

School of Biological Sciences University of Utah

Graduate Program Handbook

Date Created: July 11, 2024
Last Revised: April 11, 2025

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Welcome to the School of Biological Sciences (SBS)

Welcome from the School of Biological Sciences Director, Professor Fred Adler:

We are excited that you have chosen the School of Biological Sciences (SBS) at the University of Utah to pursue your graduate studies in biology! Our school provides an inclusive environment for you to pursue your passion for science. Our faculty comprises around 50 potential mentors whose research interests are diverse, and who serve as mentors for a substantial number (~85, as of writing) graduate students who join the program from around the world. Complementing outstanding faculty, staff and facilities, the school's graduate program is highly interactive. During your stay in the program, you will be exposed to diverse areas of biology, from molecular structures and cells, genetics and organisms, and beyond to ecosystems and all their interactions. The SBS's collegial environment, with many opportunities for interactions among research groups, has been a long-standing strength of the school, and continues to be so today. Graduate school is a time to make lifelong friendships and connections as you grow as a scientist and mature as a person. It is a challenging and exciting time, one filled with opportunities to make new discoveries as you acquire important skills that will serve you for the rest of your career. As faculty, the courses of our careers were changed and enriched by our times in graduate school, and we hope that yours will be as well during your time in the SBS. We wish you the best for your scientific explorations as you move through your graduate studies!

Quick Reference for Prospective Students, Existing Students, and Faculty

Prospective Students

If you are a prospective student and are consulting the SBS Graduate Student Handbook (hereafter Handbook) to learn about opportunities for graduate studies in the School of Biological Sciences (SBS), we recommend you start with the following: for students interested in a Ph.D. degree, [click here](#); for students interested in a M.S. degree, [click here](#); and for existing University of Utah undergraduates interested in a B.S./M.S. degree, [click here](#). To apply to an SBS Graduate Program, [click here](#).

Existing Students and Faculty

Students accepted to graduate school in the SBS must review the Handbook at the time they join the program, and should use it as a reference throughout their time as students at the University. In fulfilling roles as Research Advisors, student Supervisory Committee members, or other functions in the SBS Graduate Program, faculty should also review the policies and procedures in the Handbook. To go directly to key and frequently requested information about coursework or policies for milestone exams, click on the following:

- Ecology, Evolution & Organismal Biology (EEOB) Ph.D. students: [Coursework requirements](#), [1st year Capstone Exam](#), [Ph.D. Qualifying Exam](#), and [Dissertation Defense](#);
- Molecular, Cellular & Evolutionary Biology (MCEB) Ph.D. students: [Coursework requirements](#), [1st year Capstone Exam](#), [Ph.D. Qualifying Exam](#), and [Dissertation Defense](#).
- M.S. students: [Coursework requirements](#), [M.S. Qualifying Exam](#), and [Thesis Defense](#);
- B.S./M.S. students: [Coursework requirements](#), [B.S./M.S. Qualifying Exam](#), and [Thesis Defense](#);
- All students: Course registration via the Campus Information System ([CIS](#)) and [Developmental Plan Form](#).

Contacts in the Case of an Emergency or an Urgent Situation

If you are a student consulting the Handbook to learn what to do in the case of one of the following situations, click the relevant links for contacts and for additional information. **First and foremost, if the situation is an emergency, call 911 immediately.**

- For a general **safety issue**, such as one impacting **physical** or **mental** health, [click here](#) for more information.
- For laboratory hazards more specifically, like a **chemical spill**, [click here](#) for more information or contact the [University's Environmental Health & Safety \(EHS\)](#) right away (an EHS cheat sheet with “**first action**” **instructions and contact information** for various safety scenarios can be [found here](#); this is a good place to start).
- An **escort to your vehicle or around campus**, after hours or not, can be arranged as described by [clicking here](#); if you are on the main campus, you can simply call **801.585.2677**;
- For any non-emergency but nonetheless urgent **infrastructure issue** in a University building or laboratory space, for example, a broken water pipe, [click here](#).

Handbook Approval and Updates

Policies outlined in the Handbook have been approved by majority vote of the faculty (e.g., student programs of study for degrees and milestone exam policies). Further, the Handbook has been reviewed by [Graduate School](#) Dean Dr. Darryl P. Butt.

In addition, minor updates to the Handbook are made by the Director of Graduate Studies and the Graduate Program Coordinator that do not require a faculty vote. Examples of minor revisions include but are not limited to: annual (1) updates to the composition of Graduate Program Committee, (2) updates to course numbers if needed, and (3) updates of web-links that are not current (i.e., broken links).

Students, faculty, and SBS staff members who notice an error(s) in the Handbook, such as a non-functional link, are kindly requested to report the issue to the [Graduate Program Coordinator](#).

Support and Administrative Structure

The SBS has created a support and reporting structure designed to assist graduate students at every step in their journey toward a degree. Key participants of this structure are given below, along with descriptions of their roles. These individuals are responsible for developing and implementing clear policies for SBS graduate students, ensuring that these policies confirm to requirements of the College of Science, the Graduate School, and the University, and that the policies are applied uniformly and fairly to all students.

For both potential as well as current students, the initial contact for general questions is typically the [Graduate Program Coordinator](#).

Director of Graduate Studies

The Director of Graduate Studies oversees the Graduate Program, including the Graduate Program Committee and the Admissions Committee, and is the chair of the former. The Director of Graduate Studies reports to both the leadership of the SBS (the SBS Director), as well as to the University's Graduate School, which oversees policies and procedures that apply to all graduate students at the University of Utah. The Director of Graduate Studies is a key resource for questions about the program. Specifically, the Director of Graduate Studies:

- (1) keeps track of University policies that impact graduate students and Research Advisors and communicates these to students and faculty;
- (2) leads graduate student meetings at least once a year to assess issues with the program, and communicates policies to students;
- (3) meets with the Graduate Student Advisory Committee at least once in Fall and Spring semesters;
- (4) meets with the chair of the Admissions Committee and SBS Director to approve new student admissions, or transfer of students from other departments or programs at the University;
- (5) approves graduate student selection of Research Advisors and Supervisory Committee members;
- (6) approves graduate student programs of study (required coursework);
- (7) oversees the SBS graduate curriculum, and works with the SBS Director and the Associate Director of Undergraduate Programs to select course instructors for graduate courses;

(8) is responsible for maintaining the Handbook, and for ensuring that SBS website materials related to the Graduate Program are up-to-date;

(9) Attends required meetings with other Directors of Graduate Studies as required by the Graduate School and/or the College of Science (the University unit to which the SBS belongs).

The Director of Graduate Studies enforces SBS and University policies and can mediate conflicts between students and their Research Advisors, the SBS, the Graduate School, and other University entities, and determines whether exceptions to SBS graduate student policies are warranted. When a student has a problem that cannot be solved by the Research Advisor or Supervisory Committee, or is unsure how to proceed in the Graduate Program, the student should contact the Director of Graduate Studies. In accordance with faculty regulations, the Director of Graduate Studies is appointed by the Director of the SBS in consultation with the Dean of the Graduate School.

*Note: The Director of Graduate Studies must often provide letters of support, verification, or recommendation for graduate students and/or their Research Advisors (for instance, for applications for University or external fellowships). Students, and their Research Advisors, if applicable, must give the Director of Graduate Studies **at least three weeks prior notice** when such documentation is needed. Otherwise, delivery depends on the Director's schedule, and cannot always be guaranteed.*

Graduate Program Committee

This committee, which is chaired by the Director of Graduate Studies, consists of ~5 faculty members as well as the Graduate Program Coordinator. The SBS Ph.D. Program consists of two discipline-specific tracks: the Ecology, Evolution and Organismal Biology Program (EEOB), and the Molecular, Cellular and Evolutionary Biology Program (MCEB). The SBS Executive Committee, which selects faculty to serve on all SBS faculty committees, makes every effort to ensure equal representation and that at least one member of the Graduate Program Committee represents EEOB students and faculty, and one member represents MCEB students and faculty (a faculty member with membership in both the EEOB and MCEB divisions can be assigned to represent either division as needed at the discretion of the SBS Executive Committee). Further, one MCEB member of the committee specifically oversees the SBS's 1st year student rotation program for incoming MCEB Ph.D. students (the 1st year MCEB advisor). Responsibilities of the Graduate Program Committee include assisting the Director of Graduate Studies in overseeing the Graduate Program.

Admissions Committee

The Admissions Committee evaluates applications to the SBS Ph.D., M.S. and B.S./M.S. Graduate Programs, conducts interviews with prospective students, and along with the Director of Graduate Studies and SBS Director, decides on admittance. The committee consists of faculty members and graduate students selected to represent both the EEOB and MCEB Ph.D. Programs, as well as the Graduate Program Coordinator. There are two chairs, one faculty member affiliated with the EEOB Ph.D. Program and one with the MCEB Ph.D. Program. These co-chairs of the Admissions Committee report to the Director of Graduate Studies, and the Director of Graduate Studies informs the Admissions Committee chair(s) of any changes to the University's graduate admissions policies.

Graduate Program Coordinator

The Graduate Program Coordinator is an SBS staff member who runs the Graduate Program on a day-to-day basis and helps with all administrative steps related to admissions and student progression to degrees. The Graduate Program Coordinator is a key resource for questions about the Graduate Program. The Graduate Program Coordinator is responsible for keeping all records relating to the academic progress of graduate students. The instructions and forms needed by graduate students ([Appendix 1](#)) may be obtained

from the Graduate Program Coordinator, and the Graduate Program Coordinator regularly reminds students of requisite deadlines (for instance, course registration deadlines). Students should carefully review all communications from the Graduate Program Coordinator as soon as possible.

Director of Undergraduate Advising

The Director of Undergraduate Advising works closely with the Graduate Program Coordinator to advise students of required coursework for completion of the SBS's B.S./M.S degree that involves completion of both undergraduate and graduate level courses.

Research Advisor

All graduate degrees offered by the SBS require original research, and students are required to have a Research Advisor (also known as the **Dissertation Advisor** for Ph.D. students, or the **Thesis Advisor** for M.S. or B.S./M.S. students). The Research Advisor is the primary research mentor for a student until graduation and serves as the Chair of the student's Supervisory Committee. Only tenured or tenure-track faculty members with an appointment as a tenure-line faculty member of SBS are eligible to serve as Research Advisors for SBS graduate students. For this purpose, primary appointment means that the faculty member must have at least a 25% appointment within the SBS. Adjunct faculty are not eligible to serve as Research Advisors for SBS graduate students.

Supervisory Committee

Once a student chooses a Research Advisor, the student must form a Supervisory Committee of either two (if attempting M.S. or B.S./M.S degrees) or four (if attempting the Ph.D. degree) additional faculty members. The Supervisory Committee meets at least once a year with a student to monitor and evaluate progress toward degrees, provide feedback on research and career plans, approve a student's program of study (coursework), and administer and adjudicate passes or fails on milestone exams, including ultimately the Thesis Defense (M.S. or B.S./M.S. degrees) or the Dissertation Defense (Ph.D. degree). The requirements for Supervisory Committee members are discussed in more detail in the descriptions of the different graduate degrees (see Table of Contents).

SBS Director

Along with the Director of Graduate Studies, the Director of the SBS works with the Graduate Program Committee to ensure that the Graduate Program is equitable, vibrant and successful. The Director may participate in resolving graduate student issues.

Graduate Student Advisory Committee & Other Student Committees

The Graduate Student Advisory Committee (also known as "GSAC") is comprised of eight graduate students with equal representation from the EEOB and MCEB graduate programs, each with three regular members and an alternate who can serve in the event of absences. GSAC members will be recruited during their 2nd-5th year in the program and can serve a maximum term of two years, except for 5th year students who will serve for only one year, such that no students serve on GSAC upon entering year six or more in the program. This policy is designed to avoid having GSAC service impede the completion of degrees. Students will be eligible to serve as co-chairs in their second year of service on GSAC and two new chairs (one each from EEOB and MCEB) will be selected each year by GSAC members. Nomination and electronic elections will be conducted to appoint GSAC members in the first instance and then to replace existing members who wish to depart, have completed their term, or are entering year six of the program. Students may nominate themselves or others for service and nominees will then be requested to confirm

their eligibility following consultation with their advisor. Students from both the EEOB and MCEB programs will then vote to elect representatives from either program as needed, ranking candidates commensurate with the number of open positions. Appointments will be made based on the number of votes, adjusted according to ranking. In years following the establishment of these procedures, alternates will be given first refusal to take up an appointment as a regular GSAC member if a regular member departs, although they may also not serve beyond two years as an alternate or beyond year five in their respective program. In that event, an election will be conducted to find new alternate member(s). The Director of Graduate Studies and Director of SBS will appoint members in the event of a tie in the vote. Such decisions will consider the need to maintain balance of EEOB and MCEB representation and balance of representation with respect to the amount of time that students have been engaged in the program.

The committee:

- (1) meets at least once a semester with the Director of Graduate Studies, and informs the Director of Graduate Studies of concerns raised by the graduate student body;
- (2) assists the Director of Graduate Studies, the Graduate Program Committee, and SBS leadership in relaying and explaining policies and procedures to the graduate student body;
- (3) oversees the nomination and selection process of graduate students for graduate-student-only committees, and makes recommendations for students to serve on other committees at either the SBS, College of Science, or University levels;
- (4) organizes social and professional graduate student activities;
- (5) selects one or two student members of the committee to attend each scheduled regular SBS faculty meeting;
- (6) serves as an informal source of advice, information, and encouragement for all graduate students;
- (7) commencing in May, GSAC nominates four GSAC-RPT members (including one chair) to perform RPT service as requested by SBS administrators, culminating in the delivery of signed reports by September 1, in each year;
- (8) organizes a “graduate student well-being” day in which students can meet with the Director of Graduate Studies and/or the Director of SBS to address any problems.

Other Committees: A list of other student committees, descriptions of their functions, size, and eligibility criteria for student service are provided in [Appendix 2](#).

Contact Information

Faculty & Leadership Contacts



Director of Graduate Studies & Associate Director, Graduate Programs

Professor Colin Dale

colin.dale@utah.edu

801.661.5512

Office: Biology Building Room 204



Graduate Program Committee member

Assistant Professor Luiza Aparecido (EEOB division)

luiza.aparecido@biology.utah.edu

801.581.7088



Graduate Program Committee member

Associate Professor Sophie Caron (MCEB division)

sophie.caron@utah.edu

801.585.0848



Graduate Program Committee member

Professor Markus Babst (MCEB division)

m.babst@utah.edu

801.587.7603



Graduate Program Committee member

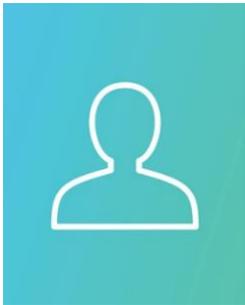
Assistant Professor Michael Werner (EEOB/MCEB divisions; also 1st year MCEB rotations advisor)

michael.werner@utah.edu

801.585.0471



Graduate Program Committee member
Assistant Professor Heejin Yoo (MCEB Division)
heejin.yoo@utah.edu
801.581.7882



Director of the SBS
Professor Fred Adler
director@biology.utah.edu
801.585.6202

Administrative Staff



Graduate Program Coordinator
Shannon Nielsen
shannon.nielsen@bioscience.utah.edu
801.581.5636
Office: Biology Building 223



Director of Undergraduate Advising

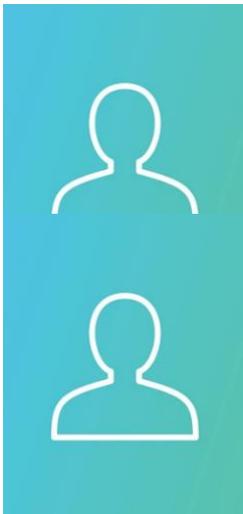
Office: 1390 Presidents Circle
Crocker Science Center, Room 240

Advising Hive:

801.587.0639

bioadvising@utah.edu

Student Contacts



SBS Graduate Student Advisory Committee, co-Chair (MCEB representative)

Audrey Brown

audrey.brown@utah.edu

SBS Graduate Student Advisory Committee, co-Chair (EEOB representative)

Annapurna Post-Leon

annapurna.post-leon@utah.edu

SBS Directory

The SBS directory that includes faculty, student, and staff contact information can be found on the [SBS' website](#) (to go directly to the online directory, [click here](#)).

Overview of SBS Graduate Degrees & How to Use the Handbook

Students join the SBS Graduate Program to pursue one of three degrees:

- (1) A [Doctor of Philosophy \(Ph.D.\) degree](#);
- (2) A [Master of Science \(M.S.\) degree](#);
- (3) A combined [Bachelor of Science \(B.S.\) / Master of Science \(M.S.\) degree \(the "B.S./M.S." degree\)](#).

To use the Handbook, read the respective section for the degree you are pursuing, or that you are considering applying to pursue. If you are a prospective student and don't know which degree is most appropriate for you, read about them all, and do not hesitate to contact the Graduate Program Coordinator, or a prospective faculty member you might want to work with, for personal guidance. A directory of faculty in the SBS,

including information about their respective research interests and whether they participate in the [Ecology, Evolution & Organismal Biology \(EEOB\)](#) or [Molecular, Cellular & Evolutionary Biology \(MCEB\) Ph.D. Graduate Programs](#), can be [found here](#) (the EEOB and MCEB divisions are not relevant for M.S. or B.S./M.S. students – all students are encouraged first and foremost to look for faculty performing research that interests them).

Apart from the sections of the Handbook dedicated to the Ph.D., M.S., and B.S./M.S. Programs, and unless otherwise noted, the remaining sections of the Handbook apply to all graduate students.

New Student Activities

Mandatory Orientations & Other Activities

New students joining the SBS Graduate Program must complete mandatory incoming student orientations at the time they arrive on campus. Reflecting changing needs and opportunities, incoming graduate student orientations offered by SBS and University personnel often change from year to year. Information about required in-person orientation activities, or ones that must be completed in the form of online modules, will be provided to all incoming students ~1 month prior to when students matriculate into the SBS Graduate Program. This information will be distributed by the Graduate Program Coordinator. During the SBS orientation students must also read and sign a pledge of ethical conduct and behavior that can be found in [Appendix 3](#).

Additional Activities for Arriving International Students

Upon arrival at the University, international students must:

- (1) visit the [International Student and Scholar Services \(ISSS\)](#) for international student orientation, and to receive any additional instructions;
- (2) participate in the [International Teaching Assistant Program \(ITAP\)](#) in order to obtain clearance to be a Teaching Assistant (TA).

Prior to student arrival on campus, the SBS Graduate Program Coordinator will assist students with contact information and timelines for interacting with ISSS and ITAP.

Important University Deadlines

- Academic calendar deadlines
 - <https://registrar.utah.edu/academic-calendars>
- International Teaching Program deadlines
 - <https://gradschool.utah.edu/ita/important-dates-and-deadlines.php>
- Thesis Office manuscript submission deadlines
 - <https://gradschool.utah.edu/thesis/calendar>
- University Fellowship deadlines, including Teaching Assistantship & Research Assistantship deadlines
 - <https://gradschool.utah.edu/tbp/graduate-fellowship-opportunities>
- Graduation deadlines
 - <https://registrar.utah.edu/graduation>

Communication with the Graduate Program

Graduate students, as well as faculty and staff, are required to use official University email accounts for all University correspondences. The SBS Graduate Program expects graduate students to check their University email accounts daily, and to reply to requests from the Graduate Program Coordinator within approximately 1-2 days. It is critical that students prioritize opening and reading emails from the Graduate Program Coordinator.

Good Standing and Satisfactory Progress in the Graduate Program

Students (incoming or current) in the SBS Graduate Program are required to regularly review the Handbook. Minimally, a student should review the information for the specific program they are in (Ph.D., M.S., or B.S./M.S.), as well as the sections of the Handbook that apply to all graduate students. Following the Handbook's policies and timelines, and successfully meeting Research Advisor, Supervisory Committee, Graduate Program Committee, Graduate School and other entities' expectations/evaluations as outlined in the Handbook result in a student classification of "satisfactory progress" toward a degree and being in "good standing" in the Graduate Program.

Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) Degree

Overview

The goal of the Ph.D. Program in the SBS is to develop independent and vibrant scientists who are prepared for successful careers in academia, industry, government, or other sectors at the Ph.D. level. This requires the ability to think independently, conduct research, analyze data, collaborate with others, teach students and/or provide training and mentorship, and communicate research and science in both oral and written forms. Students obtain these skills from coursework, research in the wet laboratory and/or in computational settings, teaching, attending presentations and seminars, and by preparing a dissertation consisting of original research that makes a substantial contribution to a field in the biological sciences.

Students enrolled in SBS Ph.D. Program receive a competitive cost-of-living stipend and full tuition coverage subject to the conditions described below and are expected perform graduate student duties full-time during the ~5-year time period it takes most students to complete the Ph.D. degree.

If you are a prospective student and you are not sure you want to attempt a Ph.D. (i.e., you are unsure you will enjoy performing the scope of original research required to defend a successful Ph.D. dissertation), the SBS also offers [M.S.](#) and [B.S./M.S.](#) degrees that you may wish to consider.

Expected Learning Outcomes (Ph.D. degree)

Students successfully completing the SBS Ph.D. degree are expected to be able to:

- (1) Conduct original scientific research in the student's area of interest, including project design, development and acquisition of techniques, data collection, analysis and publication; students will acquire and be evaluated in these skills through formal course work and hands-on training in research laboratories.

- (2) Demonstrate a general mastery of the scientific literature in biology, with expert mastery of the scientific literature in the student's area of study. Mastery will be assessed by the student's ability to converse in both formal and informal settings that include discussions with the student's Supervisory Committee, colleagues, visiting scientists, attendance at professional meetings, and serving as an effective teaching assistant.
- (3) Communicate original research and its relationship to the larger questions underpinning the research; mastery will be assessed by the student's presentation of their research to the School at least once a year, in addition to any presentations at national and international venues.
- (4) Communicate substantial and original research findings to the scientific community in written form; mastery in this area will be assessed by the preparation of a dissertation that represents a significant and original contribution to scientific knowledge, and which is published or publishable in peer-reviewed scientific journals.
- (5) Write an effective research proposal that identifies gaps in scientific knowledge, and that both elaborates a plan to address them as well as interpret potential findings; mastery in this area will be assessed in the Ph.D. Qualifying Exam.
- (6) Develop a professional portfolio that may include, but not be limited to, a curriculum vitae and/or resume, a summary of research interests and experience, a summary of teaching philosophy and experience, publications, and any other documents relevant to the student's career path.

The EEOB and MCEB Ph.D. Graduate Programs – a High-Level View

Although the SBS awards a single Biology Ph.D. degree, the Ph.D. Program consists of two tracks (or sub-programs) that reflect scientific and cultural differences within the biological sciences:

- (1) **The Ecology, Evolution & Organismal Biology (EEOB) Program.** This program focuses on the ecology and evolution of organisms, how they interact with their environments, and encompasses physiology, behavior, genetics, species interactions and ecosystem processes.
- (2) **The Molecular, Cellular & Evolutionary Biology (MCEB) Program.** This program focuses on how complex biological systems emerge from molecules, cells and genes – the fundamental units of life. Fields represented within MCEB are molecular and cellular biology, developmental biology, genetics, evolutionary biology and biological diversity, biochemistry, neurobiology, and microbiology.

For a list of faculty who participate in training EEOB or MCEB students, [visit here](#) and click on the box for EEOB or MCEB under the “Graduate Program Membership” tab in the left navigation bar. Students should note that some faculty are members of both the EEOB and MCEB programs, reflecting the increasingly interdisciplinary nature of research within the biological sciences.

One difference between the programs is that newly accepted EEOB students join their laboratory of interest directly once they arrive at the University. This option is also available to MCEB students by prior arrangement. In these cases, the selection of Research Advisor occurs during the [application/admissions process](#). An advantage of directly joining a laboratory is that work on dissertation research can begin immediately, and directly joining a research group can be desirable for students wishing to work with a specific Research Advisor in an area they enthusiastically wish to pursue.

Alternatively, students joining the MCEB program typically participate in rotations in their first year, which consist of three stints of ~7 weeks each of research under the instruction of different faculty members. In

the 2nd semester in the program, each student then decides on a formal Research Advisor to guide their dissertation research. The rotation option is ideal for students wishing to get to know the mentoring styles of different Research Advisors, as well as explore different areas of study encompassed by the MCEB program. In general, MCEB faculty encourage students joining the program to perform 1st year rotations, and the overwhelming majority do so. One member of the Graduate Program Committee oversees the first-year rotations for MCEB students (the 1st year MCEB advisor).

Despite the differences in subdisciplines and 1st year experiences, including coursework, many other requirements for the EEOB and MCEB programs are similar, and they are nearly identical after the 2nd year in the SBS Ph.D. Graduate Program.

Ph.D. Program Timeline and Milestones

As mandated by the Graduate School, candidates for the Ph.D. degree must complete no fewer than three full years (six semesters) of approved graduate work (i.e., courses numbered 6000 and above), and at least one year (i.e., two consecutive semesters) of the doctoral program must be spent in full-time academic work at the University of Utah. For information about Graduate School requirements, and for the process to petition for exceptions, please see the [Graduate School Ph.D. Degree Requirements](#). Additional information about SBS-specific requirements for a Ph.D. in Biology, and their anticipated timelines for completion, is provided in the following sections. For a typical SBS Ph.D. degree timeline for completion of coursework, as well as other key milestones along the way including the Ph.D. Qualifying Exam, and the Dissertation Defense, see the figure in [Appendix 4](#).

Admissions Requirements & Procedures for the Ph.D Program

Requirements

To apply to either the EEOB or MCEB Ph.D. Programs, applicants must (1) have completed (or be on track to complete) a recognized four-year undergraduate degree and must have (2) a minimum grade point average (GPA) of 3.0. In uncommon circumstances, applicants with a GPA of less than 3.0 may be considered (for instance, if a student has a GPA close to 3.0, has a strong record in biology-related coursework, and supportive letters of recommendation, especially from a prior research advisor or advisors).

Application Process

To apply to the SBS Ph.D. Program online, visit [here](#); follow the instructions on the application site to submit the following:

- (1) original transcripts;
- (2) three letters of recommendation (at least one from a faculty member in the college or university you attend/attended);
- (3) statement of purpose;
- (4) a curriculum vitae (CV/resume);
- (5) For non-domestic students, English proficiency scores (i.e., TOFEL, Duolingo, IELTS; for waiver eligibility please visit [here](#));
- (6) one or more faculty members you have identified as potential Ph.D. research advisors.

The SBS does not require, nor does it consider, GRE scores during its review of applicants for graduate studies.

Statements of purpose are carefully reviewed by the Admissions Committee, and compelling statements can take many forms. However, successful ones usually include (1) a rationale for why a student wants to attend graduate school, (2) a summary of prior research experiences and/or academic accomplishments, (3) a reason for selecting the SBS at the University of Utah, and (4) the identification of potential dissertation research advisors, and a justification for the selection(s). If a student wants to join a laboratory directly, it is *especially important* that they list one or several potential thesis Research Advisors and explain the choices in some detail in the statement of purpose. For students wishing to perform 1st year MCEB rotations, mentioning more briefly a larger number of potential Research Advisors is acceptable and even encouraged.

If you are unsure of which program you want to apply to (EEOB or MCEB), or whether you want to join a laboratory directly or perform rotations, please contact the Graduate Program Coordinator for advice.

Application and Acceptance Dates

The yearly deadline for applications for the SBS Ph.D. Program is December 1. Applications are only reviewed once a year. Review of domestic applicants, including US citizens and international students residing in the US, will be completed by approximately January 15. Top candidates will then be invited for in-person interviews, usually in February (travel and lodging costs will be covered by the SBS). Offers of acceptance or declination will be made within about two weeks of in-person interviews. Review of international students will proceed in parallel, and qualified candidates will be interviewed remotely by faculty members including at least one member of the Admissions Committee.

