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School of Life Sciences (SoLS) Graduate Program

The Graduate Operations Committee (GOC) of the SoLS at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) welcomes you to our graduate program. This handbook is intended to provide helpful information as you pursue a higher degree in your chosen area of study in the School of Life Sciences.

The goal of graduate education is to foster lifelong habits of inquiry and learning, to provide intellectual challenge, and to stimulate critical and creative problem solving. These goals are achieved by students through completion of a research project and appropriate advanced course work. The following guidelines are intended to assist graduate students to successfully achieve these goals.

Organization of the School of Life Sciences Graduate Programs

The School of Life Sciences (SoLS) offers programs of studies leading to the Master of Science (M.S.) and Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) degrees. Each degree requires a culminating written document, a thesis for the M.S. degree or a dissertation for a Ph.D. degree, which presents and interprets original research that the student conducted in one or more fields of study offered in the SoLS. Numerous funding opportunities are available through state-funded graduate assistantship programs via statewide initiatives or in association with individual faculty research programs. More information on SoLS Graduate Programs can be found on the SoLS website. The SoLS Graduate Handbook is the official document containing the specific procedural information for the daily operations of the School’s Graduate Program. All graduate students that matriculate into the School of Life Sciences Graduate Program must satisfy both the Graduate College requirements (described in the Graduate Catalog) and the SoLS Graduate Program requirements (described here in the SoLS Graduate Handbook). While the Graduate Catalog provides general policies regarding UNLV graduate programs it also states that academic units “may have additional specific degree requirements that students must meet to receive an advanced degree”. These additional specific degree requirements are described in this SoLS Graduate Handbook.

Useful links
Graduate College Catalog: http://graduatecollege.unlv.edu/current/publications/
Information for Current SoLS Graduate Students: http://sols.unlv.edu/current.html

The UNLV Graduate College is a central administrative unit that coordinates, supervises and supports all graduate and professional students in UNLV graduate degree programs, including masters, doctoral and professional programs. Through collaborative efforts the Graduate College and SoLS Graduate Program continually strive to maintain and enhance excellence in graduate education. Currently, SoLS supports approximately fifty (50) graduate students spread among more than twenty (20) SoLS faculty members. We offer both Ph.D. and M.S. degrees in biology with concentrations in four areas: Cell and Molecular Biology, Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, Integrative Physiology, and Microbiology (http://sols.unlv.edu/current.html).

SoLS’s Graduate Programs are organized into four Research Sections:

- A = Ecology and Evolutionary Biology (EEB)
- B = Integrative Physiology (IP)
- C = Cell and Molecular Biology (CMB)
• D = Microbiology (Micro)

All Graduate Faculty in SoLS are affiliated with one or more Research Section(s). Each Research Section has tailored its Graduate Program specifically to meet needs of their graduate students and the demands of that particular field. The decision as to which section is appropriate for the student’s research concentration will be determined at the student’s first Advisory Committee Meeting and indicated on each annual committee report (see below).

The SoLS Graduate Operations Committee (GOC) will be responsible for monitoring the student’s progress toward his/her degree. Other responsibilities of the GOC include

• Providing new or revised materials for the Graduate Catalog and SoLS Graduate Handbook,
• Instructing students on policies of the Graduate Program,
• Periodically reviewing SoLS existing Graduate Programs and when needed proposing revisions, modifications and/or new programs to SoLS for approval,
• Conducting an orientation meeting with new students,
• Reviewing the composition of Research Advisory Committees,
• Monitoring students’ progress toward their degrees by reviewing annual evaluations submitted by students and their advisors,
• Making recommendations to the Graduate Coordinator regarding issues of probations and/or separation of individual students.

The GOC is comprised of representatives from each Research Section. The SoLS Graduate Coordinator directs GOC activities. Students should be familiar with the GOC and its relationship to related offices in the university to know who to contact if assistance is needed.

Role of the College of Science Graduate Affairs Liaison

This section is under construction.

General Deadlines for Completion of Degree

A student’s progress toward completion of a degree involves the timely accomplishment of several milestones. These are described in detail in the following sections; the deadlines for each milestone are summarized in this section.

• Selection of Interim Advisor--- upon entry into the program
• Selection of Research Advisor--- within the first semester
• Selection of members of Thesis/Dissertation Advisory Committee (TAC or DAC)--- at beginning of first semester
• First meeting of the student’s Advisory Committee--- before Nov. 1 of first semester
• Annual Advisory Committee meeting and report filed with GOC--- by 10/31 of each year
• Presentation in Colloquium--- by end of spring semester each year

Degree-specific deadlines:
Masters of Science (MS):
• Advisory Committee approval of Program of Study--- at first meeting. File Part 1 with the GC and Part 2 with SoLS, before completing sixteen (16) credit hours of work towards their degree
• Obtain TAC approval and file research prospectus--- before completing 16 credits
• The Graduate College requires completion of all M.S. degree requirements within six years. In special circumstances, the student’s Thesis Advisory Committee and the SoLS Graduate Coordinator may recommend that the Dean of the Graduate College extend these degree time limits.

Ph.D.:
• Advisory Committee approval of Program of Study--- File Part 1 with the GC and Part 2 with SoLS before the end of the 3rd semester of enrollment
• Pass comprehensive exam--- before beginning of 6th semester
• Obtain DAC approval and file research prospectus--- after completion of part two of the comprehensive exam or immediately prior to the writing the dissertation
• Graduate College time limits for completion of degree requirements:
  • A student beginning a doctoral program and holding a M.S. degree in an appropriate field of study must complete all requirements for the doctoral program within six years.
  • A student beginning a doctoral degree program without a M.S. degree must complete all requirements for the doctoral program within eight years.
  • In special circumstances, the student’s Dissertation Advisory Committee and the SoLS Graduate Coordinator may recommend that the Dean of the Graduate College extend these degree time limits.

Selection of the Official Research Advisor
Incoming students are appointed an interim advisor based on the student’s stated field of interest and communications between the student and faculty during the admission process. The interim advisor usually becomes the official Research Advisor, but the student or advisor may elect to change this arrangement provided the appropriate form is filed with the student’s Advisory Committee, GOC, and the Graduate College. The role of the Research Advisor will vary, however, primary functions include monitoring the student’s satisfactory progress toward completion of the degree on time, serving as an advocate for the student when determining the Research Objectives and Program of Study, and serving as Chair of the Advisory Committee.

