



Department of Linguistics, Languages, and Cultures
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

Linguistics Graduate Program Handbook

August 16, 2023

About This Document

This is the handbook for the B.A.-M.A., M.A., and Ph.D. programs in Linguistics at Michigan State University. It lays out its structure and the policies behind it, as well as providing more general information that might be useful to prospective and current students.

If you have questions, please contact the Academic Program Co-ordinator, Ben Lampe (lampeben@msu.edu), or the Director of Graduate Studies for Linguistics (DGS), Karthik Durvasula (karthikd@msu.edu). More information can also be found on the Linguistics program website (<https://lilac.msu.edu/linguistics/>).¹

¹This document was compiled and updated with the welcome assistance from graduate students and faculty from the Linguistics program.

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1 Program Overview

The Linguistics graduate programs offer extensive training in theoretical linguistics – phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics – and in sociolinguistics and child language acquisition. Throughout our program, the focus is on the rigorous study of language as a science, and particularly as one of the cognitive sciences. We do not have courses, faculty, or programs that focus primarily on second language learning (there is an independent program at MSU in Second Language Studies); nor are we primarily focused on the question of how theoretical results can be applied in practice.

We have a lively culture of interaction in a robust intellectual community, including highly active research groups in most of the areas mentioned. We are also fortunate to have modern and well-equipped laboratories devoted to experimental and field research in phonetics, phonology, language acquisition, sociolinguistics, semantics-pragmatics, and psycholinguistics.

Many of our undergraduates and M.A. students go on to further study in Ph.D. programs, and they have done so at the most prominent and selective programs in the world. Graduates of our Ph.D. program hold positions both in linguistics and in language-teaching departments across the globe and continue to do cutting-edge research in their fields. Increasingly, our Ph.D. graduates have pursued careers in sectors beyond or adjacent to academia, including technology, educational administration, data science and more.

1.1 Terminology

In this document, it will be helpful to know these definitions of faculty and staff roles:

- **Core Linguistics faculty:** A professor who is fully or jointly appointed in Linguistics. In the case of joint appointments, the faculty member's Linguistics appointment is 51% or greater.
- **Main advisor:** A Linguistics professor who chairs your M.A. or Ph.D. guidance committee. Must be a core Linguistics faculty member.
- **Comp Advisor:** A professor who leads the supervision of a Ph.D. comprehensive/qualifying paper ("comp" paper). They must be an internal member of your committee, but they need not be a core faculty member.
- **Academic Coordinator or Graduate Secretary:** Traditionally the Linguistics program has had its own graduate secretary: a member of the department's office staff whose responsibilities include administrative handling of M.A. and Ph.D. Linguistics student affairs. From 2020-21, these duties have been transferred to an Academic Coordinator, who oversees ad-

ministrative tasks for all of the graduate programs in the department. Throughout this handbook, “Graduate Secretary” should be understood loosely to mean “Academic Coordinator, Graduate Secretary, or whichever department staff member currently has responsibility for the Linguistics graduate programs”.

2 Program Components/Plan Options

The Linguistics section offers an M.A. and a Ph.D. program. Applicants to the Ph.D. program need not already have completed an M.A. Students enrolled in the Ph.D. program do not routinely receive an M.A. along the way, but they may arrange to do so if they have fulfilled the requirements for the M.A. as well. We also offer a dual-degree B.A.-M.A. degree for Michigan State undergraduate students. Ph.D. students may consider including the graduate specialization in Cognitive Science in their course plan.

2.1 The B.A.-M.A. program

The B.A.-M.A. program is open exclusively to current MSU undergraduate students. Degree requirements are the same as for the M.A. program (section 2.2). However, up to 9 credits can be dual-counted toward both the student’s BA degree *and* their M.A. degree. Typically, these will be three 3-credit courses coded LIN at the 800-level. Courses at the 400-level can also be dual-counted, but there is no financial advantage to doing so. For information about how to apply to the B.A.-M.A. degree program, eligibility requirements, and consultation on scheduling the dual-count courses into your personal pathway to degree, please see the Linguistics website (<https://lilac.msu.edu/linguistics/>). You should also make appointments to talk to your undergraduate academic adviser. If they agree that you should apply for the B.A.-M.A. program, you should make an appointment with the Director of Graduate Studies for Linguistics to discuss this further.

2.2 The M.A. program

Applicants to the M.A. need not have majored in Linguistics at the bachelors degree level. Students may achieve an M.A. in Linguistics through the following routes:

- Dual degree B.A.-M.A. (sections 2.1 and 3.8)
- M.A. Plan A by thesis (section 3.6)
- M.A. Plan B by exam (section 3.7)

The student’s program of study must be approved by the student’s main academic advisor. The

Director of Graduate Studies serves as the student's main advisor upon entry to the program and helps the student to select an M.A. advisor.

Achievement of an M.A. in Linguistics involves the following components:

- Identification of an M.A. advisor and guidance committee (sections 5.1-5.4)
- Completion of required coursework (section 3.5)
- Completion of 30 credits (see section 3.4)
- Successful defense of an M.A. thesis (Plan A) or Passing an M.A. exam (Plan B) (sections 8.1 and 7, respectively)

2.3 The Ph.D. program

Applicants to the Ph.D. program need not already have completed an M.A. in Linguistics or any other field. Students enrolled in the Ph.D. program do not routinely receive an M.A. along the way, but they may arrange to do so if they have fulfilled the requirements for the M.A. as well (see section 3).

The student's program of study (*e.g.*, course selection and schedule, comprehensive exam plans) must be approved by the student's main advisor. The Director of Graduate Studies serves as the student's main advisor upon entry to the program and helps the student to select a Ph.D. main advisor.

Achievement of a Ph.D. in Linguistics includes the following components:

- Identification of a doctoral main advisor and guidance committee (sections 4.1.1)
- Establishment and maintenance of a GradPlan (section 4.1.2)
- Completion of required coursework (section 4.1.5)
- Completion of required Doctoral Research credits, LIN 999 (section 4.1.4)
- Completion of two comprehensive exams (section 4.1.6)
- Completion of required Responsible Conduct of Research & Scholarship (RCR) training (section 4.1.7)
- Successful defense of a dissertation proposal (section 4.1.8)
- Successful defense of a dissertation (section 4.1.9)

2.4 The Cognitive Science specialization

The interdepartmental graduate specialization in Cognitive Science is available to students who are enrolled in an M.A. or a Ph.D. in Linguistics. The College of Social Science administers the specialization. The Cognitive Science Program is not an independent degree-granting department. See the Cognitive Science Program page for more information on how to apply for the specialization.

3 Degree Requirements for the M.A.

3.1 Overview of requirements

All requirements of the University and of the College of Arts & Letters must be met. (See [Graduate Student Rights and Responsibilities](#) for residency requirements and residency fees). Current program requirements for the M.A. may change. Those outlined in the handbook for your entering academic year are the requirements that you will follow.

3.2 Selection of an advisor and guidance committee

All M.A. students must have a main advisor and a guidance committee. See Section 5 for deadlines and selection procedures.

3.3 Grade requirements

Students in the M.A. program must maintain a grade point average of at least 3.2 and not receive a grade below 3.0 in more than two courses. They must receive a minimum grade of 3.0 in all courses labeled LIN. See section 9.

3.4 Credits

A total of 30 credits is required for the degree under either Plan A (by thesis) or Plan B (by exam). Note, the University has a requirement that at least 16 of the credits earned for the M.A. degree must be in courses numbered at the 800-level. LIN 401 Introduction to Linguistics may not be taken for graduate credit. Courses below the 400 level may not be taken for graduate credit. No more than 3 credits of LIN 898 Masters Research may be counted toward the degree. Elective credits need not be restricted to courses labeled LIN. Courses at the 400-level or above in other programs may be counted toward the M.A. degree with the approval of the student's guidance committee.

3.5 Required courses

The following courses are required of all M.A. students in Linguistics, regardless of Plan type (A or B):

- **Group 1:** All of the following
 - LIN 834 Syntactic Theory I
 - LIN 837 Semantics and Pragmatics I
 - LIN 824 Phonological Theory I
 - LIN 827 Phonetics I
- **Group 2:** Two of the following, of which at least one must be either LIN 825 or LIN 835
 - LIN 825 Phonological Theory II
 - LIN 835 Syntactic Theory II
 - LIN 828 Phonetics II
 - LIN 838 Semantics and Pragmatics II

Note: An 800-level 3-credit Linguistics seminar or independent study in syntax, phonology, phonetics, or semantics or pragmatics may be substituted for one of the courses in Group 2.

- **Group 3:** One additional 3-credit Linguistics course excluding LIN 890 Independent Study that is not a course in phonetics, phonology, syntax, semantics or pragmatics.

Additional courses may be required by the student's guidance committee. Each of the required courses is worth 3 credits, for a total of 21 credits. If substitutions are made, please bear in mind the university M.A. degree requirement that 16 credits must be in courses numbered 800.

3.5.1 Deadlines

The University's time limit for completion of the M.A. degree is six calendar years from the date of enrollment in the first course that you took that counted toward your M.A. See the section on [Time limit](#) for MA students in the University's [Academic Programs Catalog on Graduate Education](#). However, you should aim to complete your studies within two years if possible.

