

MS GRADUATE STUDENT HANDBOOK

In

**THE DEPARTMENT OF ECOLOGY, EVOLUTION AND MARINE
BIOLOGY**

2026-2027



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EEMB Graduate Student Handbook: MS Degrees

These guidelines incorporate both University and Department regulations, and are designed to help ensure that students finish their MS. degrees successfully and in a reasonable amount of time. They are not designed to tie the Department's or the student's hands. Thus, there can be exceptions to many of the rules below if asked of the Graduate Committee. If there is a reason to alter timetables, take leaves, or otherwise act outside of these guidelines, it may be possible with appropriate petitions. To prepare such petitions, it is important that the student work with their major professor, the Departmental Faculty Graduate Advisor, the Graduate Program Advisor, and possibly Graduate Division.

1. MS Committees:

Students should form a committee during their first year. They should consult with their major professor in determining who would be the most appropriate committee members. They may also want to consult with the Departmental Faculty Graduate Advisor. The primary role of a student's committee is to act as a support system and resource, provide multiple perspectives, and broaden the expertise beyond that which a single major professor could offer. The committee will work with the major professor on advising the student on classes, exams and exam schedules, and on the student's specific research. The student and committee will file a "Progress Report and Study Plan" form (see page 8) every year. This serves not only as a record of progress but should also identify the student's plans for the next year. This ensures that the student and committee agree as to where a student is in their program, and what is planned for the future. These procedures ensure communication between the student and their committee to facilitate consensus on how the student can best make progress.

At a minimum, the committee will consist of the major professor and two other UC ladder faculty members, one of whom must be from EEMB. The third member can come from another department or even another UC campus if appropriate. Professional researchers, adjunct faculty, or scientists who are not associated with UC may be added to the committee either: (1) in addition to the three core UC members or (2) instead of one of the three core UC members but only with petition and approval by Graduate Division (contact the Graduate Program Advisor for the details of this process). If any of the committee members are away on sabbatical, or other leave, a temporary member may replace them during that time. The membership of the thesis committee may change as a student's interests and directions shift. The committee needs to be officially nominated via the GradPoint Student system online <https://gradpoint.ucsb.edu/students> Please refer to the Grad Division website for detailed instructions: <https://www.graddiv.ucsb.edu/academic-services/committees#How-to>

2. Unit requirements (these are the minimum requirement)

Thesis plan: 30 total units

20 must be graduate units (200 & 500 series courses)

No more than 17 of these units may be in 596 courses

NOTE: The thesis based MS is the default option for MS degrees in EEMB; moving to a comprehensive exam MS requires approval of major advisor and graduate advisor.

Comprehensive Exam plan: 36 total units

24 must be graduate units (200 & 500 series courses)

No more than half the graduate-level units may be in 596 courses

3. Course Curriculum:

EEMB 500: Campus Orientation (1 credit): This is a currently offered one-day seminar offered as part of new student orientation.

EEMB 502: Teaching Techniques (2 credits): This is a currently required course offered by MCDB in Fall and EEMB in Winter. This course may be taken in Winter of the student's first year, rather than Fall, even if TAing for the first time in the Fall of that year.

EEMB 290: Introduction to Faculty Research (2 credits): This course provides a series of seminars from EEMB faculty, introducing their research and helping to build community with the new cohort of graduate students. This course will be taught by the current Faculty Graduate Advisor.

EEMB 508: Biological Levels of Organization I (4 credits): This course focuses on topics such as adaptation and organismal function, micro/macroevolution, origins of diversity, evolution of behavior, etc.

EEMB 509: Biological Levels of Organization II (4 credits): This course focuses on topics such as ecophysiology, species interactions and coexistence, the causes and consequences of food web complexity, and ecosystem-level processes.

TA requirement: It is a requirement for every student to TA for at least two quarters. However, self-supported students, students on fellowships, or students working as a Graduate Student Researcher can petition the Graduate Committee to waive this requirement.

