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1. The Department

The Department of Cell & Developmental Biology (CDB) faculty together with the Graduate College have established the requirements necessary to achieve the Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) degree in our program. As you are developing your research and teaching skills, we expect that you, together with your faculty thesis advisor and Thesis Committee Members, will take responsibility for achieving the goals of the graduate program. Success depends on reaching the Graduate Degree Milestones and completing degree requirements in a timely manner.

Laura Martin is the Office Manager for the Department and Elaine Rodgers is the Graduate Program Secretary. Their offices are located in Room B107 CLSL. They will assist you with any registration, payroll or other administrative matters. Elaine will also handle your departmental reimbursements and travel arrangements. The School of Molecular and Cellular Biology (MCB) administrative office is located in Room 393 Morrill Hall. Their role is to assist you in business matters, such as purchase orders for research supplies and externally-funded fellowships.

Professor David Rivier, the Associate Head of the Department, and Professor Lisa Stubbs, chair of the CDB Graduate Program Committee, serve as the ombudsmen to resolve any questions or problems related to a student’s graduate program. Professor Jie Chen, the Head of the Department, is also available to discuss any academic or research problems with students, if necessary.

Should a student decide to leave his/her current thesis lab at any point for any reason, he/she must immediately meet with Laura Martin and Elaine Rodgers to discuss the implications. A mandatory meeting with the Graduate College and ISSS (if the student is an international student) will be scheduled to fully understand the student’s options.

2. Degree Requirements

2.1 Ph.D. Degree Requirements

Candidates for the Ph.D. degree must complete the following.

Graduate College Requirements:

- Completion of at least 96 credit hours of work beyond the baccalaureate degree.
- Submission of an acceptable thesis.
- All requirements for the Ph.D. must be completed within 7 years after initial registration in the Graduate College. Petition to extend this time-to-degree may be approved by the department and the Graduate College for up to 12 months.
- If the Ph.D. is not completed within 5 years after the Preliminary Examination, the student will be required to take a second Preliminary Examination.
see the Graduate College Handbook for more details [http://www.grad.illinois.edu/gradhandbook/].

Cell & Developmental Biology Department Requirements:

The CDB Graduate Program Committee evaluates factors that determine satisfactory academic progress. Failure to meet these requirements can result in the committee recommending to the Graduate College that the student be placed on probation or dismissed from the Graduate College. In particular, a student who fails to meet CDB Graduate Program Milestones in a timely fashion will be put on a departmental or Graduate College hold. This means that the student will not be given a research appointment (will not be paid) until the deficiency is corrected.

- Successful completion of the course requirements set by the Department of Cell & Developmental Biology, total of 100 credit hours – see Sections 4 & 5.

- An overall grade point average (GPA) of at least 3.0 in all graded 400- and 500-level courses.

- Passing grade on the Preliminary Examination, held during April of the second year. Under special circumstances the exam period may be extended into March and May dates. This examination is designed to determine if the student is qualified for advancement to a Ph.D. degree.

- Form a Thesis Committee by the first day of the spring semester of the third year.

- After successful completion of the Preliminary Exam, present a Departmental Student Research Seminar each academic year. The Seminar will be coupled to an Annual Meeting of the Thesis Committee to review the student’s progress. In preparation for this meeting, the student and advisor will complete the annual review form to be submitted to the committee.

- Experience teaching for at least one semester (one semester of 50% TA or the equivalent). International CDB graduate students must be eligible to teach (passed the campus requirements for English proficiency; see below) within 3 years of entering the graduate program. Students who are not eligible to teach within this time period are in poor academic standing and will be dismissed from the Ph.D. program unless special approval is granted by the graduate committee before the start of the third year.

- All students are required to publish significant findings of their primary thesis research, as a first author, in peer-reviewed journals.

- Attend at least one national scientific meeting in their chosen field, and present a first-authored poster or talk at that conference. It is expected that the advisor’s research funding will support this travel. However, if no source of funding is available, students in their fourth year or beyond who have not yet attended a meeting may receive full support from the Department to attend one national meeting.
To be eligible for departmental support each student must:

- Demonstrate that he or she has applied for external funding for this travel; for example most conferences do offer student travel awards.
- Have been accepted to the meeting as a presenter of a first-author poster or talk.
- Provide a letter from his or her advisor describing the benefits of attending that particular meeting and the need for departmental financial support.

In addition, CDB will match any external travel award obtained by a student for national conference travel at any stage in his or her graduate career, up to a total of $500. Students who are selected to present a talk at a national conference will be eligible for an additional award and departmental recognition. A student may receive unlimited departmental awards in this category throughout his/her graduate career, but the presentations must be on different scientific projects.

- Hold a pre-defense meeting with the Thesis Committee to evaluate student progress approximately six months prior to the date of the final thesis defense. This meeting can take place in conjunction with the student’s required annual oral presentation and meeting with the thesis committee.

- Submission and successful defense of a dissertation prepared on original research, performed under the direction of a faculty member or an Affiliate of the CDB Department. The dissertation must be submitted to the thesis committee at least two weeks prior to the date of defense. Defense will be held with the committee only. Upon passing the defense, a public seminar presentation of the student’s thesis work will be scheduled at an earliest possible date, preferably in a Monday or Wednesday departmental seminar slot. The Department will approve the dissertation only after the public seminar. See sections “Ph.D. Thesis (Dissertation)” Section 11.2 and “Thesis Defense (Final Examination)” Section 11.3.

### 3. Advising

All students are admitted into the School of Molecular and Cellular Biology (School of MCB) umbrella program. Over the course of the first semester, the student will perform three research rotations in laboratories within the School of MCB. During this time, the Associate Director of the MCB program, Jim Imlay, will serve as the primary advisor. At the end of the semester, the student will arrange to do thesis research in a permanent laboratory. If the principal investigator (PI) of this laboratory has a primary appointment in the Department of Cell & Developmental Biology, the student will become a member of this Department. From this point on, the student’s PI will be the first point of contact when he/she seeks advice or assistance with issues relating to the graduate program. Students should also feel free to bring up problems or concerns...
about their progression in the program with the Graduate Program Committee, the Associate Head, or the Head of the Department.

