

**University of Nevada Las Vegas  
School of Life Sciences  
Graduate Program Handbook**

**Prepared by the  
School of Life Sciences  
Graduate Operations Committee  
Revised: Spring 2019 (February 5<sup>th</sup>)**

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## *The School of Life Sciences Graduate Program Handbook*

### **1. School of Life Sciences Graduate Program**

The Graduate Operations Committee (GOC) of the School of Life Sciences (SoLS) at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) welcomes new students to our graduate programs. This handbook is intended to provide helpful information for students as they pursue a graduate degree in the Biological Sciences within their chosen area of specialization.

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 in achieving these goals.

### **2. 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 within SoLS. Numerous funding opportunities are available through state-funded graduate assistantship (GA) programs via statewide initiatives or in association with individual faculty research programs. More information on SoLS graduate programs can be found at (<https://www.unlv.edu/lifesciences/graduate-student>). The purpose of this handbook is to provide program specific information that is not found in the UNLV Graduate Catalog. Students are responsible for understanding and following the policies and procedures delineated in this document and the UNLV Graduate Catalog, as well as the NSHE Code, UNLV Bylaws, and the UNLV Student Conduct Code. Questions about policies should be directed to the Graduate College: [valarie.burke@unlv.edu](mailto:valarie.burke@unlv.edu) or [emily.lin@unlv.edu](mailto:emily.lin@unlv.edu).

Currently, SoLS supports approximately fifty graduate students spread among more than 24 SoLS faculty members. SoLS offers both Ph.D. and M.S. degrees in the Biological Sciences with concentrations in five areas organized as official Research Subprograms: Cell and Molecular Biology (CMB), Ecology and Evolutionary Biology (EEB), Integrative Physiology (IP), Microbiology (MB), and Quantitative Biology and Bioinformatics.

All Graduate Faculty in SoLS are affiliated with one or more Research Subprograms. Each research subprogram has tailored its graduate programs specifically to meet needs of their graduate students and the demands of that particular field. The decision as to which subprogram 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).

### **3. The Role of the UNLV Graduate College**

All graduate students who matriculate into the School of Life Sciences graduate programs must satisfy both the Graduate College requirements (described in the Graduate Catalog for the year they matriculated) and the SoLS graduate program requirements (described here in the SoLS Graduate Handbook).

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 programs continually strive to maintain and enhance excellence in graduate education.

#### **4. The Role of the SoLS Graduate Operations Committee (GOC)**

The SoLS Graduate Operations Committee (GOC) will be responsible for monitoring the student's progress toward their 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 programs,
- Periodically reviewing SoLS existing graduate programs and when needed proposing revisions, modifications and/or new programs to SoLS for approval,
- Monitoring each student's 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 SoLS tenure-track faculty with a wide range of research interests. The SoLS Graduate Coordinator directs GOC activities. Students should be familiar with the GOC and the Graduate Coordinator and their relationships to related offices in the university. A student should contact any GOC member they feel comfortable with if assistance is needed.

The current GOC consists of the following faculty members:

Dr. Nora Caberoy (chair)	nora.caberoy@unlv.edu	702-774-1501
Dr. Laurel Raftery	laurel.raftery@unlv.edu	702-774-1404
Dr. Philippos Tsourkas	philippos.tsourkas@unlv.edu	702-895-3385
Dr. Boo Shan Tseng	boo.tseng@unlv.edu	702-895-2700
Dr. Mira Han	mira.han@unlv.edu	702-774-1503

The current Graduate Coordinator is:

Dr. Helen Wing	helen.wing@unlv.edu	702-895-5382
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The current SoLS Administrative Assistant in charge of GOC forms is:

Alicia Portillo	alicia.portillo@unlv.edu	702-895-1274
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#### **5. The Role of the COS Graduate Affairs Coordinator**

The role of the College of Sciences (COS) Graduate Affairs Coordinator is to ensure that each graduate student complies with the rules of the Graduate College (GC) and each graduate program within the COS. The coordinator's duties are to assist with the Program of Study form for each student in order to make sure that coursework requirements and form filings are current and on track with the student's projected graduate date. The COS Graduate Affairs Coordinator is the resident expert in all the intricacies of the policies and procedures that affect COS graduate students. Thus, graduate students and faculty within SoLS should first seek the guidance of the COS Graduate Affairs Coordinator regarding any question related to a student's academic standing or plan of action. The contact information for the COS Graduate Affairs Coordinator is:

Keala (Ala) Kiko  
Office: MPE-A 120  
Phone: 702-895-0879  
E-mail: keala.kiko@unlv.edu

## **6. General Deadlines for the Completion of Degrees**

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 Mentor and Research Advisory Chair--- within the first semester
- Selection of members of Thesis/Dissertation Advisory Committee (TAC or DAC)--- at the beginning of the student's 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 calendar year
- Presentation in Colloquium--- Expected annually and scheduled in advance by the colloquium coordinator

The following is a list of degree-specific deadlines and forms:

### **6a. Forms for both M.S. (Masters of Science) & Ph.D. (Doctoral of Philosophy) Students**

As of Feb. 1, 2019, Graduate College paper forms were replaced with electronic forms. All Graduate College forms can be found in the Grad Rebel Gateway portal and are tailored to each students' specific program when they log-in. A helpful video about Graduate College online forms can be found on this website: [www.unlv.edu/graduatecollege/forms](http://www.unlv.edu/graduatecollege/forms).

Additional School of Life Sciences Forms can be found on the School of Life Sciences website, under the "Graduate Student Resources tab": <https://www.unlv.edu/lifesciences/graduate-student>  
These include forms:

#### *For students:*

Graduate Advisory Committee Annual Meeting Form  
Sample Template for GCR Request  
Biol 767/789/791 Approval Form  
Key Request Form

#### *For faculty:*

Template letter to start a Comprehensive Exam  
Comprehensive Exam Outcome Form

Instructions for routing these forms are contained within.

## **7. Selection of the Official Research Mentor and Chair of the Research Advisory Committee**

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 mentor and chair of the student's research advisory committee, but the student or interim advisor may elect to change this arrangement within the first semester before the student is required to submit their "Appointment of Advisory Committee Form." The role of the research mentor will vary, however, primary functions include monitoring the student's satisfactory progress toward completion of their 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 research advisory

committee. In some cases, the student's research mentor may not have a primary, tenure-track appointment within SoLS. Examples where a mentor cannot serve as chair are SoLS Faculty in Residence (FIR) and scientists who have primary research appointments at the Desert Research Institute (DRI) or Nevada Institute of Personalized Medicine (NIPM).

On rare occasions, the student or their advisor committee may deem it necessary to discontinue the mentor/protégé relationship. Immediate transition to a new research mentor 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 Research Advisory Committee. The GOC recommends that the student meet with the committee to discuss the timeline for this transition. GOC will aid in this transition and will give guidance to the student and new research mentor as appropriate.

## **8. Research (Dissertation/Thesis) Advisory Committees & Structure**

At the start of a student's first semester, it is their responsibility to form a Research Advisory Committee. This committee is responsible for the development, approval, and possible revision of the student's program of study. In addition, the committee must approve the thesis or dissertation and evaluate the comprehensive and/or final examination results.

During the course of the degree, the student must meet with the Research Advisory Committee at least once every calendar year (between January 1<sup>st</sup> and October 31<sup>st</sup>). 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 the various seminar and breakout rooms in SEB. Room bookings can be made through the appropriate offices in WHI 101 or SEB 2102.

