

A Guide to Graduate Study in Applied Mathematics

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1 Introduction

The Center for Applied Mathematics was created in 1964 “to encourage the application of mathematical knowledge in the physical, biological, and social sciences.” The first director was Bill Sears, an aerodynamicist educated under von Karman at Caltech, who was returning to academia after time spent in industry at Northrup. The center started with 20 members from math, engineering, physics, and chemistry. Today, we have over a hundred members, from an even broader array of disciplines, but still are guided by that original mission of encouraging the application of mathematical knowledge across a wide range of disciplines.

The range of possibilities for graduate study encompasses the areas of specialization of all of the faculty members in the field, who currently number more than one hundred. The faculty members are drawn from fourteen departments in the College of Engineering, the College of Arts and Sciences, the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and the Samuel Curtis Johnson Graduate School of Management. There is opportunity for further diversification on the choice of minor subjects.

Graduate students are admitted to the Field of Applied Mathematics from a variety of educational backgrounds that have a strong mathematics component. Generally, only students who wish to become candidates for the Doctor of Philosophy Degree are considered. About 40-50 students are enrolled in the program, which usually requires 4-6 years to complete.

2 Program timeline and milestones

A PhD in Applied Mathematics typically takes 4-6 years depending on several factors. These factors include the level of preparation prior to beginning the program, graduate committee recommendations, motivation to end graduate study quickly, and faculty availability, among other issues. Students begin their program with primarily taking classes and end it with primarily research, with the years in between being a mix of the two. During the first two years a student typically takes two or three classes a semester.

Five years is the average time period for completion of PhD, with many students continuing into their sixth year. Below is a time table based on five years.

2.1 Year 1

Take classes both semesters. A normal course load for a beginning graduate student is three courses per term.

Begin to consider who you would like to ask to be on your Graduate Committee.

Before you arrive in the fall, you will have been assigned a temporary advisor. Choose your first semester courses after meeting with your temporary advisor.

Ideally, you should select an advisor to replace your temporary one in the spring. Choose this faculty member with the idea that this person will likely be your Committee Chair for your Graduate Committee.

2.2 Year 2

Take classes both semesters.

By the end of your fall semester, you must have chosen your full committee (minimum of three members including your Chair). You will need to submit this request online in Student Center. Your advisor, the DGS, and GFA will

receive an email to sign off on the request. Begin exploring research topics for the coming spring and/or summer.

During the spring semester your research should now be underway.

2.3 Year 3

Prepare for the Admissions to Candidacy (A) exam and consult with your Chair which classes you should be taking before becoming more involved in research. During the spring or summer (must be before semester 7 begins) you must take the A exam.

2.4 Year 4

Research and finish up any remaining classes.

Begin thinking about and pursuing employment opportunities.

2.5 Year 5

Research.

Actively pursue employment opportunities during the fall semester. Don't wait until spring to start! Take the B exam (thesis defense).

3 First-Year Mentoring

The first year of graduate school is a critical period for students as they learn to navigate Cornell and to manage competing demands from coursework, research, and teaching duties. In addition to the start-of-year orientation activities, first-year students are matched with both faculty and peer mentors who can help provide guidance throughout the year.

3.1 First-Year Faculty Advising

All first-year graduate students are formally advised by the CAM director. This means that the CAM director is responsible for signing the “advisor” slot in any university forms that a first-year student might need signed. CAM students (first year and beyond) are also welcome to come to the director to ask questions or seek advice.

