

## AU Graduate Studies: Policies

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<b>Abbreviations</b>	<b>Terminology</b>
<b>AU</b>	Ajman University
<b>RGS</b>	Research and Graduate Studies
<b>DRG</b>	Deanship of Research and Graduate Studies
<b>VCAA</b>	Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs
<b>HEI</b>	Higher Education Institute
<b>OIPE</b>	Office of Institutional Planning and Effectiveness
<b>CAA</b>	The Commission for Academic Accreditation
<b>CGS</b>	Council of Graduate Studies at AU
<b>CoR</b>	Council of Research at AU
<b>College</b>	Academic College at Ajman University
<b>Dean</b>	Dean of Academic College
<b>CFAA</b>	Council for Academic Affairs
<b>GPC</b>	Graduate Program Coordinator
<b>PDC</b>	Proposal Defense Committee
<b>TEC</b>	Thesis Examination Committee
<b>DEC</b>	Dissertation Examination Committee
<b>GA</b>	Graduate Assistant - An individual who serves in a support role while completing his/her graduate studies at AU.
<b>Graduate Student</b>	A student who is studying for a degree that is higher than the one received after four years of study at a college or university.
<b>Graduate Program</b>	A graduate program is an advanced academic curriculum that leads to a higher-level degree (a master's or doctorate), with specific eligibility criteria, coursework, assessments, and qualifications upon completion.
<b>Graduate Faculty</b>	AU faculty teaching/supervising graduate courses/students
<b>Thesis</b>	A compilation of research work that demonstrates that a student is knowledgeable about the information learned throughout the master's program. Thesis is a research work that marks the end of a master's program.
<b>Dissertation</b>	A compilation of research work and the creation of new knowledge, theories, practices during doctoral studies. Dissertation is a research work that marks the end of a doctoral program.

## AU Graduate Studies: Policies

**Notice:** It is essential that both the AU Graduate Studies Policy (P) and Procedures and Guidelines (PG) are reviewed together, as they complement each other and should be considered together when seeking information and guidance related to AU's graduate programs policies and procedures.

### 1. Introduction

The Ajman University (AU) Graduate Studies Policies aim to provide a framework and ensure consistency for all graduate programs offered at AU, including master's and doctoral programs. It is mandatory for all graduate programs at AU to comply with the policies outlined in this document. The University expects full adherence to the graduate studies policies from all AU faculty, staff, and graduate students. The Council of Graduate Studies (CGS) and the Deans are responsible for ensuring that the information is effectively communicated to all graduate faculty and students.

#### 1.1. Scope of Document

In accordance with the comprehensive scope of these policies, they apply universally to all AU graduate programs, encompassing faculty, staff, researchers, and students alike. The VCAA retains the authority to address cases not explicitly covered herein and to grant exceptions when deemed necessary.

#### 1.2. Role and Responsibilities of DRG

Deanship of Research and Graduate Studies (DRG) ensures the highest standards and quality of AU graduate programs and research conducted by its faculty members. As per DRG By-laws, the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research chairs *Council of Graduate Studies*, having members representing all colleges offering graduate programs at AU.

#### 1.3. Role and Responsibilities of the College Dean

The Dean of each academic college offering graduate program(s) shall appoint a Graduate Program Coordinator (GPC) for each graduate program offered in the college and a representative of graduate programs in the Council of Graduate Studies (CGS). The Dean of each academic college designates a faculty liaison, who as a member of the Council of Graduate Studies, is responsible for overseeing all graduate programs in the college and serves as the principal communication channel between the DRG and the college.

The GPC and Dean are responsible for ensuring that graduate students with assistantships fulfill their responsibilities and meet the requirements. Failure to do so may result in termination of the scholarship or assistantship, as per graduate assistantship policy.

Generally, the college is responsible for providing comprehensive support to graduate students, including, but not limited to, facilitating timely graduation, offering supervision and training, and providing partial scholarships. The Dean ensures the availability of necessary resources and support for program coordinators and enforces policies on class sizes for effective learning at the graduate level.

## **AU Graduate Studies: Policies**

### **1.4. Graduate Program Coordinator (GPC)/Member of CGS**

Each graduate program must have a faculty member, as a Graduate Program Coordinator (GPC), who is responsible for the daily operations of the programs including all issues related to the graduate students in that particular program and report to college Dean. GPC serves as a resource and contact person about rules, regulations and procedures related with the graduate program.

