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Major Steps to Earning the Degree with Checklist

Pre-admission

☐ Read about faculty research interests, contact/meet faculty with whom you might like to work (who might serve as thesis advisor an on thesis committee). Explain this in your admission essay.

☐ Apply. **Deadlines: Fall: May 15 - International Students & Graduate Assistantships, July 1 - Regular Admissions; Spring: October 1 - International Students & Graduate Assistantships, November 17 - Regular Admissions**

☐ Recommendation for admission By MSMS Program committee.

Post-admission

☐ Submit ‘Thesis Advisor Form’ **Deadline: 1st Mon. of November**

☐ Submit ‘Thesis Committee Form’ **Deadline: 1st Mon. of March**

☐ Have meeting(s) w/committee for guidance

☐ Write a thesis proposal

☐ Meet with committee members to present/submit thesis proposal and curriculum plan. If they approve the thesis proposal and coursework, get their signatures on the ‘Thesis Proposal Defense and Candidacy Qualification Form’ and submit to coordinator **Deadline: 1st Mon. of May**

☐ Conduct research, do analysis, write thesis chapters

☐ Submit signed ‘Application for Admission to Candidacy for the Master of Science in Marine Sciences Form’, ‘Application for Graduation Form’, and copy of receipt for graduation fee payment to the registrar’s office (Mrs. Bing). She will only accept all three together. ‘The Application for Admission to Candidacy Form’ is the equivalent of curriculum checklist/gridsheet at the undergraduate level. We ask that you participate in Commencement ceremony and indicate it on the ‘Application for Graduation’ form. **Deadline: At least one semester prior to graduation semester.**

☐ Have committee review written thesis.

☐ Submit ‘Thesis Defense Approval Form’

☐ Set thesis defense date with committee **Deadline (see below) no later than six (6) weeks prior to the date graduating students’ grades are due in the registrar’s office (see academic calendar)**

☐ Submit penultimate draft of the thesis must be submitted to thesis committee members **Deadline: no later than three (3) weeks prior to the scheduled thesis defense date.**

☐ Defend your thesis (public presentation followed by a meeting with your committee)

☐ Submit one complete formatted original copy of the thesis to the Office of Graduate Studies and Sponsored Research and one electronic version of the thesis to the program director no later than three weeks prior to graduation.

☐ Submit the final thesis draft including thesis Signature Page with signatures, thesis defense report form, and copy of receipt for thesis binding from the Library
to both the Office of Graduate Studies and Sponsored Research and the Registrar’s Office (Mrs. Bing). Keep copies for yourself!

- ☐ Submit an electronic copy of the signed thesis (.pdf file) to the program director.

- ☐ Submit one complete formatted original copy of the thesis signed ‘Thesis Approval Page’ to the Office of Graduate Studies and Sponsored Research. **Deadline: no later than three weeks prior to graduation**

- ☐ Submit ‘Thesis Defense Report Form’ – make sure that it has been signed and received by the Dean of Graduate Studies.

- ☐ Get fitted and pay for cap and gown at College Bookstore

- ☐ Attend Commencement and be awarded the degree by the President.
Application Requirements

A complete application for admissions consists of a completed application form, statement of purpose (more than 500, less than 1000 words, please), two official copies of all transcripts or date they were requested, official Graduate Record Exam (GRE) scores, three letters of recommendation (enclosed in sealed envelopes), and Certificate of Immunization for students who would reside on campus.

Admissions

Regular Admission

Applicants may be granted regular admission provided they have met the following minimum degree program requirements:

- An undergraduate degree from an accredited college on file in the Office of Graduate Studies and Sponsored Research
- An acceptable grade point average (3.0 preferred, 2.5 minimum*)
- Acceptable combined Verbal and Math GRE scores (1,000 preferred, 750 minimum*)

A student may be granted regular admission with deficiencies. Deficiencies must be completed within the period specified in the acceptance letter.

*MSMS Admissions Committee evaluates all scores (GRE, GPA, letter of recommendation, essay) in admissions decisions.

Provisional Admission

Applicants who do not meet the requirements for regular admission may be considered for provisional admission. Provisionally admitted students are allowed to take a total of up to nine hours of graduate credit. If requirements for full admission are met prior to completion of 9-credit hours and the student has demonstrated progress in their thesis research, the Provisional Status Review Committee can recommend full admittance before 9-credit hours have been earned. If requirements for full admission have not been met and/or significant progress in thesis research has not been demonstrated by the time 9-credit hours have been received, the Provisional Status Review Committee can recommend removal of the student from the program.

