



Director of Graduate Studies Handbook

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Frequently Asked Questions

General

- 1. What are SMU’s expectations of a Director of Graduate Studies?** As a DGS, you are a leader in your graduate program in areas of recruitment, admissions, curriculum, student support, and strategic planning. You also advise graduate students in your program and provide administrative approvals on behalf of the program. In addition, you are responsible for working with your colleagues to ensure that the program meets SMU standards and follows SMU policies laid out in the [Graduate Catalog](#). The resources in this handbook are designed to help you fulfill these responsibilities, and the staff of the Moody School Dean’s Office are available to assist you and answer questions you may have.
- 2. How do we know what kinds of issues to bring to the Moody School versus our own school’s dean’s office?** Issues involving personnel matters (e.g. faculty or staff behavior) should always be brought to the school dean’s office. In addition, the Moody School does not handle tuition or tuition waivers, decisions regarding research or teaching assistantships, or curricular changes, so matters in those areas should also be brought to the school dean’s office.

The Moody School:

- provides professional development, career, student life, and fellowship support and services for graduate students
- manages the PhD Health Insurance Program
- oversees PhD admissions decisions
- supports recruitment for PhD, MFA, and Dedman College master’s programs
- handles enrollment and graduation issues for Dedman College programs

- f. provides Dean's Office approvals for timeline extensions, leaves of absence, committee composition, etc., for Dedman College programs.

Issues in all those areas should be brought to the Moody School Dean's Office's attention.

Admissions and Orientation

3. **Can the application fee be waived?** Application fees provide funding for the Slate application system as well as recruitment support on behalf of graduate programs. They can be waived in circumstances of exceptional need and merit. For Dedman College programs, the Moody School Dean's Office provides approval of any application fee waivers—please contact the Director of Graduate Recruitment and Admissions to request a fee waiver. In other schools, the school dean's office provides approval for application fee waivers.
4. **In reviewing applicants for admission, what information is useful to enter into Slate, and who should enter it?** Faculty reviewers and the DGS should provide full assessments of applicants via the review forms in Slate. The DGS usually completes the final review on behalf of the department, including the department's recommendation of admission or denial. Where faculty reviews are absent, DGSs should summarize their own assessment and report the assessments of their departmental colleagues on the review form. In short, the review forms provide a record of a program's review of applicants that shows the reasoning for the program's decision to admit or deny admission to each applicant. Recommendations to admit an applicant for PhD and MFA programs are sent to the Moody School. The Moody School does a final check on the application to make sure that the applicant meets all University admissions criteria and works with the department and school if there are any issues or questions.
5. **Is there a way that we can encourage or ask admitted Ph.D. applicants to let us know before April 15 whether they accept our offer of admission?** In short, no. You are strongly encouraged to stay in close contact with applicants you have accepted into your program, and to offer to provide them with any information that would help them to make their decision. However, SMU, like every other major institution of graduate education in the US, is a signatory of the [April 15 Resolution](#), which obligates our Ph.D. programs to give accepted applicants until April 15 at the earliest to make their decision on their offer of admission and funding.
6. **What kind of orientation do new graduate students receive and what information is presented at that orientation?** The Moody School organizes a comprehensive orientation, and students in Dedman College, Lyle, Meadows, Simmons, and Guildhall are invited to attend. Currently the orientation is primarily online, with asynchronous content present via Canvas. There are also some live webinars, which are recorded and loaded onto the Canvas site, as well as a welcome luncheon. Topics and offices represented include:
 - a. Welcome from the Dean
 - b. Moody School Resources
 - c. SMU Resources
 - d. Library Resources
 - e. OIT Support
 - f. Financial Aid & Fellowships

- g. Health Center
- h. Counseling Services
- i. SMU Safety
- j. Student Conduct
- k. Student Support
- l. Institution Access & Equity
- m. Bias Education and Response Team
- n. Advice from Faculty
- o. Advice from Current Students
- p. International Student & Scholar Services

