**Department of Civil Engineering**

**Master’s**

**Student**

**Handbook**

**2024-2025**

**INTRODUCTION**

This document has been prepared to provide master’s students in Civil Engineering with a summary of policies and procedures that relate to the academic program. These policies and procedures supplement those of the Graduate School as published in the Graduate Catalog (which can be found at <https://catalog.memphis.edu/>) and in the University of Memphis Student Handbook (<https://www.memphis.edu/osa/pdfs/student_code.pdf>). You are responsible for knowing and complying with the published regulations of the Graduate School and the University of Memphis.

**GENERAL PROCEDURES**

**Administration and Organization**

The Graduate Program Coordinator for the Department of Civil Engineering is responsible for administering the graduate programs within the department. Specific duties include appointing preliminary academic advisors, approving Major Advisors and Thesis Committees, administering admissions, certifying completion of degree requirements, monitoring the annual review of student progress, and maintaining official student files.

**International Students**

International students must attend the mandatory orientation offered by the Graduate School the week before the start of their first semester. Topics addressed include immigration laws, health insurance, social security, tutoring, and tuberculosis test scheduling.

Due to the time it takes to obtain a social security card, international students are advised to arrive in the U.S. at least two weeks before the start of classes and to take the necessary steps to obtain a social security card as soon as they arrive. Thesis-based master’s students on a graduate assistantship cannot begin to receive their monthly stipends until they have obtained their social security card.

**Faculty Advisors**

Upon arrival at the University of Memphis, you will be assigned a preliminary Academic Advisor. The purpose of the Academic Advisor is to assist you in selecting appropriate courses for your first semester. Students cannot register for classes until they have met with their Academic Advisor. The advisor must issue an “Alternate PIN” to allow the students to register.

For thesis-based students, the Academic Advisor may be your Major (Research) Advisor but does not have to be if you have not yet selected a Major Advisor. If you have not already selected a Major Advisor, you are urged to select a Major Advisor and Thesis Committee as soon as possible, and preferably no later than the end of your second semester in the program. Your Thesis Committee must have at least three faculty members, at least two of whom are members of the Department of Civil Engineering. All committee members must be members of the Graduate Faculty. Only one External Graduate Faculty may serve as a voting member on a student’s committee. Once you have selected your committee, you must submit the appropriate forms to the Graduate School. Once the forms have been approved by the department, college, and Graduate School, your Major Advisor becomes your academic advisor for the duration of your graduate program.

**Changing the Academic Advisor**

A change in advisor may become necessary for many reasons. Sometimes a student develops a strong interest in a project that is being overseen by a different faculty member or changes their research interests. In cases such as these, the student is encouraged to change advisors but must first establish that the new faculty member is willing to become the Major Advisor (and has the appropriate Graduate Faculty status). Any change in advisor must be approved by the new advisor, the Department Chair, and the Graduate Program Coordinator. The old advisor does not have to approve of the change.

In other cases that involve a less-than-desirable working relationship with the Major Advisor, the student should discuss the problem with the Graduate Coordinator (or, if the Graduate Coordinator is the Major Advisor, with the Department Chair). Often these problems can be resolved to the benefit of all but sometimes a change in advisor may be recommended. Any change in the Major Advisor or the membership of the Thesis Committee requires approval by the Graduate Program Coordinator and the Department Chair and submission of the appropriate forms to the Graduate School.

**Course Schedule Planning**

Every semester, you should meet with your Academic or Major Advisor to determine a course schedule for the following semester. You should enroll in the appropriate courses as soon as possible after the course registration period begins. This helps in planning course loads and faculty teaching assignments and will help to ensure that a course you need doesn’t get cancelled due to low enrollment. Before you can register for courses, your Academic or Major Advisor will first have to issue an Alternate PIN. If you are taking thesis hours (CIVL 7996) your Major Advisor will also need to give you a permit to enroll in the appropriate section of CIVL 7996. If you are taking a projects course (CIVL 7991 or CIVL 7993) the project mentor will have to give you a permit to enroll in the appropriate section.

