

USC PhD Program Handbook

Computational Biology and Bioinformatics

I. Introduction

Purposes of the PhD Handbook.....	4
The PhD at USC.....	4

II. Curriculum and Program Milestones

School/Program Overview and Curriculum.....	4
Personnel.....	5
Facilities and Resources.....	5
Program Faculty.....	5
Advisor and Dissertation chair.....	6
Rotations with Faculty.....	7
First two Semesters.....	7
Summer Research	7
Coursework	8
Required Courses	8
Elective Courses.....	9
Grade Requirements.....	9
Sample Course Schedule.....	10
Transfer of Credit.....	11
Expectations of students.....	11
Screening Exam.....	11
Qualifying Exam.....	12
Qualifying Exam Committee	12
Changes in Qualifying Exam Committees.....	13
Written Qualifying Exam.....	13
Oral Qualifying Exam.....	13
Outcomes of the Qualifying Exam.....	14
Report on the PhD Qualifying Exam.....	14
Advancement to Candidacy.....	14
Application for the PhD.....	14
Dissertation and Defense.....	14
Dissertation Committee.....	15
Committee Changes.....	15
Dissertation Formatting and Submission.....	15
Dissertation Defense.....	16
Format and Procedure.....	16
Final Approval of the Dissertation.....	17
Dissertation Submission.....	17
Completing the Dissertation.....	17

III. Making Good Progress

Advisement.....	17
Professional Development.....	18
Limitations of degrees.....	18

Academic Performance Evaluation.....	18
Academic Integrity and Research Ethics.....	19
Related University Policies.....	20
Satisfactory Progress, Academic Warning, and Dismissal	20
Dismissal Appeal.....	20
IV. Academic Policies and Procedures	
Unit Requirement.....	21
Enrollment Status.....	21
Enrollment information for F-1 and J-1 International Students.....	22
794ab Doctoral Dissertation.....	22
Concurrent Enrollment.....	22
Continuous Enrollment.....	22
Pass/No Pass Coursework.....	22
Incompletes.....	22
Audited Courses.....	23
Time Limit for Degree Completion.....	23
Leaves of Absence, Sick Days, and Bereavement.....	23
Parental Leave for PhD Students.....	24
Health Leaves for PhD Students.....	25
Sick Days and Bereavement Leave.....	25
Readmission.....	25
V. Funding and Financial Support	
Graduate Assistant (GA).....	26
Fellowships.....	27
External Fellowships.....	27
Tuition Benefits.....	28
Tuition Refund Insurance.....	28
Stipend Distribution	28
Summer Support.....	29
Mandatory Fees, Health, and Dental Insurance.....	29
Parking and Transit Benefits.....	29
Support for Conferences.....	30
Other Types of Support.....	30
Collective Bargaining Agreement.....	30
VI. GA Appointments and Responsibilities	
Eligibility.....	30
Types of GA Appointments.....	31
Research Assistant	
Teaching Assistant	
Graduate Assistant Lecturer	
Expected Effort.....	32
Appointment Periods.....	32

Financial Support.....	32
Tuition Remission.....	32
Payroll Set Up and Direct Deposit.....	33
GA-related Warning and Dismissal.....	33
VII. Tax Information	
Taxable Income and Withholding.....	33
International Student Considerations.....	33
Graduate Students Supported by Fellowships.....	33
Graduate Students Supported by Graduate Assistantships.....	34
Students Hired as Graduate Student Workers (Hourly).....	34
VIII. Health Insurance and Health Center Access	
IX. Academic Calendar	
Holidays.....	35
X. Resources, Support, and Problem Resolution	
Child Care Fund.....	35
Child Care Fund Eligibility Criteria.....	35
Short Term Hardship Grant.....	36
Short Term Hardship Eligibility.....	36
Resources for International Students.....	36
Lactation Support.....	37
American Language Institute.....	37
Center for Excellence in Teaching.....	37
Library Resources.....	37
Accommodations.....	37
Graduate Student Government.....	37
Other Support.....	38
XI. Post-Graduation	
Accessing Your Dissertation.....	39
Official Transcripts and Diploma.....	39

I. Introduction to the Graduate School

The mission of the Graduate School is to provide a distinguished educational experience at the graduate level for an outstanding and diverse student body, to support and celebrate graduate student achievements, and to lead in establishing and communicating policies, standards, and processes related to graduate education.

Purposes of the PhD Program Handbook

Graduate student success is the result of a collaborative effort among students working at their highest levels, faculty dedicated to high-quality mentorship, and staff who coordinate and advise. One of the most important ingredients in this cooperative effort is a shared understanding about what is required and what resources and supports are available.

This document serves as a roadmap for PhD students. It offers a review of expectations for students and for the faculty and administrative staff who support them. The handbook provides three types of information: 1) guidance on program requirements, including university and departmental policies, resources, and expectations; 2) practical advice for common challenges at USC; and 3) information about relevant support services and professional development opportunities.

We hope that the handbook serves as a valuable resource for PhD success, providing students with the information to complete their programs while maintaining academic momentum and personal well-being.

The handbook includes policies and practices noted in the university's catalogue, collective bargaining agreement, and other sources. It does not fully address the terms of the collective bargaining agreement, which is available for your reference on the Graduate School's [website](#).

The PhD at USC

The Doctor of Philosophy at USC is a full-time program. It is a rigorous course of study that requires original research, professional maturity, sustained intellectual focus, and academic discipline. Students are expected to devote full-time study to this degree and not undertake employment or other time-consuming commitments during the academic year, from the end of August through mid-May.

II. Curriculum and Program Milestones for the CBB PhD Program

Overview and Curriculum

Quantitative and Computational Biology (QCB) is a department within the David and Dana Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences (Dornsife). In this document, unless otherwise noted, "Department" refers to QCB, "School" refers to Dornsife, and "University" refers to USC.

The Computational Biology and Bioinformatics (CBB) PhD program is housed within, and administered by, QCB. The CBB program is managed by the QCB Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) along with the QCB department leadership (Chair and Vice Chair). CBB program regulations and curriculum are determined by QCB faculty.

Personnel

Several QCB and CBB leadership and staff positions are referenced in this handbook. These include:

- Director of Graduate Studies (DGS): Prof. Fengzhu Sun
- Graduate Academic Advisor (GAA): Dominique Andrade
- Department Chair: Prof. Remo Rohs
- Department Vice Chair: Prof. Liang Chen
- Program Manager: Dr. Rokas Oginskis
- Administrative Assistant: Tanya Moore
- Systems Administrator / Scientific Computing Specialist: Luigi Manna

The faculty and staff filling the above roles may change as students progress through the CBB doctoral degree.

Facilities and resources

The QCB department is physically located in Ray Irani Hall (RRI) on the University Park Campus(UPC) of USC. Most QCB faculty have offices and lab space in RRI. All QCB staff work in RRI. Some QCB faculty have offices and lab space outside of RRI, including most faculty jointly appointed in QCB.

All CBB students are provided office space. First year students are provided with office space in RRI. After a student's first year, when they have a research advisor, the student moves to the workspace of their advisor. This may be in a different building. Space arrangements can change at any time, and such decisions are made by QCB faculty.

Additional information on facilities and resources is provided during orientation for first year CBB students.

Program faculty

CBB faculty fall into two categories:

- Faculty with their primary appointment in the QCB department (referred to as *primary* faculty in this handbook).
- Faculty with a joint appointment in the QCB department (i.e., faculty with their primary appointment in a different department are referred to as *joint* faculty).

The names of these faculty members can be found on the QCB departmental website. An appointment may change without immediate reflection on the web site. Each student is responsible to verify departmental appointments prior to making any decisions regarding advising or composition of a student committee. Students are encouraged to consult with the GAA or DGS whenever uncertain. Note: USC faculty not associated with the CBB program may mistakenly assume they can act as advisor to CBB students. Likewise, joint faculty might assume that they can advise more than one CBB PhD student). Confusion on this issue has the potential to delay student progress.

Advisor and Dissertation chair

By the end of their first summer in the CBB program, students must have selected a “dissertation chair.” This faculty member will act as the student’s research advisor throughout their time as a CBB student and will bear primary responsibility for training the student, for making the student’s funding arrangements, and for overseeing the student’s progress through the PhD program. In the rest of this document, the term “advisor,” unless further qualified, is assumed to be the student’s dissertation chair and is equivalent to a student’s faculty mentor. Note: The CBB program makes no distinction between these roles.

One strength of QCB faculty, as a group, is our different intellectual and scientific backgrounds. This different background influences the expectations that various advisors may have of the students they advise. The nature of interactions between student and advisor will depend on the specific advisor and the specific student, as is true for all long-term interpersonal professional relationships. All QCB faculty understand their important role in training CBB students, but each may approach this responsibility in different ways. When students select an advisor, we suggest they consider both the advisor’s area of expertise and their advising style. Students should also keep in mind that the way a first-year PhD student interacts with a prospective advisor (i.e., during a rotation) likely can differ substantially from the interactions between an upper-year student and the same advisor.

You can find much information on the web concerning what might be an “ideal advisor”, and such information is likely useful. However, the relationship between advisor and student will evolve over a time period that typically requires five years. The key factor is the “fit” between advisor and student.

As previously explained, students are responsible for knowing and adhering to the various regulations, policies, timelines and milestones required for the CBB doctoral degree. However, each QCB faculty member has significant prior experience to share, both with respect to the CBB program and how to become an impactful scientist and professional. After a student has an advisor, approval by the student’s advisor is required for subsequent choices the student makes concerning their degree, and in virtually all cases the advisor’s signature is required (e.g. for elective courses, composition of committees, etc.).