Beyond the director, each incoming CAM student is assigned a provisional advisor for the first year. The provisional advisor should check in with the student at least twice a semester until the student finds a permanent advisor (which may or may not be the provisional advisor). Some topics of discussion for these meetings might include:

- Course selection

- Time management
- Seminars and colloquia
- Applying for fellowships
- Seeking advisors
- TA duties
- Adjusting to life in Ithaca
- Physical and mental health
- Relating to other students
- Any concerning behavior encountered (unethical behavior, biased speech)

For mental health resources we have CAPS (counseling and psychological services in Gannett Health Center), EARS (peer counseling), and Let's Talk (drop-in consultation; the nearest is in Sage Hall Thursdays 2:30-4:30pm). And for any concerns about unethical behavior, biased speech, etc, resources students should know about are the Office of Institutional Equity and Title IX, Office of the University Ombudsman (<www.ombudsman.cornell.edu>) and the bias reporting center (255-1426, report_bias@cornell.edu).

3.2 Peer Mentoring Program

The Peer Mentoring Program offers formal support to CAM students in their first year by pairing them with established CAM students who can help them navigate their transition into CAM. First-year students are matched with one or two peer mentors before the beginning of their first semester. The role of the mentors is to enhance the first-year experience by providing support, encouragement and information to their mentees. Mentors may have suggestions about work-life balance, adjusting to life in CAM or Cornell, advisor/advisee relationships and more. Mentors may serve as both personal and professional support for their mentees. In addition, Peer Mentor Program group events are held throughout the year and include fun activities as well as practical workshops.

Over the summer, a match-up survey is sent out to all incoming CAM students and to prospective peer mentors. In mid-August a welcome email is sent out to mentors and mentees with their matches. Mentors and mentees meet throughout the year, and larger group activities are organized 1-2 times per semester. After each semester, a feedback survey is sent to mentors and mentees. Questions or comments can be sent to the program coordinators

3.2.1 Peer Mentor Expectations

- Make a good faith effort to meet with your mentee in-person at least once per semester.
- Attend at least one group activity per semester.
- Direct your mentee to the Director of Graduate Studies (David Bindel) or the Administrative Manager (Erika Fowler-Decatur) for answers to questions you cannot answer.

- Check in on your mentee’s morale and progress or goals, both academic and research-related, at least twice per semester.
- Facilitate connections and build community between your mentee and other graduate students and faculty when appropriate.
- Respond to your mentees and the mentoring program coordinators in a timely fashion.

3.2.2 Peer Mentee Expectations

- Make a good faith effort to meet with your mentor in-person at least once per semester.
- Attend at least two group activities per semester.
- View your mentor as your go-to person for questions or concerns but also feel free to reach out to other CAM students.
- Respond to your mentors and the mentoring program coordinators in a timely fashion.

4 Forming the Special Committee

A committee chair (thesis advisor) must be selected by each Ph.D. student before the end of the second semester (i.e., before the end of Academic Year 1). Students are then expected to select a permanent full committee by the end of the third semester. Students submit a “Special Committee Change and Selection Form” to the Graduate School to indicate their selection. Students may change committee members at any time by submitting a new form to the Graduate School. However, if they are post A-exam or three months within Ph.D. exam (B-exam), they must petition. Exceptions to the above requirements must be approved by the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS).

The Special Committee consists of a Chair/thesis advisor and at least one member for each of two minor subjects. One of the minor subjects must be mathematics. The other minor field can be from any area chosen by the student that is relevant to their doctoral research.

4.1 Finding a permanent advisor

Because applied math is an “orphan” graduate field without an associated department, the faculty affiliated with applied math have a wide range of departmental homes; and our PhD students are integrated with exciting initiatives across campus in biology, engineering, computing, finance, and more. Because our PhD program touches so much of campus, choosing an advisor can be an intimidating task! Fortunately, there are several formal and informal mechanisms to help students find an appropriate advisor:

- *Discussion with faculty mentors:* The director and the provisional advisor are meant to serve as a resource for students looking for possible advisors.

In many cases, faculty members may have some idea who is looking for students (and who is not), and can help point a student to a few prospective matches.

