

University of South Dakota  
Sustainability Graduate Program  
Graduate Student Handbook

2021-2022

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## Overview

The purpose of this handbook is to provide students in the University of South Dakota's Sustainability Graduate Program with information and guidance regarding the program. Information provided here includes academic policies and processes as well as non-academic aspects of the graduate-student experience. This document supplements policies of the Graduate School presented in the Graduate Catalog (current and past Graduate Catalogs can be accessed at: <http://catalog.usd.edu/>).

This handbook refers to information, forms, deadlines, and documents that are available at the Graduate School's Graduate Student Resources site: <https://www.usd.edu/graduate-school/student-resources> (note: many links within will go through the USD Portal and will require a USD login).

## Admissions

### USD Graduate School Admissions Requirements

Completed Graduate Application form found at: <https://www.usd.edu/graduate-school/apply-now> and a non-refundable application fee of \$35.

Official transcripts verifying receipt of an undergraduate degree and previous graduate credit (in English or with translation) must accompany an application. Official transcripts of all academic work at the undergraduate and graduate levels are required for all applicants. The USD Graduate School and/or academic units retain the right to require credential evaluations from organizations, such as an Educational Credential Evaluators/World Education Services (ECE/WES), for a student if such an evaluation is deemed necessary.

Baccalaureate degree or an equivalent degree from an institution with full regional accreditation for that degree is required. A minimum undergraduate cumulative GPA of 2.7 on conferred degree and/or graduate cumulative GPA of 3.0 or better, based on a 4.0 scale, on all graduate coursework is required for full admission.

Applicants with degrees from countries other than the United States who have obtained an undergraduate or graduate degree from a regionally accredited American college or university or from an accredited institution in the following English-speaking countries: United Kingdom, Republic of Ireland, Canada (excluding Quebec), Australia, and New Zealand are not required to submit an approved English proficiency exam score. For all other applicants, a minimum score of 79 on the Internet-Based TOEFL (iBT) or 550 on the Paper-Based TOEFL (PBT), a minimum IELTS score of 6.0, or a minimum PTE score of 53 is required for graduate admission.

Applicants are required to submit a statement of purpose.

## **Additional Sustainability Program Admission Requirements**

The GRE General Test is required for those seeking the M.S. or Ph.D. GRE scores are not required for the following:

- Current USD students pursuing at least a bachelor's degree in a related area and those who have graduated from USD with at least a bachelor's degree within the last 5 years, OR
- Applicants with an earned master's or doctoral degree from a regionally accredited college or university in the United States.

\*GRE General Test at Home will be accepted for spring 2022 and fall 2022 applications.

Three (3) professional letters of recommendation are required for the M.S. and Ph.D. programs and one (1) letter of recommendation is required for the certificate.

Subject to faculty approval, those who do not meet all of the criteria above may be admitted on a provisional basis.

In order to be admitted Ph.D., applicants must have communicated with a prospective advisor to assure faculty research compatibility and capacity.

## **Curricula**

The following are the course requirements for the graduate degrees offered by the Sustainability Graduate Program. Electives can be in any subject area, must be relevant to sustainability, and are subject to approval by the student's advisor and committee and the graduate program director as a part of the program approval process.

### **M.S. Sustainability (Plan A – Thesis Option)**

30 Credits, at least 50% must be at 700-level or above

- SUST 705 - Sustainability & Complexity 3 cr.
- SUST 715 - Research for Sustainability 3 cr.
- SUST 790 - Seminar (C) 2-3 cr.
- SUST 794 - Internship (C) 1-6 cr (0-3 hours required)
- SUST 798 - Sustainability Thesis 6-9 cr.
- Approved electives 9-18 cr.

## **M.S. Sustainability (Plan B – Non-thesis Option)**

32 Credits, at least 50% must be at 700-level or above

- SUST 705 - Sustainability & Complexity 3 cr.
- SUST 715 - Research for Sustainability 3 cr.
- SUST 790 - Seminar (C) 2-3 cr.
- SUST 794 - Sustainability Internship 3-6 cr.
- Approved electives 17-21 cr.

## **Ph.D. Sustainability**

80 Credits, at least 50% must be at 700-level or above

- SUST 705 - Sustainability & Complexity 3 cr.
- SUST 715 - Research for Sustainability 3 cr.
- SUST 790 - Seminar (C) 4-6 cr.
- SUST 810 - Innovating for Change 3 cr.
- SUST 898D - Sustainability Dissertation 21-39 cr.
- Approved electives 23-45 cr.

