

# **GRADUATE STUDENT HANDBOOK**

**Policies and Procedures for Graduate Students in  
The Department of Astronomy and Planetary Science  
Northern Arizona University**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>Acknowledgements</b>                              | <b>3</b>  |
| <b>Introduction</b>                                  | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>Admission to the Graduate Program</b>             | <b>6</b>  |
| <b>Student Life</b>                                  | <b>7</b>  |
| Student Roles and Responsibilities in the Department | 7         |
| Student Representative to Faculty                    | 8         |
| Expectations of GTAs and GRAs                        | 9         |
| Financial Support                                    | 9         |
| Residency Requirements                               | 10        |
| Harassment Policies                                  | 11        |
| Plagiarism Policies                                  | 11        |
| <b>Academics</b>                                     | <b>12</b> |
| Program of Study                                     | 12        |
| General Coursework Requirements                      | 12        |
| Specific Coursework Requirements                     | 14        |
| <b>Advising</b>                                      | <b>16</b> |
| Graduate Program Committee                           | 16        |
| Primary Advisor and Graduate Committee               | 16        |
| Primary Advisor                                      | 16        |
| Switching Primary Advisor                            | 17        |
| Graduate (Dissertation) Committee                    | 18        |
| <b>Research</b>                                      | <b>20</b> |
| Finding a Primary Advisor and Research Project       | 20        |
| Research Rotation                                    | 21        |
| Comprehensive Examinations                           | 21        |
| Written Comprehensive Examination (Prospectus)       | 22        |
| Oral Comprehensive Examination                       | 23        |
| Admission to Candidacy                               | 24        |
| Seventh Semester Research Talk                       | 25        |
| Dissertation Requirements                            | 25        |
| Dissertation Document                                | 25        |
| Dissertation Defense                                 | 27        |
| Application for Graduation                           | 28        |
| Dissertation and Defense Timeline                    | 28        |

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| Masters Degrees                             | 29        |
| Masters in Passing                          | 29        |
| Terminal Masters                            | 29        |
| <b>Calendars, Timelines, and Milestones</b> | <b>30</b> |
| Student Annual Self-Evaluations             | 30        |
| Evaluations of Student Progress             | 30        |
| Annual Calendar                             | 31        |
| PhD Program Milestones                      | 32        |
| <b>Academic Probation</b>                   | <b>33</b> |
| <b>Other Policies and Resources</b>         | <b>35</b> |
| Forms                                       | 35        |
| Leave of Absence Policy                     | 35        |
| Other Resources                             | 36        |
| Mediation, Grievance, and Appeal Procedures | 37        |
| Feedback and Review                         | 37        |
| <b>Change &amp; Review Log</b>              | <b>38</b> |

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# Introduction

Welcome to the Department of Astronomy and Planetary Science.

The goal of a graduate education is to prepare a student for a professional career working at a high level. Common outcomes for students with PhD degrees in astronomy and/or planetary science include faculty, research, and/or teaching positions at a college or university level; technical jobs working in industry and/or at a research facility; and education and outreach positions — but there are many other possible jobs.

Earning a PhD means demonstrating that the student is proficient in developing and completing science projects and is an expert in a research area. It is likely that by the time the student leaves NAU they will know more about their dissertation topic than their committee members and their advisor — and perhaps more than anyone in the world. Reaching this level of expertise requires hard work and dedication to research. There are no shortcuts to achieving PhD-level knowledge and skills.

The primary activity in which a PhD student will be engaged during graduate school is research. However, a student will also take classes, and in some cases teach classes. A student will also develop critical professional skills in communication and presentation. PhD students are expected to demonstrate: the ability to generate original ideas, command of the literature, proficiency in designing, analyzing, and interpreting research, as well as aptitude in scientific writing (including but not limited to publication of research results in major professional refereed journals). Additionally, the department hopes to be able to provide opportunities for PhD students to develop basic skills in teaching. PhD students are expected to be self-motivated and largely direct their own research program with advice and counsel from the Faculty Advisor and Dissertation Committee.

The goal of the faculty is to help graduate students reach their PhD milestone through attentive mentorship, exposure to opportunities, and scientific interactions.

The aim of this document is to establish the expectations for PhD students and faculty as students proceed through the PhD program. It provides students with information on how to complete the graduate program, and provides faculty with information needed to successfully direct the graduate program of their students. Detailed information regarding general Graduate College requirements is available in the on-line [Graduate Catalog](#) and also on the [Graduate College website](#). Some of the information presented in those documents is duplicated here for clarity. The Graduate College has final authority on all policy matters. Changes to Graduate College policies usually automatically change the Department of Astronomy and Planetary Science policies and procedures except where explicitly stated.

Graduate education provides training for a professional career, and we expect students to be active and engaged members of the department. This role includes participating in department events (such as seminars and colloquia), excelling in course performance, exhibiting an attentive and innovative approach to teaching and research, and demonstrating mature and responsible behavior in all interactions with faculty, staff, visitors, and students.

***Note: It is the student's responsibility to become aware of and adhere to all policies and requirements established by the Graduate College and the Department of Astronomy and Planetary Science. The final responsibility for meeting all Department, Graduate College, and University requirements and deadlines rests with the student.***

For convenience, the Department of Astronomy and Planetary Science is usually referred to in this document as "the department."

# Admission to the Graduate Program

The Department of Astronomy and Planetary Science offers a PhD in Astronomy and Planetary Science. Students must complete and submit the admissions application form at NAU's [Graduate College website](#). Please follow directions and submit all materials online.

Successful applicants usually will have a bachelor's or master's degree in Physics, Astronomy, Chemistry, Geoscience, Planetary Science, or a related field, with a 3.0 GPA or above. Evaluation of applications for Fall admission will begin after January 1 of that year, with priority consideration given to applications received by December 1 of the prior year. Our graduate program only accepts students for Fall admission. Application fee waivers have been granted in the past to students who apply by the priority deadline and who meet a minimum GPA threshold, although this program is subject to annual review and renewal.

An application for the PhD in Astronomy and Planetary Science must include the following:

- A statement of interest describing (1) reasons for applying to NAU's PhD program in Astronomy and Planetary Science as well as (2) professional interests and goals.
- A scientific/technical writing sample such as a senior thesis, M.S. thesis, major class paper, or professional report demonstrating analytical and writing skills.
- Three letters of recommendation, at least two of which should be from faculty members.
- An official transcript of undergraduate work, submitted to the Graduate College as described within the online application.
- A current CV.

For applicants where English is not their primary language, a TOEFL score must be submitted and the applicant must demonstrate sufficient fluency in spoken English to be able to teach introductory labs and work in an English-language research setting. Applications *do not* require a reported GRE score (general or subject-specific).

Successful applicants have typically contacted at least one department faculty member prior to application. If admitted, this faculty member (or a primary faculty member listed in the formal application) will be assigned as an initial PhD advisor (see [Advising](#)).

# Student Life

## Student Roles and Responsibilities in the Department

All Department of Astronomy and Planetary Science graduate students are expected to be active, participating members of the department and to behave with integrity in all interactions with the faculty, staff, visiting scientists, students, and the general public. Graduate study not only involves teaching and research responsibilities but also gives students the practical skills to develop into a professional scientist. These qualities are developed through interactions with faculty, other graduate students, and visiting scientists; attendance at department seminars and colloquia; attendance and presentation of papers at scientific meetings; and publication of research results. Students also may take on or be assigned some small service activities within the department. All of these activities help students develop the teaching, research, and service skills the student will need to succeed as a professional scientist.

All graduate students in the Department of Astronomy and Planetary Science are expected to adhere to the university's [Academic Integrity Policy](#) and [Student Code of Conduct](#). Academic integrity means honest and ethical conduct in all aspects of academic life. Integrity is expected of everyone -- students, faculty, and staff -- within the NAU community in all academic undertakings, regardless of venue (including but not limited to: classroom, laboratory, internships/externships, paid positions, etc.) or medium (including but not limited to: assignments, written work, data gathering, oral presentations, etc.). Academic integrity is expected not only in formal coursework settings, but in all University relationships and interactions connected to the educational process, including the use of University resources. The reputation of the university and the value of the intellectual contributions of faculty, staff and students depend on the assurance that every member of the academic community adheres to the very highest standards of ethical behavior.