Requirements of Provisional Status

Students admitted to the MSMS program with provisional status must:
- have a graduate faculty member agree to be his/her major advisor or advocate prior to admittance. Ideally an advisor will be found. The advisor is someone who shares the student’s scholarly interests and will provide assistance in refining thesis topics and carry out other duties typical of a major advisor. If an advisor is not found prior to admission then the provisional student will need to obtain a faculty advocate who will serve as a resource to the student in his/her first semester and help in the identification of an appropriate advisor. It is the student’s responsibility to seek out an advisor or advocate and contact them directly during the admissions process.

- obtain a B or better in each core course and maintain a B average each semester in his/her other courses.

- successfully pass (receive a C or better) any undergraduate-level courses deemed necessary by the Admissions Committee prior to completion of his/her first semester in the MSMS program.

- submit a progress report to the MSMS Program Coordinator by the 2nd Monday of every December and May and the last Monday of July.

- have his/her advisor submit a 1 page report on his/her thesis progress by the 2nd Monday of every December and May to the MSMS Program Coordinator. This report should include progress in such areas as: library research; thesis development; laboratory and/or field competency; first-hand experience regarding academic performance; and professional development.

- improve GRE results with the aim of obtaining a target score of 1000 or greater on the verbal and quantitative portions combined, if deemed necessary by the MSMS Admissions Committee. Any student admitted with a GRE score under 1000 should retake the GRE prior to the completion of their first semester in the program.

**Provisional Student Progress Reports**

Progress reports are due on the second Monday of each December and May and on the last Monday of July. In December and May, a full progress report is due. The full progress report consists of two parts: (1) The first part of the report is an academic progress form which documents progress in MSMS courses. The academic progress form will be filled out and submitted to the Provisional Status Review Committee by the student. Information requested on the form includes titles of each class taken during the current semester, final course grades, and the signatures of his/her current instructors. If final grades are not yet available, then scores from graded tests, reports, or other class exercises may be submitted instead. (2) The second part of the report should be no more than two pages in length and focuses on progress outside the classroom, particularly regarding thesis work. Suggested issues to address include: Has a thesis topic been identified? Has a thesis committee been created? Has library research been initiated?
Has an appropriate experiment and/or sampling scheme been designed? Have data been collected? Have analyses and/or statistics been completed? How many chapters will the thesis be and what are the titles? How much has been written? Have there been any major obstacles to your progress? If so, what is necessary in order to overcome them?

By the last Monday of July, a brief progress report consisting of only part two (progress in research), is to be submitted to the MSMS Program Coordinator.

Provisional Status Review Committee

Students accepted with provisional status will be reviewed every December and May by the Provisional Status Review Committee. Progress reports submitted to the MSMS Program Coordinator will be provided to the committee for review. The committee will provide a written assessment/recommendation to each provisional student. The committee has the power to revoke funding provided by the University or recommend Academic Termination of the student from the program if significant research progress is not made.

The Provisional Status Review Committee will be comprised of three faculty members: one SkIO member, one SSU member, and one member at large. Committee members will serve for two years. To maintain continuity from one year to the next, the SSU member will rotate off after the first year (2002-2003). If there is a conflict of interest (for example, if a committee member is the advisor or advocate of a provisional student under review), then it is the member’s responsibility to find a substitute among the MSMS faculty. This substitute must either attend the appropriate portion of the meeting or submit a written evaluation and be available by telephone during the time of the meeting.

Mechanisms for Change of Admission Status from Provisional to Regular

At the termination of a provisional student’s first nine credit hours of study within the MSMS Program, the Provisional Status Review Committee must make a recommendation to the Dean of Graduate Studies and Sponsored Research to either grant full admission to the student or remove the student from the program. All provisional students are required to submit progress reports to the Provisional Status Review Committee on the second Monday of every December and May and the last Monday of July. See the Provisional Document for details of the progress report contents.

To be considered for removal from provisional status, a student must maintain a B average in all graduate courses taken in the MSMS Program and obtain a grade of B or better in all core courses. In addition, the following requirements may apply depending on reasons for admittance with provisional status.
GRE Score

If a student was admitted provisionally due to a GRE score less than the program’s target score of 1000 (combined verbal + quantitative scores), then the GRE must be retaken, the score improved, and the official scores need to be sent to the Office of Graduate Studies and Sponsored Research. In addition, provisional students already in the MSMS Program, must submit photocopies of the GRE score sheet to the MSMS Program Coordinator and the chair of the Provisional Status Review Committee. Students who have been accepted into the program, but have not yet begun studies in the MSMS Program, should send a photocopy of the score sheet to the chair of the MSMS Program Admissions Committee. A GRE preparation program is available in the Marine Science Building computer lab for studying purposes.