## **Accelerated Masters**

Up to 12 graduate credits applied toward the B.A. or B.S. in sustainability may be used toward the M.S. in sustainability.

*The following restrictions apply:*

- a. Dual-listed courses taken at the 500-level can be applied to both the B.A./B.S. and M.S. degrees. Dual-listed courses must be taken at the 500-level.
- b. The student must apply to, and be admitted to, the accelerated program prior to taking courses to be credited toward the accelerated program.
- c. No courses taken prior to admission to the accelerated program may be counted toward an accelerated graduate degree.
- d. Courses that are “double counted” must be approved by the program coordinator for inclusion in the program of study prior to taking the courses or the credits will not be applied toward the accelerated graduate degree.
- e. Only courses taken from USD are eligible for dual credit.

## **Joint Degrees**

Students may pursue joint (concurrent) graduate degrees at the University of South Dakota, and the Sustainability Program seeks to facilitate this option. Up to 12 graduate credits may be shared between two graduate programs, with the approval of graduate program directors/coordinators and the student’s advisors.

Joint degrees can be arranged with any other program, subject to approval, but several pre-approved concurrent degree combinations have been developed:

- M.S. Sustainability with J.D. School of Law

- M.S. Sustainability with M.P.A. Public Administration (Political Science Dept.)

### **Geospatial Analysis Certificate**

12 credits as follows

- BIOL 584 - Remote Sensing (C) 3 cr.
- BIOL 584L - Remote Sensing Lab (C) 0 cr.
- ANTH/ESCI/POLS 525 - Introduction to Geographical Information Systems 3 cr.
- Take two of the following courses (6 credit hours)
  - CSC 557 - Data Analysis, Decision Making, and Visualization 3 cr.
  - BIOL/SUST 592 - Topics: Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) Applications 3 cr.
  - BIOL/SUST 792 - Topics: Advanced Geospatial Analysis 3 cr.
  - GEOL 519 - Advanced Geospatial Analysis (taught by SDSM&T) 3 cr.

Note: USD graduate students must apply separately to the Geospatial Analysis certificate program. This involves completing a regular graduate application through the Graduate School, getting one letter of recommendation, and paying the application fee. This must be done prior to the semester that you intend to graduate, ahead of either the Spring or Fall semester admissions deadlines (two weeks before start of semester).

### **Program of Study**

The courses that a graduate student takes to fulfill the requirements of their academic program and meet their educational goals constitute their program of study. This program should be developed in consultation with their advisor throughout their graduate career at USD, beginning with their first semester. The initial program of study will be submitted to the Sustainability graduate program director on the *Application for Degree/Program of Study* form (available at the Graduate School page in the USD Portal) within the first year of study. The final program must be submitted to the Graduate School no later than April 15 of their graduation calendar-year for Winter graduation, and October 15 of the calendar-year preceding their graduation year for Spring and Summer graduations.

### **M.S. Thesis Process (Plan A)**

#### **Thesis Advisor and Committee**

Some M.S. students will have an intended thesis advisor when they first enroll at USD, and others will begin without having established this relationship. Students enrolling without a thesis advisor will be advised academically by the graduate program director until they select a thesis advisor. M.S. students should have a thesis advisor and committee in place by the end of their first year in the program. The selection of a thesis advisor should be based on shared research

interests and the willingness and workload capacity of the prospective advisor. Most students will have as their advisor a faculty member in the Department of Sustainability & Environment, but affiliate faculty may also serve in this role if their department chairs support this activity. Advisors must be members of the graduate faculty.

The student will work with their advisor to identify prospective thesis committee members. An M.S. thesis committee will consist of the advisor and at least one faculty member in the Department of Sustainability & Environment and at least one faculty member from another department. Committee members must be members of the graduate faculty of USD. Ideally, the non-department committee member will have some academic expertise that can help support the student in their research and thesis preparation. Researchers outside of the USD faculty can potentially be committee members if their academic backgrounds facilitate successful application to become an adjunct graduate faculty member (an unpaid temporary appointment to serve on a committee). It is the student's responsibility to request the participation of prospective committee members.

