USC Chemistry PhD Program Handbook

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I. Introduction

School/Program Welcome

Welcome to the PhD Program in Chemistry at the University of Southern California!

We are pleased to have you join our vibrant and diverse academic community. As a graduate student in our department, you will engage in advanced coursework and perform cutting-edge, highly collaborative research alongside world-class faculty and peers who are passionate about scientific discovery and innovation.

Throughout your time here, you will have access to world-class research facilities, opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration, and robust academic and professional support. Whether your goals include academic research, industry, or science communication, we are committed to helping you reach your full potential.

We are excited to support you on this journey and look forward to the contributions you will make to the USC Chemistry community.

Welcome aboard, and best wishes for a successful and fulfilling PhD experience!

Introduction to the School/Program

The Department of Chemistry at the University of Southern California is located at the University Park Campus in the historical Figueroa Corridor of downtown Los Angeles. Our department has a vibrant community of approximately 30 faculty members active in research and teaching serving approximately 250 undergraduates, 175 graduate students, and 50 postdoctoral researchers. USC labs demonstrate expertise in each of the traditional subfields, namely organic chemistry, inorganic chemistry, chemical biology, experimental physical chemistry, and theoretical chemistry. Committed to excellence in education and research, our mission is to train future chemists for impactful careers in the “central science.”

The Department of Chemistry recognizes the key role chemistry plays in other disciplines as the “central science,” and so the research at USC is highly interdisciplinary. Our department collaborates with many others at the university, including Molecular and Computational Biology, Physics, Chemical Engineering, Biomedical Engineering and Pharmaceutical Sciences. Through collaborations and joint appointments, the Department has established itself as a fulcrum for research in chemical and structural biology, drug discovery, energy research, materials science, chemical physics, and theoretical modeling of biological systems.

Faculty within the department are self-organized into sections based on common research interests, with many holding affiliations in more than one section. Some topics, like Materials chemistry, are highly interdisciplinary and are represented in all sections. Each section hosts its own seminar series and special events like journal clubs that focus on these topical areas. Students are welcome to participate in any sectional activities applicable to their interest and can mix-and-match coursework and exam structure as have agreed upon with their advisor and the Thesis Committee.

The Physical-Theoretical chemistry section has a long tradition of excellence in both theory and experiment and continues to develop its unique strengths in new research directions. Current research efforts span fundamental questions in physical chemistry, from the structure and reactivity of gas-phase molecules and clusters to dynamical processes in solutions and interfaces. Several groups are involved in ultrafast laser spectroscopy applied to problems in photovoltaics, dynamics of liquids and electrolytes, and electrochemical interfaces. Much of the research is interdisciplinary, with applications in biophysical chemistry, renewable energy, and quantum information science. Several experimental and theoretical groups work on spin dynamics, with emphasis on new ways of measuring magnetic resonance, with applications in information technology and are involved in both method development and applications.

The Organic-Materials section builds on a strong tradition of translating fundamental research in organic chemistry to cutting-edge real-world applications. Research in the section spans traditional areas of organic synthesis, such as catalysis and synthetic methodology, to emerging topics such as batteries, fuel cells, solar energy, sustainable polymer materials, organic electronics, and drug discovery. The Loker Hydrocarbon Institute founded by the late 1994 Nobel Laureate George Olah is a cornerstone of the section where research on CO_2 capture and conversion to sustainable fuels and feedstocks is a central element.

The Chemical Biology section offers a wide range of common themes that encompass biochemistry of phenotype, convergent biosciences, engineered systems and drug discovery, DNA dynamics, molecular imaging, and structural biology. Experimental and computational methods employed in the section span the range of modern approaches, including diverse microscopy and spectroscopy techniques, mass spectrometry, biomolecular structure determination (X-ray and Cryo-EM) and the full spectrum of computational techniques.

The Inorganic section performs highly collaborative and interdisciplinary research that ranges from the core of the discipline to a myriad of applications. The research encompasses organometallic and main group

synthesis, solid state and materials chemistry, metal-organic hybrids, nanomaterials, catalysis, and magnetic and electronic properties. Each group within the section develops novel synthetic methods to prepare new inorganic materials or molecular complexes that drive the research in these areas. The topics being actively explored lie at the core of many technologies relevant for creating an environmentally sustainable future and range from hetero- and homogeneous catalysis, solar energy conversion, solid state lighting, fuel cells, and Li-ion batteries.

Introduction to the Graduate School

The mission of the USC Graduate School is to provide a distinguished educational experience at the graduate level for an outstanding and diverse student body, to support and celebrate graduate student achievements, and to lead in establishing and communicating policies, standards, and processes related to graduate education.

Purposes of the PhD Program Handbook

Graduate student success is the result of a collaborative effort among students working at their highest levels, faculty dedicated to high-quality mentorship, and staff who coordinate and advise. One of the most important ingredients in this cooperative effort is a shared understanding about what is required and what resources and supports are available.

This document serves as a roadmap for chemistry PhD students. It offers a review of expectations for students and for the faculty and administrative staff who support them. The handbook provides three types of information: 1) guidance on program requirements, including university and departmental policies, resources, and expectations; 2) practical advice for common challenges at USC; and 3) information about relevant support services and professional development opportunities.

We hope that the handbook serves as a valuable resource for PhD success, providing students with the information to complete their programs while maintaining academic momentum and personal well-being.

The handbook includes policies and practices noted in the university's catalogue, collective bargaining agreement, and other sources. It does not fully address the terms of the collective bargaining agreement, which is available for your reference on the Graduate School's website.

The PhD at USC

The Doctor of Philosophy at USC is a full-time program. It is a rigorous course of study that requires original research, professional maturity, sustained intellectual focus, and academic discipline. Students are expected to devote full-time study to this degree and not undertake employment or other time-consuming commitments during the academic year, from the end of August through mid-May.

II. Curriculum and Program Milestones

School/Program Curriculum Overview

Students are admitted to the department in pursuit of the PhD. It is understood, however, that some students will subsequently opt for a Master's degree. The department is organized according to the disciplinary sections described in **Section I**. Interdisciplinary research is common and encouraged. Each student's course plans can be tailored, within bounds, to the needs and interests of each student. Degree requirements are sometimes altered to accommodate technical, academic, or administrative changes. Students are held to the requirements in effect when they join the department.

Coursework

Examples of core courses for each section are listed below. Courses that are needed to provide breadth and depth are discussed with each student individually, initially with the advisor from the Graduate Student and Postdoctoral Affairs Committee (GSPAC), and subsequently with the student's Research Advisor. Ultimate approval of the coursework is the responsibility of the Thesis Committee, which may impose further requirements.

- Organic and Polymers: CHEM 526 (4), CHEM 527 (4), CHEM 561 (4), CHEM 625 (4)
- Physical/Theoretical: CHEM 544 (4), CHEM 538 (4), CHEM 535 (4), CHEM 540 (4), CHEM 545 (4)
- Chemical Biology: CHEM 526 (4), CHEM 520a (2), CHEM 520b (2), CHEM 577a (2), CHEM 577b (2), CHEM 589 (2), CHEM 521 (2)
- Inorganic: CHEM 515 (4), CHEM 516 (4), CHEM 488 (4)

Grades

Units from the teaching practicum (CHEM 593x) and courses taken outside the Department of Chemistry without prior approval by the GSPAC cannot be applied toward the 24 units course requirement. All courses must be approved by the student's representative on the GSPAC during the first, and sometimes the second semester, after which this duty passes on to the Research Advisor. Courses taken outside the department require approval of the GSPAC prior to enrollment.

The lowest acceptable grade at the graduate level is B. All courses in which a final grade was assigned by the instructor are included in the GPA. Courses with a grade of C+ or lower do not count toward the required 24 units. Students who want to repeat a course in which a grade of C+ was received and have the subsequent grade calculated in the GPA must petition the university level Committee on Academic Policies and Procedures (CAPP) for permission to do so prior to re-registering in the course. CAPP will not grant post hoc approval. Courses with a grade of B- may be used towards the 24 units. However, a GPA below 3.00 in the first semester will result in academic probation. For example, a grade of B- in a 4-unit course must be offset by a grade of B+ or higher in a 4-unit course to avoid academic probation. No more than one grade of B- can be offset in this way. If there is more than one B- grade, the student must take one additional course.

A single grade of C+ or lower in the first semester will result in academic probation, regardless of other course grades, e.g., grades of C+ and A in two 4-unit courses will result in academic probation, even though the combined GPA is 3.17. Students may not join a research group while on probation. If, by the end of the second semester, the overall GPA of a student who was on probation after the first semester has risen to at least 3.00, their period of probation ends, and they may approach potential advisors.

Failure to achieve an overall GPA of at least 3.00 by the end of the second semester, or failure to find an advisor will result in dismissal from the program.

Research Immersion and Advisor Selection

Graduate students are initially admitted to the department, not individual groups. Chemistry is diverse, with many exciting areas, so it is important that each first-year student uses the first semester to explore research groups and advisors. To remain in good academic standing, students are required to join a group by the end of their second semester, but not until grades from their first semester have been posted.

Immersion with at least two research groups is required before committing to a Research Advisor. Each student should make an informed decision that best fits their academic interests, as mutually agreed upon by the student and the advisor. The immersions are designed to help with this decision, whose importance cannot be overstated. Each immersion lasts four to five weeks, and students are expected to commit six to eight hours per week to the process. This program is open to all interested faculty, but the department does not require them to host anyone, so students interested in specific groups are encouraged to reach out early and discuss their interests with each professor (advisor) with whom they would like to rotate with.

The choice of advisor, while important, is not absolute. If, for whatever reason, a student is unhappy with the group they joined, it is possible to switch groups. Avoiding this situation is preferred, but the department recognizes that not all initial choices work. Students should consult with the GSPAC before deciding to change groups.

Student-faculty matching for each immersion period is based on mutual interests and is managed by the GSPAC. During orientation week, students are given detailed information about how to input their choices, and how the matches are made. All research groups in the department are invited to present their research through oral and poster presentations during a mandatory all-day symposium at the beginning of the semester. Students are encouraged to look at the department website before and after the symposium to familiarize themselves with the ongoing research in the department.

Expectations for the immersion period vary from one group to the next and are managed by the individual faculty members. Some groups only expect attendance at group meetings, while others may also require a period in the lab under the supervision of a senior student or a postdoc. Whatever form is agreed upon by the student and faculty member is permitted, with the condition that the plan does not interfere with the student's coursework or teaching responsibilities. Students are encouraged to meet with all members of the faculty with whom they share research interests even if they are not paired for an immersion period. Students are not allowed to make a formal commitment to a professor prior to completion of the immersion process. This is true even in cases where a student has worked for, and/or been paid by, a professor during the preceding summer.

Transfer Credit Requirements and Policies

The number of graduate-level units that can be transferred from other institutions is determined on an individual basis by the Graduate School in consultation with the Office of Admissions. The initial request must be approved by the GSPAC in consultation with the research advisor and cannot be submitted prior to the end of the first semester. Courses submitted for consideration for transfer credit are determined in consultation with the Thesis Committee and must be approved by the Graduate School. New students with previous graduate credit, whether or not with a Master's degree, will be required to register for at least two non-research courses, one of which must be in Chemistry, during their first semester. Additional courses may be required by the GSPAC, the student's advisor, or the Thesis Committee to make up deficiencies. Approval of this request by departmental faculty members does not constitute approval of the Graduate School, Office of the Registrar, or other campus offices. Students granted a waiver or substitution of departmental requirements by faculty within the department are not exempt from any Graduate Division requirements.

Screening Exam

Screening Examination Committee Formation

The screening exam committee will consist of four faculty members from the chemistry department, which will include three members who are appointed in the student's home section (including the student's advisor) and one member who is appointed outside the student's section A joint appointment faculty may also serve as a member and will be counted as equivalent to a member outside the student's section.

