

# Graduate School Mission and History

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## Mission

The mission of the Graduate School is to

- provide graduate students advanced academic study beyond the baccalaureate;
- provide graduate students opportunities in which to develop methods of independent and systematic investigation;
- provide graduate students with opportunities for professional development; and
- provide graduate students and faculty with an environment conducive to learning and scholarly activities.

In fulfilling this mission, the Graduate School will promote, enhance, develop, and monitor graduate studies at Mississippi State University (MSU) and provide individuals with effective, efficient, and courteous assistance in admission, registration, academic progress, graduation, and post-graduation services.

## History and Organization

Established in 1878 under the Morrill-Nelson Land-Grant College Act of 1862, Mississippi Agricultural and Mechanical College functioned with a defined mission to provide higher education to Mississippi students, primarily in the fields of agriculture and engineering; its secondary mission was to train reserve officers for the U.S. Army. Departments in academic disciplines such as mathematics, physical sciences, biological sciences, English, history, government, and languages were developed to provide a more generalized college curriculum for all students.

In the early years some science departments granted master's degrees, but the primary emphasis was educating young men for careers in an agrarian society, in farming or agricultural products processing and manufacturing. Little oversight of post-graduate programs existed until a Graduate Committee of the General Faculty was established in 1914; this committee functioned until 1936, when the need for greater oversight was recognized. Thus, the Graduate School was established, a graduate dean appointed, and graduate education became an integral part of Mississippi State College (MSC). Degrees in the former "service departments" were offered as the Colleges of Arts and Sciences, Business, and Education developed.

As graduate study expanded in the South following WWII, the Conference of Deans of Southern Graduate Schools exerted a positive influence to maintain the quality of the new graduate offerings. The graduate dean at Mississippi State became a key member of the Conference, and his guidance in program development resulted in the establishment of several strong research-based doctoral programs. The first doctoral degree was granted in agronomy in 1953, followed by sociology and later engineering. In 1958 Sputnik changed the face of graduate education and university research throughout the nation, and the school was renamed Mississippi State University. The overwhelming concern for higher education resulted in emerging Congressional support for graduate fellowship programs.

In 1960 a new MSU president modified the administrative infrastructure, positioning the University to make successful proposals for fellowships, research equipment and facilities, and faculty research support awards. The Office of Research and Graduate Studies was created, headed by the Dean of the Graduate School and Coordinator of Research. A strong Graduate Council was established to enforce quality criteria for existing graduate programs and ensure adherence to criteria by proposed new programs. All graduate programs received approval from the Graduate Council, the Academic Council, the President, and the Board of Trustees of the Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning. Graduate programs flourished with support from the competitive institutional fellowship award programs funded by National Science Foundation (NSF), National Aeronautical Space Administration (NASA), the Office of Education, and Department of Defense (DOD). New doctoral faculty were recruited, the contract research program expanded, and additional doctoral programs, specialized institutes, and centers were approved. The title of Dean of the Graduate School and Coordinator of Research was changed to Vice President for Research and Graduate Studies in 1969; the Associate Dean became Dean of the Graduate School.

In 1987 due to the expanding research activity and the increase in graduate enrollment, the Graduate School was separated from the Office of Research and reported administratively to the Office of the Provost. In 1999 in a move to simplify graduate admissions and day-to-day operational matters the Graduate School as such was abolished and replaced by an Office of Graduate Studies with a Director reporting to the Office of the Provost. In July 2004 the Office of Graduate Studies was realigned with the Office of Vice President for Research and Graduate Studies. In July 2006 the Office of Graduate Studies resumed reporting to the Office of the Provost, and the Director's title was changed to Dean and Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs. In 2007 the name was changed to the Graduate School.

The Graduate Council remains the chief oversight body for all graduate programs. The Office of the Graduate School functions to maintain admissions records and promote student services, while the policies of the Graduate Council are administered by the departments and colleges. Off-campus degree programs are now offered in specialized areas at various locations inside and outside of the State.

MSU is a member institution of the Council of Graduate Schools in the U.S. and the Conference of Southern Graduate Schools. Through active participation in these bodies, the leadership for graduate studies at MSU is involved with national developments, including federal programs supporting graduate education and research. The current research expenditures at MSU exceed \$100 million per year, a significant portion of which is support for graduate research assistants. Teaching assistantships are available in most academic departments.