### **Thesis Proposal and Thesis Proposal Meeting**

In consultation with the advisor, each M.S. student will write a thesis research proposal. This proposal should be prepared by the end of their first year in the program. Barring extraordinary circumstances, students are expected to schedule their thesis defense during the academic year rather than the summer. The scope, format, and length of the written proposal will be determined by the student and the advisor and will typically be in the 10-20 page range. The student will present their proposal in a meeting with their committee to be held between two and four weeks after the distribution of the proposal. The purpose of this exercise is to allow the student to demonstrate that they have an adequate understanding of their research project and for the committee to identify any logistic or other concerns that may hinder satisfactory completion of the project. The advisor will conduct the thesis proposal meeting. During the meeting, the student will give a 15-20 minute presentation on the proposed research. This will be followed by a discussion of the proposed research with questioning by the committee. The student should note all suggestions for improvement of their research as they are discussed in the proposal meeting. The committee may recommend a second meeting if the thesis research proposal was found to need major revisions or was lacking in some way.

### **Thesis Defense**

Once a student has prepared a draft of their thesis that their advisor approves as "defensible", the student may schedule their thesis defense, in coordination with their committee. The defense must be at least two weeks after the defensible draft has been transmitted to the committee. In order to provide time for completion of the final draft of the thesis, the defense should be at least two weeks prior to the Graduate Schools deadline for thesis submission via ProQuest. The date, time, and location of the thesis defense must be communicated to the graduate program director by the student at least two weeks before the defense. The thesis defense title, date, location, and time will be announced. The student's thesis advisor will conduct the defense. The defense will consist of a public presentation and a closed session with their committee. The defense will begin with ~45-minute public presentation of the student's research results followed by questions



posed by the audience. The committee and the student will convene immediately following the public presentation to conduct the closed session of the defense. Questioning will focus on the research presented in the draft thesis and presentation. Questions are intended to allow the student to demonstrate their knowledge, judgment, and critical thinking. The defense will typically last 2.5-3 hours. Upon conclusion of questioning, the committee will excuse the student to deliberate on the outcome of the defense. The committee will have three options for an evaluation of the defense: 1) Pass, 2) Pass with conditions, and 3) Fail. The student will be invited to return to the session to discuss the outcome of the defense.

If a student fails their defense, they can return to the beginning of the process described in this section, scheduling a repeat defense no sooner than sixty days after their initial defense. The committee will decide whether the repeat defense will include a public presentation.

### **Thesis Document**

The final M.S. thesis document must conform with the guidelines provided in the *Guide to Preparing Your Thesis or Dissertation* document available in the Thesis & Dissertation tab in the Graduate School page in the USD Portal. Aspects of document style not prescribed by the Graduate School will be determined in consultation with the advisor. The process for uploading the final thesis document to ProQuest is also explained in this section of the USD Portal.

Theses must be submitted online to ProQuest by the deadline indicated by the Graduate School for the intended graduation date; see the *Graduate Student Responsibilities/Deadlines* tab at the Graduate School page in the USD Portal.

### **Non-thesis M.S. (Plan B) Oral Exam**

Students undertaking a non-thesis M.S. in Sustainability (Plan B) must pass an oral exam before a graduation approval form can be submitted. The exam will be given by a committee of three graduate faculty members, including the student's advisor. The graduate program director will appoint one committee member (typically an instructor for one of the core courses in the M.S. curriculum), and the student will solicit the participation of the other committee member, selected from other faculty members from whom the student has taken courses in their graduate program. The exam must be taken within the final four weeks of regular classes in the semester that the student is planning to graduate, and at least two days prior to the Graduate School's deadline for submission of the graduation approval form for that semester; see the *Graduate Student Responsibilities/Deadlines* tab at the Graduate School page in the USD Portal.

The exam will be 1-1.5 hours in duration and will be directed by the appointed committee member. The scope of questions will encompass content and concepts from the required courses in the M.S. Sustainability curriculum, and other courses in the student's graduate program with an emphasis on courses taken from the other committee members. Questions should also explore integration between core sustainability concepts and topical content of elective courses.

At the conclusion of the exam the committee will excuse the student to deliberate on the outcome. The committee will have two options for an evaluation of the exam: Pass or Fail. The student will be invited to return to the session to discuss the outcome of the exam.

If a student fails their exam, they can return to the beginning of the process described in this section, scheduling a repeat exam no sooner than sixty days after their initial exam.

## **Ph.D. Candidacy and Dissertation Process**

### **Dissertation Advisor and Committee**

In order for a student to be admitted to the Sustainability Ph.D. program a student must have communicated with a prospective dissertation advisor and secured their willingness to serve in this role prior to their application. The selection of a dissertation advisor should be based on shared research interests and the willingness and workload capacity of the prospective advisor. Most students will have as their advisor a faculty member in the Department of Sustainability & Environment, but affiliate faculty may also serve in this role if their department chairs support this activity. Advisors must be members of the graduate faculty.