To ensure timely progress toward degree milestones, Screening Examination committees will be formed according to the following process:

1. Beginning in November of the student's third semester, each student will submit to the Graduate Program Coordinator a ranked list of preferred departmental faculty members to serve on his/her

Screening Examination Committee. The list must be reviewed and approved by the student's Research Advisor prior to submission and shall include
    - Four faculty members appointed within the student's research section (the section of the student's Research Advisor), ranked in order of preference; and
    - Two faculty members appointed in a different departmental section, ranked in order of preference. An out-of-department faculty member may be also considered if such a committee member is in the best interest of the student's education and research.
    - Students or advisors may request a change in the assigned committee at any point in the process with appropriate justifications and/or under extenuating circumstances. Such requests will be considered by the Department Chair and Section Heads.
2. Early in January of the student's fourth semester, the Department Chair and Section Chairs will review student preferences and assign departmental committee members. In making assignments, the Department will consider student research interests, faculty expertise, student preferences, and the equitable distribution of committee service among faculty members. The Department may adjust the composition of the committee as merited to fit the best interest of the student's research and education. Department Chair and Section Heads will assign faculty jointly appointed within the Chemistry Department as best fits the needs of the Department, research, and education.
3. The finalized committee will serve as the student's Screening Examination Committee and, barring subsequent changes approved by the Department or Graduate School, will continue as four of the five members of the student's Qualifying Examination Committee.
4. The Graduate Program Coordinator will provide administrative support for the scheduling of both the Screening Examination and the Qualifying Examination. Following committee formation, the Graduate Program Coordinator will coordinate scheduling by requesting availability from the student and committee members, establishing the examination date and time, reserving an examination room and/or arranging the virtual meeting, distributing scheduling information to all participants, and ensuring that students and committee members are aware of program deadlines. Faculty members and students are not responsible for coordinating the administrative logistics of scheduling the examination. The student bears ultimate responsibility for ensuring that the examination is completed by the required deadline.

Oral Screening

The department will administer the Screening Examination during the student's fourth semester. Students must have completed, or be on track to complete, the required 24 units of coursework by the end of the fourth semester and must successfully complete those requirements to remain eligible for continuation in the PhD program. Students must complete the Screening Examination before the beginning of their fifth semester in the program. The examination will be administered by the student's Screening Examination Committee. The Screening Examination is designed to assess a student's mastery of the foundational chemical principles expected of doctoral students and their readiness to progress toward the Qualifying Examination. At the start of the examination, the Research Advisor will provide a brief oral report to the committee summarizing the student's research progress and overall performance in the program.

Each departmental section will maintain a standardized pool of topics (10-15) derived from the first-year graduate core curriculum. The topic pools will be reviewed and updated periodically by the faculty of each section. Students will be provided access to the relevant topics during their orientation into the PhD program.

The examination will be conducted in a closed-book format. At the exam, the committee will inform the student of the two selected topics from the approved pool in the relevant section, and the student will be required to answer questions posed on both topics by the committee through an oral chalk-talk presentation and discussion. Committee members may ask follow-up questions to assess the student's depth of understanding, scientific reasoning, and ability to integrate concepts across the chemical sciences. The questions on the selected topics, while at the discretion of the committee, may overlap with the general area of the student's current research. Such questions are intended to assess the student's understanding of the underlying chemical principles represented by the selected topics.

Following deliberation, the committee will assign one of the following outcomes:

Recommend. The student has demonstrated satisfactory preparation and is recommended to continue in the PhD program and progress toward the Qualifying Examination. Even in a case of recommending a student to proceed to the Qualifying Exam, the committee is encouraged to provide the student with recommendations of weaknesses and opportunities for improvement that should be addressed prior to qualification.

Not Recommend. The student has not demonstrated satisfactory preparation for progression to the Qualifying Examination. The Graduate Program Coordinator will notify the Graduate Studies and Professional Advancement Committee (GSPAC) of this outcome. Based on committee feedback and in consultation with the Department, the student may either continue in the PhD program with the expectation of substantial improvement prior to the Qualifying Examination or may elect to leave the program with a terminal Master of Science degree, provided all degree requirements have been satisfied.

The Screening Examination may not be repeated.

Students who fail to complete the Screening Examination by the required deadline must request an extension before the deadline. Requests for extension must be submitted by the Research Advisor to the Graduate Studies and Professional Advancement Committee (GSPAC) and the Department Chair and must include a justification for the request. Ordinarily, only one extension of up to three months will be granted. Failure to complete the Screening Examination by the approved deadline may result in dismissal from the program.

Qualifying Exam

The Qualifying Examination is designed to evaluate a student's readiness to conduct independent doctoral research and to advance to PhD candidacy. The examination assesses the student's ability to formulate significant research questions, develop rigorous experimental approaches, interpret preliminary results, and defend a research plan.

Students must complete the Qualifying Examination before the end of their fifth semester in the PhD program. Prior to taking the examination, students must have successfully completed the Screening Examination, satisfied all departmental and university requirements for progression in the PhD program, and maintained a cumulative GPA of at least 3.0 in all USC graduate coursework.

The Qualifying Examination will be administered by the student's Thesis Committee. This committee shall consist of the same membership established for the Screening Examination and will additionally include one out of department member, unless formally changed in accordance with Graduate School procedures. Following the screening exam, the student, in consultation with their Research Advisor, will identify an external committee member whose primary faculty appointment is outside of the Department of Chemistry. The external member must satisfy all Graduate School requirements for service on doctoral committees and may hold an appointment in the chemistry department, but this must be a zero percent appointment.

Written Proposal

The written component of the Qualifying Examination consists of a single research proposal prepared in the style of a National Science Foundation (NSF) research proposal. The proposal must be based on the student's own thesis research and should show creative skills in the student's central area of study. The proposal must demonstrate the student's ability to integrate existing knowledge, formulate innovative scientific questions, and develop a rigorous and feasible research strategy.

The proposal must not exceed twelve pages, excluding references, and must conform to current National Science Foundation (NSF) proposal formatting requirements. Specifically, the proposal must:

- Use one of the following approved fonts: Arial, Courier New, or Palatino Linotype at a font size of 10 points or larger; Times New Roman at a font size of 11 points or larger; or Computer Modern at a font size of 11 points or larger.
- Use margins of at least one inch on all sides.
- Contain no more than six lines of text per vertical inch.
- Use standard U.S. letter-sized pages (8.5 × 11 inches).
- Employ a clear, single-column format throughout the document.

Smaller font sizes may be used only for mathematical expressions, figure labels, table content, and similar supporting material, provided that all text remains clearly legible.

The proposal must contain multiple specific aims. At least one aim should focus on near-term dissertation objectives and research directions related to the student's doctoral work. Another aim must represent a forward-looking and creative research direction that extends beyond the immediate scope of the dissertation and demonstrates the student's capacity for independent scientific thinking.

The proposal should be organized as follows:

- Project Overview/Abstract (maximum 1 page)
- Background and Motivation (approximately 3 pages)
- Specific Aims (approximately 0.5 page)
- Preliminary Data (approximately 3 pages)
- Research Plan, Including Alternative Strategies and Contingencies (approximately 4.5 pages)

In both the written presentation of the proposal and its oral defense, students are expected to demonstrate a thorough understanding of the relevant literature, clearly articulate the significance of the proposed work, and present a feasible and scientifically rigorous plan for accomplishing the stated aims. The Research Advisor may provide guidance regarding the general direction and scope of the proposal. However, the written proposal must represent the student's own intellectual and written work. The proposal may not be a reproduction, adaptation, or close revision of an existing grant proposal prepared by the Research Advisor or any other investigator. All text, figures, tables, schemes, and other material derived from the work of others must be appropriately cited and attributed in accordance with accepted scholarly practice.

At the time of submission, the student shall certify in writing that the proposal represents the student's original work and complies with departmental standards regarding authorship and academic integrity. The Research Advisor shall certify that any guidance provided was limited to the general direction and scope of the proposal, as described above.

The completed proposal must be submitted to all committee members no later than two weeks prior to the scheduled examination date.

Committee members are required to review the proposal prior to the qualifying exam. If, upon review, a majority of the committee determines that the written proposal is insufficiently developed for oral defense, the student will not proceed to the oral examination. In such cases, the committee may either permit a retake under conditions established by the committee or determine that the student has failed the Qualifying Examination without the opportunity for reexamination.

Oral Component

The oral component of the Qualifying Examination consists of a formal defense of the written proposal before the Thesis Committee.

The Graduate Program Administrator will again assist the student with scheduling of the exam. Once a date and time have been selected, the student will send the Graduate Program Administrator the following: tentative dissertation title, committee members, qualifying exam date, time, and location. The exam may also be conducted remotely (fully or partially online via Zoom and other portals). Prior to the exam, the Graduate Program Administrator will send the committee a form to sign via DocuSign (or equivalent) on completion of the exam. This document is unique for each student and takes time to generate, so students should ensure they give plenty of notice prior to the exam. Any change of committee must be approved by the GSPAC and the department chair and submitted to the Graduate School using the formal procedure described below (Changes to Qualifying Exam Committees). The presiding chair of the oral presentation shall be a tenured faculty member from the student's research section and may not be the Research Advisor.

The student will present the proposal using slides, chalkboard presentation, or a combination of both. Students should prepare approximately 45–50 minutes of uninterrupted presentation material. The complete examination, including questions and discussion by the committee, is expected to last approximately 90 minutes. The student is required to cover all areas of the written proposal. Committee members may question the student regarding the proposal, underlying scientific principles, relevant literature, experimental design, data interpretation, methodological approaches, potential limitations, and alternative strategies. The examination is intended to assess both depth of knowledge and the student's capacity for independent scientific thinking.

Upon completion of the presentation, all committee members should understand the students' plans for completion of his or her degree.

Changes in Qualifying Exam Committees

The *Appointment or Change of Qualifying Exam or Dissertation Committee* form, available on the Graduate School website, must be completed whenever there is a change to a qualifying exam committee.

Changes to the qualifying exam committee must be made well in advance of the qualifying examination. Informal substitutions for the qualifying examination's written or oral parts are not permitted. Changes in a qualifying exam committee are not permitted between the written and oral portions of the examination. Modifications made without the prior approval of the dean of the degree program are not recognized and might invalidate the examination.

The examinations must be scheduled when it is possible for all committee members, including the outside member, to participate. Any or all qualifying exam committee members may participate remotely, so long as they are participatory.

A student may not change committee members after failing the qualifying examination the first time. The same faculty must reexamine the student on the same subject matter. If a faculty member is unable to serve on the committee, the dean of the degree program must be notified in writing in advance of the rescheduled exam to approve the change. The faculty replacement must be approved by the dean of the degree program, and the student must file a change of committee form well in advance of the exam.

Examination Outcomes

Upon completion of the examination, the committee will determine one of the following outcomes by majority vote:

Pass. The student has successfully demonstrated readiness to conduct independent doctoral research and will be recommended for advancement to candidacy. The committee endorses the student's plan to complete his/her degree.

Fail with Opportunity for Reexamination. The student has not satisfactorily completed one or more components of the examination but is judged capable of remediation. The committee may require the student to repeat specific portions of the examination or the examination in its entirety. A student will not be required to repeat portions of the examination that were satisfactorily completed during the first administration. Any reexamination must occur no sooner than one month and no later than six months after the original examination date. Before a reexamination is scheduled, the committee must notify the Graduate Studies and Professional Advancement Committee (GSPAC) and the Graduate Program Administrator of the conditions and expectations for the reexamination.

Fail without Opportunity for Reexamination. The student has not demonstrated sufficient preparation for independent doctoral research, and the committee has determined that reexamination is not warranted. The student will be dismissed from the PhD program.

