



Handbook for Graduate Students in Slavic Languages and Literatures at USC

The text in **black** font is primarily drawn from the USC Catalogue or the Collective Bargaining Agreement and represents the university's policies as they relate to graduate students.

Text in **burgundy** font represents processes, general operating procedures, and best practices.

Text in **green** color represents program-specific procedures and information.

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I. Introduction

Introduction to the Program

The doctorate in Slavic Languages and Literatures is designed to prepare students for a career of teaching and scholarship at the university level. It provides a thorough grounding in Russian literary and cultural history as well as in the theoretical perspectives current in the field. Elective coursework, particularly at the upper level, allows students to take advantage of the department's expertise in such additional areas as film and cultural history. The linguistic component of the curriculum and the experience of teaching as an assistant lecturer (AL) in Russian language courses serve as preparation for positions involving language teaching. Depending on departmental offerings, further study in a second Slavic language and culture may also be possible. Students may also elect to pursue a graduate certificate outside the department.

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 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.

The Ph.D. program in Slavic Languages and Literatures does not expect students to take courses toward the degree during the summer. However, students may wish to satisfy their foreign language requirements during the summer in coursework at USC or abroad.

II. Curriculum and Program Milestones

Program Curriculum Overview

Master's Degree Curriculum

The MA requires a total of 30 units, which must include the following courses:

		UNITS
SLL 500	Topics in Advanced Russian (for non-native Russian speakers)	8
SLL 501	Proseminar in Russian Literature	3
SLL 532	18 th -Century Russian Literature	3
SLL 546	The Russian Novel	3
SLL 516	Structure of Modern Russian	3

Transfer Credits

It is important to resolve any questions that may remain about credit from other institutions that you wish to apply toward your USC degree. As soon as possible in your first semester, you should ask the Administrative Assistant for Slavic, Deborah Russo, to assist you with a request for transfer credit. The department will recommend to the university which courses should be applied to your program, and the Articulation department will ultimately determine which courses can apply to the 60-unit Ph.D. requirement. USC will accept up to 4 outside credits toward the M.A., and up to 30 outside credits toward the Ph.D. —i.e., the equivalent of an M.A.—but the department may decide not to accept all your transfer credits and require that you take some additional coursework.

Language Requirements

Non-native speakers of Russian must successfully complete 8 units (4 semesters) of SLL 500: Topics in Advanced Russian and pass a proficiency exam in the language. The proficiency exam must be passed before the Master's Exam may be taken and should be completed at least four weeks prior to it to allow time for a re-take if necessary. Students who need to take a proficiency exam should accordingly contact the Director of the Language Program early in the semester of their Master's Exam to schedule the exam.

Ph.D. Degree Curriculum

Students pursuing the Ph.D. in Slavic Languages and Literatures are required to complete a minimum of 60 units of coursework beyond the baccalaureate. This means that, in addition to the 30 units completed toward the M.A., students are required to complete 30 more units of coursework, including the required courses listed below; a minimum of 4 and a maximum of 8 units will be SLL 794 a,b,c,d,z, the course taken by doctoral candidates who have completed their Qualifying Exams and are working solely on their dissertation. Students must also demonstrate proficiency in spoken and written Russian; demonstrate reading knowledge of two additional languages chosen from French, German, or a second Slavic language; pass the Qualifying Examination, which must be taken after all coursework has been completed; and complete and successfully defend a dissertation.

Course Requirements

The Ph.D. requires a total of 60 units, including the following courses:

		UNITS
SLL 545	19 th -Century Russian Poetry	3
SLL 550	Russian Modernism	3
SLL 555	Soviet Literature I (1917-1953)	3
Two of the following courses (6 units):		
SLL 650	Seminar in Russian Literature	3
SLL 660	Seminar in a Single Author or Work	3
SLL 665	Seminar in Russian Culture and the Arts	3

Plus electives from SLL; relevant offerings in CSLC, COLT, ENGL, FREN, SPAN etc., as approved by the department; or coursework towards a graduate certificate outside the department. At least 9 of these units must be completed in SLL.

