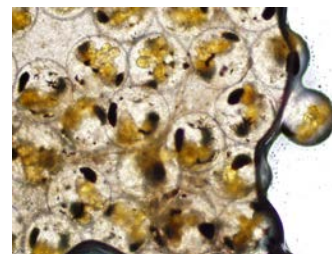


**Division of Coastal Sciences (COA)**  
Gulf Coast Research Laboratory (GCRL)  
School of Ocean Science and Technology (SOST)  
College of Science & Technology (CoST)  
The University of Southern Mississippi (USM)



**GRADUATE STUDENT HANDBOOK**  
*2017-2018 Academic Year*



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI**

GULF COAST RESEARCH LABORATORY

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## Purpose and Scope of this Document

The Coastal Sciences Graduate Student Handbook contains the policies and guidelines for doctoral and masters level graduate students in the Division of Coastal Sciences (COA) in the School of Ocean Science and Technology (SOST). These guidelines augment those stipulated in The University of Southern Mississippi (USM) [USM Graduate Bulletin](#). It is the student's responsibility to become familiar with all policies and deadlines in these documents.

## GCRL & USM Information

### Overview

The Gulf Coast Research Laboratory (GCRL) is a marine/ coastal research and education enterprise sited in Ocean Springs, Mississippi and is a unit of The University of Southern Mississippi's College of Science and Technology. GCRL has a workforce of 200 faculty, researchers, graduate students and support staff. Research at GCRL is multidisciplinary and applications-oriented with a focus on sustainable coastal and marine resources, development of new marine technologies, and the education of future scientists and citizens. Education opportunities span graduate degree programs in coastal sciences, undergraduate field courses in marine biology and hands-on discovery programs for precollege students and teachers.

Research and education activities at GCRL are conducted through an academic department, the Division of Coastal Sciences, and three centers including the Center for Fisheries Research and Development, the Marine Education Center, and the Thad Cochran Marine Aquaculture Center. Details about each GCRL department/center can be found on their webpages:

[Division of Coastal Sciences](#)

[Center for Fisheries Research and Development](#)

[Marine Education Center](#)

[Thad Cochran Marine Aquaculture Center](#)

### Contacts

#### Emergency

**Any Emergency:** 911

Ambulance Service: 800.677.1124

Hospital: 228.818.1111

Ocean Springs Police: 228.875.2211

Ocean Springs Fire Department: 228.875.1017

USM Police Dispatch (make sure to tell them you are at GCRL): 601.266.4986

#### Non-Emergency

[GCRL Directory](#)

[USM Directory](#)

USM Police Dispatch (make sure to tell them you are at GCRL): 601.266.4986

## Campus Security Authority

A Campus Security Authority is any individual or organization specified in an institution's statement of campus security policy as an individual or organization to which students and employees should report criminal activity.

### Campus Security Authorities include the following:

- A campus police department or campus security department of the university
- Any individual who has responsibility for campus security but who is not a member of the campus police department or the campus security department
- Any individual specified in the university's statement of campus security policy as an individual to which students and employees should report criminal offenses.
- Any individual of the university who has significant responsibility for student and campus activities

### Campus Security Authority (CSA) Incident Report

Under Federal Law (The Clery Act), the University is required to report annual statistics for crime and safety on campus. If you have an emergency situation, please call 911. Persons designated as Campus Security Authorities (CSAs) are required to report certain illegal conduct. If you have an incident or behavior to that you want to report, please contact one of the COA CSAs: **Dr. Joe Griffitt** (Office: Toxicology Building & Caylor 2<sup>nd</sup> floor; 228.818.8027; [joe.griffitt@usm.edu](mailto:joe.griffitt@usm.edu)) or **Darcie Graham** (Office: Field Studies Building, Room 1119; [darcie.graham@usm.edu](mailto:darcie.graham@usm.edu); 228.818.8887).

## Facilities

The GCRL is comprised of two campuses. The main campus (East Beach or Halstead) includes GCRL administrative offices, many COA faculty and students, Center for Fisheries Research and Development, Marine Education Center, Gunter Library, and the GCRL Museum. The Cedar Point campus includes many COA faculty and students, Marine Environmental Research Laboratory, Toxicology building, Thad Cochran Marine Aquaculture Center, and the GCRL Physical Plant. Campus maps can be found in Appendix A.

## Internet Access

You can access the USM/GCRL wireless network by logging in to the wireless network called "Eduroam". You will be required to log in using your username (format: [w#@usm.edu](mailto:w#@usm.edu), with # representing your multi-digit USM ID number; Ex: [w123456@usm.edu](mailto:w123456@usm.edu)) and password (the same as for your SOAR account). You can also use the [Eduroam Configuration Assistant Tool](#) to connect to the network. Eduroam is used on all USM campuses.

If you experience connection problems, contact the USM i-Tech Help Desk for assistance at 601.266.HELP.

## iTech

iTech services are available through the main helpdesk in Hattiesburg (601.266.HELP). If you have technology-related issues, you must log a support ticket through the [Self Service Portal](#). Issues will be resolved through Hattiesburg or by the GCRL iTech representative.

## Libraries

### Gunter Library

The Gunter library is located in the Caylor Building at the Halstead campus. The Gunter Library provides technical information for the research staff, resident faculty and students, and visitors. Included are files of abstracts and reprints, books and journals, expedition reports, dissertations, and reference works. Special book collections support the academic program of the Laboratory. The Gunter Library is a unique resource designed to support research, education, and service in the marine sciences.

In addition to regular library services, the Gunter Library has a copier machine and scanner, public computers and printers, and other resources. Library requests can be submitted to [guntergcr1@usm.edu](mailto:guntergcr1@usm.edu).

### USM Libraries

You can consult the [USM Libraries website](#) for more information about libraries available at The University of Southern Mississippi's Hattiesburg and Gulf Coast teaching sites, consult the following link. This [link](#) to the USM Library website provides access to the library catalog and numerous electronic databases.

## Parking Permits

Virtual parking permits are required on the GCRL campuses for anyone that will have a vehicle. To apply for a student virtual parking permit, visit the [USM Department of Parking Management](#). Once you have completed your [online registration](#) for parking, you will receive an email with your virtual parking permit number. [Permit information and costs](#) can be found online. If you have any questions or problems registering, please contact the Department of Parking Management 601.266.4943 or 601.266.5447.

## SOAR Account

SOAR is Southern Miss's online student record system. You must use your SOAR account to register for classes, pay your bills, and access other information related to your degree plan. Here's how to use SOAR:

- Access [SOAR](#).
- Once you are admitted to our program, you will receive an email from the USM Graduate School with your USM student ID number and a temporary password. When you log on to SOAR for the first time, click on "CampusID password management" and follow the directions to change your password to something that you will easily remember for future logins. If you experience problems with your user ID or password, contact the i-Tech Help Desk for assistance at 601.266.HELP.

- Once logged in to your SOAR account, use the *Student Self Service* (or *Self Service, Student Center*) menu to navigate your information.

## Division Policies

### COA Contact Information

#### COA Division Chair

Dr. Robert (Joe) Griffitt  
Research Office: Toxicology Building (Cedar Point campus)  
Administrative Office: Caylor Building (Halstead campus)  
Office Phone: 228.818.8027  
Email: [joe.griffitt@usm.edu](mailto:joe.griffitt@usm.edu)

#### COA Graduate Program Coordinator

Darcie Graham  
Office: Field Studies Building, Room 119  
Office Phone: 228.818.8887  
Email: [darcie.graham@usm.edu](mailto:darcie.graham@usm.edu)

[COA Faculty Directory](#)

[COA Student Directory](#)

### COA Website

The division website contains important information and links for students. You are encouraged to consult the “Information for Current Students” section. Also, the [Student Resources](#) page was developed to answer [Frequently Asked Questions](#) and as a [Quick Reference Guide](#). These pages are supplemental to the information contained in this document.