The student will work with their advisor to identify prospective dissertation committee members. The committee should be in place by the end of the students first year in the program. A Ph.D. dissertation committee will consist of the advisor and at least three other faculty members including at least one in the Department of Sustainability & Environment and at least one from another department. Committee members must be members of the graduate faculty of USD. Ideally, the non-department committee member will have some academic expertise that can help support the student in their research and dissertation preparation. Researchers outside of the USD faculty can potentially be committee members if their academic backgrounds facilitate successful application to become an adjunct graduate faculty member (an unpaid temporary appointment to serve on a committee). It is the student's responsibility to request the participation of prospective committee members.

### **Timeline for Dissertation Proposal and Qualifying Exams**

A Ph.D. student's dissertation proposal and qualifying exams will typically be addressed in the second year for students who entered with a previous master's degree, or the third year for students who entered the program without a previous master's degree. However, this timeline may vary, reflecting differences in common practices of disciplines contributing to the Sustainability Program. Some students will go through the dissertation proposal process before their qualifying exams, and some will take their qualifying exams first. The decision about order will be guided by the advisor.

## **Dissertation Proposal and Dissertation Proposal Defense**

In consultation with the advisor, each Ph.D. student will write a dissertation research proposal. The scope, format, and length of the written proposal will be determined by the student and the advisor. The student will defend their proposal in a meeting with their committee to be held between two and four weeks after distribution of the proposal. The purpose of this exercise is to allow the student to demonstrate that they have an adequate understanding of their research project and for the committee to identify any logistic or other concerns that may hinder satisfactory completion of the project. The advisor will conduct the dissertation proposal defense. During the defense, the student will give a 20-30 minute presentation on the proposed research. This will be followed by a discussion of the proposed research with questioning by the committee. The meeting duration may be up to two hours. The student should note all suggestions for improvement of their research as they are discussed in the proposal defense. The committee may recommend a second meeting if the dissertation research proposal was found to need major revisions or was lacking in some way.

## **Ph.D. Qualifying Exams**

In order to advance to candidacy, doctoral students in sustainability must pass written and oral qualifying exams. The purpose of the qualifying exams is for the student to demonstrate knowledge and comprehension of the subject of sustainability and coursework undertaken in their doctoral program at a level appropriate for a Ph.D. The exams will be administered by the student's doctoral committee under the leadership of the student's advisor. The written exam will be administered first. Qualifying exams should be undertaken no later than the end of the second year for Ph.D. students who entered the program with a previous master's degree, and no later than the end of the third year for students who entered the program without a previous master's degree.

### *Written Qualifying Exam*

The structure and format of the written exam will be determined by the student's advisor in consultation with other members of their dissertation committee. The exam may be open-book or closed-book and may be offered as a take-home exam (maximum duration of one week) or a timed sit-down exam offered over multiple sessions (to be completed within a period of one week).

The content of the written exam will include four subjects:

1. The general subject of sustainability as understood through required courses in the sustainability Ph.D. curriculum and potentially graduate seminars that the student has taken. This part of the exam will typically involve input from faculty members that teach in the core curriculum of the Sustainability Ph.D. program.
- 2-4. Three academic subjects selected by the student and approved by their committee. The topics should reflect coursework in the student's doctoral program, potentially including graduate coursework from a prior graduate degree, transferred into their doctoral program. What constitutes one academic subject for the exam will generally correspond to something that may be offered as a graduate course, at USD or elsewhere. Significant overlap between exam subjects

should be avoided. The student will work with their advisor to select and define topics which will be submitted to the committee for approval.

The doctoral committee may seek input from faculty outside of the committee in formulating and grading written exam questions, particularly where expertise beyond the committee is necessary.

Guidance with regard to literature for the student review in preparation for the exam will be provided to the student at least eight weeks before the exam. Such guidance may be in the form journal articles, book chapters, and books (potentially including textbooks).

The written exam will be developed by the advisor and committee and assembled into final form by the advisor.

The written exam will be graded within one week of the completion of the exam and made available for review by the student. The overall outcome of the exam will be considered in conjunction with the oral exam with four possible outcomes as described below.

### *Oral Qualifying Exam*

The oral qualifying exam will be conducted within four weeks of the written exam. The exam is conducted by the members of the student's committee, led by the dissertation advisor. Oral exams are typically 2-3 hours in duration. The scope of the oral exam is to encompass the content of the written exams and may also include content related to the student's dissertation proposal. The answers to questions from the written exams, including those where student's answers may have been considered incomplete or inaccurate, may be used as a basis for questions in the oral exam.

