

Lebanese American University

School of Arts and Sciences

Graduate Student Guide

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1. Preamble

This guide highlights major issues and questions that students may face during their graduate studies at LAU. This document is mainly extracted from the Graduate Rules and Regulations and the Thesis/Project Guidelines. Both documents can be downloaded from the LAU web site. Other questions are addressed by providing procedures and systematic steps.

For further information and details, students can refer to their assigned graduate/thesis advisor or the Department Chair.

2. Course Load, Academic Standing, and Graduation Requirements

2.1 Course Load

The normal course load for a full-time student is 9 credit hours per semester and the maximum is 12 in regular semesters and 6 in summer. Graduate students with a full or part-time employment are advised to take a reduced load. Students with graduate assistantships shall take a minimum of six credits and a maximum of nine credits in Fall or Spring semesters and a maximum of 3 credits in five-week summer session or 6 credits in eight-week summer session. However, Graduate Assistants may take up to 12 credits provided that these credits include no more than 9 credits of regular coursework (does not include thesis/project), for full-time students, and no more than 6 credits for part-time students.

2.2. Attendance Regulations

1. Students are expected to attend all classes.
2. For valid reasons, students may miss classes for a maximum that is equivalent to two weeks (6 MWF classes; 4 TTH classes).
3. When exceeding the maximum number of absences, it is the instructor's prerogative to ask the concerned student to stop attending and drop the course. In this case, it is the student's responsibility to drop the course; otherwise a grade of "F" will be given.
4. In exceptional justified cases (long illness, etc...), where absences exceed the maximum, the student has to petition to the department Chair to be allowed to stay in the course.
5. Based on the above, No grade will be assigned to attendance.

2.3. Removal of an Incomplete Grade

In order to have a grade of I changed to a regular grade, the student must complete all requirements within one calendar year unless otherwise indicated in the specific program. If the requirements are not duly completed, the grade of I will turn into F.

2.4 Withdrawal from Courses

Only one withdrawal is allowed from any given course. The second withdrawal from the same course will result in an F; an F will result in dismissal from the program.

2.5 Repeating Courses

- Graduate courses with grades less than C may not be used toward graduation. Any required course with grade below C should be repeated.
- A student is allowed to repeat a maximum of one graduate course in which a grade of B or less has been earned, in 30-credit programs, and a maximum of two graduate courses in 39-credit programs. The higher grade(s) will be counted in the GPA.

3. Time Limit

Students must complete all requirements for a master's degree within six years from their first registration in graduate courses. Students who exceed this time limit must submit a petition to request extension. In such a case, their program of study must be revalidated by the concerned department/school and this may imply ***taking additional courses*** and/or repeating outdated ones. At the School of Arts and Sciences, for each additional semester granted the student shall take at least one additional course. ***Revalidation is granted for one time only.*** Under no circumstances the extension time may exceed one year.

4. Registration

Registration is required in accordance with the university's procedures and regulations. Late ***registration requires payment of an additional late registration fee.*** Students will not be permitted to register after the late registration period.

5. Academic Standing

5.1 Good Academic Standing

Graduate students are considered to be in good academic standing if they maintain a cumulative GPA of 3.00 on all graduate coursework.

- a. To graduate no more than two repeats and two grades of C or lower are allowed.
- b. Graduate students cannot use courses with grades less than C toward graduation.
- c. Graduate students must complete all requirements within the allowed University time limit (six years). Under no circumstances, a student will be allowed time extension beyond 7 years.
- d. Students shall apply for graduation at the beginning of the semester in which they expect to graduate. They shall fill out the appropriate form (can be found on the student portal) and then submit to the Registrar's Office.

5.2 Probation

Students whose GPA falls below 3.00 at any time after the first nine credits will be placed on probation. Only one probation (besides probation upon admission) is allowed during a graduate program.

5.3 Dismissal

- Students on probation must get back into good academic standing (GPA \geq 3.00) upon the completion of nine credits. Otherwise they will be dismissed from the program in which they are enrolled.
- Students who have at any time two repeats and more than two grades of C+ or lower will also be dismissed from the program in which they are enrolled.
- Any student who earns an F on any 3-credit course will also be dismissed from the program in which he/she is enrolled.

