination from the pre-doctoral program with approval to pursue a Master's degree.
- (5) dismissal from the graduate program.

The oral candidacy exam grade must be agreed upon by a majority of the CEC members, and any minority votes must be accompanied by written feedback along with the exam certification. If option (1) or (2) is approved, you should proceed to work with the Graduate Advisor to propose a Dissertation Committee and seek approval of a dissertation proposal. If re-examination is permitted, the Certification document must specify the timeframe for the subsequent examination. You may be permitted two attempts to pass. Any student who is unsuccessful after two attempts will not be permitted to advance to candidacy.

Other Considerations

1. The research proposal approved by the thesis committee must be uploaded to your personal UTBox main folder and will become a permanent part of your record.
2. The oral candidacy exam can also serve as your annual progress meeting provided that
 - 1) your progress is discussed during the meeting and
 - 2) you prepare meeting notes that are signed by your committee and uploaded to the appropriate AY sub-folder on UTBox.

3.3.6. Selecting a Dissertation Committee

After the candidacy exam is passed, you will form your official Dissertation Committee. This can include members from the Temporary Advisory Committee, but changes can be made at this point. The Dissertation Committee has the responsibility for general supervision of your research and ultimately certifying to the Graduate Dean that an acceptable dissertation has been submitted and that all degree requirements are completed. Although the Supervising Professor provides day-to-day guidance to the student, all members of the committee are available for consultation, and you should feel free to ask for advice. The dissertation committee also has general responsibility for monitoring the students' progress.

All doctoral students, in consultation with the committee supervisor(s), must secure the agreement of a minimum of four people to serve on their dissertation committee. The following requirements apply to the composition of your Dissertation Committee:

- 1) Your supervisor and at least two other committee members must be from the Department of Marine Science GSC.
- 2) At least one person on your committee must be from outside your department. The outside member should have sufficient knowledge of your content area to provide an evaluation of your mastery of the subject.

The Graduate School requires a CV/resume for committee members who are not on the program's Graduate Studies Committee. Degree plan evaluators will search for them, but in cases where a CV/resume cannot easily be found online, it is the student's responsibility to provide this information. One of the degree plan evaluators will contact the student should a

CV/resume be required.

Retired faculty who have been nominated or granted emerita/us status and who were members of the GSC upon retirement may request continued membership on the GSC with approval of the Dean of Graduate Studies. Such requests should be accompanied by the recommendation of the appropriate GSC and be submitted to the graduate school by the GSC chair. If approved, the continued membership will be reviewed annually. Retired emerita/us faculty may serve on student committees as a GSC member or as a co-supervisor but may not serve as a sole supervisor. If a GSC member of a dissertation committee terminates employment with the university, except as discussed above, an additional current GSC member must be added to the committee. A former faculty member may remain on the dissertation committee but will assume status as an outside committee member.

Changes to the Dissertation Committee after admission to candidacy require the approval of the student, current and new committee members, and the Graduate Advisor, with final approval by the Graduate Dean. Exceptions to this process may be granted by petition to the Graduate Dean. Please be sure your committee membership is complete and confirmed before starting the application to candidacy.

3.3.7. Applying for Doctoral Candidacy

Students ready to apply for doctoral candidacy should ensure they have completed any steps that must be taken prior to candidacy. More information about Advancing to Doctoral Candidacy can be found on the Graduate School website at:

<https://gradschool.utexas.edu/academics/theses-and-dissertations/doctoral-candidacy>

After your committee is formed, visit [All My Addresses](#) to update your name, address and phone number, if necessary, then complete the online [Degree Candidacy Application form](#). You must have registered and paid tuition during the semester in which the candidacy application is submitted. You will be required to include a brief (60 lines or less) description of your dissertation proposal approved by your committee supervisor. This should be prepared in advance; the application will time out after 30 minutes of inactivity, and you will lose any changes not yet submitted or saved.

Those who wish to write a dissertation in a language other than English must [petition](#) to do so.

3.3.8. Other Requirements for Doctoral Candidates

Registration for MNS x99W: Once the Dean of Graduate Studies approves your application and you have been admitted to candidacy, you are required to **continuously** register for the dissertation course MNS x99W.

The Graduate School regularly reviews and approves candidacy applications during the first half of semesters, but applications submitted after the halfway point may not be reviewed immediately or in time for pre-registration. If you will be applying for candidacy later in the semester and want to sign up for the required _99W course the following semester it is recommended you pre-register for a placeholder course (MNS x80 Research) of the equivalent hours until your application is reviewed and approved. If you advance to candidacy after the

12th class day you are not required to enroll in the _99W course until the next long semester, after which point you must remain continuously enrolled in dissertation hours until graduation.

Continuous registration and leaves of absence: Registration for dissertation applies toward the 9-hour registration requirement for teaching assistants or fellowship holders. Under unusual circumstances, doctoral candidates may petition for a leave of absence. This petition must be presented through the Graduate Advisor before the semester for which the leave is sought. Students who do not register continuously and who are not on leave will be dropped from candidacy.