Here is a subset of important points CBB students must know about advisors:

- Students must have chosen an advisor (dissertation chair) prior to the end of a student’s first full year in the CBB program (i.e. before the end of the first summer).
- The choice regarding a student’s advisor is mutual: no faculty member is required to serve as advisor to any particular student.
- A CBB student must have an advisor who is among the QCB faculty, either a primary or joint faculty member.
- Even if a student and faculty member have agreed that they will be advisor/advisee, the arrangement is not officially recognized by the CBB program until the end of the student’s first full year in the program. Until then, all advisor/advisee arrangements are treated like rotation arrangements.
- All advising arrangements must be communicated to the QCB department as soon as they are formed or if they change. This must be done by email to the GAA.
- A faculty member jointly appointed in QCB may be an advisor to at most one CBB student at any given time.

- If a student is unable to find an advisor according to the timeline indicated above, they must inform the program and request assistance.
- To continue in the CBB program beyond the first year, a CBB student must have an advisor.

We recommend that students find an advisor by the end of the Spring semester of their first year in the program. Typically, the student will complete summer research with the faculty member who will be their advisor.

Rotations with faculty

Students in the CBB program rotate with faculty for two primary reasons:

- Rotations allow the student and prospective advisor to learn if they would be a good mutual fit as advisor/advisee.
- Rotations ensure that each first-year student is in regular communication with a QCB faculty member, so the student can easily and quickly find guidance when needed. (Note: all CBB students may also consult with the GAA or DGS at any time.)

Although rotations are typically only done by the first year students, if a CBB student past their first year is without an advisor (dissertation chair) for any reason, that student must start a rotation.

Note that the restriction on joint QCB faculty advising only one CBB student does not extend to rotations. Students may rotate with a joint QCB faculty member who is already advisor (dissertation chair) to one CBB student. However, this is not recommended unless there is strong evidence that the CBB student advised by the joint QCB faculty member is nearing graduation.

First two semesters

All first-year students need to complete at least two faculty rotations during their first two semesters. Students and rotation advisors must both confirm the rotation arrangement to the Department by email to the GAA. Rotation advisors must be eligible as dissertation advisors for CBB students. The requirements of a rotation differ depending on the rotation advisor. For example, the student may be expected to participate in research activities, interact with other students or collaborators, or have assigned lab responsibilities during a rotation. In other cases, a rotation advisor may only require the student to attend regular meetings. Rotation advisors will respect the course load of CBB students during their first two semesters. Students are discouraged from changing rotation advisors mid-semester. Even the optimal relationship may take some time to evaluate. Such a change can lead to incomplete assessment, both for the rotation that concludes early, and for the new rotation that begins late. If a student or rotation advisor feels they must conclude a rotation mid-semester, the department must be informed by communication with the GAA.

Rotations need not be with different rotation advisors to fulfill the requirement of two rotations indicated above. Students should not rotate with any faculty member if they are already certain they would not want that faculty member as dissertation advisor (e.g., if they have no interest in the possible research topics, or if the student is already certain they will have a different advisor).

Summer research

All first year CBB students must do research in the summer at USC. This is a form of rotation but differs from rotations done during the first two semesters. While students must register in coursework to maintain their continuous enrollment, CBB students do not usually ‘take’ courses during the summer, so full emphasis is on research.

All first-year students must make arrangements for this mandatory summer research before the end of the Spring semester. Students must inform the GAA of the name of the faculty member with whom they will work during that summer. Students must have a summer advisor who is eligible to act as dissertation advisor. The student must perform their summer research at USC. Summer internships are not allowed during the first year. Typically, summer research during the first year is done with a faculty member who will be the student’s advisor (dissertation chair).

Course work

Course work serves multiple purposes for doctoral students. First, it ensures students have a robust foundation for conducting research. Students with a more robust foundation can progress more quickly and confidently. Such a foundation allows students to learn advanced topics more effectively on their own. Without rigorous training through course work, students have no basis even for trusting their own expertise as they attempt to progress in research. Course work also provides breadth to doctoral education. When a CBB student takes a course, we expect that student will aim to learn as much as possible from the course, beyond attaining a high grade. The CBB program expects academic excellence from all CBB students. Attempting merely to attain a passing grade is not an acceptable attitude. Experience shows that success in courses is highly correlated with success in research.

Students must complete at least 60 units of courses carrying graduate credit and approved by the QCB department. Students must complete these 60 credits with at least a “B” average. No more than 8 units of 794 may be applied towards the degree.

The rest of this section outlines requirements on courses for the CBB program. Students entering the CBB program at the same time almost always take required courses at the same time, so students can assume they will follow a “typical” schedule through their first year. Many students select the same elective courses or take their electives in similar semesters. CBB students should aim to complete course work as early as possible so they can most effectively conduct their research. Sample course-schedule two pages below indicates an example selection of courses that meets program requirements.

Required courses

Required courses include: Q BIO 502, Q BIO 540, Q BIO 542, Q BIO 547, Q BIO 555, Q BIO 570, Q BIO 577, Q BIO 578a, Q BIO 578b, Q BIO 593, Q BIO 599, and Q BIO 790. Most of these courses should be taken in the 1st year and the first semester of the 2nd year in the program.

Students are required to enroll in Q BIO 593 (2 units) during the fall semester of their second year for TA preparation. Note: this course must be completed prior to, or concurrent with, a first TA assignment. All students must complete this course. Q BIO 593 is graded as pass/fail.

Students must complete at least 4 units of Dissertation Research (QBIO 794a and QBIO 794b). Students may not register for QBIO 794a and QBIO 794b during the same semester. Additional information on 794 courses can be found under Academic Policies and Procedures.

Within the first 3 years in the program, students must register for QBIO 542 a total of 4 times, QBIO 547 for one semester and QBIO 555 for one semester.

Elective courses

An additional 6 units of *elective* courses must be taken. The USC Catalogue section for the CBB program lists courses that are preapproved as electives. Registering in preapproved electives requires approval from a student's advisor, in the form of an email to the GAA, but does not require approval from the Department.

Alternative electives: Courses not listed among preapproved electives may be approved by the program as alternative electives, on a per-student basis. Approval requires written application, including justification, by the student's advisor, to the DGS. Approval must be granted by the DGS. Justification must relate to the student's education or research relative to the CBB doctoral degree. Keep in mind, by the time a CBB student has transitioned to candidacy, they are expected to be capable of acquiring knowledge on their own, having matured intellectually beyond the need to take courses corresponding to each new topic that might be relevant for their research. At the same time, in many situations, learning a topic by taking a course is still the most effective approach. The list of approved electives may be updated at any time, so students should check with the GAA or DGS in order to avoid seeking approval for an alternative elective that has already been approved.

Important: With respect to course registration, failure to obtain appropriate approval prior to registration is a violation of CBB program regulations and may lead to dismissal.

The 6 units of electives must come from courses that each contribute at least 3 units. Students often reach 7 or 8 units since many popular electives contribute 4 units.

Grade requirements

Students must complete, with a "B" average or greater (GPA at least 3.0), a minimum of 60 units of courses carrying graduate credit and approved by the DGS or QCB chair.

Students must complete each required course with a grade of "B" or above. The department reserves the right to allow a student to replace a required course if that course was completed without attaining a grade of "B".

At no time should the overall GPA drop below 3.0. A minimum grade of C (2.0) is required in a course to receive graduate credit, however a course with a grade lower than B cannot be applied to a PhD degree. Work graded C- or below is unacceptable for subject or unit credit toward any graduate program.

Sample course schedule

The tables below indicate an *example* schedule for courses through the first and second year in the CBB program, along with the units for each course. This example results in a minimum of 41 units, and allows the student to take their qualifying exam after 7 semesters in the program.

CBB students tend to follow an example like the one you see below. Variation can be due, for example, to availability of electives chosen by the student. Examples: a student may choose electives that are only available in the Spring semester; or a student may choose an elective that happens to be taught during the summer.

First year (23 units)	Fall (10 units)	Spring (11 units)	Summer (2 units)
	QBIO 540 (4)	QBIO 578a (3)	QBIO 790 (2)
	QBIO 570 (4)	QBIO 578b (3)	
	QBIO 547 (1)	QBIO 542 (1)	
	QBIO 577 (2)	QBIO 502 (4)	
Second year (18-20 units)	Fall (9-10 units)	Spring (7-8 units)	Summer (2 units)
	QBIO 599 (2)	QBIO 555 (1)	QBIO 790 (2)
	QBIO 542 (1)	QBIO 790 (3)	
	QBIO 593 (2)	2nd Elective (3-4)	
	1st Elective (3-4)		

If a student entering the CBB program believes they will strongly benefit from taking additional courses alongside or prior to the required courses and their electives, they should consult with the DGS.

Transfer of credit

Degree Progress in the Office of Academic Records and Registrar determines whether coursework taken elsewhere is available for transfer credit. No transfer of credit will be

considered until the screening examination is passed. A maximum of 30 units of graduate work at another institution may be applied toward the course requirements for the CBB doctoral degree. A grade of B- (with A=4.0) or lower will not be accepted and at most two courses with a grade of B will be accepted.

The DGS of the student's degree program determines whether such credit is applicable toward a specific graduate degree, subject to approval by the dean of the degree-conferring unit.