By agreement with other US universities, students should make their decisions to accept SBS graduate offers by April 15. The SBS is not obligated to honor offers accepted after April 15 but may do so on a case-by-case basis. Students accepting an offer to join the MCEB Program must also indicate, at the time of acceptance, whether they will join a laboratory directly, or if they will enter the 1st year MCEB rotation program.

The University of Utah subscribes to the [Council of Graduate Schools April 15 Resolution](#) that protects and clarifies the rights of prospective students and universities during the admissions process.

International Student Requirements & Visa Instructions

In addition to the general requirements, international students may have to submit one of several English proficiency assessments (i.e., TOFEL, Duolingo, or IELTS, but [click here](#) for waiver eligibility).

An I-20 Certificate of Eligibility is necessary to apply for an F-1 student visa through a U.S. Consulate abroad or to maintain F-1 student status in the United States. The University of Utah will begin processing the I-20 after a student accepts our admission offer. Contact the Graduate Program Coordinator for questions related to obtaining the F-1 visa and refer to the University of Utah Office of Admissions for detailed instructions ([click here](#)).

Transferring into the Ph.D. Program

The SBS does not accept transfer of graduate students from other institutions. Graduate students currently at other institutions who wish to join the SBS Ph.D. Program must apply to join the program as new students. Further, the SBS does not allow transfer of graduate course credits from other institutions.

Current University graduate students in Ph.D. programs in other departments can apply to transfer to the SBS Graduate Program *only if they have identified a willing Research Advisor in the SBS*. Application materials to be emailed to the Graduate Program Coordinator include a CV, a statement of purpose, undergraduate and graduate transcripts (including from the University of Utah), and three letters of recommendation, including one from the student's current Research Advisor or alternatively the respective Director of Graduate Studies in the student's current department. Additionally, a fourth letter of support must be provided by the prospective future Research Advisor in the SBS and should indicate information about funds available to support the student's anticipated dissertation research. Transfer applications are due **on December 1 of each year** and will be evaluated in parallel with new student applicants by the Admissions Committee. If the student is accepted into the SBS, they may begin work in a laboratory in January. Exceptions to this timeline must be approved by the Director of Graduate Studies and any such applications must still be evaluated and approved by the Admissions Committee.

Additionally, the SBS routinely accepts current Ph.D. students from two rotation-based interdepartmental 1st year programs in which some SBS faculty participate (the [Molecular Biology Program](#) and the [Biological Chemistry Program](#)). While the SBS accepts the admission criteria for these programs, transfer of Molecular Biology or Biological Chemistry Program students to the SBS Ph.D. Program nonetheless requires approval of the Admissions Committee and the Director of Graduate Studies, who assess whether a given SBS Research Advisor can support the student's anticipated dissertation research. Final acceptance of Molecular Biology Program or Biological Chemistry Program students into the SBS Graduate Program presupposes successful completion of all 1st year academic requirements in these Programs, including satisfactory completion (a "pass") of end of 1st year "Capstone Exams" offered by these two programs.

Depending on the anticipated dissertation work, the Admissions Committee will place a Ph.D. transfer student from another department into either the EEOB or MCEB programs; however, students joining the SBS from either the Molecular Biology Program or the Biological Chemistry Program always become members of the MCEB Ph.D. Program.

Upon joining the SBS, each transfer student is required to attend an orientation to the SBS that will be organized by the Graduate Program Coordinator. Within two months the student must form a Supervisory Committee and have the first meeting with the committee, except for students coming from the Molecular Biology Program or the Biological Chemistry Program, who will follow the standard timeline and policies for students joining the MCEB Ph.D. Program directly. The Supervisory Committee will assess if prior coursework, and/or a Ph.D. Qualifying Exam taken in another department, will be honored toward the SBS Ph.D. degree requirements, and establish a timeline for their completion if needed. If a Ph.D. Qualifying Exam in the SBS is deemed necessary by the student's newly formed Supervisory Committee, it must be (1) attempted by the end of the 4th semester as a Ph.D. student at the University, or alternatively (2) within six months from the time of transfer.

If a student transfers into the SBS Ph.D. Program, the years they spent as a Ph.D. student (or possibly as an M.S. student) at the University in another department or program are counted toward the cumulative time spent in the SBS Ph.D. Program.

In some cases, an M.S. student in the SBS M.S. Program may wish to transfer to the SBS Ph.D. Program. These cases are handled on a case-by-case basis and require, at a minimum, approval by the Director of Graduate Studies and the student's Research Advisor. The Admissions Committee may also be asked to review the student's request to enter the Ph.D. Program. Students in the SBS M.S. Program who wish to join the SBS Ph.D. Program should contact the Graduate Program Coordinator for more information.

Financial Support & Tuition Benefits for Ph.D. Students

Currently, new students admitted to the SBS Ph.D. Program with a B.S./B.A. degree who remain in good standing and make satisfactory progress toward the degree are provided stipend support through their 5th year in the Ph.D. Program. For students joining the SBS Ph.D. Program by transfer, the same funding guidelines apply but are based on the original matriculation dates into the University graduate program (i.e., if a student transfers from a Ph.D. program in another department after two years, they would have three years of support from the SBS if they came to graduate school with a B.S./B.A. degree).

A single level of stipend support applies to all Ph.D. students (EEOB and MCEB Programs) through the periods of guaranteed support. The guidelines for the Graduate School's [Tuition Benefit Program](#) (TBP) describes four different roles. In each case, students are not responsible for tuition fees.

Research Assistantship (RA): RA's are supported by research funds in service of the University's research mission, and are eligible for the Waived TBP.

Teaching assistantship (TA): TAs are supported by SBS in service of the University's teaching mission, and are eligible for the Waived TBP. The SBS's guarantee of financial support is conditional on a student's willingness and eligibility to be a TA if needed. To be eligible, students must be able to communicate effectively in English, cannot receive consistently poor evaluations from faculty or students, and must obey safety regulations (for instance, when providing instruction in laboratory classes). The TA mechanism assures salary support for students if faculty experience unexpected funding gaps, as well as allows the SBS to fulfill its mandated undergraduate and graduate teaching missions.

Graduate Fellowship (GF): Students who are recipients of a prestigious campus fellowship or an approved nationally competitive external fellowship are eligible for the Waived TBP.

Graduate Traineeship (TR): Students engaged in a research training program where student support is non-payroll and paid in monthly stipend payments are eligible for the Sponsored TBP.

Graduate students are encouraged to apply for support through external mechanisms, such as NSF Graduate Fellowships, or internal mechanisms such as University Graduate Research Fellowships. Graduate students will be notified of other opportunities as they arise.

In addition to the guarantee of stipend support through the 5th year of SBS Ph.D. candidacy, basic student tuition costs are covered, with the exception of special course and lab fees which are the responsibility of the student who can request that their faculty advisor cover the costs. Health insurance premiums are covered in full as long as a student maintains eligibility for the TBP. Students are responsible for additional expenses such as doctor's visits and prescriptions.

Salary and tuition support beyond the guaranteed periods is ultimately at the discretion of the Research Advisor, and may depend on several factors, including their availability of funds to support the student's dissertation research project. If funds from a Research Advisor are not provided, a student may apply for SBS funds to continue graduate studies beyond the guaranteed periods. To do so, a student's Research Advisor and Supervisory Committee must provide a letter of request to the Graduate Program Committee (to be sent to the Graduate Program Coordinator). The letter must demonstrate that the student is making satisfactory progress toward the degree and outline a credible plan and timeline for student completion. The Graduate Program Committee will forward the letter to the SBS Director(s) with or without endorsement. Ultimately, the decision to provide SBS funds to support a student beyond the guaranteed periods is at the discretion of the SBS Director, and the decision may be impacted by the availability of funds.

Residency

Domestic and non-resident alien graduate students who are not Utah residents are required by the SBS to submit evidence to the Graduate School that they have made a good faith effort to apply for and obtain Utah residency after their 2nd year (40 credit hours) of graduate study. **Students who fail to do so will lose their eligibility for Tuition Benefits** (domestic and non-resident alien graduate students who fail to obtain or apply for residency are excluded from receiving any tuition support from the SBS). In the event that residency is denied, tuition benefit status will not be affected provided the respective documentation is provided. International students are not affected by this requirement because they cannot qualify for resident status, and receive tuition benefits as long as they are in good standing in the program).

Students are encouraged to review the University's residency and reclassification options and requirements by clicking [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#). It is straightforward to apply for residency, and eligible students will receive timely reminders and instructions to apply from the Graduate Program Coordinator.

Teaching Assistant (TA) Responsibilities

The SBS requires all Ph.D. students to successfully perform at least one Teaching Assistantship (a TA) during the first three years of their time in the program. Graduate student TAs perform critical roles in the school's educational mission at both undergraduate and graduate levels. TAs are expected to contribute 20 hours a week toward their TA duties; the remaining time should be devoted to other official activities, such as dissertation research. Although only 1 TA is required, students are not limited to a single TA. Students interested in an academic/education-oriented career are encouraged to TA more than once to gain relevant experience.

In assigning students to TA courses, input and preferences of both students and faculty instructors are obtained from surveys conducted yearly by the Graduate Program Coordinator. Ultimately, the Director of Graduate Studies, with assistance from other faculty and staff, makes TA assignments. Because of teaching needs, it is not always possible to match a student to their favored courses, but an effort is made to do so when possible. If a student believes they are being asked to perform more than 20 hours a week as a TA, they should discuss this with the instructor; if the issue persists, or requires further mediation, they should contact the Director of Graduate Studies. A student is considered to have successfully completed a TA unless the respective instructor contacts the Graduate Program Coordinator to the contrary in writing within two weeks of the end of the semester during which the TA took place (the student can appeal the instructor's decision to the Director of Graduate Studies who will make a final decision). If a student does not successfully complete a TA assignment, they will be given one more chance. A second failure will result in dismissal from the Ph.D. Program.

All incoming SBS Ph.D. students, including those joining the SBS from the Molecular Biology and Biological Chemistry Programs, must complete the following:

- (1) The [Annual Teaching Symposium](#) hosted by the [Martha Bradley Evans Center for Teaching Excellence](#);
- (2) The SBS Safety & TA Training Symposium (instructors are SBS faculty and staff).

These two symposia equip students with knowledge and practical skills for excellence in teaching; the Graduate Program Coordinator will contact incoming students with dates and times for the symposia.

English Language Certification for International Students

International students must demonstrate that their spoken and written English is at a level consistent with that expected for a TA who teaches undergraduate students. International students whose first language is not English, and who have been awarded financial assistance as a TA by the SBS must be cleared by the International Teaching Assistant Program (ITAP) prior to performing any TA duties. The process for clearance by ITAP can be found [here](#).

Research Assistant (RA) Responsibilities

By mutual agreement between a student and a Research Advisor, a student may receive funding from a faculty member's grant to work on a research problem as a Research Assistant (RA). When a student is supported as an RA, the duties and responsibilities will be clearly communicated by the Research Advisor, and are related to the source of funding (for example, a federal grant). Continuation as an RA is contingent on the availability of funds, adequate performance of research duties as assessed by the Research Advisor, as well as acceptable progress toward completion of the Ph.D. degree as assessed by the student's Research Advisor and Supervisory Committee.

Graduate Assistants-Research Focus (GR) & Fellowship Responsibilities

Graduate Assistants-Research Focus (GRs) and Graduate Fellows (GFs) perform the same duties as RAs but are funded through different mechanisms, including but not limited to foundations or fellowships. Unless otherwise specified by the funding source, the requirements for RAs in the performance of research activities apply to GRs and GFs, who must likewise also make similar progress toward completion of the Ph.D degree for continued support.

Ph.D. Program Coursework

Required Courses

To receive a SBS Ph.D. degree, a student is required to complete a minimum set of four rigorous, semester-long "core" didactic courses offered at the graduate level (6000- or 7000-level courses; two ½ semester courses count as one full semester course); these core courses, and all required courses in the 1st year EEOB and MCEB curricula (see below), must be passed with a grade of "B" or better. The core courses for both the EEOB and MCEB Ph.D. Programs focus on key topics in the biological sciences, biological data analyses, scientific writing, and research ethics. Courses on biological data analyses are shared between the EEOB and MCEB core curricula.

Further, the Scientific Speaking course (BIOL 7810, which is required every semester from years 1-5 in the Ph.D. Program), and Independent Research (BIOL 7950) or Thesis Research (BIOL 7970) courses (one of which is required every semester until graduation), must be passed with a grade of "B" or better in every semester throughout a student's time in the SBS Ph.D. Program. The SBS does not impose a minimum letter grade on elective courses; however, if a student receives less than a "B-" on an elective, the course will not be counted toward the student's program of study by the Graduate School (and the grade will negatively impact a student's GPA). For each semester a student is in the Ph.D. Program, a minimum grade point average (GPA) of 3.0 is also required, subject to one semester to bring the GPA back to above 3.0. If a student fails to satisfy a required letter grade in a course, they may petition to have one chance to rectify the grade (see the next section below). Failure to meet the above letter grade and GPA criteria will result in dismissal from the Ph.D. Graduate Program. Otherwise, at least 14 credit hours of 7970 (Thesis Research: Ph.D.) are required by the Graduate School for completion of a Ph.D.

Required 1st year EEOB coursework can be found in [Appendix 5](#) (core courses are in bold).

Required 1st year MCEB coursework can be found in [Appendix 6](#) (core courses are in bold).

For both the EEOB and MCEB Ph.D. Programs students take 11 credit hours in each semester during the first two years, and take 10 credit hours afterwards; the majority of credit hours are expected to come from Thesis Research (7970) after the first year. The completion of didactic courses by the end of three full semesters in the program is *very strongly* encouraged. Further, all courses must be completed by the end of the 2nd year in the program, excepting BIOL 7970 (Thesis Research) and BIOL 7810 (Scientific Speaking), unless an exception is granted by the Director of Graduate Studies (see below). Taking nine credit hours per semester is considered full time by the Graduate School (but see also [here](#)).

Retaking a Failed Course

If a student does not pass a required course subject to the letter grade criteria described above, they may petition the Director of Graduate Studies in writing to either retake the course or to take a similar alternative course. This must be done within two weeks of receiving the failing grade. The student must include in the petition a plan and timeline for rectifying the failed course. The Director of Graduate Studies, in consultation with the Graduate Program Committee if needed, will notify the student in writing if the petition is granted. If a petition is not granted, or if the course that is retaken (or an agreed upon similar course) is not passed with a “B”/”CR” grade or better, the student will be dismissed from the SBS Ph.D. Program.

Additions/Substitutions to Core Courses, and Alternative Timelines

The core EEOB and MCEB curricula provide a straightforward and timely path for completion of required Ph.D. coursework for the majority of incoming students. However, reflecting the diversity of subject areas in biology, prior training and experiences, as well as anticipated dissertation research, the SBS recognizes that alternatives or additions (electives) to core courses may sometimes be necessary or desired.

Requests for alternatives or additions of courses should be arrived at in discussions between a student and the Research Advisor and/or the Supervisory Committee or Graduate Program Committee, and communicated to the Graduate Program Coordinator and the Director of Graduate Studies well in advance of registration deadlines. The Director of Graduate Studies will approve or decline requests. If an alternative course is in lieu of a core/required course in either the EEOB or MCEB programs of study, the same academic standards apply (i.e., a “B” grade or better is required).

The SBS also acknowledges that the standard timeline for completion of graduate coursework may not serve all students (for instance, for international students who join the program off-cycle because of visa delays, or for students wishing to take a course that is not offered every year). In such cases, the Director of Graduate Studies will review and approve/decline student requests for alternative timelines for completion of courses.

Course Registration Instructions

Only register for courses as instructed by the Graduate Program Coordinator, and remember that registering for courses that are not part of the standard EEOB or MCEB curricula requires prior approval of the Director of Graduate Studies. Information about registering for courses can be found [here](#). The Graduate Program Coordinator should always be consulted before making any changes in enrollments or registration. Failure to do so may result in significant financial liability for the student that will not be covered by the SBS.

Selection of a Ph.D. Research Advisor: Eligibility and Advice

Overview

The selection of a Research Advisor is among the most significant decisions a student will make in graduate school. It substantially impacts the next ~4-6 years of a student's life, the chances of success in obtaining a degree, and may impact career trajectories long after graduate school ends. The choice of advisor should not be taken casually. While a number of factors should be considered, minimally the Research Advisor should be willing to:

- (1) Meet regularly with the student to discuss idea, progress, challenges, needs and provide the necessary resources and advice;
- (2) Provide prompt feedback on the quality of the student's work and its future directions (including informing the student if the work does not meet the Research Advisor's and SBS's standards);
- (3) Give timely feedback on dissertation chapters and manuscripts to enable graduation in an appropriate time frame, and to advance the student's career;
- (4) Provide and ensure a respectful and professional working environment in the laboratory.

In selecting a Research Advisor, students are strongly encouraged to explicitly discuss expectations with candidate faculty members to ensure a good fit. For instance, students and faculty may differ in their expectations regarding the frequency of interactions or delivery of feedback, and hence discussion of what constitutes "regular feedback" is strongly advised to ensure that student and faculty expectations are aligned.

Eligibility to Serve as a Research Advisor & Co-Advisor policy

Only tenured or tenure-track faculty members in the SBS are eligible to serve as Research Advisors to SBS graduate students. While the SBS values its adjunct faculty, they may not serve as an SBS student's formal Research Advisor, nor can University faculty in other departments or units. The SBS does not allow a student to select co-Advisors; although collaboration is strongly encouraged, only one faculty member can formally assume the role of Research Advisor.

Finding a Research Advisor: Additional Advice & Timing

In the case of direct admit students to the EEOB and MCEB programs, or those joining the SBS Ph.D. Program from the interdepartmental Molecular Biology Program or the Biological Chemistry Program (or transfer by another mechanism), the selection of Research Advisor occurs by arrangement with the faculty member prior to the time of admittance. That is, acceptance to the SBS's Ph.D. Program is contingent upon consent between the student and a future Research Advisor. This arrangement is approved by the Admissions Committee, and by the Director of Graduate Studies, in the form of an offer letter or confirmation from the Graduate Program Coordinator.

In selecting a Research Advisor by direct admit to the EEOB or MCEB Programs, students generally contact specific faculty members at or prior to submitting applications to attend graduate school. During the interview process, students should interact as much as possible with the prospective faculty member to assess potential research interests and opportunities, and to see if personalities and expectations seem compatible. Often, prospective students interact as well with students and other personnel in the potential Research Advisor's laboratory. This can provide an opportunity to get to know the inner workings of a laboratory, as well as how existing students view the Research Advisor's mentorship style and personality.

For MCEB Program students performing rotations, students chose a Research Advisor from among the faculty members with whom they have rotated during the first year. The same recommendations for selecting advisors for direct admit students also applies to those doing rotations. MCEB students choose their future Research Advisor by mutual consent between student and advisor during the Spring semester. Timelines for this choice are conveyed to students and faculty by the Graduate Program Coordinator. Students who fail to find a Research Advisor after three laboratory rotations may be dismissed from the program. In some cases, the Director of Graduate Studies may grant permission for a 4th rotation, but this is not guaranteed.

Supervisory Committee Formation & Policies for Ph.D. Students

Supervisory Committee Roles

A student's Supervisory Committee complements and assists the student's Research Advisor in directing student research and professional development. In this role, Supervisory Committee members are a source of advice and support independent of the Research Advisor, and should the need arise, also participate in student-advisor conflict resolution. Together with the Research Advisor, the Supervisory Committee constitutes the body that makes key decisions regarding a student's progress towards obtaining a degree. Supervisory Committee members are present during regularly scheduled meetings with the student, as well as at oral examinations and the final Ph.D. Dissertation Defense, and provide timely evaluation of the student's progress.

Supervisory Committee Selection

Students are required to form a Supervisory Committee within six months of joining the SBS, or alternatively within the first month of the 3rd semester in the program for students in the MCEB rotation program or those joining the SBS from other rotation programs on campus.

The Supervisory Committee has five voting members and must consist of:

- (1) the Research Advisor who serves as the committee Chair;
- (2) at least three voting members who are tenured or tenure-track faculty of the SBS (including the Research Advisor);
- (3) one member who holds a primary appointment in a department other than the SBS, or who can be from another university (up to two members can hold appointments outside the SBS).

A common Ph.D. Supervisory Committee composition for many students will include their Research Advisor, three other tenured or tenure-track faculty of the SBS, and one tenured or tenure-track faculty member from another department at the University of Utah or at another institution.

In rare cases, an additional non-voting committee member may be added to a supervisory committee. The primary reason for such an addition would be if the added member possesses knowledge or expertise deemed essential for the student's success. Any such additions must be approved by the Director of Graduate Studies. The non-voting member will not participate in the Qualifying Exam and will not have a vote on acceptance/approval of a student's dissertation. Students should be aware that with more members it is typically more challenging to schedule committee meetings.

In most cases all Ph.D. student Supervisory Committee members will hold tenure or tenure-track positions at the University of Utah or at other comparable, research-intensive academic institutions. However, scientists holding other positions, but who are engaged in active research, and who have a track record of

supervision of students, may be eligible for Supervisory Committee service. All requests for Supervisory Committee members who are not tenured or tenure-track faculty at the University of Utah must be accompanied by the CV of the potential committee member and a letter of justification for the choice signed by the student and the student's Research Advisor. These requests must also be approved by the Dean of the Graduate School. Approval should not be taken for granted. Examples of requests that are unlikely to be approved are for individuals who do not possess a Ph.D. degree, or who were prior instructors or advisors of students at other institutions, or who otherwise had or have another type of close professional or personal relationship to students.

To provide students with independent Supervisory Committee feedback and evaluation, the SBS also requires that no Supervisory Committee members can be related to each other (including by marriage or be domestic partnership) or to the student. Former students or postdoctoral fellows of the Research Advisor are generally ineligible to serve as Supervisory Committee members until they have achieved tenure at their current institution. Further, any other potential (or perceived) conflicts of interest must be disclosed at the time the request to form a Supervisory Committee is made. An example of such might be an individual who works at a private company and who has a financial interest in the outcome of a student's research. All individuals must meet qualifications prescribed by the Graduate School.

In selecting Supervisory Committee members, students are encouraged to first talk with their Research Advisors, who serve as a valuable source of advice about potential committee members. Students should then arrange a time to discuss their thesis research plans and career goals with each prospective committee member. After obtaining affirmative commitments from all members of a potential Supervisory Committee, the names and positions of all members must be submitted to the Graduate Program Coordinator (as should any other related documentation). Ultimately, the Director of Graduate Studies, and then the Graduate School, must approve Supervisory Committees, as well as any changes to Supervisory Committees after they have formed (i.e., if a faculty member retires and must be replaced by another member).

Required Meetings & Communication

The SBS prioritizes timely Supervisory Committee feedback to students by requiring yearly Supervisory Committee meetings during fall semesters. Except for the 1st year, when students have just joined the program and have not yet formed Supervisory Committees, these yearly meetings, and the timing of their completion, are tracked by the SBS Graduate Program, the College of Science, and by the Graduate School, and are a requirement to remain in good standing in the SBS Graduate Program.

To ensure the timely completion of annual Supervisory Committee meetings, and to enhance the availability of faculty for these meetings, students must adhere to the following schedule:

- (1) 5th year students and beyond: Supervisory Committee meetings will occur in August or September (no later than Sept. 30);
- (2) 3rd and 4th year students: Supervisory Committee meetings will occur between August and October (no later than Oct. 31);
- (3) 2nd year students: Supervisory Committee meetings will occur between August and November (no later than Nov. 30).

It is recommended that students schedule committee meetings earlier rather than later in the specified periods. Any exceptions to the above timeline require prior approval by the Director of Graduate Studies and will not be granted without justification and a projected date/timeline for when the annual meeting will take place. Students typically schedule two hours for Supervisory Committee meetings; as

faculty members have many commitments, students are encouraged to arrange Supervisory Committee meetings at the earliest possible opportunity to ensure availability.

While the format of a committee meeting is at the discretion of the Supervisory Committee, meetings typically involve a student presentation of course grades, research progress, future research directions, anticipated thesis chapters, and a projected timeline for potential graduation (especially for students in the 3-4th years and beyond), activities related to professional development, as well as other topics the student or Supervisory Committee deem relevant. Committee meetings may include an interval when the student is asked to leave the room for frank discussions between the advisor and committee. It is expected that the Supervisory Committee will also provide an opportunity for the student to speak to the committee without the presence of the Research Advisor. This typically occurs at the end of the committee meeting when the Research Advisor will be requested to leave the room.

Students having their first Supervisory Committee meeting (during the 3rd semester) are required to discuss the Ph.D. Qualifying Exam with their committee. Qualifying exams must take place in the third or fourth semesters in the program; at the end of the first Supervisory Committee meeting, an approximate timeline for the written and oral components of the exam must be established, as must the selection of the Chair for [Ph.D. Qualifying Exam](#).

Prior to each Supervisory Committee meeting, the student and Research Advisor are required to provide the committee with a completed [Developmental Plan Form](#) (Parts 1 and 2). The last section of the form (Part 3) is completed by the Research Advisor in consultation with other committee members following the Supervisory Committee meeting; the Research Advisor is responsible for returning the form to the Graduate Program Coordinator (this should be done by email with the student and all committee members in copy). The Developmental Plan Form documents a student's progress in the program; more about its purpose, and instructions for completing it, can be [found here](#).

Although yearly Supervisory Committee meetings are required, this is the minimal requirement. The student, the Research Advisor, or the Supervisory Committee by majority vote, may arrange more frequent meetings (for instance, if there are concerns about a student's research direction, its feasibility, or student progress more generally).

In addition to regular yearly meetings and the administration of the Ph.D. Qualifying Exam, the Supervisory Committee also administers and adjudicates the Ph.D. Dissertation Defense. The SBS requires all Supervisory Committee members to attend the oral defense of the dissertation, and at least four members must be present during other meetings of the Supervisory Committee (the Research Advisor must always be present). Exceptions to this policy require approval in advance by the Director of Graduate Studies and will not be granted without sufficient justification.

[Mandatory Milestone Examinations for the Ph.D. Program](#)

In addition to the completion of required coursework, three exams with both written and oral components must be passed for a Ph.D. from the SBS to be awarded. The first is the Capstone Exam designed to test a 1st year student's knowledge and preparation for continuing in the program. The second exam is the Ph.D. Qualifying Exam, which further assesses a student's preparation to continue in the program in the context of a proposal for dissertation research. Finally, the Dissertation Defense assesses if a student's critical thinking skills and body of original research meet the standards for a Ph.D. degree to be awarded. Information about these "milestone exams," including the consequences of not passing an exam, is provided in the following sections.

Please note that for the Capstone Exam and Ph.D. Qualifying Exam there are some differences between the EEOB and MCEB Programs (policies for the Dissertation Defense are the same). **Please make sure you select the correct exam policies for your program (EEOB or MCEB).**

EEOB Capstone Exam

All 1st year graduate students in the SBS EEOB Ph.D. Program are required to provide a written summary of their progress at the end of their 2nd semester in graduate school. This summary will consist of three documents:

- (1) a completed copy of the [Development Plan Form](#);
- (2) a bibliography of journal articles and books read during the 1st year;
- (3) a written document outlining 1-3 potential dissertation topics which will form the basis of the Capstone Exam.

The latter document should be 2-6 pages of text, including any display items (figures or tables), followed by references (that is, references are not included in the 6 page limit). It should discuss why the particular topic(s) were selected for potential dissertation studies and where they fit into the broader context of the student's field of study. These documents must be submitted to the Examining Committee (see below) at least one week before the oral component of the Capstone Exam. The document should be single spaced with one-inch margins; acceptable fonts and font sizes are Arial 10 or Times / Times New Roman 11.

