Guidelines for ME & OR/IE Master's Degree Students

The Graduate Catalog contains degree requirements for all graduate programs, rules that affect graduate students, descriptions of graduate courses, and a list of Graduate Studies Committee Members. This document is the authority for all graduate students. These rules are supplemented by the rules of the University and rules imposed by the Graduate Studies Committee of the Mechanical Engineering Department. The Graduate Adviser has the responsibility to interpret the rules in specific cases. Each technical area may also have rules and procedures enforced by the Graduate Adviser.

PLEASE NOTE: This document is not meant to be all-inclusive. It includes areas where we have observed difficulties in the past. If you need clarification, read the Graduate School Catalog, talk with the degree evaluators in the Graduate School Office (MAI 101), talk to the faculty in the academic areas, talk with the ME/OR Graduate Coordinator (ETC 5.224) or the ME Graduate Adviser (ETC 5.146).

1. **ENROLLMENT IN THE UNIVERSITY**

- **Advising**
  For registration at the University in the first semester, you should attend the New Student Orientation. At which, you will be provided with your registration and advising form. Following orientation, a faculty member from your technical area will advise you concerning the courses in which you should enroll. Some technical areas have a set of core courses that you must take in your degree program. You will then proceed to the ME/OR Academic Advising Office (ETC 5.224) to turn in your registration and advising form. Your advising bar will be removed upon receipt of the completed form, so that you may register online.

  After the first semester, your research adviser will generally advise you for courses to enroll. You should obtain a registration and advising form. Following consultation with your adviser, you should list your proposed schedule for the semester, and have your adviser sign the form. If you do not have a research advisor, you should consult with your area faculty who has advised you for the previous semester. This completed form must be returned to the Academic Advising Office in order to have the advising bar removed and proceed with the registration process. Emails from the faculty that contain the same information are also accepted. Please be aware that some courses (ME 397P/ORI 397P) are “restricted courses” and require an additional form to be filled out and signed in order to register (faculty email approval is also fine.) These forms can be found on the forms rack outside the Academic Advising Office.

- **Registration and Courses**
  If you are a full-time student, you must enroll in at least nine (9) credit hours for each long semester (fall & spring.) Full-time status in the summer is three (3) hours. Students who work as a TA or GRA in any semester must maintain full-time registration status. If you are working as TA or GRA in the summer, you must remain registered for 3 hours.

  The Research courses (180M/380M) and the Seminar courses (197K/397K) may all be used to fulfill your minimum registration requirement (to reach 3 or 9 hours), but they may not count toward the completion of your graduate degree. Only one Graduate Research Internship (ME 397M) course may count toward the completion of your graduate degree. *ME students only

  In the fall and spring semesters, you may add or drop ME/OR and other departments’ courses via the web during the first four class days. From the 5th until the 12th class days in each long semester, you may add or drop ME/OR courses in the ME Graduate Office. If you need to add/drop any non-ME/OR course from the 5th-12th class day, you must go to that department to do so. Add/drop after the 12th class day is strongly discouraged. You will be charged a penalty to drop a course after the 12th class day. Please see the Graduate Coordinator for add/drop after the 12th class day.

  You may change the grade status (CR/NC or letter grade) of a registered course during the semester. Check the university’s Academic Calendar for the last possible date to change the grade status.
Although courses are generally not taken on a CR/NC basis, the Graduate School permits students to take 2 courses (20%) of their overall coursework on a CR/NC basis. Please check with your supervisor (research advisor) to verify which courses, if any, can be taken on a CR/NC basis.

You may take up to six (6) hours of upper-division undergraduate courses in your degree program. Courses taken for your BS degree may not be included in this allowance of six upper-division hours.

Only coursework taken within the last six years can count toward your Master's degree.

2. FINANCIAL AID

Several types of financial aid are available to continuing students on a competitive basis. Criteria for these awards are your GPA, GRE, your performance at the University of Texas, and recommendations from the faculty.

- **Fellowships**: For exceptionally qualified individuals, a few college-level and university-level fellowships are available through the recommendations of the ME/OR Graduate Advisers. The Graduate Adviser solicits recommendations from faculty and continuing students, and a fellowship committee determines the awards.