With the approval of the Director of Graduate Studies and as long as the additional coursework does not interfere with progress towards the degree in Slavic, students may pursue any certificates offered within Dornsife. Pursuing certificates outside Dornsife is possible only with special approval; any students who have a demonstrable research need for such a certificate should contact the Director of Graduate Studies.

On Transfer credit – see above.

Language Exams

All language exams must be passed at least 30 days in advance of the Qualifying Exam. When arranging the exams, you should schedule in extra time should it prove necessary for you to re-take any of them.

A) Two of: French, German, a second Slavic language. To ensure that our graduates can engage with a broad range of scholarship and primary materials relevant to their research, the department requires students to demonstrate reading knowledge of two languages besides Russian, selected from French, German, and a second Slavic language. For French and German, this requirement may be satisfied by: a) taking an intensive reading course from the French or German programs at USC (FREN 020x, GERM 020x/025x) and passing the final exam in the course; b) for students at a more advanced stage in their language study, taking an upper-level literature or language course taught in French or German; c) taking a reading exam in French or German, administered either by faculty in the Slavic department or in the respective program; d) language study in the relevant country. To demonstrate knowledge of a second Slavic language, students are expected to take or to have taken a formal course of study in the other Slavic language, whether within our department or through study in the country in question. The languages selected to fulfil this requirement should not be the student's native language(s).

B) Russian Language Exam. Before the Qualifying Exam may be taken, all doctoral candidates except native speakers must pass a Russian language proficiency exam to demonstrate their ability to function at a professional level in Russian, i.e., to read, write, and discuss matters related to the field comprehensively and with firm control of Russian grammar and the relevant vocabulary. The exam consists of two parts: 1) excerpts from a scholarly text or texts, about which the student must answer written questions in Russian without the aid of a dictionary (one hour); and 2) an oral interview in Russian based on the written exam (half an hour).

To arrange to take the exam, the student must inform the department's Director of the Language Program, who will write and administer it in consultation with the student's Qualifying Exam committee chair. The exam should be taken at least a semester before the Qualifying Exams to allow time for a retake if necessary.

Screening Procedure

The department or program will administer the **screening procedure** 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 in Section III of this Handbook.

The screening procedure in Slavic takes the form of a Progress Meeting in the student's second semester, which is typically in the spring. Thereafter, students attend yearly Progress Meetings with the department to review progress and plans – including issues of funding and teaching assignments – and for you to raise concerns and suggestions to the faculty as a group.

M.A. Exam

Students must pass this additional screening before they may proceed to the qualifying examination.

A written exam based on the department's reading list, followed by an oral exam, must be successfully passed before the M.A. can be awarded. It is normally taken during the exam period at the end of the semester in which M.A. course work is completed. This is usually no later than the end of their 4th semester of residency.

The M.A. exam covers Russian literary history from the medieval through the modern periods as well as practical linguistics and is based on material covered in courses and on the [M.A. Reading List](#). Students may request from the Department Administrator access to an online folder of previous exams, which provide useful information on the general scope and format of the exam. Students are advised to review them as an important part of their preparation. However, students should keep in mind that changes to the exam structure are possible and that new questions are incorporated into each new set of exams.

The format of the exam is the following: 1) a written exam (4 hours); and 2) an oral exam (1 hour). For the written portion, candidates type their answers on a department-provided, internet-disabled Mac laptop. The two parts are usually given on different days; progress to the oral exam is not automatic. If on the written examination the judgment of the committee is such that an oral examination cannot counterbalance a poor performance, the committee is not obliged to give an oral examination.

A student must pass both the written and oral parts in order to pass the examination. Advancement from the Master's to the Doctoral program is not automatic and depends in part upon satisfactory completion of the M.A. exam. The decision concerning progress to the doctoral level is made at the time of the exam. Students will be informed in writing if the decision is negative. At the discretion of the faculty, a student who fails the Master's exam may be permitted to take it a second time (see the [USC Catalog](#)). In the semester when the student takes the exam, the department will review their record to ensure that they have met all the coursework requirements for the M.A.; the Department Administrator will approve the courses and certify completion of the requirements on the student's record in SIS.

