**Final Year Graduation Logistics**

All of the steps toward graduation depend on your projected graduation date. It is critical that you **keep Lorna Williams informed of any changes in your projected date** so that she can update university records and ensure that you receive the proper announcements related to graduation.

Each graduate is responsible for monitoring his/her own timeline and initiating the steps to complete each of the following on schedule. Please mark your personal calendar accordingly to prompt you as needed for each time frame. Ranges are given because each person’s circumstances may vary. **Graduates need to be proactive by thinking ahead and starting early where circumstances may require additional planning or work.**

**6-12 months before defense**

* The department has a policy to reduce the likelihood that a student will enter his/her 11th semester (or later) supported as a TA. If there is a chance that you may need TA support in your 6th year or later, please discuss it with your advisor and the GPC Co-Chairs before your 10th semester (normally December or June of your 5th year) so that the financial aspects can be discussed with the department head. Please follow the details in the department policy on [**Time Limit on TA Support**](http://www.chem.cmu.edu/grad/guide/fin/time_limit.html)**.**   
  HYPERLINK "http://www.chem.cmu.edu/grad/guide/fin/time\_limit.html"
* **Discuss target defense dates with your advisor and understand the financial consequences of your plans.** There are significant financial incentives to defend/graduate in April/May, August/September or Jan/Feb, which you can learn about in the [Doctoral Student Status Policy](http://www.cmu.edu/policies/documents/DSS.html#Final%20Semester%20Tuition%20for%20All%20But%20Dissertation%20Students%20In%20Residence) under Final Semester Tuition for ABD Students in Residence.

**3-6 months before desired defense date**

* **Begin to wrap up laboratory/computational work.** Discuss with your advisor the strategy to publish your remaining work and how any publications (or publication plans) coordinate with your thesis outline.
* **Learn about and apply for OPT if you are an international student seeking U.S. employment.** You **must** register for and attend a session at OIE on Optional Practical training before you can apply for OPT that allows you to work in the U.S. While many students apply for OPT (if desired) 3 months before needing the employment authorization card, your personal goals and situation may lead you to another plan. Time for approval of OPT can vary with U.S. immigration policies so 3 months is only a general guideline. Once you graduate, you **cannot** be paid by CMU or another U.S. employer without the employment authorization card in hand.
* **Review the department’s Thesis Formatting Guidelines.** You will need these as soon as you want to begin writing thesis chapters or converting previously published work to thesis chapters. Note that the primary publication of the thesis is electronic, with a small number of bound copies for the department, advisor(s) and student paid for by the department.
* **If your advisor would like to offer you a short-term postdoc position** (e.g. to finish and submit publications from your thesis), he/she will need to work with the business manager to hire you as a postdoc, which by university policy requires that the position be officially posted for 1 week. Note that international students need to have OPT approved and have their employment authorization card to work as a postdoc.

**2-3 months before desired defense date**

* **Set a tentative defense date**. You may need to begin earlier if your advisor travels extensively or has an upcoming sabbatical. Obtain travel information for other committee members. To allow time for final revisions and certification prior to tuition rebate deadlines, the latest recommended defense dates are:
  + **April 30** for May graduates who wish to participate in hooding and whose degrees must be certified prior to hooding
  + **May 10** for May graduates
  + **August 10** for August graduates
  + **December 10** for December graduates
  + **February 10** for Spring graduates whose advisors seek 100% tuition rebate
  + **Sept. 10** for Fall graduates whose advisors seek 100% tuition rebate
* Work with your advisor and the GPC Co-Chairs to **select a** **visiting committee member** that satisfies the [MCS Policy on Doctoral Thesis Committees](https://www.cmu.edu/mcs/people/faculty/resources/handbook/doctoral.html). Discuss the external/visiting committee member with your advisor(s) and one of the GPC Co-Chairs **prior to** inviting the external/visiting committee member and prior to finalizing a defense date to make sure your dissertation committee satisfies the MCS policy. Determine with your advisor whether you and he/she will contact the visitor about serving on your committee.