Expectations of students

As a doctoral student in the CBB program, you are in training as a future scientist who will lead others in research, industry, or along some other career path. Your formal training involves completing the degree requirements stated in this handbook and the USC Catalogue. However, your scholarly, academic and scientific activities extend further. You are expected to interact frequently with faculty, students and other scientists. You will discuss science, attend seminars and lab meetings, give presentations, help fellow scientists and receive help from others. CBB students are expected to contribute to the intellectual environment of the CBB program and the QCB department.

CBB students are expected to follow the rules outlined in this document, along with those of the School (Dornsife), the Graduate School and the University. The CBB program expects academic and research excellence from all CBB students. CBB students are required to follow a strong code of ethics.

Departmental Seminars: As indicated above, an important part of graduate student training is the opportunity to attend and participate in research seminars. Currently, QCB seminars are held on Thursdays at 2pm in RRI 101. Faculty and students select seminar speakers. CBB students are required to attend the QCB seminars, and attendance is a requirement for passing QBIO 542 or QBIO 555. Other departments and schools across USC offer seminars of interest, including Biological Sciences, Chemistry, Computer Science, Mathematics, Physics, etc.

Screening

In compliance with Graduate School policy, all PhD students must pass a formal screening procedure before completing 24 units of coursework in order to continue in their program. This process is standardized and uniformly applied to all students, and each student is evaluated independently, meaning the performance of one student has no bearing on the outcome for another. Decisions are typically communicated to students by the end of May.

To pass screening, students must maintain a minimum GPA of 3.0, earning a grade of B or better in all required first-year courses, and pass three written screening examinations. Students who receive a grade lower than B in a required course during their first year must notify the GAA and DGS immediately.

The written screening exams are designed to assess students' foundational knowledge in areas critical to success in the CBB program, regardless of a student's eventual research specialization. The three subjects covered by the exams are: probability and statistics, computer algorithms, and molecular biology. Each exam is three hours long and comprehensive in scope, covering essential knowledge within each subject area. These exams are not associated with specific

courses, and students are advised not to rely on individual course preparation or last-minute study sessions (“cramming”) as a path to success. Instead, students should begin building relevant expertise from the moment they enter the program. General guidance on exam expectations is provided early in the Spring semester.

Students must pass all three written exams and meet the GPA and coursework requirements in order to remain in the CBB program. Failure to pass the screening procedure results in dismissal from the program without a written warning. Although the Graduate School allows students to appeal dismissal through the Academic Dismissal Appeal procedure, the QCB Department typically does not permit appeals for failed screening. In rare and exceptional circumstances, the Department may allow a student to retake the screening exams the following year, but this is entirely at the Department’s discretion and not guaranteed.

Qualifying Examination

The qualifying examination assesses a student’s readiness to undertake independent dissertation research and marks a critical milestone toward PhD candidacy. As outlined in the USC Catalogue, this examination evaluates whether a student is adequately prepared to carry out independent, original work in their field. In the CBB program, readiness is typically demonstrated in two ways: first, by showing a record of prior research experience that reflects growing independence; and second, by presenting a feasible and persuasive research plan with defined milestones and a realistic timeline. While the relative emphasis between these components may vary depending on the student and committee, both elements are essential to the exam.

Students must complete all university and CBB program requirements before attempting the exam. For CBB students, this includes successful completion of all required courses and at least two approved electives. Students must have a minimum 3.0 GPA in USC coursework for graduate credit and obtain formal approval from their qualifying exam committee to proceed. Students are expected to take their qualifying exam by the end of their third year in the program. The earliest a CBB student may qualify is the beginning of their eighth semester, though this may shift to the seventh semester in future iterations of the curriculum. Any student who believes they may be eligible to qualify early should consult their advisor and DGS. Students who are unable to qualify by the end of their third year must still form their qualifying committee and notify the GAA and DGS of their delay in writing. Failing to complete the qualifying exam on time may impact the student’s satisfactory academic progress.

Qualifying Examination Committee

The Qualifying Examination Committee plays a key role in evaluating a student’s readiness to pursue independent research and advance to doctoral candidacy. The committee supervises the student’s preparation, administers the written and oral exams, and ensures the fairness and academic rigor of the process. The qualifying committee is composed of five members. At least three, including the committee chair (who is also the student’s advisor), must be QCB faculty members (primary or joint). At least one member must be an “outside” USC faculty member who does not hold a primary QCB appointment. While following this composition is required for committee approval, approval is not guaranteed. Students should form their committee in close consultation with their advisor and must obtain each member’s agreement to serve. No faculty member may be added without their explicit consent. The qualifying committee must be established using the “Appointment of Committee” form from the Graduate School website, which must be submitted to the GAA with all required signatures 45–60 days before the student

attempts the qualifying examination. Students may not proceed with the qualifying exam without a fully approved committee.

Final approval rests with the USC Graduate School.

After committee approval, students must submit their date and times to the GAA for scheduling.

Changes to the Committee

Any changes to the committee must be made using the “Appointment or Change of Qualifying Exam or Dissertation Committee” form, available on the [Graduate School website](#), and must be approved well in advance of the exam. Changes are not permitted between the written and oral portions of the exam unless approved by the Dean of the Degree Program. Informal substitutions are not allowed.

If a student fails the qualifying examination, the same committee must oversee the retake. If a member is unable to continue, the Dean must approve the replacement in writing, and the student must file a change-of-committee form.

All committee members must participate in both portions of the exam. Remote participation is allowed.

Written Qualifying Examination

As part of the qualifying exam, students must submit a written qualifying document to their qualifying committee. Since CBB is an interdisciplinary field, the CBB program includes faculty with varied academic backgrounds. Consequently, the CBB program allows for variation in the style, content and length of qualifying documents. Students should consult their advisor and qualifying committee members to determine expectations on organization and content of the document. However, for all CBB students, the qualifying document must demonstrate proficiency in written communication. As such, the qualifying document is expected to be of high quality in all respects.

The qualifying document must be sent to members of the qualifying committee and the GAA at least 10 days prior to the scheduled date of the exam. Failure to do so may result in cancellation of the exam.

Oral Qualifying Examination

The oral portion of the qualifying examination consists of a closed-door presentation by the student to the qualifying committee. The student is required to answer questions posed by the committee, including questions about the written portion of the qualifying exam. As part of the oral qualifying exam, the qualifying committee will discuss their evaluation without the student present. Note: if the written portion of the qualifying exam is determined to be unsatisfactory, the oral portion of the qualifying exam may be canceled.

Outcomes of the Qualifying Examination

Following the examination, the committee determines one of three outcomes:

A. Pass

The student advances to candidacy based on a favorable vote by a majority of committee members.

B. Conditional Retake

The student fails part or all of the exam but may retake the deficient portion(s). The retake must occur within one to six months of the original exam. The student must enroll in GRSC 800abz during the term of any retake. Only failed sections are repeated; passed sections are not retaken.

C. Fail and Dismissal

If the written exam is deemed so weak that the oral portion cannot compensate, the student does not proceed to the oral exam and fails the exam. If the committee does not permit a retake, the student is dismissed from the program.

A student may not take the qualifying examination more than twice. A second failure results in dismissal from the program at the end of that semester. No exceptions are allowed.

Report on the PhD Qualifying Exam

Upon the successful conclusion of the qualifying exam, the committee will certify on the *Report on the PhD Qualifying Examination* that: (1) the exam was appropriately rigorous; (2) the student's performance on the exam was at the doctoral level; and (3) the entire qualifying examination process was fair and in keeping with USC's academic and ethical standards. The *Report on the PhD Qualifying Examination* is created by the GAA on the Graduate School website in myGradSchool.

Advancement to Candidacy

Graduate students are officially advanced to candidacy for the PhD degree when they have completed the residency requirement and passed the written and oral portions of the PhD qualifying examination.

Application for the PhD

After advancing to candidacy, students must contact their academic department or program to initiate an online degree check that will be transmitted to the Degree Progress Department. Degree Progress counselors will prepare a Degree Audit Report (STARS Report) listing any remaining requirements. Programs must apply all appropriate courses in the Student Information System for the degree to be conferred.

Dissertation and Defense

A doctoral dissertation is an original contribution to the field that demonstrates the candidate's mastery of their discipline and ability to pursue independent research. According to the USC Catalogue:

“A dissertation is an original contribution to current knowledge in the field and a demonstration that the PhD candidate has achieved sufficient mastery in the field to pursue independent research and scholarship. A dissertation represents the individual candidate’s research and writing. In fields where collaborative research has become the norm, the candidate is the sole author of the dissertation. Candidates must specify their contribution to the research and delineate colleagues’ contributions.”

In the Computational Biology and Bioinformatics (CBB) program, students are expected to aim for excellence—not simply to meet minimum standards. While it is natural to ask how many pages, references, or chapters a dissertation should include, such questions often reflect an attempt to do the minimum. The strongest dissertations are those where the student has pushed themselves to produce their best possible work.

Expectations include peer-reviewed publications that lead to a dissertation. Publishing peer-reviewed publications as first and lead author is a requirement of the program. The minimum expectation for the number of first-author publications depends on the quality and impact of these publications. The dissertation chair in consultation with the dissertation committee determines the minimum expectation for each student. While the required number can differ from student to student for a variety of reasons, the preliminary aim is 2 peer-reviewed research papers as first author.

Dissertations should not be modeled directly on previous examples, as CBB students are encouraged to define a unique scholarly path. That said, reading dissertations—especially in one’s field—can be a valuable exercise for understanding structure and scope. Students are strongly encouraged to discuss expectations and scope with their advisor and dissertation committee early in the dissertation-writing process.

Excessive ambition can also be a barrier to completion. A dissertation must be *substantial*, but it should also be *feasible* within the constraints of time and resources. Students should work with their advisors to define a focused, achievable research agenda.