3.5.2 Responsible Conduct of Research & Scholarship (RCR)

M.A. students must meet the University's requirements for demonstrating that they have been trained in responsible research practices. This is achieved through a combination of online workshops and "face-to-face" training (section 10). Overall details can be found at the Graduate School's [Research Integrity](#) page. The DGS will communicate via e-mail or in a meeting with all current students about the Linguistics program's expectations for fulfillment of the Responsible Conduct of Research and Scholarship (RCR) requirement.

3.6 Additional requirements for Plan A (M.A. by thesis)

In addition to taking the 21 credits of required courses listed in 3.5 above, students proceeding to the Plan A thesis must:

- enroll in 4 credits of LIN 899 Masters Thesis Research. No more than 4 credits of LIN 899 will be counted toward the M.A. degree in Linguistics. Typically, these credits are accrued in the student's final semester.
- accrue at least 5 more credits (to reach the minimum of 30 credits) in courses at the 400-level or above that are approved by the student's guidance committee. They need not be restricted to courses coded LIN.
- Successful oral defense of a thesis, and submission of the thesis (see section 8.1).

Students must be enrolled for at least 1 credit during the semester the student is defending their thesis. The exception is the summer semester immediately following the spring semester in which the student was registered, and/or prior to a fall semester in which the student will be registered. See the section on [Examinations](#) for MA students in the University's [Academic Programs Catalog on Graduate Education](#).

3.7 Additional requirements for Plan B (M.A. by exam)

Students proceeding to the Plan B exam must, in addition to completing all required courses detailed in section 3.5:

- Complete a further 9 elective credits in linguistics courses approved by their advisor.
 - "Linguistics courses" need not be restricted to courses labeled with the LIN designation. Courses at the 400-level or above in other programs may be counted toward the M.A. degree with the approval of the student's guidance committee.

- Pass a written examination in a chosen area of linguistics (see Section 7).

Students must be enrolled for at least 1 credit during the semester the student is taking their exam. The exception is the summer semester immediately following the spring semester in which the student was registered, and prior to a fall semester in which the student will be registered. See the section on [Examinations](#) for MA students in the University's [Academic Programs Catalog on Graduate Education](#).

3.8 Dual enrollment B.A.-M.A.

The requirements for achieving an M.A. in the dual enrollment B.A.-M.A. program are the same as for the Linguistics M.A. more generally, as outlined in sections 3.1-3.7. A maximum of 9 credits at the undergraduate tuition rate can be counted toward the M.A.

4 Degree requirements for the Ph.D.

4.1 Overview of requirements

All requirements of the University and of the College of Arts & Letters must be met. (See [Graduate Student Rights and Responsibilities](#) for residency requirements and residency fees). Current program requirements for the Ph.D. may change. Those outlined in the handbook for your entering academic year are the requirements that you will follow.

4.1.1 Selection of a main advisor and guidance committee

All Ph.D. students must have a main advisor. Initially the Director of Graduate Studies serves as the student's main advisor. By the end of the second semester of enrollment, a core Linguistics faculty member must have agreed to serve as the student's main advisor, and the main advisor and the student have together selected a guidance committee. The initial committee must include the faculty member designated as the Comp 1 Advisor (see section 4.1.6 for more on comprehensive exams). To remain eligible for funding in the second year, the guidance committee must convene its initial meeting before the end of the first year, *i.e.*, in the first two semesters. For details of how to select a main advisor, see section 5. For information about funding eligibility and program milestones, see section 9.

4.1.2 GradPlan

Ph.D. students must create a GradPlan that will serve as the framework of their progress in their Ph.D. program, as well as a conduit for faculty committee members, the Director of Graduate Studies, and the graduate secretary to help guide student development towards a successful dissertation

defense. Students are encouraged to begin their GradPlan starting in the second semester of their Ph.D. program. The Graduate Secretary can provide you with the guidance you will need.

4.1.3 Grade requirements

Students in the Ph.D. program must maintain a cumulative 3.5 grade-point average in courses labeled LIN. They must receive a grade of 3.0 or higher in all LIN courses. They must not accumulate more than 6 credits with a grade of 3.0 in courses labeled LIN. For details of the consequences of receiving grades of 3.0 or below, see Section 9.

4.1.4 Credits

The University has no overall maximum or minimum number of credits required for the Ph.D. program. However, students must have enrolled in a minimum of 24 credits of LIN 999 Doctoral Dissertation Research (maximum 36 credits) before graduation. For more information on when to enroll in LIN 999, talk to the Graduate Secretary and the Director of Graduate Studies. Requests for overrides to exceed the maximum of 36 credits of 999 must be directed by the Director of Graduate Studies to the Office of the Registrar (RO) via a relevant form at the Registrar's Online Forms Menu. Should the total number of credits go above 45 the RO will confer with the Graduate School before considering the request for an exception.

4.1.5 Required courses

- **Group 1:** All of the following
 - LIN 834 Syntactic Theory I
 - LIN 837 Semantics and Pragmatics I
 - LIN 824 Phonological Theory I
 - LIN 827 Phonetics I
- **Group 2:** Two of the following, of which at least one must be either LIN 825 or LIN 835
 - LIN 825 Phonological Theory II
 - LIN 835 Syntactic Theory II
 - LIN 828 Phonetics II
 - LIN 838 Semantics and Pragmatics II

Note: An 800-level 3-credit Linguistics seminar or independent study in syntax, phonology, phonetics, or semantics or pragmatics may be substituted for one of the courses in Group 2.

- **Group 3:** One additional 3-credit Linguistics course excluding LIN 890 Independent Study that is not a course in phonetics, phonology, syntax, semantics or pragmatics.

Additional courses may be required by the student's guidance committee.

4.1.6 Comprehensive exams

Ph.D. students will write and successfully orally defend comprehensive exams (henceforth "comp papers"). See section 6 for more details. The requirements are:

- Two research papers in two different areas of linguistics.
- At least one of the papers must show specialist knowledge in phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, or pragmatics.
- The student will identify a Linguistics faculty member as the Comp Advisor for each of the qualifying papers.
- For each paper, the student must prepare a brief written proposal (typically 10-15 pages) and submit the proposal to the committee.
- The committee must meet with the student to discuss and approve each proposal at a 1.5 hour proposal defense.
- The student must then write the paper and submit the paper to the guidance committee.
- Each paper must be subjected to an oral examination by the student's guidance committee of 1.5 hours, which may include a brief summary presentation by the student.
- If either paper is found unsatisfactory by the committee (*i.e.*, if either paper receives a Fail grade from the evaluation choices of Pass and Fail), a new paper may be proposed, submitted and defended at most once.
- Both of the comp papers must be completed before the submission of the dissertation proposal. See section 4.1.10.

If the student would like to challenge the outcome of the evaluation of a comp paper, they should follow the procedures given in section 11.3.

4.1.7 Responsible Conduct of Research & Scholarship (RCR)

Ph.D. students must meet the University's requirements for demonstrating that they have been trained in responsible research practices. This is achieved through a combination of online work-

shops and ‘face-to-face’ training, both of which are recorded in GradPlan (section [4.1.2](#)). Overall details can be found at the Graduate School’s [Research Integrity](#) page. The DGS will communicate via e-mail or in a meeting with all current students about the Linguistics program’s expectations for fulfillment of the Responsible Conduct of Research and Scholarship (RCR) requirement.

4.1.8 Dissertation proposal

A dissertation proposal must be prepared following satisfactory completion of the comprehensive exams (“comp papers”). See section [6](#) for more on comp papers. For guidelines and procedures associated with dissertation proposals, see section [8](#).

4.1.9 Dissertation and dissertation defense

Upon approval of the proposal by the guidance committee, the student will prepare a dissertation. The dissertation is a book-length scholarly work which is based on original research, and which makes a significant contribution to knowledge in linguistics. See section [8](#) for more details.

With the approval of the student’s guidance committee, a dissertation defense of 3 hours will be scheduled, at which the student will respond to questions from the Committee. This defense will be open to the public. Students must be enrolled for at least 1 credit during the semester they are defending their dissertation, including the summer semester. (Note: Students do not have to be enrolled in a credit in the semester in which they *submit* their revised and formatted dissertation to the Graduate School, provided it is the semester immediately following their defense semester.)

4.1.10 Deadlines

It is a University regulation that all of the comprehensive examination (in the case of Linguistics, both comp papers) must be completed by the end of the fifth year of enrollment in the Ph.D. program. All remaining requirements for the degree must be completed within eight years of the first course that counted toward your Ph.D. degree. See the section [Time limit](#) for Ph.D. students in the University’s [Academic Programs Catalog on Graduate Education](#).

To maintain satisfactory status in the Linguistics graduate program, however, students should adhere to the more stringent timeline explained in section [9](#).

5 Selecting an advisor and guidance committee

5.1 Before you have chosen an advisor

The Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) serves as the main advisor for all new students until they form their guidance committees. The DGS will normally schedule extra office hours before and

during registration. When students meet with the DGS they will have the opportunity to ask questions about the requirements of the program. New students holding teaching assistantships who need to determine their academic schedules before registration may schedule an earlier appointment with the DGS. All new students are encouraged to see the DGS during scheduled office hours or by appointment prior to early enrollment, early registration, or registration for each academic term until they have formed a guidance committee. Thereafter, the student and the guidance committee chair will agree upon the necessity of term-by-term advisement.