4. The First Semester of Graduate School

4.1 Coursework

During the first semester of the first year of graduate school, all students are School of MCB graduate students. As such, they take the MCB core graduate courses:

- MCB 501 - Advanced Biochemistry (4 hrs)
- MCB 502 - Advanced Molecular Genetics (4 hrs)

The students also register for lab rotations

- MCB 581 - 1st rotation (3 hrs)
- MCB 582 - 2nd rotation (3 hrs)
- MCB 583 - 3rd rotation (3 hrs)

Thus, for the first semester of the first year of graduate school, the student will be enrolled for a total of 17 credit hours.

4.2 Lab Rotations

All students are required to perform three lab rotations (MCB 581, 582, and 583) during their first semester of graduate study. Each lab rotation will be approximately 5 weeks in length. Lab rotations are graded on an S/U basis. Before the first day of classes, students will provide a list of 6 preferred MCB labs for their first rotation to Shawna Smith, who is the School of MCB Graduate Program Coordinator. Students may request any lab within any department of the School of MCB. Members of the School of MCB Admissions Committee will then assign the lab rotations based upon the student lists. The lab rotations allow new graduate students to become acquainted with faculty, graduate students, and research in several laboratories. The purpose of the rotations is to help students choose a research advisor and to expose the students to a variety of experimental questions and techniques.

Towards the end of the first lab rotation, graduate students will provide a second list of 6 preferred labs for the second rotation and towards the end of the second lab rotation, graduate students will provide a third list of 6 preferred labs for the third rotation. The Graduate Committee tries to accommodate each student’s request; however, this is not always feasible.

Beginning on December 1st, students may seek firm commitments from rotation advisors regarding joining a thesis lab. During rotations, students may indicate to their rotation advisor an interest in joining his/her lab. The rotation advisor may also indicate whether s/he might be interested in having the student join the lab at the end of the semester. This discussion is UNOFFICIAL, i.e. either party can change their mind up until December 1st. All final lab commitments need to be made by the final day of the fall semester classes.
If desired, a student may arrange another rotation after completion of the three assigned rotations. This fourth rotation should begin as early as possible after the third rotation (it is usually performed over the winter break) and must be arranged by the student and mutually agreed upon by the student and the PI. The fourth rotation is informal, the student does not need to register for the rotation, and no credit is given for it.

5. Coursework in the Second Semester and Beyond

Each student is required to register for a full-time credit load including summer until CDB program requirements are completed. To obtain a Ph.D. degree a student must complete **100 hours** of graduate credit, of which **20 hours** must be graded formal coursework. Eight (8) of the required 20 graded hours of coursework will have already been taken in the first semester (MCB501, MCB502), leaving 12 credit hours to be completed once a student joins CDB.

*All coursework must be discussed and agreed upon between the advisor and the student, whether or not the coursework is a part of the program requirement.*

Specific requirements:

- **MCB 580 - Research Ethics and Responsibilities (1 hr, S/U).**
  
  This class must be taken in the fall semester of the second year.

- **CDB 595A & C - Department and Graduate Student Seminar (6 hrs, S/U).**
  
  *These credits are only counted toward the 100 hour total prior to completing the Preliminary Exam.* Students are required to register for one credit hour of each of the CDB seminars every fall and spring semester that they register. Students must attend a minimum of 75% of the seminars for both CDB 595A & C to get a “Satisfactory” grade. Two cumulative “Unsatisfactory” grades in either or both of these courses will be considered not meeting the graduate program requirements and therefore will put the student in poor academic standing.

- **CDB 590/599 - Thesis Research (64 hrs S/U)**
  
  Students should register for CDB 590 before they pass their Preliminary Examination and CDB 599 after they pass the prelim exam.

- **MCB 540 (Scientific Writing, 2 hrs, graded).** This class must be taken in the fall semester of the second year.

- **Elective courses (10 graded hours total)**
  
  May be chosen from any MCB courses at 400 level or above; at least 3 of the courses must be taught or co-taught by CDB faculty. Occasionally, classes taken outside of MCB fulfill a niche that cannot be accommodated by an MCB course. In order for such courses to be counted toward the program requirement, they must be agreed upon by your advisor and must also be approved by the CDB Graduate Program Committee.
Number of hours per semester:

- Students who are employed as TAs need to register for 14 credit hours of research and courses combined.
- Students who are employed as RAs need to register for 16 credit hours of research and courses combined.
- 6 credit hours for summer research, regardless of the mechanism that the student is supported by.
- International students may be advised to take a reduced load during a semester when they are enrolled in a remedial English course (ESL).
- The credit hours needed after signing up for courses should be assigned to CDB 590 or CDB 599, as appropriate.

These hours may vary if a student is on a fellowship. Please contact Laura Martin, if you have questions.

6. Teaching

6.1 Requirements

Becoming a proficient teacher is an important part of graduate education. The department requires each graduate student to teach the equivalent of 50% for one semester. Non-native English speaking CDB graduate students must be eligible to teach (passed the requirements for English proficiency) within 3 years of their entering the graduate program. Ph.D. candidates who are not eligible to teach within this time period may be dismissed from the Ph.D. program.

6.2 UIUC Teaching Assistant English Language Proficiency Requirements

Illinois state law requires that all instructors at the University of Illinois be orally proficient in English to be eligible to teach. All non-native English speaking students applying for appointments as teaching assistants at UIUC must first satisfy the English proficiency admission requirements of the Graduate College and the appointing academic unit.

The TOEFL iBT test measures English language proficiency in the following areas by section: Reading, Listening, Writing, Speaking. The Speaking section includes both integrated and independent tasks. Section scores range from 0-30 and total scores range from 0-120. Further information about the test can be obtained at the TOEFL website [http://www.ets.org/toefl](http://www.ets.org/toefl).

