

Graduate Student FAQs: Fall 2026 (updated 8-17-26)

Q1: What are the Fall 2026 Grad College (GC) deadlines?

A: Here are the [key deadlines](#).

Q2: When is the VERY LAST DAY I can defend my MA/dissertation to graduate in Fall 2026?

A: The very last day is December 1, 2026.

Q3: I want to defend my MA/dissertation. When do I have to notify the front office?

A1: If you want to defend in Fall 2026 and officially graduate in Fall 2026, you must notify Beth Watson before Sept 1, 2026.

A2: If you want to defend in Fall 2026 but you are OK with a Spring 2027 degree, you must notify Beth Watson before Oct 1, 2026.

A3: If you want to defend in Spring 2027 and officially graduate in Spring 2027, you must notify Beth Watson before March 1.

A4: If you want to defend in Spring 2027 but you are OK with a Summer or Fall 2027 degree, you must notify Beth Watson before April 1.

A5: If you want to defend in Summer 2027, please see Beth Watson before June 1 to discuss your options, which includes a Summer degree or Fall degree depending on your defense date.

Q4: What is the difference between MA with thesis, MA with research paper, and MA without thesis?

A: The GC only distinguishes between two of these—MA with thesis and MA without. If you plan to do a MA with thesis, there are [additional GC formatting requirements](#). Most Soc/Crim students opt to do a MA without thesis, which has two further options. The first is a research paper, which does not carry GC formatting requirements. The second is a MA completely without written thesis; often an oral examination is used instead. In sum, there are three options:

- “MA with Thesis”: You write an MA thesis and follow all the fancy GC formatting requirements so that the MA is published with ProQuest (only 1 student in the last 10 years or so has opted for this).
- “MA without Thesis” but with Research Paper: You write a research paper, which is exactly the same as a thesis except there is no fancy formatting and you do NOT have it published by ProQuest (nearly all our students choose this option).
- “MA without Thesis” with Oral Exam instead: You do not write a thesis or research paper. Instead, you take an exam to receive your MA. When taking this option, you need 38 credits to get your MA and you do not advance to the PhD (this is a great option for students who are no longer interested in pursuing dissertation work).

Please discuss which option you would like to pursue with your faculty advisor before making your decision.

Q5: How do I set up and complete my MA/dissertation defense or Terminal MA Exam in Fall 2026?

A: Follow these steps:

1. Obtain permission from your committee chair to proceed with scheduling a defense.
2. Confirm that your committee members agree that you are ready to defend.
3. If you have an external committee member, fill out the “[external committee member approval](#)” form and submit to the main office as soon as your committee is finalized.

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4. Find a date/time that works for the committee.
5. If you want to officially graduate in December 2026:
 - a. You need to fill out the “[MA defense/exam request form](#)” and submit it to the main office to start the GC paperwork at least two weeks prior to your defense date OR by 10/1 (or 9/1, if applicable—see Q3), **whichever date comes first**.
 - b. Complete your [Application for Degree](#) by 10/1. Note: there is no fee to cancel this application, but there is a \$20 late fee if you miss the deadline. Also click through the entire [graduation checklist](#) to register for commencement and be informed about other important graduation logistics.
 - c. As noted above, make sure to schedule your defense/exam on or before 12/1/26
 - d. If you are doing a dissertation or “MA with Thesis” (as opposed to “MA with research paper”), you must officially deposit your thesis by 12/8/26 at 5pm. Please do not wait to submit your thesis until the deadline day. This will give the Graduate College time to review the thesis to determine if it is complete, and to notify you if there are missing materials that will need to be submitted before the deadline.
6. If you are OK with officially graduating in Spring 2027 but want to defend in Fall 2026, contact the front office for further instructions.

Q6: How do I set up and complete my prospectus defense in Fall 2026?

A: Follow these steps:

1. Obtain permission from your Dissertation Committee Chair to proceed with scheduling a Prospectus defense.
2. Confirm that your committee members agree that you are ready to defend.
3. If you have an external committee member, fill out the “[external committee member approval](#)” form and submit to the main office as soon as your committee is finalized.
4. Find a date/time that works for the committee.
5. Notify the front office at least two weeks in advance by filling out the “[PhD defense/exam request form](#)” so they can approve your in-house paperwork and make sure all members of your committee are approved by the Graduate College.

Q7: What steps do I follow if I want to take the take-home comprehensive exam in January 2027 or May 2027?

A: The Graduate Manual is updated with current comp exam procedures and deadlines. For the January exam, your scope statement is due December 1st and you should use the fall semester to organize your committee and prepare your scope statement. For the May exam, your scope statement is due April 1st and you should use the spring semester to organize your committee and prepare your scope statement. For the August exam, your scope statement is due July 1st and you should use spring/summer semester to organize your committee and prepare your scope statement. Please reach out to the DGS well in advance if you are planning on taking either exam.

Q8: Where can I find a summary of INTERNAL fellowships/funding I can apply for?

