

Department of Atmospheric Sciences

Graduate Student Tips, Guidelines and Expectations

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I. Departmental Graduate Student Timeline:

Graduate students should form an advisory committee with the consultation of their supervisor and have their first committee meeting at least by the end of the first year. Comprehensive examinations will be offered once a year in the first week of June. The rules on the comprehensive examination committee are listed in the respective handout on the web (<http://www.uaf.edu/asp/Academics/grad.plan2.htm>). Be aware that extremely poor results on your comprehensive examinations could result in being placed in the MS program. For MS candidates the typical timeline to completion of the degree is 2-3, for Ph.D. candidates coming in with a MS 4-5 years, with a BS 5-7 years.

In accord with UAF policies (see UAF catalog), you are expected to attend classes and seminars regularly; unexcused absences may result in a failing grade. It is your responsibility to confer with your instructor concerning absences, ask for and arrange the possibility to make up missed work. As stated in the UAF catalog, *“You and your instructor will make a good faith effort to make suitable arrangements to assure that you can make up classes and work you miss and are not penalized for your excused absence. If suitable arrangements cannot be made, you will be allowed to withdraw from the course without penalty. However, your instructor is under no obligation to allow you to make up missed work for unexcused absences or if notification and arrangements are not made in advance of the absence.”*

II. Academics:

The career opportunities are much broader and more demanding with a PhD than a MS degree. They include academic positions at colleges and universities, and leadership-track positions in government and industrial laboratories. Therefore the PhD program requires the same solid fundamentals of atmospheric science and its applications than the MS program, but at higher levels with respect to the research expectations, techniques and scientific and technical writing. It requires passing the comprehensive examination that demonstrates depth of knowledge in the fundamentals of four subject areas and the ability to perform cross-topic synthesis. It also has higher expectations on the research to be carried out for your thesis.

1. The primary goal of coursework is to obtain an understanding that will facilitate research and further your career. Grades are important, but understanding is paramount. Accept help from others when you need it. This includes making use of the office hours posted by each faculty.
2. Make sure that you understand what plagiarism is and give credit where credit is needed.
3. A successful graduate student should be able to simultaneously conduct research and successfully complete the required course- and homework. Getting work done on time is a key to early success in your business or scientific career. A major complaint of employers is that faculty does not instill a sense of responsibility in students to have work done on time. Budget your time wisely to complete all of your responsibilities i.e. homework, coursework, and research. Balance is the key.
4. Graduate advisory committee selection should be based on faculty expertise and ability to contribute towards the successful completion of your thesis project. Utilize your committee members.
5. Attend thesis proposals and thesis defenses of fellow students.
6. Always read the syllabi to be familiar with grading policies to avoid “bad awaking”.
7. Chairs are not allowed any longer to sign on oral defenses when they do not have a thesis of the student on their desk. Thus, when you will have had your oral defense and submit the paperwork to the department includes a copy of your thesis. Ask how much earlier the department chair needs the paperwork
8. In the semester in which you intend to graduate you must take the Graduate Thesis Preparation Training. The Graduate School offers this class in spring, fall, and summer. No tuition is to be paid for this class. See their schedule on the web for dates and locations.

9. Your annual activity reports must be on file with the Graduate School on May 15. This means that you have to have your graduate student advisory committee meeting at least a week prior to this date. The department chair, Dean of the college and Graduate School Dean will check that your progress based on this report and the previous years report if applicable. Thus, spend efforts on writing the activity reports.
10. At your graduate advisory committee meetings, you are expected to present your academic and research progress in a power-point presentation.

