



San Diego State  
University

## **MA Student Handbook for the SDSU Department of Chemistry**

Together, the College of Graduate Studies' Master's Student Handbook and this Department of Chemistry Handbook seek to provide you with the policies governing the MA Degree Program, and to equip you with resources and guidance for successfully completing your MA degree. Note that the SDSU's College of Graduate Studies Master's Student Handbook contains critical university-mandated information that will not be reiterated here, including information on TA-ships, finances, university-level program requirements, and more. Instead, we provide here additional information specific to the Chemistry MA Degree Program. Please also make sure to review the resources in the Chem Grad Student Google Drive, visit <https://grad.sdsu.edu/current-students> regularly for updates, deadlines, FAQs, and more, and check your SDSU email regularly. Note, some of the links in this handbook will not be available to you until you have arrived on campus and have been added to our Department's listserv.

We congratulate you for undertaking this prestigious degree that will open new doors for you, and we are honored to support you in your journey! We see in each of you your tremendous potential, and we want to empower you to strive to do your very best as you work towards your important scientific and career goals.

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# I. Degree Requirements

## A. Unit requirements.

Master's students (both MS and MA) must complete a graduate program composed of 30 units, which includes at least 24 units in Chemistry courses indicated in the [Course Catalog](#) as being acceptable for our master's degree programs. Courses must provide qualification in 2 of the 6 designated disciplines of chemistry (Analytical Chemistry, Biochemistry, Chemical Education, Inorganic Chemistry, Organic Chemistry, and Physical Chemistry) if this was not achieved via passing orientation exam(s). Note, there are regular changes to course offerings, and so the onus is on the student to ensure full degree compliance.

Of the required 30 units:

- At least 15 of these units must be 600- and 700-level courses.
  - Of these units, CHEM 790, CHEM 792, and CHEM 695 are required.
  - No more than 6 units can come from Credit/No-Credit courses (This is in contrast to the 9 unit cap for the MS degree, as this program requires 3 units of 799A for degree completion).
  - A minimum of 6 units must be graded courses.
- A maximum of 15 graded units can come from 500-level courses.
  - 500-level courses often fulfill requirements for students who did not pass orientation exam(s).
- A maximum of 9 semester credit hours may be transferred from other universities or taken as SDSU Global Campus only if they meet the basic requirements for the master's degree.
  - All non-CHEM courses require approval of the MS/MA Graduate Advisor prior to submission of your Plan of Study (POS), and by the Graduate College.
  - Three and four quarter credit hours are transferred as two semester credit hours. Calculation details are provided by the Graduate College (see the [FAQ](#)).
- A maximum of 6 units may include electives outside the Chemistry Department at the 500-level or higher.
  - There must be clear and convincing relevance to your thesis work. If this is the case, these requests are typically accepted.
  - These courses are usually within the College of Sciences, but students have also periodically taken courses in Engineering and Public Health.
  - All non-CHEM courses require approval of the MS/MA Graduate Advisor and by the College of Graduate Studies prior to enrollment in the course in the form of a PAAR (Petition for Adjustment of Academic Requirements) form. See the

Form Guide in [Forms and Form Guidelines](#) Folder in the Chem Grad Student Google Drive.

There are grade point average (GPA) requirements for these required 30 units for graduate students per the College of Graduate Studies:

1. A minimum grade of C for every course used towards the degree, though some courses require higher grades.
2. The post-baccalaureate SDSU cumulative GPA<sup>1,2</sup> must be 3.00 or higher.
3. The post-baccalaureate overall cumulative GPA<sup>1,3</sup> must be 3.00 or higher.
4. The SDSU Program of Study (POS) GPA<sup>2</sup> must be 3.00 or higher.
5. The overall POS GPA<sup>3</sup> must be 3.00 or higher.

Note:

- **Good Academic Standing** is maintained by requirements 2 and 3. Failing to do so results in [academic probation](#).
- **Advancement to Candidacy** requires all grade requirements listed above, with a minimum of 12 minimum POS units.
- **To graduate**, all grade requirements above must be met.
- Regarding #2 and #3: The “post-baccalaureate SDSU cumulative GPA” and “post-baccalaureate overall cumulative GPA” are usually identical, and are both referred to as “the cumulative GPA” by most campus staff and faculty.
- Whenever possible, take 700 level graduate classes, as they are offered on a less frequent basis than 500 level courses. Plus, they have been developed especially for graduate students!

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<sup>1</sup> The post-baccalaureate cumulative GPA (often referred to as simply “cumulative GPA”) is calculated using all graded courses listed on the SDSU transcripts after the student has earned a Bachelor’s degree, regardless of whether or not the courses are applied towards the degree the student is currently pursuing. It includes courses taken through Global Campus prior to admission. All SDSU courses taken after they have earned their Bachelor's degree will be included in the graduate transcripts post-baccalaureate GPA (even if the course is numbered 499 or less). The post-baccalaureate cumulative GPA does not reset when a degree is awarded, the degree objective is changed, or the student is readmitted through Cal State Apply to a different SDSU program.

<sup>2</sup> The SDSU GPA (sometimes called “campus GPA”) calculations use all SDSU courses: San Diego Main Campus, Imperial Valley Campus, Global Campus Special Sessions, and Open University.

<sup>3</sup> The overall GPA calculations are calculated using all SDSU courses, plus transfer courses that have been formally recognized by the SDSU College of Graduate Studies and appear on the SDSU transcripts. Note, transfer or extension courses may not be used to improve the GPA of units completed at SDSU.

In addition to the College of Graduate Studies requirements, the Department of Chemistry mandates that your GPA must be at least 3.0 (B) in the following:

- Courses listed in the **Official Program of Study (POS)**
- Courses required to complete undergraduate deficiencies.
- All courses taken at the 300-level and above concurrently to the earliest course listed in the **Official Program of Study**, including courses accepted for transfer credit.

## **B. The Plan B thesis for the MA degree**

Importantly, the 30 required units are only one component of the MA degree. You must also successfully write a Plan B Thesis that shows your expertise breadth and depth, critical thinking skills, and communication skills via a comprehensive paper on a current topic in chemistry. You will need to identify a faculty mentor who will agree to be your Plan B thesis reviewer, and you must obtain their approval on your chosen topic. Please provide the name of your faculty mentor and your general thesis topic to the MS/MA Advisor via email. The final version of your Plan B thesis must be approved by a faculty mentor, and we recommend sending several drafts to your mentor before your final submission. The Plan B Thesis is the only option for the MA degree and is not an option for the MS degree. This work cannot include written efforts already applied to another completed degree (e.g. BS/BA or non-SDSU MS/MA). Note, you must be advanced to candidacy before submission of this paper to the Graduate Advisor.