6. Thesis and Project

6.1 Thesis

A thesis is a culminating final product. It addresses a research question and leads to publishable results. It must show student's familiarity with the area of research and the ability to carry out independent research and analysis. Students are expected to be able to clearly describe and defend the approach, techniques, and/or methodologies used and draw sound conclusions in a scholarly manner.

6.2 Project

The project shall be based on substantial applied work, involving, for example, critical literature review, experimental or analytical studies, development of kits/systems, empirical testing of theories, etc.

6.3 Registration and Time Limit

Students may register for the thesis/project at any time after completing 12 credits. Before registration, the student should have secured the consent of a faculty member to serve as thesis/project advisor/supervisor. Once registered for the thesis/project, a student must complete a thesis within two calendar years, and a project within three regular semesters (not counting the summer). Registration for thesis/project will allow students to retain their status with the university for two years/three semesters with no additional tuition fees provided that the student re-registers every term (for zero credit and no fees) if they are not taking other courses. Past that date, students allowed to have a thesis or project extension by the School will be required to register for a residence fee (0 quality points), and to pay for 50% of one graduate credit per semester.

6.4 Change of registration

If, after consulting with Thesis/Project supervisor and/or Graduate Advisor, a student decides to switch between a Thesis and a Project, the student is required to petition to the UGC/concerned School for prior approval. Students changing from Project to Thesis will be required to pay only for the extra credits, provided that the student remains with the same supervisor. The change shall be made at least one semester before graduation. Students changing from Thesis to Project (and a course) will not pay for the Project, provided that the student remains with the same supervisor. But the student will not normally be refunded for the difference in credits (3 credits). The change shall be made at least one semester before graduation.

6.5. General Guidelines

1. A student seeks a faculty member's consent to serve as the thesis/project advisor/supervisor. The supervisor should be a full-time faculty member at the professorial rank in the concerned department. The department chair will be formally informed of this supervisor.
2. A thesis committee shall be made up of three members, and a project committee of two members including the advisor.
3. The thesis/project advisor and student jointly form the thesis/project committee. At least one member of the thesis committee (besides the advisor) must be a full-time faculty in the department/school concerned. The advisor shall chair the committee.
4. The role of the thesis/project advisor is to guide the student's work until the completion of thesis/project. The role of the other committee members is to review and assess the student's work. The committee members shall be kept informed of the progress of the thesis/project. The grade for a thesis/project can be Pass, or No Pass (P or NP). The grade does not contribute to the GPA.
5. These supervisors have to agree with their students on a time table of activities that ensure timely graduation and help in avoiding late thesis submission. In the extreme case (completing a thesis in 4 semesters), the following is a proposed schedule:
 - a. 1st semester: select topic, primary supervisor, and supervising committee.
 - b. 2nd semester: complete the proposal defense
 - c. 3rd semester: submit an interim report to the supervisor and the committee members.
 - d. 4th semester: complete and submit the thesis at least one month before the defense date in order to get feedback before the final defense
 - e. The committee members are expected to read the thesis within two weeks post-submission, fill the "Master Thesis Pre-Defense Evaluation" form and give it to the thesis supervisor
 - f. The committee members will decide whether the student may or may not be allowed to proceed to the defense.
 - g. If the committee's evaluation is positive, the thesis advisor will ask the Dean's office to advertise publically the defense date.
 - h. The date of the defense must be **at least two weeks** after the announcement is made public.
6. There should be at least one monthly meeting between a student and his thesis supervisor. However, the supervisor must be also available to support the student when needed.
7. When needed, students may be advised to seek writing support by going to the writing center in either Byblos or Beirut.
8. Throughout the thesis period, it is the role of the thesis supervisor (and partially the supervisory committee) to ensure that student's work will meet the quality criteria set in "Thesis Evaluation Form".
9. Students must avoid plagiarism. All theses will be submitted to plagiarism software (*turnitin.com*). In case of high plagiarism theses will not be accepted.