The total and speaking scores from the TOEFL iBT determine whether a student is eligible to be a TA immediately. Shawna Smith, who is the School of MCB Graduate Program Coordinator, is the liaison for all matters related to English language proficiency requirements. The following chart provides an outline of action for International Teaching Assistantship consideration (effective Spring 2006)*:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total / speaking iBT</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>103+ / 24+</td>
<td>Student is admitted on full status AND is immediately eligible to TA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>103+ / 23 or less</td>
<td>Student is admitted on full status BUT student must take the EPI (see below); student must pass EPI before being eligible to TA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79–102 / 24+</td>
<td>Student is immediately eligible to TA BUT student is admitted on limited status; student must take the EPT (see below) in the fall semester and any ESL courses within 2 years of beginning graduate school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79–102 / 23 or less</td>
<td>Student is admitted on limited status; student must successfully complete BOTH the EPI and EPT to be eligible for TAing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Please note: TOEFL iBT scores must be less than two years old from the first day of class at the proposed term of entry in order to be valid

### 6.3 The EPI (English Proficiency Interview)

All non-native speakers of English who wish to provide classroom instruction are required to pass the EPI with a score of 4CP, 5 or 6. There are no exceptions. The EPI is an interview in which there is a person who will talk to the student and a person who will assess the quality of spoken English. All MCB students who are in their first term and have a TOEFL iBT speaking score of less than 24 must contact Shawna Smith in the MCB Graduate Program Office to schedule a test in the fall semester. There are several possible outcomes for the initial EPI:

- If the student earns a 5 or 6, the student is eligible to TA.
- If the student receives a 4CP grade, the student is required to successfully complete “ESL 508: Seminar for International TAs” during or before the first semester of teaching.
- If the student earns a score of 4, 3 or 2, the student may retake the test after successful completion of an English improvement activity. English improvement options include enrollment in an ESL course (504, 506, or 510) or 10 hours of participation in Center for Innovation in Teaching & Learning approved tutoring and must be completed in the semester after the EPI was taken. Students have a maximum of 3 attempts. Not passing the EPI is grounds for dismissal from the department.

In addition, campus policy requires those who pass the English language assessment to: (1) attend both the All-Campus International Teaching Assistants Orientation and the All-Campus Teaching Assistants Orientation; (2) participate in microteaching; and (3) have their classroom teaching monitored closely by their department during the semesters in which they subsequently teach. Additional information may be obtained from the Center for Innovation in Teaching & Learning website [http://cte.illinois.edu/](http://cte.illinois.edu/)
6.4 The EPT (English Placement Test)
http://www.linguistics.illinois.edu/students/placement/grreg.html

The EPT does not assess or in any way affect the qualification of graduate student International Teaching Assistants (ITAs). For information about English language assessment requirements of ITAs, please go to:
http://www.grad.illinois.edu/admissions/taengprof.htm.

Those international students who have a total TOEFL iBT score of 79-102 must take an EPT. This test is administered by the Foreign Languages Department soon after the student arrives on campus. If your “Notice of Admission” states that you must take the English Placement Test (EPT), then you are required to take the test. If your “Notice of Admission” does not state this, you may choose to take the EPT if you wish to enroll in ESL courses or you may choose not to take it. All students are strongly encouraged to take the EPT well before classes begin, and if possible, at least two full business days before meeting with their advisor(s) to do final course selection.

The EPT consists of two parts: a written test and an oral test. The writing test requires students to produce an academic essay based on the information obtained from a reading passage and a short lecture. In the oral test, students are given a topic on which to speak for three minutes. If students speak intelligibly, they will be exempted from further oral testing. Otherwise, students will be required to take another oral exam. Students will be placed into or exempted from the general oral or written ESL service courses based on the results of the test.

7. Preliminary Examination

The Preliminary Exam is required by the Graduate College to determine if the student is qualified for advancement to candidacy for the Ph.D. degree. This examination consists of two parts: a written proposal and an oral defense, to be completed in April of the students’ second year.

7.1 Preliminary Exam Committee

The CDB Graduate Program Committee oversees the administering of Prelim Exams for all students. Each prelim exam committee consists of four faculty members, including 3 CDB faculty members assigned by the Graduate Program Committee and 1 faculty member from outside the Department chosen by the student. Members of the Graduate Program Committee serve as chairs of the prelim exam committees. The committees are formed in January for April exams.

7.2 Preliminary Exam Written Proposal

The student must prepare a research proposal describing his or her thesis project. It is the student’s responsibility to write his/her own proposal. However, the advisor must read drafts of these documents and provide both intellectual guidance and editorial feedback to help the students learn how to undertake good scientific writing.
The written proposal should be **no longer than 7 pages** in length (excluding the cover page and references). The written proposal must be submitted to the Graduate Program Secretary by **March 15** of the second year in the graduate program. No revision of the proposal will be accepted by the office or by the committee after this date. The format of the written proposal must follow guidelines below and will be checked by the Graduate Program Secretary prior to distributing to prelim exam committee members.

The format of the written proposal will follow that of the NIH F31 pre-doctoral fellowship application, which specifically includes the Specific Aims and Research Strategy sections. The guidelines for those sections are listed below, and come from NIH publication PHS SF424 (R&R), with a few comments added for clarity.

These websites may help get you started:


https://depts.washington.edu/anesth/research/grantsmanship/session3_WritingEffectiveSpecificAims.pdf

For fonts use Arial, Helvetica, Palatino Linotype, or Georgia typeface, a black font color, and a font size of 11 points or larger. (A Symbol font may be used to insert Greek letters or special characters; the font size requirement still applies).

Type density, including characters and spaces, must be no more than 15 characters per inch. Type may be no more than six lines per inch.

Use standard paper size (8 ½"x11"). Use at least one-half inch margins (top, bottom, left and right) for all pages. No information should appear in the margins.

Proposal Sections:

**Cover Page**: The cover page should include the title of the project, your name, the date, time and place of the oral defense, and list the members of the Exam Committee with the designated Chair indicated.

**Specific Aims** (*limited to one page*): State the goals of the proposed research and summarize the expected outcome(s), including the impact that the results of the proposed research will exert on the research field(s) involved. This section outlines the objectives and describes concisely what the specific research described in the proposal is intended to accomplish and a hypotheses to be treated. This page will typically include an introductory paragraph or two that concisely states the scientific problem and hypothesis, followed by a numbered list of 2-3 Specific Aims designed to address that hypothesis. A short but concise description of each Aim should be included after a title that accurately summarizes the Aim.