On rare occasions, the student or their advisor may deem it necessary to discontinue the mentor/protégé relationship. Immediate transition to a new Research Advisor is necessary to remain in good standing with the SoLS Graduate Program and the Graduate College. The consequences of this decision depend upon the timing or cause for this change. A change in mentorship can involve a change of research topic, an altered Program of Study requiring additional course work, administration of a revised comprehensive exam, and submission of a revised prospectus describing the new research project. In addition, the student will have to file the appropriate forms to alter the composition of the Advisory Committee. The GOC will help in this transition and will give guidance to the student and new Research Advisor as appropriate.

Dissertation/Thesis Advisory Committees & Structure
At the start of a student’s first semester, it is his/her responsibility to form an Advisory Committee. The Advisory Committee is responsible for the development, approval and possible revisions to the student’s Program of Study; for approval of the thesis or dissertation; and for the conduct and evaluation on the comprehensive and/or final examinations.
During the course of the degree he/she must meet with the Committee at least once every calendar year (between January 1st and November 1st). It will be the student’s responsibility to set up a Committee meeting and to organize a time and place. Committee meetings are usually held in either the faculty lounge (WHI 101), WHI 111, or SEB 3265. Room bookings can be made through the appropriate office in WHI or SEB.

The student should consult with his/her advisor (interim or permanent) for suggestions about faculty members most appropriate for the Research Advising Committee. The guidelines for selecting faculty can vary and can depend on the advisor’s philosophy about graduate training. The student should keep in mind that the purpose of this Committee is to help them plan their Program of Study (i.e., course work), and guide them in their research. The GOC must approve the Advisory Committee membership. The primary reason for disapproval of Committee composition would be lack of appropriate breadth and/or scientific expertise. Both SoLS and the Graduate College have forms for the formation and, if needed, revision of the Advisory Committee and Proposed Degree Program (course work) that need to be routed through the GOC. Links to both the Graduate College and the SoLS forms are available on the following websites: http://graduatecollege.unlv.edu/current/; http://sols.unlv.edu/current.html

Occasionally, a faculty member who was been appointed to a graduate student’s committee may be unable to continue in this function. In this case a request for substitution may be made by the Committee. Changes in the student’s Advisory Committee may also occur because of change in the student’s research interest or focus. Final approval or disapproval in all of these cases is granted by the Graduate College. However, the student should note that changes to the Advisory Committee late in the student’s program are not favorably received.

**Master’s Students**

The Thesis Advisory Committee for M.S. students will be composed of at least four members: the Primary Advisor, two SoLS graduate faculty (one of which can be an adjunct, affiliate, or emeritus with valid UNLV Graduate Faculty status), and a Graduate College Representative (for more information, see “Graduate College Representative” section). If a student wishes to have two adjunct, affiliate, or emeritus members on his/her committee, he/she must add those individuals as extra members. It is the student’s responsibility to identify suitable committee members, and after consultation with his/her mentor, to approach them about serving on their Advisory Committee.

In some cases a M.S. student’s proposed research project may align with the research interests of an adjunct or affiliate faculty member of SoLS. With committee approval, this faculty member may direct the student’s research and serve as the student’s mentor, but he or she cannot serve as the official Research Advisor or Research Advisory Committee Chair. In this case, one of the faculty members with Graduate Faculty status from SoLS must chair the committee and assume primary responsibility for the student’s progress.

**Ph.D. Students**

The Dissertation Advisory Committee for Ph.D. students will be composed of five members: the Primary Advisor, two or three SoLS graduate faculty (one of which can be an adjunct, affiliate, or emeritus with valid UNLV Graduate Faculty status), a Graduate College Representative (for more information, see “Graduate College Representative” section), and an External Advisory Committee Member (if only two SoLS grad faculty are designated) who is an expert in the field of study and whose primary affiliation is outside UNLV. If a student wishes to have two adjunct, affiliate, or emeritus
Selection of Committee Members:

External Advisory Committee Member:
All External Advisory Committee Members must hold a terminal degree (Ph.D. or equivalent) and have been actively involved in research directly related to the student’s graduate project. The involvement of an External Advisory Committee Member on a graduate student’s Advisory Committee is beneficial to the student and SoLS for the following reasons; 1) it is likely to increase the rigor of the graduate student’s training, 2) it will broaden the student’s scientific network, 3) it is likely to increase awareness of SoLS graduate programs on the national scientific stage, and 4) the outside member’s prestige should help the student when soliciting letters of recommendation for the next stage in his/her career.

Frequently, new graduate students may not be familiar with qualified and appropriate External Advisory Committee Members. Consequently, at the first Advisory Committee Meeting the student should consult with their primary research advisor and committee members about suitable candidates.

Once a potential External Advisory Committee Member has been identified, either the student or, in some cases, the primary research advisor should approach the person to see if they are willing to serve on the student’s Advisory Committee. If an appropriate person agrees to serve in this capacity, the student and his/her graduate advisor should submit the external member’s CV along with a letter (template available at: http://sols.unlv.edu/current.html) requesting Committee membership to the SoLS Director or Graduate Coordinator. If the outside member is approved by the SoLS Director and Graduate Coordinator, he/she will be nominated for Associate Graduate Faculty status at UNLV. All outside members serving as “persons of record” must hold valid Associate Graduate Faculty status to sign officially on behalf of the student.

The External Advisory Committee member must agree to participate in the dissertation defense either in person, via audio/video conference, or by proxy. A proxy is defined as an additional SoLS faculty member who agrees to present the External Committee Member’s written comments. This proxy must be approved in advance by the Graduate College. Beyond this minimal expectation, each Dissertation Advisory Committee can decide on the timing and level of involvement of an External Advisory Committee member. SoLS does not finance travel for the External Advisory Committee member to participate.

Graduate College Representative (GCR)
The Graduate College Representative must hold Graduate Faculty status at UNLV and must come from an academic unit other than SoLS. The principal role of GCRs, as outlined by the Graduate College, is
to ensure due process and academic rigor on student committees throughout the University. However, SoLS requests that the GCR also contributes scientifically by performing as a fully participating member of the student’s Advisory Committee. It is SoLS’s policy that the GCR has the right to ask questions during the student’s committee meetings, comprehensive exam, and final defense. The GCR has full voting privileges and as such, should be treated as a full-fledged member of the committee. A list of faculty members with Graduate Faculty status is provided on the following website: http://graduatecollege.unlv.edu/facstaff/status.html

The extent to which SoLS expects a GCR to participate is more extensive than the policies of the Graduate College. To avoid any miscommunication between SoLS and the potential Graduate College Representative, students are asked to formally submit a detailed letter requesting a faculty member to serve as the the GCR. A template for this letter is available at: http://sols.unlv.edu/current.html. Students should give this letter to their prospective GCR so that the representative is aware of the elevated expectations of SoLS. If the desired representative is unable to make this commitment, the student needs to identify another representative.