Students should consult with their interim advisors or mentors for suggestions about the faculty members most appropriate for their specific Research Advising Committee. The guidelines for selecting faculty can vary and will depend on the mentor'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., didactic courses, seminars, meeting presentations, etc), and guide them in their research. The Graduate Coordinator 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:  
[www.unlv.edu/graduatecollege/current](http://www.unlv.edu/graduatecollege/current) and <https://www.unlv.edu/lifesciences/graduate-student>.

Occasionally, a faculty member who was been appointed to a graduate student's committee may be unable to continue in that capacity. In this case a request for substitution may be made by filing a "Change of Advisory Committee" form through the GC. 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 Research Advisory Committee late in the student's program are not favorably received.

### 8a. M.S. students: Thesis Advisory Committee

The Thesis Advisory Committee (TAC) for M.S. students will be composed of at least four members with valid UNLV Graduate Faculty Status: the research mentor who usually serves as chair, two SoLS graduate faculty (only one of whom can be an adjunct, affiliate, emeritus, or FIR), and a Graduate College Representative (see below). If a student wishes to have two adjunct, affiliate, emeritus, or FIR members on their committee, they must add those individuals as extra members who will not be able to vote on the outcome of the defense. 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 TAC.

In some cases, an M.S. student's proposed research project may align with the research interests of a FIR, 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 they cannot serve as the official chair of the TAC. In this case, one of the faculty members with a primary, tenure-track appointment within SoLS must act as chair of the TAC and assume primary responsibility for the student's progress. Although some UNLV units allow for co-chairs who share advising responsibilities of master's degree seeking students, this is not an option for students receiving degrees in the Biological Sciences. In SoLS, each student must identify a single chair of the TAC who will ultimately be responsible for overseeing the progress toward the M.S. degree.

### 8b. Ph.D. students: Dissertation Advisory Committee

The Dissertation Advisory Committee (DAC) for Ph.D. students will be composed of five members with valid UNLV Graduate Faculty Status: the research mentor, two or three SoLS graduate faculty (one of whom can be an either adjunct, affiliate, or emeritus; and one of whom can be a FIR), a Graduate College Representative (see below), and an External Advisory Committee Member (if only two SoLS grad faculty are designated). Having an External Member is optional, but if included they must be an expert in the field of study and they must have a primary affiliation outside UNLV (see below). In order to be a formal member of the DAC, the External Member must also apply for and be granted Graduate Faculty Status by the GC. In addition, if a student wishes to have two adjunct, affiliate, emeritus members or FIR members on their committee, they must add those individuals as extra members who will not be able to vote on the outcome of the comprehensive exam or defense. It is the student's responsibility to identify suitable committee members, and after consultation with their mentor, to approach them about serving on the committee.

In some cases, a Ph.D. student's proposed research project may align with the research interests of a FIR, 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 they cannot serve as the official chair of the DAC. In this case, one of the faculty members with a primary, tenure-track appointment within SoLS must act as chair of the DAC and assume primary responsibility for the student's progress. Although some UNLV units allow for co-chairs who share advising responsibilities of Doctoral students, this is not an option for students receiving degrees in the Biological Sciences. In SoLS, each student must identify a single chair of the DAC who will ultimately be responsible for overseeing the progress toward the M.S. degree.

## **9. Selection of Committee Members**

### 9a. 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 the GCR, 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 a SoLS policy that the GCR has the right to ask questions during the student's committee meetings, comprehensive exam, and final defense. The GCR also has full voting privileges, and as such should be treated as a full-fledged member of the committee. A GCR must be present in person for the comprehensive exam and the thesis/dissertation defense. A list of faculty members with Graduate Faculty status is provided on the following website: <https://www.unlv.edu/graduatecollege/graduate-faculty-status>.

The extent to which SoLS expects a GCR to participate is more extensive than the policies of the Graduate College. GCRs are expected to attend annual committee meetings for example. To avoid any miscommunication between SoLS and the potential GCR, students are encouraged to formally submit a detailed letter requesting a faculty member to serve as the GCR. An e-mail template for this letter is available at: <https://www.unlv.edu/lifesciences/graduate-student>. Students should e-mail 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 must identify another representative.

#### 9b. 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 research mentor and committee members about suitable candidates.

Once a potential External Advisory Committee Member has been identified, either the student or, in some cases, the research mentor 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, an application for Graduate Faculty Status must be submitted to and accepted by SoLS and the Graduate College. Students should contact the current COS Grad Affairs Coordinator for this application and any assistance they may need with its submission. All outside members serving as "persons of record" must hold valid Graduate Faculty Status to sign the student's official paperwork that is associated with their degree.

The External Advisory Committee member must agree to participate in the comprehensive exam (for cases where the DAC is the comprehensive examination committee) and dissertation defense. This participation can either be in person or via audio/video conference. Beyond this minimal expectation, each DAC can decide on the timing and level of involvement of an External Advisory Committee member for annual evaluations. Typically, the outside member also participates in annual committee meetings often by video or teleconference, or the student may speak with them by phone or e-mail after the meeting. All External Advisory Members are asked to acknowledge the final annual committee report by signing it electronically or sending an e-mail acknowledgement that can be attached to the

committee report that is filed with GOC. SoLS does not finance travel for the External Advisory Committee member to participate in the activities of the student.

## **10. Program of Study and First Advisory Committee Meeting**

The first Advisory Committee meeting (held before October 31<sup>st</sup> of the first semester of the student's program) is for the purpose of identifying and outlining a student's project and determining the appropriate coursework. 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 official program of study can be discussed with the student early in their graduate career. 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 subprogram (CMB, EEB, IP, MB) to which the graduate student has become affiliated. 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 annual committee meeting reports.

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 requires that "Plan of Study Forms Part I & II" be completed via Grad Rebel Gateway.

## **11. Coursework requirements**

### **11a. M.S. students: Required courses**

Master's students are required to complete a minimum of 30 credit hours with grades of B- or higher. Eighteen of those credits must also be at the 700-level. If a student does not earn a B- or higher in a course, those credits will not count toward their degree. Furthermore, students receiving two grades below B- will be placed on academic probation and risk being separated from the program (see below).

Full-time students should register for at least 6 credits each semester, which is also required if they are receiving financial support from SoLS in the form of a Graduate Assistantship (GA), Research Assistantship (RA), or outside fellowship. M.S. students are expected to be full-time students; however, in rare cases a student may be enrolled in a SoLS M.S. program on a part-time basis. If no financial support is provided, students working on their thesis part time must still register for at least 3 credits in their graduating semester.

Unless approved for a leave of absence, students must enroll in and complete a minimum of six graduate credits in a rolling three-semester period. So, students must register for a minimum of three thesis/dissertation or non-thesis/dissertation in their graduating semester and meet the requirement of completing a total of at least six graduate credits that span the current semester plus the two prior semesters (including summer). Students must adhere to this policy until their thesis is completed and given final approval.

BIOL 701—*Ethics in Scientific Research* (1 credit) is required for all students who matriculated prior to the fall of 2017. Biol 701 used to satisfy UNLV's Responsible Conduct in Research requirements for all federally funded research, but this course is no longer taught.