A: For departmental funding requests, fill out the [Research/Travel Fund Application form](#) well in advance and then submit it to the Departmental Program Coordinator. For Graduate College fellowships, please see their website: <https://grad.uiowa.edu/funding/fellowships>

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Q9: What are the relevant deadlines for internal grants applications for Fall 2026?

A: Students must submit to the department in PDF format all their materials TWO WEEKS before the published official deadline. Here's the breakdown of deadlines for all internal awards for which deadlines have been published:

	<u>STUDENT Deadline</u> Submit your student materials in PDF format to Beth Watson by:	<u>FACULTY Deadline</u> Make sure your letter writers send PDF of their statements to Beth Watson by:	<u>Final/DGS Deadline</u> All materials officially submitted through Workflow/email by Beth Watson or DGS by:
GC Post Comp Fellowship (Fall)	9.1.26 (Fall); 2.16.27 (Sp)	9.9.26 (Fall); 2.24.27 (Sp)	9.16.26 (Fall); 3.3.27 (Sp)
Ballard and Seashore Dissertation Fellowship	9.1.26 (Fall); 2.16.27 (Sp)	9.9.26 (Fall); 2.24.27 (Sp)	9.16.26 (Fall); 3.3.27 (Sp)
Digital Scholarship & Publishing Studio (SU 27)	1.20.27	1.27.27	2.3.27
GC Summer 2027	TBD	TBD	TBD

Q10: Where can I find a summary of the common EXTERNAL fellowships that UI students apply for?

A: Check out the following links:

- <https://grad.uiowa.edu/grad-success/fellowship-and-grant-support>
- <https://www.grad.uiowa.edu/funding/fellowships/internal/fellowship-incentive-program>

Q11: I need help identifying fellowship opportunities that I should apply for. What can I do?

A: There are multiple ways to become more knowledgeable about the funding landscape:

- Talk to your advisors, committee members, and DGS for recommendations. Ask peers about their funding plans.
- Attend fellowship webinars hosted by the Grad College/Grad Success.
- Make a [Fellowship Consultation Appointment](#) with Grad Success. Indicate that you are looking to identify opportunities given your research area and program stage.
 - We have heard from multiple students that these appointments are **very** useful and that the staff are incredibly knowledgeable about the funding landscape.
- Make an appointment with [Kris Ackerson](#) (Grant Development Manager) at the [Center for Social Science Innovation](#). The CSSI provides three services for graduate students: (1) support with budgets and budget justifications, (2) editing and feedback to be eligible for the [Fellowship Incentive Program](#) (\$250), and (3) routing proposals to the Division of Sponsored Programs.
- Sign up for funding alerts with the [Pivot Funding Database](#).
- [Sign up here](#) for the Grad Success newsletter ("GradNav") to receive reminders about major fellowship opportunities and to stay in the loop on other professional development opportunities.
- The OPR [Research Development Office](#) is geared towards helping faculty identify and apply for external grants. They do, however, maintain a [Resource Library](#) of winning proposals for a variety of national graduate student fellowships across many disciplines.
- Follow funding organizations on social media.

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Q12: I need help developing a fellowship application that I'm currently drafting. Where can I get feedback?

A: There are multiple opportunities for feedback:

- For EXTERNAL applications: make a [Fellowship Consultation Appointment](#) with Grad Success to workshop a draft. "Please send proposals 5 days in advance of your revision deadline for an appointment."
 - PS If you are receiving feedback on an external application from Grad Success, consider applying for the \$250 [Fellowship Incentive Program](#) for your preparation work.
- For EXTERNAL applications, typically national fellowships: make an appointment with the [Grant Development Staff at the CSSI](#), such as with [Kris Ackerson](#) and/or [Kate Gloer](#).
- For INTERNAL applications: make an appointment with the [Writing Center](#).
- For NSF GRFP applicants: enroll in [SOC5800 Writing for National Fellowships](#).
- For any application, ask your advisors and writing group colleagues for comments and suggestions.
- Do not forget to get feedback on your CV along with writing samples and application questions.

Q13: I would like to improve my grant writing skills. What do I do?

A: There are several opportunities you could pursue:

- Grant and Fellowship Writing Seminar for PhD, MFA, and DMA students in the Humanities, Arts, and the Social Sciences. Note: This call should be coming out in late Fall 2026 for the Summer 2027. Click [here](#) to browse the Summer 2026 call.
- Ask the DGS to book a [Grant Writing 101 Workshop](#) from the Office of Grad Success.
- Learn to write grant proposals through various grad courses, such as Sarah Harkness's research methods course and Alison Bianchi's grad seminar on Social Psychology.
- Take the Graduate Writing course offered in our department (SOC5250: *Students improve their skills in academic writing and publication; how to write abstracts and project summaries; preparation of articles for submission to professional journals; creation of grant proposals.*)

Q14: I would like to get better at articulating my research ideas to non-specialist audiences. What can I do?

