

“The Successful Graduate Student”

The how-to manual

Jackson State University

The Division of Graduate Studies

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The Division of Graduate Studies has administrative supervision of all graduate work at the University. The Division of Graduate Studies is composed of the departments which offer graduate instruction leading to masters', educational specialist, and doctoral degrees. The faculty of the Division of Graduate Studies consists of those faculty members in the departments who are qualified to teach and conduct research on the graduate level. Members of the graduate faculty engage in scholarly pursuits in terms of research, writing, publishing, and participating in professional organizations. The Graduate Faculty consists of the President, Vice President for Academic Affairs, the academic deans and those members of the general faculty who by their scholarly attainments in their own fields of specialization have demonstrated their competence to offer graduate instruction.

The purpose and functions of the Graduate Faculty, within limits established by the Board of Trustees, are to offer graduate courses, supervise thesis and dissertation research, and advise the Graduate Council and the Graduate Dean on the establishment of policies relating to graduate training. The major advisory functions of the Graduate Faculty are carried on by committees appointed by the Graduate Dean. Appointment to the Graduate Faculty is made by the Vice President for Academic Affairs upon the recommendation of the Graduate Council and, with the approval of the Graduate Dean.

Degrees higher than the baccalaureate are granted at Jackson State University because of special attainments achieved by degree candidates. Prospective students should understand clearly that a graduate degree is not awarded upon the basis of a collection of course credits, or the passing of certain prescribed examinations, or the submission of a thesis or dissertation. In other words, the student cannot expect to receive a higher degree because of successfully completing the individual parts of the degree program.

To receive a higher degree, the student must demonstrate to the satisfaction of the graduate faculty of the department and school that they have attained through intelligence, scholarship, industry, and personal qualities the high level of professional and academic competence which the faculty of each department expects of a person holding the degree being sought.

"The how-to manual"

This "how to manual" offers tips to aid you in completing Division of Graduate Studies at Jackson State. This manual contains the following

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UNIVERSITY RESOURCES

Resources for graduate students are found throughout the campus in documents, offices, associations, on-line, and in our faculty, staff and administrators.

Your Academic Advisor: Each graduate student pursuing a degree is assigned an adviser or mentor within the area in which the student is concentrating. This adviser will be appointed by the department chair in consultation with the student. If the student in a degree program chooses to write a thesis or a project, a committee of at least three (3) graduate faculty members will be appointed to help direct the thesis. Students writing a dissertation will be guided by a committee, chaired by the major advisor.

Your Department Chair/Program Director: The Chair is responsible for most of what occurs within the Department at both graduate and undergraduate level. Graduate Program Directors specialize in matters directly related to graduate education in your department.

Your Academic College Dean- The Dean of your college is available to assist in advising and counseling students academically. The Dean is charged to supervise all schools, departments and programs within the College and to coordinate various activities.

The Division of Graduate Studies- The Division of Graduate Studies has a knowledgeable and helpful staff. The staff will advise you on aspects of Division of Graduate Studies. The Division of Graduate Studies sponsors periodic workshops for graduate students, faculty and staff.

The Graduate Catalog- The Catalog contains a description of the content of courses and credit hours. It lists admission and graduation requirements for the degrees offered by the University. It also lists office locations and phone numbers of important offices on campus. Companion to this is the **Class Schedule Booklet**, published twice a year. This booklet contains semester course offerings, semester calendar, tuition and fee schedule, refund policy, directions for early registration, JSUTALKS instruction (Computer registration) and other useful items.

Office of Financial Aid- The Office of Admissions (undergraduate) and Financial Aid at Jackson State University coordinates all financial aid offered to students. Financial Aid is the economic assistance available to help a student meet the difference between what he/she can afford to pay and what it will actually cost to attend Jackson State University. This economic assistance may be in the form of grants, loans, employment, scholarships, or a combination of any of these programs. Students seeking federal financial assistance are required to complete an application. The Office of Financial Aid is located in the B. F. Roberts Building. (601) 979-2227.

Office of the Registrar- Among the many duties of this office are grade processing, graduation audit and transcripts. The Office of the Registrar is located in the B. F. Roberts Building. (601) 979-2300.

The Division of International Studies: A student from outside the United States who is attending Jackson State University on a non-immigrant student visa come under the direction of the Foreign Student Advisor. Special on-campus advisement is provided for these students by the Foreign Student Advisor. At the beginning of each semester, foreign students are required to register with the Foreign Student Advisor. It is also necessary for them to keep the advisor informed concerning such matters as local address, change of address, change of student status, etc. For more information contact the Division of International Studies, (601) 979-3791.