10. Students must keep enough time for thesis correction, further work (if needed), and library verification before the expected graduation date.
11. The thesis defense session shall start by the candidate giving a public presentation followed by an open question/answer/debate session. A closed session will follow, after which the thesis committee will deliberate in private in the absence of the candidate to reach a final decision.
12. If the committee recommends changes, the student shall deliver the corrected/changed thesis manuscript to the advisor within a period that shall not exceed one month. The advisor must verify that the Thesis Approval Form is then signed (on 5 copies) by all committee members.
13. The candidate must provide the Library with two copies (one in PDF format on a CD, and one hard copy) of the final approved manuscript of the thesis for format verification and binding. Each copy should include a completed and signed Thesis Approval Form. The librarian shall fill and sign the Library Clearance Form. Besides the student's copy, two copies of the thesis report will remain at the library, and one copy should be sent to the thesis advisor.
14. Projects must be presented. Once the committee approves the project, members should sign the Project Approval Form, which should be included in the final approved project report.

6.6 Thesis/Project Format

Thesis/Project shall be written according to the format specified in the "Thesis/Project Guidelines" available at the university web site, under Library. The link is shown below: http://winwebnet.lau.edu.lb/DSPACE/LAU_Theses_Guidelines.pdf.

The student must provide the Library with the final version of the Thesis for format verification by the specified deadline announced every semester. The final version shall include, immediately after the cover page, a completed and signed Thesis Approval Form (Appendix III). The librarian shall verify the thesis compliance with the format specified in the "Format Guidelines". Then, the librarian shall fill and sign the Library Clearance Form (Appendix V) and give it to the student. The student is also required to submit copies of the final version of the thesis to: library, Department/Chair, supervisor, members of the Advisory Committee. The Registrar shall not register the grade for a Thesis until he/she obtains copies of both the Thesis Approval Form and the Library Clearance Form.

Project: The student must provide his/her supervisor, the Advisory Committee member(s), and the concerned Division/School with the final version of the Project report, which should include the Project Approval Form (Appendix IV) as the second page (after the cover page). Then, the supervisor will report the passing grade to the Registrar.

7. Application for Graduation

Students shall apply for graduation at the beginning of the semester in which they expect to graduate. They shall fill out the appropriate form at the Registrar's Office. Candidates for graduation will be officially notified of any requirements that they have not completed.

8. Graduate Assistantship

8.1 Objectives

Graduate assistantship is intended to enhance students' educational experiences, through providing academic services to their department/school, such as teaching and research. In return, a percentage of their tuition fee is waived.

8.2 Rights and Obligations

1. To be eligible for graduate assistantship, a student shall take a minimum of 6 credits and a maximum of 9 credits (or 12 credits, including thesis/project) in the fall and spring semesters and a minimum of 3 credits and a maximum of 6 credits in summer. Students who are left with one course to graduate may be granted assistantship.
2. Students with the status of special undergraduate and students on probation are not eligible for graduate assistantship.
3. Graduate students granted full assistantship (100%) are entitled to 100% tuition waiver. In return, the student is required to provide 20 working hours per week.
4. For partial assistantship grants, the percentage of tuition waiver and the number of weekly work hours are prorated.
5. Normally, students who have full time jobs cannot get more than 50% assistantship.
6. Graduate assistants are not entitled to the benefits granted to university faculty and staff members according to the Personnel Policy.
7. The tuition waiver does not cover any repeated course, irrespective of the reason for repeating it, including withdrawal.
8. Only graduate courses are covered by the assistantship tuition waiver.

8.3 Applying for a Graduate Assistantship

Eligible graduate students interested in graduate assistantship shall submit an application to their department within the specified deadline. Decisions on the applications are made by a committee appointed by the department and chaired by the department chair/school dean. The committee shall assign graduate assistantship grants taking into consideration the allocated budget. Decisions are to be recorded in minutes of meetings and communicated to the School Dean. After the Dean's approval, the decisions are communicated to the applicants and to the Business Office in writing.