A student may attempt the Qualifying Examination no more than twice. Students must be appropriately enrolled at USC during any semester in which the Qualifying Examination or a reexamination is conducted. A student who fails the Qualifying Examination a second time will be dismissed from the PhD program at the end of that semester. No exceptions will be permitted.

Report on the PhD Qualifying Exam

Upon the successful conclusion of the qualifying exam, the committee will certify on the *Report on the PhD Qualifying Examination* that: (1) the exam was appropriately rigorous; (2) the student's performance on the exam was at the doctoral level; and (3) the entire qualifying examination process was fair and in keeping with USC's academic and ethical standards. The *Report on the PhD Qualifying Examination* is available to graduate advisers on the Graduate School website in myGradSchool.

Advancement to Candidacy

Graduate students are officially advanced to candidacy for the PhD degree when they have completed the residency requirement and passed the written and oral portions of the PhD qualifying examination.

Application for the PhD

After advancing to candidacy, students must contact their academic department or program to initiate an online degree check that will be transmitted to the Degree Progress Department. Degree Progress counselors will prepare a Degree Audit Report (STARS Report) listing any remaining requirements. Programs must apply all appropriate courses in the Student Information System for the degree to be conferred.

Master's Degree Requirements and Policies

The Master's degree serves distinct purposes from those of the PhD. It requires deep knowledge in a chosen area of chemistry. It is not possible to be admitted as a Master's candidate directly in our department, but a student in the PhD program may switch to a Master's track at any point.

Master of Science (MS)

The MS requires at least 24 units of graduate course credit, approved by the student's Thesis Committee, together with an overall GPA of at least 3.00, a thesis based on original research, and oral defense of the thesis. The Graduate Program Administrator must be consulted once a student decides to pursue this track so that they may be given clearance to enroll in CHEM594a+b. The thesis format should follow the Graduate School guidelines. The MS Thesis Committee shall have the same faculty composition as for the PhD. The Research Advisor is responsible for supervision of the thesis. Final acceptance is based on approval of the

penultimate draft by the Thesis Committee and passing the Final Exam. Not more than two attempts may be made to pass the Final Exam. No more than three months can elapse between attempts.

Master of Arts (MA)

The MA degree requires at least 24 units of graduate course credit with an overall GPA of at least 3.00 and a comprehensive MA Exam administered by the GSPAC. The MA Exam is mandatory and generally taken the semester the student plans to graduate. It consists of a critical review or response to questions selected by the GSPAC representative from the student's home section. The student must schedule the exam and provide any required written responses two weeks prior to the date of the exam. If the student fails the exam, a second attempt is allowed. Having passed the PhD qualifying examination can serve as a substitute for the MA exam at the discretion of the Thesis Committee.

Proposal Defense

MS Thesis Defense

The student is required to present their research work to the Thesis Committee in a seminar that is open to the public and advertised to the department. At the conclusion of the seminar, the student is required to defend the work in a closed-door session with the Thesis Committee. The student must provide the penultimate draft of the Thesis to the Thesis Committee at least two weeks prior to the defense. Failure to do so may result in cancellation of the defense. The committee must decide unanimously to accept the exam and may request revisions prior to final acceptance.

Dissertation

A dissertation is an original contribution to knowledge in the field and a demonstration that the PhD candidate has sufficiently mastered the field to pursue independent research and scholarship. A dissertation represents the individual candidate's research and writing. In fields where collaborative research has become the norm, the candidate is the sole author of the dissertation. When a paper included in a three-paper dissertation has co-authors, the dissertation candidate must specify their contributions to the research and delineate the contributions of their colleagues.

Dissertations are required to be written in English. Exceptions require the approval of the Vice Provost for Academic Programs or their designee before beginning the work. The exceptions will be granted only when there is scholarly justification.

The dissertation must meet the Graduate School requirements. These, together with the deadlines for submission of various forms and abstracts, can be found at the Graduate School website (graduateschool.usc.edu). Students should consult the *Thesis/Dissertation Submission* section of this site for detailed instructions. Things like topic headings and sequencing, references, footnotes, etc. should adhere to the format of a recognized journal in the thesis area. Students typically choose journals such as: Journal of the American Chemical Society, Journal of Chemical Physics, or Journal of Organic Chemistry, and they are advised to consult with the Thesis Committee if serious departure is contemplated. Final approval rests with the Committee. The dissertation must contain a bibliography at the end, regardless of how references are handled in the body of the text.

The dissertation should include (but not necessarily in the following order):

a) A critical appraisal of the research area, including background and general significance.

b) All significant results obtained by the student, whether publishable or not.

c) A critical discussion and evaluation of these results.

The dissertation must show technical mastery of a field, prowess in research, and independent scholarly ability and must be composed by the student alone. Published manuscripts may be included, provided the student played a significant role in their preparation, but must be integrated into the thesis by the student.

Dissertation Committee

The dissertation committee is appointed as soon as possible after the qualifying examination has been passed and a dissertation topic approved. The committee must be appointed at least one month before the dissertation defense. The Appointment or Change of Qualifying Exam or Dissertation Committee form, available on the Graduate School website, establishes the dissertation committee. The form requires the signatures of each committee member, the department chair or program director, and the dean or dean's designee. The completed form is filed in the student's home department or program, and a signed copy is provided to the student.

The dissertation committee is composed of at least three and no more than five members. The committee chair must have an appointment in the student's program. All committees must have a majority of members from the student's home program.

PhD students may take advantage of the full array of faculty expertise available at USC. This includes the expertise of tenured, tenure-track, and RTPC (i.e., research, teaching, practitioner, clinical) faculty. A USC faculty member from outside the student's home program is referred to as an "outside member." The committee may also include a faculty member from an institution other than USC, referred to as an "external member."

The external member may hold a courtesy appointment in Chemistry, but this must be a zero percent appointment.

Any faculty member – external, outside, or from the student's home program – who serves on PhD dissertation and qualifying exam committees must have a professional profile that demonstrates academic impact on the field in significant, measurable ways. The judgment about these qualifications will be made using the following guide:

- For faculty within the student's home program at USC and external faculty members (who are professors at universities other than USC), the dean, or dean's designee, of the school that houses the student's PhD program will assess a professor's qualification to serve.

- For outside faculty (who are professors outside the student's program but internal to USC), the judgment of qualification to serve will be made by the dean or dean's designee of the school/college of the outside faculty member's primary appointment.

In both cases, the CV of the external member must be uploaded to the Thesis Center along with the appointment of committee form, and will become part of the official record. Judgments of demonstrated impact will be based on evidence: for example, peer-reviewed publications in major journals and presses, grant funding, and exceptionally influential practice in a given field, taking into account the person's total career, current stage of career, and any changes in performance in a more recent period.

Faculty who are evaluated based on criteria other than those noted above will not normally be considered appropriate members of PhD and qualifying exam committees, except with the explicit permission of the Vice Provost for Academic Programs acting on the advice of the School Dean.

Emeriti faculty appointed to a qualifying exam committee when they were full-time faculty at USC may continue to serve on the dissertation committee as "internal" committee members until the student has graduated. Similarly, a former USC faculty member who was appointed to the qualifying exam committee while they were a full-time faculty member may continue to serve on the dissertation committee as an internal committee member until the student graduates.

Defense of the Dissertation

After passing all required courses and the qualifying examination, and after meeting all other requirements, the candidate must write and defend the dissertation. The doctoral dissertation must be an original contribution to scholarship or scientific knowledge. The dissertation defense assesses whether this standard has been met.

While the oral examination is open to the general university community, only the members of the dissertation committee have the authority to recommend acceptance of the dissertation. Their recommendation must be unanimous.

For the dissertation defense, some committee members may participate remotely. The committee chair and the student must be present in person, unless the relevant dean and the Vice Provost for Academic Programs provide express written permission for remote participation.

Final Approval of the Dissertation

After the dissertation defense has been completed, and the committee determines that no further edits or revisions are required of the dissertation manuscript, each member of the committee electronically certifies on the *Approval to Submit Defended and Final Copy of Doctoral Dissertation* that: (1) the defense was appropriately rigorous; (2) the student's dissertation makes an original and substantial contribution to its field of study; and (3) the defense process was fair and in keeping with USC's academic and ethical standards. This includes adherence to departmental formatting requirements. No changes can be made to the manuscript's content after the *Approval to Submit f*orm is complete. The *Approval to Submit* form is electronically available through Thesis Center, the Graduate School's online thesis and dissertation processing system.

The dissertation committee must unanimously agree for the student to pass the defense.

Dissertation Submission

Doctoral dissertation manuscripts must be submitted to the Thesis Center on the Graduate School website. At the time of submission, all manuscripts should be formatted and edited according to the style determined by the student's department or program. Students have three months from the date the committee chair signs the electronic *Approval to Submit* form to complete any required formatting corrections in the Thesis Center. After the Graduate School has approved the dissertation manuscript, a copy is sent to the USC Libraries. All dissertations will be made available digitally via the USC Libraries.

Completing the Dissertation

The Graduate School provides a schedule for completing the dissertation on its website. Students must submit complete documentation and finish all corrections to the manuscript before the degree can be conferred. Upon completing all requirements, the official USC transcript will serve as evidence of the degree until the student receives their diploma.

Program Commencement

Commencement ceremonies are in May. Students who finished their graduate programs in December, March, or June, or will finish during the summer or fall may participate in the May ceremony. This is a ceremony only; no diplomas are presented. Online registration is required.

III. Making Good Progress

Student progress and success reflect the combined effort of students, faculty, staff, and the university. This section provides information on access to and systems for mentoring and advising, as well as opportunities for professional development and academic expectations.

Mentoring

Mentoring is a vital part of the graduate experience in the Chemistry PhD program at USC. From the outset of your program, you will work closely with faculty mentors who will guide your research, provide feedback, and support your progression through key milestones.

In addition to your primary research advisor, you will interact with other faculty through coursework, committee meetings, and departmental activities. Peer mentoring, student organizations, and professional development workshops also offer valuable support and perspective throughout your time in the program. We encourage open communication, regular check-ins, and proactive engagement in your mentoring relationships.

Academic Advising

The choice of a program of study is primarily that of the student, but advisors are available to provide support/guidance at any time. In addition to those described below, students may approach any member of the faculty for advice, direction, or answers to questions. Students are encouraged to meet with the members of the Thesis Committee for progress checks and feedback.

Research Advisor:

When students join a group, the Research Advisor takes over as the supervisor, teacher, and mentor. The Advisor's role is critical to the graduate student experience, but will not supersede the requirements outlined herein or those set out by the Graduate School.

Graduate Program Administrator:

This person provides comprehensive support to the graduate program by assisting the chair, faculty, and students. In general, administrators in academic advising, admissions, financial aid, career counseling, and related programs are resources that graduate students can go to with questions related to university and department requirements. See Section XII for the contact information.

Graduate Student and Postdoctoral Affairs Committee (GSPAC):

Each student has a GSPAC representative from one of the departmental sections: Chemical Biology, Inorganic, Organic/Materials, and Physical/Theoretical. These faculty members are available for consultation and guidance in course selection and any other issue where the student feels they need additional advice. They also act as temporary Research Advisor in the first semester. All students are required to meet with their GSPAC representative during initial orientation and academic advising. Once a Research Advisor has been selected, the GSPAC representative may be consulted regarding the program of study, and their approval may be required for certain departmental forms and petitions. See Section XII for the contact information.

Professional Development

PhD students are highly encouraged to have many professional development opportunities during their PhD studies. PhD students typically gain experience in research and grant writing by collaboratively working with their research advisors. In addition, the USC Chemistry department has programs to provide extensive teaching experience, e.g. lectures of introductory-level chemistry classes, to PhD students who are interested in teaching careers. The department and USC also hold several industry career fairs every year for students, who are interested in industry careers.

