

DEPARTMENT OF  **Biology**



Graduate Student Handbook
2014-2015

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Graduate Program Personnel and Resources

| | email | phone |
|-----------------------------------|--|--------------|
| Biology Office | | |
| Leah Tuor | leaht@pdx.edu | 503-725-8758 |
| Amy Jolstead | amyj@pdx.edu | 503-725-8757 |
| Department Chair | | |
| Jason Podrabsky | jpod@pdx.edu | 503.725.5772 |
| Graduate Affairs Committee | | |
| Brad Buckley | bbuckley@pdx.edu | 503.725.4239 |
| Justin Courcelle, committee chair | justc@pdx.edu | 503.725.3866 |
| Deborah Lutterschmidt | d.lutterschmidt@pdx.edu | 503.725.2325 |
| Susan Masta | smasta@pdx.edu | 503.725.8505 |
| Luis Ruedas | ruedas@pdx.edu | 503.725.9526 |

Websites

Online Resources for Current Graduate Students

<http://www.pdx.edu/biology/online-resources-for-current-graduate-students>

Portland State University Office of Graduate Studies

<http://www.pdx.edu/ogs/>

Links to University Forms, Requirements, and Deadlines

<http://www.pdx.edu/ogs/current-students>

Degree Program Overview

The Department of Biology at Portland State University offers the MA or MS, MST, and PhD degrees.

MA and MS

The primary focus of the MA and MS program is to learn how to design and execute a research project. These programs focus on: 1) The development of a research proposal that includes a review of the relevant primary literature, the identification of specific hypotheses, and an experimental plan for testing the proposed hypotheses; 2) the implementation of the experimental plan for the purpose of data collection and data analysis; 3) application of the results to tests of hypotheses; and, 4) interpretation of the results within the context of the existing literature. The primary product of the Master's degree is a thesis that describes the research activities in standard scientific format (introduction, methods, results, discussion and literature) and the student presents his or her results in a public seminar.

MST

The MST is designed primarily for students who are interested in biological education careers in environmental education programs, museums, or in secondary level schools. The MST program focuses primarily on the interpretation of science process and results for education purposes. MST students typically choose a particular sub-area of biology as a model for the development of lesson plans and curricula. The MST program includes course work in science education where different pedagogical techniques are presented and discussed. The primary product of the MST degree is a curriculum that describes the lesson plans developed by the student. The student presents his or her results in a public seminar and is required to pass an exam administered by a committee of faculty and experts in the field.

PhD

The PhD is a terminal degree in the field of biology, and is for individuals wishing to pursue research or teaching careers at private and public agencies, with industry, or at private and public colleges and universities. The PhD has many of the same goals as the Master's degree, but the research conducted by the student encompasses a research program that includes a series of interrelated experiments. Students in a PhD program are expected to work much more independently. Each student is responsible for the development and implementation of a research program that results in the preparation and publication of papers in peer-reviewed literature.

During their training, students also need to learn how to become effective teachers by using the resources available for developing these skills. These include working closely with faculty in classes and teaching independently in different settings. Our department strongly believes that learning these skills are essential parts of the PhD education.

Students completing the PhD are expected to have engaged in a course of research that will result in a series of publications, and to have become fluent in the primary literature relevant to their field of research. The primary product of the PhD is a dissertation of separate chapters- each of which describes the design and results of an individual set of experiments in scientific format. The student will present his or her results in a public seminar.

A Timeline for Your MS Degree and Important Due Dates

Pre-Yr 1, Summer

- By September 1st, you should get a letter/email with details about orientation and the events occurring the week before classes.
- Attend the Graduate Student Welcome weekend if you can.
- You are required to be here one full week before classes begin in order to attend orientation, lab safety training, TA meetings, and receive TA training/assignments.