Students carry significant responsibilities in the department in terms of teaching and research. A Graduate Teaching/Research Assistant (GTA/GRA) is an employee of the department, university, and state, and is therefore a representative of these institutions on campus, at other institutions, at professional meetings and conferences, and in all other professional settings. Therefore, graduate students are expected to exhibit high professional standards and to conduct themselves in a professional manner. Implicit in admission to the graduate program is the expectation that graduate students will develop and demonstrate a strong sense of integrity, in both the student's academics and peer interactions. The relationship between a faculty member and graduate student is unique to the academic environment and is essential to the advancement of both the student and faculty member. As a consequence, the relationship must not be compromised by unprofessional conduct by either party.

Nearly all departmental activities entail the use of facilities, equipment, and operational budgets provided through state and federal governmental funds. Anyone using state or university property for reasons other than those intended is liable for legal prosecution and/or dismissal. Telephones, copy machines, postage, computers, vehicles, and all other university or department property may not be used for personal reasons. Please check with the department office or a faculty advisor if there is doubt about the difference between official and private actions.

Students are expected to ask permission before using facilities or equipment not already assigned to their lab or project. Although some equipment is kept in common storage areas, it may well be considered the “property” of a specific research project, laboratory, or teaching area.

Appropriate keys are issued to students by the department office. Security demands that the student safeguard keys and not lend them to others. It is illegal to duplicate university keys. Also, students should be very conscious about locking doors and closing windows when they leave offices, classrooms, laboratories, and the building.

## Student Representative to Faculty

The department graduate student body should hold elections once a year (typically in August or September) to select a Student Representative to the Faculty. The goal is to increase communication between students and faculty.

This representative should be a student who has passed both their Comprehensive Exams, and should be a full-time student and in good academic standing. The graduate student representative is expected to serve for one year; if the student leaves the position before one year a new election will be held, but this should be an exceptional case. Students are only allowed to serve as Student Representative once during their graduate career at NAU unless the faculty agree otherwise. In the event that the only willing potential representative does not meet the requirements for serving, the faculty may grant an exception. Finally, in the event that no graduate student is able or willing to serve as representative, the faculty will recommend representative(s) (who may decline the position).

The duties of this representative include attending the monthly faculty meetings (until sessions of confidentiality, during which the representative will be excused) and to meet regularly with the Graduate Coordinator.

This representative should, as appropriate, canvas the graduate student population to understand topics of concern or that the students would like further information about and bring these topics to the Graduate Program Coordinator, the Graduate Program Committee, and/or the faculty. The student should also report back to the entire graduate student body on information learned from the Graduate Coordinator and/or faculty meetings. The representative

is also responsible for collecting and synthesizing graduate student feedback and inputs on issues related to department hiring.

## Expectations of GTAs and GRAs

A Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) is typically the primary instructor for undergraduate lab sections in two semesters. GTAs are expected to show up on time for laboratory preparation meetings and for their labs, be available during the advertised office hours, and focus on helping their students during lab instruction. The department will identify a GTA supervisor, who will either be a Lab Manager (staff member whose job includes ensuring that the labs are functioning, both on a technical side and a personnel side) or a faculty member. The Department Chair will appoint/announce the Lab Manager at the beginning of each academic year. The lab manager or supervisor must be notified as soon as possible for any absences from the student's lab assignments. GTAs are evaluated by the students in their labs as well as the lab manager each year and reappointment is contingent on satisfactory performance based on those evaluations. GTAs are required to attend the training session held the week before the fall semester begins and weekly laboratory preparation meetings.

It is the goal of the department to provide the opportunity to work as a GTA for at least one semester for all students who want to gain teaching experience. However, at present the number of GTA positions is limited, and it may not always be possible for all students to acquire this level of teaching experience.

Graduate Research Assistants are expected to work on the funded project that is paying their salary, under the supervision of the PI of that project (or his/her designee, as appropriate). GRAs are expected to communicate appropriately with the PI, who will typically be their faculty advisor, and produce deliverables (papers, conference presentations) as appropriate to the student's progress and relevant to the funded project.

## Financial Support

Most students in the department are awarded a GTA or a GRA. A GTA/GRA typically provides students with a stipend, tuition waiver, and health benefits during their time as in-residence graduate students. Both GTA and GRA positions are contract assignments and are typically renewed annually upon satisfactory performance (as indicated through the [annual evaluation process](#)). However, GTA assignments can be revoked at any time if performance is seriously unsatisfactory, such as multiple unexcused absences for either teaching labs or weekly lab preparation meetings. GRA assignments could be revoked mid-year only in cases of severe misconduct.

A GTA is technically only awarded for the fall and spring semesters, though summer teaching opportunities may be available occasionally. It is most common that a GTA moves onto a summer GRA position following the completion of their teaching duties. Similarly, a GRA often

includes funding to work full time (40 hours per week) on research during the summer. In both circumstances, check with an advisor to determine funding availability.

It is the department's goal to have most (if not all) students funded through GRA positions for most of their time in the program. Students should talk to their advisor and/or the Graduate Program Committee with any questions or concerns. Continuing to fund students who are already in the program, through any combination of mechanisms, is a top priority for the faculty.

Students are strongly encouraged to apply to external fellowship and grant funding opportunities (e.g., through NSF and NASA), and the department and advisor will support these efforts to the greatest extent possible. The financial details of these fellowships differ from GTA/GRA positions and vary with funding platform. Questions about the implementation of these awards should be brought to the Graduate Coordinator, who will, as appropriate, coordinate with the Graduate College, NAU's Office of Sponsored Projects, and other departments as necessary.

Students who have won independent fellowships (e.g., an NSF GRFP) can have great freedom to choose their research path, advisor, project, and project timeline, although this does not apply to all fellowships. Importantly, these students are still members of the department, and should follow the general approaches that apply to all graduate students. For example, these students will still need to have an advisor in the department, will need to complete the annual evaluation process, and will be evaluated on the usual timeline by the Graduate Program Committee.

## Residency Requirements

All students are expected to be physically present on the Northern Arizona University Mountain Campus (or nearby institutions such as Lowell Observatory or USGS) during the period that they are enrolled in the program. This is particularly important during the period when students are taking classes and/or teaching labs. Short-term excursions (1-2 weeks) away from campus during the academic year and/or absences during the summer should be approved by the student's faculty advisor (and must be approved if the student is hired as a GRA by the advisor). Longer periods away from campus can be formally requested (see [Leave of Absence](#)) or can be informally negotiated with advisors and the Department Chair.

There are two distinct types of residency that are relevant to graduate studies at NAU: residency and residency "for tuition purposes." The former is required by the Graduate College for candidacy, is typically achieved by enrolling in courses at NAU for at least two consecutive semesters (see NAU [Policy No. 100805](#)), and is covered by a subsection of the Graduate College's candidacy application form.

Residency for tuition purposes is not required of students, but is recommended (as it can prevent tuition waiver-related issues should the student win a fellowship). This type of residency can be achieved straightforwardly once the student achieves candidacy. For details, please see NAU's [residency information page](#).

## Harassment Policies

Harassment, including sexual harassment, will not be tolerated by the department or university. We include here all interactions between and among all members of our department: faculty, staff, and students. Please see NAU's [Nondiscrimination and Anti-Harassment](#) policy and the [Department of Equity and Access](#) for further information. Information regarding the Graduate College harassment policy can be found in the Graduate Assistantship, Traineeship, & Fellowship Policy Handbook ([here](#)). Finally, per NAU policy, issues of sexual harassment must be reported to NAU's [Title IX Coordinator](#).

## Plagiarism Policies

Plagiarism is prohibited by NAU's academic policies and [Student Code of Conduct](#). After the first incidence of plagiarism, the student will receive a written warning and the Department Chair will be notified. After the second incidence of plagiarism, the student will receive a written notification, and the appropriate university paperwork will be completed, including notification to the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs. This report will be added to the student's file. Please note that plagiarism rules apply to all coursework and all research endeavors.

Note that there are three common types of plagiarism: (1) direct (verbatim) plagiarism, (2) paraphrasing (or substitution) plagiarism, and (3) mosaic plagiarism. Direct plagiarism is copying exact words or wording from a source without giving attribution. Paraphrasing plagiarism is using someone else's ideas and concepts without attribution, even if you change the words. Mosaic plagiarism is stitching together various phrases that are not your own, without attribution. If the student is in doubt about how to construct some specific text, ask an advisor or course instructor.

