

# UNIVERSITY OF ROCHESTER

University of Rochester  
DEPARTMENT OF BIOLOGY

**HANDBOOK FOR THE P .D. PROGRAM**

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These regulations are published for the guidance of candidates for the Ph.D. degree in Biology and their faculty advisors. They should be read in conjunction with the descriptions of the Department's graduate programs and the related University and College regulations printed in the Graduate Bulletin and in "Regulations Concerning Graduate Study." From time to time, changes in the timing or content of the program may be authorized by the Department in response to particular situations. Written requests for such changes should be directed to the Graduate Affairs/Admissions Committee (GAAC).

## **I. COURSEWORK**

### **A. Credit Hours**

90 credit hours are required for completion of the Ph.D. degree. For students entering with an MS or MA, it is usually possible to transfer 30 credit hours toward this requirement. Credit hours include both coursework and research. The normal load is 16 credit hours in semesters in which no teaching is done, and 12 credit hours in semesters in which a teaching position is held.

Once a research advisor has been selected, students must register each semester for a sufficient number of credit hours in Biology 595 (Ph.D. Research in Biology) to bring the total to 12 credits. After a total of 90 credits has been achieved, the student should register for Biology 999 (Doctoral Dissertation). Students do not formally register for credit during the summer, but are required to do full-time research during this period.

During the first year, students are advised and their registration forms are signed by members of the GAAC. Students in the GEBS program will be advised by the graduate committee of the cluster in which they entered. In subsequent years, registration forms are signed by the student's advisor.

Dropping a course, or carrying a reduced credit load (fewer than 12 credit hours), is unusual and may only be done with the approval of the GAAC.

### C. Laboratory Rotations

Incoming students are required to rotate through three research laboratories in the first year in order to become acquainted with faculty and to aid in selection of a research advisor. A student is allowed to do no more than one rotation outside of the Biology Department. Students who enter the Ph.D. program with at least two years of prior post-undergraduate training in biology may petition the GAAC to allow two rotations in the same laboratory. Each rotation is approximately 10 weeks long, and occupies an average of 12-15 hours/week.

E. Foreign Language

The Department has no formal language requirement. However, individual faculty mentors have the option of requiring their students to demonstrate competence in a language.

F. Grades in Graduate Courses

Grades for graduate courses (and research) are reported using the following notations. Courses are either graded as S /U , or using letter grades.

A (Excellent)  
A-  
B+

E (Failure)  
I (Incomplete)  
IE (Failure)

The instructors for courses to which a graduate student is assigned are asked to submit a

used in its preparation and the origins of major experimental approaches. For example, a major question or approach incorporated directly from a review or grant proposal should be identified as such by citing it. Any aspect that has been discussed extensively with others should be footnoted. It is not necessary to identify resources for standard methodologies although unusual procedures should be referenced appropriately in the text.

The suggested format for the thesis proposal is that used for a research grant. It should include an introduction providing a brief background to the research, a list of specific aims, a description of experimental procedures, and presentation of preliminary data that have been obtained by the student to demonstrate the feasibility of the approach. The advisor must sign the thesis proposal, indicating that (s)he is willing to allow the research

without a master's degree. If terminated without a masters degree, the student may petition the GAAC to take a written master's exam. Students who are permitted to





At least one week before each meeting, the candidate will provide TAC members with a written report of work completed since the previous meeting. This report should be no more than five pages long (double-spaced, typed). A copy of the report

experiments or data analysis, to failing. Note that if the TAC has done its job and the student has been receptive to its suggestions, there is little chance of failure. Also, it is rare that a thesis is accepted without some requirement for revision. After meeting the committee's requirements for acceptance, the student should provide one corrected copy of the thesis for the research sponsor, and must file two corrected copies with the Graduate Dean.

Note that University regulations state that no thesis defense may be scheduled during the month of August. While petitions to defend during this time can be forwarded to the University Dean of Graduate Studies, exceptions are rarely made by the Dean's office. Other deadlines regarding the Ph.D. thesis are published regularly by the University Dean of Graduate Studies.

University Regulations state that all work for the Ph.D., including final thesis defense, must be completed within seven years of the initial date of registration (six years if a Master's has already been awarded before matriculation at UR). This time limit can be waived only by action of the Graduate Dean on a request from the student that has been approved by the sponsor and the GAAC.

## **V. REQUIREMENTS FOR STUDENTS IN THE M.D./P.H.D. PROGRAM**

M.D./Ph.D. candidates:

- A. are exempt from teaching.
- B. are not required to do laboratory rotations.
- C. will have the same overall coursework and exam requirements as Ph.D. students.