Deficiencies in Undergraduate Course Work

Any undergraduate courses recommended by the Admissions Committee must be taken within the first year of study in the MSMS program. It is strongly recommended that undergraduate course deficiencies be made up prior to entrance in the program in order to improve chances of successful completion of graduate courses. If the required courses are taken and passed with a C or better prior to beginning the MSMS Program, the relevant transcripts should be sent to the Office of Graduate Studies and Sponsored Programs to be added to the application file and a photocopy should be sent to the Chair of the MSMS Program Admissions Committee. If the courses are taken and passed with a C or better after studies in the MSMS Program have begun, then copies of the relevant transcripts should be submitted to the MSMS Program Coordinator and the chair of the Provisional Status Review Committee.

Non-degree (Special) Admission

Non-degree students can apply up to 8 semester hours of graduate credit taken at SSU to the MSMS program curriculum requirements if they are admitted to the program. Only 6 semester hours of approved graduate coursework not taken at SSU may be applied to the MSMS program curriculum requirements.

Transfer Credits

No more than six semester hours of graduate credit taken at another university or eight semester hours of graduate credit taken as a non-degree student at SSU may be applied toward the MSMS degree. Courses must have been passed with a B or better and must be approved by the students’ thesis committee prior to the thesis proposal defense.
Timing of Admission

Admission in the fall semester is preferred in order to facilitate the proper course sequence and the establishment of a cohort of students for peer support. Admission in the spring semester will be considered, but course eligibility may be limited due to lack of prerequisites (e.g. core course MSCI 5201 Introduction to Marine Sciences is offered in the fall semester and is a prerequisite for core course MSCI 5202 Introduction to Coastal Oceanography, which is offered in the spring). Also, student support (fellowships and assistantships) typically not initiated in the spring semester.

Orientation

New students will be provided with all of the policies, procedures, forms and information necessary to complete the degree no later than the first day of classes of the first semester of enrollment in the program.

Program of Study

Degree Requirements

All students will be required to take the twelve-hour required core curriculum as listed below. This core will provide a strong, broad multidisciplined investigation of marine sciences with emphasis on coastal environments. Through seminar and technical writing and communication courses, students will investigate marine issues and develop professional skills in critical thinking, logical interpretations and professional-quality presentations. With this common core background, the program of study provides three major tracks: Track 1 – Traditional Marine Science Research, Track 2 – Applied Marine Sciences, and Track 3 – Professional Advancement. Each track, chosen by the student in consultation with an advisor and committee, has specific curriculum requirements as well as options for courses within three curricular areas: a) Policy and Law, b) Research Tools, and c) Science.

Track 1, Traditional Marine Science Research, is designed for students: a) who plan to obtain a M.S. degree in Marine Sciences and continue into a Ph.D. program, or b) who wish to obtain a traditional research-based MS degree. Curriculum emphasis in this track is on science and original research.

Track 2, Applied Marine Sciences, is designed for students who wish to obtain a MS degree in Marine Sciences which provides them with the opportunity to learn and develop scientific skills applicable to marine science related industries, resource management, fisheries, aquaculture, and research. Curriculum emphasis in this track is on the acquisition of research tools and applied skills.
Track 3, Professional Advancement, is designed for students who are presently employed in a related field and wish to earn a masters degree in Marine Sciences for possible professional development and advancement. Examples of these students are presently employed science teachers, federal, state and local government agency personnel, and persons currently working in industry and the private sector. The curriculum in this track requires the student to take courses from all three curricula areas and allows additional flexibility for additional courses, which are most applicable to his/her particular professional development needs.

**General Requirements**

Each track requires 30 semester hours of graduate level coursework in addition to six credit hours of thesis research and preparation. An entering student must have passed an undergraduate calculus courses with a grade of ‘C’ or better or else must take such a course, which would not count toward the graduate course requirements. An advisor and an advisory committee will guide each student.

See Graduate Catalog for degree course requirements and course descriptions.

**Grade Requirements and Qualifying Examinations**

**Scholastic Warning/Academic Probation**

A regularly admitted graduate student whose GPA fall below 3.0 in a given semester will receive a letter of scholastic warning from the University placing the student on Academic Probation.

**Academic Termination**

The following are grounds for Academic Termination from the graduate program:

- A provisionally admitted student fails to achieve a 3.0 GPA after nine semester hours of course work.
- A regularly admitted student who is on academic probation fails to achieve a 3.0 GPA after nine additional semester hours of course work.