Academic Progress, Academic Standing, and Grades

- 7. What does “good standing” in a graduate program mean?** Graduate students must maintain a GPA of 3.00 or above to be in good standing in their program. Some programs have other specific requirements for good standing, e.g. not receiving two grades below a B-. PhD and MFA programs are also expected to evaluate each student on an annual basis, based on the student’s academic performance, research and teaching responsibilities, and professionalism. Usually students found to need improvement in any area in annual reviews are provided with a remediation plan to allow them to achieve satisfactory performance in this area. In some cases, though, where a student’s performance is marked as unsatisfactory on annual reviews, they may be considered not in good standing. Students who are not in good standing are usually placed on academic probation for one regular term (fall or spring) and given the opportunity to improve their performance, although in some cases, especially when specific program requirements have not been met, they may be dismissed.
- 8. What happens when a student goes on academic probation?** Students on academic probation are usually given one regular term (fall or spring) to bring their GPA or other measure of performance up to the standards of the program (in the case of probation due to grades, this means bringing the GPA up to 3.00). If a student fails to meet the standards after one term, they may be dismissed from the program, or, at the program and the school’s discretion, their probation may be extended, if they are making sufficient progress towards returning to good standing.
- 9. I’ve heard that we have to review our students’ progress and performance each year? What does that entail?** PhD and MFA programs are expected to review their students’ performance annually, and all other programs are strongly encouraged to do so. In Dedman College, each PhD program’s faculty collectively review their students’ performance in three areas: academics, research, and professionalism. While details of evaluations remain with the department, a summary of the outcome of the evaluations, including remediation plans for any students determined not to be performing at a satisfactory level in one or more of the 3 domains of evaluation are shared with the Dedman College Dean’s Office.
- 10. What is the university’s position on assigning grades to graduate students?** SMU’s policy is that “the final authority in matters of academic judgment in the determination of a grade rests with the course instructor.” It is expected that grades will be assigned based on the quality of the student’s performance in the course, as outlined in the course syllabus. In cases where a

student believes that a grade was incorrectly or “capriciously or unfairly” determined, they may appeal the grade. Grade appeals go first to the instructor; if the resolution is not satisfactory for the student, they may appeal to the department chair, then to the school dean’s office, then to the Provost’s office. While standards for graduate students are higher than for undergraduates—graduate students must maintain a 3.00 GPA, while undergraduates must only maintain a 2.00 overall GPA—faculty are still expected to evaluate graduate students based on their course assignments and assign them a grade that accurately reflects the quality of their work. Policies regarding whether and when to assign an incomplete grade are the same for undergraduate and graduate courses.

11. **If a student is not making satisfactory progress in coursework or research, when and how should that be documented and what should be done?** Grades should always reflect the faculty member’s evaluation of the student’s performance on course assignments, including in graded research courses. PhD and MFA students also receive annual performance reviews by the faculty of their program. They should receive verbal feedback supplemented with written documentation (e.g., a letter or memo) on their academic and research performance (and, in Dedman College, their professional development and performance) in a memo or other communication from the department as part of that annual review. Annual reviews that find a student is not performing at the satisfactory level in any area should include a remediation plan for the student, which makes explicit the tasks or milestones, and timelines for accomplishing those, in order to achieve satisfactory performance.
12. **If a student is making satisfactory progress in coursework and research, but is having difficulties in achieving an acceptable level of professionalism and collegiality, including ethical behavior, when and how should that be documented as a problem and what should be done?** PhD and MFA students have their performance evaluated annually by their departments, and this annual review should include an evaluation of their professionalism and collegiality. Annual reviews that find the student is not performing at the satisfactory level in any area should include a remediation plan for the student to achieve satisfactory performance. For students who display a broad or significant and continuing lack of professionalism or collegiality, official feedback in writing from the department chair and/or DGS at the time of any unacceptable behavior is also highly encouraged. Graduate students are also subject to policies related to student conduct and the honor code set out in the [Student Handbook](#) and may face disciplinary measures from the University Conduct Council or Honor Council if they violate those policies.
13. **If a student has a complaint about a faculty member’s treatment of them, what is the process for addressing the complaint?** Complaints of harassment or discrimination against a member of a protected class should be addressed to the [Office of Institutional Access & Equity \(IAE\)](#). In addition, any faculty or staff member who receives a complaint of such harassment is required by law to report it. If you receive such a report, it is recommended that you bring it to the attention of IAE right away.