### Admission to Program

Admission into the graduate program is handled through the [USM Graduate School](#). The COA program generally accepts applicants for regular admission with the following GPA:

- for the MS degree it is a GPA of at least 3.0 on all undergraduate coursework.
- for the PhD degree it is a GPA of at least 3.5 on all graduate coursework (if coming in with a prior master’s degree), or a GPA of at least 3.5 on all undergraduate coursework (if coming in without a prior master’s degree).

These GPA criteria are higher than the minimum admissions standards for regular admission guidelines as set forth by the USM Graduate School. Applicants with a GPA below the standards above have potential to receive conditional admission. Students granted conditional admission to the Division of Coastal Sciences are not eligible for any graduate assistantship positions regardless of the source of funding. Refer to the [USM Graduate Bulletin](#) and [Quality of Work](#) section in this document.



## Graduate Assistantships (GAs)

### COA Policy on Student Assistantships

A variety of mechanisms are in place to provide financial support to COA graduate students:

- **Project Research Assistantship (RA)**  
*Funding is provided by the Major Advisor or Research Director through an extramurally funded research program. Students on such an assistantship must work 20 hours per week on research program related duties. The type of work and work load for project RAs is assigned by the Major Professor (or program PI). The majority of financial support for graduate students in COA comes as project RAs.*
- **COA Research Assistantship**  
*Graduate Assistantship in Coastal Sciences may be offered by the Division of Coastal Sciences to exceptional incoming students. Students will have the option to apply for these assistantships during the application process, and the candidates will be evaluated by committee. Awardees will be subject to annual review for continuation of funding. Recipients of this award will work under the guidance of their advisor and committee, but will have flexibility in determining the scope of work, as it will not be connected to a specific externally funded project. For information on this award, contact the COA Chair.*
- **COA Teaching Assistantship (TA)**  
*Currently not available through COA for Spring/Fall, but a limited number may be available during Summer terms, contact Summer Field Program Coordinator. Occasionally opportunities will arise to serve as a TA for another department for a semester, interested students should contact the COA Chair to learn more.*

All GAs receive a tuition waiver equal to 100% of the assessed in-state and out-of-state (if needed) tuition fees. Tuition waivers do not cover fees (e.g., course fees, student activity fees, international programming fees, capital improvement fees, etc.). Recipients of any GA must be enrolled full-time for the tuition waiver to be disbursed. For fall and spring semesters, GAs must enroll in 9-13 credit hours a semester. For summer semester, GAs must enroll in 3 credit hours. Tuition waivers are applied to student accounts in SOAR on the 10<sup>th</sup> class day of each semester. If you find you have a balance after this date, please contact the COA Graduate Program Coordinator.

The assistantship stipend levels are currently as follows:

- \$1,900/mo beginning M.S. students, \$1,950/mo for M.S. students after advancing to candidacy
- \$1,950/mo beginning Ph.D. students, \$2,000/mo for Ph.D. students after advancing to candidacy

Recipients of student assistantships are considered employees and are subject to the expectations of attendance of the staff and faculty of USM. Allotted holidays are those of

the staff and faculty of USM. All other personal time away from USM must be discussed with the Major Professor.

### COA Policy on Student Fellowships

Students on externally funded fellowships may receive a higher wage than that determined for assistantships. The amount of such awards is determined by the funding source. This exception applies only to externally funded fellowship and awards, and not grant funded assistantships. This exception is made to encourage students to compete for local, state, national and international fellowships and scholarships that will enhance their research and career potential.

Additional financial support for student research and travel to meetings is available through a number of competitive awards and scholarships offered to students in COA. Interested students should check the Student Funding link at [http://gcr1.usm.edu/coastal\\_sciences/scholarships.php](http://gcr1.usm.edu/coastal_sciences/scholarships.php)

### Graduate Faculty

The Graduate Faculty implements graduate education in COA. Only members of the Graduate Faculty may:

- Teach graduate courses
- Serve as member of Graduate Advisory Committees
- Serve as Major Professor.

There are various categories of Graduate Faculty. **Regular** Graduate Faculty are tenured or tenure track members of the university faculty and **Associate** Graduate Faculty are not. General requirements for all Graduate Faculty include an earned terminal degree and demonstrated performance in teaching and research. Graduate Faculty membership and status is determined on an individual basis. Requests for Graduate Faculty status are made by the COA Chair to the university's Graduate Council.

Regular Graduate Faculty are divided into three levels:

- Level 1 members may teach graduate courses and sit on M.S. Advisory Committees.
- Level 2 members may serve as the Major Professor for M.S. students and sit on Ph.D. committees.
- Level 3 members may serve as the Major Professor for Ph.D. students.

Associate Graduate Faculty status is typically held by individuals either outside the university or in non-tenure track positions who add value to graduate Advisory Committees. Associate Graduate Faculty may not serve as Major Professors. Likewise Emeritus/Emerita Professors may not serve as Major Professors, but they may sit on graduate committees pending approval by the COA Chair. Students may check with the COA Graduate Program Coordinator for a list of COA faculty and their graduate faculty status.

## Major Professor

Graduate education in COA is implemented through the relationship between the student and a Major Professor, thus the choice of Major Professor is critical to the success of the graduate student. Students planning on enrolling in COA should familiarize themselves with faculty members and then arrange a visit to discuss research interests and ideas, possible course work schedule, and financial support. After acceptance into COA, the Major Professor is the student's primary mentor and is responsible for advising the student and chairing the Advisory Committee.

The Major Professor:

- Provides the student office and research space.
- Assists the student in selecting the Advisory Committee.
- Assists in the development in the student's program of study and degree progress.
- Works with student to formulate a research prospectus.
- Obtains the resources necessary for the chosen research project.

For students admitted to COA without a Major Professor, the COA Chair will serve as interim advisor for a period of up to 12 months after which time the student must have a Major Professor to be able to continue in the graduate program.

## Advisory Committee

The Advisory Committee:

- Guides development and implementation of the student's graduate program.
- Approves the POS (if required), the thesis or dissertation research prospectus, and the thesis or dissertation
- Administers the appropriate written and oral examinations.

It is the duty of the Advisory Committee to oversee the academic development of the student. To ensure that the student has educational experiences commensurate with the degree sought, the Advisory Committee may require a student to complete particular courses and meet specific competencies. The COA Chair is an ex officio non-voting member of all Advisory Committees.

Students must submit a [Graduate Committee Request Form](#) to the USM Graduate School to set up an official Advisory Committee. This must be done in the first semester and before any major milestones are attempted. All members of the proposed Advisory Committee must have Regular or Associate Faculty Status. It can take several months to receive final approval for a new Associate Graduate Faculty status request.

## Grievance Procedure

Students may encounter problems in areas such as academics, student life and financial support. If a student feels a need to pursue grievance, the graduate student should first consult his/her Major Professor. However, if the student is uncomfortable or dissatisfied using this route, the student should meet with the COA Chair who will counsel the student on a confidential basis and will assist in selecting an appropriate grievance procedure. Students may also refer to the [Division of Student Affairs and the Campus](#)

[Action Referral and Evaluation System \(CARES\)](#) for more details on grievances and appeals.

### **Leave of Absence**

Under exceptional circumstances (chronic illness, family crisis, extreme hardship, military deployment, etc.) a student may request a leave of absence from his/her graduate program. A leave of absence will be granted for one semester; the student may petition for one additional semester as circumstances warrant. The maximum leave allowable is one academic year. Requests for a leave of absence should be submitted using the [Leave of Absence Request Form](#) to the COA Chair. The COA Chair will forward the Leave of Absence Form to the Graduate School indicating the department's recommendation regarding leave. Upon final review by the Dean of the Graduate School, the student and COA Chair will be notified of the final decision. A student wishing to return from leave must apply for readmission, but the application fee will be waived. Normally, requests should be submitted at least one semester before the leave of absence.