5.2 The main graduate advisor

Your main graduate advisor plays a crucial role in guiding you through the program, developing your intellectual interests, as well as supporting your applications for grants, jobs, and other initiatives. They may also collaborate with you on research projects and introduce you to opportunities and contacts within and beyond the field of linguistics. Many students find that their relationship with their advisor lasts for years after graduation. It is important to choose your advisor carefully. Your primary criterion should be their academic expertise in a research area of most interest to you.

That said, it is also quite normal for students to change their main advisor during their M.A. or Ph.D. degree, or to add a co-advisor. The Linguistics faculty encourage students to work with the most appropriate main advisor for their research interests, fully aware that research interests develop and change over time.

It is generally a good idea to begin by selecting a main advisor. You can then discuss with them who the other members of the committee should be. Arrange to meet and talk with a potential advisor so that you can invite them to serve as your committee chair.

If you are an M.A. student and you intend to finish your M.A. in less than 2 years, you will need to identify an advisor by the end of the first year (second semester).

5.3 The guidance committee

Your main advisor serves as the chair of your guidance committee. Members of the committee work with you and your main advisor as you progress through your degree. The responsibilities of the guidance committee are:

- To advise the student about general program requirements and to provide counsel and recommendations regarding coursework.
- To supervise and guide the preparation of proposals, comp papers, theses, and dissertations, and to evaluate the results. [See section 6 for more on Ph.D. comp papers and the Comp Advisor]

- To conduct and evaluate oral defenses.

In most cases the student will work most directly with the chair of the committee, *i.e.*, their main advisor. The amount of participation of other members depends upon the nature and content of the student's program. For Ph.D. students, it also depends on whether a given member is serving as a Comp Advisor. Students may seek advice on degree requirements from any member of the Linguistics faculty.

Changes in the membership of the guidance committee can be made in consultation with your main advisor and the faculty members involved, and may be initiated by the student at any time in GradPlan. See also section [11.3.3](#).

5.4 The M.A. guidance committee

An M.A. committee has a minimum of three members, including the chair. The majority of the members, including the chair, must be members of the core faculty of the Linguistics program.

After obtaining the agreement of the prospective committee members, and after the first guidance committee meeting, the student initiates a GradPlan for approval by all members.

5.5 The Ph.D. guidance committee

A Ph.D. committee has a minimum of four members, including the chair. The majority of the members, including the chair, must be members of the core faculty of the Linguistics program.

After obtaining the agreement of the prospective committee members, and after the first guidance committee meeting, the student initiates a GradPlan for approval by all members.

5.6 Additional and “non-regular” committee members

Additional members: For an M.A. or Ph.D. project that is cross-disciplinary in nature, or for which specific expertise must be sought outside of the Linguistics program, it may be advisable to exceed the minimum number of guidance committee members. This is in principle permissible so long as the required minimum of core Linguistics faculty is met (2 for the M.A., 3 for the Ph.D.). The additional member(s) can be a Linguistics faculty member, faculty from another program/department, or from another university.

“Non-regular” MSU faculty, academic specialists, and non-MSU individuals: If the committee otherwise meets the requirements of the Linguistics program, an additional member may be a non-tenure stream MSU faculty member, an MS academic specialist, or a non-MSU individual. For

procedures, see the University's [Academic Programs Catalog on Graduate Education](#) (Specifically see, [Examinations](#) for MA students; [Planning a Doctoral Program and Appointment of a Guidance Committee](#) for Ph.D. students).

University policies and procedures regarding external and 'non-regular' members change periodically. You should contact the DGS for up-to-date advice if you're considering these options.

5.7 Timeline and procedures

By mid-semester of your second semester, you should identify a main advisor and a Comp Advisor for your first comp. Typically you will already have a main advisor in mind (*e.g.*, when you applied to the program) but if not, then the Comp 1 Advisor can also serve – even temporarily – as your main advisor. Vice versa, your main advisor can also serve as your Comp 1 advisor.

In consultation with the main advisor and the Comp Advisor, approach 2-3 other faculty members as relevant – electronically or in person – who will be able to provide you with expertise in the Comp 1 area and/or the expected dissertation area. Once they agree to serve on your committee, let your main advisor know.

Your main advisor should arrange an initial guidance committee meeting of 1-1.5 hours with all committee members present. At this meeting, you will discuss and determine: (i) the likely sub-field areas of the two comp papers; (ii) the courses you will take in Year 2 and beyond, and how they will support those comp papers; (iii) the timeline for your comp papers, dissertation proposal, application for a Dissertation Completion Fellowship and dissertation defense; (iv) how you will spend your time in the summer between Years 1 and 2; (v) whether the committee can expect you to defend a Comp 1 proposal before that summer, or whether instead you'll be doing pilot reading/data collection/experiments for a proposal defense in the fall of Year 2. In the latter case, the Comp 1 Advisor may wish to schedule a follow-up meeting of any faculty on the committee who are directly involved in your preparations for Comp 1. This will be an opportunity for you to talk about your summer plan in more detail.

After the guidance meeting, you should initiate a GradPlan (see section [4.1.2](#)), listing the committee members, courses taken and to be taken *etc.*. Where available in the app, specify who is serving as the Comp 1 Advisor, and (if relevant) which course(s) you are using to substitute for (a) required course(s).

Your GradPlan will be routed to all committee members for them to review against their notes from your guidance meeting. If everything is in order, they will each approve your GradPlan electronically. It is then routed to the Director of Graduate Studies.

Reminder: You can reconstitute your graduate committee after the defense of Comp 1, or indeed at

any time. For example: Your Comp 1 is in semantics but you don't intend to pursue further research in semantics. You expect Comp 2 to be on a sociophonetics topic, and the dissertation will probably also be in sociophonetics. You can replace semantics-oriented faculty with sociolinguistics and/or phonetics faculty.

6 The Ph.D. comprehensive examinations (“comp papers”)

Requirements: Two comp papers must be successfully defended in a timely manner. Each comp paper must be in a different area of linguistics, of which one must be in phonology, phonetics, morphology, syntax, semantics, or pragmatics. See section 4.1.6 for the overall requirements for comp papers, and section 9.3.5 for deadlines for satisfactory progress.

Goals: Comp papers are intended to test your grasp of two different areas of linguistics. They provide an opportunity to build on your broad understanding of the subfield (hence ‘comprehensive’) by carrying out a more narrowly focused project. Good comp papers will thus exhibit both *breadth* of understanding of core concepts, theories, problems and literature in the subfield, and *depth* of engagement with a specific research question in that subfield.

Developing research ideas: Students often develop an idea for a comp paper from a paper or project that they have already completed for a related LIN course, or from a topic with which they already have familiarity, *e.g.*, from an M.A. degree. Talk with your main advisor, with the course instructor (if relevant) and with faculty who have expertise in the subfield, about whether your idea would be suitable for expansion into a comp paper.

Planning: At your initial meeting with your guidance committee, you will discuss the likely two subfields in which you will write comp papers, the relevant courses that you have taken or will need to take to successfully carry out the research, and your specific timeline for preparation and defense of the comps.

It is a good idea to ask your advisor and/or fellow graduate students for sample comp proposals and comp papers particularly in the sub-field(s) you are planning to focus on so that you understand the nature of the documents and the expected quality better.

Finding a supervisor for each comp (the “Comp Advisor” role): Your main advisor maintains overall responsibility for ensuring that you are on track to complete your two comps. However, if one or more of your comps are to be written in subfields for which your main advisor does not have relevant expertise, or if your main advisor is unavailable (*e.g.*, they are on leave), you will need to identify a faculty member to supervise the comp: a Comp Advisor. Often, but not always, this will be instructor of a relevant course that you have taken in the program. It is important that you meet and talk with potential comp advisors to discuss your research idea and timeline. Keep your main advisor informed about the steps you are taking. Once a faculty member has agreed to supervise

your comp, they will work with you to develop a comp proposal. They must also be added to your guidance committee if they are not currently serving on it.

Comp proposal: This is a manuscript that clearly outlines and justifies your research question and hypothesis/hypotheses, provides a summary of relevant literature, explains what you will do (for projects involving fieldwork or experiments, it will be necessary to describe your proposed methods in detail), gives a timeline for completion, and justifies the project on the grounds of originality or other contribution to the field. The proposal assures the student and the committee that the contemplated paper, thesis, or dissertation is a sound and feasible project. It should convince readers that the paper will be a worthwhile piece of research and that its goals are not too extensive or too vaguely defined to be accomplished in a reasonable amount of time. Once your Comp Advisor has approved the proposal, you will circulate it to your guidance committee via e-mail.

Comp proposal defense: Not less than two weeks from the date of circulation of the comp proposal, you will defend your proposal before your guidance committee. Your main advisor will normally make the arrangements for this meeting, which lasts up to 1.5 hours. You will give a short oral summary of your proposal, and then answer questions from the committee. If the committee approves your proposal, you can proceed to the comp paper itself. If the committee requests revisions to your proposal, the committee will also agree on how to proceed next. Options include: a second defense; circulation of a revised proposal for committee approval via e-mail; or approval of the revised proposal at the sole discretion of the Comp Advisor.

Comp paper: The comp paper is a 20-30 page manuscript, similar in style to a journal article in the subfield. It would at minimum be suitable for presentation at an appropriate peer-reviewed conference, in the judgement of the respective Comp Advisor. Your Comp Advisor will tell you how they would like to work with you during the research and writing period, *e.g.*, weekly meetings, specific deadlines for drafts, *etc.*. Once your Comp Advisor has approved the comp paper, you will circulate it to your guidance committee via e-mail.