If the student’s complaint does not include discrimination or harassment against a member of a protected class, or illegal behavior (which should be reported to SMU PD), they may address their complaint to the department chair. If the department chair is not able to provide

satisfactory resolution, the student may address their complaint to the school dean's office. If the school dean is unable to provide satisfactory resolution, the student may address their complaint to the provost's office.

Students with questions or concerns about the ethics of an individual's conduct of research (e.g., questions of authorship assignment, IRB or IACUC matters, other ethical matters), should bring those questions to the attention of the department chair and the Office of Research for clarification and guidance.

The Moody School Dean's Office is also available to help assess a department's climate for graduate students, through an anonymous survey and/or through a town hall conducted with graduate students in the absence of department faculty and staff. Results of the climate assessment are shared with students and department administration so that any recommended steps towards improvement of the climate may be taken.

Enrollment and Graduation

- 14. How many credits does a student need to be taking to be considered "full time"?** For SMU graduate students, 9 credits is a full-time course load. Graduate students enrolled in fewer than 9 credits who are engaged in full-time academic work in pursuit of their degree should take the "full time status" course in their program to indicate that they are, in fact, full time students.
- 15. What does "full-time status" mean? When can a student be enrolled in "full-time status"?** "Full-time status" indicates that a student is devoting an amount of time to their academic work that is equivalent to a full-time course load of 9 credit hours. A 9 credit-hour course load would require at least 27 hours of academic work (9 contact hours + 18 hours of work outside of class) per week for the approximately 15 hours of the semester, so a student who is enrolled in a "full-time status" course is expected to be devoting themselves to academic work towards their degree for at least that amount of time.
- 16. Do students need to take credits in the summer to be full time?** No, students do not need to be enrolled in any credits over the summer to maintain their status as full-time students, providing they plan to be enrolled during the fall. However, students may need to be enrolled in research or other courses to allow them to be employed as student workers over the summer or for other reasons.
- 17. When can a student take a leave of absence, and for what reasons? What does taking a leave of absence mean for the student's progress, status in the program, etc.?** A leave of absence is a voluntary separation from the University for a defined period of time. Students may take a leave for a variety of reasons related to health, family, financial needs, etc. In general, students on a leave of absence do not retain access to University resources. However, if a student on leave needs library access or access to another resource of the University, this access can be requested from the relevant office. While a student is on a leave of absence, time limits for reaching milestones (e.g. advancing to candidacy) or completing the degree are paused, along with time limits related to eligibility for a Ph.D. Health Insurance Award and other student benefits. While on leave of absence, students are not expected to complete any academic work nor are they required to be in contact with department faculty or staff. A leave is typically for

one semester or a full academic year, but, in the case of a leave as the result of a medical withdrawal, can be for as much as two years.

- 18. How is a medical withdrawal different from a leave of absence?** Medical withdrawal is an option for students who, for reasons related to health issues, are unable to continue in their enrolled courses in a given semester and must withdraw from all courses. Medical withdrawal requests are reviewed by the Office of Student Advocacy and support. In order to request a medical withdrawal, students should complete and submit a [CCC submission form](#) and select the “medical withdrawal request” checkbox. Medical withdrawals also have conditions that must be met before a student can return to their studies at SMU. Like other leaves of absence, a medical withdrawal also “stops the clock” for degree requirements, and a student who has been granted a medical withdrawal is not required to complete any academic work or to be in contact before their return to their program.
- 19. What does a student need to do to apply for graduation?** Applying for graduation begins with an “Application for Candidacy to Graduate” (ACG) form. For Dedman College programs, the Moody School provides access to this form for students who are ready to graduate. For graduate students in other schools, the school Dean’s Office will provide access to the ACG form. Contacts for ACG forms can be found here: [Applying for Graduation](#). Additional requirements for graduation will vary by school and program. For Dedman College programs, all steps and deadlines for graduation can be found on the [Moody School graduation page](#).
- 20. What is required for the announcement of student thesis and dissertation defenses?** At least two weeks before the dissertation defense, PhD candidates are required to complete a [Dissertation Scheduling Form](#), to let the Moody School know the date, time, and location (physical or virtual, depending on the format of the examination) of the defense. The information provided on the form will be added to the Moody School Events Calendar and to an “Upcoming Dissertation Defenses” section of the Moody School Newsletter. Students may petition the Dean of the Moody School to limit attendance and announcements to SMU faculty and students.