BIOL 702—*Biology Graduate Core* (3 credits) is optional for all M.S. students who matriculated during or after the fall of 2017. The course is designed to provide information and foster skills needed for success in graduate school. It is best taken during the first year of the program. Biol 702 satisfies UNLV's Responsible Conduct in Research requirements for all federally funded research.

BIOL 796—Graduate Seminar, BIOL 793—Advanced Topics in Life Sciences, or some combination of both are required for at least 4 credits of seminar-style classes research.

BIOL 790 – *Research Colloquium in Life Sciences*. All M.S. students must attend more than 65% of the Colloquium meetings every semester even if not enrolled for credit. For students enrolled for credit, more stringent attendance requirements are described in the course syllabus. Each student must also present their research in the Colloquium once per academic year or as otherwise directed by the Colloquium Director. Students may register for BIOL 790 each semester, but no more than 9 credits can apply toward their degree. With the permission of the student’s TAC, part-time or self-funded students may be exempt from attending most Colloquium presentations; similarly, students who are residing at a collaborator’s lab at another university may be exempt. In either case, the student must inform the Colloquium Director prior to the beginning of the semester, but they are still required to present their work on average once per year.

BIOL 797—*Thesis*. At least 6 credits, but only 6, can be counted towards the degree. *NOTE*: M.S. students are only permitted to enroll in BIOL 797 after they have filed to the GC their “Prospectus Approval Form” (described below).

#### DIDACTIC COURSES (9 credits total)

- Credit from at least 3 separate, 3-credit didactic (lecture–based) courses is additionally required for all M.S. students regardless of the research subprogram to which they are affiliated.
- Furthermore, students must complete the specific course work required by their specific research subprogram (CMB, EEB, IP, MB) to which they belong. This information is described in separate PDF files as “Introduction to the (EEB, IP, CMB, MB) Subprogram.” These files are posted at: <https://www.unlv.edu/lifesciences/graduate-student>.

#### 11b. M.S. students: Other courses

BIOL 789—*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. It can be repeated, but only 9 credits can be applied toward an M.S. degree.

BIOL 791—*Research Laboratory Discussions in Life Sciences*. A graduate student can enroll in this class, with their mentor’s permission, to receive credit for presenting and participating during formal laboratory meetings with their mentor’s individual research group. This course may be repeated, but only 9 credits can apply toward an M.S. degree.

#### 11c. M.S. students: Transfer credits (UNLV course work only) or credit reduction toward degree

Master’s students may request a maximum of 15 graduate credits taken at UNLV or another institution prior to admission into the SoLS graduate program, be counted toward their UNLV M.S. degree. But these classes must have been taken at the 600 or 700 level. The student must also have earned a grade of “B” (3.00) or higher. These courses must be unanimously approved by the student’s TAC, and their acceptance must be documented in an 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.

### 11d. Ph.D. students: Required courses

Doctoral students are required to complete a minimum of 60 credit hours with grades of B- or higher. Thirty-six (18 if the student has already earned an M.S. degree) of those credits must also be at the 700-level. If a student does not earn a B- or higher in a course, those credits will not count toward their degree. Furthermore, students receiving two grades below B- will be placed on academic probation and risk being separated from the program (see below).

Students should register for at least 6 credits each semester if they are receiving financial support from SoLS in the form of a Graduate Assistantship (GA), Research Assistantship (RA), or outside fellowship. Ph.D. students must be full-time students because SoLS does not admit part-time students into a Ph.D. program. However, if no financial support is provided, students working on their dissertation who have already completed 60 credits, must still register for at least 3 credits each semester (excluding summer, unless the degree is completed in summer) until their dissertation is completed and given final approval.

BIOL 701—*Ethics in Scientific Research* (1 credit) is required for all students who matriculated prior to the fall of 2017. Biol 701 used to satisfy UNLV's Responsible Conduct in Research requirements for all federally funded research, but this course is no longer taught.

BIOL 702—*Biology Graduate Core* (3 credits) is required/highly recommended for all Ph.D. students who matriculated during or after the fall of 2017. The course is designed to provide information and foster skills needed for success in graduate school. It is best taken during the first year of the program. If a Ph.D. student needs to be excused from this class, the student should contact their advisor, if the advisor agrees, the advisor should then write to the Grad Coordinator/ GOC Chair to request a waiver for their student. Biol 702 satisfies UNLV's Responsible Conduct in Research requirements for all federally funded research.

BIOL 796—*Graduate Seminar*, BIOL 793—*Advanced Topics in Life Sciences*, or some combination of both are required for at least 6 credits of seminar-style classes.

BIOL 790 – *Research Colloquium in Life Sciences*. All Ph.D. students must attend more than 65% of the Colloquium meetings every semester even if not enrolled for credit. For students enrolled for credit, more stringent attendance requirements are described in the course syllabus. Each student must also present their research in the Colloquium once per academic year or as otherwise directed by the Colloquium Director. Students may register for BIOL 790 each semester, but no more than 9 credits can apply toward their degree. With the permission of the student's DAC, part-time or self-funded students may be exempt from attending most Colloquium presentations; similarly, students who are residing at a collaborator's lab at another university may be exempt. In either case, the student must inform the Colloquium Director prior to the beginning of the semester, but they are still required to present their work on average once per year.

BIOL 767—*Dissertation Grant Proposal Writing Exercise* (CMB and MB students only). All students in the CMB and MB subprograms must register for and pass Biol 767 within 12-24 months of passing the comprehensive exam. This 3-credit course is designed to guide the student with the writing of a grant-style research proposal based on their current work and that outlined in the Prospectus for the completion of their dissertation.

BIOL 799—*Dissertation*. At least 12 credits, but no more than 18, can be counted towards the degree.

*NOTE:* Ph.D. students are only permitted to enroll in BIOL 799 after they have filed to the GC their “Prospectus Approval Form.”

## DIDACTIC COURSES (18 credits total)

- See the Graduate Catalog for specific course requirements.

### 11e. Ph.D. students: Other courses

BIOL 789—*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. It can be repeated, but only 9 credits can be applied toward an M.S. degree.

BIOL 791—*Research Laboratory Discussions in Life Sciences*. A graduate student can enroll in this class, with their mentor's permission, to receive credit for presenting and participating during formal laboratory meetings with their mentor's individual research group. This course may be repeated, but only 9 credits can apply toward an M.S. degree.

### 11f. Ph.D. students: Transfer Credits (UNLV course work only) or Credit Reduction toward Degree

Doctoral students may request a maximum of 30 graduate credits taken at UNLV or another institution, prior to admission into the SoLS Graduate Program, be counted towards the 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 30 credit hours at UNLV.

## **12. GOC Graduate Student Annual Evaluations**

Each spring term, graduate students are required to complete the Graduate Student Annual Review survey. This survey will be sent by the Graduate College to the student's Rebelmail account. The review covers the prior calendar year and assesses student progress while setting goals for the year ahead.

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 Oct. 31), and this meeting must be documented in the "Graduate Advisory Committee Annual Meeting" form, which can be found at: <https://www.unlv.edu/lifesciences/graduate-student>. The student and committee chair should follow the instructions on the form carefully and fill out those sections specified prior to the meeting. The chair and the committee should complete the appropriate parts of the form and check the correct box indicating the student's progress as adequate or not. This information can be recorded during or after the meeting. If a committee member is absent at the time of the meeting (including an external member if applicable), the meeting may proceed but the student must meet separately with this member to review the report and obtain their signature before it can be submitted. In the case where an outside member is not present, the student may obtain the signature by faxing or e-mailing the signature page.