MENTORING



What is a mentor?

A mentor should be a trusted counselor or guide. Usually, your major professor is your mentor, but not always and not exclusively.

You do not have to limit yourself to one mentor. Other faculty, staff, administrators, postdoctoral fellows, graduate students can serve as a mentor during your graduate career.

Why have a mentor?

Studies show that graduate students with mentors tend to do better in graduate studies and complete their degrees in a more timely manner.

What can a mentor do for you?

- Q Help plan your academic program
- Q Aid in preparing for your comprehensive examination
- Q Assist in finding a thesis or dissertation topic
- Q Prepare you for your defense

and...

- Q be a confidant
- Q be an advocate within the department/university
- Q help you find funding for your studies
- Q offer honest and constructive criticism of your work
- Q help you network in your job search

How to spot a good mentor-

Talk to fellow graduate students about who to seek out and who to avoid as mentors. Take courses from a variety of professors. Attend departmental seminars, workshops, and

informal gatherings. Find out who the faculty are and let them get to know you.

Keep this in mind:

Some faculty make good mentors, others do not. Some graduate students make good mentees, others do not. Some graduate programs require lots of mentoring, others do not.

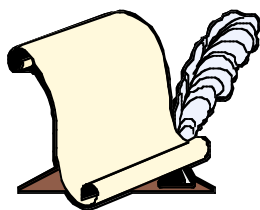
The qualities of a good mentee are the ability to listen and respond to suggestions about your work. You should come to sessions prepared, on-time, and making progress towards your degree. Remember-you are the one earning the degree, not your mentor. You need to assume the responsibility for making certain you meet the requirements for earning the degree.

Your mentor may not have all the answers-

Considerable professional resources are available to help students find solutions to their problems in the Counseling Center. This service includes: (1) providing psychological assessment, including individual psychological tests to help diagnose those areas in which students may have problems; (2) providing intensive individual therapeutic counseling for students who may have serious emotional disturbances during the period they are in attendance at the University; and (3) recommending treatment on a referral basis for students who may need additional professional services.

Personal, social and therapeutic counseling services are available from the Office of Counseling Services, Student Affairs, 601-979-6234.

For additional information, stop by the Office of the Division of Graduate Studies.



**Thesis
&
Dissertation Committees**

Understanding your departments graduate policies as it pertains to thesis and dissertation committees is vital. Key questions to ask are:

- q What functions does it provide?
- q What responsibilities does it have?
- q What guidelines must you follow?

Some departments have explicit rules, other are looser. Check with your departmental graduate handbook carefully for details.

What should you expect of your committee? This will vary from department to department, but here is a short list of things to consider.

Your committee might...

Help you choose a topic

- Meet with you periodically to assess progress
- Give advice on research and writing
- Develop and administer your comprehensive exam
- Examine your thesis/dissertation
- Conduct your oral defense
- Buy your lunch after a successful defense (?)

Choosing your committee.

The quality of your committee's guidance, input, evaluation and your interactions with the committee could mean the difference between earning your degree in a timely and relatively pain-free manner and remaining ABD (All But Dissertation).

Your committee should be formed with the approval and assistance of your major professor and department chair. The committee should be formed before you start work on your research.

Access. You should take classes from the prospective committee members, if possible, before asking. Get to know them. Is this person concerned with students? Accessible? Offer good criticism and feedback? Knowledgeable about your area of interest?

Reputation. What is this person's reputation on committees? Some faculty like to serve on committees, others do not. Some faculty don't like other faculty. **Do not** put two faculty members who loathe each other on your committee.

Scholarship. Your committee should share your interest in your scholarly research. Some faculty have better connections (reputations) outside of the university. They may be of more help finding a job upon graduation. Some faculty will have more energy to aid in the completion of your degree.

Working with your committee.

You should communicate frequently with your committee members. The burden of communicating rests with you. You must make an effort to meet with them, inform them and ask them. E-mail is a valuable tool. You should not surprise your committee with a completed thesis or dissertation. Involving your committee in the research and writing can prevent delays and frustration.

It is a good idea to keep a written record of all meetings so it is clear what was discussed and when. Your career is too important to leave to memory.

HINTS

- You can avoid many problems by carefully reviewing and selecting your committee members.
- Once your committee is formed work hard at making good progress toward completions
- Update your committee on your progress.
- Discuss concerns early. Negotiate solutions early on your concerns.

It is also possible the composition of your committee may change. It is perfectly acceptable to change your committee, although changes must be approved by you, your major professor and the department chair.