Comp paper defense: Not less than two weeks from the date of circulation of the comp paper, you will defend it before your guidance committee. Your main advisor will normally make the arrangements for this meeting, which lasts up to 1.5 hours. You will give a short oral summary of your proposal, and then answer questions from the committee. If the committee finds your paper satisfactory, your main advisor will notify the Graduate Secretary that you have passed the comp, so that this can be recorded in GradPlan. Procedures for revision are as detailed above for comp proposals. If the committee fails the paper, you have one more opportunity to propose, submit and defend a new paper, within one semester (excluding summer). See also section 11.3.

Presenting and/or publishing your comp paper: Seek advice from your Comp Advisor and your guidance committee on where to present interim and final results, and which journals or other publication venues would be suitable for your comp paper. *Publication of your comp paper is not*

a requirement. However, getting feedback on your work at conferences and via written reviews is valuable professional experience. It's also worth considering getting as much informal feedback as you can during the proposal and writing process, from mentors or peers whom you trust, from lab or research groups you belong to, or from writing groups or doctoral support groups that you have joined.

Completion of comps: You may work on both comps concurrently, although it is advisable to stagger them if possible. In principle you can also work concurrently on a dissertation proposal, although you may not defend this proposal until you have successfully defended both comp papers.

7 The M.A. Plan B exam

Each Plan B student must pass a written examination in a particular area of linguistics. A student preparing for an M.A. exam may enroll in LIN 898 Masters Research, but at most three credits of LIN 898 count toward fulfilling degree requirements. Normally, the examination is taken before the end of the term in which the student will complete course requirements. See the Linguistics program's *Policies and Instructions for M.A. Plan B Exam in Linguistics document* for specific procedures. Ask the DGS to provide this document, if necessary.

The student, in consultation with the guidance committee chair, selects an area for the examination and prepares a bibliography of works in that area. The bibliography is divided into 3-4 topic sections. The first must be a general section, *e.g.*, general sociolinguistics, general semantics, and may include key upper-level textbooks for this area. The other sections represent sub-areas of the student's knowledge, *e.g.*, Japanese sociolinguistics, phonetics-phonology interface. The student will usually be required to answer at least one question on each bibliography topic/section.

The guidance committee approves the student's selected area and bibliography and prepares the examination based on the bibliography. Exam questions are designed to elicit thoughtful and critical synthesis of the bibliographic sources, in the form of short essays. It is a good idea to ask your main advisor and/or the Director of Graduate Studies for some examples of past exam questions.

The guidance committee evaluates the written examination on the evaluation choices of Pass and Fail. If the committee fails the paper, you have one more opportunity to propose, submit and defend a new paper, within one semester (excluding summer). See also section [11.3](#).

8 Preparing an M.A. thesis or Ph.D. dissertation

8.1 M.A. by Thesis (Plan A)

Developing research ideas: Students often develop an idea for a comp paper from a paper or project that they have already completed for a related LIN course, or from a topic with which they already have familiarity, *e.g.*, from an M.A. degree. Talk with your advisor, with the course instructor (if relevant) and with faculty who have expertise in the subfield, about whether your idea would be suitable for expansion into a comp paper.

Thesis proposal: In consultation with the guidance committee the student prepares a thesis proposal of about 8-12 pages. Normally the proposal should be submitted not later than the term in which the student is to complete course requirements. The proposal assures the student and the committee that the contemplated paper, thesis, or dissertation is a sound and feasible project. It should convince readers that the paper will be a worthwhile piece of research and that its goals are not too extensive or too vaguely defined to be accomplished in a reasonable amount of time. It should be formatted in American Psychological Association (APA) style or another common format used in linguistics, such as the [Linguistic Society of America Unified Style Sheet](#). It is a good idea to ask your advisor or other students in the program for examples of recent M.A. thesis proposals.

The proposal should include:

- A statement of the topic or problem to be investigated.
- A summary of relevant previous research and scholarship on the topic.
- A presentation of the theoretical foundations, sources of data, and methods of analysis to be employed.
- A statement of the nature of expected conclusions and their significance.
- A proposed title and preliminary outline of the paper, thesis, or dissertation.
- A list of references.

You will agree with your M.A. advisor on the deadlines for drafts of the proposal. When your advisor has approved the proposal, you will circulate it to your guidance committee via e-mail. Once the committee has had at least two weeks during the regular academic year to read the proposal, the advisor will ascertain whether the committee finds your proposal sufficiently promising, or if they reject it.

If the committee finds the proposal sufficiently promising, it will meet with the student to discuss the proposed research. If it does not, the student will have one opportunity to resubmit.

Thesis: Upon approval of the proposal by the guidance committee, the student will prepare a thesis. The thesis is a formal research paper normally at least 50 pages in length. It may be an expansion of a research paper prepared by the student for a course. The thesis should not emphasize topics which only peripherally demonstrate the student's linguistic abilities, or topics that involve mechanical skills. The thesis should demonstrate the student's knowledge of linguistic theory and ability to deal with problems that arise in the application of linguistic theory.

Thesis credits: The student must enroll in a total of exactly 4 credits of LIN 899 (thesis research). It is usually advisable to do this in the semester in which you plan to graduate, but you will discuss this decision with your advisor.

Oral defense: Once your advisor has approved the final draft of your thesis, you will circulate it to your committee via e-mail. No less than two weeks from the date of circulation of the comp paper, you will defend it before your guidance committee. This is an oral examination of at most two hours. Your advisor will normally make the arrangements for the defense. You will give a short oral summary of your proposal, and then answer questions from the committee. The questions may include topics from the general area of linguistics of the thesis. The defense may be open to the public, upon agreement between the student and the guidance committee.

If the committee finds your defense satisfactory, your advisor will notify the Graduate Secretary that you have passed the defense, so that you can initiate the procedures for graduation. If the committee fails the thesis, you have one more opportunity to propose, submit and defend a new thesis within one semester (excluding summer). See also section 11.3 .

8.2 University Policy About Dissemination of Graduate Students' Research

In keeping with MSU's public mission, the University requires that theses, dissertations, and abstracts will become public after the conferral of the degree; embargoes can only be pursued for a limited period (see section 8.2.1 below). Results that are subject to restrictions for dissemination by funding agencies (see section 8.2.2) cannot be part of any document submitted as a thesis or dissertation to the Graduate School.

8.2.1 Hold/embargo on publication of documents submitted to ProQuest

Students submitting a thesis/dissertation to ProQuest now can request a hold/embargo of publication by ProQuest by contacting the Graduate School at the email id: msuetds.approval@grd.msu.edu. In response to the request, the Graduate School will send directly to the student a form that needs to be completed and turned to the Graduate School prior to submission of the document to ProQuest.

The form needs to be signed by the student's major professor and by the Associate Dean of the student's college. The request for the hold/embargo may be for six months, one year or two years. Requests for a period longer than six months must include a written justification for the length of the hold/embargo.

8.2.2 Graduate students' participating in University Research Organization (URO)

Graduate students involved in a [URO project](#) will receive both written documentation and a verbal explanation of any limitations or implications to their current or future academic progress prior to participating on the project. Students engaging in work for a URO project undergo a 2-step approval process before hiring: a consultation with a representative of the URO's office to explain the restrictions on the project, and an interview with the Graduate School Dean or Dean's designee to discuss the relationship, if any, between their work as graduate students and their participation in the project. Students must be informed that results that are subject to restrictions for dissemination cannot be part of any document submitted as a thesis or dissertation. As part of their degree program, all graduate students must have research options to ensure the generation of appropriate results to fulfill the degree requirements, and to have data for professional development activities that are integral to their graduate education (*e.g.*, presentations at conferences and research seminars).

9 Academic Performance

For the purposes of providing information to students on their academic progress and professional potential, and to the faculty for consideration in their decisions on awarding financial aid and in evaluating programs, the faculty review annually the progress of all graduate students in linguistics. The Director of Graduate Studies also conducts reviews of student records (including grades) every semester. In their decisions, the faculty take into account special circumstances of individuals, such as illness or family responsibilities. Students should make sure their main advisors know about any special circumstances and/or achievements in the field.

9.1 Procedures

All graduate students enrolled in the Linguistics program are reviewed annually. The review is based on the standards described in section 9. It has two parts.

Part I takes place in early spring. The goals of Part I are to determine (i) your eligibility for Graduate Assistantship and other funding in the subsequent academic year and (ii) whether you need any specific feedback and/or support before semester's end regarding your progress to degree. You, your main advisor, and the DGS will check your academic record for accuracy, primarily for four of the standards for evaluation listed in section 9.3. These are grade point average (GPA), course

grades, deferred grades, and rate of program completion. The DGS examines the Part I reports, consults with chairs of guidance committees, and determines which students are at risk of losing funding eligibility or who are facing other academic challenges that require intervention. The DGS meets with the entire faculty to discuss the Part I reports, paying particular attention to students at risk. After the meeting, and usually before Spring Break, the DGS will inform all students of their funding eligibility for the next year.