The following guidelines should be used for the Plan B thesis:

- The paper must be at least 20 pages in length, double-spaced, and 11 or 12 point font, with 1 inch margins.
- The bibliography must contain at least ten references, five of which must be journal articles published within the last five years
- A title and 250-word abstract must be included
- If you use AI for editing purposes, **you must submit your draft prior to any AI use**, and then the draft after AI use. The pre-AI draft must be also formally submitted (in document form, not PDF) to the faculty mentor alongside the final thesis. Your faculty mentor may have additional requirements regarding AI, and you will need to review and follow the AI regulations in the Code of Conduct section below.
- The bibliography must follow the style of the Journal of the American Chemical Society or the Journal of Biological Chemistry. The references will be noted by numbers throughout the text. We recommend you use a reference tool like Zotero or Endnote.

- The paper must be submitted to your faculty mentor for corrections at least once. You must incorporate these edits and return the document for final approval prior to the deadlines below, so start early! We recommend the first cycle of revisions begins 2 months prior to the deadline.

After your paper has been approved by your faculty mentor, the mentor must email the MS/MA Advisor (and cc you) no later than **Dec. 1** (Fall graduation), **April 20** (Spring graduation), or **July 28** (Summer graduation), stating their approval of your Plan B Thesis. The MS/MA Advisor will then file a **Culminating Experience** form with the Graduate Division on your behalf.

### C. Brief course descriptions

Brief descriptions of a subset of courses are described here. Please see details in the [Course Catalog](#):

*CHEM 695 – Graduate Education in Chemistry.* Offered only in the Fall. Skills and knowledge needed for success in a chemistry graduate program and development as a scientist. 3 units, letter-graded, cannot be repeated.

*CHEM 790 – Seminar.* An intensive study in advanced chemistry. You'll learn to read scientific literature and build effective presentations. 1 unit, letter graded.

*CHEM 792 – Bibliography.* Drafting and outlining your master's project or thesis. 1 unit, letter graded.

*CHEM 795 – Chemistry Seminar.* Advanced study in all fields of chemistry. Basically, you're attending Friday seminars (which you should be doing anyway!). 1 unit, letter graded.

*CHEM 798 – Special Study.* Individual study. This is for MA students, not MS students.

### D. Guidance on how to enroll in 792 and 798

Enrollment in CHEM 792 and 798 have different processes than typical didactic coursework.

**CHEM 798** (special study units): **Enrollment via your faculty mentor.** This course is usually not automatically created for each faculty member. Your faculty mentor will need to ensure this course has been created for them in my.SDSU. They will need to add you to the roster and provide the section and class number to you. You may then add the class for up to 3 units.

**CHEM 792** (bibliography): **Enrollment via your faculty mentor.** This course is usually not automatically created for each faculty member. Your faculty mentor will need to ensure this course has been created for them in my.SDSU. They will then need to add you to the roster and provide the section and class number to you. You may then add the class.

## E. Typical MA program length

Most of our MA students complete their degree within our department's goal of 2.5 years, provided you start early on your Plan B thesis, setting and meeting deadlines for yourself.

As MA students usually support themselves by serving as Teaching Associates ([TAs](#)), they receive part-time tuition waivers, typically equal to 6 units per semester. Thus, many MA students enroll in 6 units per semester, though there may be other reasons (residency or visa status, scholarships, aid, etc.) why a student may need to enroll in more units. You are responsible for determining how many units you should be enrolled in per semester to stay matriculated in the Master's program while also meeting any additional requirements unique to your situation.

Below is an example of the most common degree program lengths for an MA student (2.5 years). Note, a 2-year (4 semesters) or 2.3-year (4 semesters plus a summer term) plan requires out-of-pocket expenses that a TA waiver will not cover.

### 2.5-Year Sample Plan (note, not all form requirements are listed)

SEMESTER	COURSE (UNITS)	NOTE
1 (Fall)	CHEM 695 (3) CHEM 500/600/700 (3)	Required May need to meet qualifier course requirements
2 (Spring)	CHEM 500/600/700 (3) (CHEM) 500/600/700 (3)  Status change from conditional classified to classified  Identify faculty mentor and set MA topic	May need to meet qualifier course requirements Some students consider a limited number of courses outside of CHEM Dept.
3 (Fall)	CHEM 790 (1) CHEM 795 (1) CHEM 798 (1) (CHEM) 500/600/700 (3)	Required
4 (Spring)	(CHEM) 500/600/700 (3) CHEM 798 (2) CHEM 792 (1) Submit POS Apply for Graduation by the start of Fall	Required
5 (Fall)	CHEM 500/600/700 (3) CHEM 798 (3) or CHEM 500/600/700 (3)	

## II. MA Milestones

### A. Milestone overview

An MA student has important, time-sensitive milestones during their program, many of which require forms that need to be approved by the MS/MA Graduate Advisor and the College of Graduate Studies. See the MS-MA Form Guide, located in the [Forms Folder](#) in the Chem Grad Student Google Drive, for specific instructions on how to launch the forms required for many of these milestones.

The milestones you will accomplish over your MA degree include:

- Select a faculty mentor to oversee your Plan B thesis
- Complete a status change from Conditionally Classified to Classified
- Complete your official Program of Study (POS)
- File an application for graduation
- Write and submit your Plan B thesis to your faculty mentor
- Submit an Online Thesis Defense or Final Exam Form upon approval of your Plan B thesis by your faculty mentor

### B. Status change from Conditionally Classified to Classified

Master's students are accepted into our program as a conditionally classified student. By the end of their second semester, MA students must complete the following requirements to have a status change to classified:

- Take at least 4 orientation exams prior to enrollment in your first semester of graduate school to identify strengths and areas for growth. These exams are given once annually, in August. Note, failure of these exams does not endanger your status in the program.
- Complete 12 didactic (i.e. no 79X courses) Program of Study units with 3 units, usually including 695, and earn a minimum GPA of 3.00.
- Qualify in 2 chemistry subdivisions of your choice through earning a B or higher in allowed coursework (see courses below) or orientation exam score (a score  $\geq$  50<sup>th</sup> percentile per ACS National norms for that particular exam topic and exam year).
- Earn a C or higher in all program courses.