**Research Strategy** (*limited to 6 pages including all figures and tables*): Organize the Research Strategy in the specified order and start each section with the appropriate section heading:
Significance

Innovation

Approach (and alternative approaches)

Cite published experimental details in the Research Strategy and provide the full reference in the References Cited section.

(a) Significance:

- Explain the importance of the problem or critical barrier to progress in the field that the proposed project addresses.
- Explain how the proposed project will improve scientific knowledge, technical capability, and/or clinical practice in one or more broad fields.
- Describe how the concepts, methods, technologies, treatments, services, or preventative interventions that drive this field will be changed if the proposed aims are achieved.

(b) Innovation: (the Innovation section is optional, but can be used to help your committee members understand how your project will yield novel insights or develop novel approaches that will advance your chosen field.)

- Explain how the application challenges and seeks to shift current research or clinical practice paradigms.
- Describe any novel theoretical concepts, approaches or methodologies, instrumentation or interventions to be developed or used, and any advantage over existing methodologies, instrumentation, or interventions.
- Explain any refinements, improvements, or new applications of theoretical concepts, approaches or methodologies, instrumentation, or interventions.

(c) Approach: This section should include the background necessary for a reader to understand the problem you wish to solve, and to understand the basis for your hypothesis. The section should include:

- A review of the scientific literature sufficient to inform your committee of the relevant issues and unsolved problems that lead to your hypothesis
- Preliminary Data that support your hypothesis (please be sure to give proper attribution if the data presented are not your own)
- A section that describes the approach – both experimental and analytical - that you will use to attain each of your Specific Aims.

You need to convince your committee that the experiments you plan can be completed in time span consistent with a Ph.D. thesis studentship, that is, within the next 3-4 years.
For each Aim it is essential to identify potential issues that might arise in the course of the experiments you propose and alternative approaches (methods or strategies) you could use in case your favored strategy were to fail. You should also be prepared to discuss alternative hypotheses and state how you might change your strategy if results indicate that your original hypothesis is incorrect.

From the NIH manual:

- Describe the overall strategy, methodology, and analyses to be used to accomplish the specific aims of the project. Include how the data will be collected, analyzed, and interpreted.
- Discuss potential problems, alternative strategies, and benchmarks for success anticipated to achieve the aims.
- If the project is in the early stages of development, describe any strategy to establish feasibility, and address the management of any high risk aspects of the proposed work.
- If an applicant has multiple Specific Aims, then the applicant should address Significance, Innovation and Approach for each Specific Aim individually. For the CDB exam this should be brief and in addition to the overall project significance section, described above. You should also incorporate information on any of your Preliminary Studies that pertain to each Specific Aim within the Significance and Approach subsections, where this is best suited.

**References cited (No page limits):** This section provides full literature references, following the standard format, which includes the authors' names (in the correct order, as published), year of publication, title of the manuscript, title of the journal in which the work was published, volume and page numbers.

**7.3 Preliminary Exam Oral Defense**

The oral defense will be scheduled for two hours. The student should plan a presentation for no more than 20 uninterrupted minutes (although the student may indeed be interrupted with questions during the presentation) with 15 slides maximum of the proposal.

During the oral defense, the student must be able to describe clearly the rationale for the experiments, to summarize preliminary results, and to defend conclusions based on this work. The student should be prepared to explain all aspects of the project, including other studies relevant to the proposed research (i.e., relevant background and literature), all proposed experiments and techniques needed to undertake this research.

**7.4 Preliminary Exam Evaluation and Outcome**

On the basis of the written proposal and the oral presentation, the committee will evaluate the student’s progress and potential to carry out Ph.D. degree-level research.
A formal checklist will be used to assist in the evaluation of the student’s performance at this exam. A copy of the blank checklist will be made available to the students early in the spring semester to help them prepare for the exam. The committee will evaluate the proposed research, the student’s background knowledge and grasp of any relevant material, as well as the student’s ability to communicate effectively and to think critically about his/her research project.

**Before the examination** the committee will read and discuss the progress letter provided by the student’s mentor.

Following the meeting, the committee will meet with the student to explain their decision. The Chair will compose a letter of evaluation to the student and advisor **no later than two weeks following the examination**.

There are three potential outcomes of a Preliminary Examination:

- **Fail**: Students who fail will not be advanced to candidacy to the Ph.D. degree. They will be placed on probationary academic status, and must remediate the underlying conditions within 6 months. The student must retake and pass the entire Preliminary Examination within 180 days of the initial examination date according to University rules, or the student will be dismissed from the CDB graduate program.

- **Deferral**: For students who are deferred, the committee may recommend writing revisions, or revisions plus a new oral defense to be completed by the middle two weeks of the following September at the latest. A Preliminary Examination cannot be deferred twice and the outcome of a deferred exam is either “pass” or “fail.”

- **Pass**: Students who pass are advanced to candidacy to the Ph.D. degree. It is possible for a student to pass contingent on recommendations put forth by the committee including, but not limited to, rewriting parts of the proposal and/or taking additional coursework. The student must satisfy these recommendations before officially passing their Preliminary Examination.

The results of the Preliminary Examination are sent to the Graduate College by the Department in the form of a signed official notification.

7.5 Academic Probation

Students who are on academic probation (GPA<3.0) at the end of the fall semester of the second year may petition, with the support of their advisors, to take the Preliminary Examination in the following spring along with their classmates. If a student on academic probation fails the prelim exam, he/she will be immediately dismissed from the Ph.D. program. **Retake of the exam will not be allowed.**

All students must have a 3.0 GPA at the end of their third year or they will be dismissed from the Ph.D. program.
8. PhD Thesis Committee

The Thesis Committee is established after successful completion of the Preliminary Exam. At any time, if necessary, it is possible to replace a member of the Thesis Committee, with permission from the CDB Graduate Program Committee.