Yr 1 Fall

- Register for classes:
 - 3 cr Bi599 Grant Writing
 - 1 cr Bi607 Biology Seminar Series
 - 5 more credits needed for “Completing your Coursework”
- Attend the Biology Alumni Event
- Apply for an NFS predoctoral grant, try to apply for other grants and fellowships
- Reply to the Bio Office email asking if you are requesting TA support for the Winter

Yr 1 Winter

- Register for classes:
 - 3 cr Bi598 Prospectus
 - 1 cr Bi607 Biology Seminar Series
 - 5 more credits needed for “Completing your Coursework”
- Reply to the Bio Office email asking if you are requesting TA support for the Spring
- Write your Prospectus (thesis proposal)
- Establish your Thesis committee and set a date for your Prospectus defense.

Yr 1 Spring

- Register for classes:
 - 3 cr Bi520 Ethics
 - 1 cr Bi607 Biology Seminar Series
 - 5 more credits needed for “Completing your Coursework”
- Reply to the Bio Office email asking if you are requesting TA support for the Summer
- Reply to the Bio Office email asking if you are requesting TA support for the Fall
- Be sure that you have completed and returned the “[Thesis Advisory Committee Appointment and Thesis Research Proposal Approval](#)” form BEFORE the quarter ends.

Yr 2, Summer

- If you are TAing, register for classes.
- Complete your [annual graduate student progress report](#)
- Attend the Graduate Student Welcome weekend if you can.
- You are required to be here one full week before classes begin in order to lab safety

training, TA meetings, and receive TA training/assignments.

Yr 2 Fall

- Register for classes:
 - 1 cr Bi607 Biology Seminar Series
 - 8 more credits needed for “Completing your Coursework”
- Prepare and present a poster at the Biology Alumni Event
- Reply to the Bio Office email asking if you are requesting TA support for the Winter

Yr 2 Winter

- Register for classes:
 - 1 cr Bi607 Biology Seminar Series
 - 8 more credits needed for “Completing your Coursework”
 - (you should have completed your Required Coursework after this quarter)
- Organize and hold a committee meeting to update your committee on your progress
- Reply to the Office email asking if you are requesting TA support for the Spring

Yr 2 Spring

- Register for classes:
 - 1 cr Bi607 Biology Seminar Series.
 - 8 more credits”
- Reply to the Office email asking if you are requesting TA support for the Summer.
- Reply to the Office email asking if you are requesting TA support for the Fall.
- Ask the Graduate Office to run a DARS report for you to ensure that you have completed the course requirements.

The Term BEFORE you graduate

- Fill out and return the following two forms before the end of the quarter. (be aware of the university's [deadlines](#))
 - [Degree Application for MS](#)
 - [GO-16M MS Appointment of Final Examination Committee](#)

The Term you graduate

- Schedule a date for your oral thesis defense with your committee. (be aware of the university's [deadlines](#))
- Reserve a room for your defense.
- Let the Bio Office know your thesis date and title.
- Make sure your committee receives a copy of your written thesis 2 wks before your defense date.
- Be sure your advisor fills out and returns the [GO-17M MS Recommendation for the Degree](#) form following your defense.

A Timeline for Your PhD and Important Due Dates

Pre-Yr 1, Summer

- By September 1st, you should get a letter/email with details about the orientation events occurring the week before classes.
- Attend the Graduate Student Welcome weekend if you can.
- You are required to be here one full week before classes begin in order to attend orientation, lab safety training, TA meetings, and receive TA training/assignments.