Dissertation Committee

The dissertation committee is appointed after the student passes the qualifying exam and a dissertation topic is approved. Students must complete the “Appointment or Change of Qualifying Exam or Dissertation Committee” form (available on the Graduate School website), which requires signatures from all committee members, the department chair, and the school dean or their designee. This form must be filed at least one month before the dissertation defense.

The committee must consist of three to five members, including:

- A majority from the QCB program (primary or joint).
- A dissertation chair who has an appointment in the CBB program.
- At least one outside member (a USC faculty member outside the QCB primary faculty).
- Optional: one external member from a university outside USC, pending approval from the Graduate School.

All members must demonstrate academic qualifications relevant to the student's field. CVs for external members must be submitted with the appointment form. Emeriti faculty may remain on committees if they were appointed while active.

Committee Changes

Any committee changes must be approved in advance using the same appointment/change form. No informal substitutions are allowed, and changes are not permitted between the defense submission and oral examination unless approved by the dean.

Dissertation Formatting and Submission

Dissertations must be written in English, unless a scholarly justification for another language is approved in advance by the Vice Provost for Academic Programs. Formatting and stylistic requirements are determined by the student's program. CBB students should consult the GAA and follow Graduate School guidelines as outlined in the Thesis Center, USC's dissertation processing system.

The final, formatted manuscript must be submitted to the Thesis Center for approval. Students have three months from committee sign-off to complete any formatting corrections.

All approved dissertations are archived digitally through USC Libraries. The student must also pay the dissertation processing fee (currently \$115) at the time of submission.

Dissertation Defense

To schedule a dissertation defense you must:

1. Obtain your advisor's approval.
2. Meet with the GAA to confirm all requirements are fulfilled.
3. Submit the defense title and date to the Graduate School and GAA at least 30 days prior to the defense.
4. Provide a complete draft of the dissertation to all committee members and the GAA at least 30 days prior to the defense date.

Failure to meet these deadlines may result in postponement or cancellation of the defense.

CBB students must enroll in QBIO 794 during the semester of the defense. Enrollment is required through the semester of filing with the thesis center.

Format and Procedure

The dissertation defense consists of two parts:

1. Public Seminar: A publicly advertised presentation to the QCB department.
2. Private Examination: A closed-door session where the committee questions the student and evaluates the dissertation.

Following both portions, the committee deliberates without the student. To pass, the committee must unanimously accept the dissertation, the presentation, and the student's responses.

Some committee members may participate remotely. However, both the student and the committee chair must be physically present unless a written exception is granted by the Dean and the Vice Provost for Academic Programs.

Final Approval of the Dissertation

After the dissertation defense has been completed, and the committee determines that no further edits or revisions are required of the dissertation manuscript, each member of the committee electronically certifies on the *Approval to Submit Defended and Final Copy of Doctoral Dissertation* that:

1. The defense was appropriately rigorous;
2. The student's dissertation makes an original and substantial contribution to its field of study; and
3. The defense process was fair and in keeping with USC's academic and ethical standards. This includes adherence to departmental formatting requirements. No changes can be made to the manuscript's content after the *Approval to Submit* form is complete. The *Approval to Submit* form is electronically available through Thesis Center, the Graduate School's online thesis and dissertation processing system.

The dissertation committee must unanimously agree for the student to pass the defense.

Dissertation Submission

Doctoral dissertation manuscripts must be submitted to the Thesis Center on the Graduate School website. At the time of submission, all manuscripts should be formatted and edited according to the style determined by the student's department or program. Students have three months from the date the committee chair signs the electronic *Approval to Submit* form to complete any required formatting corrections in the Thesis Center. After the Graduate School has approved the dissertation manuscript, a copy is sent to the USC Libraries. All dissertations will be made available digitally via the USC Libraries.

Completing the Dissertation

The Graduate School provides a [schedule for completing the dissertation](#) on its website. Students must submit complete documentation and finish all corrections to the manuscript before the degree can be conferred. Upon completing all requirements, the official USC transcript will serve as evidence of the degree until the student receives their diploma.

III. Making Good Progress

Advisement

Doctoral studies might be more demanding than any prior education or employment encountered by students. Students in the CBB doctoral program can expect to be guided, mentored and trained in our field by a faculty member acting as their advisor. This is the primary form of advisement for any CBB student.

As students progress through their degree, they are responsible for knowing and following the rules. The CBB program staff and faculty leadership want to help students navigate their degree.

We therefore offer advising to help students adhere to rules, policies, timelines, etc., with the goal of keeping students focused on their studies and research. Although the responsibility remains on the student, CBB staff and leadership are always eager to help students – and strongly recommend that students seek guidance proactively to avoid problems.

Initial advisement involves guiding students on course registration and rotations. Students will communicate with the GAA on these issues at the start of their first semester in the program. Throughout their first year, students are expected to communicate with the GAA and DGS if unexpected challenges emerge during course work. Near the start of their first semester in the program, students begin a rotation with a QCB faculty member. Students should feel comfortable communicating with their rotation advisors about progress in courses and any other issues that arise during the transition into life as a doctoral student. Between the GAA, the DGS and rotation advisors, first year students have access to a strong support system.

Professional Development

Students will receive training in professional development through teaching assistantship (TA), presentation at scientific meetings, departmental retreat, and job fairs through Dornsife College and USC.

To prepare students for faculty positions at academic institutions, students are required to receive training in being teaching assistants through formal course work and being a TA for at least one year based on the departmental needs during the graduate studies. They will also be trained in giving scientific presentations in faculty lab meetings, classes, as well as departmental retreat. Advisors and dissertation committee members will give detailed comments and suggestions to improve the presentations. To prepare students for industry jobs, QCB will invite industry leaders and alumni working in industry to give presentations as part of the seminar series. Students are encouraged to participate and give presentations at job fairs organized by the Dornsife College and USC.

Limitations of degrees

Students enrolled in the CBB program are not allowed to pursue another degree unless they have:

- written approval from their dissertation advisor,
- written approval from the DGS or Department Chair, and
- passed their qualifying exam and advanced to candidacy.

If a student applies to and is admitted to another program without first meeting the above criteria, they may be dismissed from the CBB program. The student and the advisor must send a signed letter to the DGS outlining why the request to enter an additional degree program should be considered. The request needs to be made at least one semester before enrolling in the additional degree program. We expect all students to be primarily focused on completing their PhD while they are enrolled in the CBB program.

Academic performance evaluation

This section provides a summary of academic performance evaluation for CBB students. Most information in this section, but not all, is also explained elsewhere in this handbook.

The University and the CBB program expect that all CBB students will demonstrate both academic proficiency and research accomplishment. To ensure satisfactory progress, the QCB department continually reviews the performance of all CBB students.

The following criteria on academic performance may for the basis of a performance evaluation for a CBB student at any time:

GPA: Students who fall below the required GPA (3.0) have failed to demonstrate minimal qualification for the program. At the end of the first year, students who do not have a minimum of a 3.0 GPA are dismissed as part of the screening procedure. For students who have passed screening, if their GPA falls below 3.0 they will lose good standing in the CBB program.

Required courses: A CBB student may not receive a grade below “B” in a required course. In the first year, failure to meet a grade of “B” in required courses constitutes failing the screening procedure. In subsequent years, such a failure results in the student losing good standing in the CBB program.

Teaching qualification: International (foreign) students are sometimes required to pass language exams to qualify them for teaching. As stated in the offer letter, this is required for entry into the program. Students who do not pass the English exam may be allowed to remain in the program for one semester only if they can be funded as RA, but they will lose good standing in the CBB program. Students who fail the exam a second time will be dismissed from the program.

An example timeline is given below, along with corresponding academic performance evaluations relevant for each year. These are relevant for CBB students meeting expected milestones. If a student has a delay in their degree progress, the appropriate evaluation will correspond to their stage, and the evaluation will also consider the delay itself.

- First year: Evaluation is through the screening procedure. Students who do not pass screening are dismissed from the program.
- Second year: Evaluation is based on individual grades, GPA and the advisor’s assessment of satisfactory progress by the student.
- Third year: Evaluation is based on the qualifying exam, with outcomes that correspond to those of the qualifying exam (as indicated in the USC Catalogue).
- Fourth year: Evaluation for candidates is based on progress assessment by the dissertation committee following the annual committee meeting.
- Fifth year: If the student has finished their dissertation, academic performance evaluation is by examination of the doctoral dissertation.

All students are required to be evaluated at least once every 3 semesters. This holds even for students who have progressed faster than the above timeline. For example, if a student passes their qualifying exam in the Fall of their 3rd year, they must hold their annual dissertation committee meeting before the end of the Fall semester of their 4th year; they may not wait until the end of their 4th year.

If an evaluation indicates the student is not making satisfactory progress, the student loses good standing in the CBB program. Note: academic performance of a CBB student may be evaluated at times other than those listed above.

Any student who loses good standing in the CBB program will receive a written warning letter as explained in the Graduate School section of the USC Catalogue under the heading “Academic

Warning and Dismissal”. The purpose of a warning letter is to clarify reasons for poor performance and outline steps for the student to regain good standing in the CBB program.

Academic Integrity and Research Ethics

PhD students are held to the highest standards of academic and research integrity. These standards reflect their role as future scholars and mentors and are essential to maintaining the value of a USC degree and the trust of the academic community.