An Examining Committee consisting of the student's advisor and two SBS faculty members will evaluate the student's documents and will oversee a one-hour oral defense of the proposed thesis topic(s). The student, in consultation with the faculty advisor, should select members of the Examining Committee. Faculty members on the Examining Committee must be tenured or tenure-line members of the SBS.

The student must arrange with Examining Committee members the time and location for the one-hour defense, which must be completed on or before the last day of classes during the semester in which the exam takes place. Students who fail to undertake their Capstone Exam by this date will be dismissed from the EEOB Ph.D. Program. Exceptions to this schedule require the approval of the Director of Graduate Studies.

The one-hour defense will focus primarily on the student's potential dissertation topic(s); however, questions and discussion may cover any EEOB topic considered appropriate by the Examining Committee. The student should prepare and deliver a brief presentation covering potential thesis topics during the defense. The outcome of the defense will be an evaluation of "satisfactory" or "unsatisfactory" progress toward the Ph.D. degree by majority vote of the three-member Examining Committee.

Students who are evaluated and deemed to be making unsatisfactory progress will be placed on probation by the SBS graduate program. They will be reassessed at the end of their 3rd semester (excluding summer semesters) in a one-hour defense to be conducted by the Examining Committee after providing updates to the same three documents presented to their Examining Committee at the end of the previous semester (with respect to the end of the semester, the timeline for the second attempt at passing the Capstone Exam will be the same as for the first attempt). At this time, if a student is scored with an evaluation of "unsatisfactory" by majority vote of the Examining Committee, the student will be dismissed from the SBS Ph.D. Program ([click here](#) for more information). Otherwise, the probationary period with respect to the Capstone Exam ends.

It is the responsibility of the student's Research Advisor to communicate the result(s) of the EEOB Capstone Exam in writing to both the Graduate Program Coordinator and the student within one week of the oral exam.

Any exceptions to these timelines require approval by the Director of Graduate Studies. Students requiring accommodations for examinations are requested to make contact and arrangements through the Center for Disability Access (<https://disability.utah.edu>) in advance.

MCEB Capstone Exam

All graduate students who enter the SBS by admission through the MCEB graduate program must attempt the MCEB Capstone Exam at the end of their 1st year. This exam has both a written and oral component and must be completed by the last day of classes of the student's 2nd semester in graduate school. Both written and oral components of the exams will be evaluated by three MCEB faculty (hereafter the Examining Committee) who will be chosen by the 1st year MCEB advisor on the SBS Graduate Program Committee.

Each student will be assigned a research paper by the MCEB 1st year advisor during the first week of March which they will read and critically evaluate. Students will then write a critical review of the paper, addressing its important findings, their significance, and the quality of the evidence supporting those findings, as would be done during journal peer review (example reviews can be found accompanying papers in journals like eLife and the EMBO Journal). The written review should be 2-3 pages, 1.5 spaced, with 1-inch margins and Arial 11 font, and is due on or before March 21. Students are not allowed to exchange ideas or drafts with other students who were assigned the same paper. Students may otherwise use any resource to further their understanding of the paper and are encouraged to read relevant background papers.

By April 1, each student will receive a pass/revise decision on their written document. In case a revision is required, it should be submitted within one week (on or before April 7). Final pass/fail decisions on the written document will then be given by April 15. Each student will present the review to the Examining Committee in a 1-hour oral exam that will be scheduled by the Examining Committee on or before the last day of classes. While the oral exam will focus on the assigned paper and the student's written review, questions and discussion may cover any topic considered appropriate by the Examining Committee. The exam will be scored as "pass" or "fail" by majority vote of the 3-member Examining Committee.

Students who fail the exam will be allowed to re-take the exam once, using a different assigned paper; administration of the second exam will be the same as for the first attempt, and the second exam must be attempted within 2 months of the first exam. Failing the second exam will result in dismissal from the SBS Ph.D. Program ([click here](#) for more information).

Should any specified dates fall on a weekend or holiday, the respective deadlines will be extended to the next regular workday. The 1st year MCEB advisor on the SBS Graduate Program Committee will communicate results of the MCEB Capstone Exams in writing to both the Graduate Program Coordinator and students within one week of oral exams.

Any exceptions to these timelines require approval by the Director of Graduate Studies. Students requiring accommodations for examinations are requested to contact and make arrangements with the Center for Disability Access (<https://disability.utah.edu>) in advance.

Note: Students who join the MCEB Program through the interdepartmental Molecular Biology or Biological Chemistry Programs must pass 1st year Capstone Exams administered by those programs to be

admitted into the MCEB Ph.D. Program. The MCEB Ph.D. Program accepts the results of the Molecular Biology or Biological Chemistry Program Capstone Exams as counting toward the MCEB Ph.D. Program Capstone Exam requirement.

EEOB Ph.D. Qualifying Exam Procedure

Overview and General Philosophy

Students from the EEOB Ph.D. Program must attempt and pass the Ph.D. Qualifying Exam that consists of a written and oral proposal of the dissertation work. The Qualifying Exam must be attempted by the end of the 4th semester in graduate school (excluding summer semesters), and requirements will be enforced uniformly among candidates. To ensure sufficient time for the Qualifying Exam to take place (including any requested revisions), students are encouraged to submit their written proposal no later than midway through their 4th semester.

EEOB Ph.D. Qualifying Exam Committee

The Qualifying Exam Committee will consist of the Supervisory Committee with the exception of the Research Advisor. One member of the Qualifying Exam Committee who is a faculty member in the SBS will serve as chairperson to ensure that the rules for Qualifying Exam are followed. The Research Advisor may attend the oral portion of the exam as a silent observer and can participate at the discretion of the Qualifying Exam Committee. The Research Advisor must leave the room along with the student for the Qualifying Exam Committee's discussion following the exam and cannot vote on the outcome of the written or oral parts of the exam. A "pass" decision will be by majority vote of the Qualifying Exam Committee (at least three votes in favor for both the written and oral parts; all other outcomes result in a "fail" decision).

Written and Oral Exam Components for the EEOB Ph.D. Qualifying Exam

The exam will consist of a written document that will be defended in a single oral defense (the written and oral components comprise a single exam attempt). The written component will consist of a research proposal on the topic of the student's proposed dissertation research. The student should describe the background leading to the proposed research, the significance of the research, the research approach (design and methods) for achieving the specific aims, the rationale for the proposed approach, potential pitfalls, and expected/alternative outcomes of the proposed studies. Formatting requirements are as follows: a one page project summary plus a project description of at least six pages; single spacing; Arial 11 or Times / Times New Roman 12 font (excepting figure legends, which can have smaller font sizes but must still be easily readable); and one-inch margins. Figures/tables are included, but citations excluded, from the page limitations. While the six-page project description is the default, the student, advisor and committee can mutually agree to have a project description of up to 12 pages if this facilitates submission of a proposal to a specific funding agency. In that case, the details of font selection, size, page margins and inclusion of figures and tables can match funding agency requirements. The advisor and/or committee member(s) should not exert pressure on the student to write a longer proposal and students should inform the Director of Graduate Studies if that happens. It is however reasonable for an advisor or committee member to initiate discussion of the submission of a proposal for funding. Submission, review and any decisions relating to the funding of such a proposal cannot have any bearing on the timing or outcome of the qualifying exam.

The student is encouraged to consult with their Research Advisor during preparation for the exam about the concepts and principles of their dissertation studies. The Research Advisor and other members of the Supervisory Committee can have conversations with the student about specific aims and provide guidance and recommendations on the development of the experimental approaches. However, the student is responsible for crafting a document that speaks in their voice, and the Research Advisor and Qualifying Exam Committee members may not view or contribute to the writing or editing of the proposal itself. The student may, however, solicit feedback from other faculty, postdocs and graduate students.

The student will submit the written research proposal on a date agreed upon by the Qualifying Exam Committee. The committee will have two weeks to evaluate the written document. If the committee requests revisions, the student will have two weeks to complete them and resubmit the revised proposal. In addition to the revised proposal, the student must submit a “Response to Reviewers” document that explicitly addresses the written comments and recommendations of the student’s Qualifying Exam Committee, itemizing changes made to the proposal and justifying any recommendations not followed in the revision. The Qualifying Exam Committee will then have one week to reevaluate the written component of the exam.

The evaluation will focus on the following areas of assessment:

1. The clarity of the scientific writing, including the use of appropriate scientific terminology and reporting standards.
2. Inclusion of appropriate scholarship. Is the proposal written with sufficient discussion and citation of previous work, such that it is original and describes work that will serve as a novel and compelling advance in the candidate’s field?
3. Feasibility of the work in the context of available resources, including equipment, supplies and expertise that can be accessed by the candidate, and within the time constraints of the program.
4. Demonstration of understanding of the scientific questions, methodologies and data analysis techniques, both conceptually and technically.
5. Discussion of pitfalls and alternative approaches, where applicable.

The oral component of the Qualifying Exam cannot be formally scheduled until the student has passed the written component and must take place within 30 days from the time the student passed the written component of the Qualifying Exam. In the oral defense, the student may give a formal presentation of the proposal to the Qualifying Exam Committee, but it may not exceed 10 slides with no animation. The oral component of the Qualifying Exam may cover any material deemed appropriate by the Qualifying Exam Committee and should not exceed two hours in length. The evaluation will focus on the following areas of assessment:

1. The candidate’s understanding of the content of the written proposal and ability to defend and/or appreciate criticism(s) from the committee.
2. The candidate’s understanding of related scientific concepts, literature and research techniques, which should be commensurate with carrying out the proposed work.
3. The candidate’s ability to describe, defend and discuss aspects of their proposal in the oral format, accompanied with visual aids that are concise and clear.

EEOB Ph.D. Qualifying Exam Schedule

The Qualifying Exam must be undertaken by the fourth semester of entering the Ph.D. Program (excluding summer semesters). If a student fails to pass the written or the oral component, the Qualifying Exam is failed. Subject to both (1) a majority vote of the student’s Supervisory Committee, and (2) an affirmative vote by the student’s Research Advisor (who is a member of the Supervisory Committee), a second attempt to pass the Qualifying Exam will be granted. A second attempt must occur by the end of the following semester (excluding summer semesters) according to the same policies as for the first attempt. The Supervisory Committee will have two weeks to inform the student if a second attempt to pass the Ph.D. Qualifying Exam will be allowed. Students who have not attempted their Qualifying Exam by the end of their fourth semester, or who have not retaken and passed the Qualifying Exam by the end of their 5th semester (if a second attempt is allowed), will be judged as not making satisfactory progress toward their degree and will be dismissed from the SBS Graduate Program.

It is the responsibility of the Chair of the Qualifying Exam Committee to communicate the results of the Qualifying Exam to the Graduate Program Coordinator (1st attempt, and 2nd attempt as applicable) within three days from when the Qualifying Exam takes place.

Exceptions or modifications to these rules must be approved in advanced by the Director of Graduate Studies. Students requiring accommodations for examinations are requested to contact and make arrangements with the Center for Disability Access (<https://disability.utah.edu>) in advance.

MCEB Ph.D. Qualifying Exam Procedure

Overview and General Philosophy

Students from the MCEB Ph.D. Program must attempt and pass the Ph.D. Qualifying Exam that consists of a written and oral proposal of the thesis work (the written and oral components comprise a single exam attempt). The Qualifying Exam must be attempted by the end of the 4th semester (excluding summer semesters) in graduate school, and requirements will be enforced uniformly among candidates. To ensure sufficient time for the Qualifying Exam to take place (including any requested revisions), students are encouraged to submit their written proposal no later than midway through their 4th semester.

MCEB Ph.D. Qualifying Exam Committee

The Qualifying Exam Committee will consist of the Supervisory Committee with the exception of the Research Advisor. The Research Advisor cannot be physically present during any part of the exam. One member of the Qualifying Exam Committee who is a faculty member in the SBS will serve as chairperson to ensure that the rules for the Qualifying Exam are followed. A “pass” or “fail” decision for both the written and oral components of the Qualifying Exam will be by majority vote of the Qualifying Exam Committee (at least 3 votes in favor required to pass).

Written and Oral Exam Components for the MCEB Ph.D. Qualifying Exam

The written component will consist of a research proposal on the topic of the student’s proposed dissertation research. The student should describe the specific aims, background leading to the proposed research, the significance of the research, the research approach (design and methods) for achieving the specific aims, the rationale for the proposed approach, potential pitfalls, and expected/alternative outcomes of the proposed studies. Formatting requirements are as follows: one page describing Specific Aims, followed by a research plan of at least six pages; single spacing; Arial 11 or Times / Times New Roman 12 font (excepting figure legends, which can have smaller font sizes but must still be easily readable); and one-inch margins. Figures/tables are included, but citations excluded, from the page limitations. While the six-page research plan is the default, the student, advisor and committee can mutually agree to have the student submit a research plan of up to 12 pages if this facilitates submission of a proposal to a specific funding agency. In that case, the details of font selection, size, page margins and inclusion of figures and tables can match funding agency requirements. The advisor and/or committee member(s) should not exert pressure on the student to write a longer proposal and students should inform the Director of Graduate Studies if that happens. It is however reasonable for an advisor or committee member to initiate discussion of the submission of a proposal for funding. Submission, review and any decisions relating to the funding of such a proposal cannot have any bearing on the timing or outcome of the qualifying exam.

The student is encouraged to consult with their Research Advisor during preparation for the Qualifying Exam about the concepts and principles of the study. The Research Advisor can have conversations with the student about specific aims and provide guidance and recommendations on the development of the experimental approach. However, the student is responsible for crafting a document that speaks in their

voice, and the Research Advisor may not view or contribute to the writing or editing of the proposal itself. The student cannot solicit feedback or other help from Qualifying Exam Committee members during the writing of the proposal. The student may, however, solicit feedback from other faculty, postdocs and graduate students.

MCEB Qualifying Exam Schedule & Student Status

The Qualifying Exam Committee will have two weeks to evaluate the written document. If revisions are requested by the Qualifying Exam Committee, the student will have two weeks to complete them and resubmit the written component of the exam. In addition to the revised proposal, the student must submit a “Response to Reviewers” document that explicitly addresses the written comments and recommendations of the student’s Qualifying Exam Committee, itemizing changes made to the proposal and justifying any recommendations not followed in the revision. The Qualifying Exam Committee will then have one week to reevaluate the written component of the exam. The oral component of the Qualifying Exam must take place within 30 days from the time the student passed the written component of the exam. In the oral defense of the proposal to the Qualifying Exam Committee, the student may give a formal presentation, but it may not exceed 10 slides with no animation.

If a student fails to pass the written or the oral component, the Qualifying Exam is failed. Subject to both (1) a majority vote of the student’s Supervisory Committee, and (2) an affirmative vote by the student’s Research Advisor (who is a member of the Supervisory Committee), a second attempt to pass the Qualifying Exam will be granted. A second attempt must occur by the end of the following semester (excluding summer semesters) according to the same policies as for the first attempt. The Supervisory Committee will have two weeks to inform the student if a second attempt to pass the Ph.D. Qualifying Exam will be allowed. If a second attempt is allowed, in cases where the oral component alone was failed, the Qualifying Exam Committee will assess the extent to which the written component must be redone or revised. Students who have not attempted the Qualifying Exam by the end of their 4th semester, or have not passed their second attempt of the Qualifying Exam by the end of their 5th semester (if a second attempt was allowed) will be judged as not making satisfactory progress toward the Ph.D. degree, and will be dismissed from the SBS Graduate Program.

It is the responsibility of the Chair of the Ph.D. Qualifying Exam Committee to communicate the results of the Qualifying Exam to the Graduate Program Coordinator (first attempt and/or second attempt allowed) within three days from when the Qualifying Exam takes place.

The evaluation of the written component will focus on the following areas of assessment:

1. The clarity of the scientific writing, including the use of appropriate scientific terminology and reporting standards.
2. Inclusion of appropriate scholarship. Is the proposal written with sufficient discussion and citation of previous work, such that it is original and describes work that will serve as a novel and compelling advance in the candidate’s field?
3. Feasibility of the work in the context of available resources, including equipment, supplies and expertise that can be accessed by the candidate, and within the time constraints of the program.
4. Demonstration of understanding of the scientific questions, methodologies and data analysis techniques, both conceptually and technically.
5. Discussion of pitfalls and alternative approaches, where applicable.

The evaluation of the oral component will focus on the following areas of assessment:

1. The candidate's understanding of the content of the written proposal and ability to defend and/or appreciate criticism(s) from the committee.
2. The candidate's understanding of related scientific concepts, literature and research techniques, which should be commensurate with carrying out the proposed work.
3. The candidate's ability to describe, defend and discuss aspects of their proposal in the oral format, accompanied with visual aids that are concise and clear.

Exceptions or modifications to these rules must be approved in advanced by the Director of Graduate Studies. Students requiring accommodations for examinations are requested to contact and make arrangements with the Center for Disability Access (<https://disability.utah.edu>) in advance.

Ph.D. Dissertation Defense

The Ph.D. Dissertation Defense has a written and oral component, the administration of which is prescribed by the Graduate School ([click here](#); the following guidelines conform to these requirements). The written document consists of chapters, one or more of which present original research. What constitutes a body of work sufficient for a successful defense, as well as the number and structure of chapters, should be arrived at in discussions between the student and the Supervisory Committee. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the Supervisory Committee to set expectations and adjudicate the dissertation defense. All decisions of the Supervisory Committee during the defense process will be by majority vote. It is critical that students discuss expectations for a Ph.D. dissertation with their Research Advisor and Supervisory Committee regularly, especially as they progress in the Ph.D. Program.

The date of the oral defense for the dissertation must be approved by the Supervisory Committee. By Graduate School policy, at least **three weeks** before the final oral examination (dissertation defense), the student should submit an acceptable draft of the dissertation to the chair of the Supervisory Committee (the Research Advisor, unless other arrangements are made by the Supervisory Committee for another member to be chair), and the student must submit the draft to other committee members at least **two weeks** before the examination date. An expectation of the SBS is that a Supervisory Committee will carefully review the written dissertation prior to the oral defense; if a Supervisory Committee deems that a dissertation document is insufficient, the committee may, at its discretion, request revisions to the dissertation and reschedule the oral defense. Failure of a student to produce an acceptable written dissertation will be assessed by the Supervisory Committee as making unsatisfactory progress toward the degree.

The student must pass the final oral examination of the dissertation before graduation, and failure to pass the oral examination will result in dismissal from the SBS Graduate Program. The oral component consists of a public presentation of research that lasts ~50 minutes, followed by ~10 minutes of questions, followed by a private meeting and additional questions/comments with only Supervisory Committee members present. The oral defense and subsequent meeting of the student and the Supervisory Committee must be in person unless prior approval is given by the Director of Graduate Studies (the Director of Graduate Studies is under no obligation to grant exceptions). The Graduate Program Coordination oversees the scheduling of rooms for the oral defense. The chair of the Supervisory Committee is responsible for communications between the committee and the student during the defense process; further, the chair must inform the Graduate Program Coordinator of a pass/fail decision on the day of the oral defense. If a student does not pass the oral examination, the student may be allowed one attempt to retake the oral examination with the approval of both the Supervisory Committee and the Director of Graduate Studies (otherwise, the student is dismissed from the SBS Graduate Program).

It is critical that students inform the Graduate Program Coordinator of the oral defense date at least three weeks prior, and they must also contact the Graduate Program Coordinator during the semester before an oral defense is planned to initiate the formal approval of their Ph.D. Program of study (for more information, [click here](#)). Students should carefully follow all instructions from the Graduate Program Coordinator to ensure that any forms needed for a defense are completed according to the Graduate School's mandated timeline. Failure to finalize the program of study, or complete other needed forms, may result in long delays in a dissertation defense, and have tuition/financial repercussions.

After a student passes an oral defense, *the written dissertation document must be submitted to the Thesis Office in the Graduate School and approved*. This should be done no later than about 2-3 weeks after the oral defense; this process is monitored by the SBS and Graduate School, and the student and Research Advisor may be contacted if there is a delay. Supervisory Committees should **not allow** a student to progress to an oral defense if the written component of the dissertation needs more than minor revisions; while dissertation chapters with original research are ideally published in peer-reviewed scientific journals, this is not an SBS requirement, and is not a justification for delaying dissertation defenses or their approval by the Research Advisor and Supervisory Committee.

The [Thesis Office](#) in the Graduate School has formatting rules for the dissertation document. Students are **strongly encouraged** to review these formatting rules ([click here](#)) early and often when writing the dissertation to avoid time consuming reformatting later on and delays in the awarding of the Ph.D. degree. **The degree will not be issued by the University until the written document is submitted to and formally accepted by the Thesis Office.** Students requiring accommodations for any component of the Ph.D. defense should contact and make arrangements with the Center for Disability Access (<https://disability.utah.edu>) in advance.

Time Limit for a Ph.D. Degree & Petition for an Extension

Students who successfully complete a Ph.D. degree in the SBS typically do so in approximately five years, and the SBS time-limit for **completion of a Ph.D. degree is seven years** (the upper limit suggested by the Graduate School). However, the SBS and the Graduate School recognize that under exceptional circumstances additional time may be required. With the approval of the student's Research Advisor, Supervisory Committee by majority vote, and the Director of Graduate Studies, a student may petition the Graduate School for an extension of time to graduation of more than seven years. Instructions from the Graduate School for petitioning for an extension can be found [here](#); *students should carefully read and follow all instructions*. Ultimately, the decision to grant a petition for an extension resides with the Graduate School. Failure to meet milestones or other criteria outlined in a successful petition for an extension to graduate will result in dismissal from the Ph.D. Program as specified by the Graduate School and by SBS dismissal policies. *Students in the Ph.D. Program should therefore make every effort to finish within no more than **seven** years.*

Changing Research Groups & Dismissal Policies (Ph.D. Program)

The following guidelines have been approved by the SBS Faculty for the rare occasions when it becomes necessary to terminate a graduate student/Research Advisor research relationship or dismiss a student from the program. Either the graduate student or the Research Advisor may terminate a student/Research Advisor relationship because of dissatisfaction, and the Director of Graduate Studies may dismiss a student from the Ph.D. Program for misconduct or for failure to make satisfactory progress toward the Ph.D. degree. The following guidelines describe these procedures. The student's rights and responsibilities in the case of

dismissal are set forth in [Policy 6-400: Student Rights and Responsibilities](#) (and policies referenced therein) of the University [Regulations Library](#).

Changing a Research Advisor (Student Initiated)

When a student seeks a new research or laboratory environment, a transfer to another research group might be desired. The most important part of this process is open communication. If a student is considering transfer to another group, the student should meet with the Director of Graduate Studies to discuss the implications of this important decision and to formulate a plan of action. Depending on the situation, the student will need to communicate with the current Research Advisor, members of the Supervisory Committee, and potential new Research Advisors.

Once the plan of action is finalized and the decision to transfer is made, the student is obligated to petition in writing to the Director of Graduate Studies to obtain their written permission. The student is obligated to give the current Research Advisor a 30-day written notice and to outline the reasons for leaving the group. During the 30 days, any research must be brought to a point where it can be passed on to a new person. All notebooks and data must be returned to the Research Advisor before the student joins another faculty member's laboratory. If there is unanimous agreement between the student, the Research Advisor, and the new Research Advisor, the 30-day period may be shortened. If TA support is needed to join a new laboratory group, students should be aware that it is not possible to make TA appointments in mid-semester, and hence should plan accordingly.

After transferring to a new group, the student may also need to reconstitute the Supervisory Committee, e.g., if they have switched primary research areas. If the student has already successfully completed a Ph.D. Qualifying Exam, the student must (1) prepare a brief (3-5 page) summary outlining the new dissertation project within five months of joining the new research group, and (2) present the new project in an oral presentation to the Supervisory Committee. Should the Supervisory Committee view the new project as unacceptable, the Supervisory Committee will give the student an evaluation of unsatisfactory progress and document the decision in writing to the Graduate Program Coordinator and Director of Graduate Studies (this should be done on the last page of the Developmental Plan Form). The result will be dismissal from the graduate program.

Dismissal by Faculty from a Student/Research Advisor Relationship

If a Research Advisor is dissatisfied with the performance of a student, for example in terms of research effort, lab safety, data handling, research ethics or working environment, the advisor should (as soon as possible) communicate in writing to the student the concerns about the deficiencies in the student's performance. If the deficiencies persist, the Research Advisor may place the student on probation by identifying to the student in writing the unsatisfactory aspects of the student's performance and the measures needed to bring their performance to an acceptable level. Students are allowed a reasonable time (at least 30 calendar days) to correct the deficiencies during the probationary period, the length of which will be communicated by the Research Advisor. A copy of the letter outlining the deficiencies and timeline for corrective actions for a student's performance will be sent to the Director of Graduate Studies and the Graduate Program Coordinator. If the deficiencies are corrected in the probationary period, the Research Advisor will notify the student in writing that the probation is ended. A copy of this letter must also be sent to the Director of Graduate Studies and the Graduate Program Coordinator.

If the deficiencies persist at the end of the probationary period, it is the prerogative of the Research Advisor to terminate the student/Research Advisor relationship. The procedure will be:

- (1) To notify the student in writing giving reasons for the dismissal, and indicating a formal termination date at least 15 days after the date of the letter. A copy of the letter must also be sent to the Director of Graduate Studies and the Graduate Program Coordinator;
- (2) If the student is receiving stipend support as an RA or GR, the student will be kept on stipend support for 15 days after the date of the notification letter to ***allow time to establish a new Research Advisor relationship***, unless a new Research Advisor puts the student on stipend support before the end of the 15 days;
- (3) If the student is being paid as a TA, the SBS will continue the TA support until the end of the respective semester to allow the student to identify a new Research Advisor, contingent on the TA duties being carried out as required;
- (4) If the student fails to find a new Research Advisor within 15 days of the formal termination date or before TA funding ends, the student will be dismissed from the SBS Ph.D. Program (see section “Formal Dismissal from the Ph.D. Program” below).

It is the student’s obligation to turn over all data and notebooks in a manner that will allow the Research Advisor to continue the work; transfer to another Research Advisor, and continued good standing in the Ph.D. Program, is contingent on a student satisfactorily transferring all data/notebooks to the outgoing Research Advisor.

Formal Dismissal from the Ph.D. Program

While most students succeed in the SBS Ph.D. Program, disciplinary actions, including dismissal from the Ph.D. Program, are possible outcomes for graduate students deemed not to be making satisfactory progress toward the degree as outlined in this handbook. A student is classified as making “unsatisfactory progress” toward the degree, and will no longer be in “good standing” in the program, if any of the following conditions apply ([see also here for definitions](#)):

- (1) failure to pass all core/required courses with a grade of “B”/ “CR” or better;
- (2) a grade point average (either cumulatively or in a particular semester) of less than 3.0, subject to one semester to remedy the deficiency;
- (3) failure to successfully complete a teaching assistantship (TA) by the end of the fourth semester in the program;
- (4) failure to meet student responsibilities to maintain eligibility for the Graduate School Tuition Benefits Program during semesters for which the student would otherwise be eligible (for eligibility criteria and student responsibilities to maintain eligibility for the Tuition Benefits Program, [click here](#));
- (5) failure to find an initial Research Advisor according to the EEOB and MECB timelines for advisor selection, or to find a different Research Advisor following the dissolution of an existing student/Research Advisor relationship;
- (6) failure to schedule or attend all Ph.D. Supervisory Committee meetings according the timeline and criteria specified in the Handbook;
- (7) failure to pass written and oral parts of milestone exams, or failure to attempt a milestone exam in the allotted time period (i.e., a Capstone Exam, a Ph.D. Qualifying Exam, or a Ph.D. Dissertation Defense);
- (8) academic or scientific/research misconduct, or behavioral misconduct;

- (9) failure to make timely progress toward completion of the Ph.D. degree as determined by the student's Supervisory Committee (an evaluation of "unsatisfactory progress");
- (10) failure to meet the graduation milestones submitted to the Graduate School in a petition for extension of time to graduate (this only applies to students taking longer than the SBS approved time for completion of the Ph.D. degree).
- (11) failure to maintain the Graduate School's [continuous registration requirement](#).

