3. General Graduate Matters

3.1 Advising

All incoming students have the same advisor - the Graduate Director, who will meet with you at least once a semester to advise you on courses. By the beginning of the second year, a second-year project committee will be set up for each student with the membership reflecting your research interests. They will also advise you on courses and on your research. It is your responsibility and that of your research project advisor to set up this new committee. Beyond the second year, the second year advisor continues as your primary advisor until either you or your second year advisor informs the Graduate Director that a new advisor has been identified or that the second year advisor is unable to continue. In the latter case, the Graduate Director will work with you to identify a new research advisor. During your third year, your advisor will work with you to determine your thesis committee.

Before the end of each academic year, students in the third year and beyond will make a brief presentation to their research committee on progress during the past year and plans for the coming year. They should also provide a two-page summary report to the committee in advance of the presentation. Goals are to 1) inform the committee as to your progress and thesis and career plans; 2) provide committee feedback to you and your advisor; and 3) allow you to gain practice and receive feedback in giving presentations. Please ensure that a copy of this report is also sent to the Associate Director for your student file. After the committee presentation, your primary advisor will forward a brief summary of the comments provided by the committee to the Associate Director, with a copy to you and the other members of your research committee. Other types of presentations such as the thesis proposal defense or conference presentations (at which committee members are present) may be substituted for the yearly committee presentation at the discretion of the committee, although the reports are still required.

The Graduate Faculty of the Department of Astronomy holds periodic sessions to discuss the academic progress of the graduate students in the program. If specific actions are required, the students involved will be informed in writing. The discussions at these meetings are otherwise kept confidential.

3.1.1 The Student's Role

All graduate students should take an active role in their advising - both for course work and for research. It is your responsibility to make sure that you meet with your committee at least once per year. If the advisor does not set up the meeting then you should take the initiative and find a suitable time. You should meet with the individual members of your committee in addition to the minimal one meeting per year of the entire committee. It is important, particularly in the second year project and the beginning of the thesis, that several faculty members understand your research capabilities.

Our graduate students are generally expected to make presentations at 2-3 conferences during their graduate career. Typically, the research advisor provides funding for travel to conferences; if grant funding is unavailable, the research advisor can request department funding to help meet the minimum expectations for graduate student travel to conferences.

After acceptance to the PhD program it is up to you to define a suitable PhD thesis topic in consultation with an advisor. This should be your primary goal during the third year of studies.

3.2 Assistantships
Normally full-time graduate students are awarded either a teaching or a research assistantship. It is necessary to petition the faculty in order to obtain a waiver from this regulation. The rights, wrongs, and regulations of these assistantships are discussed in the Graduate Catalog at [www.gradschool.umd.edu/](http://www.gradschool.umd.edu/). Full-time teaching and research assistants receive 10 credits of tuition exemption per semester. This is enough to cover the normal course load during the first two years of three courses per semester (plus ASTR 695 in the first year only).

The continuation of an assistantship is contingent on making adequate progress towards the degree. Adequate progress includes maintaining a GPA of 3.0 or better (Graduate School Requirement), passing the English competency exam (if required) by the end of the first year, admission to the PhD program at the beginning of the third year, definition of an approved thesis topic by the end of the third year, and satisfactory performance in the assistantship position. If you meet all the criteria for adequate progress, you can expect continued funding of one sort or another for up to six years, at which time it is presumed that you should have completed the degree. Some students are awarded fellowships, either from the Graduate School or from other sources. Such students receive tuition remission for up to twelve credits since a student without assistantship duties should be able to carry a heavier load of courses. Because teaching is an important part of astronomy, fellows are allowed and encouraged to take on half of a teaching assistantship for two or more semesters (during which they are limited to ten credits). Details on the pay scales for graduate assistants and fellows are circulated yearly.

### 3.3 Transfer and Duration of Credits

There are specific University regulations regarding the conditions (e.g. time limits, maximum number of credits) for transfer of credit. (See Graduate School’s catalog website at [www.gradschool.umd.edu/](http://www.gradschool.umd.edu/). Be sure you are familiar with the regulations if you intend to transfer credits. There are formal University requirements on courses for MS degree and as a result, there is a formal procedure for transferring credits in this case. The only course requirements for the PhD, other than 12 credits of thesis research, are departmental requirements. Rather than transfer credits, the normal procedure for PhD students is to petition the faculty for a waiver of the requirement based on work done elsewhere.

There are also specific time limits in various phases of the graduate program. Most of these are noted in the following sections. Please be familiar with these regulations.

### 3.4 Status in the University

#### 3.4.1 Full-Time/Part-Time

This is a University distinction. It is totally determined by the number of credits taken and by the level of those courses. The formula can be found in the Graduate Catalog at [www.gradschool.umd.edu/](http://www.gradschool.umd.edu/).

#### 3.4.2 Residency

Residency is determined by the Graduate School and information on the procedures can be obtained from the Graduate School’s web site at [www.gradschool.umd.edu/](http://www.gradschool.umd.edu/). Do not assume that voting and paying taxes in Maryland imply residency. The regulations are more complex than that.