### **1.5. Classification of Graduate Programs**

Graduate programs at AU are classified into two main categories. First, research based graduate programs that require graduate students to complete and successfully defend a thesis or dissertation with original research to advance the body of knowledge in front of a designated Thesis or Dissertation Examining Committee (TEC or DEC). Second, professional based graduate programs (i.e., MBA and DBA) that have different emphasizes and requirements as part of degree completion, where advancing the practices is a core criterion for awarding the degree. These classifications guide the structure and expectations of graduate programs at AU.

## **2. Master's Degree at Ajman University**

The master's degree programs at AU consist of a minimum of one year of advanced graduate study, requiring at least 30 credit hours beyond the bachelor's level. These programs emphasize research or professional skills, and methodology, and typically culminate in a research thesis or capstone project. The subsequent sections solely address policies pertaining to master's thesis. Arabic-based programs follow the merit of this policy with some different procedural arrangements in relation to the appointment of supervisors, examiners, and thesis defense.

### **2.1. Master's Thesis**

Graduate students enrolled in master's research degree programs at AU are required to undertake independent research guided by their thesis supervisor and produce a thesis as the culmination of their studies. The number of credits allocated to the thesis component may vary between 6 and 9 credits. Thus, each master's program should comply with the specified/assigned dissertation's number of credit hours in the CAA approved study plan for the relative program. The master's thesis should demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of previous work in the field, showcase the ability to conduct research, and effectively organize research findings.

### **2.2. Thesis Supervisor/Co-Supervisor(s)**

The graduate program coordinator, in consultation with the student, must nominate a principal supervisor for approval by the college Dean. The principal supervisor must be a full-time AU active faculty member in research. A principal supervisor may oversee up to 10 theses, with exceptions granted by the VCAA. Conflict of interest cases are resolved by the GPC and college Dean or escalated to the Dean of RGS. Co-supervisors, if appointed, meet regularly to monitor progress, address concerns, and maintain records. Adjunct AU faculty may serve as co-supervisors.

## AU Graduate Studies: Policies

### 2.3. Thesis Proposal

In graduate programs, students are required to submit a thesis proposal. The proposal serves to identify a research problem, outline the research approach, and specify the necessary resources and timeframe for completing the study. Students must submit their thesis proposal to the Proposal Defense Committee (PDC) through their principal supervisor (or GPC) for approval by no later the end of the semester in which they registered for the thesis.

### 2.4. Thesis Examination Committee (TEC)

The formation of the Thesis Examination Committee (TEC) can be initiated when a student registers for their thesis. The committee composition includes the student's principal supervisor, co-supervisor(s) if applicable, a well-recognized external examiner, and an internal examiner chosen from relevant full-time faculty members or adjunct faculty. The selection of external examiner(s) follows the supervisor's recommendation, ensuring no conflicts of interest and preferring individuals with the rank of full Professor from internationally recognized universities. The Chair (GPC or a nominee [i.e., internal examiner]) of the TEC submits the report to the student upon approval from the Dean.

### 2.5. Research Publications Requirements

In preparation for the thesis defense, the graduate student is required to publish or submit a draft to an internationally recognized journal, or, at minimum, to an internationally recognized conference. However, based on the nature of discipline, these requirements/exceptions are adjusted. For example, master's students working on theses in Arabic, may instead submit a comprehensive summary written in Arabic and English, approximately 4-5 single-spaced A4 pages, prior to the thesis defense.

### 2.6. Final Master's Thesis Defense / Examination

A thesis defense is a mandatory requirement for master's students to assess the quality of their thesis. The defense aims to assess the student's knowledge, critical understanding, and evaluation skills in their field of study, with a specific focus on their thesis work. The defense should be scheduled during regular working hours, and an independent observer may be requested from DRG by relevant parties. All thesis re-examinations require the presence of an impartial representative, assigned by the college Dean, to uphold academic standards during the defense.

### 2.7. Examination Outcomes

This section outlines the possible outcomes of a thesis defense. These outcomes include passing the final examination or thesis defense with affirmative votes from the committee members, passing with minor or major modifications to the thesis or project, or failing the examination. In case of failure, the student may be allowed to retake the exam once, and a re-examination must take place in the following semester.