A: Participate in the GC's [public scholarship competitions](#) (Three Minute Thesis or 3MT competitions for short) and the accompanying workshops that help you learn to communicate complex ideas more effectively.

Q15: Where can I find information about talks on campus this semester?

- Soc & Crim: <https://sociology.uiowa.edu/research/center-criminology-and-socio-legal-studies>
- Iowa Innovation, Business & Law Center: <https://ibl.law.uiowa.edu/>
- UIowa Lecture Committee: <https://lectures.uiowa.edu/>

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Q16: Who do I ask if I have questions about policies and procedures?

A: Start with the [Grad Manual](#) before asking our Academic Services Coordinator (James Herzig) or our Departmental Administrator (Beth Watson). They will consult with the Grad College, the DGS, and the DEO as needed.

Q17: Who do I ask if I have questions about classes/research/career?

A: Start with your primary faculty advisor.

Q18: What does it mean to “route” something through Division of Sponsored Programs (DSP)?

A: If you are applying for an external GRANT OR FELLOWSHIP of ANY KIND, you need to electronically forward your application to DSP (UI gatekeeping office for grants & fellowships) for approval first. This is called ROUTING. Failure to route can lead to all sorts of trouble. This is because for legal and accounting reasons, the funds that you receive from outside sources must go through the university first and not you directly. If you have any questions about this, please ask. Also: “When in doubt, route.”

Q19: What does it mean to be on “short hours” and why should I care?

A: “Full time” status for a graduate student is 9 semester hours of courses. If you do not meet this threshold, it should mean you are making good progress toward your degree and are working on projects like your dissertation/thesis, prospectus, comps, etc. If in this situation, you should declare “short hours” status by completing a short hours form. This form serves the following purposes: 1) A student may be obtaining financial aid that requires a minimum of half-time or full-time status; 2) A student may be deferring previous student loans and needs to be at half-time or full-time status; 3) IRS regulations state that a student employee has to be doing research in fulfillment of their degree and enrolled as at least a half-time student in order to qualify as exempt from FICA withholdings. (The short version: Failure to submit a short hours form when going on short hours may affect your financial aid and/or your taxes.) To go on short hours, fill out the “[short hours request form](#)” and submit it to the main office.

Q20: How can I apply for research funding and travel funding from the department?

A: In the past, the department has set aside funds to help students pay for research and travel to conferences. Last year, students could apply for up to \$400 for research (e.g., software licenses, transcription, survey participants, etc.) and \$500 in travel funds. An application form is available here: TBD

Q21. How can I improve my job market materials for academic or non-academic jobs?

A: See below for some important resources and training opportunities.

- For academic job applications: We highly recommend the 5-day workshop “Managing the Market” offered in July by Grad Success. Each day is geared towards a specific document, with an info webinar first followed by a writing workshop. Be on the lookout for the registration call for Summer 2027.
- For any kind of job, you can always make individual appointments with Grad Success to discuss your job docs: <https://grad.uiowa.edu/grad-success-appointments>
- Ask your advisor(s) for general strategies and for editing feedback on job market materials. These materials often require multiple rounds of revision.

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- For those applying for jobs in the Fall semester, note that faculty are often traveling or busy with ASA towards the end of the summer, so definitely reach out at the start of the summer to prep job docs.
 - We recommend that you prepare job market materials on departmental letterhead.
- Professor Steve Hitlin is appointed to the role of Job Market Coordinator for AY26-27, and he will be available to provide feedback to graduate students regarding job docs. To receive feedback on a document, students will be required to have received at least one round of feedback on that document from Grad Success. Attending the *Managing the Market* workshop, the *Career Prep Bootcamp*, or making an individual appointment with Grad Success would satisfy that requirement. Ask the DGS or Job Market Coordinator for examples of job materials from recently hired assistant professors and former students.

Q22. A faculty member wants to pay me for RA work. How can I make this happen?

A: Congratulations on the job offer. Before you accept the RA work, your first move should be to tell the DGS and Grad Program Coordinator. They need to assess your current employment/fellowship status with the university in order to confirm that you can accept additional paid work. Failure to let the DGS and Grad Program Coordinator know could result in your payment being retracted in the future.

Q23. Where can I find summer employment opportunities?

A: Every UI student has an account automatically created for them on Handshake, which is the University's Employment Program through the Pomerantz Career Center. Students can find a list of available campus positions [here](#).

[Handshake | Pomerantz Career Center - The University of Iowa](#)

IMPORTANT - Every UI student has an account automatically created for them. Click link the below, then HawkID login to activate your account. Be sure to update your profile! Do not log-in with your email address unless you are an Alumni.
careers.uiowa.edu

Q24. I want to audit a class, what do I need to know?

A: You are certainly able to audit a class, however, tuition is still assessed for auditing a course and billed to your U-Bill accordingly. Additionally, you will want to obtain instructor approval to audit a class. You will want to discuss with the instructor what work you will be responsible for if you are approved for an audit.