Program/School Conduct Expectations and Conflict Resolution

General principles of Academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted, and the obligations both to protect one's own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another's work as one's own. All Students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. SCAMPUS, the Student Guidebook, contains the Student Conduct Code in Section 11.00, while the recommended sanctions are in Appendix A: https://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b. Students will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards for further review, should there be any suspicion of academic dishonesty. The Review process can be found at: https://policy.usc.edu/studenthandbook

Student Code of Conduct

Students: Graduate students are responsible for meeting not only the academic standards outlined here, but also standards for personal conduct and responsibility outlined in the General Catalogue, SCAMPUS, and other USC publications. Students have an obligation to act in a manner compatible with the University's function as an educational institution. Standards of Conduct and processes for reporting violations are outlined in SCAMPUS Part B. Ignorance is not an acceptable justification for violating community standards. Lack of intent or awareness of university standards normally will not be accepted as excuses for violations and will normally receive the same consequences as deliberate violations.

Departmental Resources for Conflict Resolution

All members of the Department are expected to contribute to a positive and professional environment fostering growth and collegiality. Yet, conflicts will inevitably arise. When you are comfortable and safe doing so, you are encouraged to discuss potential disagreements with your colleagues or Research Advisor and work toward agreeable solutions. When this proves not feasible, students should seek outside assistance as soon as the problem arises.

Graduate Program Administrator: The Graduate Program Administrator is available for advice and referral and serves as the initial contact for students wishing to vocalize and address concerns. This person can provide impartial feedback on a situation, suggest roles that particular faculty members may play in providing assistance, or advise a more formal grievance process, if necessary.

GSPAC: Serves as an impartial advisor to students during their first semester at USC and later as a resource for students external to their Research Advisor. When a conflict arises and students are uncomfortable with their research advisors they are encouraged to meet with the GSPAC representative in their section.

Department Chair: When additional help, guidance, or conflict resolution is needed, students may consult with the Department Chair. This should be reserved only for very serious situations.

Note: If information is disclosed during conversation with a departmental representative that implies or suggests harassment (sexual or otherwise) or a threat of danger/harm to any individual, confidentiality does not apply. The appropriate resource or authority must be contacted. IF YOU ARE IN A THREATENING OR UNSAFE SITUATION, SEEK HELP IMMEDIATELY.

Office of the Ombuds

The Office of the Ombuds provides a safe place on both campuses for faculty, students, and staff to navigate policies, issues, concerns, and conflicts without fear of reprisal or judgment. In so doing, the Office promotes and embodies an ethical, empathetic, and engaged culture committed to problem-solving, dispute resolution, and workplace wellness. If you are not satisfied with informal attempts at resolving a conflict, you may choose to initiate a grievance process. The Ombuds can give you information about the process but cannot handle or get involved with it. Consulting with the Office of the Ombuds is completely voluntary. All members of the University community have the right to speak with the Office. Retaliation for exercising that right will not be tolerated. The Ombuds can be contacted at (213) 821-9556 or upcombuds@usc.edu.

Office of Civil Rights Compliance

The Office of Civil Rights Compliance (OCRC) deals with Title IX. It is responsible for investigating cases of protected-class discrimination or harassment in the university community and enforcing the university's anti-harassment and non-discrimination policies. OCRC also ensures university compliance and best practices in the implementation of other laws, including equal opportunity requirements. OCRC can be contacted at (213) 740-5086 or ocrc@usc.edu.

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity depends on our collective commitment as a university community. Reporting academic integrity issues helps reinforce academic standards and preserves the value of USC degrees. If faculty suspect academic misconduct on any work that a student submits (in final or draft form), they are required to submit a report to the Office of Academic Integrity (OAI).

Information about the university's academic integrity policies is available in the USC Student Handbook and from the Office of Academic Integrity.

Because PhD students have already earned a bachelor's degree and are enrolled in advanced academic training, they are held to a higher standard of integrity in all academic work. This standard reflects the heightened ethical expectations of advanced scholarship, the student's potential role as a mentor and instructor to others, and the impact of their conduct on the broader research and academic community.

OAI is responsible for investigating and adjudicating academic integrity violations. If OAI determines, by a preponderance of the evidence, that a PhD student has committed an academic integrity violation, there is a presumption that dismissal from the academic program without conferral of the degree is the appropriate outcome. This presumption applies regardless of whether the violation occurred in coursework, research, examinations, or instructional settings.

In such cases, doctoral students are not entitled to a Review Panel under the general disciplinary process. Instead, the findings and determination of responsibility will be referred directly to the student's academic program. The program will issue a decision letter that includes outcomes and any additional information relevant to the student's academic standing. No prior written warning is required to support dismissal under this policy. The program's decision will be provided to OAI for record-keeping, and a transcript notation indicating program dismissal for academic integrity reasons will be entered.

PhD students may not appeal the findings or sanctions through the general academic integrity appeal process. Instead, their sole opportunity to challenge the finding or rebut the presumption of dismissal is through the Academic Dismissal Appeal process described in the Student Handbook.

PhD students are expected to familiarize themselves with the full list of academic integrity standards and examples of violations outlined in the USC Student Handbook, including but not limited to plagiarism, cheating, unauthorized collaboration, falsification, misrepresentation, and misuse of instructional materials. Ignorance of policy or lack of intent is not a valid defense.

In cases where a student has registered for a course on a Pass/No Pass (P/NP) basis and an academic integrity violation has occurred, a penalty letter grade will be assigned when a grading option exists. A Pass or No Pass determination is only issued in these circumstances when a letter grade cannot be issued. A student may not withdraw from a course in which they committed or were accused of committing an academic integrity violation.

The policy related to the use of generative AI (e.g. ChatGPT), collaborations, and discipline-specific professionals for the course homework, projects, and other assignments depends on the course. The students must consult with the course instructor before they use those tools.

Satisfactory Progress, Academic Warning, and Dismissal

Students are expected to maintain satisfactory progress towards their degree. To remain in good standing in the Chemistry PhD program, students must demonstrate satisfactory academic progress toward degree completion. Probation following the end of the first semester is accompanied by a warning letter that failure to reach a 3.00 GPA by the end of the second semester may result in dismissal from the program. These measures are intended to provide students with unsatisfactory grades an opportunity to remedy

the situation. A student that receives a B- or lower in more than one course in the first semester requires special permission by the Department Chair and the GSPAC to remain in the program.

Probation is recommended for students whose GPA is below 3.00 after the first semester if recovery is deemed feasible. Dismissal is recommended when the overall GPA is below 3.00 after two consecutive semesters and is approved by the Graduate School. The department accepts one 4-unit grade of B- if the cumulative GPA is at least 3.00. More than one grade of B- requires that the student repeat one or more classes, as recommended by the GSPAC, to remove probation status. In addition to grades, good academic standing and degree progress requires reaching degree milestones as described in Section III: joining a research group by the end of the second semester, attempting the screening exam by the beginning of the fifth semester, attempting the qualifying exam by the end of the fifth semester, adequately performing all teaching duties, and adhering to USC's rules of conduct.

The department may recommend that the Graduate School places a student on academic probation for failing to comply with any of these components of good academic standing.

If a student has a question or concern about their progress, they should consult with their faculty advisor or PhD program coordinator.

If a student fails to make satisfactory progress, the department chair, program director, or school/college dean will notify them in writing. Written letters should a) explain how the student is falling short of the satisfactory progress standard and b) include specific benchmarks describing how the student can succeed in the program within a reasonable timeframe. Warning letters are sent as early as possible so the student can take advantage of the recommended actions.

Students who do not meet the established benchmarks may be dismissed.

Academic Dismissal Appeal

The USC Student Handbook includes information on how to appeal a dismissal. The Graduate School Dismissal Appeal provides the final consideration of a student's dismissal from a graduate program when the dean of the relevant school has upheld the dismissal. This does not include students who have not met the conditions for continuing registration or those who have violated the Student Code of Conduct. The Graduate School will schedule the appeal once the student provides written verification of dismissal and states in writing that they want to proceed with the appeal within 30 days of the dismissal. For more information, please visit the Graduate School website.

IV. Academic Policies and Procedures

Unit Requirement

The minimum number of units for a doctoral degree is 60, including at least four units of 794ab Doctoral Dissertation. At least 24 units must be completed at USC (excluding Doctoral Dissertation 794).

Graduate students must complete the 24 course units with an overall GPA of at least 3.00 to be in good standing. Some of these units can be satisfied by graduate courses taken prior to entering the program (see section on transferring units). The remaining units must be CHEM 790 (research).

Enrollment Status

To be considered full-time, a doctoral student must be enrolled in at least six units of 500-level and above coursework each semester. Most students enroll in 12 units to make timely progress toward their degree; 16 units constitute the maximum load. Students wishing to carry more than 16 units must have prior

permission from the degree-conferring unit; such permission will be granted only in exceptional circumstances.

There are two exceptions to this six-unit requirement:

1. A student who has completed all coursework for the doctoral degree will be considered full-time during the semester in which the student is preparing for the doctoral qualifying examination, provided the *Appointment or Change of Qualifying Exam or Dissertation Committee* form has been completed and submitted to the program and the student is enrolled in GRSC 800abz, Studies for the Qualifying Examination.

2. Doctoral students who have been advanced to candidacy, that is, who have completed all coursework and have passed the qualifying examination, will be considered full-time when enrolled in 794 Doctoral Dissertation.

Enrollment Information for F-1 and J-1 International Students

F-1 and J-1 international students on student visas who are not enrolled in either GRSC 800abz or 794 must be enrolled in at least six units or receive authorization from the Office of International Services to enroll in fewer than the minimum units. International student with questions about their registration should consult the Office of International Services.
Immigration regulations require F-1 and J-1 student's physical attendance for classes during each fall and spring semester of their program. If the summer term is the student's first or last semester at USC, then physical attendance for classes is also required.
No more than one online class (up to 3 units) per semester can be counted towards the full course of study for an F-1 or J-1 student. If you only need to be registered in one course to complete your degree program during your final term, it must be in-person.

794ab Doctoral Dissertation

794ab Doctoral Dissertation confers full-time enrollment status on students who have been admitted to candidacy. Students are expected to be enrolled in 2 units of 794 each semester, except summer sessions, for a minimum of two semesters, until all degree requirements are completed.
Students are expected to complete and defend their dissertation in less than five semesters of 794. No more than eight units of 794 will be applied toward the PhD degree.

Concurrent Enrollment

If a student is simultaneously enrolled elsewhere, they may not transfer credits to USC without advance permission from the dean of the school that hosts the USC degree program. Failure to obtain permission will invalidate coursework taken during periods of unauthorized concurrent enrollment.

Transfer of Credit

The Degree Progress Department in the Office of Academic Records and Registrar determines whether coursework taken elsewhere is available for transfer credit. The faculty of the student's degree program determines whether such credit is applicable toward a specific graduate degree, subject to approval by the dean of the degree-conferring unit. The faculty will decide by the end of the second year.

Continuous Enrollment

Students are considered to be pursuing advanced degrees only when formally enrolled. PhD students must be enrolled at USC for fall and spring semesters each year until all degree requirements have been satisfactorily completed within the time limit.

During the summer term, all Chemistry PhD students are expected to register for research (CHEM 790) or dissertation (CHEM 794) units, depending on their progress in the program. While formal coursework is not typically required during the summer, students are expected to remain engaged in full-time research activities under the guidance of their research advisor.