### 3. Doctorate Degrees at Ajman University

The PhD and professional doctorate programs at AU emphasize academic rigor and research excellence, requiring a minimum of three years and at least 54 credit hours. The curriculum mandates 24 credits in advanced courses, exceeding master's-level difficulty. Independent research is essential, resulting in a publishable, original contribution dissertation. For applied-field professional doctorates, such as dentistry and business, advanced professional knowledge is paired with research insights. All candidates must pass a comprehensive exam, including coursework assessment, proposal, and dissertation defense, overseen by qualified experts. The GPC liaising with the DRG, must exhibit active, recent scholarship in their domain. While this policy outlines general expectations, specific program guidelines provide detailed instructions. AU maintains top-tier academic and research standards in its doctoral programs. Arabic-based programs align with this policy but may vary in supervisory and defense procedures.

#### 3.1. Research and Dissertation

Graduate students pursuing a PhD or professional doctorate degree at AU are expected to complete a dissertation based on their original research, under the guidance of their supervisor. The approved study plan by CAA specifies the allocated credits for the doctoral thesis. Students must successfully pass three examinations: the comprehensive examination, proposal defense, and dissertation defense examination.

#### 3.2. Dissertation Supervisor/Co-Supervisor(s)

In the dissertation registration process, the GPC, in consultation with the doctoral student, nominates a principal supervisor and a co-supervisor (if needed) for approval by the college Dean. Supervisor changes are promptly reported to the DRG. A principal supervisor can typically supervise up to five dissertations, with potential for additional approvals. Supervisors meet regularly with the student to provide the guidance. These policies ensure effective dissertation supervision and support research excellence at AU.

#### 3.3. Dissertation Examination Committee (DEC)

The Dissertation Examination Committee (DEC) is an essential part of the doctoral program at AU. It can be partially initiated when the student registers for the dissertation with both the principal supervisor and co-supervisor, and then completed prior to the dissertation defense by adding at least one internationally recognized external examiner and internal examiner. The DEC ensures academic standards and evaluates the dissertation to assign the relevant outcome (discussed in Section 3.9). The Chair of the DEC submits the report to the student/GPC upon approval from the college Dean.

#### 3.4. Comprehensive Examination

Doctoral students are required to pass a comprehensive examination designed to assess their cumulative knowledge in the subject areas and their research skills. All doctoral students must pass a comprehensive exam designed to evaluate the breadth and depth of the student's

## **AU Graduate Studies: Policies**

knowledge of his/her discipline, as well as the student's scholarly potential, as applicable. The comprehensive exam is non-credit rated, while a Pass or Fail result for each attempt is recorded on the student's academic transcript.

### **3.5. Research Proposal Defense**

Doctoral students are required to pass the proposal defense. A primary goal of the proposal defense is to provide direction and feedback early on regarding the student's research from the Proposal Defense Committee (PDC) and to assess student's ability to complete a dissertation. Students must present a clear research proposal, detailing the problem, objectives, and intended methodology, to the examination committee via their principal supervisor. Each college is responsible for facilitating the proposal submission and approval process. For research involving human or animal subjects, prior ethical approval, aligned with AU's research ethics guidelines, from the University or the Ministry is mandatory.

### **3.6. Admission to Dissertation**

When a student has passed the comprehensive exam, has completed coursework, has had his/her research proposal defense passed, and is in good academic standing, the GPC recommends the student to advance to admission to dissertation to the college Dean. The Dean of the College must approve the recommendation and communicate the decision to the Office of Admission & Registration. At this stage, the student is allowed to register for dissertation credit hours. Following this admission of the doctoral student, he/she would continue to work on the proposed research towards a dissertation.

### **3.7. Research Publications Requirements**

Doctoral students are required to publish (or have confirmation of final acceptance of) research papers from their dissertations in peer-reviewed journals recognized by AU, before submitting a dissertation defence request. As a minimum requirement (for professional doctorate), a completed draft should be submitted to an internationally recognized journal. This is a condition for the dissertation defense to be held. Where applicable, the paper(s) should be made available to the DEC, along with the dissertation.