If concerns arise due to behavioral misconduct, these issues are adjudicated through the Office of the Dean of Students. In any such event, the procedures outlined in the [Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities](#) (University policy Policy 6-400) will be followed. For University policies related to scientific/research misconduct, [click here](#).

Regarding point (9), "unsatisfactory progress" as determined by a Supervisory Committee, written feedback regarding deficiencies and ways to rectify them should be provided to the student early on. Such deficiencies should also be noted on the last page of the Developmental Plan Form that must be completed by the Supervisory Committee following each Supervisory Committee meeting. The student's Research Advisor and/or Supervisory Committee may include in the Developmental Plan Form milestones or goals with associated deadlines that will be used to assess the student's future progress. The Developmental Plan Form should also note any progress or failure in meeting previous goals or milestones (if any). Although Supervisory Committee meetings must be held annually, if deemed advisable Supervisory Committee meetings can occur at shorter intervals. For all Supervisory Committee meetings, the Developmental Plan Form must be filled out and returned to the Graduate Program Coordinator [as described here](#).

The Director of Graduate Studies and the Graduate Program Committee monitor the progress students make toward the completion of their degrees (see section "[Graduate Program Committee Oversight of Students](#)"), and the Director of Graduate Studies, who is the Chair of the Graduate Program Committee, is responsible for dismissing students from the Ph.D. Program when a student fails to make satisfactory progress toward the Ph.D. degree. In reviewing a dismissal case to arrive at a decision, the Director of Graduate Studies may consult with the student, the student's Research Advisor, Supervisory Committee, the other members of the Graduate Program Committee, the SBS Director, the Graduate School, the Office of the Dean of Students, and the Office of General Counsel.

If a dismissal decision is reached, the student will be given timely and written feedback by the Director of Graduate Studies detailing the deficiencies that led to a decision for dismissal. Dismissal of a student from the Ph.D. Program will be carried out in compliance with [University of Utah Policy 6-400](#) which includes rights for the student to appeal the dismissal decision.

Under some circumstances it may be possible for a student who is being dismissed from the Ph.D. Program to transfer to the SBS M.S. Program ([click here](#) to learn more). Dismissal from the SBS Graduate Program results in termination of all funding (if applicable), including tuition waiver, stipend, and health insurance, and access to all electronic and physical resources in the school that are not available to the public.

Voluntarily Leaving the Ph.D. Program

A student who decides to leave the Ph.D. Program must inform the Director of Graduate Studies in writing and give the Research Advisor a 30-day written notice. If a student leaves the Ph.D. Program before completing the requirements of the Ph.D., they cannot and will not be awarded a SBS Ph.D. degree. During the 30 days, any research must be brought to a point where it can be easily passed on to a new person. The 30 days can be shortened upon mutual agreement of both the student and Research Advisor. All notebooks and data must be returned to the Research Advisor before the student leaves the program.

Students should be aware that there are several consequences of leaving the Ph.D. Program early. To ensure that they understand these consequences, they should contact the Graduate Program Coordinator immediately to arrange a meeting to discuss leaving. In addition to impacting their eligibility for a degree, the timing of a student's departure from the program impacts whether tuition must be reimbursed. *Importantly, students adding and/or dropping courses after the semester's published add/drop deadlines are responsible for any and all tuition charges if they withdraw.* The Tuition Benefits Program will not pay for withdrawn credit hours, and if registration falls below the required credit hours at any time during the semester, a student becomes ineligible for the program's tuition benefit and will be billed the full tuition for that semester.

Further, the student should recognize that they might be required to re-apply should they wish to continue in the future in an SBS graduate program to work on the same or another advanced degree (but see the following section about the possibility of transitioning to the M.S. Program).

Students being supported as TAs should also be aware that it is very difficult to find TA replacements mid-semester and should be considerate of the negative effect on instruction their early departure may have.

Leaving the Ph.D. Program to Obtain an M.S. Degree

Under some circumstances, a Ph.D. student may voluntarily wish to leave the Ph.D. Program and enter the M.S. program. In addition, Ph.D. students found to be making unsatisfactory progress toward their Ph.D. degree may be able to transition to the M.S. Program. The possibility/feasibility and ease of transition from the Ph.D. Program to the M.S. Program depends on several factors, including but not limited to the number of credit hours accrued, whether the Ph.D. Qualifying Exam was successfully completed, and if there is a sufficient body of original research to constitute an M.S. thesis (or alternatively, a clear and timely path to get there). Further, the Director of Graduate Studies, as well as the Graduate School, must approve the transition. In evaluating such a request, the Director of Graduate Studies will consult with the student's current Ph.D. Research Advisor and the student's current Ph.D. Supervisory Committee. Generally, the Director of Graduate Studies will not approve a transfer to the M.S. Program unless both the Research Advisor and/or a majority of the student's Ph.D. Supervisory Committee are supportive (i.e., believe the student is capable of satisfying M.S. degree requirements in a timely manner). Transfer to the M.S. degree program will also remove any guarantees of financial support enjoyed by students in the Ph.D. Program.

If a student wishes to transfer from the Ph.D. Program to the M.S. Program they should contact the Graduate Program Coordinator **as soon as possible** for more information and instructions, as well as to ensure they fully understand the consequences of entering the SBS M.S. Program. Additional information about the School of Biological Science's M.S. Program can be [found here](#).

Master of Science (M.S.) Degree

Overview

The goal of the M.S. Program in the SBS is to develop independent and vibrant scientists who are prepared for successful careers in academia, industry, government, or other sectors at the M.S. level. This requires the ability to conduct research, analyze data, collaborate with others, and communicate research and science in both oral and written forms. Students obtain these skills from coursework, research experiences in laboratory or computational research, attending presentations and seminars, and by preparing a thesis consisting of original research that makes a substantial contribution to a respective field in the biological sciences.

In many ways, the aims of an M.S. degree are the same as those for a Ph.D degree. A key difference, however, is that the scope of contribution of original research required for an M.S. degree is less than that for a Ph.D. Correspondingly, the anticipated time for completion of an M.S. degrees is less (~2 years versus ~5 years). Historically, some Ph.D. programs required (or preferred) that applicants first obtain an M.S. degree before applying for acceptance into a Ph.D. program. For many institutions and programs, including for the SBS at the University of Utah, this is (often) no longer the case.

Nevertheless, for students who wish to obtain an advanced degree without attempting the more lengthy and involved Ph.D. degree, or just want to test if research is right for them, enrollment in the M.S. Program can be a good option, and may enhance future earning potential and career prospects. The SBS does not guarantee stipend or tuition support for M.S. students (but see below for more details).

Please contact the Graduate Program Coordinator if you have questions about whether applying to the SBS M.S. Program is right for you. Also, please note that the SBS only offers a thesis-based M.S. degree (i.e., a course-based M.S. degree, which is based solely on didactic coursework, is not offered).

Expected Learning Outcomes (M.S. degree)

Students successfully completing the SBS M.S. degree are expected to be able to:

- (1) Conduct original scientific research in the student's area of interest, including project design, development and acquisition of techniques, data collection, analysis and publication; students will acquire and be evaluated in these skills through formal course work and hands-on training in research laboratories.
- (2) Demonstrate a solid understanding of scientific literature in biology, with expert mastery of the scientific literature in the student's area of study. Mastery will be assessed by the student's ability to converse in both formal and informal settings that include discussions with the student's Supervisory Committee and colleagues.
- (3) Communicate original research and its relationship to the larger questions underpinning the research; mastery will be assessed by the student's presentation of their research to the school during their oral thesis defense in addition to any presentations at national and international venues.
- (4) Communicate original research findings to the scientific community in written form; mastery in this area will be assessed by the preparation of a thesis that represents a significant and original contribution to scientific knowledge.
- (5) Write an effective research proposal that identifies gaps in scientific knowledge, and that both elaborates a plan to address them as well as interpret potential findings; mastery in this area will be assessed in M.S. Qualifying Exam.
- (6) Develop a professional portfolio that may include, but not be limited to, a curriculum vitae and/or resume, a summary of research interests and experience, publications, and any other documents relevant to the student's career path.

Program Timeline and Milestones

As mandated by the Graduate School, at least 24 of the required 30 credit hours for an M.S. degree must be in resident study at the University of Utah. For the minimum Graduate School requirements for the M.S. degree, and for the process for petitioning for exceptions, please see the [Graduate School M.S. Degree](#)

[Requirements](#). Additional SBS-specific requirements for a M.S. in Biology, and their anticipated timelines for completion, are provided in the following sections. For a typical SBS M.S. degree timeline for completion of coursework, as well as other key milestones along the way including the M.S. Qualifying Exam and the Thesis Defense, see the figure in [Appendix 4](#).

Admissions Requirements & Procedures

Requirements

To apply to the SBS M.S. Programs, applicants must (1) have completed (or be on track to complete) a recognized four-year undergraduate degree (B.A./B.S.) and (2) have a minimum grade point average (GPA) of 3.0. In uncommon circumstances, applicants with a GPA of less than 3.0 may be considered (for instance, if a student has a GPA close to 3.0, has a strong record in biology-related coursework, and supportive letters of recommendation, especially from a prior research advisor or advisors).

Application Process

To apply to the SBS M.S. Program online, visit [here](#); follow the instructions on the application site to submit the following:

- (1) original transcripts;
- (2) three letters of recommendation (at least one from a faculty member in the college or university you attend/attended);
- (3) statement of purpose;
- (4) a curriculum vitae (CV/resume);
- (5) For non-domestic students, English proficiency scores (i.e., TOFEL, Duolingo, IELTS; for waiver eligibility please visit [here](#));
- (6) one or more faculty members you have identified as potential M.S. Research Advisors.

The SBS does not require, nor does it consider, GRE scores during its review of applicants for graduate studies.

Statements of purpose are carefully reviewed by the Admissions Committee, and compelling statements can take many forms. However, successful ones usually include (1) a rationale for why a student wants to attend graduate school to obtain an M.S. degree, (2) a summary of prior research experiences and/or academic accomplishments, (3) a reason for selecting the SBS at the University of Utah, and (4) the identification of a thesis Research Advisor(s), and a justification for the selection(s).

A student will **not be** accepted into the SBS M.S. Program unless they obtain, by prior arrangement or during the interview process, consent from an SBS faculty member to serve as a Research Advisor.

Application and Acceptance Dates

The yearly deadline for applications for the SBS M.S. Program is December 1. Applications are only reviewed once a year by the Admissions Committee. Review of domestic applicants, including US citizens and international students residing in the US, will be completed by approximately the end of January. Top candidates will be interviewed, either in person if possible (if a student resides locally) or otherwise online, before admissions decisions are made (interviews are usually scheduled in February). In general, students

interview with one or more faculty interested in hosting them in their laboratories for thesis studies (potential Research Advisors), along with at least one member of the Admissions Committee. Offers of acceptance or declination will be made within about two weeks of interviews.

By agreement with other US universities, students should make their decisions to accept SBS graduate offers by April 15. The SBS is under no obligation to honor offers accepted after April 15, but may do so on a case-by-case basis. To accept an offer, contact the Graduate Program Coordinator by email for instructions. The University of Utah subscribes to the [Council of Graduate Schools April 15 Resolution](#) that protects and clarifies the rights of prospective students and universities during the admissions process.

International Student Requirements & Visa Instructions

In addition to the general requirements, international students may have to submit one of several English proficiency assessments (i.e., TOFEL, Duolingo, or IELTS, but [click here](#) for waiver eligibility).

An I-20 Certificate of Eligibility is necessary to apply for an F-1 student visa through a U.S. Consulate abroad or to maintain F-1 student status in the United States. The University of Utah will begin processing the I-20 after a student accepts our admission offer. Contact the Graduate Program Coordinator for questions related to obtaining the F-1 visa and refer to the Admissions Office for detailed instructions ([click here](#)).

Transferring into the M.S. Program from Other Departments

The SBS does not accept transfer of graduate students from other institutions. Graduate students currently at other institutions who wish to join the SBS M.S. Program must apply to join the program as new students. Further, the SBS does not allow transfer of graduate course credits from other institutions.

Current University graduate students in M.S. or Ph.D. programs in other departments can apply to transfer to the SBS M.S. Program only if they have identified a Research Advisor in the SBS. Application materials to be emailed to the Graduate Program Coordinator include a CV, a Statement of Purpose, undergraduate and graduate transcripts (including from the University of Utah), and three letters of recommendation, including one from the student's current Research Advisor or alternatively the respective Director of Graduate Studies in the student's current department. Additionally, a fourth letter of support must be provided by the prospective future Research Advisor in the SBS. Transfer applications are due **on December 1 of each year**, and will be evaluated in parallel to new student applicants by the Admissions Committee. If the student is accepted into the SBS, they may begin work in a laboratory in January. Exceptions to this timeline must be approved by the Director of Graduate Studies and any such applications must still be evaluated and approved by the Admissions Committee.

Upon joining the SBS, each transfer student is required to attend an orientation to the SBS Graduate Program that will be organized by the Graduate Program Coordinator. Within two months the student must form a Supervisory Committee and have the first meeting with the committee. The Supervisory Committee will assess if prior coursework, and/or a Qualifying Exam taken in another department, will be honored toward the SBS M.S. degree requirements, and establish a timeline for their completion if needed. If an M.S. Qualifying Exam in the SBS is deemed necessary by the student's newly formed Supervisory Committee, it must be attempted within six months of the time of transfer.

Financial Support & Tuition Benefits

The SBS makes no guarantee of stipend support, tuition support, or health care coverage to M.S. students.

However, students in the SBS M.S. Program may be supported as a Research Assistant (RA) or Graduate Assistant-Research Focus (GR) by funds from a faculty member's research grant or by other mechanisms

or funds available to the Research Advisor, granted directly to the student. The granting of funds by a Research Advisor is solely at their discretion, however, and many faculty do not provide M.S. students stipend support. In addition, a M.S. student may seek outside support from a funding agency (i.e., a fellowship) if approved by their Supervisory Committee. The level of support cannot, however, exceed that of students in the Ph.D. Program unless the level is dictated by the external funding agency. For students whose Supervisory Committee has not yet been formed, approval of external support must be obtained in advance from the Director of Graduate Studies.

In exceptional circumstances, and only with prior approval of both the Director of Graduate Studies and Director of the SBS, an M.S. student may function, and receive support, as a Teaching Assistant.

Students receiving financial support from one of the above mechanisms *may* also be eligible for tuition coverage via the Tuition Benefit Program, as well as health care coverage. For more information, please see a description of the [Tuition Benefits Program](#) from the Graduate School and contact the Graduate Program Coordinator. When a student is being supported in their M.S. degree by a Research Advisor or other source at the level of a Ph.D. student, it is expected that they will devote all their working time to their M.S. degree studies.

Program Coursework

Required Courses

To receive a M.S. degree from the SBS, a student must complete/satisfy the following requirements:

- (1) at least 30 credit hours of courses numbered 5000 or above;
- (2) of these, a minimum of 24 credit hours must be in courses other than BIOL 6970 (Thesis Research);
- (3) up to ten hours of BIOL 6950 (Independent Study) can be counted toward the 24 credit hour minimum;
- (4) at least six credit hours of BIOL 6970 (Thesis Research), a Graduate School requirements for a M.S. degree (review the Graduate School M.S. requirements by [clicking here](#));
- (5) at least 12 credit hours must be in SBS courses (“BIOL”) other than BIOL 6950 and 6970;
- (6) at least two semesters of BIOL 7810 (Scientific Speaking), with no limit on the number of semesters of BIOL 7810 that can be taken;

An incoming student should meet with their future Research Advisor (the Chair of their future Supervisory Committee) prior to the beginning of classes to decide on a program of study for the first semester. Ultimately, an SBS M.S. student’s Supervisory Committee is responsible for approving the student’s program of study. In general, M.S. students will select graduate courses primarily from the course offerings for the SBS’s EEOB and/or MCEB Ph.D. Programs (to view these course offerings, click [here](#) and [here](#), respectively). The SBS strongly encourages, but does not require, students to take 6210 (Computing w/ Python) and 6500 (Adv Stats Modeling Biol).

The SBS requires that M.S. students receive a grade of “B-” or better, or a “CR” (credit) in a course offered with the credit/no-credit option, in all graduate courses to remain in good standing in the SBS M.S. Program. If a course is not passed subject to these minimal letter grade criteria, a student may be granted one chance to rectify the grade (please see below). Further, for each semester a student is in the program, a minimum grade point average (GPA) of 3.0 is also required, subject to one semester to bring the GPA back to above 3.0. Failure to meet these criteria will result in dismissal from the M.S. Program.

Students are strongly encouraged to complete all their required course work, excepting 6950 (Independent Study) or 6970 (Thesis Research), during their first three semesters in the program (excepting summer semesters), and the bulk of the didactic coursework should be completed in the first year. Students must also satisfy the Graduate School mandate for continuous registration as described [here](#).

Retaking a Failed Course

If a student does not pass a graduate course subject to the letter grade criterium described above, they may petition the Director of Graduate Studies in writing to either retake the course or to take a similar alternative course. This must be done within two weeks of receiving the failing grade. The student must include in the petition a plan and timeline for rectifying the failed course. The Director of Graduate Studies, in consultation with the student's Supervisory Committee, will notify the student in writing if the petition is granted. If a petition is not granted, or if the course that is retaken (or an agreed upon similar course) is not passed with a "B-"/"CR" grade or better, the student will be dismissed from the M.S. Program.

Course Registration Instructions

M.S. students should only register for courses as agreed upon with their Research Advisor / Supervisory Committee, and/or as instructed by the Graduate Program Coordinator. Information about registering for courses can be found [here](#).

Selection of a Research Advisor: Eligibility and Advice

Overview

The selection of a Research Advisor is among the most significant decisions a student will make in graduate school. It substantially impacts the next ~2 years of an M.S. student's life, the chances of success in obtaining a degree, and may impact career trajectories long after graduate school ends. The choice of advisor should not be taken casually. A number of factors should be considered. Minimally, the Research Advisor should be willing to:

- (1) Meet regularly with the student to discuss idea, progress, challenges, needs and provide the necessary resources and advice;
- (2) Provide prompt feedback on the quality of the student's work and its future directions (including informing the student if the work does not meet the Research Advisor's and SBS's standards);
- (3) Give timely feedback on thesis chapters and manuscripts to enable graduation in an appropriate time frame, and to advance the student's career;
- (4) Provide and ensure a respectful and professional working environment in the laboratory.

In selecting a Research Advisor, students are strongly encouraged to **explicitly** discuss expectations with candidate faculty members to ensure a good fit. For instance, students or faculty may have differing opinions on what constitutes a satisfactory level of interaction and/or feedback and hence discussion of what constitutes an appropriate compromise is strongly advised to ensure that student and faculty expectations are aligned.

Eligibility to Serve as a Research Advisor & Other Considerations

Only tenured or tenure-track faculty members in the SBS are eligible to serve as Research Advisors to SBS graduate students. While the SBS values its adjunct faculty, they may not serve as an SBS student's formal Research Advisor, nor can University of Utah faculty in other departments or units. The SBS does not allow

a student to select co-Advisors; although collaboration is strongly encouraged, only one faculty member can assume the formal role of Research Advisor.

Supervisory Committee Formation & Policies

Supervisory Committee Roles

A student's Supervisory Committee complements and assists the student's Research Advisor in directing student research and professional development. In this role, Supervisory Committee members are a source of advice and support independent of the Research Advisor, and should the need arise, also participate in student-advisor conflict resolution. Together with the Research Advisor, the Supervisory Committee constitutes the body that makes key decisions regarding a student's progress towards obtaining a degree. Supervisory Committee members are present during regularly scheduled meetings with the student, as well as at oral examinations including the final M.S. Thesis Defense, and provide timely evaluation of the student's progress.

Supervisory Committee Selection

SBS M.S. students are required to form a Supervisory Committee (and have the first meeting) by the end of their first semester in the M.S. Program.

The Supervisory Committee has three voting members and must consist of:

- (1) the Research Advisor, who serves as Chair of the committee;
- (2) two other voting members, at least one of whom must be a tenured or tenure-track faculty of the SBS; all three members of the Supervisory Committee can be in the SBS (and often are).

In most cases all M.S. student Supervisory Committee members will hold tenure or tenure-track positions at the University of Utah or at other comparable, research-intensive academic institutions. However, scientists holding other positions, but who are engaged in active research, and who have a track record of supervision of students, may be eligible for Supervisory Committee service. All requests for Supervisory Committee members who are not tenured or tenure-track faculty at the University of Utah must be accompanied by the CV of the potential committee member and a letter of justification for the choice signed by the student and the student's Research Advisor. These requests must also be approved by the Dean of the Graduate School. Approval should not be taken for granted. Examples of requests that are unlikely to be approved are for individuals who do not possess a Ph.D. degree, or who were prior instructors or advisors of students at other institutions, or who otherwise had or have another type of close professional or personal relationship to students.

To provide students with independent Supervisory Committee feedback and evaluation, the SBS also requires that no Supervisory Committee members can be related to each other (for example, be married or be domestic partners) or to the student. Former students or postdoctoral fellows of the Research Advisor are generally ineligible to serve as Supervisory Committee members until they have achieved tenure at their current institution. Further, any other potential (or perceived) conflicts of interest must be disclosed at the time the request to form a Supervisory Committee is made. An example of such might be an individual who works at a private company and who has a financial interest in the outcome of a student's research. All individuals must meet qualifications prescribed by the Graduate School.

In selecting Supervisory Committee members, students are encouraged to first talk with their Research Advisors, who serve as a valuable source of advice about potential committee members. Students should

then arrange a time to discuss their thesis research plans and career goals with each prospective committee member. After obtaining affirmative commitments from all members of a potential Supervisory Committee, the names and positions of all members must be submitted to the Graduate Program Coordinator (as should any other related documentation). Ultimately, the Director of Graduate Studies, and then the Graduate School, must approve Supervisory Committees, as well as any changes to Supervisory Committees after they have formed (i.e., if a faculty member retires and must be replaced by another member).

Required Meetings & Communication

The SBS prioritizes timely Supervisory Committee feedback to students that occurs during mandatory Supervisory Committee meetings that must take place during fall semesters (including during the first year the in the program). Any exceptions to this timeline require prior approval of the Director of Graduate Studies and will not be granted without justification and a projected date/timeline for when a required meeting will take place. Students typically schedule two hours for Supervisory Committee meetings; as faculty members have many commitments, students are encouraged to arrange Supervisory Committee weeks (or even months) in advance to ensure availability. Completion of the yearly Supervisory Committee meetings is tracked by the SBS Graduate Program, the College of Science, and by the Graduate School, and they are a requirement to remain in good standing in the SBS Graduate Program. In addition to regular yearly meetings, the Supervisory Committee also administers and adjudicates the M.S. Qualifying Exam and Thesis Defense. The SBS requires that all Supervisory Committee members attend M.S. Supervisory Committee meetings.

While the format of a committee meeting is at the discretion of the Supervisory Committee, meetings typically involve a review and approval of the student's coursework (especially for the first meeting), a student presentation of research progress, future research directions, anticipated thesis chapters, and a projected timeline for potential graduation (especially for students in the 2nd year or onward), activities related to professional development, as well as other topics the student or Supervisory Committee deem relevant. During the second Supervisory Committee meeting at the latest, a timeline for attempting the M.S. Qualifying Exam should be agreed upon.

Prior to each Supervisory Committee meeting, the student is required to provide the committee with the yearly SBS Developmental Plan Form. For more about the Developmental Plan Form, where to download it, and for instructions for its completion, [click here](#).

Finally, although yearly Supervisory Committee meetings are required, this is the minimal requirement. The student, the Research Advisor, or the Supervisory Committee by majority vote, may arrange more frequent meetings if deemed necessary or useful (for instance, if there are concerns about a student's research direction, its feasibility, or student progress).

Mandatory Milestone Examinations for the M.S. Program

In addition to the completion of required coursework, two exams with both written and oral components must be passed for a M.S. from the SBS to be awarded. The first is the M.S. Qualifying Exam, which assesses a student's preparation to continue in the program in the context of a proposal for thesis research. Second, the M.S. Thesis Defense assesses if a student's critical thinking skills and body of original research meet the standards for a M.S. degree to be awarded. Information about these milestones exams is given in the following sections.

M.S. Qualifying Exam Procedure

Overview and General Philosophy

Students from the M.S. Program must attempt and pass the M.S. Qualifying Exam that consists of a written and oral proposal of the thesis work by the end of the 3rd semester in the M.S. Program (summer semesters excluded). The SBS does not allow second attempts for students who fail the Qualifying Exam, and therefore failure to pass the Qualifying Exam (both the written and oral components) will result in dismissal from the SBS M.S. Program. The Qualifying Exam requirements will be enforced uniformly among candidates. The SBS's "M.S. Qualifying Exam" constitutes a "Comprehensive Examination" for M.S. students as defined by the Graduate School ([Master's Degree Requirements; V. Examinations: Thesis Option; B: Comprehensive Examination](#)).

M.S. Qualifying Exam Committee

The committee which evaluates the student's exam performance consists of the student's three-member Supervisory Committee. A member of the Supervisory Committee other than the chairperson (the Research Advisor) will be selected to oversee the administration of the Qualifying Exam and is responsible for ensuring that the rules for the Qualifying Exam are followed. The chairperson must be a member of the SBS.

Written and Oral Exam Components for the M.S. Qualifying Exam

The Qualifying Exam will consist of a written document that will be defended in a single oral defense. Decisions of "pass" or "fail" for both the written and oral components of the Qualifying Exam will be by majority vote of the Supervisory Committee (at least two votes in favor). To pass the exam, decisions of pass on both the written and oral components are required.

The written component will consist of a research proposal on the topic of the student's proposed thesis research. The student should describe the background leading to the proposed research, the significance of the research, the research approach (design and methods) for achieving the specific aims, the rationale for the proposed approach, potential pitfalls, and expected/alternative outcomes of the proposed studies. Formatting requirements are as follows: a project description not longer than six pages, single spaced, Arial 11 or Times / Times New Roman 12 font (excepting figure legends, which can have smaller font sizes but must still be easily readable), and one-inch margins. Figures and/or tables are included but citations excluded from page limitations.

The student is encouraged to consult with their Research Advisor during preparation for the Qualifying Exam about the concepts and principles of the study. The Research Advisor and other members of the Supervisory Committee can have conversations with the student about specific aims and provide guidance and recommendations on the development of the experimental approach. However, the student is responsible for crafting a document that speaks in their voice, and the Research Advisor and Supervisory Committee members may not view or contribute to the writing or editing of the proposal. The student may, however, solicit feedback from other faculty, postdocs and graduate students.

The student will submit the written research proposal on a date agreed upon by the Supervisory Committee. The Supervisory Committee will have two weeks to evaluate the written document. If the Supervisory Committee requests revisions, the student will have two weeks to complete them and resubmit the revised proposal. The Supervisory Committee will then have one week to reevaluate the written component of the exam and arrive at a pass or fail decision.

The oral component of the Qualifying Exam cannot be formally scheduled until the student has passed the written component and must take place within 30 days from the time the student passed the written component of the exam. In the oral defense, the student may give a formal presentation of the proposal to the Supervisory Committee, but it may not exceed 10 slides with no animation. The oral component of the

Qualifying Exam may cover any material deemed appropriate by the Supervisory Committee and should not exceed two hours in length.

It is the responsibility of the Chair of the M.S. Qualifying Exam Committee to communicate the results of the Qualifying Exam to the student and Graduate Program Coordinator within three days from when the Qualifying Exam takes place.