Enrollment in graduate-level course work is necessary to meet the continuous enrollment requirement. Graduate students who fail to register are no longer considered to be enrolled in a graduate degree program. After an unauthorized absence, formal readmission is required. Students who have been granted an official leave of absence do not need to apply for readmission following the approved leave. However, students who fail to return at the conclusion of any form of leave without obtaining an approved extension violate the continuous enrollment policy.

A doctoral candidate who has passed the qualifying examination must enroll each fall and spring semester in 794 Doctoral Dissertation until the dissertation has been approved. Students are expected to complete and defend their dissertation in less than five semesters.

Some courses with no academic credit, including 794z, require payment of tuition.

Grade Point Average Requirement

At no time should the overall GPA drop below 3.0. A minimum grade of C (2.0) is required in a course to receive graduate credit. Work graded C- or below is unacceptable for subject or unit credit toward any doctoral program.

Pass/No Pass Coursework

Graduate students may elect to enroll in courses on a pass/no pass basis with department or program approval. However, coursework taken on a pass/no pass basis cannot be applied toward a graduate degree. Students should consult their academic advisors before enrolling in any course on a pass/no pass basis.

Incompletes

An incomplete (IN) is assigned when work is not completed because of a documented illness or another emergency occurring after the 12th week of the semester (or 12th week equivalent for any course scheduled for less than 15 weeks).
If a student receives an incomplete, the instructor will fill out the *Assignment of an Incomplete* (IN) and *Requirements for Completion* form, which will specify the work remaining to be done, the procedures for its completion, the grade in the course to date and the weight to be assigned to the work remaining to be done when computing the final grade.
One calendar year is allowed to complete an IN. A student may not request an IN before the withdrawal deadline, as the course can be dropped. Recommended Definition of Emergency: A situation or event that could not be foreseen, and that is beyond the student's control, and that prevents the student from taking the final examination or completing other work due during the final examination period. Also note that as defined above, a student may not request an IN before the withdrawal deadline; the rationale is that the student still has the option to drop the course until the withdrawal date. The grade of IN exists so there is a remedy for illness or emergency that occurs after the withdrawal deadline.
If the IN is not completed within the designated time, the course is considered "lapsed," the grade is changed to an "IX" and will be calculated into the grade point average as 0 points. Courses offered on a Credit/No Credit basis or taken on a Pass/No Pass basis for which a mark of Incomplete is assigned will be lapsed with a mark of NC or NP and will not be calculated into the grade point average.
Completing the IN within the one-year period should be the student's highest priority. A student may petition the Committee on Academic Policies and Procedures (CAPP) for an extension of time for the

completion of an IN. Extensions beyond the specified time limit are rarely approved if the student has enrolled in subsequent semesters.
In all cases, a petition for an extension of time to complete an IN must have departmental approval and include a statement from the instructor explaining what is needed to complete the course and why the instructor believes the student should be given additional time for completion.

Audited Courses

Students who wish to audit a course at USC must register for the course on Web Registration and select the Audit grade option. Audited courses will not receive credit and will not appear on the USC transcript or grade report. However, tuition is charged, and students should check with their school or program to determine if auditing courses is an option. As noted in the USC Student Handbook, attending a course without being officially registered in it is prohibited.
Units taken for audit do not apply to enrollment status calculation.

Time Limit for Degree Completion

Progress is measured from the beginning of the first course at USC applied toward a specified degree, and all requirements for that degree must be completed within a specified time. The university's time limit for completing the doctoral degree is eight years. For students who earned an applicable master's degree within the five years before admission to the doctoral program, the time limit for completing the doctoral degree is six years from the date of admission to the doctoral program. Approved leaves of absence (up to two years or four semesters) are not counted in the time allowed to complete degree requirements.

Extensions may be granted in extraordinary circumstances. If granted an extension, the dean of the Chemistry PhD Program will allow registration for the specified extension period.

Leaves of Absence, Sick Days, and Bereavement

Students in good standing and making satisfactory progress toward a degree who must interrupt studies for compelling reasons may petition for a leave for a stated period, usually one semester. A leave must be requested before the drop-add deadline and approved by the dean of the degree program, the committee chair, and the department chair or program director. The request should include a plan for academic progress upon return. During the leave period, a student is not entitled to assistance from the faculty or use of university facilities.
If granted, the leave is recorded on the student's transcript, and the leave period is not counted in the time allowed to complete degree requirements. A leave of absence may be allowed for one semester at a time, up to a maximum of four semesters. Students who fail to apply for a leave of absence or for whom a leave has been denied (or has expired) are subject to policies governing continuous enrollment and readmission.
International students should consult with the Office of International Services before considering a leave of absence.

Parental Leave for PhD Students

PhD students are eligible for a one-semester paid parental leave if they:

- Are pregnant or are the primary caregiver of their newborn child or adopted child under six years of age
- Have completed at least one semester in the PhD program and are making good progress
- Were admitted with a Multi-Year Funding Offer (MYFO) letter that includes a four or five-year "package" consisting of support through any combination of teaching assistantship, research assistantship, and fellowship.
- F-1 and J-1 international students must additionally qualify for a medical reduced course load (RCL) if they plan to remain in the U.S. while taking parental leave

Parental leave may be taken during the semester in which the child is born or adopted, or in the semester immediately following. A student on an approved parental leave will receive tuition, fees, and a stipend. The Graduate School provides the base stipend. Schools and programs provide the tuition, fees, and a top-off the base stipend to the level specified in the student's Multi-Year Funding Offer letter.

Students should enroll in GRSC 804 to ensure continued access to health insurance and the monthly stipend. While on parental leave, students are not eligible for federal financial aid. Students with loans should consult with the Office of Financial Aid before beginning parental leave. F-1 and J-1 international students should consult with the Office of International Services to discuss parental leave and ensure there are no unforeseen issues related to their visa status.

Students interested in taking parental leave should consult with the staff graduate advisor in their department or program. The program will submit a petition to the Graduate School and will be asked to provide a copy of the initial funding letter, a statement as the primary caregiver, and one of the following:

- Verification of pregnancy signed by a US doctor (available at USC Student Health Center), or
- Birth certificate for the infant child, or
- Statement of adoption from an adoption agency

Health Leaves for PhD Students

Health Leaves are administered by USC Campus Support and Intervention (CSI) in consultation with the student's program and the Graduate School, pursuant to the university's Student Health Leave of Absence Policy.
PhD students interested in a health leave should meet with a CSI health leave coordinator to develop an individualized health and academic plan. These plans are developed through an interactive process involving the Health Leave Coordinator, the student, the academic unit, and the Graduate School.

F-1 and J-1 international students are eligible to request a health leave. They must meet with an advisor in the Office of International Services (OIS) before finalizing plans for the health leave. Students can either return to their home country or, if a doctor recommends, remain in the U.S. for medical treatment. The student should request the health leave through a CSI health leave coordinator, who works with the student, their healthcare provider, and the Office of International Services (OIS) to determine the necessary steps to approve the leave request.

A paid health leave, including tuition, fees, and at least the minimum stipend, is available for one semester. A second semester covering tuition and fees may be available if necessary. The Vice Provost for Academic Programs must review and approve additional health leaves beyond two semesters.

Sick Days and Bereavement Leave

PhD students may use up to five days of sick leave per Academic Year due to illness or to care for a family member. Students may also have up to five days of bereavement leave per Academic Year for the loss of a family member.

Readmission

A PhD student who leaves the university without obtaining a formal leave of absence, or otherwise violates the continuous enrollment policy, is not automatically readmitted. A student wishing to apply for readmission to a graduate degree program must first obtain the recommendation of the department chair or program director and submit an Application for Readmission to the dean of the degree program.

If the student's cumulative GPA is below 3.0 or if readmission is sought after more than two years of an unapproved absence, the Application for Readmission must be sent to the Graduate School for approval.

The readmission approval process must be completed by the first day of classes for the term in which the resumption of graduate studies is sought. Approvals to be readmitted are based on the academic merits of the student's request and the likelihood of academic success and completion of the degree. If readmitted, the student will be subject to all of the current University Catalogue requirements for the degree in effect at the time of readmission. Individual exceptions to the Catalogue year require the approval of the dean of the degree program. Students seeking readmission after an absence of more than 10 years may be required to reapply to the university.

A student may not be readmitted into a terminated program of study. The student must either be subject to retroactive enrollment or admission to the new program of study with the corresponding catalog requirements.

V. Funding and Financial Support

PhD students at USC benefit from fellowships, assistantships, and scholarships administered by the Graduate School and various academic units.

Graduate Assistant (GA)

GA is an overarching term used to describe Teaching Assistants (TA), Research Assistants (RA), and Graduate Assistant Lecturers (AL). GA appointments include tuition, fees, and a stipend at or exceeding the university's minimum rate. A 50% GA appointment requires an average of 20 hours per week, which is considered "full-time" for a graduate student, as the remaining 20 hours per week should be dedicated to coursework and scholarship leading to the degree. A 33% GA appointment requires an average of 13 hours per week, while a 25% appointment requires an average of 10 hours per week.
GA appointments are confirmed through an official offer letter generated via the university's TARA system or the Dornsife Student Database. The offer letter should be sent to the student at the beginning of the academic year or the start of a semester. These letters must use the standard Graduate School-approved template and detail the length of the appointment, the time commitment, the department's expectations, and benefits. Ideally, the offer letter should include the total stipend the student will receive, including top-offs. The student should sign the letter, which will be shared with the appropriate financial staff and archived by the department or program.
The university requires TAs, RAs, and ALs to be enrolled in a minimum of 6 units every semester or in equivalent full-time courses such as GRSC 800abz or Dissertation 794.

Fellowships

Fellowships provide financial support to PhD students pursuing their degrees. A fellowship is equivalent to a 50% appointment as a Graduate Assistant and includes tuition, fees, and a stipend at or exceeding the university's minimum rate.

PhD students with a fellowship are expected to commit 20 hours per week to their research. PhD students receiving fellowships may not undertake employment or other time-consuming commitments during the academic year from mid-August through mid-May. The Vice Provost for Academic Programs will review exceptions to this policy through the Graduate School's Petition system. Students on fellowships may not receive funding as GAs simultaneously.

External Fellowships

PhD students are encouraged to seek external fellowships and support that encourage intellectual independence and enhance a student's record. The USC Graduate School provides a variety of resources to support PhD students seeking funding, including information sessions, boot camps, and proposal review workshops. Students who receive one of several designated national awards may be eligible for stipend top-offs from the Graduate School.

PhD students applying for external fellowships that are “institutionally limited,” meaning that there is a limit placed on the number of students who can apply, or whose applications require the approval of a university official, should contact the Graduate School well in advance of any deadlines.

Tuition Benefits

A 50% TA, RA, or AL appointment and a fellowship include tuition remission up to 12 units per semester and six units of tuition remission for the summer following the fellowship.
A 33% TA, RA, or AL appointment includes tuition remission up to 10 units per semester of the appointment and five units of tuition remission for the summer following the assignment.
A 25% TA, RA, or AL appointment includes tuition remission up to 8 units per semester of the appointment and four units of tuition remission for the summer following the assignment.
TAs, RAs, and ALs who wish to use tuition units for coursework outside their home program must obtain written approval from their faculty advisor, program director, and the dean of the school. If students do not have prior authorization, they may be responsible for covering the cost of these units. The tuition allowance is non-transferable from semester to semester and will be applied to the student’s account in the amount appropriate for the courses they take.
Students should contact their staff graduate advisor if tuition units are not appropriately credited to their account.

Tuition Refund Insurance

Students should opt out of Tuition Refund Insurance when their tuition is being covered as part of an assistantship or fellowship. If a student has already accepted Tuition Refund Insurance but would like to decline it, they can do so here.