- *Discussion with CAM students:* The first-year mentors and other CAM students often know how field members have worked out as advisors for other students, and can be a valuable source of information.
- *Bill Sears Blitz:* The Center has a fall poster session and “blitz session” of one minute talks from students and faculty about their current research. This can be a good opportunity for new students to learn about prospective advisors (and vice-versa), as well as giving older students a peek into the broader CAM research portfolio.
- *CAM events:* Students and faculty have opportunities to socialize at post-colloquium refreshments, picnics, and other CAM events.
- *Classes and seminars:* One standard way that students get involved in research is to take a class from a prospective advisor, or to get to know a prospective advisor from interactions in a colloquium or area seminar.
- *Knocking on doors:* Even without any other excuses for interacting, it’s possible to send an email to a faculty member expressing interest in their research! If the email gets ignored, it’s also possible for a student to show up at the faculty’s office (particularly if it is during advertised office hours).

Finding a good advising match is important, and it takes time. It is fine not to match advisors immediately, and it is fine not to work with the first advisor attempted. Cornell provides extensions to give students a way to take the time they need — but at the same time, it’s best not to delay the search too much!

4.2 Special committee constitution

The committee chair will aid the graduate student in selecting a Special Committee, which shall consist of a minimum of three faculty members and which will directly supervise the graduate study and research of a student. The committee chair, who is also the thesis advisor, represents the major field of applied mathematics. The other faculty members represent two minor fields; one of these must be mathematics and the other is a field outside mathematics. This committee must be formed before the end of the third semester.

A Special Committee Selection and Change form must be submitted to the Graduate School to establish a committee or change/add committee members. This can be done online through Student Center.

Selection of a Special Committee (including the thesis advisor) is a mutual agreement between a student, the chosen faculty members and the DGS. During the pursuit of the degree, changes in circumstances may cause the student and/or faculty members to desire the termination of this commitment. Students may make changes to their special committee any time before the A exam; changes after an A exam require special approval.

Different students have different levels of engagement with their special com-

mittees. The field of applied math does not require any formal meetings of the committee except at A exams and B exams, and some students have little interaction with their committee members outside of these exams. For other students, the committee members may act as collaborators or co-advisors, helping jointly mentor the student along with the thesis committee chair.

4.3 Mentoring beyond your committee

Your advisor may be an important mentor on the path through graduate school, but you will ideally have other mentors as well. Different mentors can provide different perspectives and functions in your life: from broadening your research network, to helping you become a better teacher, to helping you define your future career goals. You will want to form relationships with faculty members who can recommend you for positions, senior students who can help you navigate Cornell and CAM, postdocs who can provide another perspective from their own PhD experiences, and others. Your advisor and special committee play an important formal role in guiding you through the PhD program, but it is worthwhile cultivating a broader network of mentors beyond your committee as well.

5 A and B exams

To be admitted formally to candidacy for the Ph.D. degree, the student must pass the oral admission to candidacy examination or A exam. This must be completed before the beginning of the student's seventh semester. The admission to candidacy examination is given to determine if the student is "ready to begin work on a thesis." The content and methods of examination are agreed on by the student and his/her committee before the examination. The student must be prepared to answer questions on the proposed area of research, and to pass the exam, he/she must demonstrate expertise beyond just mastery of basic mathematics covered in the standard first-year graduate courses.

The A-Exam should be scheduled well in advance of the exam and the appropriate form (Schedule of Examination form) MUST be submitted to the Graduate School at least 7 calendar days ahead. CAM graduate students are eligible for a Non-Thesis Masters Degree upon completion of the A-Exam. In order for this to be awarded, the Committee Chair must check the relevant box on the Results of Examination Form. The form must be turned into the Graduate School within 3 days after the exam.

The candidate must write a thesis that represents creative work and contains original results in that area. The research is carried on independently by the candidate under the supervision of the chairperson of the Special Committee. When the thesis is completed, the student presents his/her results at the thesis defense or B exam. The B-Exam (thesis defense) is scheduled with the same form as the A-Exam and must be submitted to the Grad School at least 7 calendar

days ahead.