Each student, in consultation with the thesis advisor and with the prior agreement of the faculty selected, will submit the names of three additional professors for the Thesis Committee to the CDB Graduate Program Committee no later than the start of the Spring semester of the third year. Three members of the committee, including the student’s advisor, must be primary CDB faculty members, at least two of the members must have attained tenure, and the fourth member must have a primary faculty appointment outside the department. The student’s advisor is formally a member of the Ph.D. thesis committee. With approval by the Graduate Program Committee, an additional member may be recruited to the committee - for example, to bring in new expertise as the project develops - as long as the above criteria have been met.

It is the student's responsibility to ask potential committee members to serve on the committee and obtain faculty signatures on the CDB Thesis Committee Approval Request Form. The chair, who must be a tenured primary CDB member other than the thesis advisor, will be chosen by the student with consent of the faculty member. The Graduate Program Committee will review and approve the prospective Thesis Committee. The Graduate Program Committee may also suggest an alternate member. The student must inform the outside member of his or her role on the Thesis Committee.

The Thesis Committee will meet yearly to evaluate the student’s progress and to provide advice. Each Ph.D. candidate will give an annual research seminar. All members of the committee, including the thesis advisor, are expected to attend the student’s seminar and a meeting each year, usually held immediately after the presentation, to provide feedback and advice to the candidate.

9. Graduate Student Annual Research and Academic Progress Review

Campus policy stipulates that graduate units must conduct annual academic progress reviews for all graduate students enrolled in degree-seeking programs at least once every academic year. A written copy of the review must be given to the student and be placed in the student’s academic file. The review must include: a student self-report and assessment; a written review prepared by the advisor; an opportunity for the student to discuss this review with the advisor in person.

This review will occur within the framework of the Department’s Preliminary Examinations and Annual Student Seminars:

**1st-year students**: An annual review form will be completed and signed by both the student and the advisor by May 15.
**2nd-year students:** The student’s written Preliminary Examination proposal and defense of the proposal, and the decision and summary statements by the exam committee serve as the review process. See Preliminary Examination Section 7 for details.

**All students, after completion of the Preliminary Examination (beginning 3rd-year):** The student annual seminar and meeting with thesis committee serve as the review. See Graduate Student Annual Seminar and Progress Review Section 10 for details.

10. **Graduate Student Annual Seminar and Progress Review**

10.1 **Overview of Annual Progress Review**

Each year progress review will be performed for the Ph.D. candidate in his/her 3rd year or beyond. This review must be completed **no later than last day of spring semester (early May)**, which entails the following:

- The student will present a Departmental Research Seminar.
- An annual review form must be completed and signed by both the student and the advisor one week before the seminar.
- If the student is in his/her 4th year or beyond and has not published a first-author manuscript, a manuscript draft or detailed outline of a paper in progress must be submitted to the Thesis Committee together with the annual review form. At a minimum the outline must contain a set of completed figures and an outline of planned figures with a detailed description of (1) the conclusions illustrated by completed figures, and (2) the question to be addressed by each figure planned.
- After the seminar the student will send the presentation slides electronically to the Graduate Program Secretary.
- The student will meet with the Thesis Committee to discuss progress and future research directions. This meeting is generally scheduled for a time immediately following the annual seminar, but must take place within one month following the seminar.

10.2 **Annual Student Seminar Presentation**

The presentation should be planned for 20 minutes allowing 10 minutes of discussion. Each talk should include a brief but informative synopsis of:

- Background and Significance of the project
- Results to date with emphasis on progress the student has made over the year
- A brief summary of future goals
The purpose of these talks is to:

- Provide valuable experience for the student in developing and honing their public presentation skills
- Inform other students and faculty of the student’s research, and
- Allow the student to receive constructive input from the CDB community

The talks should be styled as if for a conference, to a broad audience that is generally knowledgeable but not specifically expert in the student’s field. The student’s thesis committee is expected to attend this talk and evaluate the student’s progress as well as provide feedback to improve presentation skills. The student should provide enough background that the audience can appreciate the scope of the problem and past work, **but focus mainly on the progress that has been made** since the student’s last presentation. The committee will receive a copy of the student’s presentation from the previous year for comparison.

10.3 Annual Review Meeting

The annual review meeting should involve all committee members if possible. The Chair **must be present**, and the student’s advisor is also expected to attend.

The purpose of this meeting is to give committee members a chance to evaluate the student’s progress toward the degree. However, it is also a forum for students to gain valuable technical and scientific advice. The committee will have received the annual review form completed by the student and his/her advisor prior to this meeting.

10.4 Evaluation

The committee Chair will complete a form summarizing the committee’s evaluation of the candidate’s progress and approved by all committee members, **no later than 2 weeks following the student’s meeting**. The form will be submitted to the Graduate Program Secretary and will be forwarded to the student and advisor.

The report will include the following components:

- **Overall Assessment**: of the student’s progress, seminar presentation, and written documents
- **Strengths and Weaknesses**: in concise summary
- **Constructive advice on how to address any major concerns**

An overall rating of “satisfactory” or “unsatisfactory” should be provided by the committee and included at the top of the report each year.

**Satisfactory** progress will be assigned to students who have:

- Met obligations regarding submission of required documents
- Provided adequate information to their committee, responded knowledgably to questions, and responded to concerns from previous years
• Made overall satisfactory progress (despite normal research setbacks and possible issues) toward their degree

Unsatisfactory will be reserved to students who:

• Fail to submit their required documents, and fail to complete the meeting with their committee

• Fail to provide adequate information to their committee, fail to answer critical questions knowledgably, or fail to respond to concerns from previous years

• Fail to make adequate progress toward their degree, due to problems beyond normal research setbacks and technical issues

11. The Final Year

11.1 Pre-defense or “6-Month” Meeting

Each student who is within a year of graduating is responsible for scheduling the pre-defense meeting with the Thesis Committee. The final defense cannot be scheduled until the student has the approval of the Thesis Committee and the Advisor at the pre-defense meeting.

Consult with the Graduate Program Secretary, well in advance of scheduling your 6-month meeting, to make sure you have completed all the necessary requirements for a Ph.D. degree.