Faculty must report all suspected misconduct—including in draft work—to the Office of Academic Integrity (OAI), which investigates and determines responsibility. If OAI finds that a PhD student violated academic integrity, dismissal from the program without a degree is the default outcome. No prior warning is required. Students cannot appeal through the general academic integrity process but may submit an Academic Dismissal Appeal as outlined in the Student Handbook. A transcript notation will indicate dismissal for academic integrity reasons. Students may not withdraw from a course once a violation has occurred, and letter grade penalties apply even in Pass/No Pass courses.

Violations include but are not limited to: plagiarism, cheating, unauthorized collaboration, data falsification, misrepresentation, and misuse of instructional materials. Lack of intent or knowledge is not a defense. Programs must clearly communicate any additional expectations, such as policies on collaboration, generative AI, or discipline-specific ethics.

“A false statement of fact, made deliberately, is the most serious crime a scientist can commit.”
—C.P. Snow, *The Search*

Related University Policies

The University maintains a number of formal policies relevant to academic integrity and research ethics. Students are encouraged to review the following:

- [On Graduate Student Integrity](#)
- [Scientific Misconduct](#)
- [Misappropriation of Assets](#)
- [Intellectual Property](#)
- [Guide to Research](#)
- [USC Policies and Policy Governance](#)

Any questions or concerns related to ethics or academic integrity should be raised with the student’s faculty advisor or the Director of Graduate Studies.

Satisfactory Progress, Academic Warning, and Dismissal

Students are expected to maintain satisfactory progress towards their degree. If a student has a question or concern about their progress, they should consult with their faculty advisor or PhD program coordinator.

If a student fails to make satisfactory progress, the department chair, program director, or school/college dean will notify them in writing. Written letters should 1) explain how the student

is falling short of the satisfactory progress standard and 2) include specific benchmarks describing how the student can succeed in the program within a reasonable timeframe. Warning letters are sent as early as possible so the student can take advantage of the recommended actions.

Students who do not meet the established benchmarks may be dismissed.

Academic Dismissal Appeal

The USC Student Handbook includes information on how to appeal a dismissal. The Graduate School Dismissal Appeal provides the final consideration of a student's dismissal from a graduate program when the dean of the relevant school has upheld the dismissal. This does not include students who have not met the conditions for continuing registration or those who have violated the Student Code of Conduct. The Graduate School will schedule the appeal once the student provides written verification of dismissal and states in writing that they want to proceed with the appeal within 30 days of the dismissal.

For more information, please visit the Graduate School [website](#).

IV. Academic Policies and Procedures

Unit Requirement

The minimum number of units for a doctoral degree is 60, including at least four units of 794ab Doctoral Dissertation. At least 24 units must be completed at USC (excluding Doctoral Dissertation 794).

Enrollment Status

To be considered full-time, a doctoral student must be enrolled in at least six units of 500-level and above coursework each semester. Most students enroll in 12 units to make timely progress toward their degree; 16 units constitute the maximum load. Students wishing to carry more than 16 units must have prior permission from the degree-conferring unit; such permission will be granted only in exceptional circumstances.

There are two exceptions to this six-unit requirement:

1. A student who has completed all coursework for the doctoral degree will be considered full-time during the semester in which the student is preparing for the doctoral qualifying examination, provided the *Appointment or Change of Qualifying Exam or Dissertation Committee* form has been completed and submitted to the program and the student is enrolled in GRSC 800abz, Studies for the Qualifying Examination.
2. Doctoral students who have been advanced to candidacy, that is, who have completed all coursework and have passed the qualifying examination, will be considered full-time when enrolled in 794 Doctoral Dissertation.

Enrollment Information for F-1 and J-1 International Students

F-1 and J-1 international students on student visas who are not enrolled in either GRSC 800abz or 794 must be enrolled in at least six units or receive authorization from the Office of International Services to enroll in fewer than the minimum units. International students with questions about their registration should consult the Office of International Services.

Immigration regulations require F-1 and J-1 student's physical attendance for classes during each fall and spring semester of their program. If the summer term is the student's first or last semester at USC, then physical attendance for classes is also required. The course cannot show "Online" as the location or office on the schedule of classes.

No more than one online class (up to 3 units) per semester can be counted towards the full course of study for an F-1 or J-1 student. If you only need to be registered in one course to complete your degree program during your final term, it must be in-person.

794ab Doctoral Dissertation

794ab Doctoral Dissertation confers full-time enrollment status on students who have been admitted to candidacy. Students are expected to be enrolled in 2 units of 794 each semester, except summer sessions, for a minimum of two semesters, until all degree requirements are completed.

Students are expected to complete and defend their dissertation in less than five semesters of 794. No more than eight units of 794 will be applied toward the PhD degree.

Concurrent Enrollment

If a student is simultaneously enrolled elsewhere, they may not transfer credits to USC without advance permission from the dean of the school that hosts the USC degree program. Failure to obtain permission will invalidate coursework taken during periods of unauthorized concurrent enrollment.

Continuous Enrollment

Students are considered to be pursuing advanced degrees only when formally enrolled. CBB PhD students must be enrolled at USC for Fall, Spring, and Summer semesters each year until all degree requirements have been satisfactorily completed within the time limit.

Enrollment in graduate-level course work is necessary to meet the continuous enrollment requirement. Graduate students who fail to register are no longer considered to be enrolled in a graduate degree program. After an unauthorized absence, formal readmission is required. Students who have been granted an official leave of absence do not need to apply for readmission following the approved leave. However, students who fail to return at the conclusion of any form of leave without obtaining an approved extension violate the continuous enrollment policy.

A doctoral candidate who has passed the qualifying examination must enroll each fall and spring semester in 794 Doctoral Dissertation until the dissertation has been approved. Students are expected to complete and defend their dissertation in less than five semesters.

Some courses with no academic credit, including 794Z, may require payment of tuition.

Pass/No Pass Coursework

Graduate students may elect to enroll in courses on a pass/no pass basis with department or program approval. However, coursework taken on a pass/no pass basis cannot be applied toward a graduate degree. Students should consult their academic advisors before enrolling in any course on a pass/no pass basis.

Incompletes

An incomplete (IN) is assigned when work is not completed because of a documented illness or another emergency occurring after the 12th week of the semester (or 12th week equivalent for any course scheduled for less than 15 weeks).

If a student receives an incomplete, the instructor will fill out the *Assignment of an Incomplete* (IN) and *Requirements for Completion* form, which will specify the work remaining to be done, the procedures for its completion, the grade in the course to date and the weight to be assigned to the work remaining to be done when computing the final grade.

One calendar year is allowed to complete an IN. If the IN is not completed within the designated time, the course is considered “lapsed,” the grade is changed to an “IX” and will be calculated into the grade point average as 0 points. Courses offered on a Credit/No Credit basis or taken on a Pass/No Pass basis for which a mark of Incomplete is assigned will be lapsed with a mark of NC or NP and will not be calculated into the grade point average.

Completing the IN within the one-year period should be the student’s highest priority. A student may petition the Committee on Academic Policies and Procedures (CAPP) for an extension of time for the completion of an IN. Extensions beyond the specified time limit are rarely approved if the student has enrolled in subsequent semesters.

In all cases, a petition for an extension of time to complete an IN must have departmental approval and include a statement from the instructor explaining what is needed to complete the course and why the instructor believes the student should be given additional time for completion.

Audited Courses

Students who wish to audit a course at USC must register for the course on Web Registration and select the Audit grade option. Audited courses will not receive credit and will not appear on the USC transcript or grade report. However, tuition is charged, and students should check with their school or program to determine if auditing courses is an option. As noted in the USC Student Handbook, attending a course without being officially registered in it is prohibited.

Time Limit for Degree Completion

Progress is measured from the beginning of the first course at USC applied toward a specified degree, and all requirements for that degree must be completed within a specified time. The university’s time limit for completing the doctoral degree is eight years. For students who earned an applicable master’s degree within the five years before admission to the doctoral program, the time limit for completing the doctoral degree is six years from the date of admission to the

doctoral program. Approved leaves of absence (up to two years or four semesters) are not counted in the time allowed to complete degree requirements.

Extensions may be granted in extraordinary circumstances. If granted an extension, the Graduate Dean will allow registration for the specified extension period.

Leaves of Absence, Sick Days, and Bereavement

Students in good standing and making satisfactory progress toward a degree who must interrupt studies for compelling reasons may petition for a leave for a stated period, usually one semester. A leave must be requested before the drop-add deadline and approved by the dean of the degree program, the committee chair, and the department chair or program director. The request should include a plan for academic progress upon return. During the leave period, a student is not entitled to assistance from the faculty or use of university facilities.

If granted, the leave is recorded on the student's transcript, and the leave period is not counted in the time allowed to complete degree requirements. A leave of absence may be allowed for one semester at a time, up to a maximum of four semesters. Students who fail to apply for a leave of absence or for whom a leave has been denied (or has expired) are subject to policies governing continuous enrollment and readmission.

International students should consult with the Office of International Services before considering a leave of absence.

Parental Leave for PhD Students

PhD students are eligible for a one-semester paid parental leave if they:

- Are pregnant or are the primary caregiver of their newborn child or adopted child under six years of age
- Have completed at least one semester in the PhD program and are making good progress
- Were admitted with a Multi-Year Funding Offer (MYFO) letter that includes a four or five-year "package" consisting of support through any combination of teaching assistantship, research assistantship, and fellowship.
- F-1 and J-1 international students must additionally qualify for a medical reduced course load (RCL) if they plan to remain in the U.S. while taking parental leave

Parental leave may be taken during the semester in which the child is born or adopted, or in the semester immediately following. A student on an approved parental leave will receive tuition, fees, and a stipend. The Graduate School provides the base stipend. Schools and programs provide the tuition, fees, and a top-off the base stipend to the level specified in the student's Multi-Year Funding Offer letter.

