

Handbook of the Graduate Program
in
Biochemistry and Molecular Medicine
West Virginia University
School of Medicine

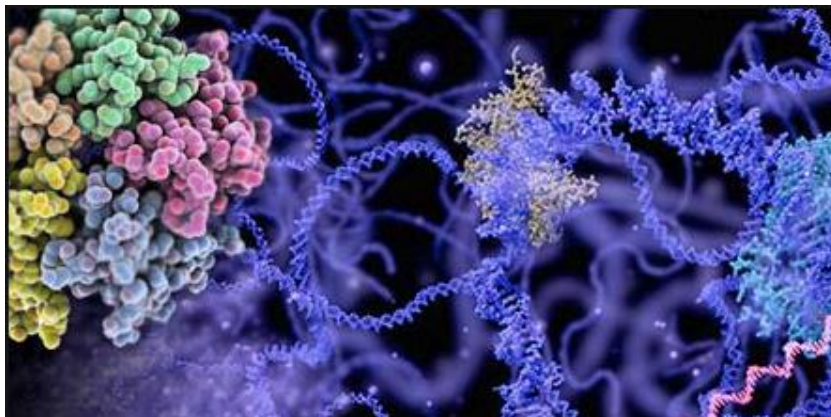


Photo credit: <https://www-ssrl.slac.stanford.edu/smb/>

**** Please Note that the program maintains a SOLE site to aid students as they progress through their graduate program journey ****

Revised July 2025

Aaron Robart, Saravanan Kolandaivelu, and Bradley Webb

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
I. ENTRY TO THE GRADUATE PROGRAM_____	3
II. BIOCHEMISTRY AND MOLECULAR MEDICINE	
PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS & GOALS of the PROGRAM_____	3
A. Formal Course Curriculum_____	4
1. Formal Courses_____	4
2. Journal Club_____	5
3. Seminars and Research Forum_____	5
4. Experiential Learning Requirement_____	6
5. Teaching_____	6
6. Doctoral Research_____	6
7. Choosing a Mentor_____	6
8. Vacations, Sick Leave, and Work Schedules_____	7
9. Student Mental Health_____	7
10. Changing Mentors_____	8
B. Academic and Professional Standards_____	10
1. Grades_____	10
2. Evaluation of the Student's Progress_____	11
3. Student Code of Academic and Professional Integrity_____	11
4. Appeals Policy_____	11
C. Ph.D. Candidacy and Dissertation_____	12
1. Formative Assessment_____	12
2. Student Advisory Committee & Meeting Schedule_____	12
3. Dissertation Proposal Defense _____	14
4. Admission to Candidacy_____	15
5. Out of Area Seminar_____	16
6. First author publication graduation requirement_____	16
7. Dissertation Preparation, Seminar, and Defense_____	18
8. Deadline for completion of the degree_____	18
D. M.D./Ph.D. Students_____	19
III. SAMPLE COURSE SCHEDULE_____	20
IV. SIGNATURE SHEET_____	22

I. ENTRY TO THE GRADUATE PROGRAM

A. General Biomedical Sciences Program

Entry into the Biomedical Sciences Program is governed by the handbook for the Graduate Programs in the Biomedical Sciences (GPBMS) developed by the Health Sciences Center Office of Research and Graduate Education (HSC ORGE). The GPBMS handbook outlines the activities, requirements, and standards for students and faculty that are shared by all degree-granting PhD programs in the biomedical sciences.

The GPBMS handbook can be found online (click [HERE](#)).

The GPBMS handbook also provides global policies and useful information common to all graduate programs that will govern student activities throughout the PhD degree. If this information needs to be amended, students and faculty will be informed in writing of the change and will be governed by the new information. The information in this handbook supplements the information that can be found in the WVU Graduate Catalog. This catalog can be found online at: <http://catalog.wvu.edu/graduate/>.

B. Biochemistry and Molecular Medicine program

At the end of the Fall semester of the first year, students choose a mentor in one of the Biomedical Sciences Programs. If the student chooses to perform his/her dissertation in a laboratory in the Biochemistry and Molecular Medicine (BMM) graduate program, this BMM handbook will supplement the GPBMS handbook. The graduate catalog contains allowances for programs to have more specific or stringent standards. In those cases, the BMM program handbook supersedes the Graduate Catalog.

II. BIOCHEMISTRY AND MOLECULAR MEDICINE PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE PROGRAM

This Handbook developed by the Faculty of the Graduate Program in Biochemistry and Molecular Medicine outlines the requirements for graduate training leading to a degree in Biochemistry and Molecular Medicine. This program adheres to the standards set forth by the American Society of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology (ASBMB) and the International Union of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology (IUBMB).

IUBMB Standards for the Ph.D. Degree in the Molecular Biosciences*

1. The candidate should demonstrate a general knowledge of physics, chemistry, biology and cell biology, biochemistry and Molecular biology, and a detailed knowledge of their area of research.
2. The candidate should be familiar with the research literature in biochemistry and in their specific field of study and should have the ability to keep abreast of major developments and to acquire a working background in any area.
3. The candidate should demonstrate skill in the recognition of meaningful problems and questions for research in Biochemistry and Molecular Medicine.
4. The candidate should possess technical skill in laboratory manipulation.
5. The candidate should demonstrate that oral, written, and visual communication skills have been acquired.