Characteristics to look for in a good advisor, mentor, boss, or committee member

It is unreasonable to expect one person to have all of the qualities you desire. You should choose thesis committee members who are strong in the areas where your advisor is weak.

1. Give you credit for the work you do
2. Willing to meet with you regularly (about 1 hour every week or every other week)
3. You can trust him/her to
4. Defend your work when you are not around
5. Speak well of you and your capabilities
6. Tell you when your work is or is not good
7. Help you graduate in a reasonable time frame
8. Look out for you professionally and personally
9. Is interested in your topic
10. Has good personal and communication skills
11. You can talk freely and easily about research ideas
12. Tells you when you are doing something stupid
13. Patient
14. Never feels threatened by your capabilities
15. Helps motivate you and keep you unstuck
16. Has good technical skills
17. Can provide constructive criticism of papers you write or talks you give
18. Knows if what you are doing is good enough for a good thesis
19. Can help you figure out what you are not doing well
20. Can help you improve your skills
21. Can suggest related articles to read or people to talk to
22. Can tell you or help you discover if what you are doing has already been done
23. Can help you set and obtain reasonable goals
24. **Will be around until you finish**
25. Is well respected in his/her field
26. Has good connections for the type of job you would want when you graduate
27. Willing and able to provide financial and computing support



Information Management

The Office of Information Management (OIM) at Jackson State University (JSU), is located at the 'e-Center'. It provides support services to academic and administrative components of Jackson State University. OIT's technical capabilities have been continually updated to meet the growing computing, communications, and information processing needs of the University community. Today, JSU's academic and administrative computing environment includes open access computer workstations, electronic mail and directory services for all students and employees, central mainframes and servers, off-campus dial-in access, data and voice networks, high speed Internet connections, and a variety of consulting, training and documentation services.

JSU students have access to software to help them write papers, create graphs, analyze data, communicate with their colleagues, play games, and perform countless other tasks, as well as software designed specifically for classwork. OIT's Web interface allows students access to their academic and financial records, including the ability to update address information, review recent account activity, and view grades. Students can also pre-register for classes via the Web or by telephone.

HELP DESK

The HELP Desk is primarily a telephone service staffed by a full-time OIM staff person, where faculty and staff can call one phone number to get help with computing problems. Your call will either be immediately resolved or it will be forwarded to others in the department with specific product knowledge and responsibilities. In some cases you will be asked to submit a request form.

The HELP desk is available from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday with voice mail available after hours. You can contact the Help desk at 979-2144 or 2069.

The OIT also offers software training sessions. Call 979-2069 for additional information.

WWW

The World-Wide Web is system for locating and accessing information on the Internet. You can search the Web using programs called "browsers" by using keywords or an Internet address. There are other ways to access and get information from the Internet: Gopher, telnet and FTP.

E-mail

Emulating the post office, e-mail allows you to communicate with others around the world by sending an electronic letter.

Listservs and Newsgroups

Signing up for a listserv put you on an electronic mailing list. You can then receive and send e-mail relating to a particular discussion group. A newsgroup is slightly different. Access is not via e-mail but through WWW.

Homepages/WebSites

Many entities have home pages. Home pages are the equivalent to a listing of resources available at the site on the WWW.



Area Comprehensive Examinations

Few words strike fear and panic into graduate students as readily as the words "area comps". Comprehensive examinations are a challenge, testing intellectual capacity, nerve, endurance and fortitude.

Question: Who welcomes the experience of being locked in a room for hours on end, being asked questions about entire centuries of human history, entire schools of teaching theories or quantum mechanics. Then your answers must go on for page upon page of lucid thought.

Answer: A graduate student.

Comprehensive examinations are a time-honored tradition for testing a graduate student's mastery of disciplinary knowledge. A test of knowledge, endurance and ability sum up this experience.

How to prepare.

- Ask- some comps are standardized, others are personalized.
- Ask- what format is being used: written, oral or a combination.
- Ask-if the comp is personalized, get some idea of the content.
- Ask- are past exams available?
- Ask- other students.
- Read and review.

TAKING COMPS, a few tips.

- Budget your time.
- Remember this examination is a test of your ability as an intellectual. As part of your answer you should "compare, contrast, synthesize, analyze, integrate information" not "regurgitate" information.
- Try to relax.

STRESS MANAGEMENT

This is a stressful situation. Seek out friends, your advisor, your mentor, your minister, whomever you can share your concerns and anxieties.