### *Outcomes of Qualifying Exams*

Immediately upon completion of the oral exam the student is asked to leave the room, and the committee will discuss the student's performance (including written and oral exams), deliberate, and select from one of the following four possible outcomes of the qualifying exam:

1. Pass. An unconditional pass. The student will then be considered a Ph.D. candidate.
2. Conditional pass. Generally scored as a passing performance, but with deficiencies in one or more areas. Such a score delineates that additional work will be conducted designed to lead to a satisfactory level of knowledge in the judgment of the committee member or members concerned with the areas of specified weakness. This may include retesting in one of the written exam subjects. Once the student meets the conditions, the examination is considered a pass, and further examination is not required. The committee will communicate to the graduate program director that the student has met their additional expectations. The student will then be considered a Ph.D. candidate.
3. Reexamination required. The candidate does not pass the examination but shows sufficient promise for eventual successful completion of the doctorate to justify a second exam.

Typically, this outcome reflects satisfactory performance on some parts of the exam and unsatisfactory performance in other parts, and in such cases only the unsatisfactory parts of the exam are subject to reexamination. The reexamination normally will be conducted under the guidelines for an original examination. No student will be allowed more than one repeat of their qualifying exams.

4. Fail. The candidate may not repeat the qualifying exams and is requested to discontinue the doctoral program. Students that failed their qualifying exams will be encouraged to complete the requirements of the M.S. Sustainability curriculum (Plan A thesis; or Plan B non-thesis) to earn an M.S. in Sustainability as a product of their work in the program.

After the deliberations of the committee the student will be invited back into the room and informed of the outcome of their exams. The outcome of the examination will be reported to the graduate program director.

Upon successful completion of qualifying exams, doctoral students without a prior master's degree who have met the requirements of M.S. Sustainability Plan B must apply for an M.S. Sustainability degree as a part of their academic progress. This process will involve submitting an M.S. program of study. For students with a previous master's degree this process of earning an M.S. as a part of their doctoral studies is optional.

### **Dissertation Defense**

Once a student has prepared a draft of their dissertation that their advisor approves as "defensible", the student may schedule their dissertation defense, in coordination with their committee. Barring extraordinary circumstances, students are expected to schedule their dissertation defense during the academic year rather than the summer. The defense must be at least two weeks after the defensible draft has been transmitted to the committee. In order to provide time for completion of the final draft of the dissertation, the defense should be at least two weeks prior to the Graduate School's deadline for dissertation submission via ProQuest. The date, time, and location of the dissertation defense must be communicated to the graduate program director by the student at least two weeks before the defense. The dissertation defense title, date, location, and time will be announced. The defense will consist of a public presentation and a closed session with their committee. The defense will begin with ~45-minute public presentation of the student's research results followed by questions posed by the audience. The committee and the student will convene immediately following the public presentation to conduct the closed session of the defense. The advisor will lead this phase of the defense. Questioning will focus on the research presented in the draft dissertation and presentation. Questions are intended to allow the student to demonstrate their knowledge, judgment, and critical thinking. The defense will typically last 2.5-3.5 hours. Upon conclusion of questioning, the committee will excuse the student to deliberate on the outcome of the defense. The committee will have three options for an evaluation of the defense: 1) Pass, 2) Pass with conditions, and 3) Fail. The student will be invited to return to the session to discuss the outcome of the defense.

If a student fails their defense, they can return to the beginning of the process described in this section, scheduling a repeat defense no sooner than sixty days after their initial defense. The committee will decide whether the repeat defense will include a public presentation.

### **Dissertation Document**

A Ph.D. dissertation will typically consist of an introductory chapter, three to five chapters prepared as manuscripts suitable for submission to professional research journals, and a final chapter synthesizing the conclusions of these manuscripts.

The final Ph.D. dissertation document must conform with the guidelines provided in the *Guide to Preparing Your Thesis or Dissertation* document available in the Thesis & Dissertation tab in the Graduate School page in the USD Portal. Aspects of document style not prescribed by the Graduate School will be determined in consultation with the advisor. The process for uploading the final dissertation document to ProQuest is also explained in this section of the USD Portal.

Dissertations must be submitted online to ProQuest by the deadline indicated by the Graduate School for the intended graduation date; see the *Graduate Student Responsibilities/Deadlines* tab at the Graduate School page in the USD Portal.