For Ph.D. students in some subprograms (EEB, IP), the comprehensive exam committee is the same as the student's DAC. Under these circumstances, the meeting held that year to examine the student may count as an official annual research advisory meeting, provided that the "Graduate Advisory Committee Annual Meeting" form is also completed, signed, and filed with the GOC.

All committee members must sign the completed form before it can be submitted to indicate

their agreement with the information discussed and to concur with the progress status of the student. Students should sign the form last and submit it by October 31. If the GOC does not receive a completed and signed form by November 1, the student will be recommended for academic probation.

Once the “Graduate Advisory Committee Annual Meeting” form is completed, it is the student’s responsibility to submit it to the GOC. A scanned PDF file of the form is e-mailed to the SoLS Administrative Assistant and the student’s Research Advisory Committee Chair. The student should keep the original hard copy for their files.

The “Graduate Advisory Committee Annual Meeting” form is for GOC use and is not 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 will begin review of the “Graduate Advisory Committee Annual Meeting” forms, as well as the cumulative GOC file for each student on November 1st each year.

### **13. 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) mentor.
- 2) Failure to hold an official meeting and submit the form with the student’s Advisory Committee during the annual evaluation period (Jan. 1 through Oct. 31).
- 3) Receipt of an “Unsatisfactory” progress evaluation at an annual Advisory Committee Meeting.
- 4) Failure to present at colloquium on the assigned date, or failure to attend the appropriate number of colloquium meetings without being excused in writing from the Colloquium Director (see above under BIOL 790).
- 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 are due at the end of the semester in which the student failed to perform.
- 6) Receipt of two grades below B minus, in any graduate class, or having a cumulative GPA that drops below 3.0. Note in the case of receiving a second grade below B minus, the student will be placed on academic probation for the remainder of their time in the program.
- 7) Failure of Ph.D. students to take the comprehensive exam by the first day of the 6th semester in their graduate program.
- 8) Failure of the Ph.D. comprehensive exam for the first time.
- 9) Failure to “remediate” the Ph.D. 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.

Students switching research mentors or taking “a leave of absence” must also maintain the same time line 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 had matriculated. Students should consult with the current COS Graduate Affairs Coordinator for the application process need to file an official “leave of absence” with the Graduate College.

### 13a. 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.

### 13b. Process of academic probation

A student will be recommended for academic probation by the GOC as soon as it receives notification that one of the 11 offenses listed above has occurred. In other circumstances where a probation is recommended by the student’s Research Advisory Committee or the Director of SoLS, the GOC will meet in special session to discuss the circumstances of the recommendation. If by a majority vote, the GOC determines that a student has committed a probationary offense, then they will also be recommended for probation. In all the above cases the GOC 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 Advisory 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, official notification from the Graduate College is made to the student and the SoLS Grad Coordinator, who will forward the official document to the GOC (for the student’s files) and to all members of the student’s Research Advisory Committee.

During the probationary period, students may not be not eligible for scholarships, fellowships, or supplemental funding of any kind. They may not be allowed to teach extra lab sections or receive supplements or bonuses to their basic stipend. They will 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 they can request reinstatement from the GOC. If the committee concurs with the student (the decision must be unanimous) it will instruct the SoLS Graduate Coordinator to 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), the SoLS Graduate Coordinator will be instructed to request that the Graduate College separate the student from the SoLS Graduate Program. 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.

### 13c. 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), they will be asked to attend a meeting with the GOC so as they can explain why they should be permitted to remain within the program. The student's research mentor and Research Advisory chair may also be asked to attend a meeting. The GOC reserves the right to recommend separation after a second probationary offense has been committed. To remain within the program after that second offense, the majority of the GOC must recommend retention. The GOC will automatically recommend that a student be separated from a SoLS grad program if a third probationary offense is committed, even if the previous two were cleared.

### 13d. 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 above) however, is remediated by the process described below:

If a student receives two grades below B minus, they will be placed on academic probation for the remainder of their time in the program, even if the student has retaken the class to receive a higher grade. However, the student may retake the class in order to replace the unsatisfactory grade in an effort to elevate their GPA. If during the probationary period the student receives a third grade below B minus, they will be separated from the graduate program.

### 13e. Timeline for academic probation/program separation

If the student is officially placed on probation, the Graduate College will document the details of any possible remediation in the official document sent to the student and placed in the student's GOC file. When the student successfully completes the remediation, they will notify the SoLS Graduate Coordinator, who after conferring with the GOC, will make a request to the Graduate College that the student be removed from probation. If the student fails to remediate the probation in the timeline provided in the Graduate College document, the GOC will meet to recommend separation from the program. They will instruct the SoLS Graduate Coordinator to make that request to the Graduate College as outlined above.

## **14. Teaching Requirements: Ph.D. Students Only**

Ph.D. students are required to perform two teaching experiences as part of their degree requirements. Typically, the student will lead a laboratory or discussion section for a biology class administered by SoLS to fulfill a teaching experience. Graduate assistantships that require classroom or laboratory instruction for two semesters also fulfill these requirements. Students receiving RA and/or fellowship support for their entire graduate program, may be granted a waiver from these teaching experiences provided that: 1) The student's DAC agrees to the waiver and documents this recommendation in an "Graduate Advisory Committee Annual Meeting" form, and 2) an e-mail request is made to the Graduate Coordinator from the chair of the students DAC.

## **15. Comprehensive Exams: Ph.D. Students Only**

A Comprehensive Examination consists of both a written and oral component. Passing a comprehensive exam confirms that a student has obtained sufficient knowledge in their subject area and

demonstrated the appropriate intellectual abilities to complete the doctorate. It also signifies that the student has accomplished one major goal of their graduate education, which is a major step for advancing to candidacy. Students who have passed their comprehensive examination are eligible for scholarships and grants requiring Ph.D. candidacy.

Comprehensive exams must be taken before the first day of the student's sixth semester in the program. There are two reasons why this timeline is enforced: 1) Advancement to Candidacy is a requirement for funding by some agencies, and 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.

While all comprehensive exams in SoLS must consist of both a written and an oral component, the exact content and format of a comprehensive exam is determined by the faculty in the research subprogram affiliation of the student. The subprogram specific format for the comprehensive exam can be found at: <https://www.unlv.edu/lifesciences/graduate-student>

Furthermore, two types of exam committees exist; this again depends on the research subprogram to which the student belongs. The first type of exam committee is the student's DAC, including the Graduate College Representative, and is led by the Chair. For those students whose DAC includes an External Member as part of their exam committee, the External Member must participate, but they can do so 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, they must be substituted with an additional SoLS faculty member who will assume the duties of the External Member. In cases where the student has more than 5 members on their DAC, only 5 can serve as voting members of record. The other members may participate in the oral exam, but they cannot vote on the exam's outcome. The non-voting members must be identified before the student begins the exam.

The second type of exam committee is a separate examination committee comprised of 5 faculty members: 4 from the student's research subprogram, 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 policy of the Graduate College that all exams must be held 3 weeks before the last day of instruction in any semester.

While all research subprograms must administer the comprehensive exam prior to the beginning of the student's sixth semester in the program, some research subprograms may wish to administer the comprehensive exam prior to the end of the student's fifth semester in the program. For example, the CMB and MB Subprograms require students to take the comprehensive exam during the summer between their fourth and fifth semesters in the program.