Additionally, a student may receive course credits for TAing. To get this credit a student must register for EEMB 501. This has a variable number of units (1-4), depending on the time commitment of the TAsip. A 50% time TAsip is worth 4 units.

Minimum GPA: Students must maintain a minimum GPA of at least 3.0 *at all times*. Graduate Division will automatically place students who fall below this on academic probation. Students who fail to bring their GPA up to 3.0 may become subject to being dropped from the program. Students **must** register for at least one class with a letter grade during their first year to establish a GPA.

Carrying too many I, NG, or NR grades: These are Incomplete, No Grade, or No Record, and are for unfinished courses. Students may not carry more than 12 units of such grades. The first quarter this occurs, a student will receive an advisory from the Graduate Division. The second quarter, they will be placed on academic probation. After 3 quarters without clearing up the incomplete courses, a student may be dropped from the program.

Thesis: For students getting a M.S. via thesis, they are expected to write and defend an original M.S. thesis. Following successful submission of the thesis, the student gives a public research seminar on their thesis research. Required coursework must be completed by the end of the quarter in which the thesis is submitted.

TAsip Eligibility and Prioritization: TAsip's in EEMB are prioritized 1) to EEMB students, 2) to those EEMB students within 5 years to degree and Master's students within 2 years to degree, 3) to those students who are meeting all time-to-degree milestones (e.g. completed writtens within 2 years, orals within 3 years etc). Missing these time to degree milestones means you may not receive an EEMB TAsip. Once all students that meet criteria 1-3 have received TAsips, next priority is given to EEMB affiliated students that are EEMB "homed" and have met criteria 2 and 3. After that TAsips are given to EEMB and EEMB homed students in reverse seniority (e.g. 6th year students, 7th year students, etc).

TAsip Service Limits & Exceptions:

Current Policy (Through Spring 2029):

- Quarters 1–12: Standard limit; no exception needed.

- Quarters 13–18: Requires Departmental Approval.
- Quarters 19–21: Requires Graduate Division Approval (temporary COVID-19 exception authority).
- Beyond 21 Quarters: Not permitted under any circumstances.

Upcoming Policy Change (Effective Fall 2029 Onward):

- Quarters 13–15: Requires Departmental Approval.
- Quarters 16–18: Requires Graduate Division Approval.
- Beyond 18 Quarters: Not permitted under any circumstances.

Comprehensive exam: For students getting a M.A. via comprehensive exam, they are expected to pass a comprehensive exam administered and graded by their thesis committee. Required coursework must be completed by the end of the quarter in which the examination is completed.

Exit seminar: For students getting a M.S. they are not required to conduct an exit seminar but they are welcome to do so.