The evaluation of the written component will focus on the following areas of assessment:

1. The clarity of the scientific writing, including the use of appropriate scientific terminology and reporting standards.
2. Inclusion of appropriate scholarship. Is the proposal written with sufficient discussion and citation of previous work, such that it is original and describes work that will serve as a novel and compelling advance in the candidate's field?
3. Feasibility of the work in the context of available resources, including equipment, supplies and expertise that can be accessed by the candidate, and within the time constraints of the program.
4. Demonstration of understanding of the scientific questions, methodologies and data analysis techniques, both conceptually and technically.
5. Discussion of pitfalls and alternative approaches, where applicable.

The evaluation of the oral component will focus on the following areas of assessment:

1. The candidate's understanding of the content of the written proposal and ability to defend and/or appreciate criticism(s) from the committee.
2. The candidate's understanding of related scientific concepts, literature and research techniques, which should be commensurate with carrying out the proposed work.
3. The candidate's ability to describe, defend and discuss aspects of their proposal in the oral format, accompanied with visual aids that are concise and clear.

Exceptions or modifications to these rules must be approved in advanced by the Director of Graduate Studies. Students requiring accommodations should contact and make arrangements with the Center for Disability Access (<https://disability.utah.edu>) in advance.

If a student transfers to the M.S. program from the Ph.D program, and has already taken and passed the qualifying exam for the Ph.D., the M.S. Supervisory Committee will determine whether this meets the requirements of, and substitutes for, the M.S. Qualifying Exam. If a transferring student has not taken and passed the Ph.D. qualifying exam, or if the M.S. Supervisory Committee decides not to accept the results of the Ph.D. Qualifying Exam, the student will be required to complete and pass the M.S. qualifying exam as described above.

M.S. Thesis Defense

The M.S. Thesis Defense has a written and oral component, the administration of which is prescribed by the Graduate School ([click here](#); the following guidelines conform to these requirements). The written document consists of chapters, one or more of which present original research. What constitutes a body of work sufficient for a successful defense, as well as the number and structure of chapters, should be arrived at in discussions between the student and the Supervisory Committee. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the Supervisory Committee to set expectations and adjudicate the thesis defense. All decisions of the Supervisory Committee during the defense process will be by majority vote. It is critical that students

discuss expectations for an M.S. thesis with their Research Advisor and Supervisory Committee regularly, especially as they progress in the M.S. Program.

The date of the oral defense for the thesis must be approved by the Supervisory Committee. By Graduate School policy, at least **three weeks** before the final oral examination (thesis defense), the student should submit an acceptable draft of the thesis to the chair of the Supervisory Committee (the Research Advisor, unless other arrangements are made by the Supervisory Committee for another member to be chair), and the student must submit the draft to other committee members at least **two weeks** before the examination date. An expectation of the SBS is that a Supervisory Committee will carefully review the written thesis prior to the oral defense; if a Supervisory Committee deems that a thesis document is insufficient, the committee may, at its discretion, request revisions to the thesis and reschedule the oral defense. Failure of a student to produce an acceptable written thesis will be assessed by the Supervisory Committee as making unsatisfactory progress toward the degree.

The student must pass the final oral examination of the thesis before graduation, and failure to pass the oral examination will result in dismissal from the SBS Graduate Program. The oral component consists of a public presentation of research that lasts ~30-45 minutes, followed by ~5 minutes of questions, followed by a private meeting and additional questions/comments with only Supervisory Committee members present. The oral defense and subsequent meeting of the student and the Supervisory Committee must be in person unless prior approval is given by the Director of Graduate Studies (the Director of Graduate Studies is under no obligation to grant exceptions). The Graduate Program Coordination oversees the scheduling of rooms for the oral defense. The chair of the Supervisory Committee is responsible for communications between the committee and the student during the defense process; further, the chair must inform the Graduate Program Coordinator of a pass/fail decision on the day of the oral defense. If a student does not pass the oral examination, the student may be allowed one attempt to retake the oral examination with the approval of both the Supervisory Committee and the Director of Graduate Studies (otherwise, the student is dismissed from the SBS Graduate Program).

It is critical that students inform the Graduate Program Coordinator of the oral defense date at least three weeks prior, and they must also contact the Graduate Program Coordinator during the semester before an oral defense is planned to initiate the formal approval of their Ph.D. Program of Study (for more information, [click here](#)). Students should carefully follow all instructions from the Graduate Program Coordinator to ensure that any forms needed for a defense are completed according the Graduate School's mandated timeline. Failure to finalize the program of study, or complete other needed forms, may result in *long delays* in a thesis defense, and have tuition/financial repercussions.

After a student passes an oral defense, *the written thesis document must be submitted to the Thesis Office in the Graduate School and approved*. This should be done no later than about 2-3 weeks after the oral defense; this process is monitored by the SBS and Graduate School, and the student and Research Advisor may be contacted if there is a delay. Supervisory Committees should **not allow** a student to progress to an oral defense if the written component of the thesis needs more than minor revisions; while thesis chapters with original research are ideally published in peer-reviewed scientific journals, this itself is not an SBS requirement, and is not a justification for delaying thesis defenses or their approval by the Research Advisor and Supervisory Committee.

Students requiring accommodations for any component of the M.S. thesis defense are requested to contact and make arrangements with the Center for Disability Access (<https://disability.utah.edu>) in advance.

The [Thesis Office](#) in the Graduate School has formatting rules for the thesis document. Students are **strongly encouraged** to review these formatting rules ([click here](#)) early and often when writing the thesis to avoid time consuming reformatting later on and delays in the awarding of the M.S. degree. **The degree**

will not be issued by the University until the written document is submitted to and formally accepted by the Thesis Office.

Time Limit for a M.S. Degree & Petition for an Extension

Students who successfully complete a M.S. degree in the SBS typically do so in approximately two years, and the SBS time-limit for **completion of an M.S. degree is four years** (the upper limit suggested by the Graduate School). However, the SBS and the Graduate School recognize that under exceptional circumstances additional time may be required. With the approval of the student's Research Advisor, Supervisory Committee by majority vote, and the Director of Graduate Studies, a student may petition the Graduate School for an extension of time to graduation of more than four years.

Instructions from the Graduate School for petitioning for an extension can be found [here](#); *students should carefully read and follow all instructions*. Minimally, however, for a student to petition they must be in otherwise good standing in the M.S. Program and have a ***strong and feasible plan to complete the M.S. degree with dates for the completion of remaining milestones***. Ultimately, the decision to grant a petition for an extension resides with the Graduate School. Failure to meet milestones or other criteria outlined in a successful petition for an extension to graduate will result in dismissal from the M.S. Program as specified by the Graduate School and by SBS M.S. dismissal policies. Students in the M.S. program should therefore make every effort to finish at the end of the 2nd year in the program, and in no more than **four** years.

Changing Research Groups & Dismissal Policies (M.S. Program)

The following guidelines have been approved by the SBS Faculty for the rare occasions when it becomes necessary to terminate a graduate student/Research Advisor research relationship or dismiss a student from the program. Either the graduate student or the Research Advisor may terminate a student/advisor research relationship because of dissatisfaction, and the Director of Graduate Studies may dismiss a student from the M.S. Program for failure of satisfactory progress toward the M.S. degree or for misconduct. The following guidelines describe these procedures. The student's rights and responsibilities in the case of dismissal are set forth in [Policy 6-400: Student Rights and Responsibilities](#) of the University [Regulations Library](#).

Changing an M.S. Research Advisor (Student Initiated)

When a student seeks a new research or laboratory environment, a transfer to another research group might be desired. The most important part of this process is open communication between all parties involved. If a student is considering transfer to another group, the student should meet with the Director of Graduate Studies to discuss the implications of this important decision and to formulate a plan of action. Depending on the situation, the student will need to communicate with the current Research Advisor, members of the Supervisory Committee, and potential new Research Advisors.

Once the plan of action is finalized and the decision to transfer is made, the student is obligated to petition in writing to the Director of Graduate Studies to obtain their written permission. The student is obligated to give the current Research Advisor a 15-day written notice and to outline the reasons for leaving the group. During the 15 days, any research must be brought to a point where it can be passed on to a new person. All notebooks and data must be returned to the Research Advisor before the student joins another faculty member's laboratory. If there is unanimous agreement between the student, the Research Advisor, and a new Research Advisor, the 15-day period may be shortened.

After transferring to a new group, the student may also need to reconstitute the Supervisory Committee, e.g., if they have switched primary research areas. If the student has already successfully completed an M.S.

Qualifying Examination, the student must (1) prepare a brief (~3 page) summary outlining the new thesis project within three months of joining the new research group, and (2) present the new project in an oral presentation to the Supervisory Committee. Should the Supervisory Committee view the new project as unacceptable, the Supervisory Committee will give the student an evaluation of unsatisfactory progress and document the decision in writing to the Graduate Program Coordinator and Director of Graduate Studies (this should be done on the last page of the Developmental Plan Form). The result will be dismissal from the SBS M.S. Program.

Dismissal by Faculty from a Student/Research Advisor Relationship

If a Research Advisor is dissatisfied with the performance of a student, for example in terms of research effort, lab safety, data handling, and/or research ethics or working environment, the advisor should make an effort at an early stage of the dissatisfaction to communicate in writing to the student the concerns about the deficiencies in the student's performance. If the deficiencies persist, the Research Advisor may place the student on probation by identifying to the student in writing the unsatisfactory aspects of the student's performance and the measures needed to bring their performance to an acceptable level. Students are allowed a reasonable time (at least 30 calendar days) to correct the deficiencies during the probationary period, the length of which will be communicated by the Research Advisor. A copy of the letter outlining the deficiencies and timeline for corrective actions for a student's performance must be sent to the Director of Graduate Studies and the Graduate Program Coordinator. If the deficiencies are corrected in the probationary period, the Research Advisor will notify the student in writing that the probation is ended. A copy of this letter must also be sent to the Director of Graduate Studies and the Graduate Program Coordinator.

If the deficiencies persist at the end of the probationary period, it is the prerogative of the Research Advisor to terminate the student/Research Advisor relationship. The procedure will be:

- (1) To notify the student in writing giving reasons for the dismissal, and indicating a formal termination date at least 15 days after the date of the letter. A copy of the letter must be sent to the Director of Graduate Studies and the Graduate Program Coordinator;
- (2) If the M.S. student is receiving stipend support as an RA or GR, the student will be kept on stipend support for 15 days after the date of the notification letter to facilitate the student finding a **new Research Advisor relationship**, unless the student starts in the laboratory of a new Research Advisor before the end of the 15 days. Please note that because the SBS does not guarantee stipend support for M.S. students, a new Research Advisor is not obliged to provide stipend support.
- (3) If the student fails to find a new Research Advisor, the student will be dismissed from the M.S. Program.

It is the student's obligation to turn over all data and notebooks in a manner that will allow the Research Advisor to continue the work; transfer and continued good standing in the M.S. Program is contingent on a student satisfactorily transferring all data/notebooks to the Research Advisor.

Formal Dismissal from the M.S. Program

While most students succeed in the SBS M.S. Program, disciplinary actions, including dismissal from the M.S. Program, are possible outcomes for graduate students deemed not to be making satisfactory progress toward the degree as outlined in the Handbook. A student is classified as making "unsatisfactory progress" toward the degree, and will no longer be in "good standing" in the program, if any of the following conditions apply ([see also here for definitions](#)):

- (1) failure to pass all courses with a grade of “B-”/“CR” or better;
- (2) a grade point average (either cumulatively or in a particular semester) of less than 3.0, subject to one semester to remedy the deficiency;
- (3) failure to find an initial Research Advisor for M.S. research, or to find a different Research Advisor following the dissolution of an existing student/Research Advisor relationship;
- (4) failure to schedule or attend all Supervisory Committee meetings according to the timeline and criteria specified in the Handbook;
- (5) failure to pass written and oral parts of milestone exams, or failure to attempt a milestone exam in the allotted time period (i.e., the M.S. Qualifying Exam and the M.S. Thesis Defense);
- (6) academic or scientific/research misconduct, or behavioral misconduct;
- (7) failure to make timely progress toward completion of the M.S. degree as determined by the student’s Supervisory Committee (an evaluation of “unsatisfactory progress”);
- (8) failure to meet graduation milestones as outlined in petitions for extensions to graduate submitted to the Graduate School (this only applies to students taking longer than the SBS approved time for completion of the M.S. degree);
- (9) failure to maintain the Graduate School’s [continuous registration requirement](#).

If concerns arise due to behavioral misconduct, these issues are adjudicated through the Office of the Dean of Students. In any such event, the procedures outlined in the [Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities](#) (University policy Policy 6-400) will be followed. For University policies related to scientific/research misconduct, [click here](#).

Regarding point seven above (“unsatisfactory progress” as determined by a Supervisory Committee): when reasonably possible, written feedback regarding deficiencies and ways to rectify them should be provided to the student early on. Such deficiencies should also be noted on the last page of the Developmental Plan Form that must be completed by the Supervisory Committee following each Supervisory Committee meeting. The student’s Research Advisor and/or Supervisory Committee may include in the Developmental Plan Form milestones or goals with associated deadlines that will be used to assess the student’s future progress. The Developmental Plan Form should also note any progress or failure in meeting previous goals or milestones (if any). Although Supervisory Committee meetings must be held annually, if deemed advisable Supervisory Committee meetings can occur at shorter intervals. For all Supervisory Committee meetings, the Developmental Plan Form must be filled out and returned to the Graduate Program Coordinator as [described here](#).

The Director of Graduate Studies and the Graduate Program Committee monitor the progress students make toward the completion of their degrees (see section “[Graduate Program Committee Oversight of Students](#)”), and the Director of Graduate Studies, who is the Chair of the Graduate Program Committee, is responsible for dismissing students from the M.S. Program when a student fails to make satisfactory progress toward the M.S. degree. In reviewing a dismissal case to arrive at a decision, the Director of Graduate Studies may consult with the student, the student’s Research Advisor, Supervisory Committee, the other members of the Graduate Program Committee, the SBS Director, the Graduate School, the Office of the Dean of Students, and the Office of General Counsel.

If a dismissal decision is reached, the student will be given timely and written feedback by the Director of Graduate Studies detailing the deficiencies that led to a decision for dismissal. Dismissal of a student from the M.S. Program will be carried out in compliance with [University of Utah Policy 6-400](#), which includes rights for the student to appeal the dismissal decision.

Dismissal from the SBS Graduate Program results in termination of all funding (if applicable), including tuition waiver, stipend, and health insurance, and access to all electronic and physical resources in the school that are not available to the public.

Voluntarily Leaving the Program

A student who decides to leave the M.S. Program must inform the Director of Graduate Studies in writing and give the Research Advisor a 15-day written notice. If a student leaves the M.S. program before completing the requirements of the M.S. degree, they cannot and will not be awarded a SBS M.S. degree. During the 15 days, any research should be brought to a point where it can be easily passed on to a new person. The 15 days can be shortened upon mutual agreement of both the student and Research Advisor. All notebooks and data must be returned to the Research Advisor before the student leaves the program.

Students should be aware that, depending on whether they are receiving stipend support from a Research Advisor, there may be several consequences of leaving the M.S. Program early. To ensure that they understand these consequences, they should contact the Graduate Program Coordinator to arrange a meeting to discuss leaving (all students, regardless of whether they are receiving stipend support, should contact the Graduate Program Coordinator). In addition to impacting their eligibility for a degree, the timing of a student's departure from the program might, in cases where a Research Advisor has chosen to subsidize an M.S. student's tuition, impact whether tuition must be reimbursed. Importantly, students adding and/or dropping courses after the semester's published add/drop deadlines are responsible for any and all tuition charges if they withdraw. The Tuition Benefits Program will not pay for withdrawn credit hours, and if registration falls below the required credit hours at any time during the semester, a student becomes ineligible for the program's tuition benefit and will be billed the full tuition for that semester.

Further, the student should recognize that they will be required to re-apply should they wish to continue in future in a SBS graduate program to work on the same or another advanced degree.

Bachelor of Science & Master of Science (B.S/M.S.) Degree

Overview

For existing undergraduate students enrolled at the University of Utah and majoring in Biology, the SBS offers a combined B.S./M.S. degree designed to allow the recipient to receive both a B.S. and an M.S. degree in only ~5 years (typically, standalone B.S. degrees take ~4 years, and standalone M.S. degrees take ~2 years, so ~6 years in total).

The expedited B.S./M.S track available for enrolled undergraduates leverages the opportunity for students to begin thesis research that can count toward an M.S. thesis in what would normally be their senior year in the B.S. Program. As with the standalone M.S degree offered by the SBS, successful completion of the B.S/M.S. degree requires a student to conduct original research and defend an M.S. thesis (a B.S/M.S degree based solely on didactic course work is not offered by the SBS). Students who matriculate into the combined B.S/M.S Program receive no guarantees of a stipend or coverage of their tuition costs.

Obtaining an M.S. degree has the potential to enhance a student's future earning potential and career prospects. For more information on deciding if obtaining an M.S. degree as part of the B.S./M.S. Program is right for you, please see section "[Master of Science \(M.S.\) Degree](#)," and/or contact the Graduate Program Coordinator for additional information.

The expected learning outcomes (EOLs) for the M.S. component of the SBS B.S./M.S. degree are the same as for the SBS's standalone M.S. degree (to learn more [click here](#)).

Expected Learning Outcomes (M.S. Degree Component of B.S./M.S. Program)

Students successfully completing the SBS M.S. degree within the B.S./M.S. Program are expected to be able to:

- (1) Conduct original scientific research in the student's area of interest, including project design, development and acquisition of techniques, data collection, analysis and publication; students will acquire and be evaluated in these skills through formal course work and hands-on training in research laboratories.
- (2) Demonstrate a solid understanding of scientific literature in biology, with expert mastery of the scientific literature in the student's area of study. Mastery will be assessed by the student's ability to converse in both formal and informal settings that include discussions with the student's Supervisory Committee and colleagues.
- (3) Communicate original research and its relationship to the larger questions underpinning the research; mastery will be assessed by the student's presentation of their research to the school during their oral thesis defense in addition to any presentations at national and international venues.
- (4) Communicate original research findings to the scientific community in written form; mastery in this area will be assessed by the preparation of a thesis that represents a significant and original contribution to scientific knowledge.
- (5) Write an effective research proposal that identifies gaps in scientific knowledge, and that both elaborates a plan to address them as well as interpret potential findings; mastery in this area will be assessed in M.S. Qualifying Exam.
- (6) Develop a professional portfolio that may include, but not be limited to, a curriculum vitae and/or resume, a summary of research interests and experience, publications, and any other documents relevant to the student's career path.

Program Timeline and Milestones

As mandated by the Graduate School, at least 24 of the required 30 credit hours for an M.S. degree must be in resident study at the University of Utah. For the minimum Graduate School requirements for the M.S. degree, and for the process for petitioning for exceptions, please see the [Graduate School M.S. Degree Requirements](#). Additional SBS-specific requirements for a B.S./M.S. in Biology, and their anticipated timelines for completion, are provided in the following sections. For a typical SBS B.S./M.S. degree timeline for completion of coursework, as well as other key milestones along the way including the B.S./M.S. Qualifying Exam and the B.S./M.S. Thesis Defense, see the figure in [Appendix 4](#).

Admissions Requirements & Procedures

Students in the SBS B.S. Program with a GPA of 3.0 or higher are eligible to apply to the SBS B.S./M.S. Program during their junior year. It is strongly encouraged that students contact the Graduate Program Coordinator prior to applying to ensure they understand the application process as well as the consequences of joining the B.S./M.S. Program.

To apply to the SBS B.S./M.S. Program, email the following to the [Graduate Program Coordinator](#) no later than February 15 (or the next business day if the 15th falls on a weekend).

- (1) official copy of the student's current University of Utah transcript;
- (2) three letters of recommendation (**one must be a letter of support from an SBS faculty member who has agreed to serve as the future Research Advisor, and documents this in the letter**);
- (3) Essay (statement of purpose) explaining the reason for applying to the SBS B.S./M.S. Program;
- (4) a curriculum vitae (CV) (must include a UNID, a preferred University email address for correspondence, home address and phone number);

The SBS does not require, nor does it consider, GRE scores during its review of applicants for any graduate program.

Applications, including student essays, are reviewed by the Admissions Committee. Essays from successful applicants often include, in addition to a rationale for applying to the B.S./M.S. Program, a summary of prior research experiences and/or academic accomplishments (if applicable) and the reason for selecting the Research Advisor (see above).

Students deemed competitive for the B.S./M.S. Program will be asked to interview in person with one or more members of the Admissions Committee (a meeting of about 30 minutes to an hour). The Admissions Committee will then decide on whether to make an offer of admission, subject to approval by the Director of Graduate Studies, to the program by the end of approximately the first two weeks in March. If admission is recommended, students must then follow directions from the Graduate Program Coordinator to formally apply through the University graduate admissions portal.

Students must accept offers by April 15. The SBS is not obligated to honor offers accepted after April 15 and will do so at its discretion on a case-by-case basis. The University of Utah subscribes to the [Council of Graduate Schools April 15 Resolution](#) that protects and clarifies the rights of prospective students and universities during the admissions process.

Financial Support & Tuition Benefits

The SBS makes no guarantee of stipend support, tuition support, or health care coverage to B.S./M.S. students.

However, after being classified as a graduate student in the University system, students in the B.S./M.S. program may be supported as a Research Assistant (RA) or Graduate Assistant-Research Focus (GR) with funds from a faculty member's research grant, or by other mechanisms or funds available to the Research Advisor, granted directly to the student. The granting of funds by a Research Advisor is solely at their discretion, however, and neither the faculty or SBS are obligated to provide B.S./M.S. students stipend support. In addition, a M.S. student may seek outside support which meets with the approval of their Supervisory Committee. Regardless of the source of support, the level cannot exceed that of students in the Ph.D. Program, unless the level is dictated by an outside funding agency/source. For students whose Supervisory Committee has not yet been formed, approval of outside support must be obtained in advance from the Director of Graduate Studies.

In exceptional circumstances, and only with prior approval of both the Director of Graduate Studies and Director of the SBS, a B.S./M.S. student may function, and receive support, as a Teaching Assistant.

Students receiving financial support from one of the above mechanisms *may* be eligible for tuition coverage via the Tuition Benefit Program, as well as health care coverage. For more information, please see a description of the [Tuition Benefits Program](#) from the Graduate School and contact the Graduate Program Coordinator. When a student is being supported in their M.S. degree by a Research Advisor or other source at a funding level that qualifies them for the Tuition Benefits Program, it is expected that they will devote all their working time to their M.S. degree studies.

Program Coursework

Required Courses

To complete the B.S./M.S. degree, a student must satisfy the requirements for both the B.S. degree and the M.S. degree. The following sections in this Handbook cover the coursework requirements for the M.S. component of the B.S./M.S. degree. To ensure completion of the requirements needed for the B.S. component of the B.S./M.S. degree, students should consult with the [Director of Undergraduate Advising](#) (the Graduate Program Coordinator is also available to assist in this process).

To receive an M.S. degree from the SBS as part of the B.S./M.S. Program, a student must complete/satisfy the following requirements:

- (1) at least 30 credit hours of courses numbered 5000 or above;
- (2) a minimum of 24 credit hours must be in courses other than BIOL 6970 (Thesis Research);
- (3) up to three credit hours of BIOL 6950 (Independent Study) can be counted toward the 24 credit hour minimum;
- (4) at least six credit hours of BIOL 6970 (Thesis Research), a Graduate School requirements for a M.S. degree (review the Graduate School M.S. requirements by [clicking here](#));
- (5) at least 12 credit hours must be in SBS courses (“BIOL”) other than BIOL 6950 and 6970;
- (6) two semesters of BIOL 7810 (Scientific Speaking).

Students in the SBS B.S./M.S. Program should be aware that tuition for all courses, whether they count toward the B.S. or M.S. programs of study, are billed at the graduate student level beginning in the first semester that a student in the SBS B.S./M.S. Program is classified as a graduate student in the University system. Students who join the BS/MS Program are allowed to take six graduate credits once they join the program and while they are within one year of completing the undergraduate degree (typically fifth year of study).

An incoming student should meet with their future Research Advisor (the Chair of their Supervisory Committee) prior to the beginning of classes to decide on a program of study for the first semester. Ultimately, a student’s Supervisory Committee is responsible for approving the student’s graduate program of study. In general, B.S./M.S. students will select graduate courses primarily from the course offerings for the SBS’s EEOB and/or MCEB Ph.D. Programs (to view these course offerings, click [here](#) and [here](#), respectively). The SBS strongly encourages, but does not require, that students take BIOL 6210 (Computing w/ Python) and BIOL 6500 (Adv Stats Modeling Biol).

The SBS requires that students receive a grade of “B-” or better, or a “CR” (credit) in a course offered with the credit/no-credit option, in graduate courses to remain in good standing in the SBS B.S./M.S. Program. If a course is not passed subject to these minimal grade criteria, a student may be granted one chance to rectify the grade (please see below). Further, for each semester a student is in the program, a minimum grade point average (GPA) of 3.0 in graduate courses is also required, subject to one semester to bring the

GPA back to above 3.0. Failure to meet these criteria will result in dismissal from the SBS B.S./M.S. Program.

Students are encouraged to complete as many of their required courses, excepting BIOL 6950 (Independent Study) and/or BIOL 6970 (Thesis Research), before their last semester in the program. While classified as a graduate student by the University, students must also satisfy the Graduate School mandate for continuous registration as described [here](#).

Retaking a Failed Course

If a student does not pass a graduate course subject to the letter grade criteria described above, they may petition the Director of Graduate Studies in writing to either retake the course or to take a similar alternative course. This must be done within two weeks of receiving the failing grade. The student must include in the petition a plan and timeline for rectifying the failed course. The Director of Graduate Studies, in consultation with the student's Supervisory Committee, will notify the student in writing if the petition is granted. If a petition is not granted, or if the course that is retaken (or an agreed upon similar course) is not passed with a "B-"/"CR" grade or better, the student will be dismissed from the SBS B.S./M.S. program.

Course Registration Instructions

Only register for graduate courses as instructed by the Graduate Program Coordinator. Information about registering for courses can be found [here](#).

Selection of a Research Advisor: Eligibility and Advice

Overview

The selection of a Research Advisor is among the most significant decisions a student will make in joining the B.S./M.S. Program. It substantially impacts the next ~2 years of a student's life, the chances of success in obtaining a degree, and may impact career trajectories long after graduate school ends. The choice of advisor should not be taken casually. A number of factors should be considered. Minimally, the Research Advisor should be willing to:

- (1) Meet in some regular fashion with the student;
- (2) Provide prompt feedback on the quality of the student's work and its future directions (including informing the student if the work does not meet the Research Advisor's and SBS's standards);
- (3) Give timely feedback on thesis chapters and manuscripts to enable graduation in an appropriate time frame, and to advance the student's career;
- (4) Provide and ensure a respectful and professional working environment in the laboratory.

In selecting a Research Advisor, students are strongly encouraged to **explicitly** discuss expectations with candidate faculty members to ensure a good fit. For instance, students or faculty may have differing opinions on what constitutes a satisfactory level of interaction and/or feedback and hence discussion of what constitutes an appropriate compromise is strongly advised to ensure that student and faculty expectations are aligned.

Eligibility to Serve as a Research Advisor & Other Considerations

Only tenured or tenure-track faculty members in the SBS are eligible to serve as Research Advisors to SBS graduate students. While the SBS values its adjunct faculty, they may not serve as an SBS student's formal

Research Advisor, nor can University of Utah faculty in other departments or units. The SBS does not allow a student to select co-Advisors; although collaboration is strongly encouraged, only one faculty member can assume the formal role of Research Advisor.

