

***PhD Student
Handbook***
2025-2026

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Introduction

The PhD in Mathematics and Applied Mathematics

Our rigorous 5-year program begins with foundational coursework that prepares students to demonstrate mastery through written comprehensive examinations. After this, students work closely with one of our distinguished research faculty to reach the frontier of knowledge in their chosen field. Thus equipped and with ongoing guidance from their advisor, students forge a path to new results through original research. The program culminates with the student's written dissertation, oral defense, and the conferral of Doctorate of Philosophy.

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.

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.

Faculty Leaders and Staff Members

Sami Assaf

Director of Graduate Studies (DGS)
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Contact Prof. Assaf for questions about exceptions to degree requirements (course waivers or substitutions), travel awards, suggestions for program improvement, or concerns about your T.A. experience.

Susan Sath Vaswani

Academic Program Manager (APM)
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Contact Susan for questions about registration, degree requirements, assistantship activation, campus resources, or other academic matters.

Jonah Cano

Student Services Assistant
jonahcan@usc.edu

Contact Jonah for printing requests, general classroom reservations, picking up exams or homework, issues with the building facilities, or checking out/returning textbooks for courses you are a TA for.

Adriana Del Villar

Administrative Assistant
adrianac@usc.edu

Contact Adriana for reimbursements you were approved to receive.

Chaunté Williams

Administrative Assistant
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Contact Chaunté to reserve one of the Department's rooms for events, your oral qualifying exam, or dissertation defense.

Michael Shields

Computer Consultant Specialist
mshields@usc.edu

Contact Michael (or Jonah) if you are experiencing technical issues with the Grad Lounge Printers.

Cymra Haskell

Director of Math Center
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Prof. Haskell manages the Math Center where Teaching Assistants (TA's) hold their office hours.

Paul Tokorcheck

Director of Undergraduate Studies
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If your students ask about their undergraduate requirements, please refer them to their academic advisors who work closely with Prof. Tokorcheck.

Sheel Ganatra

Department Chair
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Contact Prof. Ganatra for department level concerns.

Ph.D. Requirements

The Math Department offers two doctoral programs: Mathematics Ph.D. (MATH) and Applied Mathematics Ph.D. (AMAT). While the overall structure of the programs is the same, the specific requirements differ in places as noted. The major milestones for the programs are:

- Written Screening Exams
- Required Courses
- Advisor Selection
- Oral Qualifying Exam
- Thesis Defense

The expected timelines for these milestones are illustrated in the graphic on the next page.

USC Mathematics - Ph.D. Program Timeline														
YEAR 1			YEAR 2			YEAR 3			YEAR 4			YEAR 5		
Fall	Spring	Summer	Fall	Spring	Summer	Fall	Spring	Summer	Fall	Spring	Summer	Fall	Spring	Summer
Qual Courses 3 Core Courses			Complete Remaining Required Courses 5 from MATH / AMAT Electives Options					Complete Math 794a and Math 794b Continue with Math 794c, 794d, 794z, ...						
Screening Exam 1 Qual			Remaining Written Exams 2 Quals											
			Masters Degree Courses & Exams											
Talk with Faculty Attend Area Seminars			Choose an advisor			MATH Oral Exam + Research proposal			AMAT Oral Exam + Partial thesis					
						Prove Amazing New Theorems! Write publishable papers!								
												Write Dissertation		
												Thesis Defense Congratulations!		

Written Exams

Our comprehensive written exams cover material often taught in one of our foundational courses. Each instance of the associated course(s) covers a subset of the exam topics, so students generally must study additional topics independently to prepare for the exams. Exams are offered twice per year, in August and in January the week before classes begin.

All Ph.D. students must pass, at the Ph.D. level, exams in THREE core subject areas. Requirements differ by program.

Mathematics (MATH)	Applied Mathematics (AMAT)
<p>Choose THREE of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Algebra: based on Math 510ab • Analysis: based on Math 525a • Partial Differential Equations: based on Math 555a • Probability: based on Math 505a • Topology: based on Math 540a 	<p>Must do all THREE of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis: based on Math 525a • Partial Differential Equations: based on Math 555a • Probability: based on Math 505a

The 6 companion classes listed are commonly referred to as “qual courses”.

Screening Exam

The department or program will administer the screening examination before the student completes 24 units. Students must pass this procedure to continue in the PhD program. If students fail the screening procedure, they will be dismissed from the PhD program without a written warning. Students who fail the screening examination are entitled to appeal pursuant to the Academic Dismissal Appeal procedure set forth on page 16 of this Handbook.