### **Outside Employment**

Assistantships are designed to allow students to pursue their studies and research full-time. If a student engages in outside employment it is likely to interfere with his/her good progress. Therefore it is required that students discuss outside employment with their Major Professor prior to accepting any outside position. In the case of a COA Research Assistantship, both Major Professor and the COA Chair will need to give approval.

### **Research Mind-Set**

Graduate study in COA is research intensive and seeks to provide students the opportunity to specialize in a particular field of study through active research. It is important that new graduate students make the transition from an undergraduate mind-set where degree requirements are fulfilled by completing a defined number of classes or credit hours to a graduate mind-set where degree requirements are fulfilled by completing and defending a research thesis.

### **Scholarship Opportunities**

There are a variety of awards and scholarships available for active COA students. These opportunities are available through the [USM Foundation](#) and the COA Awards Committee. More details on award and scholarship opportunities can be found on the [COA website](#).

### **Student Requests**

Requests for funding to present at conferences or workshops will be based on the student's record of engagement with the Division, including but not limited to: academic performance, attendance at seminars and Division functions, and assistance with Divisional requests from the COA Chair. Assistance will also be based on availability of funds.

## Academic Policies

### Annual Progress Report

At the end of each calendar year, students will provide an annual report on research progress via the COA Graduate Student Progress Form to the Major Professor and meet with members of the Student Advisory Committee. The meeting provides an opportunity for the student to discuss with the committee on progress being made. The Committee will guide the student based on information received, and the Major Professor will file a copy of the annual report along with Advisory Committee recommendations with the COA Graduate Program Coordinator.

### Application for Degree

Students should submit a signed, completed Application for Graduate Degree (cover sheet, updated plan of study, and payment receipt) to the Graduate School degree auditor and COA Graduate Program Coordinator by the specified deadline **the semester before the planned graduation semester**. A late fee will be assessed if the deadline is missed. The Graduate School degree auditor will check the application and notify the student and his/her advisor if any problems are evident. See the Graduate School website for [specific forms, directions, and deadlines](#).

A student who applies for degree but finds that he/she cannot finish as anticipated must submit a [Graduation Deferment Form](#) to the Graduate School degree auditor and COA Graduate Program Coordinator. There is no fee associated with the *first* deferment. Any subsequent deferments must be accompanied by a fee payment. Students should notify the Communication and Documents Specialist of a deferment.

### Changing from M.S. to Ph.D., or vice versa

M.S. track students may be reclassified as Ph.D. track students. Demonstrated excellence is required in coursework and a passing grade in the comprehensive examinations before a master's-track student can be officially reassigned to the doctoral program. The student must submit a new graduate application form declaring the student's intention. The student's Major Professor should write a memorandum to the COA Chair supporting such a change.

In contrast, if a Ph.D. student fails the qualifying exams on the second attempt, then the student will be considered for an M.S. only. The student's Major Professor will write a memorandum to the COA Chair indicating such a change, and the Chair will notify the Graduate School.

### Class Registration

It is the student's responsibility to consult with his or her Major Professor, select courses, and register in a timely manner using your SOAR account. Failure to do so may result in late registration fees that are the student's responsibility. In general, students should enroll for summer and fall classes in early April. Students should enroll for spring

classes in early October. If you are a GA, you must be enrolled in the appropriate number of hours for your tuition waiver to be applied.

Special Topics or Problems courses are typically listed with a 600-level and 700-level section (e.g., COA 690/790). If you select a course that has this distinction, M.S. students should enroll in the 600-level course and Ph.D. students should enroll in the 700-level course.

**First-time** registration assistance is available through the COA Graduate Program Coordinator. New students should familiarize themselves with USM's [SOAR](#) soon after acceptance. You should change your contact information to your (new) local address and phone number. This ensures all university correspondence will arrive as soon as possible. *All university correspondence will be through the university email account issued by USM.*

**For continuing students**, early registration must be accomplished by the use of SOAR. For instructions on how to register for classes using SOAR, refer to [SOAR Tutorials](#). Refer to the [current academic calendar](#) for important student-related deadlines and dates.

Students are encouraged to consult the [USM class schedule](#) for more information. The COA class schedule is also available on the [COA website](#). Class schedule information can also be accessed through SOAR. A list of required books is provided in SOAR at the time of registration. Textbooks may be purchased from the [University's Barnes and Noble online bookstore](#).

You are permitted, with the approval of your Major Professor, to take courses offered at the USM main campus in Hattiesburg or the Division of Marine Science teaching site at Stennis. Stennis is a federal facility and all students will be required to show identification prior to entry; foreign nationals will be required to have an escort while on Stennis grounds and may require additional security clearance that needs to be obtained prior to the beginning of semester. IVN (video-conferencing) may be available for classes not offered at the GCRL location. If you are interested in this option, contact the COA Graduate Program Coordinator for more information.

### **Completion of Required University Courses**

The following courses are required to be completed by all graduate students in the beginning of the **first semester** of enrollment. Some of these courses are through the [University's Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative \(CITI\)](#) as a part of USM's Research and Scholarly Integrity Assurance Program (IAP). In addition to the required University courses offered through CITI and the Plagiarism Tutorial (USM Libraries), you will also get notifications via email from Workplace Answers on additional required courses. The email provides a link and instructions on how to log in using your SOAR ID or access via a link below. You can also access the [Online Training Schedule](#) for more information.

1. [Research and Scholarly Integrity Assurance Program](#) (CITI)
2. [Animal Subjects Research Course](#) (CITI)

3. [Academic Integrity](#) course through Workplace Answers.
4. [Plagiarism Tutorial](#)

Following completion of the modules, the student should submit a copy of the certificate to the COA Graduate Program Coordinator AND their graduate degree auditor in The Graduate School.

The Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) must approve research projects that use vertebrate animals in any way. Procedures for Institutional Animal Care and Use review are currently available [here](#). Research that involves human subjects in any way must be approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Procedures for Human Subjects Review are available [here](#). Students will work in collaboration with their Major Professor to obtain these approvals.

### **Continuous Enrollment**

Students must be enrolled continuously (each fall and spring semester) after completing required coursework and passing the comprehensive examination through the completion of the degree program. Students must enroll as stipulated below:

- Students must enroll for a minimum of one (1) hour each fall and spring semester to maintain continuous enrollment.
- Students must enroll for one hour of thesis (698) or dissertation (898) during the semester they expect to take the comprehensive exam or defend and complete the thesis or dissertation. The final version of the document, approved by both the graduate committee and Graduate School, must be deposited to the Graduate School no later than the specified deadline. If a student fails to meet the deadline for submission, he/she must register for one (1) hour of thesis (698) or dissertation (898) until graduation.
- Failure to enroll for at least one (1) hour during the fall and spring semesters will result in discontinuation from the university. A student who has been discontinued and seeks readmission must apply for readmission, pay an application fee, and remit payment for one hour of tuition, at the current tuition rate, for each fall and spring semester not enrolled.

Students must enroll for one (1) hour in each summer semester if they are using university services, e.g., library and/or technology services.

### **Course Revalidation**

A student who successfully petitioned for an extension of the time limit for graduation due to extraordinary circumstances that slowed degree progress must revalidate all graduate courses taken at The University of Southern Mississippi outside the time limit for the degree before the student can graduate. The revalidation plan must be developed by the Major Professor and approved by the COA chair and Dean of the Graduate School. A \$50 fee for each course to be revalidated must be paid before the revalidation is attempted, up to a maximum of \$400 in revalidation fees. Over-age extension and transfer courses cannot be revalidated. The Major Professor must submit a [Revalidation Request Form](#) to approval to proceed with the course(s) revalidation. Once the courses



have been revalidated, the Major Professor must submit a [Revalidation Verification Form](#).