Supervisory Committee Formation & Policies

Supervisory Committee Roles

A student's Supervisory Committee complements and assists the student's Research Advisor in directing the student's research and professional development. In this role, Supervisory Committee members are a source of advice and support independent of the Research Advisor, and should the need arise, also participate in student-advisor conflict resolution. Together with the Research Advisor, the Supervisory Committee constitutes the body that makes key decisions regarding the student progress towards obtaining a degree. Supervisory Committee members are present during regularly scheduled meetings with the student, as well as at oral examinations for the B.S./M.S. Qualifying Exam and the B.S./M.S. Thesis Defense, and provide timely evaluation of the student's progress.

Supervisory Committee Selection

SBS B.S./M.S. students are required to form a Supervisory Committee by the end of their first semester in the M.S. Program (typically fall of the senior year as a B.S. student).

The Supervisory Committee has three voting members and must consist of:

- (1) the Research Advisor, who serves as Chair of the Supervisory Committee;
- (2) two other voting members, at least one of whom must be a tenured or tenure-track faculty of the SBS; all three members of the Supervisory Committee can be in the SBS (and often are).

In most cases all M.S. student Supervisory Committee members will hold tenure or tenure-track positions at the University of Utah or at other comparable, research-intensive academic institutions. However, scientists holding other positions, but who are engaged in active research, and who have a track record of supervision of students, may be eligible for Supervisory Committee service. All requests for Supervisory Committee members who are not tenured or tenure-track faculty at the University of Utah must be accompanied by the CV of the potential committee member and a letter of justification for the choice signed by the student and the student's Research Advisor. These requests must also be approved by the Dean of the Graduate School. Approval should not be taken for granted. Examples of requests that are unlikely to be approved are for individuals who do not possess a Ph.D. degree, or who were prior instructors or advisors of students at other institutions, or who otherwise had or have another type of close professional or personal relationship to students.

To provide students with independent Supervisory Committee feedback and evaluation, the SBS also requires that no Supervisory Committee members can be related to each other (for example, be married or be domestic partners) or to the student. Former students or postdoctoral fellows of the Research Advisor are generally ineligible to serve as Supervisory Committee members until they have achieved tenure at their current institution. Further, any other potential (or perceived) conflicts of interest must be disclosed at the time the request to form a Supervisory Committee is made. An example of such might be an individual who works at a private company and who has a financial interest in the outcome of a student's research. All individuals must meet qualifications prescribed by the Graduate School.

In selecting Supervisory Committee members, students are encouraged to first talk with their Research Advisors, who serve as a valuable source of advice about potential committee members. Students should then arrange a time to discuss their thesis research plans and career goals with each prospective committee member. After obtaining affirmative commitments from all members of a potential Supervisory Committee, the names and positions of all members must be submitted to the Graduate Program Coordinator (as should any other related documentation). Ultimately, the Director of Graduate Studies, and then the Graduate School, must approve Supervisory Committees, as well as any changes to Supervisory Committees after they have formed (i.e., if a faculty member retires and must be replaced by another member).

Required Meetings & Communication

The SBS prioritizes timely Supervisory Committee feedback to B.S./M.S. students that occurs during mandatory Supervisory Committee meetings that must take during each fall semester the student is in the B.S./M.S program (excepting summer semesters). Any exceptions to this timeline require prior approval of the Director of Graduate Studies and will not be granted without justification and a projected date/timeline for when the next meeting will take place. Students typically schedule two hours for Supervisory Committee meetings; as faculty members have many commitments, students are encouraged to arrange Supervisory Committee meetings weeks (or even months) in advance to ensure availability. Completion of Supervisory Committee meetings and their timing is tracked by the SBS Graduate Program, the College of Science, and by the Graduate School, and their timely completion is a requirement to remain in good standing in the SBS Graduate Program. In addition to regular Supervisory Committee meetings, the Supervisory Committee also administers and adjudicates milestone exams including the Thesis Defense. The SBS requires that all B.S./M.S. Supervisory Committee members attend Supervisory Committee meetings.

While the format of a committee meeting is at the discretion of the Supervisory Committee, meetings typically involve a review and approval of the student's coursework (especially for the first meeting), a student presentation of research progress, future research directions, anticipated thesis chapters, and a projected timeline for potential graduation, activities related to professional development, as well as other topics the student or Supervisory Committee deem relevant. During the second Supervisory Committee meeting at the latest, an approximate timeline for attempting the B.S./M.S. Qualifying Exam should be agreed upon.

Prior to each Supervisory Committee meeting, the student and Research Advisor are required to provide the full committee with a Developmental Plan Form. For more about the Developmental Plan Form, where to download it, and for instructions for its completion, [click here](#).

Finally, although Supervisory Committee meetings are required in every fall and spring semester, this is the minimal requirement. The student, the Research Advisor, or the Supervisory Committee by majority vote, may arrange more frequent meetings (for instance, if there are concerns about a student's research direction, its feasibility, or student progress more generally).

Mandatory Milestone Examinations for the B.S./M.S. Program

In addition to the completion of required coursework, two exams with both written and oral components must be passed for a B.S./M.S. degree from the SBS to be awarded. The first is the B.S./M.S. Qualifying Exam, which assesses a student's preparation to continue in the program in the context of a proposal for thesis research. Finally, the Thesis Defense assesses if a student's critical thinking skills and body of original research meet the standards for the B.S./M.S. degree to be awarded. Information about these milestones exams is given in the following sections.

Overview and General Philosophy

Students from the B.S./M.S. Program must attempt and pass the Qualifying Exam for the B.S./M.S. degree that consists of a written and oral proposal of the thesis work. The B.S./M.S. Qualifying Exam must be attempted by the end of the 3rd semester in which the student has the formal classification of “graduate student” in the University system (summer semesters excluded; this is typically the first semester of the 5th year in the program). The SBS does not allow second attempts for students who fail the B.S./M.S. Qualifying Exam, and therefore failure to pass the exam (both the written and oral components) will result in dismissal from the SBS Graduate Program. In such cases the student can continue to fulfill the requirements of the B.S. degree and graduate with a B.S. degree. The written and oral requirements for the M.S./B.S. Program Qualifying Exam closely follow those of the SBS standalone M.S. Program Qualifying Exam and will be uniformly enforced. The SBS’s “M.S. Qualifying Exam” constitutes a “Comprehensive Examination” for M.S. students as defined by the Graduate School ([Master’s Degree Requirements; V. Examinations: Thesis Option; B: Comprehensive Examination](#)).

B.S./M.S. Qualifying Exam Committee

The committee which evaluates the student’s B.S./M.S. Qualifying Exam performance consists of the student’s three-member Supervisory Committee. A member of the Supervisory Committee other than the chairperson (the Research Advisor) will be selected to oversee the administration of the B.S./M.S. Qualifying Exam, and is responsible for ensuring that the rules for the Qualifying Exam are followed. The chairperson must be a member of the SBS.

Written and Oral Exam Components for the B.S./M.S. Qualifying Exam

The B.S./M.S. Qualifying Exam will consist of a written document that will be defended in a single oral defense. Pass or fail decisions for both the written and oral components of the Qualifying Exam will be by majority vote of the Supervisory Committee (at least two votes in favor are required to pass).

The written component will consist of a research proposal on the topic of the student’s proposed thesis research. The student should describe the background leading to the proposed research, the significance of the research, the research approach (design and methods) for achieving the specific aims, the rationale for the proposed approach, potential pitfalls, and expected/alternative outcomes of the proposed studies. Formatting requirements are as follows: a project description not longer than six pages, single spaced, Arial 11 or Times / Times New Roman 12 font (excepting figure legends, which can have smaller font sizes but must still be easily readable), and one-inch margins. Figures and/or tables are included but citations excluded from page limitations.

The student is encouraged to consult with their Research Advisor during preparation for the Qualifying Exam about the concepts and principles of the study. The Research Advisor and other members of the Supervisory Committee can have conversations with the student about specific aims and provide guidance and recommendations on the development of the experimental approach. However, the student is responsible for crafting a document that speaks in their voice, and the Research Advisor and Supervisory Committee members may not view or contribute to the writing or editing of the proposal. The student may, however, solicit feedback from other faculty, postdocs and graduate students.

The student will submit the written research proposal on a date agreed upon by the Supervisory Committee. The Supervisory Committee will have two weeks to evaluate the written document. If the Supervisory Committee requests revisions, the student will have two weeks to complete them and resubmit the revised proposal. The Supervisory Committee will then have one week to reevaluate the written component of the exam and arrive at a pass or fail decision. The oral component of the Qualifying Exam cannot be scheduled

until the student has passed the written component and must take place within 30 days from the time the student passed the written component of the exam. In the oral defense, the student may give a formal presentation of the proposal to the Supervisory Committee, but it may not exceed 10 slides with no animation. The oral component of the Qualifying Exam may cover any material deemed appropriate by the Supervisory Committee, and should not exceed two hours in length.

It is the responsibility of the Chair of the B.S./M.S. Qualifying Exam Committee to communicate the results of the Qualifying Exam to the student and Graduate Program Coordinator within three days from when the Qualifying Exam takes place.

The evaluation of the written component will focus on the following areas of assessment:

1. The clarity of the scientific writing, including the use of appropriate scientific terminology and reporting standards.
2. Inclusion of appropriate scholarship. Is the proposal written with sufficient discussion and citation of previous work, such that it is original and describes work that will serve as a novel and compelling advance in the candidate's field?
3. Feasibility of the work in the context of available resources, including equipment, supplies and expertise that can be accessed by the candidate, and within the time constraints of the program.
4. Demonstration of understanding of the scientific questions, methodologies and data analysis techniques, both conceptually and technically.
5. Discussion of pitfalls and alternative approaches, where applicable.

The evaluation of the oral component will focus on the following areas of assessment:

1. The candidate's understanding of the content of the written proposal and ability to defend and/or appreciate criticism(s) from the committee.
2. The candidate's understanding of related scientific concepts, literature and research techniques, which should be commensurate with carrying out the proposed work.
3. The candidate's ability to describe, defend and discuss aspects of their proposal in the oral format, accompanied with visual aids that are concise and clear.

Exceptions or modifications to these rules must be approved in advanced by the Director of Graduate Studies. Students requiring accommodations for examinations are requested to contact and make arrangements with the Center for Disability Access (<https://disability.utah.edu>) in advance.

B.S./M.S. Thesis Defense

The M.S. Thesis Defense component of the B.S./M.S. degree has a written and oral component, the administration of which is prescribed by the Graduate School ([click here](#); the following guidelines conform to these requirements). The written document consists of chapters, one or more of which present original research. What constitutes a body of work sufficient for a successful defense, as well as the number and structure of chapters, should be arrived at in discussions between the student and the Supervisory Committee. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the Supervisory Committee to set expectations and adjudicate the thesis defense. All decisions of the Supervisory Committee during the defense process will be by majority vote. It is critical that students discuss expectations for an M.S. thesis with their Research Advisor and Supervisory Committee regularly, especially as they progress in the M.S. Program.

The date of the oral defense for the thesis must be approved by the Supervisory Committee. By Graduate School policy, at least **three weeks** before the final oral examination (thesis defense), the student should

submit an acceptable draft of the thesis to the chair of the Supervisory Committee (the Research Advisor, unless other arrangements are made by the Supervisory Committee for another member to be chair), and the student must submit the draft to other committee members at least **two weeks** before the examination date. An expectation of the SBS is that a Supervisory Committee will carefully review the written thesis prior to the oral defense; if a Supervisory Committee deems that a thesis document is insufficient, the committee may, at its discretion, request revisions to the thesis and reschedule the oral defense. Failure of a student to produce an acceptable written thesis will be assessed by the Supervisory Committee as making unsatisfactory progress toward the degree.

The student must pass the final oral examination of the thesis before graduation, and failure to pass the oral examination will result in dismissal from the SBS Graduate Program. The oral component consists of a public presentation of research that lasts ~30-45 minutes, followed by ~5 minutes of questions, followed by a private meeting and additional questions/comments with only Supervisory Committee members present. The oral defense and subsequent meeting of the student and the Supervisory Committee must be in person unless prior approval is given by the Director of Graduate Studies (the Director of Graduate Studies is under no obligation to grant exceptions). The Graduate Program Coordination oversees the scheduling of rooms for the oral defense. The chair of the Supervisory Committee is responsible for communications between the committee and the student during the defense process; further, the chair must inform the Graduate Program Coordinator of a pass/fail decision on the day of the oral defense. If a student does not pass the oral examination, the student may be allowed one attempt to retake the oral examination with the approval of both the Supervisory Committee and the Director of Graduate Studies (otherwise, the student is dismissed from the SBS Graduate Program).

It is critical that students inform the Graduate Program Coordinator of the oral defense date at least three weeks prior, and they must also contact the Graduate Program Coordinator during the semester before an oral defense is planned to initiate the formal approval of their M.S. Program of Study (for more information, [click here](#)). Students should carefully follow all instructions from the Graduate Program Coordinator to ensure that any forms needed for a defense are completed according to the Graduate School's mandated timeline. Failure to finalize the program of study, or complete other needed forms, may result in *long delays* in a thesis defense, and have tuition/financial repercussions.

After a student passes an oral defense, *the written thesis document must be submitted to the Thesis Office in the Graduate School and approved*. This should be done no later than about 2-3 weeks after the oral defense; this process is monitored by the SBS and Graduate School, and the student and Research Advisor may be contacted if there is a delay. Supervisory Committees should **not allow** a student to progress to an oral defense if the written component of the thesis needs more than minor revisions; while thesis chapters with original research are ideally published in peer-reviewed scientific journals, this itself is not an SBS requirement, and is not a justification for delaying thesis defenses or their approval by the Research Advisor and Supervisory Committee.

Students requiring accommodations for any component of the M.S. thesis defense are requested to contact and make arrangements with the Center for Disability Access (<https://disability.utah.edu>) in advance.

The [Thesis Office](#) in the Graduate School has formatting rules for the thesis document. Students are **strongly encouraged** to review these formatting rules ([click here](#)) early and often when writing the thesis to avoid time consuming reformatting later on and delays in the awarding of the M.S. degree. **The degree will not be issued by the University until the written document is submitted to and formally accepted by the Thesis Office.**

Time Limit for a B.S./M.S. Degree & Petition for an Extension

The primary advantage of the combined B.S./M.S. Program is a shorter time to completion of the M.S. degree. Students who successfully complete a B.S./M.S degree in the SBS typically do so in approximately five years vs. a typical minimum of six years to complete both degrees separately. Therefore, the student, in consultation with the selected Research Advisor, should devise a research program that envisions completion within two years of entry to the B.S./M.S. Program (five years total to achieve both degrees). Students in the program should make every effort to finish by the end of the 5th year in the B.S./M.S. Program.

However, because research outcomes can be uncertain and may not always follow to plan, the SBS recognizes that in some cases additional time may be required to complete the requirements for both degrees. In the context of the B.S./M.S. degree, the time period for the M.S. component of the degree begins once a student is formally classified as a graduate student by the University. Since students apply as juniors to join the B.S./M.S. Program, this classification is typically at the beginning of the senior year. The SBS time-limit for **completion of a B.S./M.S. degree is four years** after joining the combined program. The student must remain in good standing and be making adequate progress towards the degree during the entire period. Under exceptional circumstances additional time may be required. With the approval of the student's Research Advisor, Supervisory Committee by majority vote, and the Director of Graduate Studies, a student may petition the Graduate School for an extension of time to graduation of more than four years in the graduate program.

Instructions from the Graduate School for petitioning for an extension can be found [here](#); *students should carefully read and follow all instructions*. Minimally, however, for a student to petition they must be in otherwise good standing in the B.S./M.S. Program and have a ***strong and feasible plan to complete the M.S. degree component with dates for the completion of remaining milestones***. Ultimately, the decision to grant a petition for an extension resides with the Graduate School. Failure to meet milestones or other criteria outlined in a successful petition for an extension to graduate will result in dismissal from the B.S./M.S. Program as specified by the Graduate School and by SBS B.S./M.S. dismissal policies.

Changing Research Groups & Dismissal Policies (B.S./M.S. Program)

The following guidelines have been approved by the SBS Faculty for the rare occasions when it becomes necessary to terminate a graduate student/Research Advisor research relationship or dismiss a student from the program. Either the graduate student or the Research Advisor may terminate a student/advisor research relationship because of dissatisfaction, and the Director of Graduate Studies may dismiss a student from the B.S./M.S. Program for failure of satisfactory progress toward the B.S./M.S. degree (defined below). The following guidelines describe these procedures. The student's rights and responsibilities in the case of dismissal are set forth in [Policy 6-400: Student Rights and Responsibilities](#) of the University [Regulations Library](#).

Changing a B.S./M.S. Research Advisor (Student Initiated)

When a student seeks a new research or laboratory environment, a transfer to another research group might be desired. The most important part of this process is open communication between all parties involved. If a student is considering transfer to another group, the student should meet with the Director of Graduate Studies to discuss the implications of this important decision and to formulate a plan of action. Depending on the situation, the student will need to communicate with the current Research Advisor, members of the Supervisory Committee, and potential new Research Advisors.

Once the plan of action is finalized and the decision to transfer is made, the student is obligated to petition in writing to the Director of Graduate Studies to obtain their written permission. The student is obligated to give the current Research Advisor a 15-day written notice and to outline the reasons for leaving the group. During the 15 days, any research must be brought to a point where it can be passed on to a new person. All notebooks and data must be returned to the Research Advisor before the student joins another faculty member's laboratory. If there is unanimous agreement between the student, the Research Advisor, and a new Research Advisor, the 15-day period may be shortened.

After transferring to a new group, the student may also need to reconstitute the Supervisory Committee, e.g., if they have switched primary research areas. If the student has already successfully completed the M.S. Qualifying Exam for the B.S./M.S. degree, the student must (1) prepare a brief (~3 page) summary outlining the new thesis project within three months of joining the new research group, and (2) present the new project in an oral presentation to the Supervisory Committee. Should the Supervisory Committee view the new project as unacceptable, the Supervisory Committee will give the student an evaluation of unsatisfactory progress and document the decision in writing to the Graduate Program Coordinator and Director of Graduate Studies (this should be done on the last page of the Developmental Plan Form). The result will be dismissal from the B.S./M.S. Program.

Dismissal by Faculty from a Student/Research Advisor Relationship

If a Research Advisor is dissatisfied with the performance of a student, for example in terms of research effort, lab safety, data handling, research ethics or working environment, when possible the advisor should make every effort at an early stage of the dissatisfaction to communicate in writing to the student the concerns about the deficiencies in the student's performance. If the deficiencies persist, the Research Advisor may place the student on probation by identifying to the student in writing the unsatisfactory aspects of the student's performance and the measures needed to bring their performance to an acceptable level. Students are allowed a reasonable time (at least 30 calendar days) to correct the deficiencies during the probationary period, the length of which will be communicated by the Research Advisor. A copy of the letter outlining the deficiencies and timeline for corrective actions for a student's performance will be sent to the Director of Graduate Studies and the Graduate Program Coordinator. If the deficiencies are corrected in the probationary period, the Research Advisor will notify the student in writing that the probation is ended. A copy of this letter must also be sent to the Director of Graduate Studies and the Graduate Program Coordinator.

If the deficiencies persist at the end of the probationary period, it is the prerogative of the Research Advisor to terminate the student/Research Advisor relationship. The procedure will be:

- (1) To notify the student in writing, giving reasons for the dismissal, indicating a formal termination date at least 15 days after the date of the letter. A copy of the letter will be sent to the Director of Graduate Studies and the Graduate Program Coordinator;
- (2) If the B.S./M.S. student is receiving stipend support as an RA or GA, the student will be kept on stipend support for 15 days after the date of the notification letter to facilitate the student finding a new Research Advisor relationship, unless the student starts in the laboratory of a new Research Advisor before the end of the 15 days. Please note that because the SBS does not guarantee stipend support for B.S./M.S. students, a new Research Advisor is not obliged to continue stipend support.
- (3) If the student fails to find a new Research Advisor, the student will be dismissed from the B.S./M.S. Program.

It is the student's obligation to turn over all data and notebooks in a manner that will allow the Research Advisor to continue the work; transfer and continued good standing in the B.S./M.S. Program is contingent on a student satisfactorily transferring all data/notebooks to the Research Advisor.

Formal Dismissal from the B.S./M.S. Program

While most students succeed in the SBS B.S./M.S. Program, disciplinary actions, including dismissal from the B.S./M.S. Program, are possible outcomes for graduate students deemed not to be making satisfactory progress toward the degree as outlined in this handbook. A student is classified as making "unsatisfactory progress" toward the degree, and will no longer be in good standing in the program, if any of the following conditions apply ([see also here for definitions](#)):

- (1) failure to pass all courses counting toward the M.S. degree with a grade of "B-"/"CR" or better;
- (2) a grade point average in courses counting toward the M.S. degree (either cumulatively or in a particular semester) of less than 3.0, subject to one semester to remedy the deficiency;
- (3) if applicable, failure to find a Research Advisor following the dissolution of an existing student/Research Advisor relationship;
- (4) failure to schedule or attend all B.S./M.S. Supervisory Committee meetings according to the schedule specified in this Handbook;
- (5) failure to pass written and oral parts of milestone exams, or failure to attempt a milestone exam in the allotted time period (i.e., the B.S./M.S. Qualifying Exam and the Thesis Defense);
- (6) academic or scientific/research misconduct, or behavioral misconduct;
- (7) failure to make timely progress toward completion of the B.S./M.S. degree as determined by the student's Supervisory Committee (an evaluation of "unsatisfactory progress");
- (8) failure to meet graduation milestones as outlined in petitions for extensions to graduate submitted to the Graduate School (this only applies to students taking longer than the SBS approved time for completion of the B.S./M.S. degree);
- (9) failure to maintain the Graduate School's [continuous registration requirement](#).

If concerns arise due to behavioral misconduct, these issues are adjudicated through the Office of the Dean of Students. In any such event, the procedures outlined in the [Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities](#) (University policy Policy 6-400) will be followed. For University policies related to scientific/research misconduct, [click here](#).

Regarding point seven above ("unsatisfactory progress" as determined by a Supervisory Committee): when reasonably possible, written feedback regarding deficiencies and ways to rectify them should be provided to the student early on. Such deficiencies should also be noted on the last page of the Developmental Plan Form that must be completed by the Supervisory Committee following each Supervisory Committee meeting. The student's Research Advisor and/or Supervisory Committee may include in the Developmental Plan Form milestones or goals with associated deadlines that will be used to assess the student's future progress. The Developmental Plan Form should also note any progress or failure in meeting previous goals or milestones (if any). Although Supervisory Committee meeting must be held annually, if deemed advisable Supervisory Committee meetings can occur at shorter intervals. For all Supervisory Committee meetings, the Developmental Plan Form must be filled out and returned to the Graduate Program Coordinator as [described here](#).

The Director of Graduate Studies and the Graduate Program Committee monitor the progress students make toward the completion of their degrees (see section “[Graduate Program Committee Oversight of Students](#)”), and the Director of Graduate Studies, who is the Chair of the Graduate Program Committee, is responsible for dismissing students from the B.S./M.S. Program when a student fails to make satisfactory progress toward the B.S./M.S. degree. In reviewing a dismissal case to arrive at a decision, the Director of Graduate Studies may consult with the student, the student’s Research Advisor, Supervisory Committee, the other members of the Graduate Program Committee, the SBS Director, the Graduate School, the Office of the Dean of Students, and the Office of General Counsel.

If a dismissal decision is reached, the student will be given timely and written feedback by the Director of Graduate Studies detailing the deficiencies that led to a decision for dismissal. Dismissal of a student from the B.S./M.S. Program will be carried out in compliance with [University of Utah Policy 6-400](#), which includes rights for the student to appeal the dismissal decision.

As applicable, dismissal from the SBS Graduate Program results in termination of all funding (if applicable), including tuition wavier, stipend, and health insurance, and access to all electronic and physical resources in the school that are not available to the public.

Voluntarily Leaving the Program

A student who decides to leave the B.S./M.S. Program must inform the Director of Graduate Studies in writing and give the Research Advisor a 15-day written notice. If a student leaves the B.S./M.S. Program before completing the requirements of the B.S./M.S. degree, they cannot and will not be awarded a SBS B.S./M.S. degree. During the 15 days, any research must be brought to a point where it can be easily passed on to a new person. The 15 days can be shortened upon mutual agreement of both the student and Research Advisor. All notebooks and data must be returned to the Research Advisor before the student leaves the program.

Students should be aware that, depending on whether they are receiving stipend support from a Research Advisor, there may be several consequences of leaving the B.S./M.S. Program early. To ensure that they understand these consequences, they should contact the Graduate Program Coordinator immediately to arrange a meeting to discuss leaving (all students, regardless of whether they are receiving stipend support, must contact the Graduate Program Coordinator). In addition to impacting their eligibility for a degree, the timing of a student’s departure from the program might impact whether tuition must be reimbursed. Importantly, students adding and/or dropping courses after the semester’s published add/drop deadlines are responsible for any and all tuition charges if they withdraw. In any instance where students are receiving a tuition benefit, the Tuition Benefits Program will not pay for withdrawn credit hours, and if registration falls below the required credit hours at any time during the semester, a student becomes ineligible for the program’s tuition benefit and will be billed the full tuition for that semester.

Further, the student should recognize that they might be required to re-apply should they wish to continue in future in an SBS graduate program to work on the same or another advanced degree.

Obtaining a B.S. in Biology after Leaving the B.S./M.S. Program

Regardless of the reason for leaving the SBS B.S./M.S. Program, if a student still wishes to obtain the B.S. degree in Biology, and is eligible to do so, they should contact the Graduate Program Coordinator as soon as possible to understand the possibility of, and procedure for, obtaining the B.S. degree.

Additional Information, Academic Requirements & Policies

Unless noted otherwise, the following additional information, requirements, and/or policies apply to students pursuing any of the SBS graduate degrees (the Ph.D., M.S., and B.S./M.S. degrees).

Graduate Program Committee Oversight of Students

In addition to oversight of student progress by the Research Advisor and Supervisory Committee, the Graduate Program Committee also reviews student progress and standing in the SBS Graduate Program. This includes evaluating the progress of Ph.D. students in their 5th year or later, or for M.S. or B.S./M.S. students after their 2nd year in the programs. These students will be requested to submit flow diagrams documenting progress and outlining a roadmap towards completion. The Graduate Program Committee will evaluate these materials, from consecutive years if available, and request individual meetings with the students and Research Advisors, as appropriate, if clarifications are needed or problems are identified. Further, Graduate Program Committee members review students' Developmental Plan Forms annually.

Development Plan Form

The Developmental Plan Form is used to document all Supervisory Committee meetings and consists of three parts.

- (1) **Part 1:** in this part, the student provides information about their recent accomplishments in the graduate program (i.e., courses taken and grades, research progress, and publications or presentations); further, students perform a self-examination of their career goals;
- (2) **Part 2:** in this part, the Research Advisor provides an evaluation of the student's progress;
- (3) **Part 3:** this part is filled out by the Supervisory Committee Chair (the Research Advisor) and should reflect input from all Supervisory Committee members (individual committee members, including the Research Advisor, may also provide feedback/comments under their own names if desired). In filling out the form, the student's Research Advisor and/or Supervisory Committee may include milestones or goals with associated deadlines that will be used to assess the student's future progress; if applicable, any progress or failure thereof in meeting previous goals or milestones should also be mentioned.

Detailed instructions for filling out the Developmental Plan Form, and for returning it to the Graduate Program Coordinator, are provided on the form itself. Until the Developmental Plan Form is filed with the Graduate Program Coordinator, a Supervisory Committee meeting is not considered to have taken place.

A copy of the Developmental Plan Form is provided in [Appendix 7](#); however, a standalone copy of the Developmental Plan Form that can be filled out electronically should be download from the SBS website and used for documenting Supervisory Committee meetings ([click here](#)).