6 Courses

A normal course load for a beginning graduate student is two or three courses per term. The Director of Graduate Studies in conjunction with the student's temporary committee chair will assist first-year students in determining the appropriate courses to meet individual needs. All requirement courses must be taken for a letter grade.

6.1 Enrollment expectations

Students on ordinary status (e.g.~not on leave of absence) are required to enroll in a minimum of 12 credits per semester. Students not enrolled in sufficient courses must be enrolled for research using either Graduate School or, if available, departmental course numbers assigned for that purpose. Graduate School research courses will be automatically adjusted at the end of the drop period to bring total credits to 12.

6.2 Prerequisite Courses

Prerequisite to the graduate program are familiarity with analysis and algebra at the advanced undergraduate level (e.g., MATH 4130-4140 and MATH 4330-4340). Students lacking either prerequisite (which may be determined by their special committee chair and/or the CAM Director of Graduate Studies), should take the appropriate courses within their first two years of study. No more than two of these courses can count towards meeting other CAM degree requirements.

6.3 Responsible Conduct in Research (RCR)

Every graduate student is required to complete a short course on Responsible Conduct of Research, to be finished by the end of the second registered semester. This online training addresses issues of authorship, peer review, plagiarism, and research misconduct. Students who are supported on NSF funding are required to take a longer course on RCR within 60 days of the start of the support period.

6.4 CAM Core Courses

For advancement to candidacy, students are required to take at least eight courses in mathematics and its applications that are approved by her/his special committee, at least 4 of which must be numbered 6000 or above. Suggested areas for these courses are given in the list of Focal Areas for Applied Mathematics. The courses must include an advanced course in computational methods (focal area (a)). In order to achieve breadth in Applied Mathematics, courses from at least three other Focal Areas should normally be included. Should a course be

listed under more than one focal area, then it will count towards only one such area as chosen by the student's Special Committee.

The program allows great flexibility in the selection of courses. Most students design their own course sequences, subject to requirements, to meet their own interests. Courses are typically chosen from the math department and many applications departments

The seven major Focal Areas for the field of applied mathematics are listed below, along with examples of recommended courses for completing the requirements in each focal area. In addition to the listed example courses, appropriate courses containing substantial mathematical content, offered by any department, may be taken to satisfy field requirements in mathematics and its applications, subject to approval by the student's Special Committee.

6.4.1 A. Computational Methods

- CEE 5745/6745, 6300, 6720
- CS 6210, 6220, 6241
- MAE 6230

6.4.2 B. Mathematical Analysis

- MATH 6110, 6120, 6210, 6220, 7130 (not both 6110 and 6210; not both 6220 and 7130)

6.4.3 C. Differential Equations and Dynamical Systems

- CEE 5735/6736
- CHEME 7530
- MAE 6010, 6110, 6330, 6840, MAE 5790/MATH 4210
- MATH 6260, 6180, 6150, 6160, 6230, 6280, 6520, MATH 6270/MAE 7760

6.4.4 D. Stochastic Methods

(Probability, Stochastic Processes, Statistics, Machine Learning, Signal and Image Processing, etc.)

- BTRY 7180 (note: most 6000-level courses not suitable)
- CS 6780, 6783, 6784, 6788
- ECE 5555, 5620, 5630
- MATH 6710, 6720, 6730, 6740, 7740
- ORIE 6500, 6510, 6540, 6570, 6580, 6700, 6710, 6720, 6750, 6780
- STSCI 6520, 7170

6.4.5 E. Optimization and Discrete Mathematics

- MATH 4410, 4420, 6230
- ORIE 6300, 6310, 6320, 6325, 6327, 6328, 6330, 6334, 6335

6.4.6 F. Algorithms and Complexity

- CS 4814, 6810, 6820, 6840
- ORIE 6350

6.4.7 G. Algebra and Logic

- CS 6117, 6764, 6766, 6860
- MATH 6310, 6320, 6340, 6390, 6810, 7880

6.5 Minor requirements

Students are required to have minors in Mathematics and in another field relevant to their doctoral research. Note that the course requirements listed above may suffice to satisfy the requirements for a graduate minor in Mathematics.