Student Funding and Support

- 21. Which students qualify for a tuition waiver?** Tuition waivers are processed by the school in which the student’s program is situated. Ph.D. students supported by a research assistantship, teaching assistantship, or a fellowship that provides them with funds for living expenses beyond a minimum threshold are generally eligible for a waiver of tuition for a full-time course load. If you have questions about whether a student is eligible for a tuition waiver, please check with your school dean’s office.
- 22. Which students are eligible for health insurance coverage? What coverage does the health insurance award provide?** Full-time Ph.D. students are automatically eligible for a Ph.D. Health Insurance Award if they 1) are fully supported by an SMU fellowship or assistantship which provides them with compensation of at least \$17,500 for the year or \$9,000 for the semester, 2) are within five years of matriculation in their Ph.D. program, and 3) are making satisfactory progress in their program. If they are not automatically eligible, they may petition the Moody School for an award with the support of their program. The award covers the individual

premiums of the SMU Student Health Insurance Plan (SHIP). In advance of the fall and spring terms, the Moody School reaches out to all departments for a list of their eligible students and confirms that list by checking financial aid and other records. For more information about the awards: [PhD Health Insurance](#). For more information about SHIP: [Student Health Insurance Plan](#).

23. How can a student apply for a Dean’s Dissertation or Moody Dissertation Fellowship? Who is eligible for these fellowships? Dean’s Dissertation and Moody Dissertation Fellowships provide support for up to one academic year (fall and spring) for students who are on place to defend their dissertations in the fellowship year. They are awarded only to students who are nominated by their department or program. Nominations open in March and are due in mid-April. Awards are announced in early May. Nominations include a letter of support from the department chair or director of graduate studies and a timeline outlining the steps remaining to completion of the dissertation to be signed by the student and their advisor. Departments may nominate multiple students, but are asked to provide a ranking of their nominees.

24. What kind of fellowships does the Moody School offer for incoming students? How can I nominate an applicant for these fellowships? The Moody School offers three kinds of fellowships for applicants who show great potential for academic success as well as potential to enhance the diversity of their programs and fields:

- a. University Ph.D. Fellowships, which are topping up awards that supplement the departmental offer to make that offer competitive with top programs;
- b. Mustang Fellowships, diversity awards which replace the departmental stipend and provide \$30,000/yr; and
- c. Moody Graduate Fellowships, which also replace the departmental stipend and provide \$30,000/yr.

All of these awards provide support for up to five years. Nominations open in January and close the first week of February; the first round of awards are generally made by the end of February. You will receive a call for nominations when nominations open. Nominations are made through an online form in the Slate application system.

25. What support is there for students to travel to conferences? Each school has its own Graduate Student Council or [Graduate Student Assembly](#). These organizations typically provide funding for graduate students to travel to conferences. In addition, the Moody School provides travel grants of up to \$750 for travel to present research or creative work at a conference. Graduate students are eligible to receive a travel grant once per year. Funds from the Graduate Student Council/Assembly and the Moody School can be combined to fully fund a conference travel trip, and they can also be combined with funds from the department or from the professional organization that is organizing the conference.

26. When can graduate students get travel reimbursement through Concur and when must they submit paper forms requesting reimbursement? In general, students must book their travel for University business outside of Concur and seek reimbursement. Only SMU faculty and staff have access to Concur.