Yr 1 Fall

- Register for classes:
 - 3 cr Bi599 Grant Writing
 - 1 cr Bi607 Biology Seminar Series
 - 5 more credits needed for "Completing your Coursework"
- Attend the Biology Alumni Event
- Apply for an NFS predoctoral grant, try to apply for other grants and fellowships
- Reply to the Bio Office email asking if you are requesting TA support for the Winter

Yr 1 Winter

- Register for classes:
 - 3 cr Bi598 Prospectus
 - 1 cr Bi607 Biology Seminar Series
 - 5 more credits needed for "Completing your Coursework"
- Reply to the Bio Office email asking if you are requesting TA support for the Spring

Yr 1 Spring

- Register for classes:
 - 3 cr Bi520 Ethics
 - 1 cr Bi607 Biology Seminar Series
 - 5 more credits needed for "Completing your Coursework"
- Reply to the Bio Office email asking if you are requesting TA support for the Summer
- Reply to the Bio Office email asking if you are requesting TA support for the Fall

Yr 2, Summer

- Be sure that you have established your Thesis committee, held an initial meeting, [Dissertation Advisory Committee Appointment](#) form BEFORE the end of the quarter.
- If you are TAing, register for classes.
- Complete your [annual graduate student progress report](#)
- Attend the Graduate Student Welcome weekend if you can.
- You are required to be here one full week before classes begin in order to lab safety training, TA meetings, and receive TA training/assignments.

Yr 2 Fall

- Set a date with your committee to hold and complete your comprehensive examinations BEFORE the end of the quarter. Complete

and return the "[GO-16D PhD Appointment of doctoral Dissertation Committee](#)" form.

- Register for classes:
 - 1 cr Bi607 Biology Seminar Series
 - 8 more credits needed for "Completing your Coursework"
- Prepare and present a poster at the Biology Alumni Event
- Reply to the Bio Office email asking if you are requesting TA support for the Winter

Yr 2 Winter

- Register for classes:
 - 1 cr Bi607 Biology Seminar Series
 - 8 more credits needed for "Completing your Coursework"
- Set a date with your committee to hold and complete your Prospectus Defense BEFORE the end of the quarter. Complete and return the "[GO-23 Doctoral Request for Advancement to Candidacy](#)" form.
- Reply to the Office email asking if you are requesting TA support for the Spring

Yr 2 Spring

- Register for classes:
 - 1 cr Bi607 Biology Seminar Series.
 - 8 more credits needed for "Completing your Coursework"
- Reply to the Office email asking if you are requesting TA support for the Summer.
- Reply to the Office email asking if you are requesting TA support for the Fall.

Yrs 3 and 4

- Continue to register for classes
 - 1 cr Bi607 Biology Seminar Series.
 - 8 more credits needed for "Completing your Coursework"
- Reply to the Office email asking if you are requesting TA support.
- In the spring term, schedule a meeting to update your committee of your progress.
- Ask the Graduate Office to run a DARS report for you to ensure that you have completed requirements.

The Term BEFORE you graduate

- Fill out and return the "[Degree Application for PhD](#) form (be aware of university [deadlines](#)).

The Term you graduate

- Be aware of the university's [deadlines](#)
- Schedule a date and reserve a room for your oral thesis defense with your committee. Reserve a room for your defense.
- Give your date and title to the Bio Office.
- Make sure your committee has your written thesis 2 wks prior to the defense.
- Be sure your advisor fills out and returns the [GO-17D PhD Recommendation for the Degree](#) form following your defense.

Course and Degree Requirements

MS

Satisfactory completion of at least 45 credits of approved graduate-level courses required for a master's degree. The student must complete at least 30 credits in the field of biology. A minimum of 6 credits, but not more than 9 credits, must be in Bi 503 Thesis. No more than a total of 12 credits may be in research (Bi 501) and reading and conference (Bi 505). No more than a total of 9 credits may be in seminar (Bi 507). A maximum of 12 credits may be programmed as electives in fields related to biology in consultation with the degree adviser. Successful completion of a final oral examination and a thesis is required. Full time students must complete their degree within 4 years of entry into the program.