Students should enroll in GRSC 804 to ensure continued access to health insurance and the monthly stipend. While on parental leave, students are not eligible for federal financial aid. Students with loans should consult with the Office of Financial Aid before beginning parental leave. F-1 and J-1 international students should consult with the Office of International Services to discuss parental leave and ensure there are no unforeseen issues related to their visa status.

Students interested in taking parental leave should consult with the staff graduate advisor in their department or program. The program will submit a petition to the Graduate School and will be asked to provide a copy of the initial funding letter, a statement as the primary caregiver, and one of the following:

- Verification of pregnancy signed by a US doctor (available at USC Student Health Center), or
- Birth certificate for the infant child, or
- Statement of adoption from an adoption agency

Health Leaves for PhD Students

Health Leaves are administered by USC Campus Support and Intervention (CSI) in consultation with the student's program and the Graduate School, pursuant to the university's Student Health Leave of Absence Policy.

PhD students interested in a health leave should meet with a CSI health leave coordinator to develop an individualized health and academic plan. These plans are developed through an interactive process involving the Health Leave Coordinator, the student, the academic unit, and the Graduate School.

F-1 and J-1 international students are eligible to request a health leave. They must meet with an advisor in the Office of International Services (OIS) before finalizing plans for the health leave. Students can either return to their home country or, if a doctor recommends, remain in the U.S. for medical treatment. The student should request the health leave through a CSI health leave coordinator, who works with the student, their healthcare provider, and the Office of International Services (OIS) to determine the necessary steps to approve the leave request.

A paid health leave, including tuition, fees, and at least the minimum stipend, is available for one semester. A second semester covering tuition and fees may be available if necessary. The Vice Provost for Academic Programs must review and approve additional health leaves beyond two semesters.

Sick Days and Bereavement Leave

PhD students may use up to five days of sick leave per Academic Year due to illness or to care for a family member. Students may also have up to five days of bereavement leave per Academic Year for the loss of an immediate family member.

CBB students should report their use of sick days to their faculty advisor.

Readmission

A PhD student who leaves the university without obtaining a formal leave of absence, or otherwise violates the continuous enrollment policy, is not automatically readmitted. A student wishing to apply for readmission to a graduate degree program must first obtain the recommendation of the department chair or program director and submit an Application for Readmission to the dean of the degree program.

If the student's cumulative GPA is below 3.0 or if readmission is sought after more than two years of an unapproved absence, the Application for Readmission must be sent to the Graduate School for approval.

The readmission approval process must be completed by the first day of classes for the term in which the resumption of graduate studies is sought. Approvals to be readmitted are based on the academic merits of the student's request and the likelihood of academic success and completion of the degree. If readmitted, the student will be subject to all of the current University Catalogue requirements for the degree in effect at the time of readmission. Individual exceptions to the Catalogue year require the approval of the dean of the degree program. Students seeking readmission after an absence of more than 10 years may be required to reapply to the university.

A student may not be readmitted into a terminated program of study. The student must either be subject to retroactive enrollment or admission to the new program of study with the corresponding catalog requirements.

V. Funding and Financial Support

Student Financial Support

PhD students at Dornsife benefit from fellowships, assistantships, and scholarships administered by the Graduate School and various academic units.

It is the intention of the Quantitative and Computational Biology (QCB) Department to provide or arrange financial support for all students in the Computational Biology and Bioinformatics (CBB) PhD program. Students should feel confident that the faculty will make every effort to ensure this goal is met.

Graduate students at USC are supported through a combination of Teaching Assistantships (TAs), Research Assistantships (RAs), and Fellowships (internal or external). All types of funding provide a stipend, tuition remission, and health benefits. Students must remain in good standing in the CBB program to retain their eligibility for financial support.

The Graduate School considers a 50% assistantship or fellowship to be equivalent to 20 hours per week of effort and prohibits students from accepting additional employment without explicit approval. See the USC Graduate Assistantship Handbook for more information.

Doctoral study is a year-round full-time commitment. CBB students are expected to pursue research continuously, including during the summer. To meet the annual stipend guaranteed in the admission offer letter, students typically receive summer support through:

- An extension of RA funding,
- A fellowship award,
- Or, in limited cases, a summer TAship.

Students are responsible for coordinating with their advisor and the GAA to ensure their summer funding is confirmed in advance.

Graduate Assistantships (GAs)

The term “Graduate Assistant” encompasses TAs, RAs, and Assistant Lecturers (ALs). These roles are paid positions that support graduate education through teaching, research, or instructional service.

- A 50% appointment involves ~20 hours/week and includes tuition remission of up to 12 units per semester and 6 units in the following summer.
- A 33% appointment involves ~13 hours/week with up to 10 units of tuition.
- A 25% appointment involves ~10 hours/week with up to 8 units of tuition.

Students must be enrolled in a minimum of 6 units or equivalent full-time coursework (e.g., GRSC 800abz or Q BIO 794) during the semester in which they are supported.

Teaching Assistantships (TAs)

All CBB students are required to serve as a Teaching Assistant for two semesters as part of their doctoral training. TA appointments include a stipend, health insurance, and tuition remission for up to 12 units. Payments span 4.5 months per semester.

TA positions are assigned by the QCB Department Chair and are contingent upon maintaining a minimum 3.0 GPA. Being a TA is considered both an academic responsibility and a job. TAs are expected to:

- Prepare thoroughly for all teaching duties.
- Treat their students with respect and professionalism.
- Uphold university standards of conduct and confidentiality.

TAs who perform poorly may be removed from their positions, and serious misconduct may lead to university disciplinary action or dismissal.

Research Assistantships (RAs)

RAs receive the same level of support as TAs. While RAs are formally considered 20-hour/week positions, students often devote additional time due to alignment with dissertation research.

RA responsibilities vary by advisor and project. In some cases, RA duties are closely tied to dissertation work; in others, the research may be distinct. Students should clarify expectations with their advisor before beginning an RA appointment.

While RAs are often preferable for aligning research with funding, flexibility is important. Students may need to accept a TAship if external funding or lab grants fluctuate.

University and Department Fellowships

Fellowships provide financial support to PhD students and are typically awarded by the university or QCB Department to attract and retain outstanding candidates. A fellowship is equivalent to a 50% Graduate Assistant (GA) appointment and includes a stipend at or above the university minimum, full tuition and fee coverage, and health insurance.

Fellowship recipients are expected to devote 20 hours per week to academic progress, primarily through research. They may not accept other employment or time-intensive commitments during the academic year (mid-August through mid-May) without formal approval. Simultaneous GA appointments are not permitted. Exceptions to these policies must be approved by the Vice Provost for Academic Programs via the Graduate School's petition system.

External Fellowships and Grants

PhD students are strongly encouraged to apply for competitive external fellowships from agencies such as the NIH, NSF, DOE, or private foundations. These awards promote intellectual independence, enhance academic records, and often provide greater flexibility in research direction. Recipients of designated national awards may also be eligible for stipend top-offs from the Graduate School.

The Graduate School offers a range of resources to support fellowship applicants, including:

- Information sessions
- Fellowship boot camps
- Proposal review workshops

Some fellowships are institutionally limited, meaning USC can nominate only a select number of applicants or requires institutional approval. Students interested in these opportunities should contact the Graduate School well in advance of application deadlines.

Tuition Benefits

Tuition benefits are applied automatically based on assistantship or fellowship status. However, students must be enrolled in approved courses each semester. Students must seek written approval from their advisor and program director before enrolling in courses outside the CBB program. Failure to do so may result in out-of-pocket tuition charges.

If tuition units are not applied correctly, students should contact the GAA or department financial staff promptly.

Tuition Refund Insurance

Students should opt out of Tuition Refund Insurance when their tuition is being covered as part of an assistantship or fellowship. If a student has already accepted Tuition Refund Insurance but would like to decline it, they can do so [here](#).

Stipend Distribution

The first stipend of the academic year will generally be available in August. To receive the stipend, students must be registered for classes well in advance of the start of the fall semester. Students are encouraged to work closely with the staff in their programs to ensure their stipend is processed appropriately.

Students switching from Graduate Assistant appointments to a fellowship or vice versa should be aware that the stipend schedules and distributions are different. However, they should still receive the university's mandatory stipend for the academic year.

Stipends are processed through Payroll. Students are highly encouraged to sign up for direct deposit through Workday. Instructions on how to sign up for direct deposit can be found [here](#). Students who do not sign up for direct deposit will have their stipends mailed to the current address listed in myUSC. International students must also have an up-to-date Glacier account to receive their fellowship stipend.

Stipends are not processed on the same day every month. Students on fellowship should expect the stipend early in the month, while students receiving stipends for GA appointments will receive the stipend towards the end of the month.

Stipends are not considered late until after the 26th of the month.

Summer Support

During the summer semester (mid-May through mid-August), students receiving support as Graduate Assistants (RA, TA, and ALs) with a 50% appointment and PhD students with fellowships may work additional hours beyond the 20-hour maximum, up to an average of 40 hours per week in other on-campus or off-campus roles.

Students who have received offers of full-time employment off-campus during the summer semester may not simultaneously hold positions as Graduate Assistants or PhD Fellows.

Students who wish to decline summer support from USC in favor of full-time off-campus employment or internships will be asked to confirm their decision in writing. This information will be archived in the student's Advise USC file. International students should review the Office of International Services website for information about Curricular Practical Training.