To complete the screening exam, all Ph.D. students must pass, at the Ph.D. level:

- One exam by August after their 1st year
- ALL three subject exams by August after their 2nd year

Students may be given additional time to complete exams if they are otherwise in good standing and are making steady progress toward completing the exam requirements.

Advisors

All students are assigned a temporary advisor in their first year in the general area of their interests. Students should find a regular advisor by the end of their 2nd year, and certainly by December of their 3rd year. There is no one way to find an advisor. We suggest students:

- Attend classes taught by various faculty in their field(s) of interest
- Regularly attend area seminars
- Discuss advisors with more senior Ph. D. students
- Speak with faculty in office hours or at departmental tea
- Request a reading course (Math 590) with a faculty member on a special topic

The student-advisor relationship is much like an apprenticeship, so a good fit between the student and advisor is important. We recommend students keep an open mind about their research area in order to find the best advisor.

Qualifying Exam and Committees

After completion of the screening procedure, the student must form a qualifying exam committee. The committee must consist of

- Committee chairperson who must be the advisor; the committee chair must have an appointment in the student's program
- Three additional faculty in Mathematics
- One faculty member at USC outside of Mathematics ("outside member")

Qualifying Exam Committee

The qualifying exam committee is responsible for supervising the student's preparation for the exam and for the fair and timely administration and evaluation of the written and oral parts of the examination.

The *Appointment or Change of Qualifying Exam or Dissertation Committee* form, available on the [Graduate School website](#), establishes the committee for the qualifying exam. The form requires the signatures of each committee member, the department chair or program director, the dean or the dean's designee.

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 may invalidate the examination.

The examinations must be scheduled when it is possible for all committee members, including the outside member, to participate. All qualifying exam committee members may participate remotely.

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.

Outcomes of the Qualifying Exam

There are three possible results of a qualifying exam:

- A. Pass, and proceed to candidacy based on a favorable vote by a majority of committee members.
- B. Fail, with the option to retake either specific sections of the exam or the whole exam, at the discretion of a majority of the committee. **The student should not be required to repeat parts of the qualifying examination passed on the first administration.** The retaking of a failed qualifying examination or any portion of a qualifying exam must occur between one and six months from the date of the first examination. **If not otherwise enrolled, the student must be enrolled in GRSC 800abz Studies for the Qualifying Examination in the term in which any portion of the exam is repeated.**
- C. Fail, resulting in dismissal from the program. If a majority of the committee concludes that the written portion of the exam is so weak that the oral portion cannot compensate for it, the student does not proceed to the oral portion, and the exam is failed. **The committee may provide the option of a retake, but is not required to do so.** If a majority of the committee determines that a retake is not warranted, the student will be dismissed from the program.

A student may not take the comprehensive or qualifying examination more than twice and must be appropriately enrolled at USC during the semester in which any such examination is taken or retaken. A student who fails the qualifying examination a second time will be dismissed from the degree program at the end of the semester in which the second examination was taken. No exceptions are permitted.

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.

The qualifying exam consists of written and oral components. Requirements for the written component differ by program.

Mathematics (MATH)	Applied Mathematics (AMAT)
<p>The student prepares a research proposal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Expository summary of the background of the research area• Precise statement of the problem on which the student proposes to work• Approximately 8-10 pages in length• Including relevant references <p>Partial results are not required.</p>	<p>The student prepares a partial thesis with</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Expository summary of the background of the research area• Precise statements and proofs of preliminary results• Outline for proposed new work• Approximately 8-10 pages in length• Including relevant references

The written component must be submitted to the qualifying exam committee **at least one week before the oral component.**

The oral component consists of a presentation by the student defending/discussing this proposal and an examination by the committee.

The deadline for completing the Oral Qualifying Exam differs by program.

Mathematics (MATH)	Applied Mathematics (AMAT)
Completed within 6 months after completion of the written screening exams, and <i>no later than the end of the 3rd year.</i>	Completed within 3 semesters after completion of the written screening exams, and <i>no later than the end of the 4th year.</i>

NOTE: Students must have earned 24 units of graduate MATH courses (500-level or 600-level) at USC before they are eligible to complete the qualifying exam. It's recommended to complete all required courses first. Students are welcome to begin research before passing the qualifying exam if

they are ready. Beginning research before completing the qualifying exam is required for AMAT students.