MST

In consultation with the graduate advisor, the students should establish the degree program before the completion of 15 credits of coursework. The program must include a minimum of 45 credits in approved graduate courses, to include a minimum of 24 credits in the area of concentration. At least 9 credits, but no more than 15 credits, must be in education courses and must include Ed 520 Introduction to Education and Society. The 45 credits required must include 6 credits in either BI 501 Project Track: Research Project relating to Biology teaching (i.e. curriculum module, grant proposal, community development project) as approved by student's committee; or BI 504 Practicum Track: 6 credits in practicum/internship/community outreach experience as approved by student's committee. In order to fulfill requirements for the degree, the student must satisfactorily complete the degree program and pass both a final written examination and a final oral examination.

PhD

PhD students are must complete Bi 698 Graduate Research Prospectus, Bi 699 Graduate Grant Writing, and Bi 520 Ethical Practice in the Life Sciences in the fall, winter, and spring quarters following admission to the program. Students must also complete 12 credits of Bi 607 Seminar, 27 credits of Bi 603 Dissertation, and 39 credits of coursework at the 500/600 level and above. Students must also have taken a departmental comprehensive exam by the fifth quarter after entering the program, followed the next quarter by a formal defense of their Ph.D. prospectus. Successful completion of the degree is contingent on the completion of original research, and presentation of results in a public oral defense and production of a formal dissertation that is submitted to and approved by the student's research committee and the University's Office of Graduate Studies. Students must complete their degree within 7 years of entry into the program.

Registering for Courses

All graduate students should register for 9 credits prior to the beginning of the Fall, Winter, and Spring terms until they meet fulfill the course requirements for their degree. After this point, students may register for 9, 5, or 1 credits depending on their situation but should consult with their advisors before registering for less than 9 credits.

The templates on the following page are designed to assist you with fulfilling your coursework requirements. Checking each credit as listed will satisfy the degree requirements in each case. The charts do not represent the only way to fulfill these requirements. However, students are strongly advised to carefully read both the University and Departmental course requirements as listed in the University Bulletin before deviating from the templates.

Completing the Coursework for your MS degree

*45 credits required

| | | | | | |
|-----------------|------------------------------|------------|----|----|----|
| Bi 599 | Grant Writing | 3 credits | Bi | Bi | Bi |
| Bi 598 | Prospectus | 3 credits | Bi | Bi | Bi |
| Bi 520 | Ethics | 3 credits | Bi | Bi | Bi |
| Courses 510-599 | | 6 credits | | | |
| Courses 610-699 | | | | | |
| Bi 503 | Thesis | 9 credits | Bi | Bi | Bi |
| | | | Bi | Bi | Bi |
| | | | Bi | Bi | Bi |
| Bi 501 | Research | 12 credits | Bi | Bi | Bi |
| Bi 505 | Reading | | Bi | Bi | Bi |
| | | | Bi | Bi | Bi |
| | | | Bi | Bi | Bi |
| Bi 507 | Seminars or Journal Clubs | 9 credits | Bi | Bi | Bi |
| | | | Bi | Bi | Bi |
| | | | Bi | Bi | Bi |

Completing the Coursework for your PhD degree

*81 credits required

| | | | | | |
|--------------------|---------------|------------|----|----|----|
| Bi 599 | Grant Writing | 3 credits | Bi | Bi | Bi |
| Bi 598 | Prospectus | 3 credits | Bi | Bi | Bi |
| Bi 520 | Ethics | 3 credits | Bi | Bi | Bi |
| Bi 603 | Dissertation | 27 credits | Bi | Bi | Bi |
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| | | | Bi | Bi | Bi |
| | | | Bi | Bi | Bi |
| Bi 607 | Seminar | 12 credits | Bi | Bi | Bi |
| | | | Bi | Bi | Bi |
| | | | Bi | Bi | Bi |
| | | | Bi | Bi | Bi |
| Additional Credits | | 33 credits | | | |
| 601 | Research | | | | |
| 607 | Seminar | | | | |
| Courses 510-599 | | | | | |
| Courses 610-699 | | | | | |
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Teaching Assistantships (TAs)

The department of biology has a limited number of Teaching Assistantships that are provided as a means to help support your research during your graduate work. The teaching assistantship provides a living stipend and full tuition for the quarter in which you are working. When supported by a teaching assistantship, you will be expected to teach undergraduate laboratory sections for a course that is appropriate to your background and area of study, as well as make satisfactory progress in your research and degree program.