In rare cases, a Ph.D. student may wish to take the comprehensive exam early, prior to the required date set by their research subprogram. In those cases, the student's DAC must unanimously agree that taking the exam early would be appropriate and in the student's best interest.

#### *15a. Student Responsibilities*

Ph.D. students must have taken their comprehensive exam before the first day of their 6th semester in the program. If a student does not take the comprehensive exam by the beginning of the 6th semester after matriculation, they will be placed on academic probation until the student fully completes the comprehensive exam.

In some subprograms, it is the student's responsibility to schedule the oral exam before the first day of the 6<sup>th</sup> semester in the program. Under these circumstances, the student should arrange the date with their exam committee and relay the date to the Committee Chair so that they can develop a full

timeline for the exam (including start date, written component submission date and oral examination date) and formalize this by putting it in writing before the beginning of the exam. In other sub-programs, the Chair of the examination committee will schedule the examination and follow up with the exam timeline. Regardless of the procedure used, if the exam is not taken by the end of the 7th semester the student will be separated from the Ph.D. Program.

It is also the student's responsibility to contact the UNLV Disability Resource Center (DRC) prior to the beginning of the examination, if specific accommodations are anticipated for the exam (<https://www.unlv.edu/drc>). The DRC will evaluate which accommodations are needed based on the supporting information provided by the student. The accommodations recommended by the DRC must be discussed and jointly agreed upon by the Chair of the Examination Committee, the Graduate Coordinator and the GOC chair. The examination committee may be included in these discussions and must be informed of the terms of the accommodation. No DRC accommodations can be granted once the exam has officially started.

#### *15b. Responsibilities of the Examination Chair and Chair of the Graduate Student's Advisory Committee*

As described above, the comprehensive examination is an important milestone in the academic training of a Ph.D. candidate. Different subprograms within the SoLS use different formats for the comprehensive, but some aspects of the examination must be standardized to ensure that parity is maintained across the school. To facilitate this, the Chair of their Advisory Committee and the Examination Chair have two sets of responsibilities.

First, it is important that they pay attention to the overarching timeline for the exam – namely that each Ph.D. student has to hold their comprehensive examination before the first day of the sixth semester. While the student is ultimately responsible for making this happen, the student's Advisory Committee Chair and/or Examination Committee Chair should agree to work with the student to ensure that this timeline is met.

Second, it is important that the terms and conditions of the examination are clear to each SoLS graduate student taking the exam. In this regard, SoLS requires that the Chair of the Examination Committee provides the student the terms and conditions of the examination prior to the start of the examination in the form of a letter. The "Comprehensive Exam Terms and Conditions Letter" should at minimum contain the following information, but additional details and information can be added as necessary;

- 1) the date of notification
- 2) the start date of the examination,
- 3) the format of the exam,
- 4) the required date for submission of the written component (within four weeks from the date of assignment),
- 5) the required date of the oral exam (within 4 weeks after submission of the written assignment),
- 6) the composition of the examination committee,
- 7) possible outcomes of the exam (including a link to the relevant section in the SoLS Graduate Program Handbook)
- 8) the statement that failure to take the exam (both written and oral) by the first day of the 6<sup>th</sup> semester will result in Academic probation.

A template letter has been generated that can be used for this purpose with a few simple additions. The resulting letter should be given to the student to denote the formal beginning of their comprehensive

examination. The template can be found on the SoLS website (<https://www.unlv.edu/lifesciences/graduate-student>).

#### 15c. Written component

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

- 1) Committee members provide questions that require library research and synthesis of ideas. The student has from one to four weeks (determined in advance) to complete the questions. The written answers may be framed as short research proposals.
- 2) Committee members provide questions that require limited library research and synthesis of ideas. The student has one or two days to answer each of the questions, which may total approximately one week. The questions may be handed out one at a time with a designated time period for answering each.
- 3) Committee members provide questions that draw solely on the student's knowledge. This closed book exam may be conducted over several days.
- 4) The committee (with or without student input) provides a topic for a grant proposal that requires library research. For CMB, the background for the grant proposal comes from a journal article selected by the committee. For EEB and IP, a grant proposal topic proposed by the student is approved by the committee. The student typically has four weeks to write the grant proposal. The proposal is submitted to the committee for review several days prior to the oral exam.

#### 15d. Oral component

Oral exams occur within 4 weeks following the submission of the written component, even in cases where the work submitted for the written portion is poorly done. The oral exam is scheduled prior to the onset of the comprehensive examination, either by the student or the Examination Committee Chair (as stated in 15a & b). Depending on the format, the student may be asked ahead of time to prepare a presentation related to the written part of the exam. The protocol described below must be followed during the oral exam.

- 1) 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 the written questions and/or the order of questioning. If any member was dissatisfied with the answers to the written exam, the student may be asked questions related to the areas of weakness.
- 2) When the student returns, the presentation, if required, will begin and the questioning commences. The questions may 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.
- 3) There is no set time limit for the examination. When the examining committee is also the student's DAC (EEB and IP), the oral examination consists of research-specific as well as additional questions on topics deemed relevant by each member of the DAC. The examination will continue until all committee members agree that they have sufficient information to end the exam.
- 4) After the committee is satisfied, the Chair will ask the student to leave the room with instructions on when to return while the committee deliberates the outcome of the exam. Before the committee discusses the performance of the student, 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. In cases where a separate Examination Committee is employed for a cohort of examinees (CMB and MB for example), a decision on the exam result may be deferred until all the candidates are heard, at which time the individual students will be evaluated as described above.

#### 15d. Comprehensive examination outcomes

The Examination Committee can return three possible outcomes for the comprehensive exam: A student may receive a **Pass, Remediate, or Fail**. A unanimous decision from the Examination Committee is required for the student to “pass” unconditionally. 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.

Students who unconditionally “pass” the comprehensive exam, have completed the correct number of credits, have received approval of their prospectus from their DAC, and have completed and filed the “Prospectus Approval Form,” should file the “Advancement to Candidacy Form” with the Graduate College.

Students who receive a “remediate” on their comprehensive exam generally demonstrate some knowledge in their field, but either the oral or written portion, or some part thereof, is insufficient to award a “pass” from the Exam Committee. A student who receives a “remediate” following consideration of both the written and oral components must complete the terms of remediation as described by the Exam Committee (possibly including taking a second written examination or addressing concepts discussed during the oral defense) within the period specified by the Examination Committee. To convert the “remediate” to a “pass,” a simple majority of the Examination Committee is required after review of the student’s work. If the student fails (by a majority vote of the Exam Committee) to meet the terms of the remediation in the timeline provided, the result of the exam will be officially recorded as a “fail.” The student will then be placed on probation and may be allowed to retake the examination as described below.

Students who receive a “fail” for their comprehensive exam generally demonstrate a fundamental lack of understanding of basic concepts in their field on all parts of the exam. If a student fails the Comprehensive Examination, they, only with the permission of the majority of the members of the Examination Committee, may be allowed to retake the exam once more. Students who receive a “fail” on the comprehensive exam will automatically be placed on academic probation. To avoid separation, they must re-take the examination after waiting at least three months, but before a calendar year has passed. The committee will establish a specific timeline for the re-examination.

A student who “failed” the comprehensive exam on their first attempt must unconditionally “pass” the exam on the second attempt by a majority vote of the Exam Committee. 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 DAC.