6. The candidate should demonstrate skill in designing experimental protocols and in conducting productive self-directed research.

*This list is adapted from the publication "Ph.D. Degree in the Molecular Biosciences".

<https://iubmb.org/resources/standards-for-the-doctoral-degrees/>

In addition to the information contained in this handbook, the student is urged to also consult the current Graduate School Catalog for additional information regarding the requirements of the Graduate Council at West Virginia University.

A. Formal Course Curriculum

A sample curriculum is provided at the end of this document.

The Ph.D. program should be completed within 5 years.

A.1. Formal Courses

During the first semester of study, the student will take the undifferentiated core curriculum. If the student decides to join the Biochemistry and Molecular Medicine Graduate Program at the end of first semester, they will take [BMM 493A / BMM 693A](#) (Molecular Genetics) during the second semester. The remainder of the student's plan of study is designed under the guidance of the student's advisor and will ultimately need to be approved by the student's advisory committee.

The student is required to take two advanced courses, one of which must be a Biochemistry and Molecular Medicine Graduate Program advanced course.

These courses include:

- Advanced Protein Chemistry and Enzymology ([BMM 750](#)) taught in the spring of even numbered years
- The Molecular Mechanisms of Human Disease ([BMM 753](#)) taught in the fall of odd numbered years

The second advanced course is an elective. The elective should be a graduate level course to complement the student's background as well as research interests. The student must consult with their advisor when choosing an elective. Suggested electives include:

- Advanced courses offered by other School of Medicine Graduate Programs
- Advanced courses (graduate level) offered in the Departments of Biology, Chemistry or the Davis College of Agriculture.
- Another advanced course in the Biochemistry and Molecular Medicine Graduate Program
- Students interested in teaching may take BMM 790, which is a teaching practicum

Additional coursework is optional. Many students find that they desire additional enrichment. West Virginia University requires that students be continuously enrolled in at least one credit each semester (including summer session) between achieving candidacy and defending their dissertation.

A.2. Journal Club

All students are required to enroll in Biochemistry and Molecular Medicine Journal Club ([BMM 785](#)) each semester of years 1-4. This course involves the presentation and discussion of current research papers. It is also a time for students to become acquainted with the variety of methods used in scientific research. The journal club is facilitated by the Biochemistry and Molecular Medicine Faculty. Students may participate in other journal clubs at the discretion of their advisor. **Students in their 5th year, or beyond, are exempt from journal club in order to focus on completion of degree requirements.**

A.3. Seminars and Research Forum

The student will present **three seminars during their graduate study.** For each seminar, the student will register for 1 credit in [BMM 796](#). Students should only register for BMM 796 during semesters when they intend to present one of these three milestone seminars. BMM796 is not intended for attending the regular departmental seminar series.

The first seminar is the student's dissertation proposal. This seminar should be given by **November 1st of the 3rd year in graduate school.** See section C.3 for specific information.

The second seminar is on a subject unrelated to the student's research. The topic is selected by the student, with the approval of his/her advisor and the seminar coordinator. Students may choose to present from the topic of their written formative assessment (see section C.1.). This seminar should be given during the spring semester of the third year or beyond. A list of guidelines in preparing this seminar should be obtained from the seminar coordinator once the topic is selected. See section C.5 for specific information.

The third seminar is the student's dissertation defense. See section C.6 for specific information. ***Students are expected to complete their dissertation defense by the end of their 5th year. See section C.7 for a full description of time to degree regulations.***

Students in their 2nd year and beyond must also give an annual informal works-in-progress presentation in the Department of Biochemistry Research Forum. All students are expected to attend their peers' presentations and provide feedback. This forum is designed to keep members of the department abreast of new research findings, provide an opportunity for students to discuss and troubleshoot experimental problems, and to permit students to develop skills in presenting and defending their research results. This forum is not meant to be an opportunity to give a formal seminar. A schedule for the forum is developed at the beginning of each semester and the advisor selects which trainee will give a presentation. Students will fill out evaluation forms of graduate students' presentations. This not only greatly aids their peer's professional development, but also helps the student learn how to provide constructive feedback.

In the student's third year their dissertation proposal seminar may be used to fulfill the Research Forum presentation requirement, if the advisor agrees.

In addition to the BMM 796 seminars and the departmental research forum, students may have the opportunity to speak at retreats, research forums in other departments, the Van Liere Student Research Convocation, and national meetings. Any opportunity to practice oral communication skills is strongly encouraged by the Biochemistry and Molecular Medicine Graduate Program.

The Department of Biochemistry also hosts a weekly seminar series in which individuals from outside the department are invited to speak about their research. Time is allotted for the students to meet with invited seminar speakers generally at a lunch following the seminar. Each semester, the graduate students as a group are encouraged to invite a speaker of their choosing. A graduate student representative(s) will coordinate this effort with the seminar coordinator.