**Course Loads**

Graduate students who register for 9 or more hours for Spring and Fall in the academic year will be considered full-time students. Graduate students who register for 6 hours or more in the Summer will be considered full time. Graduate students do not have to enroll in courses during the summer semester unless they are graduating during that semester, in which case they must enroll in at least one credit hour. The reason for this is because you must be currently enrolled at the University in order to graduate.

All international master’s students must maintain full-time status until they have completed their degree. This is a requirement of the F-1 visa. If you have less than 9 credit hours left to graduate, you may take a Reduced Course Load, but you must notify International Student Services so they can amend your I-20 accordingly.

Thesis-based master’s students supported on graduate assistantships are expected to register for a full-time course load of 9 credits per semester during the Fall and Spring semesters to maintain their assistantship (unless they have less than 9 credit hours left to graduate). Graduate students do not have to enroll in courses during the summer semester unless they are graduating during that summer semester, in which case they must enroll in at least one credit hour of thesis (CIVL 7996). The reason for this is because you must be currently enrolled at the University in order to graduate.

Graduate students may not take more than 15 credit hours per semester without approval from the Dean of the Graduate School.

**Course Numbering**

Most graduate courses are offered at two different levels with two different course numbers differing only in the first digit (e.g., 4135/6135 or 7012/8012).

Graduate students must enroll in the 6000-level version of 4000/6000 courses; the 4000-level version is for undergraduate students and entails different course requirements. Note that there are limits (detailed later in this handbook) on the number of 6000-level courses you may count toward your degree.

For 7000/8000-level courses, master’s students should enroll at the 7000-level. Students enrolled at the 8000-level (PhD students) have different course requirements than those enrolled at the 7000-level. If you are pursuing a master’s degree on the way to a doctoral degree, your advisor may recommend that you take the 8000-level version so those courses can be counted toward either degree.

**Graduate Assistantships**

Master’s students are generally not provided with graduate assistantships. Occasionally, a faculty member may provide a research assistantship to a master’s student to help prosecute an externally-funded research project. In those cases, the student will usually be expected to complete a master’s thesis based on their work. All research assistantships presume 20 hours per week of work at the standard half-time support level. Assistantship contracts are made for the periods of September 1 – December 31, January 1 – April 30, and June 1 – August 31. Support during the summer semester is contingent on the availability of funding.

Students supported on research assistantships are expected to be available for work assignments during the entire employment period. These assignments typically coincide with your research, but may involve other duties as well. Prior permission must be obtained from the Major Advisor or the person providing the financial support if a student is to be unavailable on days other than official University of Memphis holidays. Note that the entire break between the fall and spring semesters is not designated as an official University of Memphis holiday. Only the time period between Christmas Eve (December 24) and January 2 is considered as an official holiday.

**Health Insurance**

International students and their dependents are required to have health insurance coverage. International students are automatically enrolled in the University’s Wellfleet health insurance plan upon registering for classes and the fees are posted to their Tiger Express account. International students can opt out of the Wellfleet plan only if they purchase a comparable plan. Comparability is determined by Wellfleet using pre-defined rules.

Domestic master’s students who are enrolled in at least 6 graduate credit hours or are in their last semester and need less than 6 credit hours to graduate may voluntarily enroll in the Wellfleet plan.

**THE MASTER’S PROGRAM**

**Program Requirements**

Master’s students must earn at least 30 semester hours beyond the bachelor’s degree. Students have three options to choose from:

1. Students electing the thesis option will be required to complete an independent research project culminating in a master’s thesis. Upon completion of the thesis, the student must successfully pass an oral examination to assess mastery of the thesis topic and to evaluate the student’s knowledge in Civil Engineering. Thesis students must take six credit hours of CIVL 7996 Thesis.
2. Students electing the project option must take CIVL 7001, CIVL 7012, and CIVL 7993. Upon completion of CIVL 7993, project students must make an oral presentation of their project and pass an oral comprehensive examination to evaluate the student’s knowledge in Civil Engineering.
3. Students electing the course-only option must take CIVL 7001 and CIVL 7012. In their last semester, they must pass a comprehensive exam covering all of their coursework.