#### 16. 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 the “Prospectus Approval Form” with the Graduate College. The prospectus summarizes the student’s research project that will be completed 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. The format for the prospectus depends on the subprogram to which the student belongs, but minimally it requires the addition of a one paragraph description of the work to date, and what is left to be completed. Students must complete the work described in the prospectus in order to graduate. To ensure appropriate feedback is given, the TAC/DAC 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.

#### 16a. M.S. students

M.S. students may submit the Prospectus any time after they have completed 12 credits toward the degree, but they must complete a “Prospectus Approval Form” before they can register for Thesis (BIOL 797) credits.

#### 16b. Ph.D. students

Ph.D. students must complete a “Prospectus Approval Form” before they can advance to candidacy and register for Dissertation (BIOL 799) credits. The “Prospectus Approval Form” is usually submitted once all the formal coursework is completed. 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 distractive 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.

### **17. Candidacy: Ph.D. Students Only**

While it is SoLS policy to allow students who have passed their comprehensive examinations to be eligible for scholarships and grants requiring Ph.D. candidacy, the UNLV Graduate College does not yet consider these students Ph.D. candidates. A Ph.D. Candidate is an official title granted by the Graduate College. This status is achieved when candidates have completed their formal didactic classes and are expected to devote their efforts exclusively to completing their research and writing their dissertation. Ph.D. students are advanced to candidacy only after the following three conditions are met: 1) They must have taken and successfully passed their comprehensive exam, 2) they must have successfully defended their Prospectus with their DAC and submitted the “Prospectus Approval Form” to the Graduate College, and 3) they must have completed all their formal coursework required by the research subprogram to which they belong. When the above conditions are met, students should file the “Advancement to Doctoral Candidacy Application” with the Graduate College.

### **18. Dissertation Grant Proposal Writing Exercise: Required for Ph.D. Students in CMB and MB; Optional for EEB and IP.**

All Ph.D. students in the CMB and MB Subprograms must enroll and pass BIOL 767—*Dissertation Grant Proposal Writing Exercise*. Typically, students will enroll in this class 12-24 months after passing their comprehensive exam. Students should note that the class

will not be offered during the summer sessions. The Chair of their DAC will serve as the instructor of record, and students should enroll only in the section of the class associated with the appropriate instructor. At the beginning of the semester to which they are enrolled, the student will meet with their DAC Chair/BIOL 767 instructor to discuss the culminating experience for the course, which is to be a grant proposal describing the student's dissertation, including the work which must be finished prior to graduation.

Throughout the semester, the student will meet regularly with their DAC chair to discuss the progress of the proposal, the format of which is set by the individual Research Subprogram (see: <https://www.unlv.edu/lifesciences/graduate-student> for more details). Typically, the proposal will be in the form of an 8-12-page NIH or NSF grant proposal describing in detail two or three specific aims. Once the DAC Chair and the student have settled on the finished proposal, the student will convene a meeting of their DAC so that the committee members can evaluate and grade the final proposal as either pass or fail. The student must distribute the proposal to DAC members at least two weeks prior to end of the semester when grades are due. Students who fail BIOL 767 must retake the class until a passing grade is earned.

## **19. Completion of the Degree Program**

### **19a. M.S. students**

M.S. students who have completed the work outlined in their Prospectus to the satisfaction of their Research Mentor should hold a committee meeting with their TAC to discuss the content and organization of their thesis, as well as to schedule a date and time for their public and private defense. Once the "go ahead" has been granted from the TAC, the student and mentor should work closely to generate a complete version of the thesis that has been edited at least once by the student's mentor. Student who fail to hold the final committee meeting to obtain a "go ahead" run the risk that a committee member could consider the research incomplete, and require additional work before graduation. Once the complete edited draft of the thesis has been generated, the student may proceed to the steps toward graduation as outlined below.

In the M.S. Program students are expected to graduate in two years (after completing four semesters). See the Graduate Catalog for Time to Degree information.

### **19b. Ph.D. students**

Ph.D. students who have advanced to candidacy and completed the work outlined in their Prospectus and Dissertation Grant Proposal Writing Exercise (where applicable) to the satisfaction of their Research Mentor should hold a committee meeting with their DAC to discuss the content and organization of their dissertation as well as to schedule a date and time for their public and private defense. Once the "go ahead" has been granted from the DAC, the student and mentor should work closely to generate a complete version of the dissertation that has been edited at least once by the student's mentor. Student who fail to hold the final committee meeting to obtain a "go ahead" run the risk that a committee member could consider the research incomplete, and require additional work before graduation. Once the complete edited draft of the dissertation has been generated, the student may proceed to the steps toward graduation as outlined below.

In the Ph.D. Program students are encouraged to graduate within 2 years after advancing to candidacy. See the Graduate Catalog for Time to Degree information.

## **20. 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 current COS Grad Affairs Coordinator or the SoLS Graduate Coordinator prior to the semester that they plan to graduate to ensure that all Graduate College requirements have been or are being met. Students who have not followed Graduate College or SoLS procedures, who have missed deadlines, who have outstanding fees, or who have failed to file the appropriate forms, etc. will not be allowed to graduate or participate in the commencement ceremony. They will have to delay official graduation until the semester when all the requirements have been satisfied. 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.

If a student intends to graduate in the semester that the thesis/dissertation is defended, they must satisfy the following requirements before the corresponding deadlines:

- 1) The student must be enrolled for at least 3 credits during that last semester.
- 2) The student must submit an application for graduation through the student's MyUNLV account by the deadline stipulated by the Graduate College (typically 10 weeks prior to the last day of classes). Note that a "graduation and commencement" fee will be charged to the student once this application is filed.
- 3) The student must submit a mentor-approved thesis or dissertation in the format approved by the Graduate College. A current edition of a "Guide for Preparation and Presentation of the Thesis and Dissertation" is available at: <https://www.unlv.edu/graduatecollege/thesis>. The approved thesis/dissertation must be submitted to the student's TAC/DAC four weeks prior to the defense date (see below). Under some circumstances less time may be provided for the committee to read the document, but a relaxation in the 4-week rule must be granted in the form of an e-mail from each of the members of the TAC/DAC. Students must also be cognizant that the deadline for the last day to defend for a given semester is set by the Graduate College and is typically four weeks prior to the last day of classes for that semester.
- 4) The student must finalize the details for the final defense (date, time, room). They must also advertise their public seminar with the Graduate College (see the COS Grad Affairs Coordinator for details) and by distributing both hard-copy and electronic advertisements to all members of the School of Life Sciences at least two weeks prior to the defense date. In addition to a widely-circulated e-mail announcement, students must place fliers announcing their talk at multiple sites within the WHI and SEB buildings. It is also strongly recommended that students arrange to have their public defense at the colloquium venue where it will receive the largest audience from SoLS. To achieve this goal, students may have to plan their defense date several months to one year in advance with the Colloquium Director, or they may have to try to negotiate with another student scheduled to present on their preferred date.
- 5) The student must publicly defend their thesis/dissertation in a one-hour seminar at a time when all their TAC/DAC committee members can be present. Typically, this occurs within the

colloquium venue (see above), but if this proves an inconvenient time, the student must arrange another date/time to accommodate all the members of the TAC/DAC. The External Committee Member must also be present, but this can occur via an audio or video link.