Program of Study and First Advisory Committee Meeting

The first Advisory Committee meeting (held by October 31st of the first semester of the student’s program) is for the purpose of identifying and outlining a student’s project and determining appropriate course work. A major goal of this meeting is for the student to share their previous academic training and research interests with their committee, so that recommendations about appropriate course work and the Program of Study can be given to the student early in their graduate program. The Program of Study, which outlines the courses the student will complete for their degree, should be thoughtfully prepared and must comply with the regulations of the Graduate College, the SoLS Graduate Program, and the SoLS Research Section to which the graduate student belongs. For this reason the student’s proposed Program of Study must ultimately be approved by the student’s Advisory Committee and documented in writing in a Committee meeting before the appropriate form is submitted to the Graduate College.

While the Program of Study is determined early and updated during annual committee meetings (using the part of the SoLS annual committee meeting form), the Graduate College and the SoLS request that a separate Program of Study form be filed by all graduate students.

Part 1: The Graduate College Program of Study form can be found at the following link: http://graduatecollege.unlv.edu/forms/ choose either the Master’s or the Doctoral program form

Part 2: The SoLS Program of Study form, Part 2 can be found at the following link: http://sols.unlv.edu/current.html.

Coursework requirements

Master’s Students

Master’s students are required to complete a minimum of thirty (30) credit hours with a B- or higher, eighteen (18) of which must be at the 700-level. If a student does not earn a B- or higher in a course, those credits will not count towards their degree.

Students should register for at least nine (9) credits each semester if they are receiving financial support from SoLS in the form of a Graduate Assistantship (GA); otherwise they must register for at least six (6)
credits each semester. Students working on their thesis must register for at least three (3) credits each semester (excluding summer, unless the degree is completed in summer) until the Master’s Thesis is completed and given final approval.

Required Courses
All M.S. students must take:
BIOl 701 - Ethics in Scientific Research – taken in the first year of their program.
BIOl 796 A-D, BIOl 793 A-D or some combination of both – Graduate Seminar/Advanced Topics in Life Sciences – at least six (6) credits.
BIOl 790 A-D – Research Colloquium in Life Sciences - Starting in Fall 2010, all M.S. students must attend the Colloquium every semester even if not enrolled for credit. Each student must also present his/her research in the Colloquium once per academic year. Students may register for BIOl 790 A-D each semester, but no more than ten (10) credits can apply toward the degree. With the permission of the student’s Thesis Advisory Committee, part-time or self-funded students may be exempt from attending most Colloquium presentations, but they are still required to present their work once per year in this forum.
BIOl 797 Thesis - at least six (6) credits, but only six (6) credits can be counted towards their degree. NOTE: M.S. Students are only permitted to enroll in BIOl 797 after they have filed the Prospectus approval form (described below).

• Credit from at least three (3) didactic (lecture–based) courses is additionally required for all M.S. students, regardless of the Research Section they are affiliated with.
• Furthermore, students must complete the specific course work required by the Research Section (e.g., Ecology and Evolutionary Biology (EEB), Integrative Physiology (IP), Cell and Molecular Biology (CMB), or Microbiology (Micro)) to which they belong. This information is described in separate PDF files as “Required Course Work” for Students in specific Research Sections (EEB, IP, CMB, Micro). These files are posted at: http://sols.unlv.edu/current.html

Other courses
BIOl 789 A-D— Independent Graduate Study in Life Sciences. This class can be used to receive research credit related to a student’s thesis project prior to taking BIOl 797, and can be repeated, but only nine (9) credits can be applied toward an M.S. degree.
BIOl 791 A-D– Research Laboratory Discussions in Life Sciences. A graduate student can enroll in this class, with their advisor’s permission, to receive credit for presenting and participating during formal laboratory meetings with his/her Advisor’s Research Section. This course may be repeated, but only 10 credits can apply toward a M.S. degree.

Transfer Credits (UNLV course work only) or Credit Reduction toward Degree
Master’s students may request a maximum of fifteen (15) graduate credits taken at UNLV or another institution, prior to admission into SoLS’s Graduate Program, be counted towards the thirty (30) credit hour minimum graduation requirement, provided that those credits were not used to fulfill undergraduate requirements and that a minimum grade of “B” (3.00) was earned in each course. These courses must be unanimously approved by the student’s Thesis Advisory Committee and their acceptance must be documented in the first annual committee report. No independent study, thesis, dissertation, research, or seminar credits can transfer. At least 50 percent of the total credits required to complete the Master’s degree must be earned at UNLV after admission into the Graduate Program.
Ph.D. Students
Doctoral students are required to complete a minimum of sixty (60) credit hours, with a B- or higher, thirty-six (36) (eighteen (18) if the student already has an M.S. degree) of which must be at the 700-level. If a student does not earn a B- or higher in a course, those credits will not count towards graduation.

Students should register for at least nine (9) credits each semester if they are receiving financial support from SoLS in the form of a Graduate Assistantship (GA); otherwise they must register for at least six (6) credits each semester. Students preparing their dissertation must register for at least three (3) credits each semester (excluding summer, unless the degree is completed in summer) until the Ph.D. dissertation is completed and given final approval.

Required Courses
All Ph.D. students must take:
BIOL 701 - Ethics in Scientific Research – taken in the first year of their program.
BIOL 796 A-D, BIOL 793 A-D or some combination of both – Graduate Seminar/Advanced Topics in Life Sciences- at least six (6) credits.
BIOL 790 A-D – Research Colloquium in Life Sciences - Starting in Fall 2010, all Ph.D. students must attend the Colloquium every semester even if not enrolled for credit. Each student must also present his/her research in the Colloquium once per academic year. Students may register for BIOL 790 A-D each semester, but no more than ten (10) credits can apply towards a Ph.D. degree. With the permission of the Dissertation Advisory Committee, part-time or self-funded students may be exempt from attending most Colloquium presentations, but they are still required to present their work once per year in this forum.
BIOL 799 Dissertation - at least twelve (12) credits. A student may register for more, but only eighteen (18) can be counted towards their degree. NOTE: Ph.D. students are only permitted to enroll in BIOL 799 after they have filed the Prospectus approval form (described below).