Stipend Distribution

The first stipend of the academic year will generally be available in August. To receive the stipend, students must be registered for classes well in advance of the start of the fall semester. Students are encouraged to work closely with the staff in their programs to ensure their stipend is processed appropriately.
Students switching from Graduate Assistant appointments to a fellowship or vice versa should be aware that the stipend schedules and distributions are different. However, they should still receive the university's mandatory stipend for the academic year.
Stipends are processed through Payroll. Students are highly encouraged to sign up for direct deposit through Workday. Instructions on how to sign up for direct deposit can be found here. Students who do not sign up for direct deposit will have their stipends mailed to the current address listed in myUSC.
International students must also have an up-to-date Glacier account to receive their fellowship stipend.
Stipends are not processed on the same day every month. Students on fellowship should expect the stipend early in the month, while students receiving stipends for GA appointments will receive the stipend towards the end of the month.
Stipends are not considered late until after the 26th of the month.

Summer Support

During the summer semester (mid-May through mid-August), students receiving support as Graduate Assistants (RA, TA, and ALs) with a 50% appointment and PhD students with fellowships may work additional hours beyond the 20-hour maximum, up to an average of 40 hours per week in other on-campus or off-campus roles.

Students who have received offers of full-time employment off-campus during the summer semester may not simultaneously hold positions as Graduate Assistants or PhD Fellows.

Students who wish to decline summer support from USC in favor of full-time off-campus employment or internships will be asked to confirm their decision in writing. This information will be archived in the

student's Advise USC file. International students should review the Office of International Services website for information about Curricular Practical Training.
Students who serve as TAs, RAs, and ALs during the summer receive a stipend and tuition remission proportional to the appointment. The health center fee will also be provided, and the student will have access from the first day of the appointment until the end of the summer. (The spring coverage period for the USC student health insurance includes January through the end of the summer as well.)
Students who are invited to campus for any other sponsored academic purpose, such as a professional development institute, receive access to the student health center from the first day of the academic event until the end of the summer.

Mandatory Fees, Health, and Dental Insurance

Graduate Assistant appointments and fellowships include tuition, a stipend at the university's minimum rate or higher, health and dental insurance, access to the student health center, the Student Programming Fee, Norman H. Topping Student Aid Fund Fee, and the Transportation Fee.
Students who will not be in Los Angeles for the fall and/or spring semester should contact the health insurance office to see if they need to register for satellite health insurance. Students can visit the Student Health website for more information about student health insurance.

Parking and Transit Benefits

PhD students may participate in USC's Student U-Pass program. USC offers PhD students a limited number of permits for 2 or 3 days a week (partial week permits). These passes are available on a first-come, first-served basis. Permits are subject to availability at either UPC (150 campus permits total) - Shrine, Figueroa, and Grand, or HSC (50 campus permits total) - Valley and Lot 71.

Support for Conferences

Details about school or program funding for PhD students to travel to conferences. Chemistry PhD students attending conferences where they present results from their research may be eligible to apply for a departmental travel award. Awards vary by distance and are contingent on the applicant's advisor paying 50% of the expenses, and the awardees must present their research as a poster or a talk. Department funds are limited so students are also encouraged to seek assistance from conference organizers, WiSE, or USC's Graduate Professional Student Senate as well.
Candidates are eligible to receive one award per fiscal year, contingent on availability of funds. In case of limited funds, eligible candidates who have not already been recipients of a Chemistry Travel Award will be given preference. Postdocs are not eligible. Travel and professional development grants may also be available through USC's Graduate Student Government.

Other Types of Support

Scholarships are distinct from fellowships, as they do not include tuition or fees, and the dollar amount does not need to meet the university's minimum stipend requirement. Scholarships are often merit-based and do not require students to be engaged in research or teaching-related activities.
General Awards are credited to students' accounts after all other awards (such as tuition) have been processed. If this creates a credit balance, the excess funds will be automatically sent to the student's bank account, provided they have set up eRefund information in their student account and have no recent checks pending, no ACH payments in process, and no active payment plans. If students have not set up eRefund information, the credit will remain in their account to cover future charges while they remain enrolled. If students do not enroll in the following fall or spring term, once the settlement deadline passes, the university will contact them to verify their mailing address and send a physical check for any remaining balance.

PhD students may occasionally be hired as hourly Graduate Student Workers. The duties of Graduate Assistants (TA, RA, and AL) should be distinct from activities performed by hourly graduate student workers.

Collective Bargaining Agreement

Graduate students at USC are represented by the Graduate Student Workers Organizing Committee-UAW Local 872. All graduate students enrolled at USC who are employed as Teaching Assistants, Assistant Lecturers, Research Assistants, or internally-funded Fellows in STEM programs are considered part of the union. The Collective Bargaining Agreement is available on the Graduate School website.

VI. GA Appointments and Responsibilities

Eligibility

To be eligible to serve as a Teaching Assistant (TA), Research Assistant (RA), or Graduate Assistant Lecturer (AL), students must:

- have been admitted to a graduate degree program with regular graduate standing
- be enrolled full-time
- be in good academic standing with a GPA of no lower than 3.0
- be verified by their home program to be making satisfactory academic progress toward the degree
- have met the university's standards for proficiency in the English language

The university requires TAs, RAs, and ALs to be enrolled in a minimum of 6 units every semester or in full-time equivalent courses such as GRSC 800abz or Dissertation 794.

Types of GA Appointments

Each graduate student will receive an offer letter from the department at the beginning of each semester stating whether they will be paid through an RA or TA position. It is important that the student electronically accepts this offer so the Payroll Office can make the appropriate arrangements. At the end of each semester, students receive an "end of semester" report, generated by the Payroll Office, that must be completed. In some cases, a student may be paid a "stipend" during the summer. There is no offer letter associated with such payments.

Research Assistant

RAs are responsible for the accuracy, validity, and integrity of the research on which they are contributing. The quality of the research reflects on the student, the faculty supervisor, and the university. Deliberate falsification of research results may result in dismissal from the university. RAs must maintain the confidentiality of the faculty mentor's professional activities and research before presentation or publication, in accordance with existing practices and policies in the area of research activity. In the publication and presentation of research produced as an RA, the student must acknowledge the contributions of the faculty supervisor and other members of the research team. RAs should assume responsibility for making proper use of the intellectual, instructional, and physical environment in which they are conducting research. The nature of some research projects may require that the RA be available during holiday periods or semester breaks. Students and their faculty supervisors should discuss expectations and time off before the appointment is accepted.

Teaching Assistant

The responsibilities of TAs are carried out under the established supervision of the departmental faculty. The duties of TAs may include the following: reading course texts and materials, assisting during lectures,

leading discussion sections or lab meetings, holding office hours each week, responding to student concerns, grading course assignments and exams, leading and monitoring lab exercises, participating in regular meetings with supervising faculty and other TAs, designing and leading review sessions, serving as a liaison between the instructor and students, upholding the university's policy on academic integrity, and assisting with the management of the course details. The Center for Excellence in Teaching is a good resource for support and information.
As with faculty at USC, TAs are evaluated by their students. TAs should review evaluations at the end of each semester, after grades have been submitted. TAs are encouraged to keep a record of student feedback for their teaching portfolio.
Students are required to teach a minimum of two semesters during their time in the program. Most students teach two semesters in the first year, and average three to four semesters in total, but this is variable depending on each research group's level of external funding. Exposure to teaching is valued as an essential skill gained during graduate school, and students should take this responsibility seriously.

This section outlines the expectations of TAs in the Chemistry Department. Responsibilities may vary, depending on the course to which the graduate student is assigned. TAs must attend all TA meetings with lab directors or instructors of the course throughout the semester. Each TA will be assigned specific lab or discussion sections associated with a specific course. TAs are responsible for arriving to the laboratory ahead of start time to ensure the space is set up for the undergraduate students and must be fully prepared to lead the students through the experiment. TAs should be familiar with all techniques and instruments that will be used each section and prepared to answer questions that undergraduate students may have. TAs are also responsible for maintaining a safe laboratory environment and will be fully trained in what to do in an emergency during the mandatory TA training. TAs are also responsible for grading the weekly lab reports and posting the scores in the appropriate learning management system.

In addition to the laboratory responsibilities listed above, TAs are responsible for proctoring and grading all midterm exams for the lecture portion associated with the assigned laboratory. Depending on the structure of the course additional grading can be assigned for quizzes, homework or other assignments. These duties will be clearly outlined at the beginning of each semester in a contract that will be signed by the graduate student, the lab director, and the instructor of the course. Questions regarding TA expectations are encouraged and should be directed to the appropriate lab director and course instructor.

Obligation:
All new students must attend mandatory **TA training sessions**, **campus-wide TA Orientation**, and the required **laboratory safety course** during orientation week. International students must participate in an oral interview if English is not their native language. This is required for all international students regardless of visa, residency, citizenship status, or educational background. Any student not demonstrating adequate English proficiency will be required to enroll in the American Language Institute (ALI), which provides courses designed to improve oral and writing skills in English. Units associated with ALI courses count towards the maximum enrollment of 12 units.

Graduate Assistant Lecturer

Assistant Lectureres teach in the Freshman Writing Program, language programs in the Dornsife College of Letters, Arts, and Sciences, the American Language Institute (ALI), and other programs approved by the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs. Assistant lecturers may serve as instructors of record.

Expected Effort

A graduate student's first responsibility is to their doctoral research and studies. For this reason, GA awards cannot exceed 20 hours per week for a 50% appointment or 10 hours per week for a 25% appointment, averaged over a semester. Students receiving a 50% GA appointment may not undertake employment or other time-consuming commitments during the academic year from mid-August through mid-May. Students receiving a 25% GA appointment during the academic year may be eligible for part-time, off-campus employment.

F-1 and J-1 International students with a 25% GA appointment may be eligible for part-time Curricular Practical Training (CPT), if they meet the CPT eligibility requirements, and if academic department signs off on the CPT request. The Vice Provost for Academic Programs reviews exceptions to this policy through the Graduate School's Petition system.

Appointment Periods

Semester	Approximate Start Date	Approximate End Date
Fall	August 16	December 31
Spring	January 1	May 15
Summer	May 16	August 15

Financial Support

All TA, RA, and AL appointments include tuition units, health insurance, access to the student health center, and a stipend. Each year, the Provost sets the base stipend for TAs, RAs, and ALs. Schools, programs, and PIs may offer appointments with higher amounts.

Tuition Remission

The tuition allowance is non-transferable from semester to semester and will be applied to the student's account in the amount appropriate for the courses s/he takes. Students should contact the program of appointment if the tuition is not credited to their account.

A 50% TA, RA, or AL appointment includes tuition remission up to 12 units per semester of the appointment and six units of tuition remission for the summer following the assignment.
A 33% TA, RA, or AL appointment includes tuition remission up to 10 units per semester of the appointment and five units of tuition remission for the summer following the assignment.
A 25% TA, RA, or AL appointment includes tuition remission up to 8 units per semester of the appointment and four units of tuition remission for the summer following the assignment.

Tuition Refund Insurance

Students should opt out of Tuition Refund Insurance when their tuition is being covered as part of an assistantship or fellowship. If a student has already accepted Tuition Refund Insurance but would like to decline in, they can do so here. Students should opt out of Tuition Refund Insurance before late fees are assessed.

Payroll Set Up and Direct Deposit

Stipends are processed through Payroll. Students are highly encouraged to sign up for direct deposit through Workday. Instructions on how to sign up for direct deposit can be found here. Students who do not sign up for direct deposit will have their stipends mailed to the current address listed in myUSC. International students must also have an up-to-date Glacier account to receive their fellowship stipend.

Workday is USC's human resources, benefits, payroll, and performance management system. It is designed to modernize and improve the way USC delivers key services to staff and faculty. Workday includes features that allow students to manage personal information: payroll deductions, address changes, etc. To access Workday, students must fill out forms with Human Resources. Most first year

students do this during orientation week, but if changes need be made, the Human Resources office is in the Allan Hancock Foundation building (AHF) room 108.

