In 1819, the Congress of the United States donated 46,000 acres of land within the State of Alabama for the endowment of a seminary of learning. The board of trustees of the University was created by the General Assembly of Alabama in 1821, and on April 18, 1831, the University was opened for the admission of students. From the outset, the University offered graduate degrees, the first being a master of arts degree conferred in 1832. On April 4, 1865, most University buildings were burned to the ground by a body of federal cavalry. Construction of new buildings began in January 1867, and classes were resumed in April 1869. On February 25, 1884, the federal government donated 72 sections of public lands within the state to The University of Alabama in restitution for its loss in buildings and equipment when the campus was destroyed in 1865.

The Graduate School was organized as a specialized division of the University in 1924, when the University began to offer master’s degrees. In the fall of 1950, the University began to offer the PhD degree. Today, The University of Alabama provides a comprehensive program of graduate study in more than 120 master’s, educational specialist, and doctoral degree programs. The comprehensive program of graduate study embraces the humanities, the sciences, education, and several professional areas.

Graduate study is designed for college graduates who desire a deeper and more thorough involvement in scholarship and research and more thorough professional preparation in their chosen fields. Graduate study, especially at the doctoral level, is designed to develop independent scholarship, originality, and competence in research or competence in the various professional areas in which doctoral programs are offered.

The Graduate School is composed of the divisions that offer graduate instruction leading to advanced degrees. The faculty of the Graduate School consists of those faculty members of the divisions who are deemed qualified by their peers and deans to teach and do research of graduate caliber and who participate actively in these graduate activities. The Graduate School has supervision over all graduate work in the University except law and medicine.

The Graduate Council is composed of four appointed and 22 elected members and formulates graduate policy. The dean of the Graduate School is ex officio chairperson of the Council and is responsible for the administration of the regulations and requirements for advanced degrees.