## Emphasis Areas

COA offers optional Emphasis Areas for the Coastal Sciences Graduate Degree. The four emphasis areas at the M.S. and Ph.D. level are Aquaculture, Aquatic Health Sciences, Coastal Ecology and Ecosystem Processes, and Fisheries and Fisheries Oceanography. The purpose of the Emphasis Areas is to enable students to develop research, analytical, computational, and writing knowledge, skills, and abilities in preparation for occupations in academic, government, and private organizations concerned with fields relevant to scientific investigation of near shore, marine, and coastal environments. Each Emphasis Area has a specific Plans of Study form, which are linked in the [Forms](#) section of this document.

In addition to the course requirements listed in the plans of study form for each Emphasis Area, students electing to pursue an optional Emphasis Area designation will complete an additional, emphasis-specific evaluation, at the time of their comprehensive examination. The evaluation is a written exam to determine emphasis-specific skills. The exam will consist of synthetic and critical thinking questions that are derived from the final exams in each of the Emphasis Area's specific coursework.

You must declare an Emphasis Area by completing a Change of Status form (see [Forms](#) section in this document). Students should do this during their first semester of enrollment to ensure timely completion of course requirements related to each Emphasis Area.

Waive or substitution of Emphasis Area core courses must have **strong** justification from student and major professor. If all guidelines are met (see bullets below), the COA Chair will write a justification letter to the Dean of the Graduate School requesting a waive or substitution of the core course. If the student was admitted to the program prior to Fall 2017, the student must submit an updated POS with this request.

- In order to waive a core course, a student must successfully pass a proficiency exam for the core course. Waiving of core courses will only be considered for PhD students entering with a MS degree AND have successfully completed graduate level courses in the core competency. Proficiency exams will be administered and graded by the current instructor for the core course. Results of the proficiency exam will be provided to the student, COA Graduate Program Coordinator, Major Professor, and Department Chair.
- Substitution of a core elective requires the following: (1) detailed syllabus of the course to be used for the substitution AND (2) course used for substitution has not been used to obtain a previous degree. Undergraduate courses will not be accepted for substitution of any COA core courses.

## Forms

Use the links below to access forms. Some forms should be completed by students, while others require completion by your faculty/advisor. Refer to this [guide](#) to determine who



should submit a particular form and when it should be submitted. Most [Student Completion Forms](#) or [Faculty Completion Forms](#) are located on the Graduate School website, but are also linked on the COA website on the [Forms page](#). Always ensure you are using the most recent forms available. Refer to the [COA FAQ page](#), if you have questions regarding any forms.

All forms must be typed (with the exception of signatures). Handwritten forms are not accepted by the Graduate School. Complete forms must be sent electronically to the COA Graduate Program Coordinator (Darcie Graham; [Darcie.Graham@usm.edu](mailto:Darcie.Graham@usm.edu)) and the COA Degree Auditor at the Graduate School (Roseanne Scammahorn; [Roseanne.Scammahorn@usm.edu](mailto:Roseanne.Scammahorn@usm.edu)).

### Student Completion Forms

#### Application for Graduation

[Change of Status Form](#) (to declare an emphasis area)

[COA Graduate Student Progress Form](#) (Note: This is a COA-specific form and does not need to be submitted to the USM Graduate School.)

#### Course Retake Form

#### Graduation Deferral Form

#### Graduate Committee Request Form

#### Leave of Absence Form

#### *Plan of Study (POS) Forms*

General COA Degree (no emphasis area):

[Coastal Sciences M.S.](#)

[Coastal Sciences Ph.D.](#)

COA Emphasis Areas

[Aquaculture M.S.](#)

[Aquaculture Ph.D. \(has B.S.\)](#)

[Aquaculture Ph.D. \(has M.S.\)](#)

[Aquatic Health Sciences M.S.](#)

[Aquatic Health Sciences Ph.D. \(has B.S.\)](#)

[Aquatic Health Sciences Ph.D. \(has M.S.\)](#)

[Coastal Ecology & Ecosystem Processes M.S.](#)

[Coastal Ecology & Ecosystem Processes Ph.D. \(has B.S.\)](#)

[Coastal Ecology & Ecosystem Processes Ph.D. \(has M.S.\)](#)

[Fisheries & Fisheries Oceanography M.S.](#)

[Fisheries & Fisheries Oceanography Ph.D. \(has B.S.\)](#)

[Fisheries & Fisheries Oceanography Ph.D. \(has M.S.\)](#)

### Faculty Completion Forms

*NOTE: These forms are password protected and for faculty use only. If you need the password, contact the COA Graduate Program Coordinator or the Graduate School.*

[Change of Status Form](#) (to change from Conditional to Regular Admission status)

#### Dismissal Form

#### Dissertation, Nursing Capstone, & Theses Proposal Approval Form

#### Results of Comprehensive & Qualifying Exams

[Results of Oral Defense for Thesis, Dissertations, and Nursing Capstone](#)  
[Transfer Credit Approval Form](#)  
[Revalidation Request Form](#)  
[Revalidation Verification Form](#)

## Quality of Work

### Conditional Status

Students granted conditional admission to the Division of Coastal Sciences are not eligible for any graduate assistantship positions regardless of the source of funding.

To obtain *Regular Status* a **Master's** student admitted conditionally must maintain a grade point average of at least 3.0 on the first nine (9) hours of coursework at or above the 600 level, not including research hours and not to include Special Problems. The 9 hour requirement must be met no later than the end of the first semester of the student's program for full time students; for part time students it must be met no later than the end of the second semester (Semester here is defined as Fall/Spring academic semester). If, prior to satisfying the requirements to have the conditional status removed, the student attempts more than 9 hours of coursework at or above the 600 level, he or she must achieve a 3.0 overall grade point average on all coursework. Only USM courses will be applied toward the 9 hours required. Lower-level coursework (599 or lower) taken to remedy perceived deficiencies may not be counted toward the nine-hour requirement. All courses taken to remove conditional status must be taken on a campus of The University of Southern Mississippi. Failure to achieve these requirements will result in dismissal from the graduate program.

To obtain *Regular Status* a **Ph.D.** student admitted conditionally must maintain a grade point average of at least 3.5 on the first nine (9) hours of coursework at or above the 600 level, not including research hours and not to include Special Problems. The 9 hour requirement must be met no later than the end of the first semester of the student's program for full time students; for part time students it must be met no later than the end of the second semester (Semester here is defined as Fall/Spring academic semester). If, prior to satisfying the requirements to have the conditional status removed, the student attempts more than 9 hours of coursework at or above the 600 level, he or she must achieve a 3.5 overall grade point average. All courses taken to remove conditional status must be taken on a campus of The University of Southern Mississippi. Failure to achieve these requirements will result in dismissal from the graduate program.

To request reclassification as a regular graduate student, the student's advisor must write a memorandum and complete a change of status form, through the COA Chair, to the Graduate School requesting such a change.

### Regular status

A minimum 3.0 GPA in coursework is required for graduation. If the student's cumulative GPA falls below 3.0, the student has 1 (one) probationary semester in which to elevate the cumulative GPA to 3.0 by taking coursework, not including research hours. Failure to elevate the cumulative GPA to 3.0 is grounds for termination from the graduate

program.

### Minimum GPA and Course Grade Requirements

A minimum 3.0 GPA in coursework is required for graduation. Only courses with earned letter grades of C or better will be accepted for credit towards the degree and no more than two (2) grades of "C+" or "C" across six (6) credit hours is allowable in any coursework attempted.

No grade of "C-" or lower is allowable in any coursework attempted. In this case, the student is automatically put on probation until the course is retaken. A course retaken to return a student to good academic standing must be retaken the next semester the course is offered. In the case of Special Topics or Special Problems courses, the student is required to retake the course covering the same material and earn a better grade. A student may retake one course to improve his/her grade point average. The original grade in the course will remain on the transcript but will not be used in the calculation of the GPA once the repeat has been recorded. A course retake form must be submitted to the Graduate School during the semester the course is retaken.