Part II takes place in late spring semester. It is more detailed and more interactive than Part I. The goals of Part II are (i) to provide you with an opportunity to reflect on your successes, challenges, and next steps and (ii) to ensure your main advisor provides you with formative feedback. You will complete a form supplied to you by the DGS, in which you will reflect upon and provide a summary of your progress in the program in the preceding year. You will discuss the form with your main advisor (or the DGS if you do not yet have one), who will also complete a section of the form. It may be a good idea to include at least one other committee member. Ph.D. students, for example, may find it helpful to include a recent Comp Advisor. These forms, once both parties have signed them, will also be signed by the DGS and returned to you for upload to GradPlan. A copy will be retained by the graduate secretary as part of your departmental academic record (which is separate from evaluations associated with your employment record in the department, *e.g.*, GA evaluations).

See also [section 2.4.8 of the Graduate Student Rights and Responsibilities](#), which states: “Written evaluations shall be communicated to the graduate student at least once a year, and a copy of such evaluations shall be placed in the graduate student’s file.”

Students who wish to contest their annual review, to respond in writing to a warning letter from the DGS, or to complain that they did not receive a timely warning letter from the DGS, may do so by writing to the chair of their committee and/or the DGS. Should the student wish to take further action, steps are outlined in [section 11](#).

9.2 Funding and its relationship to satisfactory status

In order to receive funding awarded by the Linguistics program, including but not limited to graduate assistantships, travel grants and summer research fellowships, it is essential that you remain in satisfactory status. Students in the M.A. and Ph.D. programs are expected to maintain satisfactory status. Satisfactory status is defined in [section 9.2.1](#) below. For more on funding sources, see [sections 9.5](#) and [9.6](#).

9.2.1 Status types

At any time, a graduate student in the Linguistics program has one of the five status levels listed below. Note, **funding** is defined in [section 9.2](#) above. Unless there are extenuating circumstances, students should aim to be in at least satisfactory status at all times.

highly satisfactory: If available funding is limited, then all other things being equal, “highly satisfactory” students will be ranked above “satisfactory” students.

satisfactory: Eligible for funding. If available funding is limited, then all other things being equal, “satisfactory” students will be ranked above “probationary” students.

probationary: At risk of losing funding. Letter from the DGS. “Satisfactory” status must be regained within one semester, excluding summer. If the student is not ‘satisfactory’ by that deadline, they are deemed “unsatisfactory”.

unsatisfactory: Loss of funding. Letter from the DGS. The student becomes ineligible for funding for one academic year from the time of this designation. In the case of Ph.D. students, this reduces the overall potential GAsip funding from five years to four years. The “lost” year of funding cannot be added later. ‘Satisfactory’ status must be regained within one semester, excluding summer. If the student is not “satisfactory” by that deadline, they are deemed “at risk”.

at risk: Risk of dismissal. Letter from the DGS. If the student is in unsatisfactory status for two years, they can be dismissed from the program. See the policy on dismissal in section [9.7](#).

In most cases, the additional semester for addressing deficiencies will be the fall semester of the calendar year in which the annual evaluation is made. So if the annual evaluation is in Spring 2024, the student’s probation lasts until the end of fall semester 2024.

9.2.2 Leave of absence and annual evaluation

In the specific case of a student taking a leave of absence from the program, the clock will be stopped for the length of the absence. Thus, for example, if a student is designated “probationary” and then takes a semester of absence, they will still be “probationary” upon their return. That is, the semester of absence does not count toward the timeline below, and the student will not have been re-assigned to “unsatisfactory” status during the absence.

9.3 Standards for evaluation

If a student fails to meet the “satisfactory” standard for any of the standards for evaluation, they will receive a letter from the DGS that details their options for regaining satisfactory status. An exception to this is the standard for course grades, for which more stringent consequences apply: See section [9.3](#). Students may respond to the letter following the guidelines in section [9.1](#). Six standards of student progress are considered:

1. Course load [[section 9.3.1](#)]

2. Grade point average (GPA) [section 9.3.2]
3. Grades [section 9.3.3]
4. Number of deferred grades [section 9.3.4]
5. Rate of program completion [section 9.3.5]
6. Professional accomplishment [section 9.3.6]

These standards are described below. In their decisions, the faculty take into account special circumstances of individuals, such as illness or family responsibilities. Students should make sure their main advisors know about any special circumstances and/or achievements in the field.

9.3.1 Course load

Except during the first term of residence, students enrolled for only 400-level courses should enroll for more than the minimum satisfactory number of credits per term. Satisfactory course loads are listed below:

- Full-time M.A. student:
 - Without a graduate assistantship: 9 credits
 - With a half- or quarter-time assistantship (*i.e.*, a full or partial assistantship): 6 credits
 - With a three quarter-time assistantship (*i.e.*, more than a full assistantship): 3 credits
- Full-time Ph.D. student:
 - Most students: 6 credits
 - Students who have completed both comp papers or are doing department-approved off-campus dissertation fieldwork: 1 credit

Students with a three quarter-time assistantship: 3 credits

9.3.2 Grade point average (GPA)

Ph.D. students: Students in the Ph.D. program must maintain a cumulative grade point average of at least 3.5 in courses counted toward the degree. Courses counted for the degree are those at the 400 level or higher that are (i) labeled LIN; or (ii) non-LIN courses deemed applicable to the student's degree by the student's main advisor and guidance committee. Note that grades for LIN 490 and LIN 890 do not count toward the student's GPA.

highly satisfactory	GPA of 3.8 or above
satisfactory	GPA of 3.5 to < 3.8
probationary	GPA < 3.5

A student in probationary status has one semester, excluding summer, in which to raise their GPA to 3.5 or above. Raising the GPA can be achieved by (i) taking further courses, or (ii) re-taking a course with the instructor's permission. The student should consult with their main advisor and guidance committee about the best course of action.

If the student has completed all coursework required by their guidance committee, no probationary status is applied, and there is no expectation that the student will raise their GPA.

M.A. students: Expectations for M.A. student GPA are the same as for Ph.D. students, with the following adjustments to the scale:

highly satisfactory	GPA of 3.8 or above
satisfactory	GPA of 3.2 to < 3.8
probationary	GPA < 3.2

9.3.3 Grades

Standards for grades apply only to courses labeled LIN.

Students are expected to receive a grade of 3.5 or above in all LIN courses. Students must not accumulate (i) more than 6 credits (*i.e.*, 2 courses) with a grade of 3.0 in any courses that are labeled LIN or (ii) any grade below 3.0 in any LIN course, or they will be subject to dismissal from the program.

highly satisfactory	Grade 3.5 or above in all required courses
satisfactory	Grade 3.5 or above, with at most one grade of 3.0
probationary	<i>not applicable</i>
at risk	Grade 3.5 or above with at most two grades of two 3.0
dismissal	Three grades of 3.0 or any grade below 3.0

Unless there are extenuating circumstances, a failure to achieve at least a 3.0 in a LIN course is considered a strong sign that the student is unable to meet the basic academic standards of the Ph.D. in Linguistics. The student will be dismissed from the program, without passing through “probationary”, “unsatisfactory” and “at risk” statuses. (See section 9.7 for policies on dismissal.) The

Director of Graduate Studies is responsible for reviewing students' grade records every semester. Thus, for example, a student who receives a grade below 3.0 in a fall semester course will not return in the spring. A student who receives a grade below 3.0 in a spring semester course will not return in the fall.

9.3.4 Deferred grades

According to University policy, a deferred grade “is reserved for graduate students who are passing a course but for reasons acceptable to their instructors cannot complete the course during the regularly scheduled course period”. Deferred grades appear with the code “DF” on the student’s transcript. If for any reason an instructor issues a deferred grade to a student who did not request the grade marker, the student may request the grade marker be removed from their transcript. See the information about [Grading Systems](#) on the University’s [Academic Programs Catalog on Graduate Education](#).

Grades should not be deferred without strong justification, such as extended illness of student or instructor. Grade deferral puts the student at risk of slowing their pace of program completion.

<i>At the time of annual evaluation:</i>	
satisfactory	No deferred grades in the previous 12 months.
probationary	One deferred grade in the previous 12 months.
unsatisfactory	Two deferred grades in the previous 12 months.

The above does not apply to graduate thesis or dissertation work.

Under University policy, the student must complete the required work – and a grade must be reported – within 6 months, with the option of a single six-month extension. (Note that the DF will remain on the student’s transcript along with the new grade, *e.g.*, DF/4.0.) However, to regain satisfactory status, the student should ensure that the work is completed within one semester, excluding summer.

If the required work is not completed within the time limit, The student’s status will accordingly change downwards to the next level of status shown in section 9.2.1. Additionally, the DF will become U-Unfinished and will be changed on the transcript to DF/U under the numerical and Pass-No Grade (P-N) grading systems, and to DF/NC under the Credit-No Credit (CR-NC) system.

9.3.5 Rate of program completion

Ph.D. students are expected to complete their doctoral degrees in Linguistics within five years. The five year period includes the summer following the fifth year.

In the case of the M.A. degree, while it can be achieved in two years – or even more quickly for some B.A.-M.A. students – the program recognizes that without guaranteed funding, students may need to take more time to complete the required work. The milestones reflect this.

To maintain “satisfactory” status, a student must meet the program completion milestones below:

Ph.D. students:	
Form a guidance committee	≤ 2 semesters
Complete required courses	≤ 6 semesters
Defend 1st comp paper	≤ 5 semesters
Defend 2nd comp paper	≤ 7 semesters
Defend dissertation proposal	≤ 8 semesters
Defend dissertation	≤ 10 semesters*
M.A. students: Plan A (thesis)	
Form a guidance committee	≤ 2 semesters
Defend Plan A thesis proposal	≤ 4 semesters
Defend Plan A thesis	≤ 6 semesters
M.A. students: Plan B (exam)	
Form a guidance committee	≤ 2 semesters
Approval of Plan B reading list	≤ 4 semesters
Pass Plan B exam	≤ 6 semesters

*This includes the summer immediately following the 10th semester.