6.6 Note on eligible courses

The NY State Education Department policy indicates that

Credit toward an graduate degree shall be earned only through work designed expressly for graduate students. Enrollment . . . of undergraduates in graduate courses, and of graduate students in undergraduate courses shall be strictly controlled by the institution.

Some CAM focal area courses will be offered with both 4000-level and 5000-level versions going forward, including MATH 4410-4420, MATH 4250-4260 (crosslisted as CS 4210-4220), and MATH 4210. The 5000-level versions Because of this policy, beginning in Fall 2021, courses taken to fulfill CAM requirements must be taken with the *graduate* course number (5000+).

7 Life at the center

CAM today is a center of several applied math activities on campus. The core of the center is the graduate field of applied mathematics. But we also have a postdoc program, meant to foster interdisciplinary applied math collaborations across campus, and a colloquium series that brings a wide variety of applied mathematicians to campus. The physical heart of the program is a space on the sixth floor of Rhodes Hall where all our PhD students and postdocs have their desks.

7.1 CAM space

Each student is guaranteed an individual cubicle in a shared work space environment. This set up allows for more collaboration and mentoring among students while giving a space to work and store your materials.

CAM has several shared workstations in Rhodes 657 that have relevant software. Color and black and white printers are also available on the shared workstations. Students also have access to other computers in computer labs on campus, and especially Rhodes Hall. Print jobs with more difficult requirements can be accommodated by working with departmental staff.

7.2 Colloquium

The applied math colloquium meets on Fridays from 3:30-4:30, with refreshments in the CAM space afterward. The colloquium usually (but not always) meets in Rhodes 657. The talks cover a wide range of applied mathematics, and are meant to be accessible to a broad applied math audience. Students are encouraged to show up even for talks outside their immediate interest!

In addition to the talk, speakers are invited to have lunch with the students (funded by CAM). The lunch meeting is not open to other faculty, and is meant to give students the chance to have a candid conversation with the speaker about mathematics, mathematical careers, and life more generally.

7.3 Bill Sears Blitz

The Bill Sears Blitz slide and poster session is an opportunity for CAM faculty and students and community members to mingle and learn about all the interesting things that CAM members are doing. Presenters are welcome to give a poster and/or a one-minute one-slide summary in a “poster blitz” talk or give a slide in the blitz session. This event takes place in the fall semester, and is meant both as a way for new students to learn about prospective advisors and for the rest of CAM to keep up with what is going on in the center.

7.4 SIAM Student Chapter

CAM is home to Cornell’s student chapter of the Society for Industrial and Applied Mathematics (SIAM). As members of the SIAM student chapter, students are also eligible to free SIAM student membership.

7.5 Other Events

Throughout the year, CAM offers a number of social events for students and faculty, including fall and spring picnics, a holiday celebration, orientation for new students, and a graduation ceremony. In addition to formal CAM events, the CAM students also organize a variety of events, including a coffee hour, the informal “CAM Colloquially” student seminar series, and others. CAM students also frequently attend seminars and colloquia held in peer units across campus, from mathematics to mechanical engineering.

8 Funding

All full-time students in Applied Mathematics receive a full support package and are guaranteed five years of funding, subject to satisfactory academic progress. Upon availability, students in their sixth year are also funded. CAM does not admit students who are self-funded. Please contact the CAM office for any questions or clarifications.

It is important to note that while students are guaranteed funding for five years, the form of support may vary. Due to CAM's interdisciplinary nature and faculty field structure, the actual dollars of guaranteed support often come from different departments across campus. This arrangement allows students to work closely with faculty, lab clusters, and students from different disciplines while still maintaining a home in CAM. For example, a student may hold a Teaching Assistant (TA) position for two years in Math, a Graduate Research Assistant (GRA) position for two years in Computer Science and a final year be on a Graduate School fellowship. While the funding comes from different sources, the student has received the guaranteed five years of support.

