

## Program Handbook Quick Guide

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A strong graduate program handbook is both a reference guide and a governance document—it sets clear expectations, reduces confusion, and ensures students, faculty, and staff share a consistent understanding of policies and processes.

### Make it:

- **Clear** Plain language with minimal jargon
- **Searchable** Digital PDF with bookmarks or an online handbook
- **Aligned** Consistent with Graduate School or University policies ([Link directly to the policies rather than restating or rephrasing policy](#))
- **Stable** State the frequency updates and how students are notified
- **Actionable** Include checklists, tables, timelines, and samples

Here's a comprehensive list of elements that well-designed graduate handbooks typically include. Use this as a checklist or structure for building or revising your own. Some programs may not need to include everything listed.

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### Core Elements of a Good Graduate Program Handbook

1. Welcome & Program Overview
2. Admissions & Enrollment Requirements
3. Degree Requirements
4. Academic Policies & Standards
5. Advising & Mentoring
6. Graduate Student Milestones
7. Research & Professional Expectations
8. Funding & Financial Information
9. Program Culture, Conduct, & Community Standards
10. Resources & Support Services
11. Graduation & Post-Graduation Processes
12. Appendices

For specifics of what topics can be included in each of the categories above, keep reading!

## **1. Welcome & Program Overview**

- Program mission and goals
- Overview of degree options (e.g., MA, MS, PhD, certificates)
- Contact information for program leadership, Graduate School contacts, and key administrative staff
- Organizational structure (committees, roles, reporting lines)

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## **2. Admissions & Enrollment Requirements**

- Admission criteria and required materials
- Deferral policies
- Transfer credit policies
- Continuous enrollment requirements
- Full-time vs. part-time status definitions
- Leave of absence and re-entry procedures

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## **3. Degree Requirements**

### **Master's Programs**

- Minimum credit hours
- Required vs. elective coursework
- Capstone/thesis/project requirements

### **Doctoral Programs**

- Expected timeline to degree
- Required coursework and milestones
- Residency requirements

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## **4. Academic Policies & Standards**

- Expectations regarding academic progress
- Minimum GPA requirements
- Grade policies (e.g., pass/fail, incomplete, course repeats)
- Academic probation and dismissal procedures
- Expectations for timely completion of milestones

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## **5. Advising & Mentoring**

- Advisor assignment process
- Changing advisors
- Expectations for faculty mentors and graduate students
- Meeting frequency expectations
- Annual progress review procedures and templates

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## **6. Graduate Student Milestones**

Depending on degree type, this may include:

- Program of Study form
- Candidacy requirements
- Qualifying/Comprehensive exam policies
- Thesis/Dissertation proposal requirements
- Defense procedures
- Submission requirements (formatting, deadlines, Graduate School policies)

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## **7. Research & Professional Expectations**

- Research conduct and integrity
- IRB/IACUC guidelines
- Lab safety or fieldwork requirements
- Authorship expectations
- Teaching responsibilities (for GTAs)
- Professional development or training expectations

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## **8. Funding & Financial Information**

- Types of funding (assistantships, fellowships, scholarships)
- Guaranteed funding periods
- Workload expectations for GAs (hours, duties)
- Tuition waivers and health insurance
- Renewal and eligibility criteria
- Outside employment restrictions

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# **UAB Graduate School**

## **9. Program Culture, Conduct, & Community Standards**

- Code of conduct
- Anti-harassment and grievance procedures
- Conflict resolution pathways
- Expectations for respectful communication and professional behavior

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## **10. Resources & Support Services**

- Academic support (writing center, libraries, tutoring)
- Mental health and wellness services
- Accessibility/Disability services
- Career services
- International student resources
- Campus safety resources

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## **11. Graduation & Post-Graduation Processes**

- Application for graduation
- Final clearance checklist
- Exit surveys
- Career placement support
- Alumni engagement opportunities

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## **12. Appendices**

- Flowcharts or milestone timelines
- Forms and links
- Sample curriculum plans
- Internal deadlines relative to Graduate School deadlines
- Glossary of terms