- **Teaching Assistantship (TA)**: Teaching assistants are selected from applications submitted to the Academic Advising Office. Teaching Assistants in their first semester of a TA appointment must complete the Teaching Assistant Certification provided by the Cockrell School of Engineering. Foreign students must pass the ITA English Assessment Test (through the International Office) and attend their orientation in order to become eligible to work as a TA. The department covers the cost of the ITA English Assessment for offer students (students guaranteed a financial offer by the department.) The TA salary is paid out as a monthly stipend at the beginning of each month for the previous month.

- **Graduate Research Assistantship (GRA)**: Graduate research assistantships (GRAs) are awarded by individual faculty members. Interested students should talk to the faculty about the availability of support. GRA stipends are paid at the beginning of each month for the previous month.

*Arrangements for a GRA must be made prior to the semester in which it is to be effective. If you accept a teaching assistantship, you cannot change to a GRA after the first day of classes.*

3. PROGRAM AND SCHEDULE OF WORK

- **Degree Plans**
  Master’s students in ME (OR see next paragraph) have three alternatives to pursue the MSEME degree: 30 credit hours including thesis (8 courses + 6 thesis credit hours over 2 semesters), 33 hours including report (10 courses + 3 report credit hours), and 36 hours with no thesis/no report (12 courses). If you are considering obtaining a Ph.D., it may be possible to begin immediately in the Ph.D. program depending on which technical area you pursue. The Graduate Adviser and your research advisor can provide details of this option.

*Master’s students in OR/IE have the same options but slightly different credit hour requirements. Please consult the following page for this outline:

http://www.me.utexas.edu/areas/orie/degrees.php

The selection of a degree plan is your decision; however, the choice may be restricted by your acceptance of a GRA or by your selection of a research supervisor. If you accept a GRA, the Coursework MS option (no-thesis/no-report) is not available without written agreement of the faculty member providing the GRA. The
selection between the thesis or report option will be made in consultation with your research advisor. Some faculty members will only supervise thesis research.

- **Courses and Satisfactory Progress**
  Grading standards are different in graduate courses from undergraduate courses. Satisfactory progress in our graduate program requires a GPA over 3.0. Students whose cumulative GPA falls below 3.0 will be placed on academic probation by the Graduate School. If on academic probation, a student cannot hold an academic appointment (TA/GRA) and may lose a recruiting fellowship. If academic probation continues for two semesters, one would be dismissed from the Graduate School.

  Grades for undergraduate courses are not computed in your overall GPA. To graduate, all graduate students must have a graduate grade point average of at least 3.00. Additionally, candidates for the master’s degree must also have a grade point average of at least 3.00 in courses included on the Program of Work (see Section 5) and any undergraduate courses taken for a letter grade to satisfy the MS degree requirements must have a letter grade equivalent above 3.0.

- **Planning your program**
  It is good to plan your program early in your academic career with the help of a faculty member in your technical area. Remember that most graduate courses are offered once a year, and some are offered even less often.

- **Time to complete the degree**
  Most Masters students enter in the fall semester. The schedule below shows a possible plan for completing the MSE with the thesis option that requires approximately one calendar year plus a long semester (admission in September and graduation in December of the following year).

  **Fall:** 9 hours of coursework  
  (Selection of research topic)  
  **Spring:** 9 hours of coursework  
  **Summer:** 3 hrs. Thesis A  
  **Fall:** 6 hours of coursework, 3 hrs. Thesis B

  A typical schedule would be:

  **Fall:** 9 hours of coursework  
  (Select a research topic)  
  **Spring:** 9 hours of coursework  
  **Summer:** If enrolled, 3 hrs. Research (to work as TA/GRA)  
  **Fall:** 3 hours of coursework, 3 hrs. Research, 3 hrs. Thesis A  
  **Spring:** 3 hours of coursework, 3 hrs. Research, 3 hrs. Thesis B

  A typical MS program is completed within 18 – 27 months. Beyond 24 months, your progress will be reviewed to determine ways to ensure your graduation.

4. **SELECTING A RESEARCH TOPIC**

  Selection of a research topic will normally be made near the end of the first semester. If you have a GRA you can write your thesis or report on the project that funds your GRA, and thus will effectively select your "topic area" based on your research project. Otherwise, time should be spent during the first semester searching for a topic. This is normally accomplished by discussing with faculty members in your technical area to get suggestions. A topic is chosen by common consent of the student and a particular faculty member who agrees to supervise the work.
Please inform the Academic Advising Office when you have selected a topic and supervisor (research advisor). In addition to the supervisor (first reader), a second reader is required to examine your thesis when you submit it for graduation. Be sure to ask for permission before listing someone as a second reader.