Continuous Registration

All graduate students must be enrolled in the fall and spring semesters for a **minimum** of three credit hours in SBS courses for all semesters in which they are in the SBS Graduate Program (this includes the semester of the Dissertation/Thesis Defense). Please note that for those with special certification needs, e.g., to prevent the beginning of undergraduate loan payments, it may be necessary to register for more than three hours per semester (it is the student's responsibility to identify and conform to any special certification

needs unrelated to University policies). For detailed instructions related to course registration when students are being supported on a stipend (i.e., RA, GR, or TA funds), please consult with the Graduate Program Coordinator. The Graduate School's continuous registration policy, including exceptions, can be found by [clicking here](#). It is very important that students familiarize themselves and follow these Graduate School policies.

Student Health Insurance

Graduate Student Health Insurance (GSHIP)

Subsidized health insurance (medical, dental, vision) is available to all funded SBS graduate students. Premiums are 100% subsidized by the University, with premiums for teaching assistants charged to the state-funded benefits pool, those for research assistants to relevant benefits lines, and those for students be supported by fellowships or traineeships covered by SBS. SBS does not automatically cover insurance for fellowships (GF) and traineeships (TR), and these must be addressed on a case-by-case basis. Students can elect to self-pay to enroll in coverage for dependents (spouse/domestic partner, children).

Leave of Absence Policy

If a student is considering taking a leave of absence they should consult with the Graduate Program Coordinator as soon as possible. Students who wish to discontinue their studies for one or more semesters (other than summer semesters) must complete a Request for Leave of Absence form ([click here](#)). The form must be approved and signed by the Director of Graduate Studies and SBS Director and then forwarded to the Registrar's Office for processing.

Requests for unpaid leaves of absence may be granted for up to one year for circumstances related to:

- a serious health condition of the student or family member;
- care for newborn or newly adopted child (see "Parental Leave Policy" below);
- a call to serve in military service;
- other compelling reasons that the student's department believes are in the best interest of both the student and the University of Utah.

The form requesting a leave of absence for a current semester must be completed and received in The Office of the Registrar by the last day of classes of the semester. Leaves of absence are not granted retroactively. Students must officially withdraw from classes in any semester for which a leave is granted; failure to formally withdraw results in the reporting of E or EU grades for all classes. For more information about official withdrawal, [click here](#).

Leaves are granted for a maximum of one year at a time and may be renewed by submitting a new form to The Office of the Registrar after receiving renewed permission from the Director of Graduate Studies and SBS Director. The leave of absence is void if a student registers for classes in a semester for which a leave was granted. Additional and official language concerning leaves can be found via the Graduate School website, [click here](#). Because of the nature of graduate student funding (time limits on when grant funds must be used), and of scientific progress (key projects in laboratories often cannot be suspended for the duration of long leaves), students who take leaves receive no guarantee that they can return to work with and receive funding from (if applicable) the same Research Advisor, or pursue the same dissertation/thesis project(s) (a typical exception is for shorter-term parental leaves).

Reduced or altered duties to accommodate family or other emergencies may not require filling out the Leave of Absence Form; students should consult with their Research Advisor, the Graduate Program Coordinator, Supervisory Committee, and/or the Director of Graduate Studies.

Any student contemplating a leave is strongly encouraged to contact the Graduate Program Coordinator as soon as possible.

Parental Leave Policy

The SBS generally adheres to the Parental Leave Policy adopted by the University of Utah Graduate School. It is important that students considering Parental Leaves of Absence familiarize themselves with those policies before proceeding further ([click here](#)). Qualifications for paid Parental Leave are described therein.

A graduate student is eligible for a Parental Leave of Absence if the graduate student has been matriculated in a graduate program degree for a least one semester, has not yet defended their dissertation, and is otherwise in good standing within their degree program at the time the Parental Leave of Absence is taken.

An eligible Graduate Student may take a Parental Leave of Absence from a graduate degree program for up to eight consecutive weeks following a child's birth, adoption, or foster placement. Students who qualify for paid parental leave will receive their normal pay and benefits during their leave. Students may also apply for an additional four weeks of leave without pay, should they so choose.

A graduate student eligible for paid Parental Leave of Absence may take a single Parental Leave of Absence for each birth, adoption, or foster placement and is eligible to take up to a maximum of two paid total Parental Leaves of Absence during the duration of their graduate degree program. Alternatively, the eligible graduate student may choose to take a single unpaid Parental Leave of Absence for each birth, adoption, or foster placement, in lieu of, or in excess of, the above provided paid Parental Leaves of Absence. A graduate student not eligible for paid Parental Leave of Absence may take a single Parental Leave of Absence for each birth, adoption, or foster placement, without limits on the number of births, adoptions, or foster placements, during the duration of their graduate degree program.

If the child's parents are both eligible University of Utah employees, postdoctoral fellows, or graduate students, both parents may be entitled to a University of Utah sponsored leave of absence according to their eligibility requirements and terms of the relevant University of Utah policy.

A graduate student who intends to take a Parental Leave of Absence shall notify the graduate student's Research Advisor and the Director of Graduate Studies at least 90-days before the anticipated birth or as soon as reasonably possible before adoption or foster placement for which the graduate student intends to take a Parental Leave of Absence. This allows the SBS and student to plan for the student's absence and ensure a seamless transfer of responsibilities. Although no conflicts are anticipated, this policy may be superseded by an external funding agency.

Check-out Procedure

Upon completion of study and before leaving the University campus, the student is responsible for turning in all keys issued in their name. As stated on the key request (signed at the time keys are issued): "I will return this key when my need or employment terminates." Keys must be returned to the Main Office (201 SB), not to the Research Advisor.

Holidays, Vacations & Other Activities

Graduate students are entitled to observe [named holidays](#) as designated by the University. Graduate students supported by any University funds are also entitled to ten additional paid days of vacation during the calendar year provided that vacation days do not interfere with teaching and/or research responsibilities (see below). As a rule, TAs are not allowed to take vacation during weeks that classes are in session or during reading periods and exam times. Any exceptions to this policy must be approved by a TA's teaching supervisor(s). The teaching supervisor(s) is under no obligation to grant requests for exceptions.

Students supported from non-TA funds, including grant funds administered by the University (for instance, RAs or GFs), observe the ten working days' vacation allotment unless mandated otherwise by the funding agency. To ensure that time-sensitive research is not disrupted, the dates of vacation days must be approved by a student's Research Advisor in advance. The Research Advisor must also approve, in advance, any additional times away from the University, for instance, as might be necessitated for extended international travel.

Vacation is not accrued or carried over, nor is there any monetary compensation for vacation time when a student leaves the program. The times between academic terms, including summer, are considered part of the active training period and vacation days taken during these times are counted toward the annual allotment.

International students who plan to travel abroad must contact the University of Utah International Student and Scholar Services to make sure that they comply with their visa regulations and do not experience difficulty returning to the United States. International students must also discuss with their Research Advisors the potential complications that may arise as the result of delays in obtaining visas.

Professional Development

A comprehensive list of resources for graduate student professional development is maintained by the Graduate School ([click here](#)). Additionally, students in the SBS Graduate Program receive emails from the Graduate Program Coordinator with additional resources or workshops relevant to professional development that have a more biological sciences related focus.

Student & Faculty Code

Code of Conduct

The SBS is committed to fostering excellence in our community of scholars and leaders. We recognize that diverse and inclusive teams can produce creative and impactful scholarship and are eager to ensure that each member of our academic community is respected and valued for their unique contributions. This Code of Conduct upholds the Graduate School's commitment to conduct graduate and postdoctoral education according to the highest ethical and professional standards in compliance with applicable University, state, and federal regulations.

The SBS is committed to providing a safe, harassment-free and discrimination-free environment for everyone. Harassment includes offensive comments or denigrating jokes related to nationality, gender, sexual orientation, disability, age, physical appearance, body size, race, religion, or veteran's status, sexual images in public spaces, deliberate intimidation, stalking, following, harassing photography or recordings, inappropriate physical contact, unwelcome sexual attention, and harassment through social media.

All University of Utah faculty, staff, and students are expected to comply with the applicable anti-harassment, anti-discrimination, and scientific and professional ethics laws and policies in effect at the University of Utah.

Visitors, including participants at any University or SBS sponsored events, are expected to comply with these same standards, as well as to policies at their place of employment. In addition to any applicable reporting requirements at their home site, visitors are encouraged to report violations.

To report violations (or possible violations) of this code of conduct, contact the Directory of Graduate Studies, the Director of the SBS, or as applicable, [The Office of Equal Opportunity, Affirmative Action, and Title IX \(OEO/AA\)](#).

Code of Students Rights and Responsibilities

This code is defined by the [Policy 6-400](#), and policies linked therein, of the University Regulations Library. The purpose and scope of these policies state:

"A. Purpose.

The mission of the University of Utah is to foster student success by preparing students from diverse backgrounds for lives of impact as leaders and citizens. The University supports the intellectual, personal, social, and ethical development of members of the University community. These goals can be best achieved in an open and supportive environment that encourages reasoned discourse, honesty, and respect for the rights of all individuals. Students at the University of Utah are encouraged to exercise personal responsibility and self-discipline and engage in the rigors of discovery and scholarship.

Students at the University of Utah are members of an academic community committed to basic and broadly shared ethical principles and concepts of mutual respect. Integrity, self-authorship, justice, respect, and responsibility represent the basis for the rights and responsibilities that follow. Participation in the University of Utah community obligates each member to follow behavior standards.

The purposes of our University Student behavior standards are to help guide our Students' understanding of University expectations and processes. These outlined policies and processes are designed to educate, develop, and hold students accountable to those standards. The University believes in Students' rights to due process and a fair and transparent resolution. These standards have been designed to protect individuals and the campus community and create an environment conducive to achieving the academic mission of the institution. This policy establishes processes to resolve issues related to student behavior, including an informal resolution process, a formal resolution process, and for very serious allegations that could result in suspension or dismissal from the University or the revocation of a degree or certificate, a Hearing process.

Certain behaviors by Students may fall within this policy and other policies. When this is the case, an appropriate University administrator shall determine which policy is the appropriate policy under which to proceed.

B. Scope

This policy applies to all University of Utah Students. This policy establishes the broad requirements related to student behavior and Student Behavior Standards Violations. [Procedure P6-](#)

400A establishes detailed requirements implementing the process for addressing Violations of the Behavior Standards. This policy addresses only Violations of the Behavior Standards. Student academic misconduct and professional and ethical misconduct, which were formerly addressed in this policy, are addressed in [Policy 6-410](#). Appeals of academic actions, which were formerly addressed in this policy are addressed in [Policy 6-100](#) Section III.J. Student Records, which were formerly addressed in this policy are addressed in [Policy 6-411](#).”

Members of the University of Utah community who wish to report a violation of this Code of Conduct should contact the appropriate administrator which can include the Director of Graduate Studies, the Director of the SBS, the Dean of the Graduate School and/or Associate/Assistant Deans of the Graduate School, the Dean of the College of Science, or the University’s Title IX coordinator.

Academic Misconduct

As defined in University [Policy 6-410](#) of the Regulations Library:

“Academic Misconduct” includes, but is not limited to, cheating, misrepresenting one's work, inappropriately collaborating, plagiarism, and fabrication or falsification of information, as defined further below. It also includes facilitating Academic Misconduct by intentionally helping or attempting to help another to commit an act of Academic Misconduct.

- 1. “Cheating” involves the unauthorized possession or use of information, materials, notes, study aids, or other devices in any academic exercise, or the unauthorized communication with another person during such an exercise. Common examples of cheating include, but are not limited to, copying from another Student's examination, submitting work for an in-class exam that has been prepared in advance, violating rules governing the administration of exams, having another person take an exam, altering one's work after the work has been returned and before resubmitting it, or violating any rules relating to academic conduct of a course or Program.*
- 2. Misrepresenting one's work includes, but is not limited to, representing material prepared by another as one's own work, or submitting the same work in more than one course without prior permission of both Faculty Members.*
- 3. “Plagiarism” means the intentional unacknowledged use or incorporation of any other person's work in, or as a basis for, one's own work offered for academic consideration or credit or for public presentation. Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, representing as one's own, without attribution, any other individual's words, phrasing, ideas, sequence of ideas, information or any other mode or content of expression.*
- 4. “Fabrication” or “falsification” includes reporting experiments or measurements or statistical analyses never performed; manipulating or altering data or other manifestations of research to achieve a desired result; falsifying or misrepresenting background information, credentials or other academically relevant information; or selective reporting, including the deliberate suppression of conflicting or unwanted data. It does not include honest error or honest differences in interpretations or judgments of data and/or results.*

Academic dishonesty and/or misconduct will not be tolerated. Students who are found to be academically dishonest will be subject to disciplinary action up to and including dismissal from the program. Actions for academic misconduct shall follow the process set forth in [Policy 6-410](#) of the Regulations Library. Please see also the student pledge that incoming graduate students in the SBS must read and sign ([Appendix 2](#)).

Additional information: Reporting Discrimination, Harassment or Sexual Misconduct

Students should contact [The Office of Equal Opportunity, Affirmative Action, and Title IX \(OEO/AA\)](#) for reporting of discrimination, harassment, or sexual misconduct. Reports can be made via the SAFEU website

(<https://safeu.utah.edu/how-do-i-report/>) and/or by clicking “submit a report” on the [OEO/AA homepage](#)). You may also reach OEO/AA by phone (801.581.8365) or email (oeo@utah.edu). Further, note that administrators, supervisors, or faculty at the University are subject to mandatory reporting requirements. To learn more about mandatory reporting requirements for administrators, supervisors, or faculty, and how mandatory reporting may impact students, [click here](#); instructions for explaining mandatory reporting for University personnel subject to these requirements, available from the OEO/AA website, are:

“How can I explain my OEO/AA Mandatory Reporting Responsibilities to my class, team, or other group?”

Sexual Misconduct, Discrimination, and Related Retaliation:

The University of Utah is committed to fostering a positive and welcoming learning, working, and living environment. Sexual Misconduct, Discrimination and Retaliation are prohibited by University Policy. Faculty and staff, including [name of office] have a responsibility to inform the Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action (OEO/AA) when made aware of incidents of sexual misconduct, discrimination, and related retaliation, to ensure that individuals who have experienced discrimination, harassment, or sexual misconduct are informed about receiving support and options for addressing the misconduct through University and/or criminal processes. Incidents may come to the attention of faculty and staff in any way, including through face-to-face conversations, admissions or scholarship applications or essays, a written class assignment or paper, class discussion, email, text, or social media post. This obligation applies regardless of where or when an incident occurred, including if it occurred off campus and/or before they were a member of the campus community. Additional information can be found on the [OEO website](#) or you may contact oeo@utah.edu or 801-581-8365. If you wish to seek support confidentially, please contact the Victim-Survivor Advocates 801-581-7776 or advocate@sa.utah.edu.”

Title IX

Students should familiarize themselves with Title IX, including information about reporting title IX violations. Click [here](#) for additional information and for the contact information for the Title IX Coordinator at the University of Utah. Complaints of sexual misconduct should be made directly to the [Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action, and Title IX](#).

Dispute Resolution

Informal Dispute Resolution

Students may contact the Director of Graduate Studies for assistance in conflict resolution in cases when a conflict cannot be resolved directly with the Research Advisor or if a conflict is outside the scope of the student/Research Advisor relationship. The SBS Director may also be involved in informal conflict resolution, and should be contacted directly in the event that any conflicts involve the Director of Graduate Studies. Students can also make an appointment with one of the Graduate School deans to voice complaints or concerns (this can be requested through info@gradschool.utah.edu or by calling 801.585.5529). In addition, students can receive help from the University Ombuds’ Office, which provides dispute resolution, resources, and the potential for mediation. For more information about the role of the Ombuds’ Office, and for contact information, click [here](#).

Formal Dispute Resolution

Students wanting to resolve academic disputes formally should use the Academic Appeal process described in the [Policy 6-100](#) of University of Utah procedures for students.

Safety

Student safety, and that of all members of the SBS, is a top priority. Students may access to the [SafeU](#) app that provides easy access to many of the critical personal safety resources that the University has established to safeguard the physical and mental health of University students, faculty and staff.

In an emergency, dial 911 or seek a nearby emergency phone located throughout campus.

Report any crimes or suspicious activities to the **University Police at 801-585-COPS (801-585-2677)**; this number will connect you to a dispatch officer at the [University Department of Public Safety](#).

Many students, faculty, and staff need to be on campus at night or at odd hours. In order to increase security throughout campus, the University Department of Public Safety provides courtesy escorts, available 24/7/365.

To request a courtesy escort, call 801-585-2677 if you are on the Main Campus.

To request a courtesy escort, call 801-581-2294 if you are on the Health Sciences Campus.

The University seeks to provide a safe and healthy experience for students, employees, and others who make use of campus facilities. In support of this goal, the University has established many resources and support services to assist students who may have been affected by harassment, abusive relationships, or sexual misconduct. A detailed listing of University Resources for campus safety can be found [here](#).

Your well-being is key to your personal safety. If you are in crisis, call the [Crisis Line](#) (24/7): 801-587-3000; help is close. An additional resource is the [Suicide Prevention Hotline](#) – In Salt Lake City, call 24/7: 801-261-1442. Moreover, the College of Science has an embedded therapist available to enrolled undergraduate and graduate students in the SBS and other units within the College ([click here](#), and then scroll down to “EMBEDDED THERAPIST”).

The University has additional resources to promote emotional and physical wellness, including the Counseling Center, the Student Health Center, and the Women’s Resource Center. Counselors and advocates in these centers can help guide you to other resources to address a range of issues, including substance abuse and addiction. The contact information for these centers, as well as other contact information for other entities relevant for well-being and personal safety, are given below:

Police: <https://safety.utah.edu>

Phone: 911 (emergency) or 801.585.2677 (non-emergency).

University Counseling Center: <https://counselingcenter.utah.edu>

Room 246, Student Services Building (SSB)

Phone: 801.581.6826

Student Health Center: <https://studenthealth.utah.edu/services>

Madsen Health Center, 555 Foothill Drive

Phone: 801.581.6431

Women's Resource Center: <https://womenscenter.utah.edu>

Room 411, Olpin Union Building (UNION)

Phone: 801.581.8030

Sexual Assault Victim Advocacy: <https://wellness.utah.edu/victim-survivor-advocacy>

Room 328, Student Services Building (SSB)

Phone: 801.581.7779

The Office of the Dean of Students: <https://deanofstudents.utah.edu>

Room 270, Olpin Union Building (UNION)

Phone: 801.581.7776

Motorist Assistance: <https://publicsafety.utah.edu/campus-security/>

University security officers assist motorists who need a jump-start when their car batteries died (call 801.585.2677 and let the dispatcher know the location of your vehicle, along with the color, make and model).

Research Policies & Training

Laboratory/Occupational Safety

NOTE: If you are consulting this section of the Handbook to know what to do in the case of an urgent laboratory or occupational safety issue (i.e., a chemical spill), please

[CLICK HERE](#)

to download first-response instructions including phone numbers to call.

All University personnel working in research/laboratory settings, including graduate students, are required to satisfy laboratory/research safety and occupational training requirements before performing research. These requirements apply not only to laboratory work, but to fieldwork as well.

At the University, [Environmental Health & Safety \(EHS\)](#) oversees requirements for working with chemicals and biological agents, proper disposal of reagents, reporting of laboratory accidents/injuries, and more. Students should visit the EHS site and familiarize themselves with the resources that EHS provides.

Further, an EHS requirement is that each laboratory have a Chemical Hygiene Plan (CHP) that covers University-level laboratory safety and best-practice policies. Additionally, and reflecting the diversity of research performed at the University and in the SBS, a laboratory's CHP also covers laboratory-specific hazards and the associated policies for protection of personnel and the environment. Depending on the laboratory, an additional Biosafety Manual may also be required.

Prior to beginning research in a laboratory, each student should discuss safety-related issues with the Research Advisor, and must review the laboratory's CHP, and Biosafety Manual, if applicable (the Research Advisor will document the review/training). Subsequently, these documents should be reviewed annually. This applies not only to students formally joining the laboratory of a Research Advisor, but also to MCEB students performing 1st year rotations, as well as to students rotating in SBS laboratories from other rotation programs across campus.

Reporting/Addressing Safety Issues

Students should report safety "near misses" to EHS by [clicking here](#) (an option to report anonymously is also available, and the University has a non-punitive reporting policy).

Further, concerns about any issues related to laboratory safety, or for that matter any other safety issues associated with SBS buildings or SBS-associated activities broadly defined, should be reported to the SBS Safety Committee. The Chair and other members of this committee change from year to year, so contact the SBS main office for information about the faculty/staff members serving on the Safety Committee at any given time (call 801.581.6517).

The SBS is located within the College of Science (COS), and safety issues can also be reported to the COS Director of Safety, who is another excellent source of information about safety on campus. To contact the COS Director of Safety, click on "email us" on the [COS Safety and Wellness webpage](#) that also hosts links to safety and wellness resources.

Finally, if you notice that SBS buildings are unlocked after hours, or if any doors are propped open, please call campus security immediately to report the issue (801.585.2677). They will come investigate and ensure the doors are locked.

Radiation Safety

If your laboratory uses radiation (ionizing radiation, or non-ionizing radiation, such as UV radiation used for DNA imaging), a section of your laboratory's CHP will have instructions about uses and precautions. You should review this information; to find additional information about radiation safety, [click here](#).

Building/Equipment/Infrastructure Issues

Any number of issues related to SBS buildings can arise that may not represent emergency safety concerns but that nonetheless can damage buildings or equipment and therefore need immediate attention (and that could become safety issues if not fixed). An example would be a water leak from a broken pipe, or if building heating/cooling is not working.

If you encounter these or similar issues, call the University Plant Dispatch to report the problem (**801.581.7221**). If after hours, no one will pick up immediately; however, stay on the line and you will eventually be transferred to someone who can help. Don't be shy about telling them to come and examine/fix the problem (be specific about the problem, and provide the building name, room number, etc.). If you are unsure whether you should call, do it anyway.

In parallel, please notify the SBS Facilities Manager ([click here](#) and search “Facilities” for contact information).

Research Misconduct

Misconduct in science is defined as fabrication, falsification, or plagiarism, in proposing, performing, or reporting research. Misconduct in science does not include errors in the recording, selection, or analysis of data, differences in opinions involving the interpretation of data, or misconduct unrelated to the research process.

Scientific misconduct will not be tolerated. Students who are found to have carried out scientific misconduct will be subject to disciplinary action up to and including dismissal from the program. Actions for research misconduct shall follow the process set forth in [Policy 7-001](#) the Regulations Library.

Student Awards

School Specific Awards

An overview of SBS graduate student awards is provided below. The number of anticipated awards, due dates, and funding levels by year may be subject to change depending on the availability of funds, and other considerations. Where letters of support from faculty members (or others) are required for award applications, students are strongly encouraged to give letter writers at least several weeks advanced notice. Selection of award winners is by the Graduate Program Committee, and usually occurs within three weeks following application due dates. The specific dates for which fellowship funds must be used are typically for one or more semesters during the following academic year (please contact the Graduate Program Coordinator for more information).

Mr. George R. Riser Research Award

Overview: This award is made possible by scholarship endowment funds generously provided by Mr. George R. Riser. The purpose of the award is to support outstanding School of Biological Sciences Ph.D. students pursuing research careers in behavior, ecology and environmental biology, ecosystem science, evolutionary biology, physiology and functional morphology, and plant biology. The recipient of the *Mr. George R. Research Award* will receive a full semester of salary support in the amount of approximately \$13,880, which will allow them to conduct research in lieu of teaching. A student may receive up to two Riser Research Awards during their graduate career. Nominees will be evaluated based on the quality of their research proposal and the promise the candidates display for future scientific contributions. One award is typically made per academic year.

Eligibility: (1) The recipient must be actively engaged in fieldwork while receiving the award; (2) the recipient must complete the Ph.D. Qualifying Exam prior to their application; (3) the recipient must be in good standing in the graduate program (i.e., a 3.0 GPA or higher); and (4) a student in their sixth year of study or beyond is not eligible for the award.

Applications should include: (1) A one-page proposal describing the research project and projected goals for the upcoming academic year – the proposal should include specific details regarding the need for the award as well as the time frame for completing the project; (2) a curriculum vitae (CV); and (3) a nomination letter written by the student’s Ph.D. supervisor and one supporting letter written by another faculty member which should both be addressed to the *Riser Award Committee*. The nomination letters

should make the case for why the student deserves the award based on need, past accomplishments and expected outcomes.

Submission: All forms and letters should be submitted electronically to the Graduate Program Coordinator. The specific due date by year, typically in March, and any additional information/instructions, will be conveyed in an email from the Graduate Program Coordinator to students and faculty in advance of the submission deadline.

The Dr. Scott A. Lloyd Memorial Graduate Fellowship

Overview: The recipient of the *Dr. Scott A. Lloyd Memorial Graduate Fellowship* will receive a full semester of salary support in the amount of approximately \$13,880, which will allow the student to conduct research. The purpose of the award is to support outstanding School of Biological Sciences Ph.D. students pursuing research careers in cell biology, immunology, molecular biology or related fields. This award is made possible by funds generously provided by the Lloyd family. Nominees will be evaluated based on the quality of their research proposal and the promise they display for creative and independent research contributions. For recipients of the Scott A. Lloyd Memorial Fellowship who are eligible for the Graduate School insurance benefit and also serve as teaching assistants in the year of the award, the School of Biological Sciences will cover 20% of the yearly premium cost. For recipients supported by research grants while receiving the fellowship, it is expected that the supervisor's research grants will provide a supplement to cover the 20% premium cost. One award is typically made per academic year.

Eligibility: (1) The Recipient must complete the Ph.D. Qualifying Exam prior to his/her application; (2) the recipient must be in good standing in the graduate program (i.e., a 3.0 GPA or higher); and (3) a student in their sixth year of study or beyond is not eligible for the award.

Applications should include: (1) A one-page proposal describing the research project and projected goals for the upcoming academic year – the proposal should include specific details regarding the need for the award as well as the time frame for completing the project; (2) a curriculum vitae (CV); and (3) a nomination letter written by the student's Ph.D. supervisor and one supporting letter written by another faculty member which should both be addressed to the *Graduate Program Committee*. The letters should make the case for why the student deserves the award based on need, past accomplishments and expected outcomes.

Submission: All forms and letters should be submitted electronically to the Graduate Program Coordinator. The specific due date by year, typically in March, and any additional information/instructions, will be conveyed in an email from the Graduate Program Coordinator to students and faculty in advance of the submission deadline.

A. Herbert Gold and Marian W. Gold Scholarship

Overview: In 1992, A. Herbert and Marian W. Gold established a scholarship fund with a very specific purpose – to provide financial assistance for a School of Biological Sciences graduate student "in the field of plant biology with some emphasis on field work". The A. Herbert and Marian W. Gold Scholarship award is approximately \$2,500 per year. In making this gift, the Golds stipulated that the award should go to a single student at any given time (that is, one award per academic year).

Eligibility: (1) applicants must be in their first through fifth year of graduate study (students beyond their fifth year are ineligible for the award); (2) applicants must be in good standing in the

Graduate Program (i.e., a 3.0 GPA or higher); and (3) up to date on committee meetings, etc. Any student whose graduate research satisfies these stipulations may apply.

Applications should include: (1) A current curriculum vitae (CV); (2) a one-page description of the student's thesis research project and progress to date; (3) a statement of current and expected stipend support, including sources and amounts; (4) copies of undergraduate and graduate transcripts; (5) a letter of support from the student's Research Advisor; and (6) a letter of support from a second member of your Supervisory Committee.

Submission: Please combine the CV, description, statement of support and transcripts into one PDF and email to the Graduate Program Coordinator (letters of support should be sent by letter writers directly to the Graduate Program Coordinator). The specific due date by year, typically in March, and any additional information/instructions, will be conveyed in an email from the Graduate Program Coordinator to students and faculty in advance of the submission deadline.