# Academics

## Program of Study

By the end of the second semester of coursework, the student, in consultation with any/all advisors, must submit an approved Program of Study Form to the Graduate College. The [Program of Study Form](#) can be downloaded from the Graduate College website. Table 1 (course offerings; see below) should be used to outline the planned series of coursework for the student. The Program of Study clearly specifies the required courses and lists a tentative dissertation topic. The faculty advisor and Chair of the Department of Astronomy and Planetary Science must approve the original Program of Study, as well as any revisions to the Program of Study. The Graduate Coordinator and dissertation committee can/should also be consulted on issues related to the Program of Study. Once a Program of Study has been approved, a student is expected to adhere to the Program, unless an updated Program is approved via the process just described. The Program of Study Form, including any revised Programs of Study, must be copied to the Graduate Coordinator, the graduate student's file in the Department of Astronomy and Planetary Science, and the faculty advisor. Per NAU policy, students may adopt any Program of Study that has been in effect during their tenure in the department.

## General Coursework Requirements

The student, advisor(s), and dissertation committee will decide on the best courses for the student's Program of Study. All graduate students must maintain a GPA of 3.0 or better. Only six credits of "C" grades may be used in the Ph.D. degree program, all other grades must be "A" or "B." A student with more than 6 credits of graduate course work with a grade of "C" or below are automatically placed on academic probation and may not be allowed to continue in the Ph.D. program, regardless of GPA.

Graduate students do not normally repeat courses, but if a grade of "C," "D," or "F" is received in a graduate course, students may repeat that course with faculty advisor approval. If a course is repeated, both grades are used in the computation of the overall grade point average (GPA). Credits earned for repeated courses may only be used once to fulfill graduate requirements. These course repeat rules are covered by [NAU Policy 100318](#).

Students who are GTAs or GRAs must be full-time students, which means enrolled for nine credits during every semester. Most students in their first two years will take two classes (6 credits) per semester. The remaining credits might be courses such as AST598 (Planetary Analogs), AST599 (Fellowship writing – course number likely to change at some point), or other similar courses. The rest of the credits needed to reach 9 credits total for each semester should be Graduate Research (AST685). Typically a student will be enrolled in their advisor's section of AST685, if their advisor is an NAU faculty member. If the primary advisor is off campus, the

student may enroll in their faculty advisor's section of AST685, the Graduate Coordinator's section, or the Department Chair's section.

After a student has completed their first four semesters (and therefore, in most cases, most or all of their coursework), the student should enroll in AST685 for up to 9 credits (i.e., full time research). At present, NAU caps the number of AST685 credits per section at six credits, so students may need to enroll in two different sections to reach 9 credits total. These two sections can be split between the committee chair/faculty advisor, any other committee member, the graduate coordinator, and/or the Department Chair.

Students in their final year of their PhD should enroll in AST799 ("Dissertation"). As of August, 2020, 15 credits of AST799 will be the requirement to graduate; for most students, the easiest way to do this is to enroll for 9 credits of AST799 in each of their final two semesters. The Graduate College strongly suggests that students do not enroll in AST799 until they are close to writing and finishing their dissertation (i.e., the last two semesters), as these are dissertation-focused credits. During the term the student completes and defends their dissertation, the student must enroll for at least one credit of 799. If the student does not maintain continuous enrollment after work has begun on their dissertation and the student does not have an approved leave of absence on file with the Graduate College and wish to resume work, the student must submit a new application for admission and register for additional credits of AST 799 in an amount equal to the number of such credits missed while not maintaining continuous enrollment. Please see NAU's [continuous enrollment policy](#) for more details.

If a student is carrying out significant research in another academic unit the student may also enroll in 799 courses with a different prefix (i.e., g., GEO799, CS799, etc.). However, the majority of the 799 credits should always be AST799.

Graduate credit may not be earned for courses numbered 100-399. Up to six credits of 400-level courses from NAU may be used for a Ph.D. degree program with the approval of the dissertation committee (which requires filing of the Override Authorization-Audit/Class Links/Out of Career Form, available from the [Registrar's website](#)).

The maximum graduate course load is 16 credits per semester. Graduate teaching and research assistants (i.e., most students in the DAPS PhD program) may only take a maximum of 12 credits per semester.

Contingent on approval of the faculty advisor (in consultation with the dissertation committee) and Department Chair, any number of graduate credits required for the Ph.D. degree may be transferred to NAU from another institution. However, only a maximum of 24 credits of graduate-level coursework completed during a Master's or Ph.D. degree can be used to meet degree requirements. In general, it is recommended that transfer credits be used to replace graduate elective courses and not required graduate core classes.

General guidelines and procedures for NAU doctoral programs are described at the Graduate College [resources website](#).

## Specific Coursework Requirements

All students must complete a minimum of eight classes (four core classes and four electives), typically during their first two years in the program. The four core classes required of all students are the following:

- AST 501 (Fundamentals of Planetary Science I) (3 units)
- AST 502 (Fundamentals of Planetary Science II) (3 units)
- AST 570 (Astrochemistry) (3 units)
- PHY 530 (Applications of Modern Physics [Spectroscopy]) (3 units)

Note about PHY530: For Spring, 2021, students should enroll in AST530 (“Special Topics”), as the permanent AST version of this class does not yet exist. PHY530 (“Spectroscopy”) will also be offered in Spring 2020 through APMS. If in doubt, talk to the instructors and/or an advisor and/or the Graduate Program Committee.

Additionally, students must take any other relevant four graduate level courses. These could be (for example) in Astronomy/Planetary Science (AST prefix), Physics, Computer Science, Geology, Environmental Science/Remote sensing, Informatics, and/or Chemistry, etc.. The selection of these elective courses should be made in consultation with the faculty advisor and, as appropriate, dissertation committee.

The expected course rotation, as of this writing, is shown in Table 1. Although a few classes are offered every year, most are offered once every two years. Students should therefore plan their schedules according to the information in Table 1 so they can complete their coursework in the required two years. Graduate Research (AST685) and Dissertation (AST799) can be offered any semester (the faculty member may need to request that a section be created). A section of Reading for the Comprehensive Exam (AST 587) can be created for you in your fifth semester prior to taking the PhD Comprehensive Exam.

The planned rotation of courses is given below.

Table 1: Planned Rotation of Graduate Courses

| <b>Course Number</b> | <b>Topic</b>                         | <b>Fall</b> | <b>Spring</b> |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------|---------------|
| AST501*              | Fundamentals of Planetary Science I  | Odd         |               |
| AST502*              | Fundamentals of Planetary Science II |             | Even          |
| AST510               | Exoplanets                           | Even        |               |
| AST520               | Astroinformatics                     |             | Odd           |
| AST5xx*              | Spectroscopy                         |             | Odd           |
| AST555               | Remote sensing                       |             | Even          |
| AST570*              | Astrochemistry                       | Even        |               |
| AST580               | Observational astronomy              | Every       |               |
| AST598               | Planetary Analogs                    | Every       |               |
| AST599               | Fellowship Proposal Writing          | Every       |               |

\* required course

# Advising

## Graduate Program Committee

The department's Graduate Program Committee (GPC) establishes and reviews the graduate policies and procedures. The Graduate Program Committee is chaired by the Graduate Program Coordinator and includes (at least) two additional faculty members appointed by the Department Chair. The Graduate Program Committee is responsible for periodic review of the policies and procedures concerning the graduate programs of the department. Significant revisions to the policies and procedures as recommended by the Graduate Program Committee are subject to approval by the Department Chair, review by the graduate students, ratification by the faculty, and, as appropriate, final approval by the Dean of the Graduate College.

The Department Graduate Program Committee reviews applications from prospective students and recommends admission of applicants. The Graduate Coordinator recommends to the Department Chair candidates for different types of financial support, such as GTAs and GRAs. Applications for admission are reviewed in the spring semester of each academic year for admission the following fall.

Every incoming student will be assigned an advisor. In many cases, this is a faculty member whom the student applied to work with. In the case where that match is not made before the student's arrival on campus, the Graduate Program Committee will assign a temporary advisor to the student to help the student learn about research going on in the department, and to help the student get started finding a permanent primary advisor and project. This temporary advisor need not be the student's ultimate research and dissertation advisor. In the case where an incoming student's primary research advisor is off campus (e.g., Lowell or USGS), a secondary advisor from within the department will be assigned. In all cases, the assignment of an advisor to incoming students does not imply a funding commitment from the advisor. Finally, a primary or secondary advisor with administrative privileges at NAU is sometimes referred to as a "faculty advisor."

## Primary Advisor and Graduate Committee

### Primary Advisor

Every student will be assigned an advisor upon entering the program. In cases where a student starts at NAU as a GRA this advisor will also be their research advisor/mentor (i.e., PI of the research project). In cases where a student starts at NAU as a GTA, an advisor with similar interests will be assigned. This initial advisor will help the student get started in the program (choosing classes, making introductions, and overall guidance).