Before taking the qualifying examination, the student must have met all of the university's and program's requirements for the PhD degree, except the dissertation. The student must have a GPA of at least 3.0 on all USC coursework available for graduate credit and the approval of their qualifying exam committee to proceed to the exam.

Steps to complete the qualifying exam:

1. In addition to your advisor, find four other faculty members for your qualifying exam committee. One of your committee members must come from outside the Math department, but still in USC.
2. Set a date and time for your oral qualifying exam that works for all committee members. The oral qualifying exam can be completed remotely via Zoom. If it's done in person, email the Academic Program Manager (sath@usc.edu) to schedule a room.
3. *At least 2 weeks before your oral exam date*, email the list of your committee members and their USC email addresses to the APM, who will use DocuSign to obtain electronic signatures required on the "[Appointment or Change of Qualifying Exam](#)" form.
4. *At least 1 week before your oral exam date*, email the written proposal to your committee.
5. Defend/discuss your proposal on the oral exam date with your committee.
6. Your committee will complete and sign the "Report on PhD Qualifying Exam" form to indicate if you passed. A copy of the completed form will be given to you. Please save it for your records.
7. After passing the Ph.D. Qualifying Exam, you must register in Math 794a if you pass before the add/drop deadline of the semester. If you pass after the semester's add/drop deadline, you must register in Math 794a the following semester.
8. Registration in Doctoral Dissertation courses (Math 794a, 794b, 794c, 794d, 794z) is required until the dissertation is submitted and processed by USC's Thesis Center.

Dissertation and Defense

Following completion of the screening exam and approval of a dissertation topic by the chair of the student's qualifying exam committee, the student proceeds with research towards the dissertation. 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 Ph.D. thesis, based on a substantial amount of original research conducted by the student, must be defended, and approved by the dissertation committee.

The dissertation committee must have at least three, but no more than 5, members. The committee must consist of

- Committee Chair who must be the advisor; the committee chair must have an appointment in the student's program
- One to three additional faculty in Mathematics
- One faculty member at USC outside of Mathematics ("outside member")

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.

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."

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* form 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.

Steps to defend and submit your dissertation:

1. After forming your dissertation committee, set a date and time for your dissertation defense that works for all committee members.
 - a. The dissertation chair must attend in person, but other members can join remotely. If the dissertation chair must attend remotely, email the APM (sath@usc.edu) at least 2 weeks before the defense date. The APM will submit a petition to The Graduate School to request approval for the Chair to attend remotely.
 - b. Email the APM a list of your committee members and their USC email addresses. The APM will use DocuSign to obtain all signatures required for the [Appointment of Dissertation Committee form](#)
2. Create a profile in [USC's Thesis Center](#) and upload the completed *Appointment of Dissertation Committee* form
3. On the morning of your defense, go to the Checklist page in the Thesis Center to generate the electronic *Approval to Submit* form. Your action will prompt the Thesis Center to send an email containing a link to the form to all your committee members.
4. Defend your thesis. Make any changes to your manuscript that your committee requires. Monitor the progress of the electronic *Approval to Submit* form through the Checklist page of your Thesis Center Profile to check if all signatures from the committee have been submitted.
5. Upload a PDF of the completion certificate from the [Survey of Earned Doctorates](#) (SED)
6. Submit your manuscript.
7. Make any formatting changes requested by the thesis coordinator.
8. Monitor your email for a message from the USC Digital Library. You must respond to the email to finalize publishing information with the USC Digital Library. The deadline for finalizing publishing information is the degree conferral date of the given term. This is the final step required for degree conferral.

NOTE:

Although not a hard rule, it is recommended to ask faculty members who are active in research (Tenured or Tenure track) to serve on your committee. As you review the [faculty directory](#):

- Professors and Associate Professors are tenured faculty
- Assistant Professors are tenure-track
- RTPC, Lecturer, or Teaching Faculty are non-tenured

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.

Course Requirements

The course requirement includes required and elective courses. The student must complete, with no grade lower than B, a minimum of 60 units of courses carrying graduate credit.

Required Courses

We recommend students complete course requirements by the end of the 2nd year in the program. Requirements must be met by the end of the 3rd year. Specific course requirements vary by program.