How to obtain a TA each quarter

Between 2-6 weeks prior to the beginning of each quarter (even earlier for fall quarter), you will receive an email at your pdx.edu account that asks you to state whether you would like to receive a TA for the upcoming quarter. Please consult with your advisor to determine whether your support will come from a Research Assistantship (from a grant to the lab or fellowship to you) or a Teaching Assistantship for the quarter.

You must respond to the email to let us know how you will be supported. If you require a TA, you may request two preferences for laboratories that you would like to teach. First year students cannot make requests for which courses they TA until their second quarter. We always try to match students with their preferred interests, but our first priority is to meet the needs of the department's undergraduate lab courses and ensure that our undergraduates receive the best education possible. As such, there are a number of cases where we will be unable to meet students requests.

TAs are awarded to students in the following priority. Students accepted into the program with a guarantee of support and who have not yet received that level of support (in the form of either a TA or RA) will receive first priority. We will then try to accommodate all students who entered into the program without any promise of departmental support or have exceeded their promised amount of departmental support as best we can, on a case by case basis. However, departmental support cannot be assured in these cases.

Summer quarter TAs are also available but they are fewer in number and are distinct from those offered during the normal school year. No guarantee of departmental support can be made for the summer quarter, to any student. If a TA is awarded to a student for the summer, it does not count against the total amount of departmental support the student was promised.

Requirements while supported by a TA

1. Your Graduate Assistantship includes a tuition waiver for nine credits per term. You must sign up for 9 credits at the 500 level or above while you are a TA. If you sign up for more, you will have to pay for the credits exceeding 9 out of your own pocket. If you need to take a course below the 500 level (e.g., foreign languages or safety training), you must obtain permission before doing so.

2. Your Teaching Assistantship is provided to you by the Department of Biology to make it easier for you to obtain your research and degree goals. As such, it is expected that the remainder of your time will be spent on your research and degree. You are required to make satisfactory progress in your research to remain in good standing while supported by a TA.

While supported by a TA, other employment or volunteer work should be limited to activities that are considered important for your graduate training. The Department of Biology has established a limit of 10 hours per week for employment and volunteer activities, provided that the activity is related to your research and degree goals.

3. As a faculty, we value high-quality teaching, and we expect our graduate students to do the same. Although your first priority as a graduate student should be your research, you will need to balance your teaching duties with research. As representatives of the Department of Biology, we are expected to meet the following basic guidelines:

- A. Come early and prepared. This includes ALL TA meetings, proctored exams, and labs. (There is a zero tolerance policy for being late or missing labs, prelab meetings, assigned proctoring or other duties. **DO NOT** be late for a lab or miss a lab without making prior arrangements for a substitute and clearing it with the course instructor).
- B. You must be available to meet with the instructor for beginning the week before the entire period you are on contract as a TA.
- C. Present yourself well with appropriate dress and hygiene. Use appropriate language.
- D. Submit assignments and return graded work to your students in a timely manner.
- E. Cooperate with your fellow TAs to establish fair grading policies, and help each other to improve the overall learning experience of the students in your classes.

4. At the end of each term, you will receive student evaluations. Members of the Graduate Affairs Committee will review these and we expect you to review them too. You should pay particular attention to areas where you are rated lower or to issues that are mentioned by more than one student- especially if the same issue is raised in more than one lab. If you have questions or concerns about your evaluations, you should speak with your advisor or a member of the GAC, and we will be glad to help you rectify the situation.

If there are serious or repeated issues that adversely affect the undergraduate lab experience, or any of the above requirements are not met in full, your TA may be revoked and/or you may not receive future support from the department.