- 27. How do we know when to have student stipend payments processed through payroll versus accounts payable?** Any activities that require the student to perform work for the university must be processed through payroll. Funds provided to students that do not entail any work requirements whatsoever must be processed through accounts payable. Students can have their funding split across payroll and accounts payable, if some of the funding is depending upon work and some is not. Payment for teaching assistants and research assistants must be paid through payroll, as it is compensation for work. Fellowships that are not contingent on completion of work activities, should be paid through accounts payable.
- 28. How do external fellowships and awards impact a student's funding from SMU?** Some fellowships and awards from external funding sources provide a stipend intended to cover the student's living expenses. Stipends from external sources that are equivalent to or exceed the total amount a student would usually receive from their SMU assistantship and/or fellowship will replace funding for living expenses from SMU sources. Some fellowships and awards provide stipends that are less than what a student would otherwise receive from SMU. In that case, if a student is funded by a Moody School fellowship, their external award will be supplemented to match the total stipend amount they would have received had they not won the external award. For example, if a Moody Graduate Fellow (\$30,000/yr stipend) wins an external award for \$20,000, the Moody School will supplement that award for \$10,000 for a total stipend amount of \$30,000. DGSs should be aware that each fellowship and award has different rules about how the award is to function in conjunction with their internal or external funding. Please contact the Director of Graduate Fellowships and Awards with any external fellowships and awards questions.
- 29. Where should I direct a student experiencing distress?** If you are concerned about a student's health, safety, or financial well-being, you are encouraged to refer them to the [Caring Community Connections \(CCC\) Program](#). In addition, if you become aware that a student is experiencing harassment or discrimination as a member of a protected class, you should report this to the [Office of Institutional Access & Equity \(IAE\)](#). There are also a number of other resources available to SMU graduate students, and you are encouraged to make students aware of them:
- a. [Disability Accommodations and Success Strategies \(DASS\)](#)
 - b. [SMU Police Department](#)
 - c. [Counseling Services](#)
 - d. [Chaplain and Religious Life](#)
 - e. [Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention](#)
 - f. [Residence Life and Student Housing](#)
 - g. [Student Conduct and Community Standards](#)

Calendar of Moody School Events and Deadlines

This calendar is intended to inform you about what is taking place in the Moody School each month as it affects you and your students. Specific dates for each event and deadlines for fellowships, award, and other opportunities sponsored by the Moody School will be announced by email and posted on the [Moody School website](#) where appropriate.

Monthly:

- Workshops on professional development, career development, and fellowships topics
- Student life activities for graduate students
- Travel grant applications open, travel grants awarded

August:

- Dissertation Writing Boot Camp: early August
- Orientation (live events and virtual orientation Canvas course launch): mid-August
- Ph.D. Recruitment Grant proposals due: late August

September:

- PhD and MFA program representative (DGS and Chair) meeting: early September
- Moody School fellows welcome reception: mid-September

October:

- PhD Candidacy Ceremony: mid-October

November:

- Three-Minute Thesis Competition: early-mid November
 - First round heats: first week of November
 - Finals: second week of November

December:

- Moody School fellows end-of-semester/holiday party: first week of December
- Application deadlines for some PhD programs
- Doctoral graduate recognition luncheon: Friday before December Commencement

January:

- Nominations for Outstanding Graduate Student Instruction Awards due: end of January
- Application deadlines for remaining PhD programs
- PhD and MFA program representative (DGS and Chair) meeting: mid-January

February:

- Nominations for University Ph.D., Mustang, and Moody Fellowships due: first week of February
- Outstanding Graduate Student Instruction Award recipients announced: end of February

March:

- First round of fellowship offers made: early March
- Admitted Student Visit Day: mid-March
- Research and Innovation Week (keynote talk, graduate poster session, faculty panels, fellowships celebration): end of March

April:

- Dean's Dissertation and Moody Dissertation Fellowship nominations due: mid-April
- Initial deadline for acceptance of Ph.D. admissions offers: April 15

May:

- Dean's Dissertation and Moody Dissertation Fellowship recipients announced: early May
- Doctoral graduate recognition dinner: Friday before May Commencement
- Fellowships Boot Camp: late May

Moody School Dean's Office Contact List

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General Questions

Email smugrad@smu.edu or call 214-768-4345.