• Credit for at least six (6) additional didactic (lecture–based) courses is required for each Ph.D. student, regardless of the Research Section they belong to.
• Furthermore, students must complete the specific course work required by the Research Section (e.g., EEB, IP, CMB, or Micro) to which they belong. This information is described in separate PDF files as “Required Course Work” for Students in specific Research Sections (EEB, IP, CMB, Micro) posted at the following link: http://sols.unlv.edu/current.html

Other courses
BIOL 789 A-D— Independent Graduate Study in Life Sciences. This course can be used to award research credit related to a student’s dissertation project prior to taking BIOL 799, and can be repeated with a maximum of nine (9) credits applied toward a Ph.D. degree.

BIOL 791 A-D— Research Laboratory Discussions in Life Sciences. A graduate student may enroll in this class, with their advisor’s permission, to receive credit for presenting and participating during formal laboratory meetings with his/her Advisor’s Research Section. This course may be repeated, but only 10 credits can apply toward a Ph.D. degree.
Transfer Credits (UNLV course work only) or Credit Reduction toward Degree

Doctoral students may request a maximum of thirty (30) graduate credits taken at UNLV or another institution, prior to admission into SoLS’s Graduate Program, be counted towards the sixty (60) credit hour minimum graduation requirement, provided that those credits were not used to fulfill undergraduate requirements and that a minimum grade of “B” (3.00) was earned in each course. These courses must be unanimously approved by the Dissertation Advisory Committee and their acceptance must be documented in the first annual committee report. Independent study, thesis, dissertation, research, or seminar credits will not be permitted as transfer credits. Students entering the Doctoral Program with an M.S. degree from another institution must complete at least thirty (30) credit hours at UNLV.

GOC Graduate Student Annual Evaluations

An evaluation of satisfactory progress for each Graduate Student in the School of Life Sciences (SoLS) is determined every year by the Graduate Operations Committee (GOC). Each graduate student in SoLS must have at least one Advisory Committee meeting each calendar year (Jan 1 to Nov 1). The student should complete Section 1 of the form before the meeting. The Chair of the Committee completes Section 2 of the form during the meeting. Attending Committee members should sign the form at the end of the meeting to indicate their agreement. If a committee member is absent, then the meeting may proceed, but the student must meet separately with this committee member to review the report and obtain their signature.

Once the Graduate Advisory Committee Annual Meeting is completed, it is the student’s responsibility to submit it to the GOC (placed in the GOC box in the SoLS office). The Graduate Advisory Committee Annual Meeting is for GOC use and should not be filed with the Graduate College. It is used by the GOC to determine whether students are making satisfactory progress toward their degrees. Failure to submit this form before the annual evaluation period will be considered as evidence of unsatisfactory progress and will be used as grounds for probation and/or separation from the SoLS Graduate Program (see below).

The GOC of the SoLS will review the Graduate Advisory Committee Annual Meeting Forms on November 1st each year.

Criteria leading to Academic Probation and/or Separation

It is expected that students will progress satisfactorily throughout their academic life within the School of Life Sciences. Students that are not making satisfactory progress towards their degree, or within their academic program will, however, be put on academic probation. Situations leading to academic probation may include, but are not limited to:

1) No current affiliation with a Research (thesis/dissertation) Advisor.
2) Failure to hold an official meeting with the student’s Advisory Committee during the calendar year.
3) Receipt of an “Unsatisfactory” progress evaluation at the Advisory Committee Meeting.
4) Receipt of an “Unsatisfactory” performance evaluation of the student’s GA or PTI duties by a Course Director or Laboratory Coordinator.
5) Receipt of an “Unsatisfactory” performance evaluation of the student’s RA duties by a research mentor. An “Unsatisfactory” RA evaluation must be submitted in written form by the advisor to the GOC when grades due at the end of the semester in which the student failed to perform.
6) Receipt of one grade below B minus, in any graduate class, or having a cumulative GPA that drops below 3.0.
7) Failure of PhD students to take the comprehensive exam by the beginning of the 6th semester in their graduate program.
8) Failure of the comprehensive exam for the first time.
9) Failure to “remediate” the comprehensive exam within the period stipulated (up to 1 year) by the examination committee.
10) Failure to enroll in at least six credits (for full time students) within one calendar year (three credits each semester).
11) Failure to re-enroll in course work after a leave of absence has expired.

Part-time students, those taking less than six credits per semester, are expected to meet the same deadlines as full time students. For example, part time students must take their comprehensive exam before the beginning of the sixth semester.

Students switching research mentors or taking “a leave of absence” must also maintain the same timeline as full time students. For example, changing mentors at the end of the second year does not reset the requirement for the comprehensive exam by the beginning of the sixth semester from the time the student matriculated. Refer to the Graduate Catalog for guidelines and application process for taking a “leave of absence,” or suspending your graduate program.

**Student Probations**

There are two types of student probation; Student Conduct Probation and Student Academic Probation. A Conduct Probation is assessed and administered at the University level by the Office of Student Conduct. An Academic Probation is assessed and administered by the GOC of the School of Life Sciences, who makes a recommendation to the Graduate College.

**Process of Academic Probation**

If by majority vote, the GOC determines that a student is not making satisfactory progress toward his/her degree, they will instruct the SoLS Graduate Coordinator to formally request action on the student from the Dean of the Graduate College. A copy of this request letter will be supplied to the student and all members of his/her Research Committee. This action might involve academic probation (for the student’s first offense) or separation from the program (for failure to resolve probation or for multiple offenses). In the case of probation, the GOC and Graduate Coordinator will indicate what work the student must complete (including deadlines) to avoid separation from the program. If the Dean of the Graduate College approves the request, notification is made to the student, the SoLS Grad Coordinator, and his/her Research Advisor. Such a letter must clearly state the conditions of remediation and timelines for reinstatement if applicable.

During the probationary period, students are not eligible for scholarships, fellowships, or supplemental funding of any kind. They will not be allowed to teach extra lab sections or receive supplements or bonuses to their basic stipend. They will also be ranked in the lowest priority for GA funding from the School during the probationary period, and they are reminded that existing GA contracts can be modified or dropped during this time.