## **Academic Policies and Procedures**

Graduate students are responsible for knowledge and understanding of the policies in the Graduate Catalog, here: <http://catalog.usd.edu/content.php?catoid=31&navoid=1857>. Some important policies are reiterated and/or made specific to the Sustainability Graduate Program below.

### **Full-time Status and Normal Course Load**

A full-time graduate-student course load is 9-12 credit hours. During the regular academic year, the normal maximum registration for a graduate student is 12 credit hours per semester. The normal registration during the summer session is 9-12 credit hours of course work. Students on graduate assistantships must enroll for at least 9 credit hours during the fall and spring terms, and at least 1 credit hour during the summer term (if employed as a “graduate assistant” in the summer).

### **Academic Standing and Incomplete Grades**

Graduate students are required to make progress toward degree completion every semester they are enrolled at the University. Graduate School policies include the following: “In addition to overall satisfactory performance, graduate students must maintain a cumulative GPA average of 3.0 or above in all work included in the program of study submitted for their degrees. Furthermore, no more than one-third of the credit hours with grades of ‘C’ are permitted.... A cumulative GPA of 3.0 or higher is required to progress in the Graduate School.” No grade

below a 'C' is acceptable for graduate credit. "Grades of 'D', 'F', or other unsatisfactory designations are not acceptable for graduate credit. This does not mean that grades of 'D' and 'F' may not be assigned to graduate students but that credit for courses in which such grades have been earned will not be counted toward a graduate degree although they are included in GPA calculations." Only the last grade is used in calculating GPA for courses that have been repeated.

A grade of "I" ("Incomplete") should be given to graduate students only when exceptional circumstances prevent a person from completing a particular piece of assigned work (such as a seminar or research paper) by the end of the semester. Student and professor will agree on a deadline for the work to be completed. The deadline should be a maximum length of one calendar year from the date the Incomplete was assigned. If the student does not meet that deadline, the Incomplete will remain on the student's transcript, and the student, according to the Graduate School policy, must retake the course. An Incomplete cannot count toward the credits required for the degree.

### **Academic Standing: Probation and Dismissal**

The Sustainability Graduate Program adheres to the Graduate School's policies on probation and dismissal, which are as follows: "If a student has more than one course of unsatisfactory work and/or has not maintained a 3.0 term or cumulative graduate GPA, the academic program places the student on warning, probation, or dismisses him/her from the program in keeping with department and Graduate School policies. Degree programs and the Graduate School review the academic standing of all graduate students each term, and program leaders notify students directly of academic warning, probation or dismissal. The Graduate School is copied on all student communication. A graduate student may be dismissed from the program at any time for failure to meet the academic performance and progress standards of the degree program's or Graduate School. The department is required to provide students a written notice of the issues and an opportunity to meet with the program head (face-to-face, teleconference, virtually) before dismissal action."

### **Transfer Credits**

Students undertaking an M.S. in Sustainability may transfer up to 6 graduate credits (non-thesis) from another accredited institution, subject to approval of their committee and the graduate program director who will consider the relevance of proposed transfer courses for their degree program.

Students undertaking a Ph.D. in Sustainability may transfer up to 18 graduate credits (non-thesis/dissertation) from another accredited institution, subject to approval of their committee and the graduate program director who will consider the relevance of proposed transfer courses for their degree program.

### **Leave of Absence**

Should you need to suspend your graduate education, you may do so for up to three semesters (including summer). If you return within this timeframe, you will not need to reapply for

admission. Taking a leave of absence does not change the time frame for degree completion, therefore, students will be subject to the time limits discussed before the leave occurred. Students returning after three consecutive semesters of leave will need to contact the Graduate School before re-enrolling. See the Graduate School's Continuous Enrollment policy for more information.

### **Oral Exams and Defenses**

In keeping with Graduate School policy, all M.S. and Ph.D. defenses or qualifying exams will be conducted in person on the USD campus. With the prior written approval of all committee members, defenses or exams may be conducted by video-conferencing systems.

### **Academic Integrity**

“The College of Arts and Sciences considers plagiarism, cheating, and other forms of academic dishonesty inimical to the objectives of higher education. The College supports the imposition of penalties on students who engage in academic dishonesty, as defined in the ‘Conduct’ section of the University of South Dakota Student Handbook.

No credit can be given for a dishonest assignment. A student found to have engaged in any form of academic dishonesty may, at the discretion of the instructor, be:

1. Given a zero for that assignment.
2. Allowed to rewrite and resubmit the assignment for credit.
3. Assigned a reduced grade for the course.
4. Dropped from the course.
5. Failed in the course.”

