

## DEPARTMENT POLICIES FOR GRADUATE PROGRAM

### COUNCIL OF GRADUATE SCHOOLS

Texas A&M is a member of the US Council of Graduate Schools which has adopted April 15th as a critical date in the application review process. Basically stated, the council, to which every major institution is a member, states that students are not required to accept appointments prior to April 15th. And, it states that a student must obtain a release from the first institution to accept an offer from another institution after April 15th. We affirm that it is unethical for a student to continue pursuing offers if an offer has already been accepted within our program.

### ENGLISH PROFICIENCY EXAM

International students (including those transferring from another US institution) are required to take the ELPE (English Language Proficiency Exam) upon arrival to Texas A&M to verify their communication skills. The tests are offered once a semester. If scores so indicate, students may be required to take additional courses through the TAMU English Language Institute (ELI).

Although a student has been verified or certified by the ELPE, if a faculty member feels that a student is still not proficient in any aspect of the English language, the faculty member may require the student to take ELI courses to improve English skills. Courses might consist of grammar, writing lab, reading, listening, vocabulary, or oral skills as the faculty member recommends. International students are, therefore, encouraged to make continuous improvement of their understanding, use and application of the English language.

### GAR AND GANT RESPONSIBILITIES

Typically, funded graduate students are offered either Graduate Assistant - Research (GAR) or Graduate Assistant - Non-Teaching (GANT) appointments. Both positions require 20 hours of work per week. GAR's are assigned research project activity (that may or may not be directly related to thesis research). GANT's are assigned course support duties such as grading or lab assistant for one or more courses. Students are reminded that additional research activities are expected as part of their academic program of study leading to their thesis or dissertation.

### TERM OF APPOINTMENT

Appointments are usually for one year, but shorter appointments have been established in such cases that a trial period is needed or a limited funding source is present. Poor academic performance and/or unsatisfactory GANT/GAR performance are grounds for suspension of support. Continued financial aid is contingent upon satisfactory progress in your graduate program, and upon the availability of funds for graduate student support by your advisor or department.

## **AEROSPACE FUNDAMENTALS QUALIFYING EXAM (AFQE)**

New and transfer Ph.D. students will take the AFQE in late May following the first academic year of study (usually Fall and Spring semesters—two semesters). The exam will cover fundamental material from the disciplines of solids/structures, aerodynamics/fluids, and dynamics/controls as well as the mathematics associated with such disciplines. The score from the AFQE, course performance, and recommendations from the student's advisor(s), will be used in a total evaluation of performance. Ph.D. students are encouraged to take AERO 601 (Fluid Mechanics), AERO 603 (Continuum Mechanics), and AERO 622 (Dynamics), or equivalent courses from prior degrees, as part of their first year study to prepare for the Exam. The AFQE is an exam on aerospace engineering fundamentals, and is NOT another final exam on the three courses listed above. Students who fail the written portion of the AFQE may be given one additional opportunity to retake the written portion of the AFQE which will usually be given in early August following the May exam. A student must pass the AFQE; and failure mandates a change of program to M.S. or transfer to another department or university.

## **COURSE LOAD**

A full course load of 9 credit hours is required to maintain an assistantship (6 credit hours in the 10-week summer session). These hours may include courses such as Research (AERO 691) and Seminar (AERO 681). The maximum course load for graduate students is 15 hours. International students are not always required by INS to register during the summer; however, if they are paid as an assistant, they must register for 6 hours in the 10-week session.

## **SEMINAR POLICY**

Master's students are required to have a minimum of 2 hours of AERO 681 or MEMA 681. Ph.D. students are required to have a minimum of 4 hours of AERO 681 or MEMA 681. Individual advisors may recommend more, but not less. The seminar courses may be used to satisfy degree program requirements (up to 2 hours for M.S., and up to 4 hours for Ph.D.). Some faculty, at their discretion, may require students to attend and/or register for seminar more often, or even every semester.

Suggestion: save some AERO 681 hours for latter terms when your research has matured (you will be asked to present your work at seminar).