By the end of a student's second semester each student must identify a primary advisor. This may be (or is likely to be) the advisor assigned upon entry to the program. Selection of a primary advisor does not necessarily obligate that advisor to pay the student as a GRA, though current and future funding is a topic that student and potential primary advisor should discuss. (Identifying co-advisors could be beneficial and would capitalize on the department's highly complementary research areas.) If the primary advisor is a NAU faculty member, that advisor also serves as chairs of the dissertation committee. For students whose primary advisor is off campus, a secondary advisor must be selected from the department faculty. The minimum role of this secondary advisor is to help guide the student through administrative requirements and to serve as chair of the dissertation committee (per Graduate College policies; the off-campus advisor serves as co-chair). As mentioned above, a primary or secondary advisor with administrative privileges at NAU is sometimes referred to as a "faculty advisor." It is expected that a primary advisor be in Flagstaff (e.g., NAU, Lowell, USGS).

The primary advisor works closely with the student in all aspects of the graduate program and has the following responsibilities:

- Function as a research and career mentor for the student.
- Work with the student to develop a research project that is the right scope for a PhD.
- Advocate for the student.
- Help the student find and participate in professional opportunities (e.g., conferences).
- Work to ensure open communication with the student.
- Work with the student to form the student's dissertation committee.
- Work with the student to develop a Program of Study that meets the needs of the student and the requirements of the graduate program.
- Work with the student to ensure that the Dissertation Committee meets periodically and functions effectively.
- Review and approve the student's dissertation before submitting it to other members of the student's Dissertation Committee for review prior to the final oral defense.
- Periodically review the student's career and program progress.
- Organize and administer the student's Comprehensive Exam.
- Organize and administer the student's final oral defense of the dissertation.
- Approve the student's application for graduation.

## Switching Primary Advisor

It is not uncommon for students to change advisors during graduate school. The decision to change primary advisor can be amicable — the student's primary research could shift towards the expertise of a new advisor, and all parties agree that it makes sense to switch the formal primary advisor. Here, the Graduate Coordinator should be informed and an updated Dissertation Committee Recommendation form should be submitted to the Graduate College ([link](#)).

It can also be the case that the decision to switch primary advisor is not amicable. For example, there may be a mismatch in advisor and advisee research or communication styles, or there may be funding/support issues with the primary advisor. Here, the student's decision to switch advisors should not be undertaken lightly, as it may result in a student starting over on a research project, an increase in the time to graduation, and/or financial support implications. Similarly, the advisor should not take the decision to drop a graduate student lightly, as graduate students are integral and essential to faculty and department research success. It is in the interest of both parties to work together to create a productive, positive, and successful research partnership.

If a student decides to pursue changing advisors under non-amicable circumstances, the student is encouraged to discuss this decision with the Graduate Coordinator and/or Graduate Program Committee. The student's right to confidentiality on this topic must be respected by the Coordinator and Program Committee. The student should follow the guidance for finding a (new) primary advisor ([here](#)). If informed of the situation, the Graduate Coordinator may be able to find department resources (e.g., a GTA appointment) to support the student while they search for a new primary advisor. As department resources are often scarce, this support cannot be guaranteed, unfortunately.

## Graduate (Dissertation) Committee

The graduate, or dissertation, committee serves two purposes. The first is to guide the student through their professional and research development. This may include providing suggestions on the student's research topic, working with the student on various research topics and tasks, and making introductions to various contacts in the field (expanding on the advisor's network). The second purpose of the dissertation committee is to ensure that the student is ready to advance to candidacy and carry out the research project (through the Comprehensive Exam), and then that the student has completed PhD-worthy work and is ready to graduate (through the dissertation defense). Students should work with their primary advisor to assemble the graduate committee, and the committee must be finalized by the end of the student's third semester. Students are encouraged to begin thinking about committee membership as early as their first semester. Students are solely responsible for the finalized membership of their committee.

The graduate committee is composed of at least four members: the primary advisor and three other members. When the primary advisor is an off-campus individual, the secondary advisor is included as committee co-chair. The committee can have more than four members, as appropriate. Tenured or tenure-track faculty from the department must make up at least 50% of the student's committee (for example, 2 out of 4 or 3 out of 5 members must be from the department).

By NAU policy, one committee member must be from outside the department, and could be either from another department at NAU or from an institution outside of NAU. Lowell and USGS

are common outside institutions, but some students and advisors choose advisors who are not in Flagstaff. Outside advisors — particularly those from outside NAU — should be informed as to the level of commitment that is expected from them, and whether and how often they will be expected in Flagstaff.

When the committee has been identified, the student and faculty advisor fill out a Dissertation Committee Recommendation form (see Graduate College forms [here](#)) and submit it to the Graduate College, with a copy to the Graduate Coordinator. For details concerning selection and recommendation of the Dissertation Committee, also see NAU's [policy for theses and dissertations](#).

The first meeting between the student and their graduate committee must be held by the end of the student's third semester. Unless advised otherwise by their primary advisor, committee meetings must be scheduled by the student each semester thereafter to discuss progress, get advice on any difficulties encountered, and receive feedback.

A student may change the personnel on their committee at any point, but this change should be carefully considered and must be approved by the student's primary advisor, the Department Chair, and the Graduate College. In the event of a committee change, a new dissertation committee form must be submitted to the Graduate College. Examples of when committee membership changes might be appropriate include: a current committee member retiring or leaving NAU/Flagstaff, the arrival in Flagstaff of an individual who brings new expertise and is a better match than an existing committee member, a switch of primary advisor, or a significant shift in research emphasis that suggests that a different set of expertise on the committee might be a better match for the student's research program.

# Research

By the time students leave this PhD program they will be a leading expert in their research topic. Typically, students take around five years to develop this expertise (although longer periods are permitted), which they do under the mentorship of their advisors and dissertation committee.

## Finding a Primary Advisor and Research Project

Some students will enter the program with a clear idea of what area of astronomy and planetary science they want to work on, and an agreement with a faculty member to work together. In this case, that project will be the primary research project(s) and that faculty member will be the student's primary advisor and dissertation committee chair. This is a common path, for example, when students enter the program as a GRA.

Other students might enter the program with a general sense of their area of interest ("planetary geology" or "telescopic observations") which still might leave a wide range of specific topics to work on and a number of different faculty who might appropriately be the primary advisor. This is a common situation for students entering as a GTA, for example.

While finding a primary advisor is often an organic process, a first step towards finding this advisor should be a review of the research interests of DAPS faculty, Lowell Observatory astronomers, and local USGS scientists. The student is then encouraged to read recent publications from faculty, astronomers, and scientists whose work is of interest to the student. Following this, the student should have a "short list" of local scientists who could be a good fit as a primary advisor. The student should then schedule meetings to talk with potential advisors on their short list in order to refine their interests and start to develop a research direction. Here, students are also encouraged to visit different lab group meetings, talk to current students, and, as possible, try small-scale research projects to get a taste of what research in that area and with that advisor would look like. In some cases, the potential advisor will have small-scale projects ready for a student to engage with. In other cases, significant discussion will be needed to find research areas that are interesting to both the student and potential advisor, and are reasonable and interesting research projects. It is appropriate and important to discuss funding and support with a potential advisor, and potential advisors are not obligated to provide funding.

By the end of their second semester all students should have identified a primary advisor and be in the process of defining the research topic that will eventually be the student's PhD dissertation.

## Research Rotation

Students are required to engage in a research rotation under the guidance of a separate advisor (i.e., distinct from their primary advisor). For students entering *without* a well-defined primary advisor and dissertation topic, research rotations will be used, in part, to explore dissertation project ideas. Here, the student must complete two distinct rotation-like projects by the time research rotation products are due (see below; one project is selected as the formal rotation project).

The goal of a research rotation is to help the student build complementary skills to those developed in their dissertation work and to expose the student to other areas of astronomy or planetary science. Thus, the rotation is conducted with an advisor that is distinct from the primary advisor and on a topic that is different from the dissertation topic. The rotation project is likely to be smaller than the dissertation project (though it need not be). The minimum scope of a rotation is a one semester, three credit project — around 10 hours/week for 15 weeks. While carrying out this rotation, students should register for three credits of AST685 under their rotation supervisor's name. In some cases the rotation project may continue beyond the scope of one semester, depending on mutual interest, and eventually become a mature part of the student's dissertation. The rotation advisor may be a good person to consider for membership on the dissertation committee.