GA-related Warning and Dismissal

PhD students serving as a GA may be disciplined, suspended or discharged for absenteeism; lateness; failure to adhere to stated course or research deadlines; failure to aid in the preparation of course or research materials; failure to hold sections, labs, or office hours; failure to grade, failure to perform assigned lab duties, willful abandonment of teaching or research assignments; failure to comply with applicable policies. Students and their faculty supervisors should discuss expectations and time off before the appointment is accepted. Discipline will only be for just cause and each case will be taken very seriously, recognizing that the Collective Bargaining Unit also may need to be involved.
When possible, a conference meeting will be held with the student and their supervisor before a suspension or discharge. The student may request to have Union representation present at the conference meeting. The University will notify the student and the Union in writing of the issuance of discipline or any investigative leave.

VII. Tax Information

Taxable Income and Withholding

General tax information for PhD students is available on the Student Financial Services website. USC staff cannot provide tax advice. We strongly advise students to contact the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) or consult with a tax professional for tax-related questions.

International Student Considerations

International students may wish to consult the Office of International Services (OIS) website, which offers general information about tax exemptions, tax-related forms, and access to Sprintax, a tax preparation software. OIS cannot advise on tax-related issues. Students should consult with a qualified tax professional for individual assistance.

Graduate Students Supported by Fellowships

The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) provides information regarding the tax treatment of fellowship awards. The IRS also provides information regarding the 1098-T form. Some education-related items that are included in your fellowship may not be taxable, for example, tuition remission. Other items, such as living expenses including room and board, transportation, and entertainment, are generally considered taxable.
While receiving a fellowship, domestic students will not receive a W-2 form. However, according to the IRS, you must report all taxable amounts, whether or not you received a Form W-2. If you have taxable income from your fellowship, you may need to make estimated tax payments. For more information, see Pub. 505, Tax Withholding and Estimated Tax, and the IRS help on estimated taxes.
International students (non-resident aliens for tax purposes) on fellowship receive their stipends through University Payroll Services. The stipend may be treated as taxable income by the IRS. Therefore, the university may be obligated to withhold income taxes. The amount of this tax withholding depends on the individual's circumstances, including their total stipend and the status of the tax treaty between their home country and the United States. Tuition remission provided to an international student on fellowship is not taxable.

Graduate Students Supported by Graduate Assistantships

The stipends provided via the University Payroll Services to domestic and international students who are serving as TA’s, RA’s, and AL’s are treated as taxable income by the Internal Revenue Service.

Therefore, the university may be obligated to report the income and withhold income taxes. The amount of this tax withholding depends on the individual circumstances of the student, including the total stipend, the instructions provided by the student on Form W-4, and, if an international student, the status of the tax treaty between their home country and the United States, as well as Form 8233. Tuition remission provided to a TA, RA, or AL is not reportable or taxable.

Students Hired as Graduate Student Workers (Hourly)

The payment that domestic and international students receive as hourly graduate student workers is treated as taxable income by the Internal Revenue Service. The amount of this tax withholding depends upon the individual circumstances of the student, including the total amount paid per pay period, the instructions provided by the student on Form W-4, and, if an international student, the status of the tax treaty of their tax residence country and the completion of IRS Form 8233.

VIII. Health Insurance and Health Center Access

The Engemann Student Health Center website provides information about the USC health insurance, on-campus medical services, student counseling services, and wellness. Students can also make appointments through the website. The Engemann Student Health Center is used primarily by students based at UPC.

The Eric Cohen Student Health Center website provides information about the USC health insurance, on-campus medical services, student counseling services, and wellness. Students can also make appointments through the website. The Eric Cohen Student Health Center is used primarily by students based at HSC.

IX. Academic Calendar

Holidays

PhD students with graduate assistantship (GA) appointments will observe the academic holiday schedule. If a student serving as a GA is unable to observe a holiday due to the obligations of their appointment, they will be provided with an alternative day off instead of the missed holiday during the same semester, with the advance agreement of their designated faculty supervisor and, as needed, the Director of Graduate Studies.

X. Resources, Support, and Problem Resolution

Child Care Fund

A childcare subsidy of up to $1,800 is available per semester for each child under the age of six. The subsidy is considered taxable income and is subject to reporting on the appropriate forms. The student is solely responsible and liable for any tax liability resulting from the subsidy provided to the student or their dependent.

If a student has a loan, particularly Direct Loans, the Child Care grants could reduce the student’s loan eligibility. Students should contact the Financial Aid Office to confirm.

International students should note the following:

- To remain eligible for this grant, students must maintain valid F-1 or J-1 status, and their dependents must maintain F-2 or J-2 status.
- This grant cannot be used as proof of funding for bringing dependents (spouse and/or children) to the U.S. under F-2 or J-2 status. Information regarding proof of funding for dependents is available on the Office of International Services website.
- J-1 students who receive this grant must request a new DS-2019 with updated funding information by submitting a Financial Update Request through the Trojan International Portal. Once processed, a new DS-2019 will be issued.
- Students in F-1 status on post-completion Optional Practical Training (OPT) or STEM OPT Extension, as well as J-1 students on post-completion Academic Training, are not eligible to apply for or receive this grant.

Child Care Fund Eligibility Criteria

The student must be a graduate student worker in the union bargaining unit in the semester in which the provider expense was incurred. Applicants must furnish supporting documentation as reasonably requested by USC. Eligible childcare providers include:

- A licensed childcare center
- A licensed family childcare provider
- A licensed after-school program
- A daytime summer camp program
- An in-home provider with a Social Security or Tax I.D. number. An in-home provider cannot be a spouse, relative, child under age 19, or anyone who lives in the same household as the student. Nannies and nanny shares are covered if the caregiver has a valid Social Security number or Tax ID Number.

Funds are not available for overnight camp, team registration fees, extracurricular activities, or club sports. The program's primary intent must be to provide childcare while the parent is working. Summer programs can be considered a childcare program if they meet the requirements above.

Applications are processed in the order received. Applications will not be accepted or processed when funds for the academic year have been exhausted. More information is available on the Graduate School Website.

Short Term Hardship Grant

Short-term hardship grants are available to students with dependents. Grants are subject to a cap of $2,500 per graduate student worker per semester. Grants may not be used for expenses that are covered by another fund or account. The grant is taxable income and is therefore subject to taxation and reporting on the appropriate forms. The student is solely responsible and liable for any tax liability resulting from the grant.

Short Term Hardship Eligibility

The student must be a graduate student worker in the bargaining unit in the semester in which the provider expense was incurred. The student must have a dependent, and they must furnish supporting documentation as reasonably requested by USC.

Hardships may include, but are not limited to, events resulting from a sudden or unexpected illness, imminent loss of housing, loss of property due to natural disaster, or medical, dental, and vision expenditures not covered by any other source.

If the dependent is covered by a health insurance plan, unanticipated emergency or short-term out-of-pocket expenses are not covered by the insurance plan. If the dependent is not covered by a health insurance plan, unanticipated emergency or short-term out-of-pocket medical expenses incurred by the Graduate Student Worker.

Applications are processed in the order received. Applications will not be accepted or processed when funds for the academic year have been exhausted. More information is available on the Graduate School Website.

Resources for International Students

The Office of International Services (OIS) supports F-1 and J-1 international students, helping them maintain immigration status, navigate complex immigration regulations, and succeed academically and personally. Key services include immigration advising, travel advising, and guidance on employment rules, such as on-campus work, CPT, and OPT.

With expertise in F-1 & J-1 immigration regulations, OIS advisors collaborate with government agencies and university departments to ensure students comply with their visa requirements while at USC.
For more information, please visit the OIS website at ois.usc.edu.

OIS advisors are available for one-on-one meetings daily via Zoom - no appointment is necessary :

- Mondays, Wednesdays, & Fridays: 1 PM-3 PM
- Tuesdays & Thursdays: 10 AM-12 PM
- J-1 advisors are available Tuesdays, Wednesdays, & Thursdays

Lactation Support

PhD students have access to spaces for expressing and storing breast milk. Rooms on the UPC and HSC campus are listed here.

American Language Institute

Many international students are from countries where English is not spoken as a native language. The American Language Institute (ALI) provides classes and other resources to assist international undergraduate and graduate students in improving their English and adapting to an American university program. Before they can be cleared to begin teaching at USC, all international Teaching Assistants are required to take part in a training program run by ALI.

Center for Excellence in Teaching

The Center for Excellence in Teaching (CET) is the university's think tank for innovative teaching. As a faculty-led initiative, CET draws upon the talents of experienced faculty to promote a commitment to excellence in teaching, learning, and scholarship. CET provides training and resources to improve teaching at USC, including supporting faculty and Teaching Assistants as they devise new courses and develop enriching out-of-class activities. CET offers seminars and lectures throughout the semester on a variety of topics and provides a training session at the beginning of each semester for Teaching Assistants.

Library Resources

Accessibility Training for Teaching Assistants at USC

Organized and developed by a collaboration between the Undergraduate Student Government (USG), Graduate Student Government (GSG), and USC Libraries as a resource for accessibility training for teaching assistants.

Accommodations

The University provides reasonable accommodations to PhD students who are disabled or become disabled and need reasonable accommodations to perform the essential functions of their job. More information is available from USC's Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS).

Graduate Student Government

The mission of GSG is to enhance the graduate and professional student experience by serving as the face of the student body. GSG is responsible for managing student resources efficiently, providing a voice for the student community, building a community that fosters interdisciplinary exchanges, and informing students about their rights, resources, and opportunities. Elected officers, senators who represent all schools and departments, and special interest committees tackle issues specific to graduate and professional students and provide venues for interaction beyond the academic realm. An Executive Board of 29 officers is selected every spring by the GSG senators and outgoing executive board members. The Executive Board oversees the daily operations of GSG and works closely with the Senate to promote graduate and professional student interests within the USC administration and academic departments.

More information is available from the Graduate Student Government website.

Other Support

Campus Support and Intervention (CSI)
CSI connects with members of the USC community when they need support in achieving their academic, professional, and personal goals.
(213) 740-0411
uscsupport@usc.edu

USC Kortschak Center for Learning and Creativity
KCLC offers outreach, programming, and individual coaching services to USC students and departments to promote a campus-wide understanding of learning differences and their potential to facilitate creativity and academic excellence.
(213) 740-7884
kortschakcenter@usc.edu

Office of the Ombuds
Available to faculty, staff, and students experiencing University-related concerns, conflicts, or challenging situations.
(213) 821-9556 (University Park Campus)
upcombuds@usc.edu
(323) 442-0341 (Health Sciences Campus)
hscombuds@usc.edu

Counseling and Mental Health
Provides counseling and support for all students.
(213) 740-9355 (WELL)

Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS)
Provides support services for individuals with disabilities.
(213) 740-0776 (University Park Campus)
(323) 442-1000 (Health Sciences Campus)
osasfrontdesk@usc.edu

XI. Post-Graduation

Accessing Your Dissertation

The dissertation manuscript will be available for search and download from the USC Digital Library shortly after completing all of the steps in the Thesis Center, or after any requested restriction expires.

Official Transcripts and Diploma

The Registrar's Office oversees the distribution of university diplomas and transcripts, in compliance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Most diplomas are mailed to the permanent address on record six to eight weeks after a degree is conferred. More information is available on their website.

XII. Program Appendix

Departmental Administration and Contact Information

The office of the Department Chair is responsible for the administration of all teaching, research, and service functions. Vice-Chairs, members of the Executive Committee, and the Department Administrator, who is the chief administrator for the staff, work closely with the Chair. Policies and procedures for the department have been developed through a consultative process utilizing input from various departmental standing committees, faculty, staff, and students. Policies and procedures are developed and maintained in accordance with campus and university policies and procedures, such as those set forth by the Graduate School. Every attempt has been made to ensure that the information is accurate as of July 2025.