## **ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE**

Graduate students should maintain a GPA of 3.0 or better (some fellowships require a 3.2 or 3.5 GPA). Students who fall below a 3.0 are placed on scholastic probation, and such students must establish a written plan with the department's graduate advisor to remedy the situation. Prolonged probation will jeopardize a funded appointment and may lead to dismissal.

## **DEGREE PLAN REQUIREMENT**

Master's students must have on file an approved **degree plan prior to pre-registration for the 2<sup>nd</sup> semester** after enrollment; Doctoral students must file **prior to pre-registration of the 3<sup>rd</sup> semester**. Failure to have an approved degree program will result in a student being **blocked for registration by the Aerospace Engineering Department and the Office of Graduate Studies.**

## **OFFICE AND LAB ASSIGNMENTS**

We are able to provide most of our graduate students with superior office space. Our primary goal is to do our best to find every graduate student an office, but in some cases, it may not be exactly what the student prefers. We recognize that our teaching assistants need a place to meet with students, our research assistants need a place to think, and all graduate students need a place to study. Our policy is to be as fair and consistent as possible to all students when offices are assigned. Our priority policy gives funded Ph.D. students the highest priority, working down on the priority list to unfunded students.

Office assignments are provided by the department head's designee (currently, Ms. Karen Knabe). No one else, including your faculty advisor, may make assignment decisions. Each student must realize that offices are deemed a privilege, and abuse of the policy will result in loss of office. This includes manipulation of facts, disrespect of property, and disrespect to others. If you are assigned an office, you will also have a shared mailbox in the 6<sup>th</sup> floor kitchen. If you find that you do not need the office for any reason, in consideration of other students, please let Mrs. Knabe know so the office can be assigned to another student.

## **EMAIL AND CONTACT INFORMATION**

The department has computing facilities, your advisor may provide research computers in assigned offices and TAMU has open computer labs. Important university and department announcements are now almost always sent through email to the student's neo account. It is your responsibility to check this account often and to provide your correct address/phone/email contact to the payroll office, registrar and to the department graduate office.

## **MULTIPLE FELLOWSHIPS, STIPENDS, AND OTHER AWARDS**

Our department offers competitive financial support for its students. When possible, graduate students are nominated for multiple awards and sources of support from both TAMU and external organizations. These awards may include, but are not limited to, full or partial stipends, tuition support, supplemental grants, etc. Sources may come from the College of Engineering, the Board of Regents, the Office of Graduate Studies, our department, as well as private industry, or the government. We may submit a candidate's name to several competitive award committees for consideration, in hopes that the student receives one. The department expects the student to notify us of cases in which multiple awards are received. The student will be allowed to keep the best possible situation (such as the highest fellowship offer and highest supplemental award). However, the department does not permit situations such as a combination of multiple full fellowships, multiple tuition grants, plus other supplemental awards. If in doubt about accepting an award, ask the graduate director. In general, students are not permitted to hold a major fellowship (stipend plus, in some cases, tuition and/or fees) and a full research assistantship at the same time.

## **VACATIONS**

Graduate students do not earn official vacation time (but are eligible for health insurance), and they are expected to support their funded activity year-around except during the official campus holiday breaks.

Periods between academic terms are important work periods; and they are not holiday breaks. Assistantship holders are expected to work between academic terms. This is true for breaks between any academic terms other than official breaks.

If you have plans (such as personal travel) which may require additional time away from work, you must have permission, and you must coordinate with your advisor, in advance, a plan to accrue time to justify your absence. Failure to obtain permission may jeopardize your funding.

Research assistants (GAR's) must see their advisors regarding vacation. Teaching assistants (GANT's) and students on any other form of departmental support must see their assigned supervisor for permission to be absent. International students should always go to the International Student Services office before travel to see if their documents are in order. A month or more prior to your travel, discuss your plans with an ISS counselor and obtain special letters or other documents as required to avoid re-entry problems. Many of your questions can be answered at the ISS website! <http://iss.tamu.edu>

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