Students must select/declare their rotation project by their third semester. All students will give a 10-15 minute presentation on their rotation work by the end of their fourth semester. This talk should be in a typical conference style, with a brief introduction to the problem, an overview of the methods used, results, and discussion/conclusions. It is not expected that all rotation projects have concrete and/or publishable results, and it is acceptable for the results section of the student's talk to cover new skills that were learned during the rotation. Finally, students must submit an LPSC-style abstract on their rotation work by June 1st of their second year (see template [here](#)). Students who fail to complete their required rotation project according to this timeline are subject to academic probation (as defined below; although the Graduate Program Committee may grant exceptions).

## Comprehensive Examinations

The written and oral comprehensive examinations (sometimes referred to, collectively, as the Qualifying Exam) are designed to assess the student's breadth and depth of knowledge in astronomy and planetary science as well as their analytical ability, innovation, and critical thinking skills. Upon successful completion of both comprehensive exams, the student is considered qualified to proceed into the intensive research phase of their degree program that leads ultimately to a PhD dissertation and defense. Both the written and oral comprehensive examinations must be passed in order for the student to advance to candidacy. A student making satisfactory progress is expected to have completed both segments of the

comprehensive examination by the end of their fifth semester. Failure to complete both comprehensive examinations by the end of the fifth semester will result in the student being placed on academic probation. Cases where exceptional circumstances exist that prevent the student from completing the examinations by the end of their fifth semester will be considered on a case-by-case basis by submission of a petition to the Graduate Program Committee upon approval by the primary advisor and dissertation committee.

## Written Comprehensive Examination (Prospectus)

The written comprehensive examination consists of a written prospectus detailing the student's proposed dissertation topic. The purpose of the prospectus is to demonstrate that the project is original, scientifically important/interesting, the right scope for a dissertation, and possible to be completed.

The prospectus should be no more than 15 pages in length, exclusive of references (single-spaced, 12 point font size, Times New Roman or similar font, 1 inch margins on each side). Generally, this prospectus should motivate the research project, culminating in a statement of the science hypotheses or goals of the proposed work. The prospectus should then include a detailed description of the methodology to be used and expected results (including any work done to date). Finally, the prospectus should include a description of the work remaining and a timeline with significant milestones.

The prospectus should be written in consultation with the primary advisor (and any co-advisors, if relevant), but it must be the student's own work — the student can, and should, discuss the content of the prospectus with their advisor but the written work must be entirely that of the student. The student is also encouraged to seek feedback from other graduate students in the program. The prospectus should be sufficiently detailed that the dissertation committee can assess its intellectual merit, proposed methods, anticipated results, and its fit within the broader PhD dissertation. At least three-fourths of the dissertation committee, including the primary advisor, must vote in favor of passing in order for the student to successfully pass the written comprehensive examination. The committee will provide feedback to the primary advisor, who will summarize these comments and provide written feedback to the student.

The written comprehensive examination must be successfully completed prior to scheduling the oral comprehensive examination. If the student fails the written comprehensive exam, they are placed on Academic Probation. A second attempt at the written comprehensive exam must occur within six months; in this case, the consequent delay in the oral exam is acceptable and the student will not be penalized for taking their oral exam after their fifth semester. The outcome of the written comprehensive exam is recorded on the Report of the Results of Written Comprehensive Examination form which can be found in the [department forms index](#). Detailed feedback on the written exam will be provided by the committee to the student.

If the student fails the second attempt at the written comprehensive examination, they may petition the department to receive a terminal M.S. in Astronomy and Planetary Science degree, and, as described below, if the Graduate Program Committee concludes that masters-level work has been accomplished then the degree can be awarded. Otherwise the student will be dismissed from the program with no degree awarded.

## Oral Comprehensive Examination

The oral comprehensive examination provides an opportunity for the student to display their knowledge about astronomy and planetary science and their research topic. The student will be evaluated on their understanding of the field and ability to bring together ideas and present them cogently in an oral format. The student also will be evaluated on their knowledge of the proposed research project and their preparedness to carry out the remaining work. The evaluation is given by the student's dissertation committee, is closed-door, and lasts up to three hours (including all components). It is taken after the student has successfully passed the written comprehensive examination. The faculty advisor will organize the format of, and direct, the examination, which includes the following aspects:

- A 20-30 minute presentation by the student of the research topic, discussion of the question to be addressed, and the methodology by which the research will be conducted.
- Questions related to the research.
- Questions on other relevant topics, including questions related to coursework completed by the student as well as basic knowledge in astronomy and planetary science.

The depth and breadth of questions from the committee generally should reflect the student's research topic. In other words, the student is expected to have detailed knowledge of topics that are essential to carrying out the proposed work, but the questions and expected competence on topics that are more tangential to the proposed work will be less detailed and more conceptual. The primary advisor is responsible for ensuring that the oral exam is conducted in a fair and appropriate manner.

Each member of the dissertation committee will keep notes on the questions asked and how well the student responds to each in order to produce an individual summary of the student's performance. After the student has finished their presentation and has addressed all questions from the committee, the student will be asked to leave the room but to remain nearby. The faculty advisor will then lead the discussion among the committee regarding the student's performance on the oral comprehensive examination.

The potential outcomes of the oral exam are "pass," "pass with conditions," and "fail." A majority of the committee must agree on the assigned grade. The student returns to the room to be debriefed by the dissertation committee on their performance. The committee will also provide

written feedback to the student within a week of the oral exam. This memo must be signed by both the primary advisor (and secondary advisor, if applicable) and the student.

A grade of “pass” means that the student is prepared to take on their dissertation research full-time.

A grade of “pass with conditions” means that overall the student is prepared, but that a significant weakness was identified in the student’s preparation, and the committee requires the student to correct this weakness. The conditions that are applied will be commensurate with the perceived weakness, and could (for example) include taking a class to reinforce some key material, or giving a (closed-door) presentation on a topic to the dissertation committee within a specified number of months, or similar. The goal of these conditions is to provide the student an opportunity to demonstrate topical or skill competency to the dissertation committee in the event that there is a perceived significant weakness in the student’s oral exam performance. On the Comprehensive Exam Form (see DAPS forms [here](#)) the specific conditions will be noted, as well as both the requirements and the timeline to meet the conditions specified. The student is permitted to negotiate an acceptable timeline. Once the conditions are met, the advisor and student complete the Comprehensive Exam Form again, indicating “pass.” If the conditions are not met within the timeline then the student is placed on Academic Probation and will typically have one additional semester to meet the conditions. If the conditions are not met within that additional semester then the grade reverts to “fail.”

A grade of “fail” means that the student did not demonstrate their readiness to complete PhD-level work on the topic proposed.

If the student fails the Oral Comprehensive Examination, they are placed on academic probation and a second attempt may be scheduled within six months. If the student fails the second attempt at the Oral Comprehensive Examination, they may petition the department to receive a terminal M.S. in Astronomy and Planetary Science degree. Otherwise the student will be dismissed from the program with no degree awarded.

Results of the oral examination must be reported to the Graduate College on the “Report of Results of Oral Comprehensive Examination” form found in the [Department forms index](#).

## Admission to Candidacy

Upon successful completion of the written and oral comprehensive examinations, the student must apply to become an official candidate for the PhD degree. This implies that the student is prepared to undertake an individual research program and write a dissertation.

The student must complete and submit the [Candidacy Application Form](#) to the Graduate College. Admission to candidacy requires:

- Confirmation of two consecutive semesters of full-time study in residence after admission to the Ph.D. program (see Graduate Catalog Residency Requirements). This does not necessarily imply legal residence in Arizona, but rather that the student has physically been on campus for two (or more) consecutive semesters.
- Successful completion of the written and oral comprehensive examinations.
- Completion of all course work on the Program of Study approved by the faculty advisor, dissertation committee, and Graduate Coordinator. This includes removal of course deficiencies specified by your committee.
- Approval of prospectus as indicated by the signatures of all dissertation committee members on the title page.

## Seventh Semester Research Talk

Students in their seventh semester will give a science talk (potentially during one of our regular colloquium slots). Nominally this will be a 20-30 minute talk on the student's primary research topic. The goals of this colloquium are: (1) to give students practice at presenting their research (2) to give students practice in giving a talk that is longer than a standard conference presentation and (3) for members of the department to learn what the student is working on.