The approved courses for the 6 divisions include (note not every course is offered every semester):

*Analytical Chemistry*: 550, 750, 751, 752, 753, 736\*, 761\* courses, or score  $\geq$  50<sup>th</sup> percentile level based on national averages for the Analytical Chemistry ACS exam.

*Biochemistry*: 560, 562, 563, 564, 761\*, 763, 765 courses, or score  $\geq$  50<sup>th</sup> percentile level based on national averages for the Biochemistry ACS exam.

*Chemical Education*: 781

*Inorganic Chemistry*: 520A, 520B courses, or score  $\geq$  50<sup>th</sup> percentile level based on national averages for the Inorganic Chemistry ACS exam.

*Organic Chemistry*: 432, 538, 730, 731, 732, 734, 736\* courses, or score  $\geq$  50<sup>th</sup> percentile level based on national averages for the Organic Chemistry ACS exam.

*Physical Chemistry*: 510, 711, 712, 713, 714 courses, or score  $\geq$  50<sup>th</sup> percentile level based on national averages for the Physical chemistry ACS exam.

*\* Though starred courses meet qualification requirements for more than one subdivision, you are not allowed to use a single course for more than one qualification requirement.*

As you plan your coursework, we encourage you to begin working on your preliminary Program of Study (POS) spreadsheet. You can find a planning template in the [Planning your Program folder](#) in the Chem Grad Student Google Drive. As new courses are developed in our program, it is possible that additional courses not listed here may fulfill qualification requirements. Inquire with the MS/MA Graduate Advisor before enrollment in the course to ensure the course is suitable for qualification. If you do not meet this requirement within the first year, a registration hold will be placed on you and a petition for an extension must be filed and approved before you can start your third semester. This will require a meeting with the Graduate MS/MA Advisor to approve a plan to meet this requirement.

Usually towards the end of the spring semester, the MS/MA Graduate Advisor will initiate a Status Change form on your behalf. If you have not been notified that a form has been submitted and you have completed these requirements, submit the appropriate google form requesting that the MS/MA Graduate Advisor submit a Status Change form on your behalf (see the Form Guide in the [Forms and Form Guidelines Folder](#) in the Chem Grad Student Google Drive). Do not initiate this petition for status change form with the College of Graduate Studies on your own. If you do not see confirmation of your expected status change by early May, email the MS/MA Graduate Advisor immediately.

### **Reminders:**

- No 79X courses may be used to count towards the status change in Year 1. Save these courses for after your second semester!
- Rarely, a course may be considered outside this group to be suitable for qualification (usually only newly developed courses not yet formally approved for qualification). You will need MS/MA Graduate Advisor permission AND College of Graduate Studies permission (via a Petition for Adjustment of Academic Requirements, or PAAR form)

prior to enrollment if you intend to use a different qualifier course. Permission is not guaranteed.

- Students often request a non-CHEM course to count towards the Program of Study (POS) as part of their electives. In the case of an elective, you will still need MS/MA Graduate Advisor permission AND College of Graduate Studies permission (via a PAAR) prior to enrollment in that course to use it as part of your POS. Permission is not guaranteed, but is typically honored when it supports your thesis/program area.
- Check out the university catalog [here](#). Check out this searching for classes guide [here](#).

### **C. Complete your official Program of Study (POS) and Advance to Candidacy**

After you have passed the qualifier exam requirements and attained Classified Graduate Standing, you can submit an Official Program of Study (POS) and Advancement to Candidacy for an Advanced Degree. Your Official POS lists all courses that you have taken or plan to take to meet your MA degree requirements (see above in this Handbook for unit requirements). As you prepare your Official POS, you should perform a degree audit in my.SDSU, refer to your preliminary POS template, and review guidance in the [MS\\_MA Program Folder](#) in the Chem Grad Student Google Drive. Your overall GPA must be at least a 3.00 to submit your POS. **You are expected to submit your Official POS in November or December in your third semester.** At a minimum, your Official POS must be approved at least one semester before your anticipated graduation date. Approval of your POS may require 2-4 weeks.

During the preparation of your Official POS, you will need to ensure you have met the following requirements to Advance to Candidacy. To be eligible to Advance to Candidacy, you must:

- 1) Meet the following GPA requirements:
  - a) A minimum grade of a C (2.0) in every course used towards your degree
  - b) SDSU graduate GPA must be a 3.00 or higher
  - c) Overall graduate GPA must be a 3.00 or higher
  - d) SDSU Program of Study GPA must be 3.00 or higher
  - e) Overall Program of Study GPA must be 3.00 or higher
- 2) Complete at least 12 Program of Study (POS) units with a minimum 3.00 GPA (and all program courses obtained a grade of C or better)
- 3) Pass orientation examinations or complete coursework that fulfill this requirement (see requirements for the status change from conditionally classified to classified) and thus completed a status change from conditionally classified to classified.

- 4) Ensure all necessary Petition to Adjust Academic Requirements (PAAR) form requests have been submitted and approved.

The set of requirements specified in the Graduate Bulletin at the time your Official POS is approved will be in effect for your degree. Any change for an elective class option to your Official POS after it has been approved must be made on a PAAR form. If the change affects a specific degree requirement, Chem 790, 792 or 695, versus an elective option, it must also be made using a PAAR. To request a PAAR to be submitted on your behalf by the MS/MA Graduate Advisor, see instructions in the latest Form Guide in the Chem Grad Student Google Drive). We prefer that you do not submit a PAAR to the College of Graduate Studies on your own.

**Generally, you will request to be advanced to candidacy at the same time your Official POS is approved, though your advancement MUST happen prior to registration in your final semester.** Often, this is in May/June after semester 4 for the 2.5-year plan, or early January for the 3-year plan. If you are ineligible to advance before your planned final semester, degree completion will be delayed by at least one term, and you will need to complete additional paperwork/costs (see Request to Postpone Graduate Application section). Any deficiencies that prevent advancement to candidacy at this point will result in the review of your status at the end of each semester by the Graduate Division.