NOTE on guidance committee milestone: The student must have formed a committee. An initial guidance meeting must have been convened. The student must initiate a GradPlan to record the outcome of the meeting, and all committee members must approve it via GradPlan.

If, at the time of annual evaluation, a student has not made satisfactory progress, the student is automatically placed in probationary status, triggering a letter from the DGS.

Recall that satisfactory rate of progress through the milestones is directly tied to funding eligibility. It applies to all students, not just those dependent on MSU graduate assistantships. For more on funding, see sections 9.4–9.6.

9.3.6 Professional accomplishment

Participation in program activities is expected, unless personal circumstances in the preceding year have impeded a student’s ability to participate. Program activities include attendance at lectures and colloquia, conference practice talks of other students, and pre-professional workshops.

Professional accomplishments are those beyond expected normal participation in program activities

(colloquia, lectures, conference practice talks, workshops) in the past year. They include research activities such as article submission, publications, presentations at conferences, grant submissions to national funding agencies, teaching awards, *etc.*. They also include, where relevant, a student's evaluation as a graduate assistant (GA), as reflected by mid-semester and/or end of semester GA evaluation forms (and undergraduate student evaluation forms, in the case of teaching assistants (TAs)).

highly satisfactory	Professional accomplishments beyond satisfactory normal participation
satisfactory	Participation in program activities such as colloquia, lab talks

9.4 Funding eligibility

As part of the annual evaluation process, the Linguistics faculty assesses students' eligibility for funding. "Funding" includes, but is not limited to, graduate assistantships (GAships), funding for travel to conferences, summer research fellowships, and other opportunities for which the Linguistics program has some decision-making power.

Students are not eligible for funding unless they are in satisfactory status.

9.5 Graduate assistantships (GAships)

For more information about graduate assistantships (duties, expectations, compensation, *etc.*), see section [12](#).

Ph.D. students: All Ph.D. students can expect up to five years of GAship funding, including the summer following the spring semester of the fifth year (although summer GAships are almost never available). Ph.D. students in their sixth year or beyond are not eligible for GAship funding. A GAship after five years is offered only rarely, *e.g.*, if the LiLaC department has a need for a specific skillset. Ph.D. students can expect to receive a GAship every year, unless (i) they are in "unsatisfactory" or "at risk" status; or (ii) department resources are unexpectedly highly constrained. In the latter case, GAships will be awarded to students in "highly satisfactory" status ahead of those in 'satisfactory' status, unless there is a need for a specific skillset.

M.A. students: If one or more GAships remain after all eligible Ph.D. students have been funded, the remaining GAship(s) may be awarded to eligible M.A. students. *This does not happen every year.* M.A. students in their third year or beyond are not eligible for GAship funding.

9.6 Other funding

Students making satisfactory progress toward their degree are eligible for numerous sources of additional financial support, including, but not limited to:

- funding for research and travel to conferences
- Summer Support Fellowships (SSF)
- Summer College Research Abroad Monies (SCRAM)
- Dissertation Completion Fellowships (DCF)
- Emergency Fellowship Funding from the Graduate School

Research and travel to conferences: Applications are accepted throughout the year. For more information about research and conference travel support, talk to the Director of Graduate Studies and watch for notices via e-mail throughout the year. Support is also available for conference travel from the [College of Arts & Letters](#), the [MSU Graduate School](#) and the [Council of Graduate Students](#).

Summer Support Fellowships (SSF): All Ph.D. students in satisfactory status can expect to receive at least one fellowship during their five year career. Applications are accepted in early spring. A subcommittee of Linguistics faculty reviews applications and sends a rank-ordered list to the College of Arts & Letters. See the College of Arts & Letters' [Graduate Resources](#) page for more information.

Summer College Research Abroad Monies (SCRAM): For students whose research requires the use of resources abroad, the College of Arts & Letters provides a competitive fellowship. Applications are accepted in early spring. See the College of Arts & Letters' [Graduate Resources](#) page for more information.

Dissertation Completion Fellowships: Applications are due in the early spring. For Ph.D. students who are in the late stages of their career. The expectation is that students will work full-time for one semester on writing their dissertations, and finish during the tenure of their fellowship. Linguistics Ph.D. students are strongly encouraged to apply for these awards in their fourth year, in order to take the spring or fall semester of their fifth year to focus on dissertation writing. See the Graduate School [Dissertation Completion Fellowships](#) page for more information.

Emergency Fellowship Funding: The Graduate School's Emergency Fellowship Funding is available to graduate students who experience unusual or unforeseen emergency situations that are of a sudden and temporary nature. Emergency funds are intended to provide support for one-time

unexpected and extraordinary expenses and may be up to \$3,000, though applications for dire circumstances that exceed that award amount may be considered. Tuition, health insurance, rent, groceries, household utilities, and other ordinary living expenses are typically not covered by Emergency Fellowship Funding. See the Graduate School's [Emergency Fellowship Funding](#) page for more information.

9.7 Dismissal from the program

Status: A student who has failed to regain satisfactory status after two years is at risk of dismissal from the program. See section [9.2.1](#) on statuses.

LIN course grades: A student who fails to achieve a 3.0 in a LIN course will be dismissed without first passing through probationary and at risk statuses. A student who accrues three grades (more than 6 credits) of 3.0 in LIN courses will be dismissed.

Failure to pass M.A. exam or comp papers: M.A. Plan B exam. A student who fails the M.A. exam may retake the exam at most once and within one additional semester, excluding summer. If the student fails again, they will be dismissed from the program. Ph.D. comp papers. A student who is given a failing grade on a comp paper may propose a new – or a revised version of the original paper – which must be proposed, submitted and defended within one semester, excluding summer. This can only be done once for each comp paper. If a resubmitted paper also receives a failing grade, the student will be dismissed from the program.

Failure of M.A. thesis or Ph.D. dissertation: If a thesis or dissertation is defended and failed, the student is dismissed from the program. If the examining committee requires revisions, they must state in writing a date by which the revisions must be satisfactorily completed, and whether the entire committee or just the committee chair needs to approve the revisions. If the revisions are not completed by the agreed-upon time, the student is dismissed from the program.

Academic integrity: Violations of academic integrity may also result in dismissal. This is covered in section [10](#).

Conduct: See section [11](#).

Dismissals are not automatic. Decisions are made at the discretion of the DGS, in consultation with the Linguistics core faculty.

Students may request an extension to regain satisfactory status. The request for an extension must be given to the DGS before the end of the semester in which the dismissal letter is sent. A request for an extension must include the following:

- A justification of why the extension is needed.
- A clear timeline for regaining satisfactory status.
- A letter from the main advisor supporting the extension.

A student who wishes to contest a dismissal decision should may do so by writing to the chair of their committee and/or the DGS. Should the student wish to take further action, steps are outlined in section 11.

10 Research Integrity and Safety

Students and faculty are expected to be familiar with and to abide by the MSU Graduate School's Guidelines for Integrity in Research and Creative Activities (the Graduate School's [Research Integrity](#) page and the University's [Research Integrity](#) page).

Generally, in linguistics the two most serious kinds of violations of academic integrity are falsification of data and plagiarism. Falsification of data is changing or making up data and presenting these data as though they were the result of an experiment, questionnaire, or fieldwork collection project. Plagiarism is the use of another's work, ideas, or writings (including things found on the internet) without proper attribution. If you are in doubt as to when you need to cite a source, and the form your citation should take, you can ask your main advisor.

Program policies concerning academic integrity:

- Any violation of academic integrity by a student will be handled according to University regulations and may be considered grounds for a penalty grade of failure for the course in which it occurred. Such a penalty grade will be accompanied by a report to the student's academic dean, in writing, of the relevant circumstances.
- Any suspected instance of a violation of academic integrity by a graduate student in linguistics will be reported to the DGS, before any other action is taken.
- If it is established that a violation has in fact occurred, and if it is the first violation for that student, the student will be given a warning, in writing, that any subsequent occurrence may result in dismissal from the program.
- The DGS will keep a permanent record of all occurrences of violations of academic integrity by graduate students in linguistics.

Graduate students who carry out research involving human subjects must get appropriate training/certification and comply with the policies and procedures of the University Institutional Review

Boards (IRBs). Prior approval of the relevant IRB is required for such research. The regulations may be found at the [Human Research Protection Program](#) website. Note that M.A. theses and doctoral dissertations are considered publications.

Students may be interested in using software available from the university to check manuscripts for unintentional plagiarism (accidentally reproducing passages of someone else's prose). This includes the [Ithenticate package](#).

11 Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution

11.1 Student conduct

Students are expected to abide by University policies and ordinances. Violations of University policy are adjudicated through University procedures, and violations of University ordinances are adjudicated through criminal court proceedings in the same manner as city ordinances or state law. For a comprehensive list of those policies and ordinances, see the [Spartan Life Student Handbook](#).