*NOTE: Adopted by vote of the faculty of the College, April 12, 2005 and Amended by vote of the faculty of the College, March 18, 2014.*

Graduate students are expected to conduct themselves honestly and professionally both within and outside the department. Graduate students who engage in dishonest conduct in their professional relationships - including in the production and submission of theses, presentations, and work for publication - may be subject to sanctions, including, but not limited to, removal of departmental funding or dismissal from the program. All such decisions are at the discretion of the graduate program director in consultation with the student's advisor. The University of South Dakota Graduate Catalog states that “a graduate student may be dismissed from the program at any time for failure to meet the academic performance and progress standards of the degree program or the Graduate School. The department is required to provide students a written notice of the issues and an opportunity to meet with the program head (face-to-face, teleconference, virtually) before dismissal action.”



## **Graduate Academic Appeal and Grievance Procedures**

Students may appeal an academic decision involving such matters as final course grades and dismissal from the program using an appeal process defined by South Dakota Board of Regents Policy 2:9. The Sustainability Graduate Program adheres to the procedures established by the Office of Academic Affairs for impartial review and hearing of any academic grievances. The university's academic appeal procedures, including the form that must be filed with any appeal, are accessible through the Graduate School's page in the USD Portal; look for the "Academic Appeal Form." A student pursuing an academic appeal may confer with the Graduate School before initiating the process. Students may also invoke the standards and procedures provided under this policy to challenge academic responses to instances involving alleged student academic misconduct or to challenge other decisions, justified on academic grounds, that affect their participation in or completion of university academic programs.

Students should initiate an appeal through discussion with the individual responsible for the decision. For grading disputes, students should contact the appropriate faculty member. For decisions regarding the program, students should contact the graduate program director and the chair of the Department of Sustainability & Environment.

## **Graduate Assistantships**

The Department of Sustainability & Environment has several graduate teaching assistantship positions. In addition, the department coordinates a university Sustainability Coordinator assistantship. At any given time, faculty members in the Department of Sustainability & Environment may have grants or contracts that support research assistantships or assistantships associated with other professional activity.

Some students in the Sustainability Graduate Program have also been supported by assistantships offered by other academic programs at USD or administrative offices.

### **Graduate Assistantship Workload**

Graduate assistants may not work at a rate above 50% full-time employment (FTE). Most graduate assistantships, including teaching assistantships are considered 20-hour-per-week 50% FTE positions. Graduate assistants working at this level are therefore ineligible for additional work within the university.

Graduate teaching assistantships typically involve teaching two undergraduate lab sections per semester. Graduate teaching assistants are expected to maintain regular office hours announced to their sections. Graduate teaching assistants are expected to fully prepare for their teaching responsibilities, which may involve regular meetings with a course instructor and/or teaching assistant coordinator. Unsatisfactory teaching performance will result in non-renewal of the assistantship.

Graduate research assistantships and other departmental assistantships will involve work with a designated supervisor. The specific responsibilities, hours of work, and performance evaluation will be managed by that supervisor. Research assistantship work is conducted for the stipend and not necessarily for the student's thesis/dissertation. However, supervisors may choose to allocate research assistant's time toward thesis/dissertation work.

All departmental graduate assistants may, as a defined part of their positions, be expected to participate in departmental support and recruiting activities constituting up to four hours per semester.

### **Graduate Assistantship Compensation and Tuition Reduction**

Graduate assistants receive a stipend and tuition reduction. The stipend varies by position. Tuition reduction is based on South Dakota Board of Regents policy:

*Resident graduate assistants and resident graduate student fellows shall be assessed fifty-three percent (53%) of the resident graduate tuition rate for all on-campus courses, in addition to 100% of the general activity fee and any discipline fees. Nonresident graduate assistants and nonresident graduate student fellows shall be assessed sixty-three percent (63%) of the resident graduate tuition rate for all on-campus courses, in addition to 100% of the general activity fee and any discipline fees.*

Note that this means that graduate assistants will typically be responsible for some of their tuition and all of their fees. Some assistantships, supported by grants or contracts, may pay for all or some part of the tuition not supported by the assistantship tuition reduction policy described above, and may cover some or all fees.

Current tuition and fees can be viewed under the USD column at:  
<https://www.sdbor.edu/student-information/Pages/Tuition-and-Fees.aspx>

### **Graduate Assistantship Duration**

Graduate assistantships may be awarded for up to twelve months at a time. Graduate teaching assistantships are for the nine-month academic year. Renewal of an assistantship is subject to satisfactory performance, academic progress, and availability of funds.