A letter will be provided to the committee by the student’s advisor that evaluates the student’s progress towards the Ph.D. and readiness to defend. The advisor, as a member of the thesis committee, must also attend the pre-defense meeting. This meeting provides an opportunity for the Committee to evaluate the student’s progress, suggest any additional experiments that may be necessary before completion of the thesis, and determine whether the expected time-frame for completion of the thesis is reasonable.

A week prior to the pre-defense meeting, the student must provide the committee with the following:

• An outline of the thesis (indicating sections that have been completed and any experiments that have not yet been completed)

• A final version of the introductory chapter

• Evidence of having published significant findings of their primary thesis research, as a first author, in peer-reviewed journals

• Drafts of any papers that are being reviewed for publication or about to be submitted

• An updated curriculum vitae (CV)
11.2 Ph.D. Thesis (Dissertation)

The Graduate College has strict requirements for the thesis format. A copy of these thesis guidelines can be obtained from the Graduate College website or from the Thesis Office. Please read these thesis guidelines carefully before writing your thesis.

Once you have made all revisions that were suggested by your thesis committee, the format of your thesis will be reviewed by the Graduate Program Secretary. Once approved by the Department, the thesis can be sent to the Graduate College. The Thesis Office will review your thesis and if any changes are necessary will send an email of necessary corrections. A time lag of up to, but not exceeding, one year is permitted between time of the final exam (thesis defense) and official deposit of the thesis in the Graduate College, but the degree is not official nor conferred until all other degree requirements have been met and the thesis is deposited. The Graduate College website outlines the steps necessary for the deposit of the thesis.

11.3 Thesis Defense (Final Examination)

The Final Thesis Defense Committee will be the same as the Thesis Committee with the researcher advisor serving as the Director of Research.

The Ph.D. candidate should arrange a time with the committee and reserve a room for the final defense, and inform the Graduate Program Secretary of the time and place of defense. The student is expected to submit his/her thesis to committee members at least 2 weeks prior to the final defense. The committee will read the thesis and make suggestions for corrections and any additional work which may be necessary to complete the Ph.D. If it is determined by the committee that the required changes are so extensive that this timeline cannot be met, or if the changes could be made but the student fails to meet this two-week deadline, the defense will need to be rescheduled.

Upon passing the defense the committee will sign the “Final Examination Result” form. The student must schedule a one-hour seminar within 7 days of successful defense, preferably in a Monday or Wednesday seminar slot. All faculty and students will be expected to attend. After the seminar, the “Final Examination Result” form will be signed by the department and forwarded to the Graduate College. (Thesis Committee members sign the form at the time of defense if the student passes.) One bound copy of the final thesis must be turned in to the CDB Office after the Graduate College has approved the thesis for deposit.

When a thesis is successfully defended and deposited, the DFR grades for CDB 599 will be changed to S (satisfactory). If the student fails the final defense, the grade becomes U (unsatisfactory), and the thesis cannot be deposited. No credit will be given for CDB 599 unless a thesis is deposited.
11.4 Electronic Deposit of Thesis (EDT) [http://www.grad.illinois.edu/thesis-dissertation](http://www.grad.illinois.edu/thesis-dissertation)

Shortly after degree conferral for each graduation period, the Graduate College transfers the theses of those graduates to IDEALS, the Illinois Digital Environment for Access to Learning and Scholarship. IDEALS is the digital repository for research and scholarship produced at Illinois and contains over 40,000 graduate theses.

When you submit your thesis to the Graduate College, you will be asked to select a release option for your work in IDEALS. These options go into effect when the Graduate College transfers your thesis to IDEALS. Take time to review the IDEALS Deposit Agreement: Non-Exclusive Distribution and Preservation License prior to submission.

**IDEALS Release Options**

The release option you choose will go into effect after your thesis has been transferred to IDEALS. The metadata for your thesis—including title, author’s name, adviser/committee, department, degree, abstract, and subject(s)—will be visible for your thesis in IDEALS for all release options. All doctoral and master’s students will choose from one of three release options:

- **Open Access**: The thesis will be immediately publicly available through IDEALS.

- **U of I Access**: Access to the thesis through IDEALS will be restricted to members of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign community for a period of 2 years. The thesis will also be available through the University Library’s interlibrary loan service during this period of time. After 2 years, the thesis will become publicly available through IDEALS.

- **Closed Access**: Access to the thesis through IDEALS will be restricted such that it will not be available to anyone, including you and your adviser, for a period of 2 years. After 2 years, the thesis will become publicly available through IDEALS.

**ProQuest Release Options (Optional)**

Read the detailed information about ProQuest at: [http://www.grad.illinois.edu/thesis/release-options](http://www.grad.illinois.edu/thesis/release-options)

11.5 The Graduate College Calendar

The [Graduate College Calendar](http://www.grad.illinois.edu/thesis/release-options) lists the dates of important deadlines for graduate students.

11.6 Dates and Deadlines for Graduation

Degrees are conferred three times per year, in August, December, and May. After completing their thesis deposit, a student may request a Degree Certification Letter (DCL) by downloading the [Degree Certification Letter Request](http://www.grad.illinois.edu/thesis/release-options) from the Graduate
College website. After completing and signing the top half of the form, the student should submit the DCL request to the Graduate Program Secretary, who will complete the departmental section and route the completed request to the Graduate Student Academic Services (GSAS) Office for processing.

12. Additional Requirements, Situations and Expectations

12.1 Experimental Records and Data

All experimental procedures and results should be carefully recorded in the student’s lab notebooks. Laboratory notebooks should be systematic and thorough enough to be scrutinized by other scientists or granting agencies. According to federal funding agencies, University of Illinois, and Departmental policy, all lab notes and data are considered property of the laboratory where the research was done and should remain in the laboratory when the student leaves. With permission of the research advisor, the student may take a copy of these materials upon leaving the lab.