If the student successfully completes the requirements for reinstatement in the allotted time he/she can request reinstatement from the GOC. If the Committee concurs with the student (the decision must be unanimous) it will forward a letter to the Graduate College requesting reinstatement. If the student fails
to clear probation after the allotted time (as determined by unanimous decision of the GOC) a letter will be forwarded to the Graduate College asking that the student be separated from the Graduate Program and the Graduate College. Once removed by the Graduate College, the student can be re-admitted to the SoLS Graduate Program only by applying to the Graduate Admission Committee as a new candidate.

**Repeat Offenders**
Students are reminded that probationary offenses of any kind (Conduct or Academic) are serious matters. As such, if a student commits a second probationary offense (even if the first offense has been cleared), he/she will be summoned to appear before the GOC to explain why he/she should be permitted to remain within the program. The student’s research mentor and Research Advisory chair may also be asked to attend the meeting. The GOC reserves the right to recommend separation after a second probationary offense has been committed. If a student commits a third probationary offense (even if the other two were cleared) the GOC will recommend that the student be separated from the program immediately.

**Remediation**
For most issues leading to probation, the steps for remediation will be outlined in the letter of probation. A probation triggered by a low grade or low GPA (criterion 6) however, is remediated by the process described below:

If a student receives a grade below B minus, he/she will be placed on academic probation. During the probation period a student may, with the permission of the instructor, remediate the grade and be removed from probation by retaking the class or submitting extra work to earn a passing grade. If the student retains the unsatisfactory grade without remediation, he/she will remain on probation for the duration of their time in the program. If during the probation period the student receives a second grade below B minus he/she will be separated from the Graduate Program.

**Timeline for Academic Probation / Program Separation**
If the GOC confirms that a student has committed a probationary offense, the GOC submits a Department Recommendation for Student Probation Form, which describes i) the probationary offense and ii) conditions and timeline for removal of probation. Copies of this Recommendation Form are sent to the student, all members of the student’s Advisory Committee (including the GCR), the Director of the School of Life Sciences, the SoLS Graduate Coordinator and the Dean of the College of Sciences. When the student complies with the terms for removal of probation, the student must notify the Graduate Coordinator, who will confirm and assist with notifying the Graduate College. If the student fails to comply with the conditions and timelines for probation removal, the GOC will recommend to the Graduate College that the student be separated from the Graduate Program at that time. Official notification of Academic Probation and of Separation is sent to the student by the Graduate College.

**Prospectus**
The culminating experience for SoLS graduate students is a written description of their scholarly research project in the form of a thesis (M.S.) or dissertation (Ph.D.). Before writing the thesis/dissertation the student must file a prospectus. The prospectus summarizes the student’s research project that will be described in the thesis/dissertation. To ensure that the Thesis/Dissertation Advisory Committee agrees with the proposed content of the thesis/dissertation, the prospectus is discussed at a
meeting of the student’s Advisory Committee. To ensure appropriate feedback is given the Committee should receive the prospectus at least two weeks prior to the meeting. If this timeline is not met any committee member may request to postpone the meeting for Advisory Committee discussion of the prospectus. It is in the student’s best interest to develop the prospectus early to avoid significant delays in the progress of thesis/dissertation writing.

**Master’s Students**

M.S. students are expected to have completed a Prospectus Approval Form before sixteen (16) credits of graduate credit have been taken. The Prospectus Approval Form is usually submitted with the Proposed Degree Program Form.

**Ph.D. Students**

The Graduate College recommends that Ph.D. students complete a Prospectus Approval Form by the end of the sixth semester. The Prospectus Approval Form is usually submitted within one semester after the Advancement to Candidacy form. Given the greater intellectual growth required and the more extensive research that needs to be accomplished, Ph.D. students are given extra time compared to their M.S. counterparts for proposal development. Thoughtful preparation of a prospectus promotes graduation in a timely fashion by: 1) focusing the student academically, 2) providing a research protocol and proposed timeline, 3) encouraging closure of distracting side projects, 4) allowing faculty appropriate input during crucial research development stages (i.e., early in a student’s program), and 5) ensuring the student has carefully thought through their research before proceeding to thesis/dissertation writing.

**Comprehensive Exams – Ph.D. Students Only**

A Ph.D. student must have successfully passed their comprehensive exams before the beginning of the 6th semester (typically the fall semester of the third year). Successfully completing comprehensive exams confirms that a student has obtained sufficient knowledge in their subject area, demonstrated appropriate intellectual abilities and signifies that the student has accomplished one major goal of their graduate education, which is recognized by their advancement to candidacy.

If a student does not take the comprehensive exam by the beginning of the 6th semester after his/her matriculation date, he/she will not be eligible for state Graduate Assistant funding from SoLS and in addition, the student will be placed on academic probation until the student successfully completes the comprehensive exam. If the exam is not taken by the end of the 7th semester the student will be separated from the Graduate Program.

Comprehensive exams must be taken on time for two reasons: 1: Advancement to Candidacy is a requirement for funding by some agencies. 2: The comprehensive exam will test that a student has the required foundational skills of scholarship, critical thinking, and creative problem-solving that are needed to adequately perform in the Ph.D. program. Both students and faculty benefit from a timely intervention if a student is not making satisfactory progress in these areas.

The comprehensive exams have both written and oral components. The exact content and format of the comprehensive exams are determined by the faculty in the Research Section affiliation of the student.
Furthermore, two types of exam committees exist; this again depends on the Research Section to which the student belongs.

The first type of exam committee is the student’s DAC. For those students whose DAC includes an External Member as part of their exam committee, the External Member may participate in person or by audio/video conference. If the External Member is not available to participate in both written and oral aspects of the exam, he/she must be substituted with an additional SoLS faculty member who will sit in as a proxy for the External Member.

The second type of exam committee is a separate examination committee comprised of 5 faculty members: 4 from the student’s Research Section, and a fifth member, whose affiliation is outside SoLS, who serves as the GCR and whom is selected by the other four members of the student’s Examination Committee. In such cases, the student will be informed of who is serving on their Examination Committee four weeks prior to the beginning of the examination. It is the Graduate School’s policy that all exams must be held three (3) weeks before the last day of instruction in any semester.

Written Exams
The exam committee will implement the written exam by following one of the models outlined below.