III. Work Ethics and Research:

Your profession is to be a graduate student. This means:

1. For successful supervising you are expected to be available during normal work hours (9am – 5pm on Monday thru Friday). Successful research towards a thesis, however, will often require that you have to expend more than this amount of time. Having a 20h contract does not mean that you are only in 4h a day.
2. You are expected to keep a proper notebook written in English (using Latin letters) with pencil. This ensures that notes will be still readable if you spill coffee on it. Invalid notes have to be crossed out, not erased. Include a remark why you rejected these results/experiments (What was wrong?). All notes have to be dated. Notes have to be in such detail that any lab [\[2\]](#) member can use them to repeat your research/simulation/experiment. Ask your supervisor for details.
3. Notes must reflect accurately and honestly what you did.
4. The supervisor has the right to inspect the notebook any time without prior notice. Notebooks remain in the lab once you leave the lab, i.e. you will hand your notebook to your supervisor.
5. Set short-term goals for each semester, discuss them with your supervisor and committee and strive to meet them. Report regularly on your progress to the supervisor and at least once a year to the committee.
6. Take responsibility of your research, i.e. work independently and attempt to solve your own problems, but seek help when needed.
7. Successful research is the fruit of hard work, persistence and dedication, and often many extra hours.
8. Plan your time ahead to meet the expectations on your coursework and research.
9. Research has highest priority despite there are no grades. Course work compliments the research, and is no excuse for no or slow progress on the research part.
10. Research is a team effort. Attend the lab meetings, and help your lab mates when you can and ask them for help when you need it.
11. Submission of papers to journals or abstracts to conferences, meetings, or workshops requires the approval of your supervisor.
12. Keep the cubicle area clean with respect to both dirt and noise.
13. Report non-functioning equipment, worms and viruses immediately.
14. Help maintain required lab supplies, e.g. report when the printer gets low on ink, GAUs are running out.
15. Any lab only has limited budgets for supply. So use material wisely.
16. Do not print private stuff on lab printers.
17. Lab equipment will not leave the places it is placed in, i.e. you cannot loan it for the week end or so.
18. Only you or other graduate students in your lab are authorized to use the lab's computers or other equipment.
19. Help keep the computers virus-free. Do not open attachments from suspicious sources. Before opening attachments they have to be scanned for viruses. Keep the firewall on.
20. Share disk space on work stations fairly, i.e. remove unnecessary data and do not have mirrors of data.
21. Do not download/install software without approval of your supervisor.

22. If you work in a laboratory, make yourself aware of the safety issues and share space fairly. Do only use the equipment you have been trained on and that you are allowed to use. Use it only within the framework of what it was intended to be used for.

III. Professional Conduct

1. Never speak negatively about your university, college, institute, program, or research group. Such comments will reflect badly on you, can cost you the interview, the job and the respect of your colleagues (Be aware that the atmospheric science community is very small!).
2. Focus on improving the name of our lab and do not tear down the work of students or other labs. Gossiping about others is unacceptable.
3. Always give your best when presenting your research at conferences, meetings and workshops. Rehearse your talk several times and dress professional. A single poor performance and bad impression can jeopardize your future career as a scientist.
4. Be scientifically ethical. Always report data accurately and honestly in publications, presentations, discussions and personal communications with colleagues and reporters.
5. Plagiarism is unacceptable at all times including in grants, publications, presentations and coursework. Changing the words with thesaurus or taking parts of your advisor's article or his/her proposal of the grant you work on is still plagiarism. UAF has strong policies on plagiarism including removal from the university.
6. Everybody deserves respect and is equally important for the success of the university.
7. Your career depends not only on your supervisor and other faculty, but also on your fellow students.
8. Maintain a professional attitude, which means that you dress proper and do not spread odor.
9. Attend seminars that are related to your research and the Atmospheric Sciences Informal Seminar.
10. Attend lab meetings and bring research material that you want to discuss. Be prepared to present your results when asked for.
11. Make sure that the cubicle area is a quite work place. Do not use this area for private conversation, homework discussion or phone calls.
12. Do not eat during meetings, classes, and seminars unless it is permitted explicitly.
13. In classes, seminars, defenses, and meetings, give the person who is speaking your undivided attention. It is not only common courtesy, but whispering or talking can distract, annoy, and even intimidate students around you as well as the speaker. Essentially, you should treat everybody as you would like, and expect, to be treated yourself.
14. Please understand that this is a college - you are expected to be on time for classes, seminars, and meetings and have all the required material unpacked. Lateness or unpacking is disturbing and unfair.