- 6) The student must privately meet with their TAC/DAC after the public defense. Often this occurs immediately following the public defense, but it is sometimes arranged for another date and time when all the members of the TAC/DAC can meet. In this meeting the committee members will discuss with the candidate the thesis/dissertation as well as the comments from the public defense, and suggest changes or revisions to the written document. To be allowed to graduate, the TAC/DAC members must vote on allowing the graduation to go forward, and that decision must be unanimous. It must also encompass all members of record who serve on the TAC or DAC including members who may have abstained from a decision (because of limiting the voting to 5 members for that exercise) on the comprehensive exam.
- 7) The student must submit the final signed “Culminating Experience Form,” an “iThenticate Summary Report” that compares the thesis/dissertation document for similarity and plagiarism, and the completed thesis or dissertation document itself in the form of a PDF file to the Graduate College by the deadline. Typically, this deadline is two weeks before the end of the semester.
- 8) After the Graduate College had reviewed the student’s thesis/dissertation and made suggestions for edits, the student must submit the final version of the document to the Graduate College by the final deadline for that semester (typically one week before the end of the semester).

#### 20a. M.S. and Ph.D. Oral Defense Guidelines

If any member of a student’s TAC/DAC finds the final draft of the thesis/dissertation unsatisfactory, they may request that the Chair of the Advisory Committee postpone the public defense and committee meeting. This request must be submitted up to 3 days before the scheduled defense date. The oral defense guidelines generally follow the guidelines for the oral component of the comprehensive examination.

- 1) 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.
- 2) 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.
- 3) 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.
- 4) 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.
- 5) The candidate is then asked to leave the room and the Committee begins deliberations. During this period, the adjudicators will discuss their expectations for any final revisions to the thesis or dissertation; this should continue until the Committee members are in unanimous agreement. At this point the outcome and required modifications are presented to the student.
- 6) After the student has made final modifications to the thesis or dissertation, and the modifications have been accepted, the successful degree candidate is responsible for securing the signed

“Culminating Experience Form” and submitting it and the approved thesis/dissertation to the Graduate College as outlined above. The SoLS Graduate Coordinator will not sign until all committee members have accepted and signed the above forms.

## **21. Miscellaneous Policies**

### **21a. 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 switch to the SoLS Ph.D. program, without completing the M.S. degree must, in consultation with their Research Mentor, request the *Change of Degree Form A* from the SoLS Graduate Coordinator before the end of the student’s third semester in the SoLS Graduate Program. The student and their 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 is then forwarded to the Graduate College in the form of an official appeal. Students can be assisted in the appeal’s process by the COS Grad Affairs Coordinator or the SoLS Graduate Coordinator. Once approved, the Graduate Operations Committee should be informed of the change.

### **21b. 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 their Research Mentor solicit the *Change of Degree Form B* from the Graduate Coordinator. The student and their Research Advisor must complete the *Change of Degree Form B*, which consists of three parts: student petition, advisor endorsement, and signature page. The petition to change degree programs is then forwarded to the Graduate College in the form of an official appeal. Students can be assisted in the appeal process by the COS Grad Affairs Coordinator or the SoLS Graduate Coordinator. Once approved, the Graduate Operations Committee should be informed of the change.

### **21c. Student stipends and financial support**

Most students who matriculate into the M.S. or Ph.D. program are offered fellowship or assistantship funding, from one of three sources, or a combination thereof: 1) A state funded Graduate Assistantship (GA), with the primary responsibility to instruct undergraduate laboratory or discussion sections. 2) A Research Assistantship (RA) awarded to the student or their mentor, from extramural grants. 3) 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. 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 a Ph.D. degree requires a full-time commitment, and an advanced degree in SoLS is research based. In addition, progress toward an M.S. degree requires a serious time commitment that is likely to conflict with employment elsewhere. 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 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.

### 21d. Evaluations required for students receiving teaching Graduate Assistantships

The individual duties for a teaching GA are determined by the faculty Course Director, often in consultation with a staff member serving as a Laboratory or Discussion Coordinator. As such, students must comply with the requirements of their supervisors (Director and/or Coordinator), and they will be evaluated in the form of a written report midway through each semester. If a student receives an “unsatisfactory” in that mid-term evaluation, they will be given explicit instructions for how to improve their performance, and they will be required to be evaluated a second time at the end of the semester. If the student receives another “unsatisfactory” at the end of the term, their teaching GA will be rescinded for one semester. After the one-semester break, a student may be awarded another GA, but if the student receives an “unsatisfactory” for a second time during their career, they will be prohibited from receiving any more teaching GA funds from SoLS from that point on. At the end of each semester all completed teaching evaluation forms must be submitted to the GOC (through the SoLS administrative assistant) for inclusion in the student’s file.

### 21e. Increased stipends for Ph.D. students passing comprehensive exams

M.S. and Ph.D. GA stipends are set and standardized by the Graduate College for each academic unit on campus. However, a Ph.D. student who passes their comprehensive exam and is otherwise in good standing, usually becomes eligible for extra stipend support in the form of a supplement from SoLS. These supplements are awarded on a yearly basis starting in the fall semester, but under some circumstances that may be added to stipends received in the spring semester. The amount of this award (typically a few thousand dollars per year) is determined by the SoLS Director in consultation with the SoLS Graduate Coordinator. The amount and duration of each supplement depend on funds available to SoLS each year, and thus no student is guaranteed a SoLS supplement. Students on probation and students not awarded GAs (Students on RAs or fellowships) are not eligible for these SoLS supplements.

### 21f. Employment outside of UNLV

Students who are awarded GA, RA, or fellowship support are not permitted to obtain employment outside of SoLS. Exceptions are only granted by petitioning the SoLS Director and the SoLS Graduate Coordinator with final approval from the dean of the Graduate College. Failure to request approval of the outside employment may result in the state-funded GA/RA being rescinded. It is unlikely that a Research Mentor will provide supplementary salary support from a research grant for a student who continues employment outside UNLV. Please adhere to Graduate College policies related to domestic and international students.

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.

### 21g. Leave 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 Mentor, the COS Graduate Affairs Coordinator, and/or the SoLS Graduate Coordinator, to determine whether it is appropriate for them 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,” which can be obtained the Grad Rebel Gateway portal.

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 their Research Mentor, and they may choose to return early. Students must be aware that all degree requirements must still be completed within the mandatory time limits set by the Graduate College. For example, if a Ph.D. student took a leave of absence for one year at the end of their 3<sup>rd</sup> semester, they would be required to take their comprehensive exam immediately after their return because this would still be seen as the beginning of their 6<sup>th</sup> semester in the program. It should also be noted that a student returning from a “Leave of Absence” is not guaranteed a Graduate Assistantship. In addition, the Student’s Research Mentor 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.

### 21h. 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 must act professionally by treating everyone with respect. Occasionally interpersonal conflicts may arise; between students, between the student and their mentor, or with other personnel at the university. Under these circumstances, the student should first attempt to resolve the issue directly and immediately with the other individual(s) involved. If this is not successful, or if the student becomes uncomfortable approaching the person, the student can ask the SoLS Director, the SoLS Graduate Coordinator, the Chair of the GOC, or the COS Graduate Affairs Coordinator for advice or potential mediation. A student is reminded that the sooner they seek advice or mediation the more likely they are to achieve a positive outcome. If the student is unsatisfied with the informal mediation, they should 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 cases where a student is placed on probation, the reason for that action is clear, and the remediation requirements are stated and within the student’s control. In the event that a student disagrees with the GOC recommendation to place the student on academic probation, the student may choose to file a formal appeal with the Graduate College. The guidelines for that appeal can be found at in the Grad Rebel Gateway system. If the dean of the Graduate College accepts the appeal, then the dean will refer the case to the university-wide Appeals and Legal Issues Committee, for a final binding resolution.