5. Administrative Issues:

- FAFSA forms: All students are expected to file the “Free Application for Federal Student Aid” form *every* year. The form is available at: <http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/>. This may seem like a nuisance, but there are fellowships available through UCSB (e.g. fee fellowships) that are *not* available if you have not filed a FAFSA. The FAFSA for the following school year is usually due by early March. Make it a habit to fill this form out at the beginning of each year.
- California Residency: Submit a Statement of Legal Residence ([SLR](#)) to UCSB residence deputy’s office after you submit your Statement of Intent to Register. Nonresident students classified in their first year must initiate reclassification to CA resident status by the start of their second year by submitting an updated Statement of Legal Residence. Reclassification is not automatic. Refer to the Office of the Registrar <https://registrar.sa.ucsb.edu/residency/establishing-residency> for the requirements on establishing California residency.
- Registration: Students are expected to remain registered every quarter they are in the program, unless they are on approved leave.
- Credit requirements: All students must register for at least 12 units each quarter to maintain their status as full time students.
- Petitions: In cases where a student needs to act outside the guidelines, it likely takes a petition to either the Department or to Graduate Division. For petitions for leaves etc. the forms are available at Graduate Division. All petitions will need either the Departmental Faculty Graduate Advisor or Department Chair’s signature. Please work with the Graduate Program Advisor to organize all petitions.
- In Absentia: *In Absentia* policy allows students conducting research or studies away from the University to maintain full-time student status while receiving an 85% reduction of the combined Tuition, Student Services Fee, and Campus Fees. Nonresident Supplemental Tuition (NRST) and Graduate Student Health Insurance Plan (GSHIP) fees are not reduced. Doctoral students advanced to candidacy may take a maximum of two years (second year requiring exception by the Graduate Dean). Master’s students who have completed at least one year of coursework may take a maximum of one year. Read the full policy here: [In Absentia Policy](#)
- Personal Leave of Absence: The Personal Leave of Absence allows eligible graduate students (who were registered the preceding quarter) to temporarily pause their enrollment for up to three quarters. During an approved leave, standard registration fees are paused. Students cannot hold student academic appointments (e.g., TA/GSR positions), receive most forms of University financial support, or automatically access standard campus privileges—though voluntary health insurance (UC SHIP) enrollment remains available. Read the full policy here: [Leave of Absence](#).

- **Filing Quarter:** The Filing Leave of Absence allows graduate students who have finished all research and substantially drafted their final thesis or dissertation to take leave in lieu of registering during their final degree completion quarter. Students are eligible to take Filing Leave only once and must have been registered (enrolled in units) during the preceding academic quarter. Instead of paying full registration tuition, students on Filing Leave pay a \$20 non-refundable petition fee and a Filing Fee (equal to half of the Student Services Fee) upon degree completion. Read the full policy here: [Filing Quarter Policy](#).
- **Monitoring Status:** Falling behind the schedule outlined here and/or recurring issues in meeting progress or advising expectations in your lab may result in being placed on monitoring status. This typically requires quarterly Academic Progress Plan reports to the department and Graduate Division.
 - **Employment:** Monitoring does not prohibit employment. If 1–3 quarters over Time to Advance/Time to Degree, a Home Department employment exception is needed. If 4 or more quarters over Time to Advance/Time to Degree, an employment exception must be approved by the Graduate Division.
 - **Fellowship:** Monitoring does not prohibit fellowship funding.
 - **Financial Aid:** Monitoring does not prohibit financial aid.
 - **Central Fellowship Competitions:** Students are not eligible to apply or be nominated, as they must be in Good Academic Standing.

Warning Status: If no improvement after a monitoring quarter, the department can request escalation to Warning.

- **Employment:** Employment is not allowed. Employment exceptions can be requested, only granted by the Graduate Division in rare situations.
- **Fellowship:** Fellowships not allowed.
- **Financial Aid:** Financial aid is allowed, granted the student is still meeting [Satisfactory Academic Progress](#).
- **Central Fellowship Competitions:** Not eligible to apply/be nominated as students must be in Good Academic Standing
- If no improvement during the warning quarter, department can request academic disqualification

6. Other places to go for information, advice, and help:

In general, your major professor is the best starting point for questions and problems, but there is a variety of other people and places to go for information and advice.

Graduate Program Advisor <i>Mengshu Ye</i>	Go to the Graduate Program Advisor (GPA) for technical information about administrative issues such as timetables, forms, requirements, petitions, etc. If the GPA doesn't have the answer, they will know where to direct you.
Faculty Graduate Advisor <i>Hillary Young</i>	This is a rotating faculty position. Go to the Faculty Graduate Advisor for signatures on petitions, and if you have more "academic" questions than you could ask the GPA. For example, if you want to talk about issues relating to your studies, your relationship with your major professor, etc.
Departmental Graduate Committee	This group is comprised of the Faculty Graduate Advisor and three other faculty members. They are responsible for overseeing the EEMB graduate program as a whole. When the advisor is unavailable, the other members can sign petitions and similar

	things.
Department Chair	The Department Chair is available if you have problems that the Faculty Graduate Advisor is not able to handle satisfactorily.