**A reminder if you want to apply any UCSD courses to your official POS:** you can take classes at UCSD provided they complement courses offered here. However, they must be part of your program of study for the MA degree. You must be in good academic standing. A 4-unit class at UCSD converts to a 2-unit class at SDSU. The corresponding fees for those four-unit classes are equivalent to a 3-unit class at SDSU. You need to begin a PAAR request to take classes at UCSD at least 1.5 months before the start of the quarter at UCSD. To request a PAAR to be submitted on your behalf by the MS/MA Graduate Advisor, see instructions in the latest Form Guide in the Chem Grad Student Google Drive). Note there are limits to the number of courses not taken at the SDSU campus that may be transferred towards your degree. We prefer that you do not submit a PAAR to the College of Graduate Studies on your own.

#### **D. File application for graduation**

You must apply for graduation, since this is not automatic. Please review FAQs from the College of Graduate Studies [here](#). The application is due 3-6 months before the official diploma date and must be done through your my.SDSU account. Deadlines are posted [here](#).

A registration hold may prevent you from applying to graduate and you will need to resolve it. See guidance [here](#). If you have missed the deadline for graduation applications, contact the Graduate Studies office at [gra@sdsu.edu](mailto:gra@sdsu.edu) to determine whether it is possible to petition for a late application. But please **don't miss this deadline!** If you plan to participate in Commencement, review deadlines, checklist, and other important information [here](#).

## **E. Remaining an active student in good standing**

Per [university policy](#) and College of Graduate Studies [policy](#) and [resources](#), to remain in Good Standing with the College of Graduate Studies, students must:

1. Maintain good academic standing with the university based on overall cumulative and SDSU cumulative GPA are both at least a 3.00,
2. Are in good judicial standing (as defined by the Center for Student Rights and Responsibilities),
3. Make continued good progress toward the degree each semester (as defined by the graduate program),
4. Maintain matriculation (enroll in classes or file Leave of Absence, each Fall and Spring semester).

Thus, you need to remain enrolled and taking classes each semester until you have completed **all** degree requirements and filed for graduation. Occasionally, students need to take time off from their studies for a variety of reasons. To remain active, you must apply and have approved a Leave of Absence (LOA). You must submit a LOA request when you cannot attend a Fall or Spring term for any of the following reasons: medical, educational, financial, military, and/or personal. The LOA is necessary to maintain your active status "matriculation" when there are no courses during a particular fall or spring term. This is an important tool to help you finish your degree in times of difficulty. Please inform your research advisor and the MS/MA graduate advisor that you are applying for an LOA. You do not need to disclose details to them, but they need to be aware of your plans.

You are eligible for a LOA if:

- you have already finished your first semester at SDSU
- you are in good academic standing (not on academic probation)
- you do not have any of the following pending holds: judicial hold, eligibility hold, degree application hold, disqualification hold
- you have not exceeded the maximum four leave of absences

To request an LOA:

1. Log into my.SDSU and select the Academic Records tile.

2. Select Student Records Forms.
3. Select the Leave of Absence form.
4. Complete the form with the intended term for Leave of Absence and type of leave requested.
5. Submit form, once submitted a confirmation email will be sent.
6. Allow 5–7 business days for processing.
7. Students will be notified via their SDSU email once the request has been processed.

To cancel a previously submitted LOA request, complete the same form and select the **Cancel Leave of Absence** option.

Although approvals are not guaranteed, an exception to the maximum allowed LOA policy can be requested by submitting the Leave of Absence Form. Graduate students who are not in good academic standing will have their LOA requests automatically reviewed for a possible exception. Graduate students in their first semester at SDSU cannot take a LOA. If students do not enroll during their 1st semester as a matriculated student, they will be considered a "no-show" and will have to apply for readmission.

**Other Important Information:** It is very important that you make suitable progress towards your master's degree if you are supported at a teaching assistantship or are awarded a nonresident tuition waiver (NRTW). You must be registered for at least 6 units of classes each semester that are included in your program of study. Failure to make suitable academic and/or research progress or maintain a 3.0 GPA may result in the loss of your TA-ship and NRTW. Not all students may be awarded NRTWs due to the limited number provided by SDSU to our department. NRTWs are limited to 5 semesters. You are responsible for your fees when not enough NRTWs are available and when you request an NRTW beyond these time limits.

### III. Brief TA Guidelines

Being a TA is an important and rewarding experience – you play a key role in shaping how undergraduates feel about chemistry (is it relevant to their lives? If they work hard, can they learn important chemistry principles, or is this simply a discipline to be feared?) Undergraduates sometimes are inspired to undertake research at SDSU after hearing more about their TA's research. You play a critical role as an educator and mentor for your undergraduates. If you find yourself nervous before your class, or uncertain that you have enough knowledge to teach a course, this is common. We are committed to providing you

with the resources you need, and with appropriate preparation on your part, we know you will be successful.

Most of the TA resources and information is provided in the College of Graduate Studies's Master's Student Handbook and will not be reiterated here. Please also review carefully the information found in the current Chemistry & Biochemistry Department Academic Student Employee (ASE) policies. The latest version can be obtained from the Chem Grad Student Google Drive and/or from the Chemistry front office.

A typical workload assignment of 0.4 corresponds to 16 hours per week of work. All duties required for your assignment will be detailed in a Description of Duties form provided to you at the time of hiring.

Primary duties may consist of one of the following assignment types:

- Two lab section assignments (TA)
- Four discussion section assignments (TA)
- One lab and two discussion sections assignments (TA)
- Assisting a large enrollment lecture instructor (ISA)

Additional duties can include:

- Attending department TA/ISA training before the first day of classes
- Attending weekly TA/ISA meetings
- Preparing course materials relevant to your assignment
- Holding office hours or tutoring sessions
- Grading student work from their section or others
- Proctoring exams for their students or other sections
- Attending course lectures

Initial contracts will only cover a single semester and reappointment is based on department needs and satisfactory completion of duties. No ASE can begin working without a contract in place and any work performed without a contract cannot be compensated. To support all cohorts of Master's students and to promote timely completion to degree, a master's student might stop being offered TA contracts after completing 3 years in our master's programs. Unsatisfactory performance of assigned job duties may result in reassignment or revision of duties at any time during the term of appointment, which will result in the department issuing a revised Description of Duties form.