## Dissertation Requirements

### Dissertation Document

Information about dissertation requirements can be found on the Graduate College [Theses and Dissertations website](#). Please follow the "Checklist for Doctoral Students" to ensure meeting all requirements. Note that the student needs to submit the graduation paperwork in the semester prior to the one in which the student plans to graduate. The Thesis and Dissertation Coordinator of the Graduate College is a critical source for all current thesis requirements, including format, style, deadlines, and the "format check." Note that all Theses and Dissertations are submitted electronically. A "format check" by the Graduate College assures that the document is being prepared such that the final copies will be acceptable to the Graduate College. The "format check" is required and can prevent lengthy delays to completion of a degree.

Two types of dissertation formats are accepted. In the first type, the dissertation is a complete work, and has a coherent narrative arc that typically includes an introduction, methodology, data, analysis, results, discussion, and conclusions. In the second type, the dissertation consists of chapters containing peer-reviewed publications by the student on the work, but must also include additional introduction and conclusions chapters that tie the publication results together. There is no formal publication requirement for graduation, and a dissertation can also be a combination of the two above types. The student and dissertation committee must agree upon the choice of the specific format. The amount of work presented in any dissertation type is not different.

The following list provides guidelines for completion of the dissertation:

- The faculty advisor must review the completed dissertation prior to submission to the entire dissertation committee. The student is expected to revise the dissertation based on the faculty advisor's comments and resubmit it to the faculty advisor—this may require multiple iterations until the faculty advisor deems the dissertation ready to be submitted to the dissertation committee, (i.e., submit completed dissertation document to the faculty advisor at least eight weeks prior to the dissertation defense).
- Submit the dissertation electronically to the Electronic Thesis and Dissertation (ETD) Coordinator ([etd@nau.edu](mailto:etd@nau.edu)) for format review. This should be done in the first two or three months of the semester in which you plan to graduate, but no later than three weeks prior to the defense. Be aware that the format check cannot be completed during the last two weeks of the semester or in the period between semesters. The format check will typically take five to ten working days for completion and needs to be done before the final defense. This can occur concurrently with chapter review and approval by the advisor and committee. See the [ETD Format Checklist](#) for specific information on the university requirements.
- After all chapters have been reviewed and approved by the faculty advisor, the student will provide the full dissertation to the entire dissertation committee at least three weeks prior to the dissertation defense examination date. If a committee member determines that the dissertation is inadequate, they may return it to the student with requested revisions no later than two weeks prior to the defense and notify the faculty advisor of their concerns. Under extreme circumstances, the student, advisor, and committee member may need to discuss a delay of the defense. Students are expected to carefully consider the comments of their dissertation committee. The faculty advisor has the responsibility to ensure that the recommendations of the dissertation committee have been addressed in the revised dissertation. The faculty advisor has final responsibility for dissertation approval.
- Work with the faculty advisor and dissertation committee to schedule the date, time, and location of the dissertation defense examination. Note that the defense cannot be scheduled within two weeks of the end of the term. The faculty advisor must submit the dissertation defense scheduling form to the Graduate College ETD Coordinator at least 10 working days prior to the defense. This is a strict deadline and can result in needing to reschedule the defense if the deadline is missed. A copy of the completed dissertation must also be submitted to the ETD Coordinator at this time to be passed on to the faculty member representing the University Graduate Committee at the defense. (This UGC faculty member will be someone from outside the discipline and serves to ensure uniformity of defenses across campus. This person will be assigned, or self-assign, to the defense, and the student has no control over who it will be. This UGC representative is never involved prior to the defense, and is usually only very marginally involved during the defense.)

- Students must register for at least one credit of dissertation (AST799) for each semester after and during the defense until a final copy of the thesis is submitted to the Graduate College. As a result, summer defenses are discouraged because summer GRA appointments seldom include tuition funds/waivers.
- The final dissertation must be submitted to the Graduate College at [etd@nau.edu](mailto:etd@nau.edu) after approval by the dissertation committee and a successful final defense.

## Dissertation Defense

A final dissertation defense is required of all Ph.D. students. The student must work with their faculty advisor and dissertation committee to schedule a date and time for the final defense. All members of the dissertation committee must participate in the final defense. If a committee member is unable to attend in person, arrangements must be made for that person to participate via Skype, Zoom, WebEx, or some other method. The student is responsible for reserving the room for the final defense with the department office staff. The room will need to be reserved for a four hour time period. The student must provide the department office staff with the dissertation title, a short abstract of the presentation, and the date, time, and location of the defense at least two weeks prior to the defense so the public presentation portion of the examination can be advertised to faculty and students.

The dissertation defense examination consists of two components: a presentation and an oral examination. The presentation component is open to all faculty, students, staff, and public. During this portion of the exam, the student orally presents an overview of the objectives, methods, results, and implications of the thesis research. The presentation is expected to last approximately 45 minutes. Questions from the audience are permitted within a 15-minute period following the presentation. The presentation portion of the final defense will not exceed 60 minutes. All members of the audience who are not on the dissertation committee or representing the University Graduate Committee (UGC) are required to leave the room following the presentation.

The oral examination by the dissertation committee and UGC Representative will start immediately after the presentation once the room has been cleared of all other audience members. This portion of the examination will usually last at least 60 minutes and will not exceed 120 minutes. The faculty advisor and UGC Representative have the responsibility to ensure that the examination is conducted in a fair and appropriate manner. Dissertation committee members will take turns directing questions to the student. Questions will be limited to the dissertation research or to general knowledge related to the dissertation. Extended and detailed answers are expected from the student in response to the questions. Oral examination questions are designed so the student can demonstrate his or her ability to integrate and apply information gained from coursework and the dissertation research project.

Once the dissertation committee has completed their questioning of the student, the student will be asked to leave the room but to remain nearby. The faculty advisor leads the discussion of the

student's performance on the presentation and oral examination. Following the discussion, the dissertation committee will vote on whether to pass or fail the student. A majority vote of the committee is required for the student to pass. The UGC Representative collects the ballots, tallies the results, and records the official vote. The dissertation committee must fill out the Thesis/Dissertation Oral Defense — Part 1 Form to record and document the vote. This form can be downloaded by either the faculty advisor or the UGC Representative and brought to the defense (see Graduate College forms [here](#)). The UGC Representative and/or faculty advisor records the vote results and any required changes or other requirements that must be completed prior to final acceptance of the thesis. All dissertation committee members must sign the document according to form rules. If a committee member is not able to sign the form, they must give permission for the UGC Representative or faculty advisor to sign for them. The UGC Representative or faculty advisor submits the form to the Graduate College within 48 hours after the defense.

The student is called back into the room by the faculty advisor to learn if they passed or failed. The dissertation committee will debrief the student on his or her performance and discuss what revisions are required before the thesis will be accepted as final. If the student fails the first defense, the student will be placed on academic probation and will be given another opportunity to defend. The second defense should be scheduled within six months of the first defense. If the student fails the second defense, they will be dismissed from the program with no PhD degree awarded, though they may petition their committee for a Master's degree xxx DET: fix up xxx.

Once the student has completed final revisions to the dissertation, the faculty advisor fills out and signs the Verification of Final Thesis/Dissertation Document — Part 2 Form ([https://nau.edu/graduate-college/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/Final\\_Oral\\_Defense\\_Form\\_Parts\\_1and2.pdf](https://nau.edu/graduate-college/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/Final_Oral_Defense_Form_Parts_1and2.pdf)) and submits it to [etd@nau.edu](mailto:etd@nau.edu). The student must submit the final version of the dissertation with all revisions to the Graduate College on the [NAU EDT website](#) no later than two days prior to the last day of term. The student is also required to fill out and submit the Survey of Earned Doctorates (SED) form, whose link is provided within the NAU ETD website.

## Application for Graduation

The Graduate College announces its deadlines for filing an Application for Graduation on its [deadlines website](#) at the start of each academic year. Applications for graduation must be submitted at least one semester prior to when graduation is expected. Relevant documents and instructions are available in the [forms section of the Graduate College website](#).

## Dissertation and Defense Timeline

A general timeline with major milestones for a dissertation and defense should follow:

Semester prior to defense:

- Submit Application for Graduation. ([link](#))
- Enroll for appropriate 799 credits.

Semester of defense:

- Enroll for appropriate 799 credits.

Ten business days prior to defense (at least):

- Electronically submit dissertation to [ETD Coordinator](#). Follow formatting rules. ([link](#))
- Submit Dissertation Defense Scheduling form. ([link](#))
  - Note that defenses cannot occur within two weeks of the end of term.