Remember: the Office of Counseling Services, Student Affairs, (601-979-6234) provides intensive individual therapeutic counseling for students who may have serious emotional disturbances during the period they are in attendance at the University; and recommends treatment on a referral basis for students who may need additional professional services.

Once you have finished your comprehensive examinations, congratulate yourself and rededicate yourself to completing your degree!

Research and Intellectual Matters

Office of Research and Development

The Office of Research and Development (ORD) at Jackson State University is the conduit for the university's interaction with the world. It shares with the world the achievements of the University family and the expertise of University scholars. It also creates, promotes and supports a research and development environment at the University by providing faculty and staff with assistance and support in identifying, securing externally funded grants, awards and donations.

Getting the most out of the relationship with your research advisor or boss

Meet regularly - you should insist on meeting once a week or at least every other week because it gives you motivation to make regular progress and it keeps your advisor aware of your work.

Prepare for your meetings - come to each meeting with:

- * List of topics to discuss
- * Plan for what you hope to get out of the meeting
- * Summary of you have done since your last meeting
- * List of any upcoming deadlines
- * Notes from your previous meeting

Email him/her a brief summary of EVERY meeting - this helps avoid misunderstandings and provides a great record of your research progress. Include (where applicable):

- * Time and plan for next meeting
- * New summary of what you think you are doing
- * To do list for yourself
- * To do list for your advisor
- * List of related work to read

- * List of major topics discussed
- * List of what you agreed on
- * List of advice that you may not follow

Show your advisor the results of your work as soon as possible - this will help your advisor understand your research and identify potential points of conflict early in the process.

- * Summaries of related work
- * Anything you write about your research
- * Experimental results

Communicate clearly - if you disagree with your advisor, state your objections or concerns clearly and calmly. If you feel something about your relationship is not working well, discuss it with him or her.

Whenever possible, suggest steps they could take to address your concerns.

Take the initiative - you do not need to clear every activity with your advisor. He/she has a lot of work to do too. You must be responsible for your own research ideas and progress.

Finding a thesis topic or formulating a research plan

- Pick something you find interesting - if you work on something solely because your advisor wants you to, it will be difficult to stay motivated.
- Pick something your advisor finds interesting - if your advisor doesn't find it interesting he/she is unlikely to devote much time to your research. He/she will be even more motivated to help you if your project is on their critical path (although this has down sides too!).
- Pick something the research community will find interesting -if you want to make yourself marketable.
- Make sure it addresses a real problem. Remember that your topic will evolve as work on it.
- Pick something that is narrow enough that it can be done in a reasonable time frame
- Have realistic expectations (i.e. Don't expect the Nobel Prize) Don't worry that you will be stuck in this area for the rest of your career. It is very likely that you will be doing very different research after you graduate.

Making continual progress on your research

Keep a journal of your ideas - write down everything you are thinking about even if you think it is stupid. It will help you keep track of your progress and keep you from going in circles. Do not plan to share it with anyone, so you can write freely.

- Set some reasonable goals with deadlines
- Identify key tasks that need to be completed
- Set a reasonable date for completing them (on the order of weeks or months).

- Share this with your advisor or enlist your advisors help in creating the goals and deadlines.
- Set some deadlines that you must keep (e.g., volunteer to give a student seminar on your research, work toward a conference paper submission deadline, etc.)
- Keep a to do list - Checking off things on a to do list can feel very rewarding when you are working on a long-term project.
 - List the small tasks that can be done in about an hour
 - Pick at least one that has to be completed each day
- Continually update your:
 - Problem statement
 - Goals
 - Approach (or a list of possible approaches)
 - One-minute version of your research (aka the elevator ride summary)
 - Five-minute version of your research
- Discuss your research with anyone who will listen - use your fellow students, friends, family, etc. to practice discussing your research on various levels. They may have useful insights or you may find that verbalizing your ideas clarifies them for yourself.
- Write about your work
- Early stage: Write short idea papers and share them with your advisor and colleagues.
- Intermediate stage: Find workshops and conferences for submitting preliminary results. This can also help you set deadlines.
- Advanced stage: Target relevant journals.
- Avoid distractions - it is easy to ignore your research in favor of more structured tasks such as taking classes, teaching classes, organizing student activities, creating web pages like this, etc. Minimize these kinds of activities or commitments.
- Confront your fears and weaknesses. If you are afraid of public speaking, volunteer to give lots of talks. If you are afraid your ideas are stupid, discuss them with someone. If you are afraid of writing, write something about your research every day.
- Balance reading, thinking, writing and hacking - often research needs to be an iterative process across all of those tasks.