## **VI. EVALUATION OF STUDENT PERFORMANCE**

The GAAC reviews the progress of students on a regular basis. First-year students are evaluated at the end of each semester. At the conclusion of each spring semester, the Department conducts an annual evaluation of each student's progress. This evaluation is intended to provide students with feedback about their performance and identify students in need of additional guidance.

Each assessment begins with the student's completion of a self-evaluation form, which is provided to the students by the graduate program coordinator. This self-evaluation addresses coursework, research, teaching, and professional development activities undertaken during the past year. The self-evaluation is then routed to the student's primary advisor for review. The student and advisor then discuss the self-evaluation, goals for the next year, and any areas for improvement. The advisor then provides written comments on the form, outlining (i) their assessment of the student's progress towards degree completion and (ii) recommendations for the coming year. Students then have an opportunity to respond to the advisor's comments before the evaluation is given to the graduate program coordinator.

Students who have met with their Thesis Advisory Committee (TAC) within one year may substitute the TAC report for the self-evaluation form. The GAAC will provide documentation to the Office of Graduate Education and Postdoctoral Affairs (GEPA) by August 1 to attest that all students completed the annual evaluation.

In addition to the annual evaluation, documents to identify potential candidates for Departmental or University awards and fellowships include grade reports, qualifying exam performance reviews, and written evaluations of lab rotations and teaching.

Students will be notified by the GAAC in writing if there is a concern about performance. A decision to terminate a student from the program will only be made following detailed discussion by the GAAC in consultation with the student's advisor. The faculty of the Biology Department must approve such action by majority vote before any recommendation for academic termination is sent to the Dean.

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## VII. PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

### A. Ethics and Disciplinary Procedures

Graduate students are expected to maintain standards of the highest integrity in coursework, in the conduct of research, and in the performance of teaching duties. As outlined in The University Regulations on Graduate Study (section on Disciplinary Procedures for Graduate Students), charges indicating that these standards have been violated will be reviewed by the appropriate departmental and University committees, and may lead to expulsion from the Ph.D. Program.

### B. Vacation Policy

The department recognizes that vacations are important, both to enjoy the non-scientific aspects of life and to recharge your batteries. However, it is important that vacations be taken at opportune times so that they do not interfere with students' research progress and responsibilities as teaching assistants. Therefore students should be aware of the following vacation policies:

Graduate students are entitled to official University holidays (New Year's Day, Memorial Day, 4th of July, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day and the Friday following Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day). In addition, reasonable accommodation will be made for students needing to observe religious holidays. All other absences must be approved in advance by the advisor.

For first year students, absences must be approved in advance by the GAAC, to ensure that they do not interfere with completion of rotations.

Semester breaks are not automatic holidays.

Vacations interfere with teaching assistant duties, including meetings prior to the start of classes.

International students should also follow procedures set by the International Services Office.

Unauthorized absences may result in a prorated withholding of a student's stipend.

## **VIII. PARENTAL LEAVE**

### **A. Definition –**

although they should alert the PI when they make the request. Requests should include the likely dates of the leave and when possible, should be made at least 60 days prior to the leave.

## **IX. SUPPORT SERVICES**

Students in need of support are encouraged to speak with their advisor, the department's graduate coordinator, or the [Assistant Director of Student Support Services in the Office of Graduate Education and Postdoctoral Affairs](#)<sup>7</sup> located in Lattimore 206.

Students may also reach out for advice or support by contacting one of the [Graduate Student Ombudspersons](#) .

University will respond as necessary and appropriate, and it assumes no liability for any interruption or adjustments made to student life, residential housing, class schedules and format, method and location of instruction, educational activities, and operations caused by these or other unforeseen circumstances or events. And the University shall not be responsible for the refund of any tuition or fees in the event of any such unforeseen circumstances or events, except as may otherwise be expressly provided in the University's Leave of Absence and Withdrawal Policy or its published tuition refund schedule ([Payments and Refunds - Office of the Bursar \(rochester.edu\)](#) ).

## APPENDIX

### Document History

The Regulations for the Ph.D. Program for the Department of Biology of the University of Rochester were promulgated by the 1986-87 Graduate Affairs Committee; Joanna Olmsted (Chairman), David Hinkle, Edwin Stephenson, and John Werren. It was circulated to the faculty and reviewed by a representative for the graduate students (Robert West). On October 3, 1986 the document was discussed at a Faculty Meeting and adopted.





On January 13, 2020, faculty voted to approve a parental leave policy.

In July 2020, support services were added and the evaluation section was revised to incorporate the ASE GEPA annual evaluation requirement. It was not necessary to get a faculty vote as no Department policy was added, removed, or changed.

In September 2024, Section X (Emergency or Temporary Closings) was handed down from the Dean of the School of Arts and Sciences. Neither change required a faculty vote.