Phyllis Coley and Thomas A. Kursar Graduate Field Research Award

Overview: This award is made possible by the Coley-Kursar Endowment. The purpose of the award is to support outstanding School of Biological Sciences Ph.D. students conducting field research in one or more of the following areas: behavior, ecology and environmental biology, ecosystem science, evolutionary biology, physiology and functional morphology, and plant biology. The recipient of the award will receive approximately \$3,000 to assist with fieldwork expenses. Nominees will be evaluated based on the quality of their research proposal and the promise the candidates display for future scientific contributions. One award is typically made per academic year.

Eligibility: (1) the recipient must be actively engaged in fieldwork while receiving the award; (2) the recipient must complete the Ph.D. Qualifying Exam prior to their application; (3) the recipient must be in good standing in the program (i.e., a 3.0 GPA or higher); and (4) students in their sixth year of study or beyond are not eligible for the award.

Applications should include: (1) A one-page proposal describing the research project and projected goals; (2) specific details regarding the need for the award as well as the time frame for completing the project; (3) a curriculum vitae (CV); and (4) a nomination letter written by the student's Ph.D. supervisor and one supporting letter written by another faculty member which should be addressed to the *Coley-Kursar Award Committee*. The letters should make the case for why the student deserves the award based on need, past accomplishments and expected outcomes.

Submission: All application materials and letters should be submitted electronically to the Graduate Program Coordinator. The specific due date by year, typically in March, and any additional information/instructions, will be conveyed in an email from the Graduate Program Coordinator to students and faculty in advance of the submission deadline.

Riser Award for Outstanding Graduate Research

Overview: This award is made possible by scholarship endowment funds generously provided by Mr. G. Richard Riser. The purpose of the award is to honor outstanding research efforts by SBS Ph.D. students. Nominees will be evaluated based on the quality of the research performed as graduate students and the promise the candidates display for future scientific contributions. Cash prizes of approximately \$500 will be announced and presented annually at the SBS Awards Social. Together with a cash prize, each

recipient has their name added to a Riser Awardee plaque that is displayed in the foyer of the Biology Building. One or two awards are typically given per year.

Eligibility: Students nominated by their Research Advisors or other faculty members must have completed their dissertation defense between approximately June 1 of the previous year to May 31 of the current year (anticipated defense date) to be eligible for the award.

Applications should include: (1) A current curriculum vitae (CV) with a list of publications and manuscripts in preparation (including abstracts and/or reprints); (2) a nomination letter (preferably written by the student's Ph.D. Research Advisor) and at least one supporting letter which should be addressed to the *Riser Award Committee* (the supporting letter can be written by a faculty member, co-worker, or fellow student; letters of nomination and support should discuss the candidate's accomplishments and potential as well as the significance of the candidate's dissertation research); (3) a dissertation abstract and a copy of the dissertation title page signed by the committee; and (4) up to three electronic copies of completed manuscripts or papers.

Submission: All application materials and letters should be submitted electronically to the Graduate Program Coordinator. The specific due date by year, typically in March, and any additional information/instructions, will be conveyed in an email from the Graduate Program Coordinator to students and faculty in advance of the submission deadline.

School Specific Travel Fund Opportunities

The SBS Graduate Program has a limited amount of funds to help defray the cost of student travel to research sites. The travel awards range up to \$500 per year, and preference will be given to students whose major professor cannot support any or part of a student trip, and no student may receive more than one department travel award during the year. To apply for funds, please address a memo to the Graduate Program Committee indicating the purpose and dates of your travel, the estimated expenses, the status of your current research project, and other funds you have received or are applying for. Travel requests must also include a separate letter from the dissertation/thesis advisor justifying the need for the student's support.

To be eligible, students must be in good standing and current on their yearly committee meetings. Approval from the Graduate Program Committee must be received before the travel expense is incurred. Recipients of the Riser Travel Award may receive up to two awards during their graduate career. Travel funds can only be used for the approved trip. Students beyond their fifth year in the program are not eligible for SBS travel funds.

The Graduate Program Committee would also like to encourage students to apply for supplemental travel funds from the Graduate School. Please contact the Graduate Program Coordinator for further information and prior to submitting an application to the Graduate School.

College/University Fellowships and Awards

A list of the Graduate School awards can be found at: <https://gradschool.utah.edu/funding/fellowships-scholarships-awards/index.php>

Graduate Student Travel Assistance Award: <https://gradschool.utah.edu/current-students/graduate-student-travel-assistance-award>

Thesis & Dissertation Awards: <https://gradschool.utah.edu/funding/fellowships-scholarships-awards/grad-school-administered/index.php#thesis>

External Fellowship & Award Opportunities

The Graduate School maintains a comprehensive list of external fellowship and award opportunities that can be found by [clicking here](#). In particular, SBS students may wish to consider applying for support from the [National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship Program](#) (GFRP). All SBS graduate students are encouraged to apply for external fellowships or awards when possible or eligible. Students should carefully review eligibility criteria (i.e., students can only apply to the GFRP in either their 1st or 2nd years in graduate school).

Additional funding possibilities can be accessed using the [Pivot tool](#) supported by the Office of Sponsored Projects.

Financial Assistance

Graduate student financial resources: <https://gradschool.utah.edu/resources-hub/financial.php>

Other Student Resources

Graduate School Resources

Administrative & Records

Graduate Records Office: <https://gradschool.utah.edu/navigating-grad-school/index.php>

Advocacy

Graduate School Diversity Office: <https://diversity.gradschool.utah.edu/index.php>

Graduate School Dean: dean@gradschool.utah.edu

Workshops & Training Materials

The Graduate School provides resources or workshops related to graduate student training in many areas: <https://gradschool.utah.edu/resources-hub/index.php>

Writing & Manuscript Editing

Thesis Office: <https://gradschool.utah.edu/thesis>

Grammarly: <https://gradschool.utah.edu/resources-hub/grammarly/index.php>

University Resources

University ID Card

University card information: <https://ucard.utah.edu>

Resources Available to International Students

The primary campus contact for international students is the office of [International Student and Scholar Services \(ISSS\)](#). In particular, the ISSS handles issues related to international student status in the US, and can provide further information on F-1 and J-1 visas. The Graduate Program Coordinator serves as liaison to the ISSS. Even short-term international travel can pose risks to a student's ability to re-enter the US and therefore to continue in the graduate program. The ISSS can help identify potential difficulties and advisability of travel.

TRAX Pass

UTA University pass: <https://commuterservices.utah.edu/uta>

TRAX Schedules & Maps: <https://www.rideuta.com/Rider-Tools/Schedules-and-Maps>

Wireless Connections

Onboarding instructions to Utah wireless: https://onboard.utah.edu/enroll/uofu/prod_3/process
Software

Grammarly: <https://gradschool.utah.edu/resources-hub/grammarly/index.php>

New Student Guide to Digital Resources: https://it.utah.edu/help/it_guides/new_student_guide.php

Hardware & Books

University Bookstore: <https://www.campusstore.utah.edu/utah/home>

Surplus & Salvage: <https://fbs.admin.utah.edu/surplus>

Paychecks and Direct Deposit

Human Resources Paycheck Information: <https://www.hr.utah.edu/payroll/paycheck.php>

Housing

Graduate Student Housing Resources & Options: <https://housingoptions.utah.edu/graduate-housing>

Meals & Food

Utah Meal Plans: <https://housing.utah.edu/dining>

Art & Entertainment

Arts Pass: <https://www.finearts.utah.edu/arts-pass>

Graduate Writing Center & Graduate Student Reading Room

The Graduate Writing Center funded by the Graduate School: <https://writingcenter.utah.edu/grad-student-services.php>

Graduate students have three options for writing support: (1) live, online tutoring (Zoom), (2) in-person tutorials in the Marriott Library, and (3) asynchronous tutoring (written feedback from a tutor). All three options are free to students pursuing graduate degrees at the University.

University Libraries

In addition to the research offerings, the Marriott Library has events and programs specifically for graduate students. Check [here](#) for schedules and more information.

Student Health, Wellness, & Recreation

Student Health Center: <https://studenthealth.utah.edu>

University Counseling Center (including Mindfulness Center): <https://counselingcenter.utah.edu>

Center for Student Wellness: <https://wellness.utah.edu>

Campus Recreation Services: <https://campusrec.utah.edu>

Leadership & Dispute Resources

Office of the Dean of Students: <https://deanofstudents.utah.edu>

Faculty Ombuds Office: <https://academic-affairs.utah.edu/office-for-faculty/facultyombuds>

Graduate School: <https://gradschool.utah.edu/about/contact-us.php>

Support Groups & Services

Center for Disability & Access: <https://disability.utah.edu>

Office of Equal Opportunity, Affirmative Action, and Title IX: <https://oeo.utah.edu>

Office for Equity & Diversity: <https://diversity.utah.edu>

International Student & Scholar Services: <https://iss.utah.edu>

LGBT Resource Center: <https://lgbt.utah.edu>

Veteran's Support Center: <https://veteranscenter.utah.edu>

Women's Resource Center: <https://womenscenter.utah.edu>

Financial Resources

University Financial Wellness Center: <https://personal-money-management.utah.edu>

Pivot: <https://osp.utah.edu/news/pivot.php>

Feed-U Pantry: <https://union.utah.edu/resources-spaces/feed-u-pantry/hours-about-us>

Appendix 1: Required Forms

This handbook and all forms are available online at <https://www.biology.utah.edu/graduate-students/#forms-policies>

The *Supervisory Committee* form is required for the selection of Ph.D. and M.S. committee members, for approval by the Director of Graduate Studies and the Graduate School.

The *Developmental Plan* form is described in Appendix 7.

The *Capstone Examination Report* form and *Prelim/Qualifying Examination Report* form should be completed and submitted to the Graduate Program Coordinator following completion of those examinations.

Appendix 2: Graduate Student Committees

The composition and function of the **Graduate Student Advisory Committee** is described on page 13 of this handbook. This committee also provides oversight in the selection of members for all committees listed below in the SBS graduate student Fall mandatory meeting. They encourage equitable representation of the graduate student body and balanced participation of students with respect to divisional affiliation (EEOB and MCEB) and seniority in the program. Students in the latter stages of the graduate program who are under pressure to complete their studies may be excused from service on committees.

The **Entertainment Committee** comprises eight voluntary graduate student members identified by the graduate student body during the Fall mandatory meeting. The committee serves to organize and coordinate social events for graduate students and provide oversight for the management and use of the graduate lounge.

The **Scientific Speaking Committee** comprises two voluntary graduate student members identified by the graduate student body during the Fall mandatory meeting. The committee serves to assist SBS administrative staff in the provision of food, purchased by SBS, following the Scientific Speaking class.

The **Graduate Invited Speaker Committee** comprises three voluntary graduate student members identified by the graduate student body during the Fall mandatory meeting. The committee serves to solicit and propose nominations for outside speakers in the SBS seminar series. They also work with SBS administrators to organize meetings between the invited speaker and SBS graduate students during the visits.

The **SBS Retreat Committee** comprises four voluntary graduate student members identified by the graduate student body during the Fall mandatory meeting. The committee coordinates with SBS administrators and faculty to determine graduate student involvement in the retreat, including nomination of graduate student speakers and poster presenters.

The **Admissions Committee** comprises four voluntary graduate student members identified by the graduate student body during the Fall mandatory meeting. The committee works with the Graduate Program Coordinator and SBS faculty committee members to evaluate graduate student applicants for admissions.

The **Recruitment Committee** comprises ten voluntary graduate student members identified by the graduate student body during the Fall mandatory meeting. The committee works with SBS administrators, faculty, the Graduate Program Coordinator and the Director of Graduate Studies to organize and participate in graduate student recruitment during the SBS interview weekend. This includes organizing and participating in meetings/interviews, social events and recruiting activities.

The **College of Science Council** and **College of Science Committee on Belonging and Community** each maintain one SBS graduate student member, elected each year by the College of Science.

Appendix 3: Academic Standard Pledge

The University of Utah's Regulations Library outlines each student's rights and responsibilities. These common-sense documents emphasize our responsibility for civil and ethical behavior, and each student is encouraged to familiarize themselves with them:

Regulations Library: <https://regulations.utah.edu>

Policy 6-400, Student Rights and Responsibilities: <https://regulations.utah.edu/academics/6-400.php>

Policy 6-410, Student Academic Performance, Academic Conduct, and Professional and Ethical Conduct: <https://regulations.utah.edu/academics/6-410.php>

One of the critical issues discussed in these document is academic misconduct. The following has been taken/adapted from Policy 6-410:

"Academic Misconduct" includes, but is not limited to, cheating, misrepresenting one's work, inappropriately collaborating, plagiarism, and fabrication or falsification of information, as defined further below. It also includes facilitating Academic Misconduct by intentionally helping or attempting to help another to commit an act of Academic Misconduct.

"Cheating" involves the unauthorized possession or use of information, materials, notes, study aids, or other devices in any academic exercise, or the unauthorized communication with another person during such an exercise. Common examples of cheating include, but are not limited to, copying from another Student's examination, submitting work for an in-class exam that has been prepared in advance, violating rules governing the administration of exams, having another person take an exam, altering one's work after the work has been returned and before resubmitting it, or violating any rules relating to academic conduct of a course or Program.

Misrepresenting one's work includes, but is not limited to, representing material prepared by another as one's own work, or submitting the same work in more than one course without prior permission of both Faculty Members.

"Plagiarism" means the intentional unacknowledged use or incorporation of any other person's work in, or as a basis for, one's own work offered for academic consideration or credit or for public presentation. Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, representing as one's own, without attribution, any other individual's words, phrasing, ideas, sequence of ideas, information or any other mode or content of expression.

"Fabrication" or **"falsification"** includes reporting experiments or measurements or statistical analyses never performed; manipulating or altering data or other manifestations of research to achieve a desired result; falsifying or misrepresenting background information, credentials or other academically relevant information; or selective reporting, including the deliberate suppression of conflicting or unwanted data. It does not include honest error or honest differences in interpretations or judgments of data and/or results.

It is important that all incoming students clearly understand these regulations, and the possible consequences of being found guilty of academic misconduct. **Actions from academic misconduct can lead to dismissal.**

To prevent any ambiguity, below are some of the academic exercises you will encounter, and some potential pitfalls that can result in academic misconduct:

Homework assignments: You must turn in your own work. Turning in a copy of someone else's assignment, even if it has been changed a bit, or providing your work for another to copy, would be academic misconduct.

Exams: Copying another person's exam, receiving unauthorized communication from others (or the internet) or using unauthorized material brought into an exam is cheating. Cheating falls under academic misconduct.

Written reports or papers: Copying another person's work, and passing it off as if you had written it is plagiarism. It is also possible to plagiarize your own work - that is, if you copy something you previous wrote, and do not cite it appropriately, it is still plagiarism. Because of this, be cautious about turning in a single document for assignments for different classes unless you've received permission from both instructors.

Excessive quotes: It is also not acceptable to quote large passages of text. As a graduate student, we expect you explain concepts, etc., in your own words.

In signing below, upon joining the SBS Graduate Program, a student confirms they have read and understand what is meant by "academic misconduct," and agree not to engage in this or other disallowed activities presented in this SBS pledge document, or as outline elsewhere in the SBS Graduate Handbook, or in the University of Utah's Regulations Library.

Signature: _____

Your name: _____

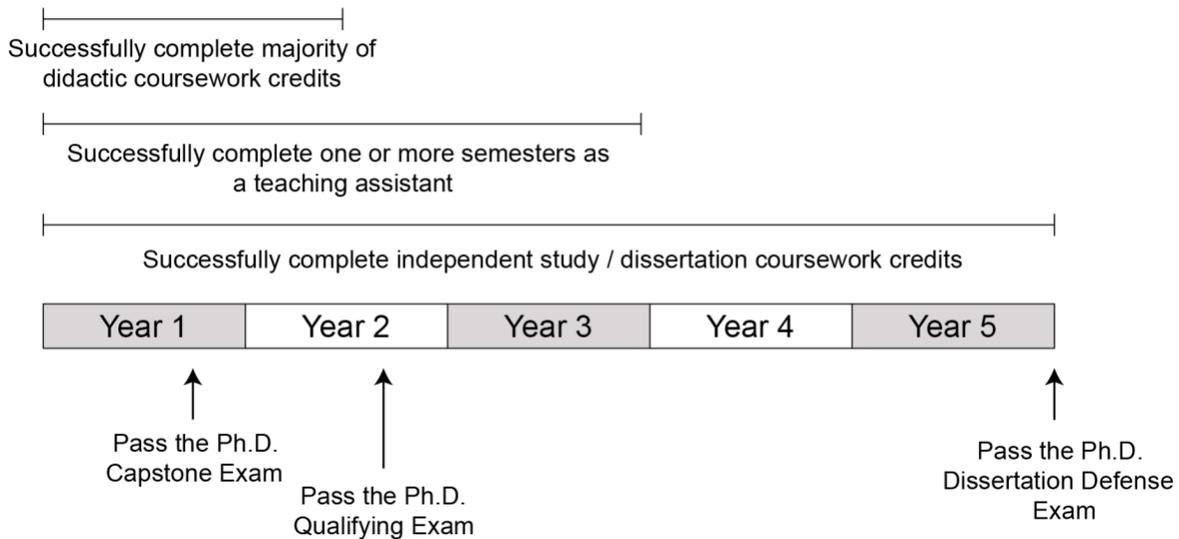
uID number: _____

Date: _____

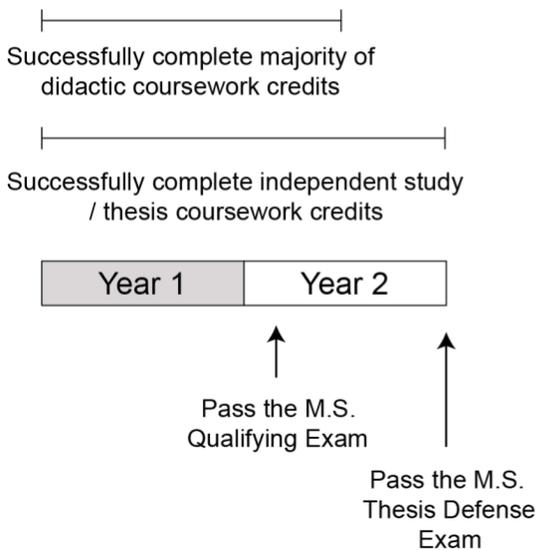
Appendix 4: Schematic of SBS Graduate Degree Timelines

Typical timelines for progression toward successful completion of the SBS Ph.D. degree (top) and SBS M.S. degree (bottom) are shown. The schematic for the M.S. degree applies as well, with some modifications depending on the student's situation, to the M.S. degree that is part of the SBS's combined B.S./M.S Program after the student is classified as a graduate student in the University system (but please [click here](#) for more information about B.S./M.S. requirements).

Standard Timeline for the SBS Ph.D. Degree



Standard Timeline for the SBS M.S. Degree



Appendix 5: EEOB 1st Year Program Curriculum

EEOB Ph.D. Program 1st year Curriculum

Fall Semester

Course name	Offered	Subject	Catalog #	Units	2025 Instructor(s)
Computing w/ Python	Full Sem	Biology	6120	2	R. Clark
Critical Analysis	Full Sem	Biology	7406	1	A. Yamaguchi
Independent Study	Full Sem	Biology	7950	5	Research Advisor
Research Ethics	1st ½ Sem	MBiol	7570	1	V. Karahalios
Sci Speaking Sem (EEOB)	Full Sem	Biology	7810	1	G. Rose/N. Phadnis
Sci Writing	1st ½ Sem	Biology	6100	1	S. Caron/J. Reimer O. Rog
TOTAL UNITS:				11	

Spring Semester

Course name	Offered	Subject	Catalog #	Units	2026 Instructor(s)
Adv Stats Modeling Biol	Full Sem	Biology	6500	3	D. Bowling/F. Adler
Elective (optional)	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD
Independent Study*	Full Sem	Biology	7950	variable	Research Advisor
Scientific Speaking (EEOB)	Full Sem	Biology	7810	1	N. Vickers/M. Werner
TOTAL UNITS:				11	

All courses shown are required. Courses with names in bold count toward the SBS requirement of a minimum of four full semesters of core didactic courses focusing on the biological sciences, biological data analyses, and scientific writing and research ethics.

* *Units of Independent Study (BIOL 7950) should be adjusted so that the total number of units per semester is 11.*

TBD: to be determined.

The SBS EEOB 1st year curriculum is designed so that students complete all required core courses in the 1st year. Deviations from the above course schedule for 1st year students require approval from the Director of Graduate Studies.

*For more information about the required courses in the EEOB Program please see [General Catalog & Class Schedules](#). Once on this site, go to “**Main Campus Class Schedules**,” select the requisite semester, and click on “**BIOL – biology**”. Search or browse courses by scrolling down; for course descriptions, click on the “**Class Details**” tab (upper right) of each course entry.*

Appendix 6: MCEB 1st Year Program Curriculum

MCEB Ph.D. Program 1st year Curriculum

Fall Semester

Course name	Offered	Subject	Catalog #	Units	2025 Instructor(s)
Advanced Genetics	2 nd ½ Sem	Biology	6140	1.5	Golic/Hughes/Jorgensen
Computing w/ Python	Full Sem	Biology	6120	2	R. Clark
Foundations of Mol Bio	1st ½ Sem	MBiol	6500	3	J. Brasch/J. Hale
Independent Study*	Full Sem	Biology	7950	variable	M. Werner
Intro to MCEB Research	1st ½ Sem	Biology	7961	1	C. Dale
Research Ethics	1st ½ Sem	MBiol	7570	1	V. Karahalios
Sci Speaking Sem (MCEB)	Full Sem	Biology	7810	1	G. Rose/N. Phadnis
Sci Writing**	1st ½ Sem	Biology	6100	1	S. Caron/J. Reimer O. Rog
TOTAL UNITS:				11	

Spring Semester

Course name	Offered	Subject	Catalog #	Units	2026 Instructor(s)
Advanced Biochemistry	2 nd ½ Sem	Biology	7961	1	B. Olivera
Advanced Cell Biology	1st ½ Sem	Biology	7962	1	M. Babst/N. Vierra
Adv Stats Modeling Biol	Full Sem	Biology	6500	3	D. Bowling/F. Adler
Independent Study*	Full Sem	Biology	7950	variable	M. Werner
Sci Speaking Sem (MCEB)	Full Sem	Biology	7810	1	N. Vickers/M. Werner
TOTAL UNITS:				11	

All courses shown are required. Courses with names in bold count toward the SBS requirement of a minimum of four full semesters of core didactic courses focusing on the biological sciences, biological data analyses, and scientific writing and research ethics.

* Units of Independent study should be adjusted so that the total number of units per semester is 11.

** While direct admittance MCEB students may take Scientific Writing (BIOL 6100) in their 1st year, they many also attempt the course in their 3rd semester; MCEB students participating in the rotation program typically take BIOL 6100 in the 3rd semester.

The SBS MCEB 1st year curriculum is designed so that students complete all required core courses in the 1st year with the exception of Scientific Writing, which most students attempted in the first half of fall semester of the 2nd year. Deviations from the above course schedule require approval from the Director of Graduate Studies.

*For more information about the required courses in the MCEB Program please see [General Catalog & Class Schedules](#). Once on this site, go to “**Main Campus Class Schedules**,” select the requisite semester, and click on “**BIOL – biology**”. Search or browse courses by scrolling down; for course descriptions, click on the “**Class Details**” tab (upper right) of each course entry.*

Appendix 7: Developmental Plan Form

A standalone version of the Developmental Plan Form is available for download from the SBS website ([click here](#), scroll down to “Graduate Forms & Policies”, and select “Developmental Plan Form”). Please use the standalone version for documenting Supervisory Committee meetings.

DEVELOPMENTAL PLAN FORM (DPF)

SCHOOL OF BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES (SBS)

INSTRUCTIONS:

Annual Supervisory Committee meeting:

The DPF must be completed in full (**PARTS 1-3**) by the SBS graduate student, the faculty Research Advisor, and the Supervisory Committee. The student is responsible for scheduling the mandatory annual Supervisory Committee meeting according to the following timeline for Ph.D. students:

5th year students and beyond: Supervisory Committee meetings will occur in August or September (no later than Sept. 30)

3rd and 4th year students: Supervisory Committee meetings will occur between August and October (no later than Oct. 31)

2nd year students: Supervisory Committee meetings will occur between August and November (no later than Nov. 30).

M.S. and B.S./M.S. students must also have annual committee meetings, the timings of which are covered in the SBS Graduate Student Handbook.

For required annual Supervisory Committee meetings, the **student must fill out PART 1.1 and 1.2**, and the **Research Advisor must then fill out PART 2**.

The Research Advisor should then email the DPF to the entire Supervisory Committee prior to the Supervisory Committee Meeting, and cc the student.

The Supervisory Committee must then complete PART 3 and return the DPF to the Graduate Program Coordinator (see instructions under PART 3).

Other Supervisory Committee meetings:

In addition to the annual Supervisory Committee meeting required of all students, the student/Research Advisor/Supervisory Committee members may request more frequent meetings of the student and Supervisory Committee to (1) ensure/assess satisfactory progress toward the degree, and/or to (2) provide research guidance/support/encouragement for the student at critical times in their research.

In these cases a DPF must also be filed with the Graduate Program Coordinator. However, only PART 3 is required to be completed (other parts can be if deemed useful).

PART 1.1: STUDENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Name of Student: Year in Program:

Name of Research Advisor:

Program (Ph.D., M.S., B.S./M.S.): Utah Resident (answer "Yes" or "No"):

Courses taken in the last year (add more rows if needed):

Department	Course Title/Number	Units	Grade

Courses being taken currently, or planned for the semester/year ahead (add more rows if needed):

Department	Course Title/Number	Units	Grade

Answer the following questions – add as much extra space as needed.

Describe research undertaken this year:

List oral presentations given this year (Scientific Speaking, poster presentations, meeting talks, etc.):

Manuscripts and/or abstracts published in the last year. Provide authors (surname and initials), title, journal name, volume, and inclusive page numbers (if submitted, or in preparation, indicate so):

Describe how your form of support (TA, RA, Fellowship, etc.) contributed to your training and development:

PART 1.2: STUDENT SELF EVALUATION

In an attempt to better advise students, the Research Advisor, Supervisory Committee, and Graduate Program Committee would like each student to complete the following questions that ask you to do some self-evaluation of your professional goals. Expand with as much space as necessary.

1. At the present time, what is your career goal(s)?
2. What strengths do you see yourself having at the present time that provide a good fit with your career plans?
3. What areas do you think you need to develop so that your skills better match your career goals?
4. What are your plans to develop those skills/areas?
5. In what ways might your Research Advisor, Supervisory Committee, and/or the SBS, help you develop these areas and move toward your career goal(s) in the next 12 months?

Student signature (print name):

Date:

PART 2: RESEARCH ADVISOR EVALUATION

1. Use and familiarity of literature pertaining to project:
2. Design and execution of experimental work:
3. Relative use of time towards dissertation/thesis research versus other activities:
4. Evaluation of research data:
5. Record keeping:
6. Independence and motivation:
7. Overall progress/other comments:

Research Advisor signature (print name):

Date:

PART 3: SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE COMMENTS

To be completed by the Chair of the Supervisory Committee (Research Advisor) with input from other committee members and returned to the Graduate Program Coordinator within a week of the Supervisory Committee Meeting.

Return as a PDF by email with the student and all Supervisory Committee members copied on the email.

For additional information about completing/filing the DPF, see the SBS Graduate Student Handbook “Developmental Plan Form” section.

Supervisory Committee meeting date:

Supervisory Committee members present:

Student was present (indicate “Yes” or “No”):

Supervisory Committee comments (use extra space if needed):