Thesis Committee

Your thesis Committee evaluates your written thesis proposal and in the case of the PhD, administers/evaluates the comprehensive exam. In addition, this committee may also assist in such aspects as the initial choice of dissertation topic, the planning and execution of your research, dissertation and related publications writing, and career planning. Finally, this committee reads and approves your final thesis, and evaluates your thesis defense.

Thus, the composition of this committee is important for the student, and students choose who makes up this committee in consultation with their advisor and other faculty. However, in the end, it is the student who is responsible for selecting who sits on their committee. Should the needs or expertise required for the students thesis changes over time, the student has the option to change committee members in future years as needed.

For the MS degree

Your committee must consist of at least three members (including your advisor). At least two of these members must be on the faculty in the Department of Biology at PSU. You must have selected your committee, and passed your Prospectus Defense before the end of your **third** term of enrollment (inclusive of summer term). Once completed, you will fill out the "[Thesis Advisory Committee Appointment and Thesis Research Proposal Approval](#)" form that can be found on the department's website and return it to the biology office.

For the PhD degree

Your committee must consist of at least four members (including your advisor). At least three of these members must be on the faculty in the Department of Biology at PSU. Nonrotating PhD students must have selected and met with their committee before the end of your **third** term of enrollment (inclusive of summer term). Rotating PhD students that do three rotations, must have selected and met with their committee before the end of their **forth** term of enrollment (inclusive of summer term). Once completed, you will fill out the "[Dissertation Advisory Committee Appointment](#)" form that can be found on the department's website and return it to the biology office.

Your comprehensive exams must have been taken before the end of your **fifth** term of enrollment (inclusive of summer term). And your prospectus (thesis proposal) defense must be completed before your **sixth** term of enrollment (inclusive of summer term).

Comprehensive Exams (PhD students only)

After forming their committee, and before their fifth quarter of enrollment (including summer quarter) ends, PhD students must take a comprehensive exam that involves both written and oral components.

For the written component, each member of the committee will assign the student specific questions designed to test the student's knowledge in their general discipline and subject area of research. The areas of focus may be made in consultation with the rest of the committee and student's advisor.

Each committee members' questions are then provided to the student's advisor along with instructions on how long (half day/full day), and under what terms (open/closed book, with/without computer access) the student may have to answer the questions. The advisor will then compile and administer the exam in an appropriate manner. The entire exam may last no longer than five consecutive days. Following the written exam, the questions are returned to the appropriate committee member for grading.

For the oral component, a meeting with the entire committee is held no more than 2 wks after the completion of the written exam. Committee members may ask the student to address, clarify, or expand on any aspect of their written questions that they feel the student did not adequately address. They may also ask questions related to or derived from their original topics as necessary to make a judgment as to whether the student has sufficient knowledge to advance to candidacy in the PhD program.

Immediately following the meeting, the student will leave the room and the committee members discuss and reach a consensus as to whether the student passed or failed the comprehensive exam.

If it is decided that the student passed, then the committee members sign and complete the "[BI-001 Completion of PhD Examination](#)" form found on the department's website. The student should then also fill out the "[PhD_Program_of_Study](#)" and "[GO-16D PhD Appointment of doctoral Dissertation Committee](#)" forms. Students may return these forms to the biology office.

If it is decided that the student did not pass, a second comprehensive exam may be given to the student before the end of the following quarter. If the student does not pass on the second attempt, they may not advance to candidacy for the Ph.D. in biology. The committee may then decide whether it would be suitable for the student to transfer into the MS program or if they should be dismissed from the graduate program.

Prospectus (thesis proposal) Defense

Committee Requirements: The student should form her/his thesis committee well before the anticipated date of their prospectus defense, and should consult committee members in a timely manner to make sure their expectations are clearly understood, and to allow time to produce a professionally effective proposal.