Failure to demonstrate satisfactory progress towards completion of degree requirements as determined by the Advisory Committee and COA Chair will result in the assistantship being revoked, and may ultimately entail termination of the graduate program. Dismissal from the graduate program will be initiated as a recommendation from the student's Advisory Committee to the COA Chair. The Chair will act on this recommendation and forward the dismissal request to the Graduate School.

### Probation

A student will be placed on academic probation for the next regular semester of enrollment (fall or spring) for the following reasons: the cumulative grade point average (GPA) or program GPA falls below 3.0, a grade of "C-" or lower is awarded; a seventh hour of C+ or below is awarded; a U is earned in thesis or dissertation research. The major professor and/or department chair will inform the student in writing that he/she will be placed on probation for one semester or as directed by the program (if full time) or up to two semesters (if part time). The letter will include a set of expectations for the student's return to good academic standing. Once the terms of the probationary period have been met, the department will inform the Graduate School and the student in writing. Failure to return to good academic standing by the end of the probationary period will result in dismissal from the program.

During the probationary semester(s), a student will not be allowed to engage in progress toward degree activities which include: defending a thesis, dissertation, or capstone project, and participating in qualifying or comprehensive examinations. A student may not graduate until he/she returns to good academic standing.

### Thesis and Dissertation Guidelines

All students are expected to show satisfactory research progress while enrolled in COA 698/898 thesis/dissertation. Each semester of enrollment, the Major Professor must

develop a set of expectations for research progress in writing, discuss these expectations with the student no later than the first week of the semester, and collect the signature of the student acknowledging that he/she understand the expectations. The Major Professor will assess student progress throughout the semester or minimally at the end of the semester to determine whether the work was satisfactory. Failure to meet the minimal expectations of satisfactory performance articulated in the research expectations document will result in the student being awarded an Unsatisfactory (U) grade and being placed on probation.

The student can return to good academic standing if satisfactory research progress is made during the probationary semester resulting in a Satisfactory (S) grade. One Unsatisfactory grade can be removed from the transcript by petition for a grade change by the Major Professor if the student earns two consecutive S grades. A second U grade in these courses at any point in the degree program will result in dismissal from the program. More specifics on the grading system for Thesis and Dissertation courses can be found in the [USM Graduate Bulletin](#).

Guidelines for formatting the thesis/dissertation can be found on the [Graduate School Website](#). Students should contact the Communications & Documents Specialist at the Graduate School if questions arise.

All students must have the Communications & Documents Specialist (Graduate School) check and approve their title pages before they ask the Advisory Committee members to sign them. Four title pages are required, each bearing the original signature of each committee member in black ink. The Graduate School will not accept final copies of theses or dissertations unless the Communications & Documents Specialist (Graduate School) has first checked and approved them.

### **Transfer Credit Policy**

As many as six (6) semester hours or nine (9) quarter hours of graduate credit from other accredited institutions may be transferred to a student's program based on review and approval of the Major Professor, Advisory Committee, COA chair, and Graduate School Dean. The coursework to be transferred must have been taken within the time period allowed for the particular graduate degree program. Such coursework must carry a letter or numeric grade of "B" or better and cannot be a pass/fail or satisfactory/unsatisfactory course. Incomplete "I" grades are not transferable. The coursework may not have counted toward another degree. Final evaluation and acceptance of transfer credit will not be made until the student has been in academic residence for one semester (doctoral only). Transfer grades will not calculate in the USM GPA. Transfer credit is not automatic and will be awarded only after evaluation of the content of the courses requested to be transferred. Students will supply syllabi, course descriptions, and other requested materials for review. A total sum of no more than twelve (12) credit hours of combined transfer coursework and non-degree coursework may be applied toward a graduate degree.

## Degree Requirements

### M.S. Degree

#### Suggested Timeline

Full-time students are expected to complete a Master of Science degree in three years or less. For part-time students, there may be up to an additional two years to complete the program (Semester here is defined as Fall/Spring academic semester).

| Action                              | Date Completed                  |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Completion of University courses    | 1 <sup>st</sup> Semester        |
| Formation of Advisory Committee     | 1 <sup>st</sup> Semester        |
| Approval of Program of Study (POS)* | 1 <sup>st</sup> Semester        |
| MS Thesis Prospectus approved       | 2 <sup>nd</sup> Semester        |
| Comprehensive exam                  | 3 <sup>rd</sup> Semester        |
| Thesis Defense                      | End of 4 <sup>th</sup> Semester |

*\*POS forms are NOT required for Fall 2017 newly admitted graduate students and continuing forward; instead, Degree Progress Reports (DPRs) will be used to monitor progress to degree. All other students must complete required POS forms throughout their degree plan. See section on POS/DPRs for more information.*

A more detailed outline of the expected actions for an M.S. degree can be found on the [Graduate Student Progress Form](#). Failure to demonstrate satisfactory progress towards completion of degree requirements may result in the assistantship being revoked, and may ultimately entail termination of the graduate program.

#### Formation of Advisory Committee

The M.S. Advisory Committee must have a minimum of three members (including the Major Professor). A majority of the committee must be from the COA faculty. Each committee member must have at least Level 1 Associate or Level 1 Regular Graduate Faculty status. The chair of the committee (Major Professor) must be a member of the COA faculty and have Level 2 Regular Graduate Faculty status. Additional appropriate, non-voting members may be added to the committee with the approval of the COA Chair. An additional COA faculty member may be appointed by the COA Chair to attend the oral comprehensive examination and one to attend the thesis defense to observe the proceedings. The committee evaluates the prospectus, provides guidance on courses the student should take, administers the comprehensive exam, and evaluates the written and oral defense of the thesis. Successful completion of the prospectus, comprehensive exam and thesis defense requires the approval of a majority of the committee members.

A [Graduate Committee Request Form](#) must be submitted to the Graduate School early in the student's degree program, prior to defense of proposal or the comprehensive exam, whichever comes first. All proposed committee members must have active Regular or Associate Graduate Faculty status.

### Approval of Program of Study (POS) – for students admitted prior to Fall 2017

By the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> semester in the COA graduate program, the student must file a Coastal Sciences MS Plan of Study (POS) with the Graduate School. The POS projects the coursework taken during the student’s M.S. degree program. The POS is formulated in consultation with the Major Professor and the Advisory Committee, and approved by the Advisory Committee and the COA Chair.

Students admitted prior to Fall 2017 will continue to use POS forms through graduation, even if granted an extension to their time limit. Students will need to submit POS forms to their degree auditor for preliminary and final degree audits. The POS forms will no longer be available on the Graduate School website, but will be maintained on the [COA website](#). While students can (and should) utilize a Degree Progress Report (DPR) in SOAR, any coursework taken prior to 01/01/2015 will not be populated on the DPR.

### Degree Progress Report (DPR) – for students admitted Fall 2017 to present

Effective for all Fall 2017 newly-admitted graduate students and continuing forward, the Graduate School will utilize Degree Progress Reports (DPRs) to monitor progress to degree. The DPR’s will replace Plan of Study (POS) forms and graduate degree auditors in the Graduate School will not accept POS forms from these students. Any coursework taken by any student (including Fall 2017 admits) prior to 01/01/2015 will not be populated on the DPR.

Students and faculty should utilize the DPR to track progress to degree and assist in course scheduling. DPRs can be accessed through SOAR. Students should refer to the [“View SMART sheet..now Advisement/Degree Progress Report \(DPR\)” tutorial](#) for instructions on how to access this information in SOAR. Faculty should refer to the [“Advisors: View DPR \(Degree Progress Report\)” tutorial](#) for instructions on how to access this information in SOAR.