8.1 What funding covers

All full-time students receive a support package that includes the following:

8.1.1 Tuition

Fall and spring tuition is directly paid by the department supporting the student. The student is not responsible for any charge or duty in this process. The current tuition amount can be found on the Graduate School web site.

8.1.2 Student Health Plan (SHP)

The SHP premium is paid on a yearly basis by the department(s) supporting the student. The student is not responsible for any charge or duty in the process. Information may be found on the SHP web site. Please note that only the student's health plan is covered in the support package. Optional dental and vision plans are available, but are not included as a part of SHP. Spousal/family insurance is available, but is the responsibility of the student. The student is also responsible for any copays or deductibles incurred as a result of using services while on the plan.

8.1.3 Stipend

All full-time students receive a competitive academic year stipend. Payment amounts vary according to the funding source, as does the payment schedule. All admitted students are informed of the amount of funding (pre-tax) for their first year in their admission letter. Subsequent years of funding may increase or decrease depending on the funding source. The amount you receive after

taxes depends on your individual circumstances. All international students are required to obtain an American social security card directly after having arrived in the United States in order to receive their stipend. Cornell University also offers free direct deposit into your bank account.

8.2 Types of funding

There are typically three types of funding sources: fellowships, Teaching Assistantships (TA), and Graduate Research Assistantships (GRA). All three cover the above components described in a support package. However, stipend amounts and payment schedules will vary.

8.2.1 Fellowships

Fellowships are highly desirable because they do not carry an extra work/effort requirement. There are numerous types of fellowships available, with most being competitive. There exists a number of fellowships awarded by external to Cornell organizations, such as National Science Foundation, Departments of Energy, Defense and Homeland Security, and others. CAM awards the prestigious Presidential fellowship to two new students every year at the discretion of the Admissions Committee. The Cornell Graduate School also offers a number of fellowships according to certain criteria. Whenever possible, the Admissions Committee (for new students) and CAM faculty and advisors (for current students) nominate appropriate candidates for these competitive fellowships. Fellowship stipends are typically paid in two lump sums divided between the Fall and Spring semesters.

8.2.2 Teaching Assistantships (TAs)

A TA is responsible for assisting a faculty member in administering a class. Duties could include grading, managing a course web site, leading discussion sections, holding office hours, etc. There is a maximum limit to the number of hours a student can be expected to devote to their duties. Please consult the Cornell Policy on Graduate Assistantships for further details and expectations. TA positions are a very valuable piece of a student's experience. Being a TA helps reinforce knowledge of material and is a very attractive item to colleges and universities when considering job applicants in academia, especially for tenure track positions. While TA positions require additional work, they have a large payoff and many students very much enjoy helping others learn and become more confident in mathematics. Stipends are typically paid in bi weekly paychecks.

8.2.3 Graduate Research Assistantships (GRAs)

A GRA position allows a student to undertake research under the direction of a faculty member, usually the Committee Chair. Such a position allows a student to gain invaluable research experience that is helpful for their dissertation

research and for finding a research or academic oriented position after earning the PhD. Stipends are typically paid in bi weekly paychecks.

8.3 Outside employment

Students with a university-funded fellowship, external fellowship, or GRA position may accept employment of no more than eight hours per week, if allowed in the terms of the fellowship. Students working as TAs may work up to five hours per week, so long as the combined hours of the assistantship and work do not exceed 20 hours per week.

8.4 Summer support options

There is no tuition charged if a student enrolls in research over the summer (June-August). However, the student is responsible for tuition if they enroll in a class and are expecting to receive a residency unit. CAM is not able to guarantee summer funding, though most students receive summer funding as a GRA or TA depending on faculty support.

8.5 Conference and travel grants

The Graduate School offers limited funding for presenting at conferences or undertaking research in other locations. Please refer to the Graduate School web site for details and procedures.