Graduate Division	Graduate Division is the administrative branch of UCSB that oversees all things relating to graduate programs. They have a lot of useful information at http://www.graddiv.ucsb.edu. They also have a lot of good people who can provide you with advice on problems you may have, if you can't get the answer from the Graduate Program Advisor or Faculty Graduate Advisor. For financial issues, please contact Mengshu Ye or Hillary Young For academic issues, Dr. Lindsay Cahn (Director of Academic Services; lindsay.cahn@graddiv.ucsb.edu) is probably the right person. The main number of the Graduate Division is (805) 893-2277.
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8. Financial Support:

The general EEMB philosophy is that students should be properly supported so that they can focus on their academic program. This support may be in the form of teaching assistantships (TA), University fellowships, departmental fellowship support, graduate student research (GSR) positions, extramural funding, or some combination of these. In EEMB, most sources of support are coordinated through the student's major professor.

Teaching assistantships: To obtain a TAship students *must* complete a TA request form in a timely manner after requests are distributed noting courses they are qualified to teach. Simultaneously professors will make requests to the Department for specific teaching assistantships or their specific courses. Faculty requests for TA support are then balanced against the courses that need TAs and the particular expertise needed for those courses. The balancing of requests and needs is done by the Staff Graduate Advisor and the Graduate Committee. If you wish to TA a particular class we encourage you to reach out to the faculty that teaches that class at least one quarter prior. Other programs also occasionally have TAs available that are open to students from other departments. The Environmental Studies program is one such program, and takes applications during winter quarter. TA ship and eligibility is discussed previously but we emphasize that a student may TA only up to a maximum of 18 quarters during their graduate tenure. This cap is set by the University of California system.

Graduate student researcher positions: Individual faculty may have research grants with graduate student support incorporated into them. They are entirely responsible for allocating these funds among graduate students.

TA and GSR Payscales: Please note that because TA and GSR positions use different pay scales, your salary will vary depending on whether you are appointed as a TA or a GSR in a given quarter. For the 2026-2027 academic year, the TA payscale can be viewed [here](#) and the GSR payscale can be viewed [here](#). A TA/GSR's salary step is determined by their relevant prior quarters of experience. If you have any questions about salary placement, please contact the department staff.

Departmental funds: The Department receives a modest sum of money every year to use for supporting graduate students - called "block grants". Most of that money is used to pay out-of-state tuition and first year

fellowship packages for incoming students. Additional funds are usually used to support students who have 1) no summer support available through their advisor, 2) emergency needs, typically for small amounts (e.g. to replace a failed computer), 3) summer travel for conferences and training, and 4) more occasionally, academic quarter support for high achieving senior students to finish up. Emergency funding calls go out 2-3 times a year but students may also contact grad advisor directly at any point during the year to request emergency block grant support. Other funding calls typically go out in spring quarter, or late winter quarter. Individual students are responsible for applying for these graduate support funds, which are then allocated based on a combination of merit, need, and the student's past history of receiving these funds.

Central fellowships: The university offers several internal fellowships for continuing students. These can change each year and are listed on the [university website](#). Calls are typically announced in late winter and due early March. They are typically submitted in partnership by advisor and advisee.

Fee fellowships: Each year the Department is allocated a small amount of money to use to help students cover fees. These fellowships may only be awarded to students who are considered "financially needy" (which includes most students). This *requires* that students have filed the FAFSA form. Students can apply directly to the Department for these funds. Calls for requests will go out each spring quarter.

Extramural funding: There is a wide range of fellowships that students may apply for. Students are encouraged to visit Graduate Division's website at [https://www.graddiv.ucsb.edu/our-services/extramural funding](https://www.graddiv.ucsb.edu/our-services/extramural-funding). This has good records of programs, requirements, deadlines, etc.