12.2 Ethical Conduct

Students and faculty are expected to hold the highest ethical standards during their pursuit of scholarly research and teaching. Students should become familiar with the definition of academic misconduct:

http://www.grad.illinois.edu/gradhandbook/1/chapter3

All students are expected to adhere to the standards of intellectual and academic integrity as spelled out in these publications. Each student must complete MCB 580, Research Ethics & Responsibilities.

Any member of the University community who becomes aware of an apparent instance of academic misconduct relating to research or scholarship is obligated to report the incident or practice to the Department Head (or to the Campus Research Standards Officer). The Department Head and the Campus Research Standards Officer are charged with protecting the academic reputation and position of anyone who in good faith reports misconduct in scholarship or research.

12.3 Vacation and Sick Leave

Success in any biology Ph.D. program and a scientific career thereafter requires hard work and dedication. In contrast to classwork, experiments may continue on weekends and between semesters year round. In fact, the time between classes is often the most productive time to do experiments. Graduate students are not officially eligible for vacation benefits except for the official University holidays. Graduate students who wish to schedule a vacation must have the time approved by his/her advisor well in advance. Research and teaching assistants are also entitled to 13 days of non-accruable sick leave each year. In the event of more protracted illness, leave without pay may be requested (see below).
12.4 Academic Leaves of Absence

Below is a short description of the Academic Leave of Absence. It is your responsibility to read all the information regarding an Academic Leave Of Absence at:

http://www.grad.illinois.edu/gradhandbook/2/chapter2/registration

Graduate Students in degree-seeking programs are entitled to a total of two terms (fall and/or spring semesters) of academic leave of the types described below, in the course of a single degree program. However, students must document their request for a leave and meet the eligibility requirements. Students who anticipate not being enrolled for one or more terms, (fall or spring semesters, not summer), for whatever reason must meet with their program adviser before the first day of classes of their period of non-enrollment to apply for and receive approval for an Academic Leave of Absence. Students who are enrolled in summer only programs must apply for a Leave of Absence before taking a summer term off.

There are two categories of Academic Leaves of Absence:

- **Personal Academic Leaves of Absence** may be requested for a variety of reasons, including but not limited to leave for health reasons, for personal reasons, for active military service, or to take care of dependents or family members. Students who are on an approved Personal Academic Leave of Absence use the leave for personal reasons and not to make progress on the degree. In addition, students on Personal Academic Leaves of Absence should not expect that faculty will provide feedback on academic work, including proposals or drafts of theses.

- **Academic Progress Leaves of Absence** may be requested for instances of academic activity such as Study Abroad when the student registers at another institution, or fieldwork when the student is not using UIUC resources including faculty time, nor receiving financial support paid through the University. Students who are on an approved Academic Progress Leave of Absence do use the Leave to make progress toward completion of the degree, but must not use campus resources. Expectations of progress to be made during the Leave should be documented in the student’s academic file. International Students: International students must meet with an ISSS adviser prior to requesting a leave and the ISSS adviser must sign the Request for Academic Leave of Absence form.

12.5 Grounds for Dismissal

A student must be “in good standing” to remain as a student in the Department of Cell & Developmental Biology. There are several situations that will cause a student to lose their good standing status:

- Academic probation (cumulative GPA less than 3.0)
- Failure to fulfill coursework requirements, such as two cumulative “unsatisfactory” grades in CDB 595A and/or CDB 595C
• Failure of the Preliminary Examination
• Failure to make satisfactory progress deemed by the thesis committee
• Misconduct relating to propriety, ethics, failure of effort, or lack of progress. These problems can manifest in either the student’s coursework or lab work. While any faculty member can report various types of student misconduct, the student’s research advisor is usually in the best position to determine if such misconduct is taking place. It is the advisor’s responsibility to handle these issues as deemed necessary including expulsion of the student from their laboratory.
• Cases also may arise where a student is asked to leave a CDB laboratory by the advisor for a variety of reasons. In this case, the student MUST contact the Graduate Program Committee Chair, Dr. Lisa Stubbs, as soon as possible to discuss the situation. The student is automatically and immediately considered to be in poor academic standing in CDB if he/she does not have a thesis lab.

13. Financial

13.1 Appointments

Four types of financial assistance are available to graduate students:
• Teaching assistantships
• Research assistantships
• Fellowships
• Training grant appointments

For TAs and RAs, the stipend is divided into 11 equal payment units. A student will receive one unit of payment per month (on the 16th of each month) for 9 months during the fall and spring semesters and two months (June and July [RAs], July and August [TAs]) during the summer term. While there are only 11 payments, your contract is for 12 months. Thus, you are expected to work during the month you do not receive a paycheck. Our graduate students do not receive a paycheck in August unless they hold a 12-month appointment such as a traineeship or fellowship or hold a 25%TA appointment and a 25% RA appointment in the summer.

13.2 Paychecks

Paychecks and reimbursements from the University will be direct deposited into your bank account. Payday is typically the 16th of each month. The University pays monthly paid employees on the 16th of the month following the service dates of the 16th through the 15th. If the 16th of the month falls on a weekend or holiday then the pay date is the last work day prior.
13.3 Tuition Waivers

Each student holding an appointment of at least 25% but not more than 67% receive a tuition waiver. Fees must be paid by the student.

13.4 Fees

Registered graduate students must pay all applicable fees as listed in the campus [Graduate Student Handbook](#).

14. Master’s Degree

CDB does not recruit students into a separate Master’s degree program. The program exists only to assist Ph.D. students in good standing who may wish to receive the Master’s degree. The CDB Master’s degree requires that students complete all of the same coursework required of Ph.D. students during their first two academic years, [Section 5](#) except that **minimum GPA is 2.75**. If a student has passed the Prelim Exam, a Master’s degree can be granted at any time upon the student’s request for as long as the student remains in CDB. The CDB office will assist with the Department and Graduate College procedures.

If a student fails the Prelim Exam but has otherwise fulfilled all requirements of Ph.D. program in the first two years and would like to be considered for a master’s degree, the Graduate Program Committee will, in consultation with the student’s Prelim Exam committee, determine whether or not the student qualifies to receive a Master’s degree. Should the committee approve of a path to Master’s degree, the student must also fulfill all research requirements set forth by the advisor, including completion of bench work and documentation of research results.