For the prospectus defense, students should prepare a written document and spoken presentation sufficient to support a 30 minute presentation of the goals of the thesis, typically including an introduction to the research question, preliminary data, models, etc. as appropriate which are relevant to at least the first goal, and should be prepared thereafter to discuss questions raised by the committee in professional scientific depth.

For specific questions and/or concerns students should speak directly with PI and committee for clarification and proposal expectations.

Guidelines for your Prospectus (thesis proposal)

- 1) Introduction and specific aims
 - Brief introduction addressing biological question including 3-4 specific aims
- 2) Background and significance
- 3) Preliminary data
 - Preliminary data should be included if relevant
 - This can be included before the research design or as each aim is proposed
- 4) Research design and methods for each aim
 - Overview and rationale for aim
 - Experimental plan
 - Expected results
 - Limitations/contingency plans

Length of the document should not exceed 10 pages, excluding figures and references.

References should contain information such as article title (e.g. in the style of *Cell* rather than *Science*)

Procedure for your Prospectus (thesis proposal) defense

- It is the student's responsibility to schedule the date, time, and room for exam
- The student should send their written proposal to the entire committee at least one full week before your meeting
- Once the committee convenes the student will be asked to step out of the room
- The advisor updates the committee on the student's progress in lab, coursework and teaching
- The student gives a slide presentation covering the research proposal
- At any point during the presentation the committee may ask questions
- An additional question period may follow the student's presentation
- Upon completing the presentation and questions, the student will be asked to leave the room Committee will discuss exam and present recommendation in private
- The student will then discuss the exam with the committee and sign the necessary forms
 - For MS students, after completing your prospectus defense, fill out and return the "[Thesis Advisory Committee Appointment and Thesis Research Proposal Approval](#)" form found on the department website to the biology office.
 - For PhD students, after completing your prospectus defense, fill out and return the "[GO-23 Doctoral Request for Advancement to Candidacy](#)" form found on the department website to the biology office.

Exam length is typically 1-2 hours

Annual Graduate Student Progress Reports

Each summer, all graduate students are required to fill out a short progress report. An email from the department should remind you of this. The link to the online form can be found on departmental website's "Resources for Current Graduate Students" page, or at the link below.

<http://web.pdx.edu/~justc/Graduate/ProgressReport/>

Once filled out, the report will be sent to your committee members for their approval. In the event that any committee members expresses some concerns, the graduate student will be notified and they must then schedule a committee meeting no later than the following Fall quarter to discuss their progress.

Students asked to hold a committee meeting during the Fall quarter should not consider this a penalty and ALL graduate students are encouraged to schedule and hold committee meetings annually, irrespective of their progress.

Ph.D. Rotations

Ph.D. students accepted into the program as rotational students are given the option to rotate and work in the labs of three research professors to gain experience and identify your thesis advisor. Rotations typically last one term, and the student may opt to do less than three rotations if (s)he so chooses. The student's offer letter may suggest potential rotations based on the student's interest and professor availability. However, students are encouraged to discuss the possibility of rotations with additional or alternative professors if they are interested in their research.

The final decision for your thesis advisor and laboratory is based primarily upon your interests, but ultimately must be made mutually between the student and professor. Both the professor and student must agree to the arrangement, and factors such as lab space, lab resources, and the student's qualifications may be factored into the final decision.

Department Activities

Biology Seminar Series

The department's seminar series is scheduled on Thursdays from 12–1 pm. Outside speakers present their own research at these seminars. The seminar series is considered an integral part of the Ph.D. program, and graduate students are expected to attend unless teaching at the same time. Students may register for credit for attending the seminar series as BI 607. 12 credits of seminar are currently required for the PhD degree.

Seminar dates and speakers are posted on the bulletin board outside the department's main office and on the departmental website.

Alumni Night

Each fall, on the Friday evening before the university's alumni weekend, the department hosts a Biology Alumni Night. The event features a seminar from a former PSU alum, a poster session, and a catered reception for alumni, faculty, and students. All non-first year graduate students are required to present a poster and attend this festive event.