Link to:

<https://www.cmu.edu/mcs/people/faculty/resources/handbook/doctoral.html>

* Determine, in consultation with your advisor, the **last date when you will be paid as a graduate student**. Your degree will be certified when you submit your final revised thesis and required forms. The date of certification is the last date when you can legally be paid as a student. If we have no other information from your advisor, this will be the last date for which you can receive your stipend as a student. It is up to you to coordinate the submission of your final thesis with the last day on which you wish to be paid.
* Be aware that if you already have employment arranged starting shortly after your defense, they may request proof of your degree before you can start work. You must request this [verification](https://www.cmu.edu/hub/registrar/student-records/verifications/index.html) officially through the Hub; the Chemistry Department is not permitted to provide this. <https://www.cmu.edu/hub/registrar/student-records/verifications/index.html>

**2 months before desired defense date**

* **Plan a timeline with your advisor** so that he/she can see any remaining parts of your thesis and comment on them within 1 month. Agree on a thesis title.
* Review your potential defense dates with your committee members and **finalize the defense date**.
* **Obtain signatures and submit the** [**Thesis Committee Approval Submission Plans (Part 1) Form**](http://www.chem.cmu.edu/grad/guide/forms/)to Lorna Williams which:
  + Provides notice to the department of when you will submit your thesis,
  + Shows department approval for your visiting committee member,
  + Ensures that your advisor is aware that he/she must make time for final review of the thesis before submission to the full committee so that it will be as complete as possible at that time.

**1 month before defense date**

* **Submit** [**Preliminary Thesis Announcement Form (Part 2)**](http://www.chem.cmu.edu/grad/guide/forms/) **to Lorna Williams** 
  + Sets the official defense date and finalizes your thesis title so that a public announcement can be prepared and a room reserved
* **Submit the full thesis to the advisor for final review.**
* Check that the formatting **satisfies the thesis formatting guidelines**.
* **Begin preparing for your defense**:
  + The public defense should include an introduction for a general chemistry audience showing the importance of the work.
  + The public presentation for the defense should be no more than 40 minutes to allow sufficient time for the question-and-answer with the committee.
  + Study for your defense as for any other oral exam. You should expect the question-and-answer portion of the exam to be rigorous and your performance to leave a lasting impression on your committee, whom you may wish to ask for professional recommendations in the future. Thus, the question-and-answer portion of the defense is an important opportunity to showcase your expertise and gain an ally/contact in your field in your visiting committee member.

**At least 2 weeks before defense date**

* **Submit your thesis to your committee and to the department’s Graduate Program Coordinator.** While most committee members prefer to read the thesis on their screen, you may be asked for one or more hard copies for the defense. You may print 1-2 copies on a departmental color printer for this purpose. If additional color copies are needed, we encourage you to consult with your advisor about possible help with the costs. At this time, your thesis defense will be announced publicly, per MCS policy.
* **Begin to complete all of the documents to be submitted with your final thesis.** Note particularly the option to embargo your thesis to allow time for later publication of your work; many journals will treat electronic publication of your thesis as prior publication of the work.
* **Determine with your advisor when your financial support will end.** If he/she will be paying your stipend as a graduate student until your degree is certified, your advisor needs to inform Tim and Lorna so that they know when they can process your degree certification and final stipend check. Normally, you should submit the materials as soon as possible and in person unless you are working until your certification date.
* Obtain **Certification and Graduation Instructions** from the department’s Graduate Program Coordinator and review them carefully. The package will include the papers that your committee will need at your defense. As the author, it is your responsibility to understand the requirements for submitting all necessary materials correctly for certification of your degree.

**Immediately following defense**

* Submit the signed cover page and “yellow card” with the committee members’ signatures to the department’s Graduate Program Coordinator. The “yellow card” is the proof of your successful degree completion.

**Up to 1-2 weeks after defense date and no later than one week before the tuition rebate deadline for that semester.**

* Complete any revisions as required or recommended by your committee. Normally, these can be completed in a couple of days or weeks, which allows for timely certification of your degree in time for starting employment. Certification normally requires 7-10 days to obtain all relevant signatures.
* Submit [Completed Dissertation and Thesis Submission Checklist](https://www.library.cmu.edu/sites/drupal-live.library.cmu.edu/files/ETD_SubmissionChecklist_Form_2019.pdf) (from Library website) to Lorna Williams along with the electronic PDF of your finalized thesis. Lorna will upload your thesis and checklist to the library server.