15. Departmental Grievance Policy

Students, faculty, and staff at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign are a diverse group whose personalities, experiences, activities, and personal goals vary widely. Most conflicts and problems that arise in this environment can be resolved informally, without invoking formal grievance procedures. University policy strongly encourages all students who believe they have a dispute or conflict to use all appropriate avenues for informal resolution before initiating the Graduate College grievance process described below.

In most cases, a graduate student who has a problem should first discuss that problem with the person who seems to be the source of the difficulty. If that discussion is inappropriate or unfruitful, the problem can probably still be resolved informally with assistance from the other individuals within the department. We encourage meeting with your advisor, members of your thesis committee, chair of the Graduate Program Committee, Dr. Lisa Stubbs, or Associate Head of the department, Dr. David Rivier. The Head of the department, Dr. Jie Chen, is also available to discuss any issues if necessary. Students who feel that they need advice about how
best to approach a particular situation may also seek advice from a number of different campus offices, including the Graduate College.

Graduate students who believe that they have received an incorrect or inappropriate decision or behavior that adversely affects their status as graduate students may file a formal grievance with the Graduate College if informal efforts to resolve the problem are not successful. The grievance may be filed directly with the Graduate College. See the Graduate College Policy and Procedures on Grievances by Graduate Students. Students who wish to consult with a Graduate College dean about a possible grievance situation may call the Graduate College to make an appointment.

16. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What should I do if I do not find a permanent laboratory by the end of my first semester in MCB?

Occasionally a first year MCB student will not find a permanent research laboratory by December. Typically the MCB Graduate Program Committee will know of your situation and will work with you to find a laboratory willing to take you for a 4th rotation as soon as possible. In order to expedite this process, you should make a list of additional faculty who are working in your area of interest and make an appointment with the MCB Graduate Program Committee Chair to go over your options. Unless other arrangements are made, your 4th rotation should begin immediately after your fall semester final examinations and it should be completed by the beginning of the spring semester.

What if the advice that my advisor gives me is different from the advice of the CDB Department program?

It is the responsibility of your advisor to provide advice that will facilitate your progress through the CDB curriculum and to understand the Program requirement and goals. Your advisor is required by the Department to be supportive of your efforts to hold your Preliminary Exam on time, to write the required documents in the appropriate format, and to turn them in on or before the due dates. If you have questions or concerns, please feel free to contact the Chair of the CDB Graduate Program Committee.

What if my advisor asks me to change my research project completely?

Occasionally it is in your best interest to redefine your research project. Ideally, you should have a good working relationship with your advisor and you resolve this issue together. If you need advice on how to establish improved communication with your advisor, you may meet with the Chair of the CDB Graduate Program Committee.

What if I need to change advisors or programs?

Occasionally, a student may feel that his/her intellectual or career development would be served best by changing advisors. Reasons for this decision might include a change in research interests by the student, differences between the scientific philosophies of
the student and advisor, or personality conflicts. For various reasons the advisor may leave the University or could lose research funding. Either the student or the advisor might desire that a change be made. It is departmental policy that students should be able to change advisors when such circumstances warrant. At the same time, the decision to change advisors should not be taken lightly, since the advisor may have committed a position in the laboratory, rejecting other potential students in the process, and may have provided financial support during the early training period in expectation of increased productivity later. From the student’s perspective, it is likely that a change in advisors will increase the time to completion of the Ph.D. degree and reduce the recognition he/she would receive for any work already completed. Because of these consequences, the student and advisor should attempt to resolve any conflicts or adjust the program of the student to better fit their career objectives before making the decision to change advisors.

In the event that a student-advisor relationship breaks down, the student or the research advisor should consult the Department Head prior to switching of the research advisor. A written agreement may be necessary in cases that have implications for publications, ethical conduct, or grievances.

What if I need to substitute a member of my thesis committee?

If you need to substitute a member of your thesis committee, you need to confirm that the new prospective member has at least the same status as the one who is leaving, i.e. tenure-track faculty in CDB or not in CDB. The new member will have to be approved by the CDB Graduate Program Committee.

What if I would like to have a non-tenured professor on my thesis committee?

If the scientist that you would like to have on your committee is not tenured or on a tenure-track appointment, you need to write a note to the Graduate College via the CDB Graduate Program Secretary and explain why this prospective member will be an asset to your committee. One successful explanation is to say that Professor (X) is one of a very few experts in the field of (___) on this campus and he or she will provide extremely valuable advice on your dissertation research progress. You should be as specific as you can in relating the prospective committee member’s credentials to your research project.

What if I have an exceptional circumstance and I cannot take my Preliminary Examination during the second semester of my second year?

If a student has unusual and compelling circumstances (e.g., switching of research advisor or serious illness) during the first two years of graduate study that prevents him/her from taking the Preliminary Examination by the end of the second year, the student may request an extension in a letter to the Chair of the CDB Graduate Program Committee, before March 1st of the third year. Also the student must ask his/her advisor to submit a letter to support the petition. If the extension is granted, the student must take the Preliminary Examination during the following September CDB examination period. In the event an extension is denied, the student will take the Preliminary Examination as previously scheduled.
How do I know when I'm finished with my Ph.D. research?

Typically the student and advisor come to an agreement regarding the extent of the project when the student is writing the Preliminary Examination. The Thesis Committee will initially endorse feasibility and initial timeline of the project. The annual student reviews will provide a guide for student, advisor, and the thesis committee in accessing student progress. Students should publish their findings as they complete appropriate portions of their research. This will provide milestones for the student and advisor and provide the framework for your thesis chapters. If the student and advisor cannot agree that the student has completed the entire dissertation research project, the student should seek counsel from the Thesis Committee.

What if I have additional questions or suggestions for new FAQ’s?

Please contact:

Laura Martin immartin@illinois.edu Office Manager
Elaine Rodgers erodgers@life.illinois.edu Graduate Program Secretary
Dr. Lisa Stubbs ljstubbs@illinois.edu Chair of the CDB Graduate Program Committee.