Seminar presentations

Doctoral students are required to present their research progress in the form a seminar at least twice prior to their oral thesis defense. Several opportunities are available to meet this requirement, including- the Graduate Student Welcome/Orientation that is held each year prior to the beginning of the Fall quarter; and student-run seminars within the department are often held on Tuesdays at noon and can also be used to fulfill this requirement. In addition, students may also obtain credit for presenting their research as a talk at national or regional meetings. Lab meetings, group meetings, or journal club presentations do not count toward fulfilling this requirement. Masters students are also strongly encouraged to present their research in these forums when possible, but it is not required.

Journal Clubs

The purpose of journal clubs is to review current literature in specialized fields, and learn to critically read the primary literature to assess the paper's conclusions, experimental design, examine alternative interpretations, and place the results into a broader context.

Students are encouraged to inquire about specific journal clubs from faculty or graduate students in similar fields of interests.

Satisfactory Progress and Good Standing in the Program

Departmental conditions for good standing

All admission letters to the graduate program in biology contain the following statement, “This offer is contingent upon your satisfactory progress and good standing in the graduate program.”

With respect to coursework, good standing means that students will maintain a B average (3.0 GPA) or above and will not receive a grade of I, X, M, NP, AU, or C+ or below in any single course. As soon as students suspect they may be in danger of receiving such a grade, they should let their advisors know and contact the departmental chair of graduate affairs, Justin Courcelle, email justc@pdx.edu. If any of these conditions arise, tuition and stipend support may not be provided during the following quarter. In some cases, if the student has a good reason for why the grade or GPA infraction occurred, AND it is the first time such a situation occurred, the student may petition to be put on probation for one quarter. While the student is on probation, (s)he may continue to receive tuition and stipend support. If any of these conditions occur in two separate quarters, tuition and stipend support may be permanently terminated and this can be considered sufficient grounds for dismissal from the program.

For students to remain in good standing in the graduate program, they must also retain an academic adviser that is willing to serve as their mentor, not violate the Student Conduct Code, and meet the standards of the profession the candidate will be entering. In addition, all students must make satisfactory progress in their research, as assessed by the student, their advisor, and their committee. Dismissal from the program can occur if the student and their advisor mutually agree that satisfactory progress has not, or is not being made in research. In the event that the student and advisor disagree about the state of progress, a committee meeting will be held between the student and the student’s committee members (including her/his advisor) to discuss the progress and state of their research. If, following the meeting, the consensus of the committee is that the student has not made satisfactory progress, then this can be considered sufficient grounds for termination and dismissal from the program. The student will then be notified by email at their pdx.edu account.

If the student disagrees with this decision, the student may respond to the email within a two week period. The department’s Graduate Affairs Committee should also be included on the response letter. The response will be reviewed by the Graduate Affairs Committee and a written notice of their decision will be emailed to the student.

University conditions for good standing

There are also a number of university criteria that are considered grounds for dismissal from the program. These can be found in the University bulletin and include:

- Failure to validate admission by registering and paying for at least one credit.
- Failure to be registered for three years.
- Academic disqualification: Allowing a graduate GPA to fall below 3.0 and failing to raise the GPA above 3.0 in the next nine credits OR allowing a graduate GPA to dip below 3.0 a second time.
- Academic dishonesty.
- Failure to successfully complete a graduate course in the approved program of study for the degree.
- Failing all or a portion of the comprehensive examination.
- Failing the dissertation defense.
- Failure to meet the following time limitations:
 - No more than five years (for doctoral candidates who enter with a masters degree) or seven years (for students entering with a bachelor's degree) may pass between admission and completion of comprehensive exams.
 - No more than three years may pass between completing the comprehensive exams and advancing to candidacy.
 - No more than five years may pass between advancing to candidacy and completing all graduation requirements for the doctoral degree.