5. APPLYING TO GRADUATE

At the beginning of your last semester you should “apply for Master’s Candidacy”. This consists of an online application, plus the submission of a hard-copy of Program of Work and having it signed by your supervisor before delivery to the Academic Advising Office for final approval. The online application consists of identifying your supervisor (first reader) and the second reader, and specifying the courses you have completed or will take to meet the degree requirements. It is to the student’s advantage to develop a well-defined description of the scope of the proposed work (preferably written) that is agreed upon by the student and his/her thesis adviser.

6. WRITING THE THESIS OR REPORT

While requirements for writing a thesis or report will vary considerably with different faculty members, there are several suggestions that can be made:

- Writing a thesis or report that is acceptable to you and to two faculty members will undoubtedly take longer than you expect. Start early, plan ahead and work hard. One should expect a minimum of two months of full time effort for writing, faculty approval, and final editing. This assumes that all the analytical, computational, and/or experimental work is completed at the time the writing begins.

- Before starting the writing phase, it is imperative that a very detailed thesis outline be developed – a minimum of 4 or 5 pages with the outline detailed to the second level of subheading below the chapters, followed by brief description, phrases or subjects to emphasize important considerations.

- While it may be advisable to provide your adviser with one section (or chapter) for review to determine their level of expectation, the quality of the first draft provided to your adviser should be complete to the point that if it were acceptable to him or her you could word process it in final form. This means among other things: title, table of contents, list of figures and tables, logically developed, fully referenced, correct grammar and punctuation, figures and tables sequentially numbered and titled, data or analysis and results fully assessed, etc. While the format will vary depending on the topic, the candidate and the thesis adviser, the draft should be complete.

- You must be enrolled in classes (though not necessarily full-time status) during the semester you plan to graduate.

- If you are taking the thesis option, you must take both Thesis A (698A) and Thesis B (698B) courses and be enrolled in Thesis B in the semester you plan to graduate. Thesis A must be taken before Thesis B and the two cannot be taken concurrently. **(Though these course numbers begin with the number 6, these are three-hour courses.)** Thesis B can be repeated if the thesis itself is not submitted to the Graduate School by the last class day of the semester you’re planning to graduate. If writing a report, you must be enrolled in the Report course (398R) in the semester in which you plan to graduate. Again, this may be repeated as necessary.

7. IMPORTANT DEADLINES AND FINAL PAPERWORK

The actual deadline dates for these items are printed in the course schedule. The deadline dates are inflexible.

- File the online Application for Master’s Candidacy. You will also need to file a paper Program of Work form in the ME/OR Academic Advising Office in ETC 5.224. In the event that you do not graduate when you plan, the online application must be submitted again the following semester.
8. **RULES GOVERNING TEACHING ASSISTANTS AND GRADUATE RESEARCH ASSISTANTSHIPS**

The following rules apply to both TA’s and GRA’s.

- To be appointed as a TA/GRA, you cannot be on academic probation (GPA > 3.0).
- In order to be appointed for a TA or GRA, you may not have:
  - more than two X’s (incomplete)
  - more than one X and one I (permanent incomplete).
  Two I’s are not allowed.
- If you are appointed as a TA or GRA, you must be registered full-time.
- The different academic areas (Dynamic Systems and Control, Manufacturing and Design, Thermal and Fluid Systems, OR/IE, etc.) of the ME Department have TA positions in undergraduate courses.
- When you are appointed as a TA, you cannot withdraw to accept a GRA after classes begin.
- An international student who is a TA must be certified as competent in the English language. The certification is done by the International Office (see Graduate Coordinator).
- GRA’s are assigned by faculty members holding research grants or contracts. If you are interested in a particular research program, you must contact the faculty member directly.
- You cannot be appointed as a TA and/or GRA for more than 14 long semesters.
- If you accept a GRA, the Coursework (no-thesis/no-report) option is not available without written agreement of the faculty member providing the GRA.
- In general, there is lower priority for appointing a student to a TA after the student has had a TA appointment for 2 long semesters.
- Students (including international) are permitted to work up to 40 hrs/week (100%) in the summer semester if the opportunity is available.

9. **GOING ON TO THE DOCTORAL PROGRAM**

You must complete the appropriate internal form if you plan to continue from a Master’s to a Ph.D. Please see the Graduate Coordinator for the form, which will ask you to list three faculty members who will be asked to provide recommendations in support of your request to enter the Ph.D. program.