A minimum of 18 hours of Civil Engineering course work at the 7000 level will be required for all MS degree programs. This includes CIVL 7996 (for thesis-based students) and CIVL 7993 (for project-based students). No more than 9 hours of committee/advisor-approved course work below the 7000 level will be allowed in any program of study. Classes taken outside the department must be approved by the committee/advisor and must complement the student’s program of study in Civil Engineering.

**Time Limitation**

Master’s degrees must be earned within 8 consecutive years of admission. There are no exceptions to this policy; however, students may request to validate old courses as described in the Academic Regulations portion of the Graduate Catalog.

**Retention**

A student pursuing the master’s degree may be terminated for any of the following reasons:

1. Failure to maintain a grade point average of 3.0 or above. A student who has a cumulative grade point average below 3.0 will be placed on probation. A second consecutive semester on probation can result in termination unless the Graduate Coordinator recommends an extension and the extension is approved by the Herff College Director Of Graduate Studies and the Dean of the Graduate School.
2. Failure to pass the Comprehensive Examination. If the student does not pass on the first attempt, the exam can be taken a second time. The Thesis Committee may recommend remedial coursework before the second attempt. A second failure results in termination.
3. Failure to make satisfactory progress towards completion of the degree in a timely manner.
4. Failure to satisfy the Thesis Committee on the final thesis or project defense (for students electing the thesis or project option).

Any student whose continuation is denied may appeal the decision to the University Council for Graduate Studies.

**Graduation**

In order to graduate the student must:

1. “Apply to Graduate” by the appropriate deadline (see Registrar’s website for deadlines).
2. Pass the comprehensive exam. For students pursuing the project or thesis options, the project/thesis defense serves as an oral comprehensive exam. The comprehensive exam result form must be on file with the Graduate School.
3. Submit their thesis documents to the graduate school (if applicable), including a thesis committee form, a thesis proposal defense form, and a thesis defense form. Theses must be submitted electronically.
4. Have a cumulative GPA of 3.0 on all graduate work undertaken at The University of Memphis whether or not the courses are listed on the candidacy form. Grades of “D” or “F” are not accepted for any graduate degree credit, but these grades will be computed in the GPA. No more than seven (7) hours of “C+,” “C,” or “C-” will be counted toward degree requirements. Please note that master’s students must apply to graduate at the end of the semester prior to graduation, which means they must have a cumulative GPA of 3.0 before they begin their last semester. You cannot use your last semester to bring your GPA above 3.0. This means you may have to take classes beyond those needed for graduation just to increase your GPA to an acceptable level.

**THESIS-BASED MASTER’S STUDENTS**

**The Thesis Proposal**

Thesis-based master’s students must prepare a written thesis proposal. The proposal must be read and approved by the Major Advisor prior to distribution to the Thesis Committee. The thesis proposal will include headings such as Abstract, Introduction, Literature Review, Method of Approach, Work Plan, and References. The Work Plan should articulate specific steps and phases in the research and the number of calendar months expected to complete each task. The Work Plan should include the dates of manuscript submission, which should be set in consultation with the Major Advisor. Ideally, the bulk of the thesis proposal will serve as the first several chapters of the final thesis.

All members of the Thesis Committee must approve the proposal by signing a “[Thesis/Dissertation Proposal Defense Form](http://www.memphis.edu/gradschool/resources/forms_index.php)” (obtained from the [Graduate School Forms](https://www.memphis.edu/gradschool/resources/forms_index.php) webpage) and submitting it to the Graduate Coordinator to be filed with the Graduate School.

**Writing the Thesis**

Writing a thesis usually takes much more time than a student anticipates. Some of the additional time is imposed by corrections to drafts suggested by the advisor and committee, but most of it results from unexpected problems that arise as the writing progresses. This may result in additional computations or experimentation. This is a normal part of research. Keep in mind, too, that thesis must usually be defended at least 7 weeks prior to the date of the graduation ceremony in order to meet Graduate School deadlines to submit the final defended and corrected thesis.

The Graduate School has prepared, and periodically updates, a thesis/dissertation preparation guide. The current guide can be found at <https://www.memphis.edu/gradschool/current_students/td-prep.php>.