NOTE: With the exception of core courses and students who have provisional status, the number of C’s a student earns during their course is irrelevant as long as a cumulative 3.0 GPA is maintained.

All students in the MSMS Program are expected to complete the four core courses (listed below) with a grade of B or better.
MSMS Core Courses:
MSCI 5201 Introduction to Marine Sciences (3-1-4)
MSCI 5202 Introduction to Coastal Oceanography (3-1-4)
MSCI 5401 Technical Writing and Communication (3-0-3)
MSCI 5402 Research/Marine Science Seminar (1-0-1)

Students who receive grades of B or better in the core courses need not take a qualifying exam. They should, however, be prepared to answer integrative questions on concepts presented in the core courses at their defense in addition to questions specific to their thesis research.

If a student fails to achieve a grade of B or higher in one of the MSMS core courses, he/she will have one opportunity to pass a written qualifying exam in that core area. The exam will be designed by the professor(s) who taught the core course in which unsatisfactory progress was made and will be designed to test competency in that core area. It is the responsibility of the student to seek guidance on preparing for the exam from the relevant faculty member(s).

Scheduling of qualifying exams will be done by the MSMS Program Coordinator in conjunction with relevant faculty members and students. Qualifying exams will be offered once per semester. The exam should be scheduled no earlier than one month after the receipt of the unsatisfactory grade (< B) to ensure ample preparation time. The qualifying exam should also be offered well in advance of the start of the semester in which the relevant course(s) will next be taught.

The qualifying exam will be in written format with approximately one-half day allotted per exam.

The qualifying exam will be initially evaluated by the course instructor. If it falls into a potentially failing category based on the instructor’s evaluation, it will be evaluated by no less than three faculty members including the instructor for the course, the thesis advisor, and the coordinator of the program. For cases in which there is overlap (e.g. thesis advisor is coordinator) another faculty member will be selected to serve on the committee.

Students who pass the qualifying exam need not retake the course. If the written exam is not passed prior to the subsequent semester in which the relevant core course is offered, then the student will be required to reenroll in the course and achieve a B or better. Students who do not pass the course the second time with a ‘B’ or ‘A’ will be recommended for academic termination from the degree program.

**Graduate Student Advisement**

A temporary advisor and the thesis advisor must be a member of the graduate faculty at SSU. The thesis advisor must be a full graduate faculty member. An advisory committee consists of at least three advisory members, of which at least two are graduate faculty
members based at Savannah State University. Upon approval by the advisory committee, an original-work major paper may be substituted for a research thesis for students following tracks 2 or 3. In either case, thesis or major paper, a “proposal of research” must be submitted by the student and approved by the student’s advisor and advisory committee.

Financial Assistance

Applicants and students may apply for financial assistance in the form of Research Fellowships, Teaching Assistantships, research awards, and travel awards. Rules pertaining to financial assistance are stated below.

State Funds
Monies originate from the State of Georgia and are dispersed through a degree granting college, school, department, or program are deemed state funds. These funds typically are allocated by or requested from a department head, dean, or other administrative official. Included in these types of funds are: teaching assistantships, laboratory coordinator positions, departmental research assistantships, or student employment (not awarded as need-based financial aid through the financial aid office).

Independent Investigator Research Grant (HRG or “independent”) funds
These are funds that have been awarded to a single investigator or multiple investigators by an outside agency (federal, state, foundation, or private) to conduct research on a particular topic. These funds are directed toward the specific research goals of an individual or team and are governed by said individuals. They are mostly in the form of narrowly focused research assistantships associated with one of the principal investigators. They are separate from funds designated to set up research centers, institutes, or integrated programs.

Research Program, Center or Institute (RPCI or “center” funds)
These are federal, private or foundation funds that have been awarded to an institution or investigators to establish an externally funded center, program, or institute with a research and or educational mission. Such programs include those that award multiple internships/assistantships to students, seed money, or mini grants to faculty. These funds are typically governed by a program director, coordinator, or manager and are most often research assistantships or student employment that may be awarded to students working with faculty affiliated with the program, center or institute.

Guidelines
1) Students requesting state or “center” funds must meet the minimum requirements for regular admission into the program. All students may receive “independent” funds.
2) Assistantships and coordinator positions are funded as 20-hour per week commitments and combined with fulltime enrollment are considered fulltime
positions. As such, these positions may not be combined with off campus employment or other 20-hour positions.

3) Students receiving research assistantships must have a thesis advisor.

4) Student loans and need-based financial aid are not evaluated when a student is considered for support.

5) Assistantships may be suspended or revoked if a student is not making satisfactory progress towards the research project, teaching assignment, or in the degree program.