9 Administrative matters

The graduate field of Applied Mathematics is part of CAM; but, as with all graduate fields at Cornell, is administratively a part of the Graduate School. Many graduate fields are embedded in departments and colleges and interact with the broader leadership (the chairs and deans) of those units. Though CAM cooperates with several other colleges and their departments to provide funding for TA lines and postdoctoral scholars, it does not belong to any of Cornell's colleges. Instead, it is one of the centers governed by Cornell's Office of the Vice Provost for Research and Innovation (OVPRI). Hence, most "local" administration that CAM students will see involves the CAM director and administrative manager.

The CAM Director (David Bindel) also serves as the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) for the field of applied mathematics. Erika Fowler-Decatur serves as the Graduate Field Assistant (GFA). The GFA and DGS manage the affairs of the field and sign graduate student forms and petitions, as well as serving as the first point of contact between students and the Graduate School. The CAM administration is also generally the first point of contact between graduate students and the other academic units on campus, such as the departments that provide TA lines for CAM students.

9.1 Residency and leave

To receive an advanced degree a student must fulfill the residence requirements of the Graduate School. One unit of residence is granted for successful completion of one semester of full-time study, as judged by the chair of the Special Committee. The Ph.D. program requires a minimum of six residence units. This is not a difficult requirement to satisfy since the program generally takes four to five years to complete. A student who has done graduate work at another institution may petition to transfer residence credit but may not receive more than two such credits.

Students may request leave of absence status during their program for a variety of reasons, whether personal (e.g. health reasons), professional (e.g. internships), or administrative (e.g. students working after filing their dissertation, but before conferral). Health leaves are available up to a maximum of four years; personal leaves are for up to 12 months, renewable for a maximum of four years. Parental accommodations are also available in the form of either six weeks of paid accommodation (eight weeks for the birth mother for a C-section) OR up to two semesters of reduced load status, depending on circumstances.

In absentia status is available for students conducting approved research 100 miles or more away from the Cornell campus while under the guidance of the special committee. This sometimes happens, for example, when students move with an advisor to a different institution (whether the move is permanent or for a sabbatical). To be eligible, students must first have completed two semesters of registration at a Cornell campus.

9.2 The Student Progress Review

The Student Progress Review (SPR) is an annual exchange of written feedback where advisees are asked to reflect on recent accomplishments, identify challenges, and set goals. Committee chairs then review their students' SPR forms and give constructive feedback. Chairs may rate student progress as excellent, satisfactory, needs improvement, or unsatisfactory. The SPR document is available to the student, the special committee, and the DGS and GFA.

The SPR is required even if advisors already communicate on a regular basis. For students who usually only talk to their advisors about research, the SPR can be an opportunity to have a conversation both about progress through the program and about broader career goals.

9.3 Academic standing

Students are expected to meet graduate school milestones or work through approved petition processes. Students who have formed a special committee are also expected to meet the expectations of their committee.

When a committee chair deems a student's progress less than satisfactory on

the SPR (either “Needs Improvement” or “Unsatisfactory”), the DGS will work with the student and the advisor on a plan to address issues.

Students who receive an “Unsatisfactory” rating on their SPR have made little or no progress in the preceding one or two semesters, and are not considered to be in good academic standing with the Graduate School. In this case, the DGS will work with the student, advisor, and Graduate School on a detailed improvement plan, which is approved by (and then enforced by) the graduate school.

9.4 Petitions and other forms

Petitions and other forms are available from the graduate school web site. These forms include standard processes used by every student (scheduling exams and registering the results of those exams, filing a dissertation), as well as petitions for change of status or for extensions on program milestones. For guidance on graduate school petitions and forms, students should communicate with the GFA (Erika Fowler-Decatur).

10 Other Cornell resources

The Graduate School web page has a wealth of information for prospective and current students. In particular, the Graduate School resources page has pointers to numerous resources around Cornell for academics, health and wellness, safety, managing as an international student, student life, etc.