Students are expected to conduct themselves professionally. In general, we believe that appropriate professional conduct includes:

- respect for others' personhood and diversity of personhood, including but not limited to race, color, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, style of dress, manner of speaking, political viewpoint, *etc.*;
- a shared commitment to basic values such as fairness, equity, honesty, and respect;
- honest and accurate representation of one's identity, credentials, and professional background (*e.g.*, no inflation of status or experiences on one's vita, and accurate representation of contributions to committee work or to collaborative projects and publications);
- awareness that appropriate professional conduct does not entail the transfer or appropriation of the work of others without shared decision-making, credit, and benefits – a standard for how to work appropriately within a community and to collaborate professionally;
- acknowledgement of the collaborative and social nature of the scholarly enterprise, which extends beyond use of formal scholarly citations to an acknowledgement of how fellow scholars have helped one to form ideas, review drafts, suggest revisions, *etc.*;
- respect for one's intellectual ancestors, especially for those who created the discipline within which one works;
- actively and respectfully listening to and engaging with people, their ideas, and how they

experience (and represent) cultural and intellectual institutions;

- respect for human subjects involved in research;
- explicit training of graduate students in sound disciplinary practices (including appropriate methodological instruction) in core courses and in the interactions that we have with one another as colleagues.

11.2 Sexual Harassment Policy

This all-university policy applies to university employees as well as students. Sexual harassment is reprehensible and will not be tolerated at Michigan State University. Such behavior subverts the mission of the University and threatens the careers, educational experience, and well-being of students, faculty, and staff.

The University prohibits sexually harassing behavior including that made unlawful by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972, and the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act. University policy and the law also prohibit retaliation against persons who report sexual harassment.

11.2.1 Confidentiality

To the extent permitted by law, the confidentiality of each party involved in a sexual harassment investigation, complaint, or charge will be observed, provided it does not interfere with the University's ability to investigate the allegations or take corrective action.

11.2.2 Prohibited Acts

No member of the University community shall engage in sexual harassment. Persons who engage in sexual harassment are subject to disciplinary action, including dismissal for employees and/or suspension for students.

Sexual harassment is defined as unwelcome advances, requests for sexual favors, or other behavior of a sexual nature when (a) submission to such conduct is made explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's employment or status in a course, program, or activity; (b) submission to or rejection of such conduct is used as a basis for a decision affecting an individual's employment or status in a course, program, or activity; (c) such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work or performance in a course, program, or activity, or of creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment in which one engages in employment, a course, a program or an activity.

11.2.3 Examples of Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment encompasses any unwanted sexual attention. Examples of behavior encompassed by the above definition include, but are not limited to a) physical assault; b) threats or insinuations which cause the victim to believe that sexual submission or rejection will affect their reputation, education, employment, advancement, or any conditions which concern the victim's standing at the University; c) direct propositions of a sexual nature; d) subtle pressure for sexual activity, an element of which may be conduct such as unwelcome sexual leering; e) conduct (not legitimately related to the subject matter of the work, course, program, or activity in which one is involved) intending to or having the effect of discomforting and/or humiliating a reasonable person at whom the conduct is directed. This may include, but is not limited to, comments of a sexual nature or sexually explicit statements, questions, jokes, or anecdotes, and unnecessary touching, patting, hugging or brushing against a person's body.

Depending on the circumstances, any of the above types of conduct may be considered sexual harassment and subject to disciplinary action, even if that conduct occurs only once.

11.2.4 Seeking Assistance or Filing a Complaint

- Students, faculty and staff who believe they are the victims of sexual harassment may seek information and assistance from:
 - The chairperson, director, or dean of the relevant unit
 - Supervisory support personnel
 - The Women's Resource Center
 - The Ombudsman
 - Student Life or Residence Life staff
 - The MSU Counseling Center
 - The Sexual Assault Crisis and Safety Education program
 - Faculty or staff academic advisors
 - The Faculty Grievance Official
 - The Anti-discrimination Judicial Board Coordinator
 - The Office of Student Employment
- If a student, faculty member, or staff member wishes to file a complaint, they may take the following action(s):

- If the alleged harasser is a faculty or staff member, the affected individual(s) may make a written complaint to that employee’s unit administrator.
- If the alleged harasser is the unit administrator, the affected individual(s) may make a written complaint to the unit administrator’s superior or another unit administrator within the Department.
- If the alleged harasser is a student, the affected individual may file a complaint with the Office of Judicial Affairs.
- A student, faculty, or staff member also may elect to file a written complaint with the Anti-discrimination Judicial Board for non-disciplinary relief, or with another appropriate dispute resolution body.

The filing of such a complaint does not prevent the University administration from taking independent disciplinary action.

11.2.5 Awareness

Members of the University community are responsible for knowing and understanding the University’s policy prohibiting sexual harassment. Students who do not understand the policy should contact the Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs. Faculty and staff who do not understand the policy should contact Human Resources or the Assistant Provost for Academic Human Resources, whichever is appropriate. For additional information, see MSU’s [Policy on Relationship Violence and Sexual Misconduct \(RVSM\)](#).

Students may be dismissed from the program if they fail to display professionally accepted behavior, by acting overtly violent, threatening, or abusive; committing felonies or destroying property; displaying proven gross incompetence and negligence in their teaching assignments; and other serious breaches as confirmed by the University grievance officers, University lawyer, or University police.

11.3 Conflict resolution

Conflicts, disagreements, and issues sometimes arise during the course of a graduate program. The University has established a judicial structure and process for hearing and adjudicating alleged violations of recognized graduate student rights and responsibilities ([GSRR/LSRR/MSRR](#), Article 5).

The first venue to resolve such conflicts informally or formally rests within the Linguistics program and then the LiLaC department. Students may file a formal grievance at the College level following the College of Arts & Letters [by-laws](#) (specifically, see section 3.6. *Grievance and Hearing Procedures* on the by-laws page).

For an overview of conflict and grievance systems at MSU, including how to report concerns anonymously, see the [Ombudsperson's website](#).

11.3.1 Conflicts with students

If you have a conflict with another student, your first point of contact is the [Office of Student Support and Accountability](#).

11.3.2 Conflicts with faculty

The following are steps you can take to deal with concerns you might have about a faculty member in cases including, but not limited to, contesting a course grade, a failed comp paper, thesis or dissertation defense, or an annual evaluation.

If there is a conflict of interest (for example, the Associate Chair is also your main advisor), you are encouraged to take your concern to the next level in the sequence below. At any time of this process, you may consult the University's [Ombudsperson](#), and section [11.2.4](#) below.

- In case of a conflict with a faculty member, including the DGS, a student should consult with the department's Associate Chair for Graduate Studies, who may meet with one or both of the individuals involved.
- Following that the department chair should be consulted if necessary.
- If a student is dissatisfied with the outcome of discussions with the (associate) chair, the student can request a [department grievance hearing](#). A Department Grievance Board will be convened.
- Conflicts which cannot be resolved at the department level should be reported to the Associate Dean of Research and Graduate Education.

11.3.3 Changing your advisor or guidance committee members

Changes in the membership of the guidance committee can be readily carried out in GradPlan, upon consultation with faculty members involved. They may be initiated by the student at any time. Such changes are not normally interpreted as an indication that a conflict with a faculty member has occurred. See section [5](#), on guidance committee formation.

However, in cases of irreconcilable conflict, the Director of Graduate Studies, in consultation with the LiLaC department chair, shall reserve the right to replace a student's graduate main advisor or committee chair with another qualified person acceptable to both the graduate faculty and to the

student, as ascertained through private discussions. See Such replacement shall occur within one week of the meeting at which an irreconcilable conflict has been identified.

11.3.4 Other resources on conflict resolution

- **The Graduate School:** offers workshops and useful information on conflict resolution.
- **The MSU Ombudsperson:** If you find yourself in this situation and have exhausted the internal resources for resolving the issue, you may contact the Office of the University Ombudsperson. The Office of the University Ombudsperson provides assistance to students, faculty, and staff in resolving University-related concerns. Such concerns include: student-faculty conflicts; communication problems; concerns about the university climate; and questions about what options are available for handling a problem according to Michigan State University policy. The University Ombudsperson also provides information about available resources and student/faculty rights and responsibilities. The office operates as a confidential, independent, and neutral resource. It does not provide notice to the University - that is, it does not speak or hear for the University. Contact the Ombudsperson at any point during an issue when a confidential conversation or source of information may be needed. The Ombudsperson will listen to your concerns, give you information about university policies, help you evaluate the situation, and assist you in making plans to resolve the conflict.

Contact information: Office of the University Ombudsperson, 129 N. Kedzie Hall, (517) 353-8830, ombud@msu.edu

12 Work related policies

For questions related to employment, your first point of contact is the Graduate Secretary, Ben Lampe (lampeben@msu.edu).

12.1 Policies

All program and department policies related to graduate assistantships (GAships) are (or should be) consistent with [Article 4 of GSRR](#). For graduate assistants appointed as teaching assistants, employment conforms to the specifications of the [current MSU-GEU contract](#).

Outside of Teaching Assistantships (TAships), the Linguistics program does not require students to complete any other teaching experiences.

GAs receive health insurance in accordance with MSU [Human Resources policy](#).

For more on GA pay levels, tuition benefits, enrollment requirements, hiring procedures, *etc.* please refer to the Graduate School's page on [assistantships](#).

12.2 Employing unit

Linguistics students are usually funded by GAships operated by the Linguistics program, *e.g.*, they work as Research Assistants (RAs) to Linguistics professors or as TAs for courses taught by Linguistics professors. However, in some cases, Linguistics students are employed as GAs by other programs or units. Examples of these GAships from the past have included: TA for a Japanese, Chinese, German, or other language course; RA for a Second Language Studies professor; RA for the Center for Language Teaching Advancement (CeLTA); Editorial Assistant to a Philosophy professor; TA in the English Language Center.