6) All student employment is limited to 20 hours per week (university guidelines)

7) Students are bound by all federal financial aid regulations and guidelines of Savannah State University.

Teaching Assistant duties

1) Prepare and deliver laboratory instruction and assist with lecture instruction.

2) Prepare/administer/grade/record and return assignments, quizzes or examinations to students in a timely manner under the supervision of the professor of record.

3) Be available during office hours, via email or phone to students.

4) Report student misconduct to appropriate campus officials.

Thesis Proposal

The thesis proposal must be presented to and approved by the thesis committee in the form of a formal written document and an oral presentation. This must be done by the end of the 2nd semester of study (e.g. 1st Monday of May for those entering in the fall semester) for full-time students. The timeline for part-time students is at the discretion of the advisor and committee. The proposal should clearly describe the problem or questions to be addressed by the research with clearly stated hypotheses, the methodology to be used, a preliminary literature review, and a timeline for project completion. A statement of needed equipment, supplies, and travel required for the project and how these items will be funded should also be included. This document is not meant to restrict the student from pursuing different avenues as opportunities arise within their research, but to provide a clear initial guideline for the committee’s input and approval. Once the thesis proposal and the initial draft of the “Application for Candidacy” form (see below) including curriculum track and courses –see Plan of Study Approval below) are approved/signed by the committee, a student is eligible to enroll in Thesis I.

Plan of Study Approval

At the time that the thesis proposal is presented to the thesis committee the ‘Thesis Proposal Defense and Candidacy Qualification Form’ should be presented to and approved by the committee. This ensures that the courses taken by a student are approved by the committee as relevant to their particular needs and goals and that the student is on track to graduate in a timely manner. This document is to be submitted to
the MSMS Program Director with an attached copy of transcripts (official or unofficial) from SSU graduate study and transcripts from any off campus graduate work to be applied to the degree. Deviations from this initial plan of study may occur due to restrictions in course offerings. If this occurs, the advisor and committee must approve the revised plan of study and the advisor must initial any course substitutions made on the original “Application for Candidacy” form prior to course registration. The form can then be updated, printed again, and used as the official Application for Admission to Candidacy for the Master's Degree (see below).

**Thesis Defense**

The thesis defense shall consist of two parts: 1) an oral presentation open to the public with a question and answer period; followed by 2) a thesis evaluation attended only by the committee members and the student. The oral presentation must be advertised two weeks in advance. The purpose of the private thesis defense is mainly, but not exclusively, to address any outstanding concerns based on the oral presentation, to review substantive changes to the penultimate draft submitted before the defense; and to ask questions that will help determine the readiness of the student to graduate. The committee can set future writing deadline(s) to assist student in graduating on time. Scheduling a defense before the graduation deadline does not ensure that the candidate will graduate as all committee members must sign the thesis cover page attesting that they approve the final written version.

**Application for Admission to Candidacy, Application for Graduation, and fees receipt**

Submit signed ‘Application for Admission to Candidacy for the Master of Science in Marine Sciences Form’, ‘Application for Graduation Form’, and copy of receipt for graduation fee payment to the registrar’s office (Mrs. Bing). She will only accept all three together. ‘The Application for Admission to Candidacy Form’ is the equivalent of curriculum checklist/gridsheet at the undergraduate level. We ask that you participate in Commencement ceremony and indicate it on the ‘Application for Graduation’ form.

**Thesis and Defense Deadlines**

- The thesis defense which includes a public presentation of thesis in seminar series format followed by a thesis committee meeting must be scheduled no later than six (6) weeks prior to the date graduating students’ grades are due in the registrar’s office (see academic calendar).

- A penultimate draft of the thesis must be submitted to thesis committee members no later than three (3) weeks prior to the scheduled thesis defense date. The
penultimate draft is the next to final version in a series of versions of the thesis which the thesis committee has reviewed. The final version is the one containing the signed thesis signature page that will be submitted to the Dean of Graduate Studies.

**Thesis Processing**

- The student must submit one complete formatted original copy of the thesis to the Office of Graduate Studies and Sponsored Research and one electronic version of the thesis to the program director no later than three weeks prior to graduation.

- The final thesis draft including Thesis Signature Page with signatures and thesis defense report form, and copy of receipt for thesis binding from the Library should be submitted to both the Office of Graduate Studies and Sponsored Research and the Registrar’s Office (Mrs. Bing).

- Submit an electronic copy of the signed thesis (.pdf file) to the program director.

- For details about thesis binding (e.g. number of copies), please contact the Graduate Studies and the Library (no approved written policies currently exist).