1) Each committee member provides a question(s) that requires library research and synthesis of ideas. The student has from one to four weeks (determined in advance) to complete the questions for each committee member. The written answers could be framed as short research proposals.

2) Each committee member provides a question(s) that requires limited library research and synthesis of ideas. The student has one or two days to answer the questions of each committee member which may total approximately one week to respond to all questions. The questions could be handed out one at a time with a designated time period for answering each.

3) Each committee member provides a question(s) that draws solely on the student’s knowledge. This closed book exam could be conducted over several days.

4) The committee (with or without student input) provides a topic for a grant proposal that requires library research. Typically, the background for the grant proposal comes from a journal article selected by the committee. The student typically has four weeks to write the grant proposal. The proposal is submitted several days prior to the oral exam for committee review.

Oral Exams
Oral exams occur following the completion of the written component and are orchestrated by the Chair of the student’s Examination Committee. The protocol described below must be followed for the oral exam. Depending on the format the student may be asked ahead of time to prepare a presentation related to the written part of the exam.

• After the examining committee is convened by the Chair, the student is asked to leave the room while the committee discusses the student’s performance on written questions and/or the order of questioning. If any member was dissatisfied with answers to the written exams, the student may be asked questions related to the areas of weakness.

• When the student returns, the presentation, if required, will begin and the questioning commences. The questions could concern the clarification of answers to the written exams. Students are often asked about the major fields of biology that are directly relevant to their area of study, but questions may also be
drawn from any area of biology. Each member of the committee is given the opportunity to ask questions with no explicit time restrictions, but, in general, all members should have approximately equivalent amounts of time.
• There is no set time limit for the examination. The examination will continue until all committee members agree that they have sufficient information to end the exam.
• After the committee is satisfied, the Chair will ask the student to leave the room while the committee deliberates the outcome of the exam. Before discussion ensues it is recommended that each committee member write on a piece of paper a non-binding vote of pass, fail, or remediate. All members of the committee must vote and not abstain. The Chair can then announce the tally as a straw poll to initiate discussion. At this point individuals can discuss their reasons for proposing a pass, fail or remediate. The resulting dialog should continue until all members agree that it is time to vote. The outcome of this vote is binding.

Comprehensive Examination Outcomes
The Examination Committee can render three possible outcomes for the comprehensive exam: A student may receive a Pass, Remediate or Fail. A unanimous decision of the Examination Committee is required for the student to “pass”. A simple majority is required for the student to “fail” or “remediate”. The Chair of the examination committee must document the results of the exam and send the report to the GOC and Graduate College.

Students who “pass” the comprehensive exam and have completed the Program of Study, exclusive of BIOL 799, should immediately file the “Advancement to Candidacy Form” with BOTH SoLS and the Graduate College. It is the student’s responsibility to have the proper forms prepared prior to the oral exam sessions and obtain the necessary signatures of the Examination Committee members on the form when receiving a “pass.” (http://graduatecollege.unlv.edu/forms/)

Students who receive a “remediate” result for their comprehensive exam generally demonstrate some knowledge in his/her field but the committee finds that either the oral or written portion, or some part thereof, is insufficient to award a “pass.” A student who received a “remediate” following consideration of both the written exam and oral exam must complete the terms of remediation as described by his/her committee (possibly including taking a second written examination or addressing concepts discussed during the oral defense) within the period specified by his/her examination committee. If the student does not do so, the result of the exam changes to “fail”, he/she will be placed on probation, and the student will have to retake the examination as described below.

Students who receive a “fail” result for their comprehensive exam generally demonstrate a fundamental lack of understanding of basic concepts in his/her field on all parts of the exam. If a student fails the Comprehensive Examination, he/she, at the discretion of the Examination Committee, may be allowed to retake the exam once.
Students who receive a “fail” on the comprehensive exam will be placed on academic probation. To avoid separation the student must re-take the examination after three months, but before a calendar year has passed. The committee will establish a timeline for the re-examination.

A student who “failed” the comprehensive exam on his/her first attempt must fully “pass” the exam on the second attempt. A “remediate” may not be awarded at the second exam. Students who “fail” the second exam will be separated from the Ph.D. program at that time. However, students who “fail” the
second exam may be allowed to complete a M.S. degree with the consent of the GOC and the student’s Research Advisory Committee.

**Graduation Requirements**

Formal graduation is a separate process from successful defense of the thesis or dissertation. Students must keep in mind that the Graduate College has its own deadlines each semester that students must meet in order to graduate. Students should check with the SoLS Graduate Coordinator or the College of Science Graduate Liaison prior to the semester that they plan to graduate to ensure that all Graduate College requirements have been met. Students that have not followed Graduate College or SoLS procedures, who have missed deadlines, have outstanding fees, failed to file the appropriate forms, etc. will not be allowed to graduate or participation in the graduation ceremony and will have to delay official graduation until the semester when all requirements have been satisfied for graduation.

If a student intends to graduate in the semester the thesis/dissertation is defended, the following documents must be submitted to the Graduate College for final approval at least two weeks prior to the end of the semester: 1) Oral Defense Form signed by all committee members, 2) Thesis/Dissertation Approval Form signed by the Chair of the Student’s Advisory Committee, SoLS Graduate Coordinator and Dean of the College of Sciences 3) Final Thesis/Dissertation including modifications, in both hard copy and electronic formats. Students are advised to start the process well before official deadlines to avoid problems that delay anticipated graduation dates. Students typically underestimate the time involved in writing and formatting the dissertation. Failure to adequately consider these issues is a common reason why students do not graduate on time.

A current edition of a “Guide for Preparation and Presentation of the Thesis and Dissertation” is available from the Graduate College website (http://graduatecollege.unlv.edu/PDF_Docs/t&dmanual.pdf). This document covers the Graduate College regulations for theses and dissertations. Students are **strongly** encouraged to obtain a copy well in advance of writing.

**Final Defense**

**Master’s Program**

Master’s students that have completed their Prospectus and worked in cooperation with their Research Advisor to complete their thesis for review by the TAC may apply for the final defense for the advanced degree. In the M.S. Program students are expected to graduate in two years (after completing four semesters). Although it is common for delays to occur, the Graduate College limits M.S. students to six years (12 semesters) to complete the degree requirements.

M.S. students may arrange for the final examination for the advanced degree on these conditions:

- satisfactory completion of required course work
- submission of a completed thesis (found acceptable by the advisor) to the TAC four weeks prior to the defense date.