If a graduate student fails to meet their academic assistantship obligations and/or resigns from the position, the assistantship will be terminated, and the tuition charges re-billed for the semester at the non-reduced rate.

### **Required Course Load**

Graduate assistants must enroll for at least nine credit hours per semester (one credit in summer if receiving a summer assistantship). Students in their final semester of study who provide evidence that fewer than nine credit hours remain for graduation will be granted exceptions by the Graduate Dean or designee.

## **Applying for Graduate Assistantships**

In order to be considered for departmental graduate assistantships at the time of their application, applicants should apply by the priority admissions deadline. Students wishing to be considered for teaching assistantships should indicate this in the statement of purpose in their application and explain their qualifications for this work. Similarly, students seeking any other departmental assistantship with defined responsibilities should present their interest in, and qualifications for, the position.

Current students interested in being considered for open departmental assistantships should communicate this interest to the graduate program director by the priority admissions deadline so that they can be considered for such positions along with the new applicants. This communication should include a one-page statement of interest and be accompanied by an unofficial transcript.

Students interested in applying for graduate assistantships offered by other departments or administrative offices must complete an application at: <https://www.usd.edu/graduate-school/graduate-assistantships>

Provisionally admitted graduate students cannot be awarded graduate assistantships.

## **Practical Matters**

### **Office Space**

The Department of Sustainability & Environment has a graduate student office space (AK 203) which has eight cubicles for graduate students. Students desiring a cubicle in this space should request the space by contacting the graduate program director, who will coordinate the assignment of a cubicle with the department secretary, Brenda Walker. If there are more students desiring a cubicle than there are available spaces the prioritization is: (1) graduate teaching assistants; (2) other departmental graduate assistants (research etc.); and (3) other graduate students. There may be office space available in other buildings for students being advised by faculty members based in other buildings on campus.

### **Building Access and Room Keys**

Access to Akeley-Lawrence Science Center is by ID Card. See Department Secretary Brenda Walker to assure that you have been granted proper access to the building. Requests for room keys, including teaching rooms, research labs, and the graduate student office space should also be made with Brenda Walker.

## **Travel**

Graduate students may travel as a part of their research and academic experience at USD. In some cases that travel may be supported by funds from the Department of Sustainability & Environment or grant/contract funds administered by a faculty member. Travel that is to be funded should be discussed with the faculty member associated with the funding or the department chair. In some cases, vehicular travel may involve the use of a state fleet vehicle, and this will be arranged by Brenda Walker in coordination with the responsible faculty member. All funded out-of-state travel and all air travel must go through an approval process that begins with the submission of an out-of-state travel request form. Students will work with the responsible faculty member and Brenda Walker to prepare and submit this form. In order to receive reimbursement of expenses after funded travel students will submit a travel detail form (in-state, out-of-state, or out-of-country), prepared with the assistance of Brenda Walker.

## **Email**

Students are expected to use their USD email account for all academic communications.

## **Registering for Thesis or Dissertation Credits**

Make sure that thesis or dissertation credits are listed with your advisor, if they are not then please ask them to request a section under their name.

In order to register for a number of thesis or dissertation credits other than the default, you will need to follow these instructions:

1. Log in to the myUSD portal as you normally would.
2. On the main page click the red tile that says “REG” (registration self-service).
3. On the registration page you will click “Register for Classes” it’s the first option in the right-hand column.
4. Now you should be on the “Register for Classes” page and there will be four tab options.
5. Click the tab that says “Schedule and Options”.
6. On this page you will click on the credit hours you want changed and a drop-down selection should appear.
7. select the correct number of credit hours
8. Click “save” in the bottom right-hand corner of the page

## **Switching from M.S. Program to Ph.D. Program**

Students admitted to the M.S. Sustainability program may become interested in pursuing a Ph.D. in Sustainability at USD at some point in their studies. A student interested in this may complete their M.S. and then apply to the Ph.D. program, but they may also elect to try to switch to the Ph.D. program before completing their M.S. To accomplish this a student must apply to, and be admitted to, the Ph.D. program following the same admissions process as a new student. Once admitted, the student can apply the coursework taken up to that point to their Ph.D. program. If

any thesis credits had been taken prior to the switch they can be converted to dissertation credits by having the thesis/dissertation advisor file the appropriate forms with the Graduate School.