Students should therefore be aware that in most cases their employing unit is the Department of Linguistics, Languages, and Cultures. But for some students, the employing unit could be another department (*e.g.*, Romance & Classical Studies) or center (*e.g.*, English Language Center). For departments and centers within the College of Arts and Letters, rates of pay are standardized. For questions about your contract or your employing unit, please speak to the Graduate secretary for Linguistics.

12.3 How GAships are awarded

Linguistics has a fixed set of 15 GAsnip positions that it can expect to receive from the College of Arts and Letters each year. A subset of these are allocated annually to those TAships that are necessary for the good functioning of Linguistics undergraduate courses, and those that fulfill the Linguistics program's obligation to the LiLaC department to offer Integrated Arts and Humanities courses. The remaining GA positions are allocated to RAships.

The 15 GAships are provided by the College to support Ph.D. students. There are no dedicated GA lines for M.A. students. Therefore, the Linguistics faculty allocates available GAships exhaustively to eligible Ph.D. students first. If GAships remain, they can be awarded to M.A. students who are in good academic standing.

The first priority recipients of available RAships are first year Ph.D. students. A first year RAsnip allows new students to devote their energies to their own courses without the distraction of also teaching courses. RAships are also opportunities for new students to develop research skills that will facilitate success in comp papers, and to join lab communities. The second priority recipients of RAships are fifth year Ph.D. students. A fifth year RAsnip provides faculty with experienced assistants, and allows the student to focus on completion of their dissertation. However, fifth year students who are particularly keen to gain additional teaching experience (especially solo teaching experience, if they haven't yet done any) will be given a TAsnip if possible.

Students are given the opportunity to express their preferences, *e.g.*, an RAsnip versus a TAsnip, for teaching an IAH course versus a LIN course, a GAsnip in CeLTA versus a GAsnip in Linguistics,

etc. in a survey that is circulated in the December-January period. The survey is generated by a consortium of units with language-related GAships. As of this handbook year, those units included German, Linguistics, Second Language Studies, TESOL, Spanish, French, CeLTA, and the English Language Center. Students are also welcome to talk directly to the Director of Graduate Studies for Linguistics, to let them know of any specific preferences, concerns, special needs accommodations, or life circumstances that might be relevant.

While the Director of Graduate Studies will do their best to accommodate students' preferences, ultimately GAship positions are awarded to meet the needs of the program and/or the department.

Where possible, students are offered a GAship position that lasts for one academic year. However, in some circumstances students may be required to switch roles mid-year, *e.g.*, RA for a lab in the fall, TA for a course in the spring; TA for a LIN course in the fall, TA for a different LIN course in the spring.

Where possible, students are given the opportunity to teach a course for two years, so that they have time in which to grow and improve in the role, and to gain confidence and ease. This ideal must be balanced against departmental needs, and against the need to ensure all students have a chance to TA, *e.g.*, an introduction to linguistics class. Therefore, students can expect to have diverse TA experiences during their graduate degree.

When assigning students to TA positions, the Director of Graduate Studies and the Linguistics faculty consider (i) student's satisfactory standing in the program; (ii) student's background, *e.g.*, overall teaching experience, relevant content knowledge in the subdiscipline; (iii) student's schedule, which might clash with the course times.

12.4 English language proficiency for TAs

TAs who were required to demonstrate English proficiency as a condition of admission must also demonstrate English proficiency before they can work as a TA. This requirement can be fulfilled in multiple ways, of which the most common is a brief Speaking Test administered by the English Language Center. The test can be taken at any time in the year or semester prior to starting the TA position. For more information see [MSU Policy Affecting International Teaching Assistants](#).

12.5 Leaves, vacation, and work outside the academic year

Leave to attend conferences: This is expected and encouraged. Students should talk to their GA supervisor about how to make up hours, how a class will be covered or cancelled, *etc.*.

Leave for vacation, parental leave, other dependent care: Talk to the Director of Graduate Studies, who in most cases will be able to advise you of current LiLaC or MSU policies.

Medical leave: GAs are entitled to paid medical leave. See the Graduate School's [Policies and Procedures](#) for more information, and the GEU contract (for TAs).

Leave of absence from the program: Graduate students may take an unpaid leave of absence, *e.g.*, to deal with mental health concerns or other matters without filing any formal paperwork. Students can remain unenrolled in course credits for up to three consecutive semesters (including summer), after which they will need to be readmitted to the program. See the section on [Readmission to Original Program](#) in the University's [Academic Programs Catalog on Graduate Education](#). The student should talk to the Director of Graduate Studies, who will issue a letter outlining how academic requirements such as comp paper deadlines will be readjusted.

Work outside the academic year: GA contracts start before classes begin and end before classes conclude. GAs should expect that their supervisor will require them to work throughout the official contract. This may include attending TA training sessions or meetings prior to the start of classes. It is recommended that you ask your supervisor to be explicit about their expectations.

12.6 Grief absence policy

The Linguistics program follows the University's [grief absence policy](#). For master's (Plan A), master's (Plan B) with research responsibilities, and doctoral students, it is the responsibility of the student to: a) notify their advisor/major professor and faculty of the courses in which they are enrolled of the need for a grief absence in a timely manner, but no later than one week from the student's initial knowledge of the situation, b) provide appropriate verification of the grief absence as specified by the advisor/major professor and faculty, and c) complete all missed work as determined in consultation with the advisor/major professor and faculty. It is the responsibility of the advisor/major professor to: a) determine with the student the expected period of absence – it is expected that some bereavement processes may be more extensive than others depending on individual circumstances, b) receive verification of the authenticity of a grief absence request upon the student's return, and c) make reasonable accommodations so that the student is not penalized due to a verified grief absence. If employed as an GA or TE, the graduate student must also notify their employer. Both employer and student will swiftly communicate to determine how the student's responsibilities will be covered during their absence. Graduate teaching assistants (TAs) should refer to the bereavement policy in GEU contract Article 18.

12.7 Summer instructorships

If a summer course is available for a Linguistics graduate student to teach, the Director of Graduate Studies, in consultation with the faculty and interested students, will assign a student to the course. This teaching position is not a TAship. Students will be employed as an instructor. It is recommended that you talk to the Academic Program Coordinator ('graduate secretary') about the conditions of the hire, *e.g.*, start and finish dates, salary, payment schedule, health insurance, *etc.*

Usually, the Linguistics professor who supervises the course during the regular academic year will serve as an informal Faculty of Record for the course during the summer. It is recommended that you communicate early with that professor to find out (i) if they are willing/would like to meet with you before the summer to discuss the course and share teaching materials and (ii) if they will be available during the summer if any questions arise.

12.8 Department office space and supplies

All Linguistics students working as TAs, and when possible, Linguistics students working as RAs, will be offered a desk and computer in an office in the LiLaC department. Office arrangements will be communicated by the Graduate Secretary.

Rights to and availability of other resources such as access to the department building out of hours, access to printing and copying, mailboxes, *etc.* will be communicated by the Graduate Secretary.

12.9 Expectations for supervisors and GAs

Guidelines for supervision of graduate assistants:

- Graduate assistants (both TAs and RAs) meet with their supervising faculty members before the beginning of the semester to assure that they fully understand and accept their responsibilities. For TAs, this includes adhering to the University's Code of Teaching Responsibility. Responsibilities of half- time and quarter-time graduate assistants should require an average of 20 and 10 hours per week, respectively, for the 18 weeks of the appointment.
- Graduate assistants will be provided, by their supervising faculty, with the materials and information needed to perform their duties. For TAs, this will include textbooks; for all graduate assistants, this will include any needed technology access, or other project-related supplies.
- Faculty supervisors of teaching assistants will provide explicit training for the course that TA will be teaching or assisting with. In the Fall and Summer semesters, this training will take place in the week immediately before the first week of classes. Training for the Spring semester will take place at the end of the Fall semester. Training may consist of one or more sessions over a period of 1 to 3 days. Unless the supervisor determines that a particular TA does not need to participate in the training, participation is mandatory.
- At the end of each semester, the graduate assistant will receive a written evaluation of the work performance to date. Faculty supervisors and graduate assistants will discuss and attempt to correct problems that are reported in these evaluations.

13 University resources

In addition to those mentioned elsewhere in the handbook, the university offers a number of resources that may prove useful.

- The University's [Academic Programs](#) site, which contains official descriptions of courses and academic programs. In many cases, more complete and up-to-date information on a particular course may be gained by simply finding its syllabus online.
- Resources provided by the Graduate School:
 - [Graduate career development](#)
 - [Diversity, equity, & inclusion programs](#)
 - [Events](#)
 - [Forms](#)
 - [Funding](#)
 - [Graduate life & wellness](#)
 - [Mentoring](#)
 - [Policy information](#)
 - [Professional development](#)
 - [Research Integrity](#)
 - [Traveling scholar opportunities](#)
 - [University Committee on Graduate Studies](#)
- Resources provided by university-level units such as [OISS](#), [RCPD](#), [Office of Spartan Experiences](#), the [Libraries](#), the [Olin Health Center](#), the [Burgess Institute for Entrepreneurship & Innovation](#), the [Writing Center](#), and [University Outreach & Engagement](#), and the [Ombudsperson's Office](#).