Students who serve as TAs, RAs, and ALs during the summer receive a stipend and tuition remission proportional to the appointment. The health center fee will also be provided, and the student will have access from the first day of the appointment until the end of the summer. (The spring coverage period for the USC student health insurance includes January through the end of the summer as well.)

Students who are invited to campus for any other sponsored academic purpose, such as a professional development institute, receive access to the student health center from the first day of the academic event until the end of the summer.

Mandatory Fees, Health, and Dental Insurance

Graduate Assistant appointments and fellowships include tuition, a stipend at the university's minimum rate or higher, health and dental insurance, access to the student health center, the Student Programming Fee, Norman H. Topping Student Aid Fund Fee, and the Transportation Fee.

Students who will not be in Los Angeles for the fall and/or spring semester should contact the health insurance office to see if they need to register for satellite health insurance. Students can visit the Student Health website for more information about student health insurance.

Parking and Transit Benefits

PhD students may participate in USC's Student U-Pass program. USC offers PhD students a limited number of permits for 2 or 3 days a week (partial week permits). These passes are available on a first-come, first-served basis. Permits are subject to availability at either UPC (150 campus permits total) - Shrine, Figueroa, and Grand, or HSC (50 campus permits total) - Valley and Lot 71.

Support for Conferences

Travel and professional development grants may also be available through USC's Graduate Student Government.

Other Types of Support

Schools and programs may offer scholarships and awards in addition to the GA appointment or fellowship. Scholarships are distinct from fellowships, as they do not include tuition or fees, and the dollar amount does not need to meet the university's minimum stipend requirement. Scholarships are often merit-based and do not require students to be engaged in research or teaching-related activities. Schools and programs may also provide stipend top-offs to PhDs to supplement the university's minimum stipend or a stipend received from an external funder.

General Awards are credited to students' accounts after all other awards (such as tuition) have been processed. If this creates a credit balance, the excess funds will be automatically sent to the student's bank account, provided they have set up eRefund information in their student account and have no recent checks pending, no ACH payments in process, and no active payment plans. If students have not set up eRefund information, the credit will remain in their account to cover future charges while they remain enrolled. If students do not enroll in the following fall or spring term, once the settlement deadline passes, the university will contact them to verify their mailing address and send a physical check for any remaining balance.

PhD students may occasionally be hired as hourly Graduate Student Workers. The duties of Graduate Assistants (TA, RA, and AL) should be distinct from activities performed by hourly graduate student workers.

Collective Bargaining Agreement

Graduate students at USC are represented by the Graduate Student Workers Organizing Committee-UAW Local 872. All graduate students enrolled at USC who are employed as Teaching Assistants, Assistant Lecturers, Research Assistants, or internally-funded Fellows in STEM programs are considered part of the union. The Collective Bargaining Agreement is available on the Graduate School website.

The department staff and faculty cannot answer union-related inquiries, and administer union-related activities (e.g., email, events) need to be clearly identified as such and cannot be financially or otherwise supported by the department. Department email lists cannot be used for non-department or non-university related information, unless approved by the Department Chair or DGS.

VI. GA Appointments and Responsibilities

Eligibility

To be eligible to serve as a Teaching Assistant (TA), Research Assistant (RA), or Graduate Assistant Lecturer (AL), students must:

- have been admitted to a graduate degree program with regular graduate standing
- be enrolled full-time
- be in good academic standing with a GPA of no lower than 3.0
- be verified by their home program to be making satisfactory academic progress toward the degree
- have met the university's standards for proficiency in the English language

The university requires TAs, RAs, and ALs to be enrolled in a minimum of 6 units every semester or in full-time equivalent courses such as GRSC 800abz or Dissertation 794.

Types of GA Appointments:

Research Assistant

RAs are responsible for the accuracy, validity, and integrity of the research on which they are contributing. The quality of the research reflects on the student, the faculty supervisor, and the university. Deliberate falsification of research results may result in dismissal from the university. RAs must maintain the confidentiality of the faculty mentor's professional activities and research before presentation or publication, in accordance with existing practices and policies in the area of research activity. In the publication and presentation of research produced as an RA, the student must acknowledge the contributions of the faculty supervisor and other members of the research team. RAs should assume responsibility for making proper use of the intellectual, instructional, and physical environment in which they are conducting research. The nature of some research projects may require that the RA be available during holiday periods or semester breaks. Students and their faculty supervisors should discuss expectations and time off before the appointment is accepted.

Teaching Assistant

The responsibilities of TAs are carried out under the established supervision of the departmental faculty. The duties of TAs may include the following: reading course texts and materials, assisting during lectures, leading discussion sections or lab meetings, holding office hours each week, responding to student concerns, grading course assignments and exams, leading and monitoring lab exercises, participating in regular meetings with supervising faculty and other TAs, designing and leading review sessions, serving as a liaison between the instructor and students, upholding the university's policy on academic integrity, and assisting with the management of the course details. The Center for Excellence in Teaching is a good resource for support and information.

As with faculty at USC, TAs are evaluated by their students. TAs should review evaluations at the end of each semester, after grades have been submitted. TAs are encouraged to keep a record of student feedback for their teaching portfolio.

QBIO 593 is a 2-unit TA training course designed specifically for graduate students in Quantitative and Computational Biology taken during their second year.

Graduate Assistant Lecturer

ALs teach in the Freshman Writing Program, language programs in the [sub school] College of Letters, Arts, and Sciences, the American Language Institute (ALI), and other programs approved by the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs. Assistant lecturers may serve as instructors of record.

Expected Effort

A graduate student's first responsibility is to do their doctoral research and studies. For this reason, GA awards cannot exceed 20 hours per week for a 50% appointment or 10 hours per week for a 25% appointment, averaged over a semester. Students receiving a 50% GA appointment may not undertake employment or other time-consuming commitments during the academic year from mid-August through mid-May. Students receiving a 25% GA appointment during the academic year may be eligible for part-time, off-campus employment.

F-1 and J-1 International students with a 25% GA appointment may be eligible for part-time Curricular Practical Training (CPT), if they meet the CPT eligibility requirements, and if the academic department signs off on the CPT request. The Vice Provost for Academic Programs reviews exceptions to this policy through the Graduate School's Petition system.

Appointment Periods

Semester	Approximate Start Date	Approximate End Date
Fall	August 16	December 31
Spring	January 1	May 15
Summer	May 16	August 15

Financial Support

All TA, RA, and AL appointments include tuition units, health insurance, access to the student health center, and a stipend. Each year, the Provost sets the base stipend for TAs, RAs, and ALs. Schools, programs, and PIs may offer appointments with higher amounts.

Tuition Remission

The tuition allowance is non-transferable from semester to semester and will be applied to the student's account in the amount appropriate for the courses s/he takes. Students should contact the program of appointment if the tuition is not credited to their account.

A 50% TA, RA, or AL appointment includes tuition remission up to 12 units per semester of the appointment and six units of tuition remission for the summer following the assignment.

A 33% TA, RA, or AL appointment includes tuition remission up to 10 units per semester of the appointment and five units of tuition remission for the summer following the assignment.

A 25% TA, RA, or AL appointment includes tuition remission up to 8 units per semester of the appointment and four units of tuition remission for the summer following the assignment.

In cases when the student terminates the GA appointment to accept employment prior to degree completion, the student will be solely responsible for all tuition and fees required for continuous enrollment.

Payroll Set Up and Direct Deposit

Please visit <https://payroll.provost.usc.edu/paychecks/direct-deposit/>

GA-related Warning and Dismissal

PhD students serving as a GA may be disciplined, suspended or discharged for absenteeism; lateness; failure to adhere to stated course or research deadlines; failure to aid in the preparation of course or research materials; failure to hold sections, labs, or office hours; failure to grade, failure to perform assigned lab duties, willful abandonment of teaching or research assignments; failure to comply with applicable policies. Students and their faculty supervisors should discuss expectations and time off before the appointment is accepted. Discipline will only be for just cause and each case will be taken very seriously, recognizing that the Collective Bargaining Unit also may need to be involved.

When possible, a conference meeting will be held with the student and their supervisor before a suspension or discharge. The student may request to have Union representation present at the conference meeting. The University will notify the student and the Union in writing of the issuance of discipline or any investigative leave.

VII. Tax Information

Taxable Income and Withholding

General tax information for PhD students is available on the [Student Financial Services website](#). USC staff cannot provide tax advice. We strongly advise students to contact the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) or consult with a tax professional for tax-related questions.

International Student Considerations

International students may wish to consult the Office of International Services (OIS) website, which offers general information about tax exemptions, tax-related forms, and access to Sprintax, a tax preparation software. OIS cannot advise on tax-related issues. Students should consult with a qualified tax professional for individual assistance.

Graduate Students Supported by Fellowships

The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) provides information regarding the tax treatment of fellowship awards. The IRS also provides information regarding the 1098-T form. Some education-related items that are included in your fellowship may not be taxable, for example, tuition remission. Other items, such as living expenses including room and board, transportation, and entertainment, are generally considered taxable.

While receiving a fellowship, domestic students will not receive a W-2 form. However, according to the IRS, you must report all taxable amounts, whether or not you received a Form W-2. If you have taxable income from your fellowship, you may need to make estimated tax payments. For more information, see Pub. 505, Tax Withholding and Estimated Tax, and the IRS help on estimated taxes.

International students (non-resident aliens for tax purposes) on fellowship receive their stipends through University Payroll Services. The stipend may be treated as taxable income by the IRS. Therefore, the university may be obligated to withhold income taxes. The amount of this tax withholding depends on the individual's circumstances, including their total stipend and the status of the tax treaty between their home country and the United States. Tuition remission provided to an international student on fellowship is not taxable.