In order to ensure adequate time to advertise the public thesis presentation, students must give at least two weeks public notice by sending an e-mail announcement and posting fliers advertising the seminar that summarizes the thesis research.
The student must: 1) present the public seminar that summarizes their thesis research and respond to audience questions, and 2) defend their thesis in a closed meeting with the TAC. On rare occasions, a graduate student may request a member of the GOC to attend his/her oral defense, however, it is the student’s responsibility to contact the GOC to ensure member availability.

Ph.D. Program
Ph.D. students that have completed the Prospectus and worked in cooperation with their Research Advisor to complete their dissertation for review by the Dissertation Advisory Committee may apply for the final defense for the advanced degree.

In the Ph.D. Program students are expected to graduate three years after completing the comprehensive exam. Although it is common for delays to occur, the Graduate College limits Ph.D. students to six years if a student matriculates with a Master’s and eight years if not.

Ph.D. students may arrange for the final examination for the advanced degree on these conditions:

• satisfactory completion of required course work
• submission of a completed dissertation (found acceptable by the advisor) to the DAC four weeks prior to the defense date.

In order to ensure adequate time to advertise the public thesis presentation, students must give at least two weeks public notice by sending an e-mail announcement and posting fliers advertising the seminar that summarizes the dissertation research.

The student must: 1) present the public seminar that summarizes their dissertation research and respond to audience questions, and 2) defend their dissertation in a closed meeting with all the DAC members present. An External Member of a DAC must attend the defense either in person, or by audio/video conference. On rare occasions an external member’s interests can be represented by proxy via a SoLS faculty member (see section; External Advisory Committee Members). On rare occasions a graduate student may request a member of the GOC to attend his/her oral defense, however, it is the student’s responsibility to contact the GOC to ensure member availability.

Master’s and Ph.D. Oral Defense Guidelines
If any member of a student’s committee finds the final draft of the thesis/dissertation unsatisfactory, he or she may request that the Chair of the Advisory Committee postpone the public defense prior to three days before the scheduled defense date. The oral defense guidelines generally follow the guidelines for the oral component of the comprehensive examination.

• After the student presents the public component of the final defense any attendee can ask questions or provide comments. If any Advisory Committee member was dissatisfied with answers to the questions they can be pursued in the private component of the oral defense.
• Following the public seminar, the student, the voting members of the student’s Advisory Committee (as approved by the Graduate College) and a GOC facilitator (if requested), will proceed to the closed oral defense.
• The initial questions could concern the student’s research or clarification of answers provided in the public defense. Each member of the committee should be given the opportunity to ask questions with no explicit time restrictions, but in general all members should have approximately equal amounts of time if they require it.
• After all adjudicators have had an opportunity to ask questions the Committee should discuss whether the defense will continue and whether there are any important questions that should still be answered. The defense could end at this point but may continue until all Committee members agree that they have sufficient information to end the defense.

• The candidate is then asked to leave the room and the Committee begins deliberations. During this period, the adjudicators will discuss their expectations for completion of the dissertation and the resulting dialog should continue until the Committee members are in agreement. At this point the outcome and required modifications are presented to the student.

• After the student has made final modifications to the dissertation and the modifications have been accepted, the successful degree candidate is responsible for securing the “Oral Defense Results Form” and the “Thesis/Dissertation Approval Form”, obtaining the required signatures and submitting the forms to the Graduate College. The SoLS Graduate Coordinator will not sign until all committee members have accepted and signed the above forms.

Miscellaneous Policies

Application to the Ph.D. program for students admitted to the M.S. program
A student admitted to the SoLS M.S. program who subsequently wants to enter the SoLS Ph.D. program, without completing the M.S. degree must, in consultation with his/her Advisor, request the Change of Degree Form A from the SoLS Graduate Coordinator. The student and his/her Research Advisor must complete the Change of Degree Form A, which consists of three parts: student petition, advisor endorsement, and signature page. The petition to change degree programs must be approved by the Graduate College before the end of the student’s third semester in the SoLS Graduate Program. Once approved, the Graduate Operations Committee should be informed of the change.

Application to the M.S. program for students admitted to the Ph.D. program
A student admitted to the SoLS Ph.D. program who subsequently wants to enter the SoLS M.S. program without completing their Ph.D. must in consultation with the Research Advisor solicit the Change of Degree Form B from the Graduate Coordinator. This change must occur before the student starts the 6th year (11th semester) in the Graduate Program. The student must have a meeting with their Advisory Committee which must agree with the student’s desire to change Graduate Programs. All Advisory Committee members must sign the Change of Degree form. The student submits the Change of Degree form to the Graduate Coordinator, the Director of the School of Life Sciences, and the Dean of the College of Sciences for approval. Once it has been approved at the School and College level the student submits the Change of Degree form to the Graduate College for approval. The Graduate College should then amend the student’s file to indicate the change in their Graduate Program. Once approved, the Graduate Operations Committee should be informed of the change.

Teaching Requirements and Student Stipends
Most students that matriculate into the MS or PhD program are offered fellowship or assistantship funding, by one of three sources, or a combination thereof. The first is a State funded Graduate Assistantship (GA), with the primary responsibility to instruct undergraduate laboratory sections. The second is a Research assistantship (RA) awarded to the student or their advisor, from extramural grants. The third is a merit-awarded fellowship. To be eligible for a University merit-based award, students must submit the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form to the UNLV Graduate College. In rare cases, a student may choose to be self-funded; however the rules governing the student’s
progress through the program still apply. Students are reminded that an advanced degree in SoLS is research based and as such requires a serious time commitment that is likely to conflict with employment elsewhere.

The individual duties for a teaching GA are determined by the Course Director and often administered by the Laboratory Coordinator. As such, students must comply with the requirements of their supervisor, to be considered for subsequent funding.

The individual duties for an RA are determined by the research mentor and the requirements outlined by the funding agency.

Ph.D. students are required to teach as GAs for two semesters as part of their degree requirements. Upon admittance each student receives an acceptance letter which includes details regarding their financial support. This support frequently is a Graduate Assistantship (GA), which requires that the student perform the duties attached, generally teaching. Students on probation are considered the lowest priority for continued financial support from SoLS. As long as a student is making reasonable progress toward completion of their degree, as determined by their Advisory Committee and GOC, they can normally expect five (5) years of institutional support, as long as funds are available. All graduate students and their faculty advisors are expected to continually seek and apply for funding in the form of fellowships and research assistantships via local, state and federal programs.