Mathematics (MATH)	Applied Mathematics (AMAT)
<p>The following must be completed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MATH 510a Algebra • MATH 525a Real Analysis • MATH 540a Topology • MATH 794a Doctoral Dissertation • MATH 794b Doctoral Dissertation 	<p>The following must be completed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>MATH 505a Applied Probability</u> • <u>MATH 525a Real Analysis</u> • <u>MATH 555a Partial Differential Equations</u> • <u>MATH 794a Doctoral Dissertation</u> • <u>MATH 794b Doctoral Dissertation</u>
<p><u>Five</u> additional courses from the following list must also be completed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MATH 502a Numerical Analysis • MATH 505b Applied Probability • MATH 507b Theory of Probability • MATH 509 Stochastic Differential Equations • MATH 513 Lie Theory • MATH 514 Algebraic Geometry • MATH 510b Algebra • MATH 520 Complex Analysis • MATH 525b Real Analysis • MATH 532 Combinatorial Analysis • MATH 533 Algebraic Combinatorics • MATH 535b Differential Geometry • MATH 540b Algebraic Topology • MATH 541a Introduction to Mathematical Statistics • MATH 555b Partial Differential Equations • MATH 556 Mathematical Fluid Dynamics • MATH 565a Ordinary Differential Equations 	<p><u>Five</u> additional courses from the following list must also be completed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MATH 502a Numerical Analysis • MATH 505b Applied Probability • MATH 507b Theory of Probability • MATH 509 Stochastic Differential Equations • MATH 520 Complex Analysis • MATH 525b Real Analysis • MATH 530b Stochastic Calculus and Mathematical Finance • MATH 532 Combinatorial Analysis • MATH 541b Introduction to Mathematical Statistics • MATH 542 Analysis of Variance and Design • MATH 545 Introduction to Time Series • MATH 547 Mathematical Foundations of Statistical Learning Theory • MATH 550 Statistical Consulting and Data Analysis • MATH 555b Partial Differential Equations • MATH 556 Mathematical Fluid Dynamics • MATH 565a Ordinary Differential Equations • MATH 574 Applied Matrix Analysis • MATH 580 Introduction to Functional Analysis

Any of the three core required courses for each program (510a, 525a, 540a for MATH; 505a, 525a, 555a for AMAT) can be waived if the student earns a PhD pass on the corresponding written exam.

NOTE: Due to the interdisciplinary nature of the program, Applied Mathematics Ph.D. students may wish to take courses outside of the Mathematics department. Students may request approval to take ONE course per academic year outside of the Math department.

Prior to registration for the external course, students must:

- Ask their academic advisor to submit a statement to the DGS detailing how the external course is essential for the student’s research program
- Submit the “[External Course Approval](#)” form

If a student registers in an unapproved course outside of Math, they are subject to the full responsibility of paying the tuition costs and associated fees for this course.

Students must take all courses for a letter grade or Credit/No Credit. Courses cannot be audited or taken for Pass/No Pass. Audited or Pass/No Pass courses will not be covered by assistantship or fellowship awards. Students are responsible for all tuition costs for audited or Pass/No Pass courses.

Transfer of Credit

No transfer of credit will be considered until the screening examination is passed. A maximum of 30 units of graduate coursework at another institution may be applied toward the course requirements for the Ph.D. A grade lower than B will not be accepted.

Conferring a Master’s degree

Students can add and confer ONE Master’s degree within the Department of Mathematics.

To earn a Master of Arts in MATH or AMAT, 24 units total are required with specific courses listed below.

Mathematics (MATH)	Applied Mathematics (AMAT)
MATH 510a MATH 525a One option (2 courses) from A, B, or C: A) MATH 535a and MATH 540a B) MATH 555a and MATH 565a C) MATH 505a and MATH 541a	MATH 525a At least 3 courses from: Math 502a Math 502b Math 505a Math 505b Math 541a Math 541b Math 555a Math 565a

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

A complete record of university policies can be found in [USC's Catalogue](#).

This PhD Student handbook highlights a few policies we recommend reviewing every semester.

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.

Satisfactory Progress, Academic Warning, and Dismissal

Students are expected to maintain satisfactory progress towards their degree. Students will receive a progress letter at least once per academic year, indicating their status towards degree completion by the specified deadlines in the letter and this handbook. 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](#).

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).

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.

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 students 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.

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. USC Graduate School Policy Requires a minimum grade of C (2.0) in a course to receive graduate credit. However, the PhD programs in the Department of Mathematics require a grade of B or higher for graduate credit in required courses.

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. 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.

Time Limit for Degree Completion

Students have 5 years from their first semester in the PhD program to finish their doctoral degree. Extensions may be granted in extraordinary circumstances.

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.

Funding and Financial Support

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.

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](#).

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.

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.