V. Graduate Student Evaluations:

1. You can call more than one graduate student advisory committee meeting per year.
2. You have the right to be evaluated at least once per year. You may request additional evaluations at anytime.
3. Evaluations will be used to keep you on track and focused towards a timely completion of your thesis work. They will include evaluation of performance, project viability and future goals.
4. Prior to evaluation, you will be required to complete an evaluation form. This form will list your accomplishments over the evaluation period, your self-evaluation of performance and your future short and long term goals. You may also make positive or negative comments regarding your laboratory experiences.
5. Comments made on evaluation forms are considered confidential and will not be shared with other lab workers. They may be shared with your advisory committee.
6. Your evaluations may be used in general for future letters of recommendation; however, letters will generally focus on your abilities at the time the letter is requested with a clear emphasis on your positive rather than negative attributes.

VI. Degree Requirements

The UAF catalog provides the detail on the specific degree requirements. Detailed information on thesis defense, orals and comprehensive exams with respect to the Atmospheric science Program are available at <http://www.uaf.edu/asp/Academics/grad.plan2.htm>. You are expected to be familiar with both these documents. Additionally be aware of the following:

1. It is the student's responsibility to keep in graduate standing. This includes, among other things, having at least a B average, calling committee meetings and submitting annual reports to the graduate school (see UAF catalog for details).
2. The thesis must be approved by the advisor before being submitted to the student's advisory committee.
3. A thesis should contain the student's original research and conform to the requirements of the UAF Graduate School and the Atmospheric Science Program. If previously published manuscripts are to be included, necessary approvals should be obtained from the publishers.
4. At your advisors discretion, letters of recommendation for future positions may be held until at least a first draft of the thesis has been received. Only under rare occasions will you be allowed to return for a thesis defense after you have begun your post-doctoral research or a PhD position elsewhere. For your own good, finish all your UAF requirements before moving on.
5. Allow committee members at least 6 weeks to evaluate your thesis before you schedule your defense. This will enable sufficient time to perform re-writes. Your thesis should be complete and acceptable by all committee members before you defend.
6. It is the student's responsibility to have the thesis written in acceptable English and the format required by the Graduate School. The format is published on the web, and the Graduate School offers classes on Thesis Writing and a TA from the English department for help. Make use of these resources.
7. Your thesis defense will include a public seminar and a "private" examination by your committee. When defending, be clear and concise in your answers and ask for clarification if you do not understand a question. If you require assistance in preparing for your defense, you should consult your advisor.
8. Your advisor has a dual role in your thesis defense. S/he will be an examiner, but also an advocate.
9. While thesis defenses can be difficult, remember that the defense is designed to probe your limits. Thus you are not likely to answer every question correctly or completely. If you do not know something, admit it – do not make up an answer. Say specifically what you do not know, but go on to explain what you do know about the question. If the question is about something that is unknown in the field, be sure you say that the answer is unknown rather than that you do not know.
10. Before leaving UAF, you will be required to participate in a Student Learning Outcome Assessment (SLOA) and an exit interview. This interview will include an evaluation of your experience in the program and lab. Make sure you have completed all necessary tasks before leaving. Among these tasks are return of keys, cataloging of experimental samples and data, release of laboratory notebooks and cleanup of your research area and materials.
11. Some labs have their own additional exit interview.

Please sign below to indicate you have read and agree with the statements made in the above tips, guidelines and expectations. Failure to follow these guidelines is considered to be a breach of responsibilities as a graduate student in this program and will be dealt with accordingly.

Print Name: _____

Signature: _____

These guidelines have been adopted in great part from guidelines provided to students at the UAF Chemistry Department and University of Washington. It has been modified for UAF and the Department of Atmospheric Sciences.

Note that the term lab here refers to the research group of your supervisor. In the following the word is used for both the group as well as the laboratory.

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