The assistantship contracts are to be signed by the department chair and the dean, as well as by the student.

8.4 initial Selection and Renewal Criteria

Graduate assistantships are granted on a competitive basis and guided by the following criteria:

1. Undergraduate GPA and entrance exam scores;
2. The student must not be a special undergraduate or on probation.

3. The student's interests and skills fit departmental needs for teaching, research, or other duties.
4. The allocated budget shall be respected.
5. To renew their graduate assistantship, students must maintain good academic standing, and must have performed assigned duties satisfactorily in the preceding semesters as determined by the supervising faculty's positive evaluation. Evaluation is performed every semester using a departmental form.

9. Academic Integrity

LAU fosters an atmosphere of high integrity by maintaining an ongoing dedication to honesty and responsibility.

A. Plagiarism and Falsification of Research Material

Plagiarism is using someone else's ideas, words, or work as if it were one's own without clearly acknowledging the source of that information. Examples of plagiarism include:

- Submitting research work (a report, project, thesis, etc.) written by someone else and claiming that it is one's own work.
- Paraphrasing another person's words without citing the source.
- Including material (e.g. written work, figures, tables, charts, graphs, computer programs, etc.) in one's work without acknowledging its source.

Plagiarism and falsification or forging of research material or data are serious academic offenses subject to disciplinary action by the faculty and/or the department/school concerned. The disciplinary action could range from resubmitting the work with penalty to dismissal from the program. At the request of the faculty, the Dean of Graduate Studies/Dean of the School shall issue a written warning. A copy of the warning will be kept in the student's file and at the Registrar's Office.

B. Cheating:

Students caught cheating on an exam receive a score of zero on the exam in their first cheating attempt in the course and receive a warning from the department/school concerned at the request of the faculty. A copy of the warning will be kept in the student's file and at the Registrar's Office. A score of zero on an exam resulting from cheating must be counted in the student's course grade. Students caught cheating for the second time will receive a grade F in the course. The act of cheating will be recorded and included in the student's file.

The table below is a checklist that helps the students in writing their thesis.

Thesis	Title
	Is it brief?
	Is it specific and does it reflect the content of the report?
	Abstract
	Does it state the motivation?
	Does it state the problem?
	Does it reveal the methods used?
	Does it state the major results and contribution?
	Introduction
	Does it give adequate background to introduce the research question?
	Does it identify the topic?
	Does it state the research question and objectives?
	Does it give the scope and purpose of the study?
	Does it summarize previous work? (does not replace the literature review section)
	Does it state your contribution?
	Does it give an outline of the rest of the thesis/report?
	Methods / Methodology
	Does it explain why the research method was chosen? Is it technically sound?
	Are the study design and execution adequate to address the research question stated earlier?
	Are the study design and execution described in sufficient detail so that their validity can be judged and researchers can replicate the work?
	Is the experimental procedure explained?
	Does the thesis/report describe and justify collected data (where applies)?
	Results
	Are the results described?
	Do the findings answer the research question?
	Are the data meaningful and representative?
	Are tables and figures included to clarify the presentation of the data/results?
	Are appropriate analysis and interpretation of the results given?
	Does the text only highlight and interpret what is presented in the figures and tables? and does not repeat the whole information?
	Are unnecessary data and results excluded? (may include as appendix)
	Discussion (and Conclusions)
	Does it reinforce the meaning and significance of the findings?
	Does it present relationships and generalizations?
	Does it explain anomalies?
	Does it point to the limitations?
	Are conclusions clearly stated?
	Are main and secondary conclusions based on the results and the discussion?
	Tables and Figures
	Are figures and tables cited in the text?
	Are figure legends and caption clear and accurate?
	Are table titles clear and descriptive?
	Are all acronyms and abbreviations defined in the report?
	References
	Do they include recent and key references?
	Do they follow one standard style?
	Are they complete and accurate?
	Are all the references cited in the text?
	Are all cited references listed?
	General
	Is the English of good quality?
	Does the text have a clear structure that is easy to follow?