

# Faculty Mentoring Guide

Students are responsible for planning their programs of study with the assistance of a faculty mentor. The role of the faculty mentor is to assist the student in making the best possible academic decisions. It is essential for students and their faculty mentor to confer each semester to select coursework and obtain approval for the student's program of study.

## **Resources**

Resources used in the program planning process include the MSCS Graduate Student Handbook (available on the Graduate Studies website or by contacting the Graduate Studies Office), the Graduate College catalog (available online), and the MSCS list of 500-level courses (available on the MSCS website). Courses should be selected with the MS exam and/or PhD preliminary exams in mind.

## **Tips For Students**

Each student is assigned a faculty mentor in their area of concentration. Nondegree students will meet with the Director of Graduate Studies until a program of interest has been identified. PhD students will continue to meet with their faculty mentor until a thesis advisor has been selected.

Students are expected to be thoroughly prepared when they meet with their faculty mentor, to be completely familiar with the program requirements, and to have thought out their course of study as completely and carefully as possible. In particular, students should be prepared to answer questions about their academic record.

## **Tips for Faculty Mentors**

Faculty mentors are encouraged to take a proactive and serious interest in their students' careers. Taking initiative in arranging appointments with students and giving considerable thought to how to guide students through the various aspects of their programs of study is particularly important.

Faculty mentors should meet with each student prior to each registration period to guide their students in the selection of courses. These meetings should also focus on long term planning, career interests, and qualifying exams.

## **What Faculty Mentors Should Know**

### 1. About the optional Master's degree thesis:

Nearly all students opt for the MS exam instead of writing a master's thesis. However, students who wish to write a master's thesis must achieve a 3.5 grade point average in the core courses, find a thesis advisor, and notify the Director of Graduate Studies of their intent to write a thesis *no later than the end of their second semester* in the program. At least 5 hours of thesis research is required for this option. A satisfactory thesis must be completed and successfully defended within one year of completion of 32 credits hours for the degree.

### 2. About the Master's exam:

Students should be encouraged to attempt the master's exam at the end of their first year in the MS program. Those planning to continue for the PhD degree must earn a "high pass" on the master's exam to be eligible for admission to the PhD program. Prelim exams do *not* substitute for the MS exam in meeting the program requirements for the MS degree.

### 3. About MS students taking prelims:

Many MS students will complete at least one sequence of courses leading to a prelim exam and should be encouraged to take the exam shortly after completing the sequence. Prelims are given late in the spring term each year. There is no penalty for a less than satisfactory score; the prelim can be re-taken in the future or an alternate prelim can be selected.

### 4. About financial support for MSCS graduate students:

Students should be referred to the current MSCS Graduate Handbook for a definition of "good standing" for students applying for financial aid. Specific details on the student's continued eligibility for aid is also outlined in this Handbook.

### 5. About course loads and other special courses:

The Graduate College defines "full-time" as 9 credit hours of enrollment. However, some students may be required to take additional hours and should consult with the Graduate Studies Office to confirm these hours. International students and students on certain types of Tuition and Service Fee Waivers (TFWs) are just two examples of students who may be required to enroll in at least 12 credit hours.

All first time TAs are required to take *Math 589 – Teaching and Presentation of Mathematics*. This is a two credit hour course, offered each Fall term.

An Independent Study (596) course is a popular option for many students. These courses provide an opportunity for students to study one-on-one with a professor on a topic that is not offered as a regular course. Faculty mentors should exercise caution when recommending these courses for MS students; the Graduate College requires MS students to complete 9 hours of 500 level coursework which *cannot* include Independent Study courses (596).

For PhD students, Independent Study courses are an excellent way for students to become familiar with professor’s research and the individual professor’s work style. This information can assist in the selection of a thesis advisor.

6. About time allowed to earn a degree

Students must remain in good standing to continue in MSCS toward degree completion.

This table illustrates MSCS policies governing *good standing and degree completion*.

| End of Year | Admitted to MS  | Admitted to UIC MS and continuing to PhD | Admitted to PhD without a MS             | Admitted to PhD with MS                  |
|-------------|-----------------|--|--|--|
| 1           |                 |  |  |  |
| 2           | Complete Degree | High Pass on MS Exam                     | High Pass on MS Exam                     | Pass one prelim                          |
| 3           |                 | Pass one prelim                          | Pass one prelim                          | Meet requirements for doctoral candidacy |
| 4           |                 | Meet requirements for doctoral candidacy | Meet requirements for doctoral candidacy |  |
| 5           |                 |  |  | Complete Degree                          |
| 6           |                 | Complete Degree                          | Complete Degree                          |  |