**Additional resources:**

[SDSU Center for Teaching and Learning resources](#)

[First Day of Class Tips](#)

[Tips for New Teaching Assistants](#)

[Learning to Teach: 10 Tips for Professors](#)

[SDSU Canvas main page](#)

[SDSU Canvas Support Homeroom.](#)

[Introduction to teaching with Canvas - Self Paced Course](#)

## **IV. Code of Conduct**

### **A. The Commitment from the Department of Chemistry**

SDSU and the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry are committed to fostering a supportive, inclusive, intellectually stimulating environment that enables all of our students to thrive as they develop as scientists. Thus, we strive to:

- provide each student an opportunity to successfully complete their degree to the standard required by the degree program
- sustain a respectful, collegial, engaging, and active educational atmosphere
- safeguard the health, safety, welfare, property, and human rights of all members of the university community
- uphold the academic integrity of the program

These standards align with San Diego State University Policies defined in the [University Catalog](#), the [Academic Senate Policy File](#), and with [university policy](#).

The faculty mentor overseeing your MA degree is committed to the professional development of the student, to provide reasonable access via informal and formal meetings, and to provide regular feedback on student's thesis. A student may seek periodically additional support from the Departmental Chair or the MS/MA Graduate Advisor.

### **B. Codes and resources for students**

Graduate students at SDSU are expected to adhere to the highest standards of professionalism, academic integrity, and ethical behavior throughout their time in the program. This commitment extends to all professional activities, both on and off campus, including conference and meeting travel, where students represent their program, department, and the university.

Academic dishonesty and class/lab disruption is not tolerated in the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry. Academic Dishonesty includes: cheating that is intended to gain unfair academic advantage; plagiarism that is intended to gain unfair academic advantage; other forms of academic dishonesty that are intended to gain unfair academic advantage; furnishing false information to a university official, faculty member, or campus office; forgery, alteration, or misuse of a university document, key, or identification instrument; misrepresenting oneself to be an authorized agent of the university or one of its auxiliaries; unauthorized recording, dissemination, or publication of academic presentations (including handwritten notes) for a commercial purpose; misuse of computer facilities or resources; encouraging, permitting, or assisting another to do any act that could subject them to discipline.

Plagiarism shall be defined as the act of incorporating ideas, words, or specific substance of another, whether purchased, borrowed, or otherwise obtained, and submitting same to the university as one's own work to fulfill academic requirements without giving credit to the appropriate source. Plagiarism shall include but not be limited to (a) submitting work, either in part or in whole, completed by another; (b) omitting footnotes for ideas, statements, facts, or conclusions that belong to another; (c) omitting quotation marks when quoting directly from another, whether it be a paragraph, sentence, or part thereof; (d) close and lengthy paraphrasing of the writings of another; (e) submitting another person's artistic works, such as musical compositions, photographs, paintings, drawings, or sculptures; (f) submitting as one's own work papers purchased from research companies; and (g) representing work produced by generative artificial intelligence (AI) as one's own.

Lab/classroom disruption includes: willful, material and substantial disruption or obstruction of a university-related activity, or any on-campus activity; participating in an activity that substantially and materially disrupts the normal operations of the university, or infringes on the rights of members of the university community; failure to comply with directions of, or interference with, any university official or any public safety officer while acting in the performance of their duties.

The Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry refers graduate students to College of Graduate Studies and/or SDSU for the following important guidelines and policy:

[Matriculation/Remaining in Good Standing/Enrollment Requirements](#)

[Electronic Forms](#) (see also the Form Guide in the [Forms and Form Guidelines folder](#) in the Chem Grad Student Google Drive)

[Leave of Absence policy](#)

[Academic Probation and Disqualification](#)

[Withdrawals](#)

[Student Code of Conduct](#)

[Principles of Community](#)

[Time, Place and Manner/Free Speech](#)

[Inclusive SDSU](#)

### **C. General best practices for students**

To help you progress successfully through your program, we recommend the following best practices:

1. **Work towards becoming an effective, efficient problem-solver.** You will want to:
  - a. Take responsibility: of your progress, your project, your motivation, your goals, and your future.
  - b. Build trouble-shooting and resiliency skills.
  - c. Communicate clearly.
  - d. Be organized.
  - e. Be ethical and respectful.
  - f. Learn from others and teach others. Make sure you provide space for others to contribute, and ensure you are taking space to contribute.
  - g. Leverage your strengths and build on your areas for growth.
  
2. **Meet periodically with your faculty advisor, and come to these meetings prepared.** You will want to:
  - a. Ensure alignment in priorities, deadlines, and thesis goals.
  - b. Empower your research advisor to mentor you effectively by communicating respectfully but honestly. They may or may not be able to accommodate your requests, but self-advocacy is an important skill to develop regardless.
  - c. Seek out mentors beyond your faculty mentor.
  
3. **Develop technical depth and breadth.** By the end of your MA degree, you will need to apply your critical thinking and technical skills to new challenges in the next stage of your career.
  - a. Master the fundamentals and fill knowledge gaps early, as core concepts compound.
  - b. Aim to deeply understand assignments, protocols, methodology, and instrumentation, as well as your hypotheses, project rationale, significance, and impact of your research.

- c. Stay up to date with scientific literature, and consider leveraging tools like AI, Zotero/Endnote, etc. in an ethical and appropriate way to help you be organized and efficient in your reading.
  - d. Attend our Departmental Seminars and ask questions!
4. **Treat research + TAing like a full-time job.** Remember, science is a world-wide enterprise, and you will ultimately be competing for jobs and opportunities among the best and brightest, just like you. You will want to:
- a. Be organized and efficient in planning your days ahead of time. We suggest using an online- or paper-based calendar to help you allot time for research, classes, TAing, meetings, seminars, etc.
  - b. Maintain consistent work hours.
  - c. Strive for your personal best; try not to get too hung up on your perceived success or failure of others.
  - d. Set goals and track your progress.
  - e. Keep your lab notebooks up to date, all data organized and backed up, your trainings current, etc.
  - f. Be a good lab citizen: take care of lab and departmental equipment and resources, only use equipment after proper training, and be a collaborative and kind colleague.
5. **Work on your written and oral communication skills.** Be sure to:
- a. Write early and often.
  - b. Strive for clarity.
  - c. Practice describing your research to specialists and non-specialists.
  - d. Present your work at as many opportunities as you can, and for a wide variety of audiences.
  - e. Prepare written drafts early so you can receive ample feedback.
  - f. Do not wait until the end to begin writing your thesis. Outline as you go.
  - g. Work on a short, big picture elevator pitch highlighting your skills to prepare for networking opportunities.
6. **Take advantage of professional development opportunities.** You will want to:
- a. Practice your collaboration, networking, and project management skills.
  - b. Build leadership/mentoring/managing skills.
  - c. Participate in outreach opportunities.
  - d. Take advantage of free trainings/certifications available at SDSU if they align with your career goals or areas needing growth.