**Theses with Separate Research Chapters**

A published (or about-to-be-published) journal article may appear in the thesis, in part or in its entirety, if the student’s own thesis research was the primary source for the article. If pre-published (or about-to-be-published) work is used in the thesis, it must be consistent with the rest of the document, so that the result is a cohesive document with an introduction that provides a framework for linking the chapters and a conclusion. Thus, the thesis provides a source for those who want to study the totality of the research in greater detail than can be found in a single journal article.

The student must be first author on all published or about-to-be-published manuscripts that form a portion or portions of the thesis. The department will accept multi-authored material if the candidate is first author of the material and if the candidate’s contributions are clearly and fully indicated in the conclusion section of the thesis. In fact, the contributions of each author in each chapter should be properly attributed. It is up to the Thesis Committee to determine if the candidate’s contributions to the paper represent independent work.

**Submission of the Thesis to the Thesis Committee**

The student must provide a final draft copy of the thesis (read and approved by the Major Advisor) to each member of the Thesis committee at least 2 weeks prior to the date of the defense. The copy of the thesis presented to the committee members must be complete in every detail and in suitable form for presentation to the Graduate School. To ensure this, the Major Advisor may have to read several drafts of the work prior to submission to the committee. The advisor must ensure that the thesis is both grammatically and scientifically correct before it is presented to the committee. The student should consult with members of the Thesis Committee well in advance of the thesis defense regarding the timing of the defense and whether the committee member want a hard copy or electronic copy of the thesis to review for the defense.

Thesis Committees have considerable latitude on the issue of the scientific content of a thesis. Some committees will want to settle questions or disagreements about scientific approaches and conclusions before the defense. Others may prefer to defer some or all such questions to the defense. The advisor, committee and student should agree on the proper venue for discussion of such questions but should adhere to the standard that the defense copy and the final copy submitted to the Graduate School should be essentially the same. Clearly, if there is a major disagreement among committee members regarding scientific content, then the material in question should be resolved prior to the thesis defense.

**The Final Thesis Defense**

When the candidate has prepared the thesis to the satisfaction of their Major Advisor, a date, time and room for the thesis defense (final oral examination) must be selected. It is the responsibility of the candidate to determine that the examination date and time are acceptable to all members of his or her Thesis committee. You must formally announce your defense using the “[Thesis/Dissertation Defense Announcement Form](https://memphis.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6A3iFZELrGYXohf)” (obtained from the [Graduate School Forms](https://www.memphis.edu/gradschool/resources/forms_index.php) webpage). This form must be submitted three weeks prior to the date of your defense. You should also send an e-mail to the Dean’s Office with the same information you entered into the online form so your defense can be announced to the members of the Herff College.

The defense will consist of a public presentation of the student’s research followed by questions from the audience, then questions from the Thesis Committee. The audience and the candidate will then be asked to leave the room while the Thesis Committee meets to discuss and vote on the defense results.

By University regulations, all members of the Thesis Committee must be present (either in-person or remotely through Zoom or Teams) for the final oral examination and a unanimous positive vote is required for a successful thesis defense. If the final defense is successful, the Thesis Committee will complete and sign the online “[Thesis/Dissertation Final Defense Results Form](http://www.memphis.edu/gradschool/resources/forms_index.php)” (obtained from the [Graduate School Forms](https://www.memphis.edu/gradschool/resources/forms_index.php) webpage) and an “[Assessment of Defense Results](http://www.memphis.edu/ce/docs/assessment_of_defense_results.docx)” form **(**obtained from the [Department Forms](https://www.memphis.edu/ce/forms.php) webpage). The latter should be submitted to the Graduate Coordinator.

The student must then make any and all corrections provided by the committee members before or during the defense and upload the defended and corrected thesis to the Graduate School web site by the requisite deadline. The student must also submit a “[Thesis/Dissertation Approval Form](http://www.memphis.edu/gradschool/resources/forms_index.php)” signed by all of the Thesis Committee along with a copy of the “[Thesis/Dissertation Checklist](http://www.memphis.edu/gradschool/resources/forms_index.php)” directly to [gsgraduateanalyst@memphis.edu](mailto:gsgraduateanalyst@memphis.edu).

If the student fails the final oral examination, or presents an unacceptable thesis, the committee will provide advice to the Graduate Program Coordinator regarding remedial action or possible removal from the program.