### Degree Plan

A minimum of 30 graduate credit hours beyond the Baccalaureate is required for the MS in Coastal Sciences. The [Graduate Bulletin](#) should be consulted for the breakdown of specific hours required per course type (Electives, Research, Thesis, etc.) for a general COA degree and Emphasis Areas.

Below is a guideline to credit hour requirements for M.S. students that select a **general COA degree plan**. For students that declare an Emphasis Area, there are specific courses required for the Electives. The [Graduate Bulletin](#) should be consulted for specific details related to any COA degree plan.

| <b>Course Type – for general COA degree (not Emphasis Areas)</b> | <b>Hours Required</b> |
|--|-----------------------|
| COA 691 (Research)   | 6                     |
| COA 698 (Thesis)   | 6                     |
| Electives (Determined by Major Professor & Advisory Committee)   | 18                    |
| <b>Total Hours Required</b>                                      | <b>30</b>             |

*Note: COA 691- Research, COA 697- Independent Study, and COA 698- Thesis do not*



*count toward credit hours of electives for the M.S. degree. A minimum of 18 credit hours must be earned at the 600 level or greater.*

### Thesis Prospectus Approval

Within **6 months** of approval of the Plan of Study (POS), the student is required to prepare a concise, yet detailed, written thesis prospectus. An approved prospectus is a research plan detailing the scope of work and associated deliverables that fulfills the thesis requirements of the M.S. degree. This written document must be presented to the Advisory Committee at least two weeks prior to the student making an oral slideshow presentation before a public audience on the prospectus.

Any subsequent revisions to the research prospectus must then be approved by the Advisory Committee within one (1) semester of the presentation and only after approval can the thesis research project be considered acceptable for earning the degree. Modifications to an approved prospectus during the implementation of the research is acceptable. Minor modifications need approval of the Major Professor only; however, major changes in scope or direction of the research must be approved by the Advisory Committee.

### Comprehensive Examination

After completing all courses in the POS/DPR (typically in the third semester or at another time acceptable to the Advisory Committee) a written and/or oral comprehensive examination will be conducted by the Advisory Committee. The examination is passed by a majority vote of the Advisory Committee members and may be taken twice only. Failure to pass the M.S. comprehensive exam on the second attempt is grounds for termination from the program. The Major Professor must submit the results of the M.S. comprehensive exam on the [Results of Comprehensive & Qualifying Exams](#) form to the COA Graduate Program Coordinator and the Graduate School degree auditor immediately after completion of the exam.

Those students electing to pursue an optional Emphasis Area designation will also need to complete an additional, emphasis-specific evaluation, at the time of their comprehensive examination. The evaluation is a written exam to determine emphasis-specific skills and is used to help evaluate student learning outcomes in the Emphasis Area program.

Students advance to candidacy for the M.S. in Coastal Sciences by completing all coursework with at least a 3.0 GPA, completing an approved thesis prospectus, and successfully passing the comprehensive examination.

### Thesis

The M.S. thesis research is designed to give the student experiences in the scientific process. The M.S. thesis must be the result of original investigation. The thesis research project is developed by the student under the direction of the Major Professor.

## Thesis Defense

After courses are completed and the comprehensive examinations passed, the M.S. candidate becomes qualified to defend the thesis in their next semester. At least two (2) weeks prior to the defense the student will present an acceptable copy of the thesis to all members of the Advisory Committee and have the work approved by the Communications & Documents Specialist (Graduate School).

The thesis defense includes (1) a public seminar followed by (2) an Advisory Committee oral examination. Student defenses must be publicly advertised at least two weeks prior to the defense date. It is the responsibility of the student and their Major Professor to determine the defense date and the responsibility of the student to reserve a venue. A majority vote of the Advisory Committee determines the outcome of the defense. The outcome must be reported to the COA Graduate Program Coordinator and Graduate School as soon as possible after the meeting. It is the responsibility of the students to adhere to the [timelines](#) set by the Graduate School.

## Time Limit

A Master's degree must be completed within five (5) academic years from the semester of initial enrollment in a Master's program. Five years is the maximum time allowed for graduate coursework toward a Master's degree for both full time and part time students. A student must meet the requirements and adhere to the policies described in the [USM Graduate Bulletin](#) that is current the first semester of enrollment through the fifth (5<sup>th</sup>) year in the program.

If a student's degree progress is slowed due to an extreme hardship, he/she may petition the COA Chair via the Major Professor for a limited extension which will then be reviewed by the Dean of the Graduate School. If an extension is granted, the student will become subject to the [USM Graduate Bulletin](#) that is current the semester the extension is granted and will be responsible for meeting any new requirements of the degree and/or departmental or university policies. Course revalidation will be required.

Continuance of assistantship support depends on good progress towards completion of a degree (as well as availability of funds). Therefore, full-time M.S. students will not be eligible for further support after their third year. Under extenuating circumstances, a student may, with the support of the student's advisor and committee, petition to be allowed to receive additional support beyond these limits. Such a request requires the approval of the COA Chair and a majority vote of the COA faculty in support of the request.

## Ph.D. Degree

### Suggested Timeline

Full-time students are expected to complete a Ph.D. from a master's degree in five years or less, and a Ph.D. from a bachelor's degree in six years or less. For part-time students, there may be up to an additional two to three years to complete the program. Part-time students especially should be aware of the university time limits discussed later in this section (Semester here is defined as Fall/Spring academic semester).



| Action                              | Date Completed              |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Completion of University courses    | 1 <sup>st</sup> Semester    |
| Approval of Program of Study (POS)* | 1 <sup>st</sup> Semester    |
| Formation of Advisory Committee     | 2 <sup>nd</sup> Semester    |
| Qualifying Exam                     | 3 <sup>rd</sup> Semester    |
| PhD Prospectus approved             | 4 <sup>th</sup> Semester    |
| Formal coursework completed         | 3 <sup>rd</sup> Year        |
| Comprehensive exam                  | 3 <sup>rd</sup> Year        |
| Dissertation Defense                | End of 4 <sup>th</sup> Year |

*\*POS forms are NOT required for Fall 2017 newly admitted graduate student and continuing forward; instead, Degree Progress Reports (DPRs) will be used to monitor progress to degree. All other students must complete required POS forms throughout their degree plan. See section on POS/DPRs for more information.*

A more detailed outline of the expected actions for a Ph.D. degree can be found on the [Graduate Student Progress Form](#). Failure to demonstrate satisfactory progress towards completion of degree requirements may result in the assistantship being revoked, and may ultimately entail termination of the graduate program.

#### Formation of Advisory Committee

The Ph.D. Advisory Committee must have a minimum of four members (including the Major Professor). A majority of the committee must be from the COA faculty. Each committee member must have at least Level 2 Associate or Level 2 Regular Graduate Faculty Status. The chair of the Committee (Major Professor) must be a member of the COA faculty and have Level 3 Regular Graduate status. Only one committee member can be from outside the university. Additional appropriate, non-voting members may be added to the committee with the approval of the COA Chair. An additional COA faculty member may be appointed by the COA Chair to attend the oral comprehensive examination and one to attend the dissertation defense to observe the proceedings. The committee evaluates the prospectus, provides guidance on courses the student should take, administers the qualifying and comprehensive exams and evaluates the written and oral defense of the dissertation. Successful completion of the prospectus, comprehensive exam, and dissertation defense requires the approval of a majority of the committee members.

A [Graduate Committee Request Form](#) must be submitted to the Graduate School early in the student's degree program, prior to defense of proposal or the comprehensive exam, whichever comes first. All proposed committee members must have active Regular or Associate Graduate Faculty status.