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

To request funding, fill out the online ["Apply for a Travel Award"](#) form. The form will ask you to submit a strong justification that explains why this conference is essential and necessary for your research. In addition, your faculty advisor must also email their memo of support to the DGS, further explaining why this conference is necessary. After receiving your request, the DGS will let you know whether funding support is approved or denied. Travel and professional development grants may also be available through USC's [Graduate Student Government](#).

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](#).

GA Appointments and Responsibilities

Eligibility

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](#).

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.

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 they take. 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.

TA Duties and Expectations

A complete record of policies related to your employment as a Teaching Assistant can be found in the Graduate School's [handbook for TAs, RAs, and ALs](#). We will highlight some policies specific to TAs in the Math Department:

- Students who receive a 50% Teaching Assistantship should devote no more than **20 hours per week** to their teaching duties. If you believe you are spending an excessive amount of time on teaching duties, please consult with the Director of Graduate Studies.
- At the beginning of the semester, the supervising faculty member should discuss with their TAs the scope of their duties and responsibilities, clarifying their expectations for:
 - attendance in lecture
 - leading discussion sections

- photocopying or posting materials online
- writing and posting solutions
- administering quizzes and other course assignments
- grading quizzes, exams, and other course assignments
- recording and sharing records of grades
- deadlines and timelines for completing grading and posting records
- upholding academic integrity
- proctoring exams
- overall purpose of the teaching assistant (TA) in the course
- frequency and mode of communication
- **TAs must hold 3 hours of office hours at the Math Center.** Their office hours are scheduled during designated days and times by the Math Center Director, Prof. Cymra Haskell. If a TA needs to change their office hours temporarily during a given week or permanently for the rest of the semester, they **MUST** coordinate with Prof. Haskell for approval. Similarly, if TAs want to hold office hours via Zoom or need to cancel one of their office hours on a given day due to unforeseen circumstances, they **MUST** contact Prof. Haskell at least **24 hours in advance**
- **TAs may not cancel their discussion sections.** TAs should never miss teaching their sections. However, if it is necessary for a TA to miss a class, TAs must notify their supervising faculty member and the APM (sath@usc.edu) at least 7 business days in advance. TAs are responsible for coordinating an appropriate substitute.
- To remain in good academic standing, all PhD students are expected to treat their TA duties seriously and to perform with professionalism and in compliance with all University policies. **Repeated failure to perform TA duties satisfactorily may result in dismissal from the PhD program.**
- Students who wish to obtain temporary employment (an hourly paid position) in addition to their 50% Teaching Assistantship must submit a petition to The Graduate School
 - The temporary employment cannot exceed 5 hours per week
 - The department will not support the petition for students in their 1st year of the program as we believe students should focus on their studies and TA duties
 - After the 1st year, the department may support the petition if the student is on track of completing degree requirements on time (courses, exams, GPA)

Guidelines for scheduling your student to take an exam/quiz at the Math Department Office (KAP 104)

Occasionally, one of your students may need to make up an exam or take an exam with testing accommodations. If you would like the student to take the exam at the Math Office, please email the Student Services Assistant (jonahcan@usc.edu) at least 1.5 days in advance the following information:

1. Name of student taking the exam/quiz
2. Date and Time the student plans to take the exam/quiz in KAP 104 (the office is open 8:30am-5:00pm)
3. Amount of time student is permitted to take the exam/quiz (e.g. 50 minutes, 75 minutes, etc.)
4. What resources are allowed, if any (e.g. Cheat sheet, graphing calculator, etc.)
5. Attach a copy of the exam/quiz for the department to print, otherwise you can drop off a hard copy for us before the student arrives

TA Professionalism

When serving as a TA, you are acting as a university employee, held to employee laws, and should engage in professional behavior, at all times. Per USC employee policies:

- TAs must report to work dressed appropriately and according to the requirements of the position and department; good grooming and personal hygiene are expected
- Discussion sections and office hours are for discussions of course material. TAs must not include any activities unrelated to course material, e.g. movies, videos, music, artistic performances, etc.
- TAs should not eat in classrooms, including during their discussion sections or office hours. If TAs eat before or after their discussions, please ensure all trash is disposed of and the shared spaces are kept clean for the next group using the classroom
- TAs should fully erase the board after each discussion session for use by the next class
- All TA interactions with students must be made via USC email, in the discussion classroom, or at the Math Center during office hours. TAs must not exchange personal emails or phone numbers with their students

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.

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.

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.

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.

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).

Accommodations 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

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](#).