Extension of candidacy: If you have not completed your dissertation within two years of admission to candidacy, the GSC is required to review your progress and make a recommendation to the Graduate Dean on the extension of your candidacy. The GSC may recommend that the student's candidacy be extended for one year or that the candidacy be terminated for lack of satisfactory academic progress. Reviews will occur each year after an extension.

3.3.9. Graduation

Application for the degree: At the beginning of the semester that you intend to graduate, you must notify the Graduate Program Coordinator and their supervising professor of your intent to graduate. You must also apply to the Graduate School for the degree. Deadlines and submission instructions for graduation can be found online at:

<https://gradschool.utexas.edu/academics/graduation>.

Dissertation Defense/Final Oral Examination: You must circulate your dissertation, in its essentially final form, to your dissertation committee at least four weeks prior to your scheduled defense. When all members of your committee agree, you should schedule your final oral exam with the GSC Chair and notify the Graduate Coordinator and Seminar Chair of the time and place. The [request for final oral exam](#) is submitted to the Graduate School at least two weeks prior to the exam, following procedures specified by the Graduate School. Dissertation defenses cannot be held within two weeks of the last class day of the semester, unless the committee has consented to hold the defense within those last 2 weeks.

In the Department of Marine Science, the final oral exam consists of two parts. The first is a public seminar that is open to all faculty and students. Immediately following the seminar, you meet privately with your dissertation committee and any other GSC members who wish to be present, to answer questions from committee members. If at least four members of the committee approve, the committee chairman notifies the Graduate Dean of successful completion of the exam and that all degree requirements have been met.

Appendix A: Written Exam Candidacy Certification

(available from MSI-admin@ as a DocuSign) The undersigned oral examination committee members hereby certify that

(Student's name)

Has taken the written examination portion of the candidacy exam on_____.

Candidacy Exam Committee (CEC) Decisions:

CEC Chair: _____

- passed unconditionally.
- passed conditionally. The conditions are listed on the attached sheet.
- failed with a retake permitted.
- failed with no retake permitted. The student is recommended for termination from the pre- doctoral program with approval to pursue a M.S. degree
- failed with a recommendation for dismissal from the Department of Marine Science

CEC Member: _____

- passed unconditionally.
- passed conditionally. The conditions are listed on the attached sheet.
- failed with a retake permitted.
- failed with no retake permitted. The student is recommended for termination from the pre- doctoral program with approval to pursue a M.S. degree
- failed with a recommendation for dismissal from the Department of Marine Science

CEC Member: _____

- passed unconditionally.
- passed conditionally. The conditions are listed on the attached sheet.
- failed with a retake permitted.
- failed with no retake permitted. The student is recommended for termination from the pre- doctoral program with approval to pursue a M.S. degree
- failed with a recommendation for dismissal from the Department of Marine Science

CEC Member: _____

- passed unconditionally.
- passed conditionally. The conditions are listed on the attached sheet.
- failed with a retake permitted.
- failed with no retake permitted. The student is recommended for termination from the pre- doctoral program with approval to pursue a M.S. degree
- failed with a recommendation for dismissal from the Department of Marine Science

Revised: March 2021

Appendix B: Oral Exam Candidacy Certification

(available from MSI-admin@ as a DocuSign) The undersigned oral examination committee members hereby certify that

_____ (student's name)

has taken the oral examination portion of the candidacy exam on_____.

Candidacy Exam Committee (CEC) Decisions:

CEC Chair: _____

- passed unconditionally.
- passed conditionally. The conditions are listed on the attached sheet.
- failed with a retake permitted.
- failed with no retake permitted. The student is recommended for termination from the pre- doctoral program with approval to pursue a M.S. degree
- failed with a recommendation for dismissal from the Department of Marine Science

CEC Member: _____

- passed unconditionally.
- passed conditionally. The conditions are listed on the attached sheet.
- failed with a retake permitted.
- failed with no retake permitted. The student is recommended for termination from the pre- doctoral program with approval to pursue a M.S. degree
- failed with a recommendation for dismissal from the Department of Marine Science

CEC Member: _____

- passed unconditionally.
- passed conditionally. The conditions are listed on the attached sheet.
- failed with a retake permitted.
- failed with no retake permitted. The student is recommended for termination from the pre- doctoral program with approval to pursue a M.S. degree
- failed with a recommendation for dismissal from the Department of Marine Science

CEC Member: _____

- passed unconditionally.
- passed conditionally. The conditions are listed on the attached sheet.
- failed with a retake permitted.
- failed with no retake permitted. The student is recommended for termination from the pre- doctoral program with approval to pursue a M.S. degree
- failed with a recommendation for dismissal from the Department of Marine Science

Revised: March 2025