A student who passes the comprehensive exam on time and is otherwise in good standing becomes eligible for support on a special SoLS GA. SoLS GAs are awarded at a higher stipend level than the regular state-funded GA. The decision to award a SoLS GA is made by the Research Section members in collaboration with the Graduate Coordinator. SoLS GAs can only be awarded on a yearly basis starting in the fall semester. Thus, someone who passes the comprehensive exams during the 4th semester (typically spring) is eligible for two (2) years of SoLS GA support and someone who passes the comprehensive exams in the 5th semester (typically fall) is eligible for one (1) year of SoLS GA support since the SoLS GA cannot begin until the following fall. The number of SoLS GAs available will depend on funding and thus no student is guaranteed a SoLS GA. Graduate students who are awarded a fellowship are not eligible for a GA stipend.

“English as foreign language” requirements
The Graduate College policy stipulates that international students whose primary language is not English and who are Graduate Assistants (GAs) or Part-Time Instructors (PTIs) are required to receive a score of 550 (213 computerized) on the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) prior to assuming any type of instructional duties. Students will need to take the exam as soon as they arrive on campus. Students who fail the exam but who will be required to teach at a later date should contact the Director of the English Language Center for guidance. The fee for the exam will be paid by the student. Students should see the Graduate College Policy Manual for further regulations.

Employment outside of UNLV
Students who are awarded GA or RA support are not permitted to obtain employment outside of SoLS. Exceptions are only granted by petitioning the SoLS Director AND the SoLS Graduate Coordinator. Failure to request approval of the outside employment may result in the state-funded GA/RA being rescinded. It is unlikely that a Research Advisor will provide supplementary salary support from a research grant for a student who continues employment outside UNLV.
Students who are self funded are not exempt from the requirements and timelines for satisfactory progress through the Graduate Program. Failure to make satisfactory progress will result in the student being placed on probation or removed from the Graduate Program.

Leaves of Absence
In rare cases, a student may experience a major life event that temporarily impedes their progress toward completion of the degree. Such extenuating personal circumstances might be a serious medical condition, a family emergency, military deployment, or maternity/paternity leave. In such cases, the student should consult with their Research Advisor and the Graduate Coordinator, to determine whether it is appropriate to take a leave of absence for up to one year. This requires approval from the Graduate College and requires the submission of the “UNLV Graduate College Leave of Absence Form.” Students who fail to enroll without an approved “Leave of Absence” will be placed on probation and/or removed from the Graduate Program.

During the “Leave of Absence” the student should remain in contact with SoLS and may choose to return early. Upon returning from an approved “Leave of Absence” the student will resume his/her program at the same point that he/she was at when the “Leave” began. Note, that a student returning from a “Leave of Absence” is not guaranteed a Graduate Assistantship. In addition, the Student’s Research Advisor may choose to place a different individual on the student’s research project during this period, with the potential result that the student must start a different project.

Students who fail to return from a granted “Leave of Absence” at the designated date will also be placed on academic probation and/or removed from the Graduate Program.

Student Conflicts and Grievances
A student pursuing a graduate degree in SoLS is in a professional position, and should behave accordingly. Students are reminded that they don’t have to like everyone, but they must act professionally by treating everyone with respect. Occasionally interpersonal conflicts may arise; between students, between the student and their advisor, or with other personnel in the University. Under these circumstances, the student involved should first attempt to resolve the issue directly and immediately with the individuals involved.

If this is unsuccessful, or the student becomes uncomfortable in approaching the person, the student can ask the SoLS Director, the SoLS Graduate Coordinator or the COS Graduate Liaison for advice or potential mediation. If the student is unsatisfied with the informal mediation, they may present their case to the GOC in writing, as a formal complaint within SoLS. At this point, the GOC will investigate the incident from the perspectives of all involved, in order to formally resolve the issue. In some cases, the resolution may include placing a student on academic probation.

In most cases when a student is placed on probation, the reason for the probation is clear, and the remediation requirements are stated and within the student’s control. In the rare event that a student disagrees with the GOC decision to place the student on academic probation, they may choose to file a formal grievance with the Dean of the Graduate College. If the Dean of the Graduate College accepts the grievance, then the Dean will refer the case to the University-wide Faculty and Student Grievance Committee, for final binding resolution.

If a student feels harassed by a faculty member, then they should immediately seek counsel from a sympathetic faculty member, ideally their Research Advisor or the Graduate Coordinator. This faculty
member has an obligation to consult with GOC and the SoLS Director so that appropriate action can be taken.

In situations where the GOC determines that a SoLS faculty member is grossly negligent in their responsibilities as a research mentor, the GOC may request that the SoLS Director revoke the Graduate Faculty Status for the offending individual. A faculty member without Graduate Faculty Status cannot accept students into their laboratory and cannot serve as an official member of any student committee. To be reinstated, the faculty member’s Graduate Faculty Status application must be accepted by the SoLS Director.

Students and their advisors are recommended to consult the applicable University policies on the following topics by accessing information found at the websites listed below:

Discrimination: http://hr.unlv.edu/Diversity/complaints.html
Academic Conduct: http://studentlife.unlv.edu/judicial/misconductPolicy.html
Sexual Harassment: http://hr.unlv.edu/Diversity/Policy_Statements/UNLV_Sexual_Harassment_Policy.html
Nepotism: http://hr.unlv.edu/Policy/nepotism.html

Diversity, Reaffirmation of Commitment to Equal Educational and Employment Opportunity (EEO): http://www.unlv.edu/main/statements.html

Disclaimer

The SoLS Graduate Handbook is provided as an outline of expectations and protocols that are conditions for satisfactory progression towards a graduate degree. All SoLS faculty advisors, advisory committees, and graduate students are expected to comply with the terms of this document. The SoLS Graduate Handbook does not cover every potential situation, and does not represent a legal contract or agreement. In the event of a discrepancy between the Handbook and actual practice, the GOC will review the situation and decide on the appropriate policy. The SoLS faculty reserve the right to revise this Handbook at any time. In the event of disparity or conflict between this Handbook and the policies of the University, the stricter policies shall take precedence. Neither the University nor SoLS assumes liability for loss or damage incurred as a result of using this Handbook.