Day of defense:

- Committee completes Oral Defense Form: Part 1. ([link](#))

Following defense:

- Committee completes Oral Defense Form: Part 2 once revisions completed. ([link](#))
  - Must be submitted before the Registrar's end-of-session date for the term.
- Electronically submit accepted dissertation to ProQuest. ([link](#))
- Complete Survey of Earned Doctorates. ([link](#))

## Masters Degrees

### Masters in Passing

The department is developing a “Masters in Passing” degree, where students who successfully complete their comprehensive exams could apply to be awarded a “Masters in Astronomy and Planetary Science.” The department hopes to have this degree in place by Fall 2020. Applying for this degree will likely require filling out some forms but no additional research or coursework, beyond that already accomplished by students who have passed their exams.

### Terminal Masters

For a number of reasons students might leave the program prior to completing all of the requirements. The department has the ability to award a terminal Master's degree (“Masters in Astronomy and Planetary Science”) in cases where masters-level work has been performed. If the student feels that they have accomplished masters-level work and would like this degree to be awarded, they should petition the Graduate Program Committee, with arguments and evidence in support of that petition. The Graduate Program Committee will consult with the advisor(s) and, if approved, work with the student and the Graduate College to fill out the appropriate paperwork for the degree to be awarded. Examples of masters-level work may include, but are not limited to, publishing a first-author paper, successfully completing the comprehensive examination process, and/or making substantial contributions to a collaborative research project that the student does not lead.

# Calendars, Timelines, and Milestones

## Student Annual Self-Evaluations

Each student is required to provide an annual review report to the Graduate Program Committee and their faculty advisor. The goal of this document is to encourage student self-reflection on achievements in the past year, and to motivate the student to look ahead for realistic but ambitious goals for the coming year.

The annual review should be 2-3 pages and should describe the work completed over the past year. The emphasis should be on research progress (papers, conference presentations, talks, etc.), and brief descriptions of coursework taken (if any) and outreach/teaching/other activities (if any) should also be included. The student should also include a short (roughly one paragraph) description of goals for the coming year.

Annual reviews are due September 15 of each year unless the Graduate Coordinator specifies a different deadline. Students who have just begun the program (i.e., in their first semester) are exempt from submitting this annual self-evaluation, which will be due just a few weeks after these students begin the program.

The self-evaluation is not intended to be a rebuttal of the faculty evaluation of a student's performance (next section); there is a separate mechanism for replying to those faculty evaluations.

## Evaluations of Student Progress

The Graduate Program Committee will compile semesterly evaluations for each pre-exams student in January (for the fall semester) and May (for the spring semester). These semesterly evaluations are written by the primary advisor and consist of:

- an review of the student's teaching performance (as appropriate),
- a review of the student's coursework (as appropriate),
- a review of the student's research productivity (provided by the faculty mentor), and
- an overall statement of progress in the PhD program (developed by the Graduate Coordinator).

Semesterly evaluations will be provided in writing to the students and documented by the department. Students are encouraged to review these evaluations with their advisor, the Graduate Coordinator and Graduate Program Committee, and/or the Department Chair, as appropriate.

Students who have completed their exams will undergo the same review process described above, but only once per year. At present, those annual reviews will occur in January. Post-exams students may also request twice-yearly reviews. The potential grades for these reviews are “progressing,” “needs work,” and “not progressing.”

The grade of “progressing” means that overall the student is making appropriate progress through the PhD program. However, the Graduate Program Committee may still note area(s) of weakness for the student to improve.

The grade of “needs work” means that the student is making some progress, or progress in some areas, but that overall the student’s performance does not meet the expectations of our program. Specific areas of weakness will be identified by the Graduate Program Committee. (Post-exams students who receive an overall evaluation that is not “progressing” will be reviewed again after six months, rather than waiting for the next scheduled annual review.)

The grade of “not progressing” indicates serious deficiencies in the student’s work that need to be addressed. Specific areas of weakness will be identified by the Graduate Program Committee.

Students are expected to discuss their evaluations with their advisor. Students who wish to respond to their evaluation may do so in writing via a field provided in the faculty evaluation form. Such responses must be returned within two weeks. In the case that a student does not challenge the grade and only wishes to clarify some aspect of their performance, they may email the Graduate Program Committee which will read the reply and file it alongside the original evaluation. In the case that a student wishes to challenge their grade, they must email the Graduate Program Committee with a formal request for a change in score along with arguments for why the Graduate Program Committee’s original score was not correct. The Graduate Program Committee will consult with the student’s advisor and Department Chair and reply to the student with their findings (including possibly a revised score) within two weeks. Students may meet with any of the advisor, Graduate Program Committee, and/or Department Chair to discuss grade revisions.

## Annual Calendar

Milestones that apply to all students (unless there are exceptions as described elsewhere in this handbook) include the following:

- |               |   |
|---------------|---|
| September 15: | Student annual self-evaluation due.                   |
| January 10:   | Semesterly evaluation provided to students.           |
| May 20:       | Semesterly evaluation provided to pre-exams students. |

## PhD Program Milestones

The timeline below is meant to suggest a nominal path through the program, but many students may have different timing. If the student has any questions, please talk to an advisor, the dissertation committee, and/or the Graduate Program Committee. A draft timeline chart showing these milestones can be found at this [link](#). Students are also encouraged to follow the Graduate College's Checklist for Doctoral Students (see the Graduate College [forms page](#)).

- Semester 1: Start program.  
 Meet Graduate Coordinator and Graduate Program Committee.  
 Begin identifying research rotation project(s).  
 If entering without primary advisor, meet faculty and discuss research ideas.
- Semester 2: Continue to develop primary research topic and plan.  
 Finalize research rotation advisor and project.  
 Finalize primary advisor (and faculty advisor, if required).  
 Submit Program of Study to Graduate College ([link](#)).
- Semester 3: Meet with Graduate Coordinator and/or Graduate Program Committee.  
 Finalize dissertation committee.  
 Continue to develop primary research topic and plan.  
 Continue research rotation project.  
 Submit Recommendation of Dissertation Committee to Graduate College ([link](#)).
- Semester 4: Continue to develop primary research topic and plan.  
 Presentation of research rotation.  
 LPSC-style write-up of rotation project due.  
 Finish coursework requirements (normally).
- Semester 5: Meet with Graduate Coordinator and/or Graduate Program Committee.  
 Finalize primary research topic and plan.  
 Written comprehensive exam (i.e., prospectus).  
 Oral comprehensive exam.  
 Complete departmental Comprehensive Exams form ([link](#)).  
 Submit Candidacy Application form to Graduate College ([link](#)).
- Semester 6+: Annual meet with Graduate Coordinator and/or Graduate Program Committee.  
 Apply for residency for tuition purposes (recommended) (Semester 6; [link](#))  
 Seventh semester research talk (Semester 7)  
 Continuous progress on primary research topic, including papers and talks.  
 Write/accumulate dissertation.  
 Defend (Semester 10, usually; see separate [Dissertation & Defense Timeline](#)).

## Academic Probation

A student can be placed on Academic Probation for issues related to failing to make progress through the PhD program (detailed throughout this document). The purpose of Academic Probation is to inform a student and their committee of areas of weakness in the student's progress through the program. A key outcome of notifying these parties will be the development of a sustainable plan to mitigate these progression weaknesses. The student's advisor(s) and dissertation committee will work with the student to build this plan and to consider the unique and individual circumstances of each student's academic situation. Under extenuating circumstances (e.g., medical leave of absence, parental leave), the Graduate Program Committee may agree to modify the definition and implementation of Academic Probation to best accommodate a student and ensure success. Unless otherwise noted here, Academic Probation within the Department of Astronomy and Planetary Science will follow all rules and guidelines established by the Graduate College ([Policy No. 100319](#)). The process of academic probation is separated from graduate research or teaching assistantship hiring (and the stipend and benefits associated with these assistantships).

The student will be notified of probation in writing (by email) by the Graduate Coordinator; relevant advisor(s) and Department Chair will be informed as well. The student, advisor(s), dissertation committee, and Graduate Program Committee will then work together to develop an "Improvement Plan," which specifically states what the student must do to be removed from probation (including relevant deliverables/outcomes and timelines/milestones). This improvement plan will be signed by the student, relevant advisor(s), the Graduate Coordinator, and the Department Chair.