Graduate Students Supported by Graduate Assistantships

The stipends provided via the University Payroll Services to domestic and international students who are serving as TA's, RA's, and AL's are treated as taxable income by the Internal Revenue Service. Therefore, the university may be obligated to report the income and withhold income taxes. The amount of this tax withholding depends on the individual circumstances of the student, including the total stipend, the instructions provided by the student on Form W-4, and, if an international student, the status of the tax treaty between their home country and the United States, as well as Form 8233. Tuition remission provided to a TA, RA, or AL is not reportable or taxable.

Students Hired as Graduate Student Workers (Hourly)

The payment that domestic and international students receive as hourly graduate student workers is treated as taxable income by the Internal Revenue Service. The amount of this tax withholding depends upon the individual circumstances of the student, including the total amount paid per pay period, the instructions provided by the student on Form W-4, and, if an international student, the status of the tax treaty of their tax residence country and the completion of IRS Form 8233.

VIII. Health Insurance and Health Center Access

The Engemann Student Health Center website provides information about the USC health insurance, on-campus medical services, student counseling services, and wellness. Students can also make appointments through the website. The Engemann Student Health Center is used primarily by students based at UPC.

The Eric Cohen Student Health Center website provides information about the USC health insurance, on-campus medical services, student counseling services, and wellness. Students can also make appointments through the website. The Eric Cohen Student Health Center is used primarily by students based at HSC.

IX. Academic Calendar

Holidays

PhD students with graduate assistantship (GA) appointments will observe the academic holiday schedule. If a student serving as a GA is unable to observe a holiday due to the obligations of their appointment, they will be provided with an alternative day off instead of the missed holiday during the same semester, with the advance agreement of their designated faculty supervisor and, as needed, the DGS.

This applies only to GA appointments. For advancement to degree, the student will follow the university's holiday schedule available at:

<https://employees.usc.edu/benefits-perks/time-off/calendars-and-holidays/>

X. Resources, Support, and Problem Resolution

Child Care Fund

A childcare subsidy of up to \$1,800 is available per semester for each child under the age of six. The subsidy is considered taxable income and is subject to reporting on the appropriate forms. The student is solely responsible and liable for any tax liability resulting from the subsidy provided to the student or their dependent.

If a student has a loan, particularly Direct Loans, the Child Care grants could reduce the student's loan eligibility. Students should contact the Financial Aid Office to confirm.

International students should note the following:

- To remain eligible for this grant, students must maintain valid F-1 or J-1 status, and their dependents must maintain F-2 or J-2 status.
- This grant cannot be used as proof of funding for bringing dependents (spouse and/or children) to the U.S. under F-2 or J-2 status. Information regarding proof of funding for dependents is available on the Office of International Services [website](#).
- J-1 students who receive this grant must request a new DS-2019 with updated funding information by submitting a Financial Update Request through the [Trojan International Portal](#). Once processed, a new DS-2019 will be issued.
- Students in F-1 status on post-completion Optional Practical Training (OPT) or STEM OPT Extension, as well as J-1 students on post-completion Academic Training, are not eligible to apply for or receive this grant.

Child Care Fund Eligibility Criteria

The student must be a graduate student worker in the union bargaining unit in the semester in which the provider expense was incurred. Applicants must furnish supporting documentation as reasonably requested by USC. Eligible childcare providers include:

- A licensed childcare center
- A licensed family childcare provider
- A licensed after-school program
- A daytime summer camp program
- An in-home provider with a Social Security or Tax I.D. number. An in-home provider cannot be a spouse, relative, child under age 19, or anyone who lives in the same household as the student. Nannies and nanny shares are covered if the caregiver has a valid Social Security number or Tax ID Number.

Funds are not available for overnight camp, team registration fees, extracurricular activities, or club sports. The program's primary intent must be to provide childcare while the parent is working. Summer programs can be considered a childcare program if they meet the requirements above.

Applications are processed in the order received. Applications will not be accepted or processed when funds for the academic year have been exhausted. More information is available on the [Graduate School Website](#).

Short Term Hardship Grant

Short-term hardship grants are available to students with dependents. Grants are subject to a cap of \$2,500 per graduate student worker per semester. Grants may not be used for expenses that are covered by another fund or account. The grant is taxable income and is therefore subject to taxation and reporting on the appropriate forms. The student is solely responsible and liable for any tax liability resulting from the grant.

Short Term Hardship Eligibility

The student must be a graduate student worker in the bargaining unit in the semester in which the provider expense was incurred. The student must have a dependent, and they must furnish supporting documentation as reasonably requested by USC.

Hardships may include, but are not limited to, events resulting from a sudden or unexpected illness, imminent loss of housing, loss of property due to natural disaster, or medical, dental, and vision expenditures not covered by any other source.

If the dependent is covered by a health insurance plan, unanticipated emergency or short-term out-of-pocket expenses are not covered by the insurance plan. If the dependent is not covered by a health insurance plan, unanticipated emergency or short-term out-of-pocket medical expenses incurred by the Graduate Student Worker.

Applications are processed in the order received. Applications will not be accepted or processed when funds for the academic year have been exhausted. More information is available on the [Graduate School Website](#).

Resources for International Students

The Office of International Services (OIS) supports F-1 and J-1 international students, helping them maintain immigration status, navigate complex immigration regulations, and succeed academically and personally. Key services include immigration advising, travel advising, and guidance on employment rules, such as on-campus work, CPT, and OPT.

With expertise in F-1 & J-1 immigration regulations, OIS advisors collaborate with government agencies and university departments to ensure students comply with their visa requirements while at USC.

For more information, please visit the OIS website at [ois.USC.edu](https://ois.usc.edu).

OIS advisors are available for one-on-one meetings daily via Zoom - no appointment is necessary :

- Mondays, Wednesdays, & Fridays: 1 PM-3 PM
- Tuesdays & Thursdays: 10 AM-12 PM
- J-1 advisors are available Tuesdays, Wednesdays, & Thursdays

Lactation Support

PhD students have access to spaces for expressing and storing breast milk. Rooms on the UPC and HSC campus are listed [here](#).

American Language Institute

Many international students are from countries where English is not spoken as a native language. The American Language Institute (ALI) provides classes and other resources to assist international undergraduate and graduate students in improving their English and adapting to an American university program. Before they can be cleared to begin teaching at USC, all international Teaching Assistants are required to take part in a training program run by ALI.

Center for Excellence in Teaching

The Center for Excellence in Teaching (CET) is the university's think tank for innovative teaching. As a faculty-led initiative, CET draws upon the talents of experienced faculty to promote a commitment to excellence in teaching, learning, and scholarship. CET provides training and resources to improve teaching at USC, including supporting faculty and Teaching Assistants as they devise new courses and develop enriching out-of-class activities. CET offers seminars and lectures throughout the semester on a variety of topics and provides a training session at the beginning of each semester for Teaching Assistants.

Library Resources

Accessibility Training for Teaching Assistants at USC

Organized and developed by a collaboration between the Undergraduate Student Government (USG), Graduate Student Government (GSG), and USC Libraries as a resource for accessibility training for teaching assistants.

Accommodations

The University provides reasonable accommodations to PhD students who are disabled or become disabled and need reasonable accommodations to perform the essential functions of their job. More information is available from USC's [Office of Student Accessibility Services \(OSAS\)](#).

Graduate Student Government

The mission of GSG is to enhance the graduate and professional student experience by serving as the face of the student body. GSG is responsible for managing student resources efficiently, providing a voice for the student community, building a community that fosters interdisciplinary exchanges, and informing students about their rights, resources, and opportunities. Elected officers, senators who represent all schools and departments, and special interest committees tackle issues specific to graduate and professional students and provide venues for interaction beyond the academic realm. An Executive Board of 29 officers is selected every spring by the GSG senators and outgoing executive board members. The Executive Board oversees the daily operations of GSG and works closely with the Senate to promote graduate and professional student interests within the USC administration and academic departments.

More information is available from the [Graduate Student Government](#) website.

Other Support

Campus Support and Intervention (CSI)

CSI connects with members of the USC community when they need support in achieving their academic, professional, and personal goals.

(213) 740-0411

USCsupport@USC.edu

USC Kortschak Center for Learning and Creativity

KCLC offers outreach, programming, and individual coaching services to USC students and departments to promote a campus-wide understanding of learning differences and their potential to facilitate creativity and academic excellence.

(213) 740-7884

kortschakcenter@USC.edu

Office of the Ombuds

Available to faculty, staff, and students experiencing University-related concerns, conflicts, or challenging situations.

(213) 821-9556 (University Park Campus)

upcombuds@USC.edu

(323) 442-0341 (Health Sciences Campus)

hscombuds@USC.edu

Counseling and Mental Health

Provides counseling and support for all students.

(213) 740-9355 (WELL)

Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS)

Provides support services for individuals with disabilities.

(213) 740-0776 (University Park Campus)

(323) 442-1000 (Health Sciences Campus)

osasfrontdesk@USC.edu

XI. Post-Graduation

Accessing Your Dissertation

The dissertation manuscript will be available for search and download from the USC Digital Library shortly after completing all of the steps in the Thesis Center, or after any requested restriction expires.

Official Transcripts and Diploma

The Registrar's Office oversees the distribution of university diplomas and transcripts, in compliance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Most diplomas are mailed to the permanent address on record six to eight weeks after a degree is conferred. More information is available on their website.