#### Approval of Program of Study (POS) – for students admitted prior to Fall 2017

By the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> semester in the COA graduate program, the student must file a Coastal Sciences PhD Plan of Study (POS) with the Graduate School. The POS projects the coursework taken during the student's Ph.D. program. The POS is formulated in consultation with the Major Professor and the Advisory Committee, and approved by the Advisory Committee and the COA Chair.

Students admitted prior to Fall 2017 will continue to use POS forms through graduation, even if granted an extension to their time limit. Students will need to submit POS forms to their degree auditor for preliminary and final degree audits. The POS forms will no longer be available on the Graduate School website, but will be maintained on the [COA website](#). While students can (and should) utilize a Degree Progress Report (DPR) in SOAR, any coursework taken prior to 01/01/2015 will not be populated on the DPR.

**Degree Progress Report (DPR) – for students admitted Fall 2017 to present**

Effective for all Fall 2017 newly-admitted graduate students and continuing forward, the Graduate School will utilize Degree Progress Reports (DPRs) to monitor progress to degree. The DPR’s will replace Plan of Study (POS) forms and graduate degree auditors in the Graduate School will not accept POS forms from these students. Any coursework taken by any student (including Fall 2017 admits) prior to 01/01/2015 will not be populated on the DPR.

Students and faculty should utilize the DPR to track progress to degree and assist in course scheduling. DPRs can be accessed through SOAR. Students should refer to the [“View SMART sheet..now Advisement/Degree Progress Report \(DPR\)” tutorial](#) for instructions on how to access this information in SOAR. Faculty should refer to the [“Advisors: View DPR \(Degree Progress Report\)” tutorial](#) for instructions on how to access this information in SOAR.

**Degree Plan**

A minimum of 84 graduate credit hours beyond the Baccalaureate degree or a minimum of 54 graduate credit hours beyond the MS degree is required for the Ph.D. in Coastal Sciences. The [Graduate Bulletin](#) should be consulted for the breakdown of specific hours required per course type (Electives, Research, Dissertation, etc.) for a general COA degree and Emphasis Areas.

Below is a guideline to credit hour requirements for Ph.D. students that select a **general COA degree plan**. For students that declare an Emphasis Area, there are specific courses required for the Electives and Research Tools. The [Graduate Bulletin](#) should be consulted for specific details related to any COA degree plan. *Note: COA 791- Research, COA 797- Independent Study, and COA 898- Dissertation do not count toward credit hours of electives or Research Tools for the Ph.D. degree. 500-level courses do not count towards a Ph.D. degree.*

*Requirements for students entering with the B.S. degree*

| <b>Course Type – for general COA degree (not Emphasis Areas)</b> | <b>Hours Required</b> |
|--|-----------------------|
| COA 791 (Research)   | 28                    |
| COA 898 (Dissertation)   | 12                    |
| Research Tools   | 15                    |
| Electives (Determined by Major Professor & Advisory Committee)   | 29                    |
| <b>Total Hours Required</b>                                      | <b>84</b>             |

*Requirements for students entering with the M.S. degree*

| <b>Course Type– for general COA degree (not Emphasis Areas)</b> | <b>Hours Required</b> |
|---|-----------------------|
| COA 791 (Research)  | 16                    |
| COA 898 (Dissertation)  | 12                    |
| Research Tools  | 15                    |
| Electives (Determined by Major Professor & Advisory Committee)  | 11                    |
| <b>Total Hours Required</b>                                     | <b>54</b>             |

### Research Tools

The Ph.D. program requires the student and Advisory Committee include a minimum of 15 credit hours of research tools appropriate for the student's goals. The research tools credit hours count toward the total coursework requirement of 54 or 84 credit hrs.

Courses qualifying as research tools are those in which a student learns a technical skill that is useful and relevant to their scientific research. Examples include courses in which statistical analysis, computer programming, field or laboratory instrumentation, field or laboratory techniques are learned. Additional details on suggested research tools courses offered through the Emphasis Area program can be found the POS forms. The specific research tools courses are approved by the Advisory Committee and the COA Chair. The research tools must be listed on the POS and then submitted to the Graduate School for final approval. Evaluation of competency in research tools will be assessed through the student's grades in relevant coursework, and by the Advisory Committee during the qualifying and comprehensive exams as well as the final dissertation defense.

### Qualifying Exam

A Ph.D. qualifying exam serves two purposes:

1. The exam is intended to extend the discipline-specific knowledge successfully gained through the first year of coursework into an integrative context across the multiple disciplines of coastal sciences.
2. The exam is intended to be administered early enough in a Ph.D. student's program that a required proficiency of coastal sciences may be adequately assessed.

All Ph.D. students must successfully complete the qualifying exam within six months of the end of their second semester. The exam will be interdisciplinary and is intended to extend discipline-specific knowledge into an integrative context across the multiple disciplines comprising coastal sciences.

The Qualifying Exam Committee will evaluate the Ph.D. student's written responses to assess the student's academic progress and to help evaluate student learning outcomes in the Emphasis Area program. If the majority of the Qualifying Exam Committee members determine that the student performs at a standard equivalent to a B or greater, the student will pass the exam. If a Ph.D. student fails the qualifying exam on the second attempt, then the student will be considered for an MS only.

The Major Professor must submit the results of the Ph.D. qualifying exam on the [Results of Comprehensive & Qualifying Exams](#) form to the COA Graduate Program Coordinator and the Graduate School degree auditor immediately after completion of the exam.

#### Dissertation Prospectus Approval

Within **12 months** of approval of the Plan of Study (POS), the student is required to prepare a concise, yet detailed, written dissertation prospectus. An approved prospectus is a research plan detailing the scope of work and associated deliverables that fulfills the dissertation requirements of the Ph.D. degree. This written document must be presented to the Advisory Committee at least two weeks prior to the student making an oral slideshow presentation before a public audience on the prospectus.

Any subsequent revisions to the research prospectus must then be approved by the Advisory Committee within one (1) semester of the presentation and only after approval can the dissertation research project be considered acceptable for earning the degree. Modification to an approved prospectus during the implementation of the research is acceptable. Minor modifications need approval of the Major Professor only; however, major changes in scope or direction of the research must be approved by the Advisory Committee.

#### Comprehensive Examination

After completing all courses in the POS/DPR (typically in the fourth semester or at another time acceptable to the Advisory Committee) a written and oral comprehensive examination will be conducted by the Advisory Committee. In most cases the written examination is taken and, pending the outcome of that examination, an oral examination is taken within 30 days of the decision of the written examination by the Advisory Committee. The examination will be passed by a majority vote of the Advisory Committee members and may be taken twice only. If a student fails the Ph.D. comprehensive exam on a second attempt, then the student will be considered for an M.S. degree only. The Major Professor must submit the results of the Ph.D. comprehensive exam on the [Results of Comprehensive & Qualifying Exams](#) form to the COA Graduate Program Coordinator and the Graduate School degree auditor immediately after completion of the exam.

Those students electing to pursue an optional Emphasis Area designation will also need to complete an additional, emphasis-specific evaluation, at the time of their comprehensive examination. The evaluation is a written exam to determine emphasis-specific skills and is used to help evaluate student learning outcomes in the Emphasis Area program.

Students advance to candidacy for the Ph.D. in Coastal Sciences by completing all coursework with at least a 3.0 GPA, completing an approved dissertation prospectus, and successfully passing the qualifying and comprehensive examinations.

Doctoral candidates should complete the comprehensive examination **at least** one (1) semester prior to the defense of the dissertation.

## Dissertation

The PhD dissertation research is an independent and original investigation that results in a significant contribution to science. The PhD dissertation must be the result of original investigation. The dissertation research project is developed by the student under the direction of the Major Professor.

## Dissertation Defense

After courses are completed, the comprehensive examinations passed, and the research tools requirement fulfilled, the Ph.D. candidate becomes qualified to defend the dissertation in their next semester. At least two (2) weeks prior to the defense the student will present an acceptable copy of the dissertation to all members of the Advisory Committee, and have the work approved by the Communications & Documents Specialist (Graduate School).