### 21i. Other student resources

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

*Graduate College Catalog:*

<https://www.unlv.edu/academics/catalogs>

*Information for Current SoLS Graduate Students:*

<https://www.unlv.edu/lifesciences/graduate-student>

*Human Resources (for issues of discrimination, sexual harassment, nepotism, etc):*

<https://www.unlv.edu/hr>

*Office of Student Conduct:*

<http://studentlife.unlv.edu/judicial/misconductPolicy.html>

*Useful information for International Graduate Students and their advisors:*

<https://www.unlv.edu/graduatecollege/international>

## **University Resources**

### **Academic Success Center**

The goal of the Academic Success Center is to help students do well academically and complete their studies on time. They offer or will refer you to such programs and resources as tutoring, advising, skills testing, career exploration and more. They guide students every step of the way to the many established resources created to ensure they complete their educational goals. Learn more about the programs and services the center currently offers.

### **Alumni Association**

With an alumni base 90,000 strong, the UNLV Alumni Association offers a variety of services and opportunities in support of alumni and their families. UNLV alumni are encouraged to support the values of higher learning through advocacy, involvement, and giving.

### **Commencement Office**

Located in the UNLV Registrar's Office, the commencement office is the last step in the graduation process. Please check with the commencement office for information on the commencement ceremony and your diploma; for all other information about graduate student degree completion and graduation, including thesis/dissertation requirements and doctoral hooding, please contact the Graduate College.

### **Office of Diversity Initiatives**

The vision of the Office of Diversity Initiatives is to advocate, promote, and support the advancement of equity, inclusiveness, and empowerment of a continuously changing collegiate and global community. The mission of the Office of Diversity Initiatives is to provide leadership and support for UNLV's diversity mission: *to nurture equity, diversity, and inclusiveness that promotes respect, support, and empowerment*. This Office also handles UNLV Title IX questions, inquiries, and reporting.

### **Disability Resource Center (DRC)**

The DRC is committed to supporting students with disabilities at UNLV through the appropriate use of advocacy, accommodations, and supportive services to ensure access to campus courses, services, and activities. The DRC is the university-designated office that determines and facilitates reasonable accommodations in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Graduate students with disabilities must disclose to the DRC in order to receive appropriate accommodations.

### **Office of International Student and Scholars**

International Students and Scholars (ISS) ensures compliance with both SEVIS (Student and Exchange Visitor Information System) and federal law, so that the university can continue to be authorized by the U.S. federal government to enroll international students; host and hire international scholars; assist and advise employment eligibility and authorization relating to international students and scholars, and visa, travel, and immigration issues; provide critical and specialized services to the international students and scholars of the UNLV community; and facilitate their transition to the campus and the U.S.

### **Jean Nidetch Women's Center**

The Jean Nidetch Women's Center is committed to creating a supportive and inclusive environment for all genders through programming, services, and advocacy for the UNLV community. The Women's Center has informational resources, brochures, and flyers for a variety of on and off campus organizations to help empower and protect yourself, and learn about your options. They also provide free tampons, pads, and condoms.

### UNLV Libraries

UNLV Libraries has always been more than books; they are about encouraging students and creating quality programs that elevate growth and learning. Please visit their website for important information about the services they offer to graduate students.

### Graduate & Professional Student Association (GPSA)

The Graduate & Professional Student Association serves all currently enrolled University of Nevada, Las Vegas graduate and professional students. The GPSA maintains the Graduate Student Commons located in the Lied Library room 2141. The facility a working office equipped with a copier, fax, flatbed scanners, color laser printer, office supplies, and computers with printers and a small kitchen area. The GPSA is the graduate student governance body at UNLV; the GPSA Council consists of one graduate student representative from each graduate department, and they meet monthly. The GPSA also provides volunteer opportunities, sponsors social events, and supports graduate student research through the graduate research and travel grants program.

### Office of Student Conduct

The Office of Student Conduct is a student-centered, service-oriented office located within the Division of Student Affairs. The Office of Student Conduct collaborates with the UNLV community to provide an inclusive system through enforcement of the *UNLV Student Code of Conduct* by:

- Promoting awareness of student rights and responsibilities;
- Establishing accountability for student choices;
- Creating opportunities for involvement in the process; and
- Striving to uphold the values and ethics that advance the common good.

### Military and Veteran Services Center

The Military and Veteran Service Center is staffed with veterans and GI Bill-experienced staff to assist more than 1,000 veterans, dependents, active duty service members, National Guard members, and reservists. Their mission is to develop a welcoming, veteran-friendly campus environment that fosters academic and personal success.

### The Financial Aid & Scholarships Office

The Financial Aid & Scholarships Office supports higher-education access and persistence by providing financial aid to eligible students. The office partners with student organizations, the UNLV Foundation, the Graduate College, and other external constituents to provide financial aid learning opportunities and scholarship support for graduate students.

### Writing Center

This is a free service to UNLV students to help you with any writing project, from papers to creative writing, to resumes, and we can work with you at any stage of the writing process. The center can help you brainstorm, make an outline, work on your drafts, or just be a soundboard for your ideas. The center staff can assist you in person, or via the Online Writing Lab (OWL) page.

## University Policies and Procedures

Graduate students are responsible for knowing and acting in accordance with UNLV Policies and Procedures. To view the most commonly referenced campus policies and procedures, you can refer to the following websites:

- [Academic Integrity](#)
- [Activation for Military Service](#)
- [FERPA/Privacy Rights](#)
- [Health Insurance - Mandatory](#)
- [Jeanne Clery Campus Safety and Security Report](#)

- Proof of Immunization
- Policies and Procedures on the Protection of Research Subjects
- Rebelmail Policy
- Student Conduct Code
- Student Computer Use Policy
- Title IX

To ensure compliance with Graduate College policies and procedures, please review the relevant sections of the [Graduate Catalog](#):

- Academic Calendar
- Academic Policies
- Admission and Registration Information
- Degree Progression Policies & Procedures

In addition, the [Graduate College website](#) contains additional information regarding policies and procedures.

## **22. Annual Review Procedures**

Each spring term, graduate students are required to complete the Graduate Student Annual Review survey. This survey will be sent by the Graduate College to the student’s Rebelmail account. The review covers the prior calendar year and assesses student progress while setting goals for the year ahead.

## **23. Final Disclaimer**

The purpose of this handbook is to provide program specific information that is not found in the UNLV Graduate Catalog. Students are responsible for understanding and following the policies and procedures delineated in this document and the UNLV Graduate Catalog, as well as the NSHE Code, UNLV Bylaws, and the UNLV Student Conduct Code. Questions about policies should be directed to the Graduate College: [valarie.burke@unlv.edu](mailto:valarie.burke@unlv.edu) or [emily.lin@unlv.edu](mailto:emily.lin@unlv.edu).

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 mentors, 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 interpretation of policy. The SoLS faculty reserve the right to revise this Handbook at any time.

*Nothing in this handbook supersedes any NSHE, UNLV, or Graduate College policy.*

## **Handbook Information**

Last revised	Revised by	Changes summary
Helen Wing	Spring 2019	Updated information