7. **Define your immediate, short-term, medium-term, and long-term goals, and evaluate them and your progress regularly.** As much as you can, align your coursework, technical skills, and professional development skills with these goals. Individual Development Plans ([IDPs](#)) can be very helpful! We recommend you share your goals with your research mentor.
  
8. **Maintain your well-being.** Be sure to:
  - a. Commit to sleep, exercise, eating a well-rounded diet, social connection, and activities that reinvigorate/replenish your joy or relaxation, not just science! These things are performance tools, not luxuries, and they keep you productive and creative.
  - b. Don't hesitate to use campus mental health resources. Remember, they are not JUST for acute issues/crises, but also for building tools to help you enjoy life! You can find details on resources in the [SDSU Resources and Mental Health and Wellness Resources folder](#) in the Chem Grad Student Google Drive and info [here](#). Don't forget to also check out the Wellness room in GMCS 212! You will find guidelines for room usage and the keypad code for entry in the [SDSU Resources and Mental Health and Wellness Resources folder](#) in the Chem Grad Student Google Drive.
  - c. Develop bonds with your peers. Attend CGSA events, invite a lab mate for a coffee, arrange a hike with a neighboring lab, etc.
  
9. **Be organized and proactive with the bureaucratic elements of your degree progression.** Make sure you:
  - a. Perform regular degree audits/evaluations using my.SDSU.
  - b. Review the resources from the Chemistry Department and the College of Graduate Studies to stay organized and on track.
  - c. Be proactive in submitting forms.
  - d. Remember that you are responsible for ensuring degree progress, including meeting milestones/timelines/deadlines.
  - e. Check your email regularly.
  - f. Respond to the semester check-in surveys sent out by the MS/MA Graduate Advisor.
  - g. Get help when you are experiencing issues or barriers. Don't let them endanger degree completion.

**10. Seek funding support and other opportunities in consultation with your research mentor.** Consider:

- a. Applying for scholarships.
- b. Take on short/abbreviated roles that allow you to develop skills you value (e.g. leadership, mentoring, etc.)

**11. Protect your time and finish strong!** Be sure to:

- a. Remember your values and your “whys” for undertaking this degree. This can keep you motivated and reignite your enthusiasm.
- b. Remember that you are here to learn; no one knows everything! You are in this program because we know you have what it takes to be a successful Master’s degree scientist. Your field needs you! You have your own unique perspectives, skills, and background that allow us to tackle the world’s toughest scientific problems.
- c. Schedule uninterrupted deep-work time.
- d. Be efficient in administrative tasks.
- e. Don’t let procrastination/perfectionism derail your progress.

**D. Graduate student use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and related data processing**

Artificial Intelligence (AI), including generative tools such as ChatGPT and other large language models (LLMs), is rapidly evolving and widely used in academic, business, and everyday settings. These resources have tremendous value, and you should learn to use them with careful, informed, and ethical engagement. AI tools may create generative or predictive content. However, they may produce inaccurate, biased, plagiarized, or fabricated (“hallucinated”) material. You are responsible for their own competence when using AI, including the ability to verify the accuracy and reliability of any AI-assisted work.

**Master’s thesis documents and other materials you produce over the course of your master’s degree must always fully reflect your original contribution.** You must clearly and transparently distinguish your own work from that of prior scholars, and from that of AI. Using AI does not exempt you from plagiarism or academic honesty standards. Any use of AI tools must be transparent. You are fully responsible for maintaining integrity and properly acknowledging the original source of an intellectual contribution, and for speaking with your research advisor for any additional regulations they might have regarding AI.

Submitting original data or writing to AI systems carries risks to confidentiality and loss of intellectual property. Information entered may be stored, reused for model training, and later appear in responses to other users. You must consider these risks before sharing sensitive or original material. Please review this [library web page](#) that provides students with guidelines and resource links, including AI definition, and guidance for AI use in the academic setting. Please review SDSU's AAI (Academic Applications of Artificial Intelligence) and Information Technology's AI resources on [this web site](#).

The following are **permitted** uses of AI in our Department of Chemistry:

- Idea development: brainstorming research questions, conceptual frameworks, methodological approaches, and topics for further inquiry.
- General research assistance: locating publicly available information, searching the chemical literature, identifying relevant subject areas, or summarizing existing literature for the student's review and verification.
- Editorial support: improving grammar, spelling, punctuation, sentence and paragraph structure, and the overall clarity of student-written text. AI use in this category must not alter the intellectual content or introduce new substantive material.

The following are **prohibited** uses of AI in our Department of Chemistry:

- Generation of academic content: producing text, paragraphs, or sections of any milestone document, including proposals, exam materials, or thesis chapters.
- Creation of visual or analytical materials: generating figures, diagrams, schematics, graphical elements, or data visualizations.
- Reference generation: producing citations, bibliographies, or reference lists.
- Data analysis or interpretation: drawing conclusions, interpreting experimental data, or performing analytical reasoning, except with the research advisor's approval and only after the student has performed and documented their own interpretation and shared this interpretation with the advisor.
- Use of sensitive research materials: uploading or processing unpublished data, proprietary information, laboratory results, or any confidential research materials without explicit prior approval from the student's research advisor.

When AI is used for permitted purposes, students must:

1. Retain the original draft: submit the initial draft of the document (before AI-assisted editing) alongside the final submission.
2. Disclose AI use: include a brief declaration within the milestone document stating which AI tool(s) were used and for what specific, permitted purpose. Example: "ChatGPT 5.1

was used solely for grammar, spelling, and clarity editing. No AI-generated text, figures, or references are included in this document.”

3. Explicitly check all references/citations in the thesis. AI can “hallucinate” or misrepresent articles, and it is the student’s responsibility to ensure all references/citations are actual peer-reviewed articles and that you have accurately portrayed their findings in your thesis.