With the exception of students who earn below a GPA of 3.0 in any given semester, Academic Probation is omitted from students' transcripts and is meant to remain internal to NAU, the Graduate College, and the Department of Astronomy and Planetary Science. Students on Academic Probation for two consecutive semesters may be asked to leave the graduate program if the Graduate Program Committee agrees that the Improvement Plan remains unfulfilled. Students who are placed on Academic Probation for three total semesters are no longer eligible to progress through their graduate studies. The recommendation for dismissal must follow the procedures outlined in NAU [Policy No. 100319](#), and students may appeal this recommendation following the procedures outlined in NAU [Policy No. 100103](#). If a student is dismissed from the program due to Academic Probation (as above) there will be no option for a terminal Master's degree.

Students placed on Academic Probation will have an additional committee member assigned to their dissertation committee. This assignment will be made by the Graduate Program Committee, and will be a member of the Graduate Program Committee or, if all members of the Graduate Program Committee are already on the student's committee, the Department Chair or

Associate Department Chair. The role of this additional committee member is to provide an independent mediator and to promote student success. The dissertation committee (with input from the Graduate Program Committee) will then define an Improvement Plan that must be satisfied by the student before the end of the following semester (to avoid the consequences outlined above). Examples of possible improvement requirements include: (1) additional coursework; (2) a literature review; (3) an improved GPA; or (4) completion of the student's comprehensive exam. If the student satisfies the Improvement Plan, they will be removed from Academic Probation. If the student fails to satisfy the Improvement Plan by the end of the assigned semester, the student will remain on Academic Probation (at which point the Improvement Plan may be revised). The Improvement Plan will be agreed upon by the student, relevant advisor(s), and the Graduate Coordinator before final approval by the Department Chair (as mentioned above).

Students may be placed on Academic Probation for any of the following reasons. Please note that these reasons are determined by the NAU Graduate College (see aforementioned Policy No. 100319). Where there is disagreement between the policies of the Graduate College and the Department of Astronomy and Planetary Science, the departmental policies override those of the Graduate College.

- Failure to maintain *Good Academic Standing*, which is defined as earning one "D," one "F," or two "C's" on any course(s) they are taking towards their graduate program of study, or having their cumulative GPA drop below 3.0.
- Failure to make sufficient *Academic Progress*, as determined by the student's dissertation committee. This is defined in NAU Policy No. 100319 as failure to:
  - [make] satisfactory progress in research, scholarship, or creative activity,
  - [complete] the program elements within specified time limits, and/or
  - [pass] required program examinations.
- Not satisfying conditions stated in their Semester Evaluation:
  - Receiving a mark of "Not Progressing," or
  - Failure to satisfy the conditions set forth in the previous Semester Evaluation as a result of a grade of "Needs Improvement."
- Not satisfying the requirements for completion of the research rotation:
  - Failure to complete the rotation write-up at the end of the student's fourth semester, or
  - Failure to present the oral component of the rotation by the end of the fourth semester.
- Not satisfying the requirements for completion of their Comprehensive Exam:
  - Failure to pass either their written or oral exam prior to the end of the fifth semester,
  - Receiving a mark of "Fail" on their Comprehensive Exam; or
  - Failure to satisfy the conditions set forth in order to satisfy a mark of "Pass with Conditions."

## Other Policies and Resources

### Forms

A collection of Department of Astronomy and Planetary Science forms can be found [here](#). Please send suggestions for forms/policies that should be added to the Graduate Program Committee.

### Leave of Absence Policy

Graduate students in degree programs that require continuous registration may be granted a Leave of Absence for up to one academic year by the Associate Dean of the Graduate College, upon the recommendation of the student's Faculty Advisor and the Department Chair. The Leave of Absence form is available from the Graduate College (see [here](#)). A leave will be granted under conditions requiring the suspension of activities associated with the thesis/dissertation or coursework. A leave will be granted for extraordinary reasons only. Normally, time-to-degree requirements are not suspended during a Leave of Absence — if an extension of time to degree is needed, it should be requested in the Leave of Absence form. The right to use University facilities and/or faculty time is suspended during a Leave of Absence. No form of graduate assistant support will be provided during the Leave of Absence.

International students (students attending NAU on an F-1 or J-1 visa) are generally not eligible for a Leave of Absence due to federal regulations. Contact the [Center for International Education](#) for any exceptional circumstances or questions.

Leave of Absence requests must be filed no later than the last day for adding classes during the semester in which the leave is to start and cannot be granted retroactively. Students on an approved Leave of Absence will not be required to apply for readmission. Students who are absent beyond the end of an approved Leave of Absence may be required to apply for readmission as a graduate student and to the appropriate academic department. A Leave of Absence will be extended beyond one year only under exceptional circumstances. Such an extension must be requested on the Leave of Absence form.

### Other Resources

All parts of the university are dedicated to student success, and students are encouraged to seek out any help they may need. A partial list of resources available to students within the department includes other students; faculty advisor; other members of the dissertation committee; the Graduate Coordinator; the Graduate Program Committee; and the Department Chair and Associate Chair. Furthermore, the department's faculty members care about the

success of all graduate students, so students are encouraged to seek out any faculty member for discussions related to science, professional development, and/or any difficulties encountered in professional or personal life.

Outside of the department there are a number of resources available to students as well. Where possible, students should talk with intra-department resources before consulting with extra-department resources, in the interest of full communication.

The [Graduate College](#) is a strong advocate for graduate students on this campus. Questions about bureaucratic issues should go to the appropriate Graduate Coordinator and/or Graduate College staff (see [here](#)), who are very friendly, knowledgeable, and helpful. Questions or issues of a more substantive nature should go to the Associate Dean or Dean of the Graduate College. Both are dedicated to helping students, but please recognize that they have very large constituencies across campus, so should generally only be approached if all department resources have been exhausted, or if department resources cannot be consulted for a specific reason.

Students may also want to work with the Graduate Student Government ([GSG](#)), which advocates to university administration to represent the needs of graduate students; there are elected GSG positions that students in our department may choose to run for. The university also maintains a formal system (see [here](#)) for anyone on campus who has a complaint or issue that cannot be handled directly through the chain of command.

The NAU Human Resources ([HR](#)) department can be consulted if there are workplace issues. The NAU Equity and Access Office ([EAO](#)) can be consulted if there are equity or access issues. On issues of inclusivity, diversity, and equity, contact the NAU Office of Inclusion ([link](#)).

Finally, NAU Campus Health Services ([link](#)) has a wide range of services available to students, including well visits, sick visits (though emergencies should proceed to an emergency room), and mental health counseling.

## Mediation, Grievance, and Appeal Procedures

Students who experience difficult situations of any nature (interpersonal relationships, workplace safety issues, student-advisor communication or working relationship complaints, or any other issue) are encouraged to work with faculty to solve the issues. The general approach is that the student should document (in writing) the complaint and work up the “chain of command,” which has the following structure: student’s faculty advisor; dissertation committee members; department Graduate Coordinator and/or Graduate Program Committee; Department Chair; Associate Dean of the Graduate College. If the student does not feel comfortable at one level of the reporting structure that level may be skipped (example: student/mentor relationship makes student feel uncomfortable so student proceeds to Graduate Coordinator).

Mediation of difficult situations is available, encouraged, and can be requested through the Graduate Coordinator or Graduate Program Committee. For example, if a student-advisor relationship is strained or challenging, either party can request a Graduate Program Committee member to help mediate the situation; student-student difficulties can also be mediated. While students and faculty are encouraged in all cases to privately discuss problems and look for solutions, either party can request mediation.

Grade appeals will be treated as described by NAU [Policy No. 100105](#).

All other appeal procedures are described in the NAU catalog or in the NAU student handbook. Please consult with an advisor, the Graduate Coordinator, the Graduate Program Committee, or the Department Chair with any questions.

## Feedback and Review

Feedback on this handbook or on any aspect of the graduate program is welcome. Feedback can be provided to an advisor, the Graduate Student Representative to the Faculty, the Graduate Coordinator, the Graduate Program Committee, and/or the Department Chair. If possible, the Graduate Program Committee and/or Graduate Student Representative should be CC'd on communications to help ensure accountability. Formal review of this document by the Graduate Program Committee and Graduate Student Representative should occur at least once every year.

## Change & Review Log

|   |            |
|---|------------|
| v0.9 Incorporated student feedback [TDR]                              | 08/20/2020 |
| v0.7 First “complete” draft distributed to grad students for comments | 07/26/2020 |
| v0.5 Updated version to all faculty [DET]                             | 04/14/2020 |
| v0.2 Comments from LMP, TDR, JPE included                             | 11/20/2019 |
| v0.1 First Google Docs version created by DET                         | 10/17/2019 |