Students who fail the M.A. Exam are entitled to appeal pursuant to the Academic Dismissal Appeal procedure set forth in Section III of this Handbook.

Qualifying Exam

The qualifying examination is designed to assess a student's readiness to undertake independent research for their dissertation. It is comprehensive and, in most programs, includes both written and oral parts.

In the Slavic Department, the Qualifying Exam is usually scheduled during the exam period at the end of the semester after the student has fulfilled at least 52 units of graduate-level coursework.

Ph.D. Qualifying Exam tests whether students demonstrate the thinking and writing skills that qualify them to write a dissertation. There will be two (2) written exams and an oral exam. There will no longer be a written exam based on the student's dissertation prospectus, but there will be a vigorous oral defense of it during the oral exam. Students should therefore finalize their dissertation prospectus and disseminate it to their committee members a minimum of four weeks before Exams 1 and 2.

Exams 1 and 2 will be administered in person in the department. Faculty on the Exam Committee will design exam questions based on the student's selected materials (see Instructions for Students on the department website). Students will answer two of the three essay questions provided on each exam during a four-hour period.

The written exams will be graded according to a rubric that is included in the Instructions for Students. Faculty members of the exam committee will grade the essays and the average of their grades must be 80% or better for the student to advance to the oral exam.

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.

If not otherwise enrolled, a student must enroll in GRSC 800abz *Studies for the Qualifying Examination* during the semester in which they take the qualifying examination. Students are allowed to enroll in the GRSC 800abz courses a maximum of three times, first in GRSC 800a, followed by GRSC 800b, and, only if necessary, GRSC 800z.

Because two semesters of preparation for the qualifying examination should be sufficient, students enrolling in GRSC 800z must obtain a D-clearance from the Graduate School. In addition, the student will receive a warning letter from their program outlining academic expectations and a path toward completing the PhD in a timely manner.

If the student's written examination is satisfactory, the student may proceed to the oral portion of the exam. The student must complete the oral portion within 60 days of submitting the completed written portion to the qualifying exam committee. If additional material is to be covered in the oral portion, the committee should notify the student of the content expectations in advance.

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 qualifying exam committee is composed of five members. The committee chair and at least two additional members must have an appointment in the student's program.

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.

In the Slavic Department, the committee chair must be a tenured or tenure-track faculty member, and one of the five committee members must be an "outside" member, i.e., a faculty member from USC but from outside the department. Students should consult with the Director of Graduate Studies when forming a committee.

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.

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.

Proposal Defense

During the semester preceding the Qualifying Examination, but not later than one month before it, the doctoral candidate must submit a formal proposal for the dissertation to the Qualifying Exam Committee. This should include: a description of the proposed topic; a discussion of current scholarship on the question and the original contribution the given thesis will make; a discussion of the project's proposed methodology and materials; and a selected bibliography.

Suggested length of the proposal is 10-15 pages, not including the bibliography. The Committee decides on the appropriateness of the dissertation topic for the given student and provides advice concerning questions of methodology and research strategies. The Qualifying Exam Committee may also make suggestions about who might later serve on the Ph.D. Dissertation Committee (see below). The dissertation proposal will be critically examined and rigorously vetted during the Qualifying Oral Exam.

If you have completed all coursework and are not otherwise registered during the semester you plan to take your Qualifying Exams, you must register for GRSC 800 which is a full-time equivalent course.

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.

A complete dissertation is normally expected to be between 200 and 250 pages, not including the bibliography. However, this norm should not be taken to mean that simply producing 200 pages of writing equals completing a dissertation: each dissertation committee will determine what constitutes adequate coverage of a student's topic. Graduate students are advised to review a handful of dissertations in areas related to their research, both from USC and from other US institutions, to familiarize themselves with the genre. You will be expected to follow the Graduate School's [manuscript formatting guidelines](#).