Department Chair:
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Vice-Chair:
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Department Administrator:
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(213) 740-7036

Graduate Program Administrator:
Claudia Cortez

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(213) 740-6855

Administrative Directory

Main Office:

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Graduate Program: chemgrad@usc.edu

Student Affairs:

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Computer Consultant
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Computer Support
USC ITS, (213) 740-5555, consult@usc.edu

Graduate Student Postdoc Advising Committee:
(GSPAC)

Magan Fieser (Inorganic)
(213) 821-4228, fieser@usc.edu

Surya Prakash (Organic-Materials, co-chair)
(213) 740-5984, gprakash@usc.edu

Peter Qin (Chemical Biology & Physical-Theoretical, co-chair)
(213) 821-2461, pzq@usc.edu

Shops and Facilities Directory

Department Safety Officer:

Corey Schultz
Director of Facilities and Safety
SSC 4th, (213) 740-7037, cschultz@usc.edu

Undergraduate Labs:

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Xiaojun Zhang,
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VWR Lab Store:
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darrell.karrfalt@avantorsciences.com

Glass Shop:
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Director Glass Shop
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Machine Shop: 6:30AM-2:30PM M-F
Seth Wieman
Industrial Design Engineer
KAP Basement B-1B, (213) 740-6111, wieman@usc.edu

Electronics Shop:
Joseph Lim
Electronics Technician
LJS 157, (213) 740-4104, lim760@usc.edu

Department Services

Department E-mail Address: All graduate students are required to obtain a USC email account. This is our primary way of sending you announcements and information. Only your USC e-mail will be used for departmental and USC-related correspondence, so be sure to check it regularly. If you use a personal account (Yahoo, Gmail, etc.), make sure that USC-generated messages are not intercepted by a spam filter.

Mail and Mailboxes: After joining a research group, you will be assigned a mailbox in the appropriate building. This is for departmental notices, campus mail, and professional mail that pertains to your role as a graduate student. Personal mail and packages should be received at your home address. You are expected to check your mail regularly. Mail left for more than 30 days, or that does not fit in your mailbox due to overflow, will be recycled. As a default, mail may be sent to the main office (3620 S. McClintock, SGM 401, Los Angeles, CA 90089-1062; or SGM 401, MC 1062).

Copiers: The copy machine in the main office is there to support your teaching responsibilities. Use your lab resources for research materials. If you experience a problem with the copier (jam, paper outage, error message, etc.), follow the instructions on the screen. Notify the Department Administrator if the problem persists or if there is no more paper in the mail room; extra paper is typically stored in the mail room of the main office.

Fax: There are fax machines in the department's satellite offices and in the main office (SGM 401). The fax number for the SGM 401 location is (213) 740-2701. Please ask the office staff for assistance. If you receive a fax, it will be sent to you as a pdf through email.

Keys: First-year students will be issued keys to their teaching labs from their respective lab managers. These keys must be returned at the end of the semester. After selecting a research advisor, students should request keys to the appropriate building and lab/office space. These requests should be sent through the advisor to Corey Schultz (SGM 450, cschultz@usc.edu), who will procure them from the university lock shop. These keys should be returned to your advisor upon graduation.

Room Reservations: The Department maintains meeting rooms that can be reserved by contacting the respective administrators below. When using these facilities, students are responsible for leaving them clean, in their original configuration, lights off, and locked.

- SGM460: Michele Dea (michele@usc.edu)
- SSC604: Diana Cervantes (dianac26@usc.edu)
- OCW214: Em Thielman (edebeer@usc.edu)

Facilities Management Services (FMS): It is the responsibility of all who use department labs and resources to clean and maintain them. However, it is understood that additional maintenance is required at times. For technical issues with projectors and related equipment in departmental meetings rooms, contact the Director of Instructional Computing or Computer Consultant. For issues related to lighting, air conditioning, flooring, etc. contact FMS, or the Department Safety Officer, depending on the issue. For maintenance issues in your lab, office, common areas of buildings, or surrounding areas, FMS should be contacted directly. Requests may be made at: https://fpm.usc.edu or by calling (213) 740-6833 during business hours.

The Week Ahead: A weekly bulletin of announcements and information entitled "The Week Ahead" is sent to all members of the department. Topics include: announcements of general interest, awards to faculty and students, seminars, departmental, Dornsife, and USC-wide meetings, ACS meetings, etc.

General Academic Policies and Procedures

Academic policies and procedures set by the Graduate School apply to all graduate students. Additional policies and procedures are set by the department. Campus-wide policies can be found in the General Catalogue of the Office of the Registrar and the Graduate School.

Changing Degree Objective:

Students in the PhD program who elect to switch to the Master's program should discuss this with the GSPAC, their Research Advisor, and their Thesis Committee. If the student still wishes to change the degree objective, a Change of Degree Status petition must be submitted to the Graduate School by the Graduate Program Administrator.

Registration

Students register for classes via Web Registration through the https://my.usc.edu portal. Instructions are available at the Office of the Registrar website. It is the student's responsibility to consult Web Registration each semester for schedules and deadlines concerning registration and enrollment. It is essential to register for courses on time. If students foresee a problem, contact the Graduate Program Administrator for help. All graduate students are expected to maintain a course load of at most 12 units each semester. Students who do not enroll in at least 6 units by the posted deadline will incur a $100 fee for late registration. (https://arr.usc.edu/registration).

Verification of Graduate Student or Employment Status

Students requiring verification of enrollment, student status, employment status, or financial support for housing, visa, student loans, childcare or other personal reasons may request a letter from the Graduate Program Administrator. Requests must be made at least one week prior to the date the verification letter is needed and must be made by the student. Letters should be picked up from the Graduate Program Administrator during regular business hours on or after the agreed upon date.

Colloquia and Seminars:

The Chemistry department hosts a variety of seminars and colloquia throughout the year. Each section hosts a topical seminar series on a specified day of the week as follows:

- Physical/Theoretical – Monday
- Inorganic – Tuesday
- Organic/Materials – Wednesday
- Chemical Biology – Thursday
- Department Colloquia/Named Lectures –Friday

All graduate students are required to attend the seminar series in their research area. Seminars are posted to the shared calendar (https://dornsife.usc.edu/chemistry/event-calendar/) with upcoming seminars announced through "The Week Ahead" e-mail sent each week. All students are required to attend departmental colloquia and named lectures. These include:

- George A. Olah Lecture in Chemistry
- Carl M. Franklin Lecture on Science and Society
- Anton Burg Memorial Lecture
- John Stauffer Distinguished Lecture in the Sciences

Health and Safety

In addition to the information below, USC offers services aimed at maintaining a safe environment and increasing student awareness and comfort. Students may sign up to receive campus alerts via the Trojans Alert System and request a Lyft when walking at night.

Department of Chemistry Safety Practices and Policies

Safety**:** Safety is of paramount importance in the Department. Ensuring a safe work environment is a shared responsibility of all students, postdocs, faculty, and administrators. The Department sup- ports a strongly proactive approach to safety concerns.
Training: USC Environmental Health and Safety offers classes that deal with general lab safety, blood borne pathogens, radiation, and x-rays. Any person working in a department lab must, at minimum, take the appropriate general lab safety class prior to beginning work. Additionally, each research advisor is responsible for ensuring specific training and practices germane to the group's research. Safety Data Sheets (SDS), formerly known as Materials Safety Data Sheets (MSDS), describing the properties of various chemicals are available to the USC research community at the SDS Website. SDSs for many common chemicals are also available at the Sigma Aldrich website.
First-Aid: First Aid cabinets are located within the research labs. Corey Schultz is the Department Safety Coordinator. He has information about first aid assistance.
Hazard Reporting: Unsafe conditions in any workspace should be reported to Corey Schultz or the Chair. Forms for reporting hazards or unsafe conditions are at: https://chem.usc.edu/safety_concerns/index.html.

University Safety Practices and Policies

Environmental Health and Safety: The office of Environmental Health and Safety (EH&S) is committed to promoting a safe and healthy environment for research, instruction, and the campus com- munity. EH&S assists the campus meet its obligations for compliance with State and Federal health, safety, and environmental regulations through education, auditing and monitoring, technical consultation, and provision of direct services,

Injury and Illness Prevention Program (IIPP): The IIPP is the most important health and safety regulation/program in California. The IIPP law is administered by the California Occupational Safety and Health Administration (Cal-OSHA). It requires employers to establish the following foundation safety program elements that apply to all workers regardless of their job duties:

1. Ensure that workers are trained in, and comply with, safe work practices.
2. Inspect for and correct unsafe/unhealthy work conditions as soon as possible.
3. Maintain documentation of all training and inspections.
4. Encourage workers to report unsafe conditions at https://ehs.usc.edu /report-a-safety concern-form/without fear of reprisal.
5. Communicate safety issues in a way that is understandable to all workers.
6. Report and investigate all occupational injuries.

Handling and Reporting Incidents

Procedures for responding to fire, chemical exposure, medical, and other emergencies are outlined below. This information is also available in the USC 1-2-3 Serious Injury Reporting Flyer and EH&S Emergency Notification Fact Sheet, posted on the wall of each lab and office. In case of emergency and/or injury, the incident should be reported to your supervisor or lab manager and the Department Safety Coordinator or Chairperson. When an emergency occurs, a system is in place to handle it. The Department of Public Safety (DPS) immediately notifies the proper internal/external departments and agencies (e.g. Environmental Health and Safety, Fire Safety, LAFD, LAPD, and LA County HazMat) to respond and assist. In case of emergency, do the following:

1. Notify DPS immediately: UPC (213) 740-4321; HSC (323) 442-1000.
2. Give the following information: your name, call-back number, location (campus, building, room number), nature of the emergency. Describe in detail, including names of injured parties if possible.
3. Notify USC EH&S within 8 hours: (323) 442-2200, USC must report serious injury or illness to Cal-OSHA within 8 hours.
4. Report the emergency to your supervisor and the Department Safety Coordinator
5. Complete Workers' Compensation form: If you are injured, you (or responsible agent) must complete the Employee's Claim form for Workers' Compensation Benefits (DWC-1).

Substance Abuse and Smoking Policies

The USC Drug Free Policy recognizes that illegal or abusive use of alcohol and other drugs by members of the university community has a detrimental effect on the university's commitment to provide excellence in teaching and research. Misuse of alcohol and drugs by USC students, faculty, and staff poses hazards both to the individuals involved and to the community. Students, faculty, and staff share responsibility for creating an environment conducive to eliminating alcohol and drug abuse in the university community. Unauthorized use, possession or distribution of alcohol, tobacco products, unauthorized or illegal drugs, or drug-related paraphernalia in the university community or at university-sponsored activities is prohibited. See https://policy.usc.edu/drug-free.

It must be clearly understood by all students that chemistry lab work carries significant safety and facility risk, and the level of risk is heightened following the consumption of alcohol or other drugs. Individuals under the influence of alcohol or drugs must not perform any laboratory work. Alcohol and drugs impair a person's ability to make sound decisions and judgments. With their decision- making ability seriously impaired, any person working while intoxicated could make grievous errors. It is Department policy that no lab work at the instructional or research level be performed by individuals under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Persons under 21 years of age are prohibited to possess or consume alcohol. Official identification may be required to verify that a person has attained the legal age for possessing or consuming alcohol. Many undergraduate students are under 21 years of age. As a result, uncontrolled access to alcohol in departmental areas accessible to students under 21 years of age, such as classrooms, meeting rooms, and offices, is prohibited. Any type of food and beverage storage or consumption in instructional and research labs is also prohibited.