All student and faculty research MUST be approved by the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to the conduct of the research. A copy of the IRB application is available in the department and the Graduate Office. Students currently engaged in research who have not been approved by the IRB should contact the Division of Graduate Studies immediately.

**Students must show proof of IRB approval when they submit their project, thesis or dissertation to the Division of Graduate Studies.*

If you have a query on a question not covered here, or desire more complete information, please contact the Office of

Research Administration 6th Floor Administration Tower, at 979-2931.

Research is defined broadly as a systemic investigation (including the phases of research development, testing, and evaluation), designed to develop or to contribute to generalizable knowledge. Some demonstration and service projects may include research activities. In this context, class projects involving human subjects are considered to be research, as are a number of institutional research projects. Human subjects are living individuals about whom an investigator (whether professional or student) collects data through intervention includes both physical procedures by which data are gathered and manipulations of the subject or the subject's environment that are performed for research purposes.

Federal regulations require that federal departments and agencies scrutinize all human subject research conducted or sponsored by each department or agency. These regulations also spell out the requirement that any institution receiving any federal funding for human subject research have an Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research (IRB) that reviews all human subject research.

The Role of a Graduate Student

Know your rights.

What are your obligations as a research assistant or a teaching assistant. What's reasonable? Consult your departmental student's handbook, the **Graduate Catalog**, the JSU's **Student Handbook**, and other resources available to you.

Have a problem?

Follow the guidelines specified in your resources.

Grievance Policy

Objective - To create and sustain an academic environment that permits students to freely express concerns or reveal complaints about their education and educational process and to have their complaints addressed swiftly and forthrightly.

Statement - Students enrolled at Jackson State University may register a concern or complaint about any academic regulation, the instructional program, delivery of the program, grades received, the academic advisement system, or any other matter related to academic affairs, without any adverse action for expressing the concern or filing the complaint. Concerns and complaints will be received, explored or investigated, and responded

to in a fair and timely fashion, though students should understand the final response by the University may not be the response they prefer.

Procedure

Classroom Concerns or Complaints (e.g. Grades received; improper dismissals; unprofessional behavior)

Student discusses concern or complaint with the instructor.

Instructor provides a response (allow up to five days if investigation is required).

Complaints unresolved by the instructor or for which the response is unacceptable must be described in writing by the student and submitted to the department chair.

The chair properly logs and investigates the matter and provides a written response to the student within ten days.

Issues that are still unresolved must be submitted by the student to the school dean.

The dean provides the final written response within ten days, which may be done with committee input and/or in consultation with higher level administrators.

Other Academic Concerns or Complaints (e.g. Academic advisement or academic regulations)

Student discusses the concern or complaint with the academic advisor.

The advisor provides a response (allow up to five days if an investigation is needed), or refers it to the appropriate official/body, e.g. Department chair or Academic Standards Committee, for response within twenty days. The appropriate official/body returns the response to the advisor and the advisor returns it to the student.

Issues that are still unresolved must be submitted by the student to the school dean.

The dean provides the final written response within ten days, which may be done with committee input and/or in consultation with the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs.

If the complaint remains, the student will submit it to the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs for a final response.

Note: Academic complaints dating back more than a semester generally will not be investigated.

When to say no, maybe, or yes.

This list is not exhaustive, only meant to provide guidance. Notice- there often is not a clear cut answer.

Say no to:

- Additional responsibilities and duties outside or outside of the department.
- Professional Conferences: Does this conference interfere with completing your dissertation? Not all conferences provide valuable exchanges.
- Serving on committees. Some committees can waste your time. Ask your fellow graduate students or advisor which committees to avoid.

Say yes to:

- Additional responsibilities and duties outside or outside of the department.
- Professional Conferences: Presenting papers at conferences provides valuable exposure to others in your professional field.
- Serving on committees. Some committees can provide valuable training or experiences. Ask your fellow graduate students or advisor which committees are worthwhile.

Getting the most out of what you read

Be organized

CLOSING WORDS

When you meet your goals, reward yourself

Don't compare yourself to senior researchers who have many more years of work and publications

Don't be afraid to leave part of your research problem for future work

Exercise

Use the student counseling services

Occasionally, do something fun without feeling guilty!

Sources for This Brochure:

"JSU Graduate Catalog"

"Graduate School Survival Guide" by Wanda Pratt. Found on-line at:

[http://www-](http://www-smi.stanford.edu/people/pratt/smi/advice.html)

[smi.stanford.edu/people/pratt/smi/advice.html](http://www-smi.stanford.edu/people/pratt/smi/advice.html)

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