The dissertation defense includes (1) a public seminar followed by (2) an Advisory Committee oral examination. Student defenses must be publicly advertised at least two weeks prior to the defense date. It is the responsibility of the student and their Major Professor to determine the defense date and the responsibility of the student to reserve a venue. A majority vote of the Advisory Committee determines the outcome of the defense. The outcome must be reported to the COA Graduate Program Coordinator and Dean of CoST as soon as possible after the meeting. It is the responsibility of the students to adhere to the timelines set by the Graduate School at <https://www.usm.edu/graduate-school/application-graduate-degreecertificate>.

## Residency

In order to be considered a student in good standing, the Division and University require that a period of on-site residency be maintained. Residency is structured as a full-time experience and provides doctoral students with significant time for extensive involvement with faculty, professional colleagues, and peers as well as concentrated study and course work on a campus of The University of Southern Mississippi. Options for satisfying the residency requirement are: (a) two consecutive academic semesters (Fall and Spring) of 12 credit hrs each, (b) 2 consecutive summer terms of 12 credit hrs each, or (c) 3 consecutive full-time semester of 9 credit hrs each.

## Time Limit

A doctorate must be completed within eight (8) calendar years from the date of initial enrollment in a doctoral program. Eight (8) years is the maximum time allowed for graduate credits toward a doctoral degree for both full time and part time students. A student must meet the requirements and adhere to the policies described in the [USM Graduate Bulletin](#) that is current the first semester of enrollment through the eighth (8<sup>th</sup>) year in the program.

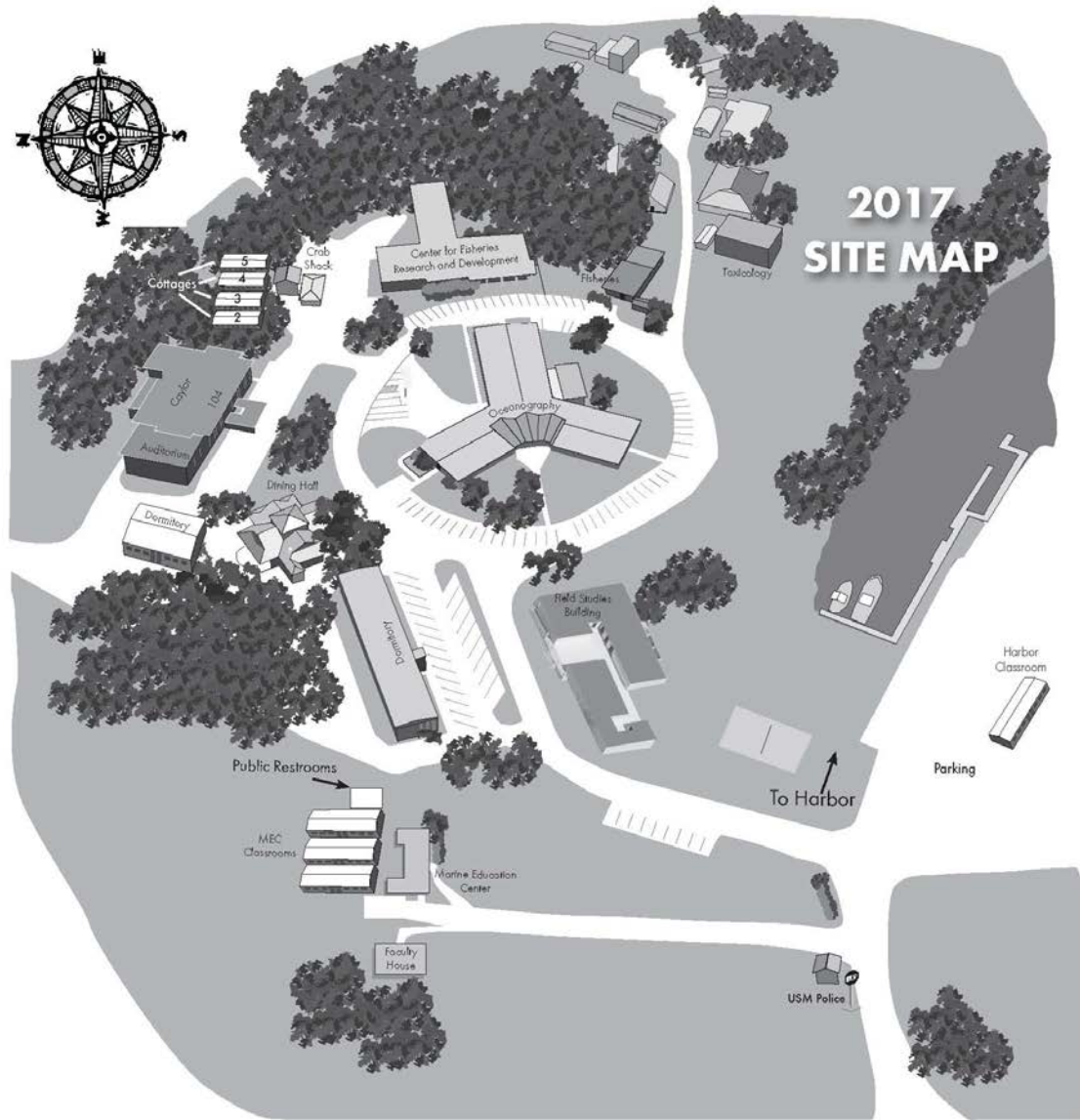
If a student's degree progress is slowed due to an extreme hardship, he/she may petition the COA Chair via the Major Professor for a limited extension which will then be reviewed by the Dean of the Graduate School. If an extension is granted, the student

becomes subject to the [\*USM Graduate Bulletin\*](#) that is current the semester the extension is granted, including responsibility for any changes in the requirements of the degree and/or departmental or university policies. Course revalidation will be required.

Continuance of assistantship support depends on good progress towards completion of a degree (as well as availability of funds). Therefore, full-time Ph.D. students will not be eligible for further support after their sixth year. Under extenuating circumstances, a student may, with the support of the student's advisor and committee, petition to be allowed to receive additional support beyond these limits. Such a request requires the approval of the COA Chair and a majority vote of the COA faculty in support of the request.



# Appendix A: Campus Maps



**THE UNIVERSITY OF  
SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI**

GULF COAST RESEARCH LABORATORY

**Halstead Campus (Main Campus)**

**Address: 703 East Beach Drive, Ocean Springs, MS**

Halstead

**Caylor 104** - 920 s.f. - Max. Capacity = 61 but usually set up as about 40

**Auditorium** - 2065 s.f. - Capacity = 150 fixed seats

**Dining hall** - Dining Space - 1756 s.f. Capacity = 117

**4 MEC classrooms** - Each classroom 600 s.f. - Max. capacity = 40

**Harbor Classroom** - 960 s.f. = Max capacity = 64

**Cottage 2** - 2 bedroom - 2 Bunk beds and a double bed in small room = 6

**Cottage 3** - 1 bedroom with bunk beds = 2

**Cottage 4** - 1 bedroom with bunk beds = 2

**Cottage 5** - 2 bedroom - 2 Bunk beds and a double bed in small room = 6

East Beach Drive



GCRL Cedar Point Campus



GCRL/CPLR: Some buildings shown may have been built by previous owners of the land. The City of Ocean Springs does not warrant the accuracy of the information shown on this map. The City of Ocean Springs does not warrant the accuracy of the information shown on this map. The City of Ocean Springs does not warrant the accuracy of the information shown on this map. The City of Ocean Springs does not warrant the accuracy of the information shown on this map.

**Gulf Coast Research Laboratory**  
**Cedar Point Campus**  
300 Laurel Oak Drive, Ocean Springs, MS 39564  
Numbers following building names correspond to updated street addresses.