Students are responsible for consulting their research mentor prior to using AI in cases where appropriate use is not explicitly stated as acceptable. Faculty advisor approval is mandatory before entering any unpublished or confidential research materials into AI tools. Unauthorized or undisclosed use of AI, including the incorporation of AI-generated text, figures, or references, constitutes a violation of academic integrity and will be addressed in accordance with Departmental and University policies on academic misconduct. The Department encourages the responsible use of AI tools where they enhance efficiency, complete other search tools for scientific information, and support the writing process. However, the central intellectual contributions of milestone documents must originate from the student, who bears the ultimate responsibility for the content of these documents. These expectations uphold the scholarly standards of the Chemistry discipline and reflect emerging norms across leading research institutions.

## E. Grievances

If you have experienced conduct that may constitute discrimination, harassment (including sexual harassment), retaliation, dating violence, domestic violence, sexual exploitation, or stalking, it is important to report the information to the Center for Prevention of Harassment and Discrimination (CPHD). Reports can be made using the forms provided [here](#). You may also report information in person, by email, or by phone. To do so, contact CPHD at:

**Email:** [cphd@sdsu.edu](mailto:cphd@sdsu.edu)

**Phone:** 619-594-6464

**Physical Location:** Administration 228

These issues are not handled by the Department of Chemistry as we are not trained in these areas. The individuals in the CPHD are professionals ready to assist you in these serious issues.

At SDSU, most employees, including faculty, staff, and administrators, are considered “[Responsible Employees](#)” or mandated reporters. This means that we have a

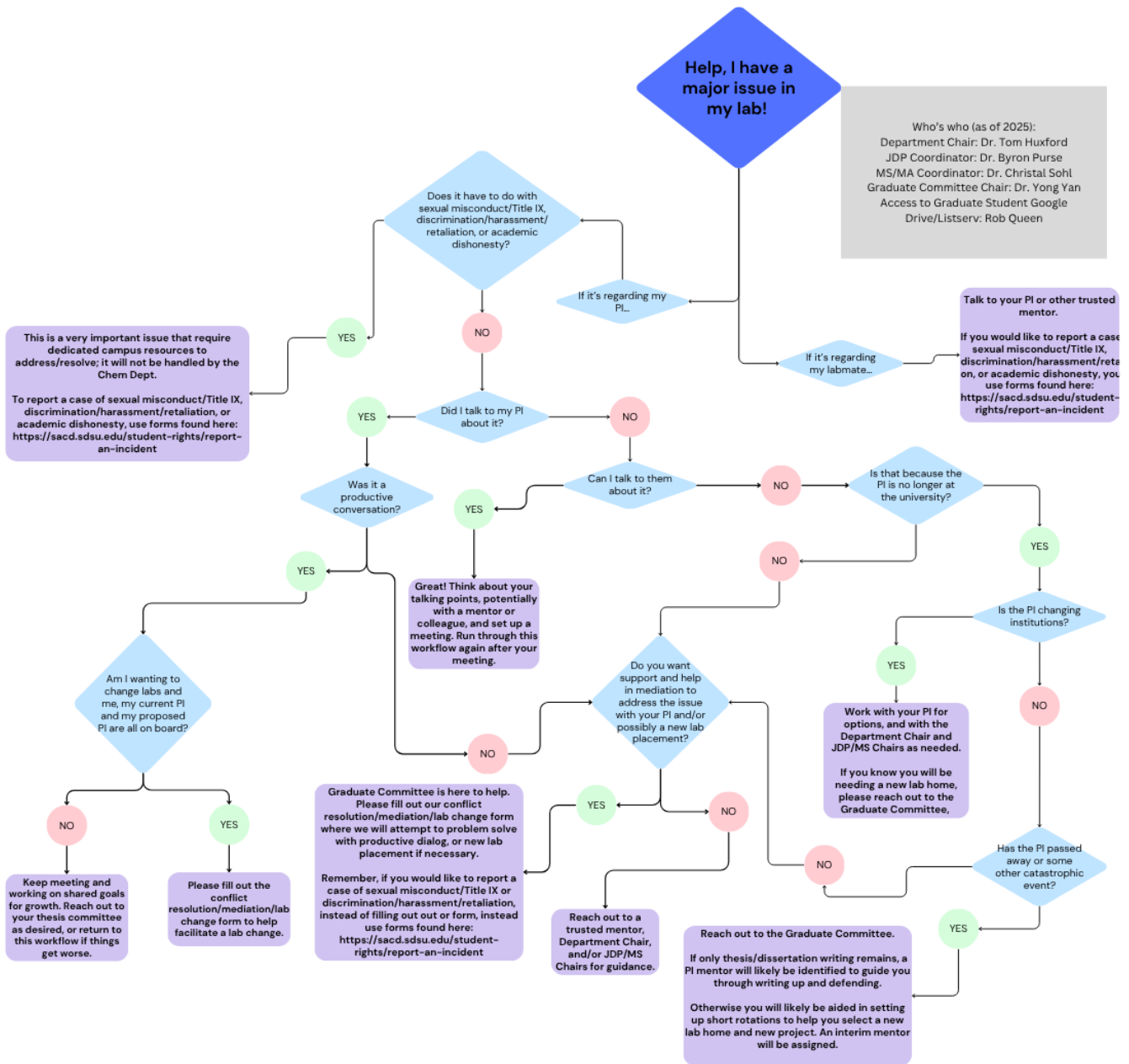
duty to report to the Title IX Coordinator/DHR Administrator when we learn about or see prohibited conduct such as sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, dating violence, domestic violence, stalking, sexual exploitation, prohibited consensual relationships, discrimination based on a protected status, harassment based on a protected status, and retaliation. Responsible employees do not include physicians, psychotherapists, professional licensed counselors, licensed clinical social workers, and clergy who work on or off campus, acting solely in their roles or capacities as part of their employment, in the provision of medical or mental health treatment or counseling; or sexual assault and domestic violence counselors and advocates who work or volunteer on or off campus in sexual assault centers, victim advocacy offices, women's centers, and health centers and who are acting solely in that role in the provision of counseling or advocacy services.

For personnel issues that do not or do not appear to involve the conduct outlined above, our Department has created resources for you. For issues with your faculty mentor, your first step is to talk to them directly to try to communicate the issues you are having. Often mentoring styles, misguided mentoring strategies, etc., once the research mentor is aware of their ineffectiveness with you, can be modified and the relationship is improved. What we learn is effective for one student rarely translates fully to another, and most PIs will highly value an honest, fair, respectful, and professional discussion of what you need and what isn't working for you. Self-advocacy is also a critical skill to hone, and this is the time to grow that skill. There are also skills to learn to be more effectively mentored; a holistic approach is usually best in resolving issues.