Dissertation Review. Your committee chair has the prerogative of asking you to hold an unofficial review of the entire dissertation prior to the defense. This is a highly recommended procedure that provides an opportunity for your committee to meet with you and discuss the complete draft of your dissertation as a group. There are many good reasons for this, including: to encourage your committee members to decide as a group what re-writing they expect of you by the time of the defense (rather than making individual—perhaps even contradictory—demands). It also gives them, and you, a chance to consider the thesis as a whole (rather than chapter by chapter, as has presumably been the case thus far).

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."

Some schools and programs require “outside members,” and others do not.

In the Slavic Department, the Dissertation Committee must include at least two committee members from the home program, at least one of whom must be tenured, and there must be an Outside Member who must be from some other department; additional members may be included at the student's and committee chair's discretion. Faculty eligible to serve as committee chairs and members include tenured and tenure track faculty, and non-tenure track faculty of outstanding stature who have a documented record of exceptional expertise and superior achievement in their field, and whose appointment has been approved by the dean.

Since not all the people you want on your Dissertation Committee may have served on the Qualifying Exam Committee that approved your dissertation topic, the chair of your Dissertation Committee may convene a meeting of all prospective Dissertation Committee members in person in order to review your proposal with you and to sign the Appointment of Committee form. The purpose of this meeting is both to help determine what direction your further work should take, and to decide on the optimal composition of the committee itself.

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.

Scheduling Considerations. With the approval of your dissertation committee, you may schedule your Dissertation Review and final Defense at any point during the year—but unless you plan ahead, you may not be able to receive your degree during the semester in which you defend. Hence, when thinking about scheduling your Defense and planning to complete your degree in a given semester, you need to keep in mind the time that may be needed between producing a full draft, Dissertation Review, Defense, any necessary revisions, and submission.

As you plan, please review the [submission timelines and deadlines](#) on the Graduate School website. If you schedule your defense too close to the submission deadline, you may not have enough time to submit that term. However, please remember that the dissertation defense may not be scheduled until the entire committee agrees that the candidate and the dissertation are ready for it. Each stage of the process must be agreed upon [in advance](#) with your dissertation committee. It is your responsibility to make sure that these steps are taken.

Registration in 794 is required until the dissertation has been submitted to the Graduate School. In order to avoid registration in a semester, the required documentation and your manuscript must be submitted to the Graduate School by the Add/Drop date of that semester.

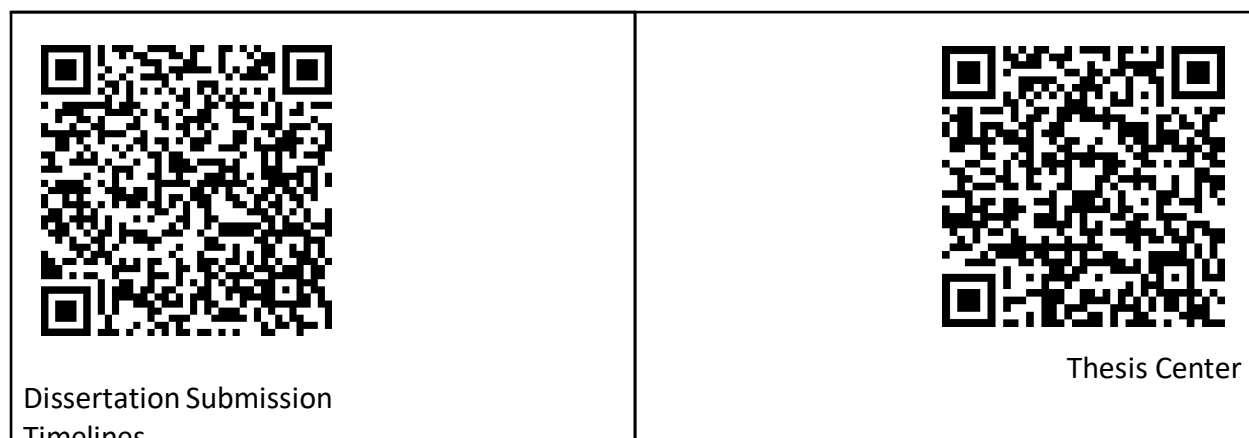
You will need:

- [Approximately one month](#) from when you submit the full draft dissertation to the committee to the date of the Dissertation Review (to allow your committee members to read it).
- [A minimum of one month](#) from the Dissertation Review to your resubmission of the full dissertation to the committee. The revisions required by the committee may well take substantially longer than this.
- [Approximately one month](#) from when you resubmit the full dissertation to the Defense, again to allow your committee to read the dissertation.
- [A minimum of two to three weeks](#) to carry out any further revisions required by the committee, to complete and submit the Graduate School checklist ("Approval to Submit" Form signed by committee, Appointment/Change of Committee Form, and Survey of Earned Doctorates), to be cleared to upload your dissertation, and to upload the dissertation.

You will accordingly need to plan—at an absolute minimum—for approximately four months to elapse between your completion of a full draft of your dissertation and submitting your dissertation. Accordingly, with good planning, hard work, and an amenable committee, one may do it all in one semester (although you will still have to turn in the initial draft during the previous semester). However, the process is likely to take longer than this.

It is [your responsibility](#) to familiarize yourself with and to follow the [timeline](#), [formatting guidelines](#), [document requirements](#), and [step-by-step instructions](#) provided by the Graduate School. To get your degree in a given semester, you must meet the university's submission deadline in the given term. Furthermore, the Graduate School does not guarantee the degree will be granted in the semester of submission, insofar as changes required by the Thesis Coordinator may slow the acceptance process. An earlier submission obviously allows more time for this.

Prior to the defense, please create a profile in [Thesis Center](#), the Graduate School's thesis processing system. Your committee will need to be complete you to do this. Instructions can be found [here](#).



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

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

The department regularly organizes professionalization workshops to support graduate students in their academic careers at USC and their professional activities after completing their degrees. In addition, students are encouraged to participate in the [Dornsife PhD Academy](#), which offers training and networking opportunities as students embark on their graduate studies and prepare for the job market in a variety of careers. Students who attend a sufficient number of sessions also become eligible for additional [professional development funds from the Academy](#) and can achieve a [Certificate in Communication, Leadership, and Management](#).

Academic Advising

All graduate students taking classes should plan their course schedules for each semester in consultation with the Director of Graduate Studies.

Director of Graduate Studies for AY 2025-2026 is Professor Thomas Seifrid (seifrid@usc.edu).

Staff Graduate Advisor is Deborah Russo (russod@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.

Satisfactory Progress, Academic Warning, and Dismissal

Students are expected to maintain satisfactory progress towards their degree. *In the Slavic Department, this means that a student should be completing courses with a final grade of B or better. Students with multiple Incompletes may not be considered as making satisfactory progress. 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).

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.

In the Slavic Department, summer enrollment is not required.

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. 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.

In the Slavic Department students must consult with the Director of Graduate Studies and/or their faculty dissertation advisor for approval.

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 Graduate School](#) 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.

Please discuss your situation with the Director of Graduate Studies and/or your faculty dissertation advisor.

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 is 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

Please ask the Director of Graduate Studies about support for attending conferences. Travel and professional development grants may also be available through USC's [Graduate Student Government](#).

Other Types of Support

Schools and programs may offer scholarships and awards in addition to the GA appointment or fellowship. 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. Schools and programs may also provide stipend top-offs to PhDs to supplement the university's minimum stipend or a stipend received from an external funder.

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

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 serving as TAs are expected to meet with the primary instructor of record before the beginning of the semester in order to establish mutual expectations.

Graduate Assistant Lecturer

ALs 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.

Students who will serve as ALs in Russian language must undergo teacher training, which will take place approximately two weeks before the start of the academic year. Students must be physically present to attend training in person.

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

Visit the Welcome Center where you will set up your Workday profile (if you are an international student, you will also need to set up your Glacier profile). Be sure to bring your USC ID to complete the required forms. You can set up a bank account at the Credit Union 9 or any bank you choose. When you receive confirmation that your Workday profile is complete, you can log into Workday and set up direct deposit.

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](#).