### **3.8. Dissertation Defense**

The DEC make recommendations regarding the dissertation defense outcome. The recommendations can include: approving the dissertation as presented, approving it with minor modifications, requiring major revisions and resubmission, or rejecting the dissertation, which leads to academic dismissal.

Doctorate students can request a delay in making their dissertation public for up to two years by seeking approval from the Dean. This policy ensures a fair evaluation process, encourages quality dissertations, and allows students the option of delaying public access to their work if necessary.

### 4. Graduate Faculty Members

Faculty members who participate in a graduate program (teaching graduate level courses or supervising/co-supervising graduate students) are considered as “Graduate Faculty Members” of that program. Graduate faculty members must hold a terminal degree earned from an internationally recognized institution of higher education and show a strong record of active engagement in research and scholarship, including recent publications, or have significant professional experience in applied fields as practitioners.

### 5. Degree Completion Time and Change of Major

This policy outlines the duration and time limits for both master's and doctoral degree programs at AU. Additionally, the policy addresses the conditions for changing majors within graduate programs.

For master's degree programs, most full-time students typically require 2-3 years (a minimum of 1 year) for completion, with a maximum time allowance of 4-5 years. Extensions to these time limits may be granted for an additional year by the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs (VCAA) under specific circumstances, subject to directives and standards that are currently published by CAA. Regarding doctoral degree programs, most students require 4-5 years (a minimum of 3 years) for completion, with a maximum time allowance of 7 years, unless stated otherwise in the CAA-approved study plan. Similar to master's programs, extensions of up to one year may be considered by the VCAA, subject to CAA's directives and standards.

Students may switch majors within the same college if they meet the admission requirements of the desired program. In the doctorate programs, changes of major are only permitted before the comprehensive examination. Change of major requests must be supported by the student's supervisor, the coordinators of both programs, and approved by the college Dean. Upon final approval, credits earned in the first program are applicable to the student's second program degree.

### 6. Joint/ Dual Degrees

This section is aligned with AU's Joint/Dual Degrees Policy. AU establishes joint and dual degree programs with globally recognized institutions, adhering to CAA and WSCUC accreditation standards. AU commits to quality assurance, legal compliance, and internal approval protocols, with a maximum of 50% partner-taught curriculum for these programs. All programs require pre-implementation approval from the Chancellor and relevant accrediting bodies. The joint degree is a single degree awarded by two institutions, where students study a curriculum that is agreed between the two institutions. AU, in some cases, offers in partnership with other esteemed institutions, thereby affording students the unique opportunity to concurrently earn two degrees from both universities. The Dual degree is two degrees awarded by two institutions, to students who have met the requirements for completion of both degrees. AU, in some cases, offers a Dual

## AU Graduate Studies: Policies

Degree Program to allow students to pursue two degrees simultaneously, enabling them to acquire interdisciplinary knowledge and skills.

### 7. Exit Qualification

This section is related to the unfinalized/ongoing policy for AU Exit Qualification. The advancement of policy aspects will be subject to the content of this AU's policy following the approval from CAA. An exit degree is an approved exit point from a program for students unable to fulfil the program requirements in which they are enrolled.

### 8. Credit Transfer for Graduate Degrees

The graduate degree requirements at AU may be satisfied by transfer of graduate credit for courses studied at accredited institutions. Conditions and circumstances under which this transfer should be granted will be subject to AU related policies and procedures (i.e., Advance Standing and Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) Policy and [Admissions for Graduate Transfers](#)) and the approved study plan by CAA.

At graduate programs, doctoral students have the opportunity to be exempted from certain required graduate-level doctoral courses. Exemption may be granted if the student has previously completed a similar course, either at AU or another institution, as a graduate student (e.g., master's level), and achieved a minimum equivalent grade of "B". In such cases, the student will not be required to retake the course but will need to register for additional credit hours to fulfil the total credit hour requirement for degree completion. The maximum credit hours granted through PLAR must not exceed 25% of the total completion requirements for graduate programs, unless stated otherwise in the study plan approved by CAA and/or in CAA standards. The credit hours of the exempted courses will not be included in the calculation of the student's CGPA.

### 9. Graduate Assistant (GA) Policy

The approved graduate assistant policy is available in DRG [Policies and Procedures](#).