If speaking with your mentor is unsuccessful or you feel uncomfortable doing so, you can get help from the SDSU Chemistry Graduate Committee, a group of faculty members that volunteer to serve and represent each division. To launch this confidential request for conflict resolution or mediation for a serious issue related to your research lab/research lab mentor, use this [link](#).

Your issue may also simply be a mismatch with no issues/grievances with your current faculty mentor. Perhaps you've already worked out your new lab home and your current and future research mentor are on board. Please fill out the same [link](#) so we have record of this and to ensure all the details are resolved.

We take these issues seriously, and we are committed to reaching an effective resolution for all involved. This can range from working with you and your research mentor on specific goals, or exploring options for finding a new lab home. Here is a workflow that will help you decide your appropriate steps:



## V. Resources

### A. College of Graduate Studies links

[All Things Graduate Life Resources](#)

[Key Deadlines](#) (see both "Registration" deadlines and "Graduation" deadlines)

[Degree Requirements](#)

[E-Form help](#)

[FAQs](#)

[Financial Support](#)

[Employment \(TAs, GAs, ISAs\)](#)

[Graduate Student Experience Program \(GSEP\) explanation with opt-out form link](#)

## **B. Departmental links and resources**

- Current College of Graduate Studies and Department of Chemistry MS/MA Handbooks and Policies are [here](#) in the Chem Grad Student Google Drive (reach out to Rob Queen at [roqueen@sdsu.edu](mailto:roqueen@sdsu.edu) if you do not have access to the Chem Grad Student Google Drive).
- Forms and form guidelines in the [Forms folder](#) in the Chem Grad Student Google Drive
- Program planning [here](#) in the Chem Grad Student Google Drive
- Various resources are housed in this [Resources folder](#) in the Chem Grad Student Google Drive. This includes Funding/Scholarships, Leave (Parental, Medical, etc.), Mediation request/Conflict resolution, and SDSU-specific resources including mental health and wellness, sexual misconduct response and prevention, economic and economic crisis resources, etc.
- Chemistry Grad Students listserv ([chemgrad@sdsu.edu](mailto:chemgrad@sdsu.edu); reach out to Rob Queen at [roqueen@sdsu.edu](mailto:roqueen@sdsu.edu) if you have not been added).
- Chemistry Graduate Student Homeroom in Canvas (reach out to Dr. Christal Sohl at [chem.ms-advisor@sdsu.edu](mailto:chem.ms-advisor@sdsu.edu) if you do not have access)
- MA degree catalog requirements info [here](#)
- MS degree catalog requirements info [here](#)
- Link to [Prof. Sohl's appointment booking](#), please select only MS/MA appointments.
- As a new Graduate student, be sure to work with the front office and your research advisor to ensure key and key card access. To pick up keys, visit the Key Issue office next to Peterson Gym. [Key Issue office hours and location](#).

## **C. Departmental communication**

You will be given two SDSU email addresses, one as a student and the other as a TA. We recommend you use your student account for all research matters. Important SDSU communications will be sent via email, so be sure to check and read all SDSU and departmental communications. You will also be added to the Chemistry Department listserv ([chemgrad@sdsu.edu](mailto:chemgrad@sdsu.edu)), which will also allow you to access our Chem Grad Student Google Drive. This listserv is used to communicate department announcements to all students, including seminars, upcoming events, internships, and job opportunities. Finally, you will be added to the Chemistry MS/MA Program Canvas Homeroom page. This page holds important information about student resources, scholarships, career pathways, and department contacts. Announcements for internships and job opportunities are also posted on Canvas and we recommend checking announcements regularly.

#### D. Department contact info:

Prof. Tom Huxford, Department Chair: [thuxford@sdsu.edu](mailto:thuxford@sdsu.edu)

Prof. Christal Sohl, MS/MA Graduate Advisor: [chem.ms-advisor@sdsu.edu](mailto:chem.ms-advisor@sdsu.edu)

Prof. Byron Purse, JDP Director and Graduate Admissions Coordinator: [bpurse@sdsu.edu](mailto:bpurse@sdsu.edu)

Prof. Regis Komperda, Associate Chair for Curriculum Management: [rkomperda@sdsu.edu](mailto:rkomperda@sdsu.edu)

Rob Queen, Departmental coordinator: [roqueen@sdsu.edu](mailto:roqueen@sdsu.edu)

The Chemistry Graduate Student Association (CGSA): [sdsu.cgsa@gmail.com](mailto:sdsu.cgsa@gmail.com)

For Questions about...	Contact...
Financial Aid and Billing	<a href="#">Cal Coast Student Financial Center</a>
The Graduate Student Health Insurance Program (GSHIP)	Email <a href="mailto:gship@sdsu.edu">gship@sdsu.edu</a> / visit <a href="https://sdsu.edu/gship">sdsu.edu/gship</a>
Scholarships and fellowships facilitated through the College of Graduate Studies	Email <a href="mailto:grad.scholarships@sdsu.edu">grad.scholarships@sdsu.edu</a> / visit <a href="https://grad.sdsu.edu/financial-support">https://grad.sdsu.edu/financial-support</a>
TA assignments	Email Dr. Regis Komperda, Rob Queen, and Dr. Tom Huxford
TA contracts, TA waivers	Email Rob Queen
Questions about unit 11 (TA/GA/ISA) hiring	Email <a href="mailto:grad.employmentspecialist@sdsu.edu">grad.employmentspecialist@sdsu.edu</a> / visit <a href="https://grad.sdsu.edu/current-students/graduate-student-employment">https://grad.sdsu.edu/current-students/graduate-student-employment</a>
Slate: Supplemental Graduate Application questions	Email Dr. Byron Purse
Degree requirements and degree completion	MS/MA students: email Dr. Christal Sohl JDP students: email Dr. Byron Purse

Departmental issues	Email Department Chair Dr. Tom Huxford
All other non-departmental graduate matters	Email <a href="mailto:gra@sdsu.edu">gra@sdsu.edu</a>
Regularly check out <a href="#">Deadlines and due dates</a> on <a href="#">CGS's website</a>	