Students should attend all departmental seminars and research forums. Experiments and other obligations should be planned to allow attendance of these very important educational opportunities. Registration for BMM 796 is only for one of the student's three milestone seminars, not for attendance of the Departmental seminar series.

Repeated absences from these events may result in the student receiving a U (Unsatisfactory) or I (Incomplete) grade in BMM 797 requiring a committee meeting and potentially dismissal from the graduate program depending on the situation.

A.4. Experiential Learning (BMS 707)

The Experiential Learning requirements are governed by the GPBMS handbook section VI.B.

All students are required to take 1 credit of experiential learning prior to graduation. The syllabus in the appendix of the GPBMS handbook provides more details on this course. The overall goal is for students to participate in an activity that better informs either their research questions or a career goal. This activity needs to be something that would not otherwise occur during the student's dissertation research. Students are encouraged to think broadly and develop unique experiences. A folder on SOLE (under Health Sciences Center Graduate Programs -> Biomedical Graduate Program) contains sample ideas. For this course, 1 credit hour is defined as 45 hours in the activity. This is a loose guideline and should not be considered the upper limit of time spent. Financial assistance will be available to defray the cost of these experiences. Students must complete an application (available on SOLE) and have the activity approved prior to enrolling in the course. HSC ORGE will receive applications, evaluations and can answer questions on this course.

A.5. Teaching

Teaching experience is a valuable part of Ph.D. training. Every effort will be made to provide the student with training in this area. Students with a particular interest in teaching should make this known to both their advisor and the graduate program director so that ample experience can be planned. Possible experiences include a teaching practicum (BMM 790) taught in combination with other graduate programs and presenting a lecture in a course.

A.6. Doctoral Research

The dissertation advisor is the student's sole advisor in the graduate program. Most of the student's time in the graduate program will be devoted to conducting their dissertation research. Students register for research credits each semester as BMM 797, and their performance is graded satisfactory or unsatisfactory by their dissertation advisor. The expected learning outcomes, mechanism of evaluation, and criteria for grade for this course are described in the [BMM 797 syllabus](#). Students are expected to make progress on their research while engaging in course work, journal club, teaching, and seminar attendance.

A.7. Choosing a Mentor

During the first semester of study, students will be provided a list of available mentors in the Biochemistry and Molecular Medicine Graduate Program. The student will choose three laboratories to carry out a rotation. After completing these rotations, the student will decide, which laboratory they will conduct their dissertation research.

Each BMM mentor will discuss their lab's expectations document with the student before formally joining the lab. The program strives to ensure that all parties are clear about the expectations in the mentor's laboratory to help foster a strong mentor-mentee relationship.

A.8. Vacations, Sick Leave, and Work Schedules

All graduate students are entitled to 2 weeks of paid vacation per calendar year; these are in addition to the standard [University holidays](#) (when the university is closed). The implementation and timing of the time off should be discussed with the primary advisor such that arrangements can be made for laboratory activities in the student's absence. These expectations are likely to vary among research laboratories, so it is important to establish these expectations upon entry in the laboratory. Students on a VISA and leaving the country are to schedule a meeting at least one month prior to departure with Joe Andria (jandra@hsc.wvu.edu) to ensure that all paperwork and assurances have been completed and to receive a letter requesting their return.

The student should discuss the expectations for total hours of work as well as the days of service (weekends/holidays) with their dissertation advisor. These expectations are likely to vary between laboratories so it is important to establish what these are upon entry into a laboratory. ***Fulfillment of BMM program expectations requires students to be in person on campus the vast majority of the time, students should plan their living arrangements accordingly.*** The student should be aware that these decisions are made in the best interest and safety of the student and for the efficient conduct of the experiments.

Students should be aware that the degree is granted based on completion of the dissertation research and not based on length of time in the program.

If the student is sick for a journal club, class, or seminar they should inform the faculty member in charge prior to that activity. The student should not assume that informing their advisor or course director of an absence will result in the communication of that information to other faculty. Each faculty member with whom the student has a class or other obligation must be informed individually.

The WVU Health Science Center has a defined policy to deal with extended periods of time away from the laboratory or class, generally greater than two weeks. This is termed a leave of absence and may be taken due to grave illness, pregnancy or family crisis. This policy can be found [HERE](#) and should be consulted when considering such leave. In some circumstances, the leave may be imposed upon the student administratively due to academic issues or policy violations. The procedure for administrative leave is described in this policy. Click [HERE](#) to download the form for requesting extended leave.

A.9. Student Mental Health

College students commonly experience difficulties that may interfere with academic success. Stress, sleep problems, relationship and social concerns, adjustment to college, financial problems, family issues, discrimination, or anxiety and depression all affect one's ability to remember, learn and perform. If you or a friend is struggling, we strongly encourage you to seek support. Supportive, confidential resources are available on campus, and most are at no-charge. The BeWell office is the counseling hub for all Health Sciences students. BeWell offers short-term individual counseling, consultations and various other mental health services.

- You can schedule an appointment with BeWell by emailing the BeWell Coordinator, Layne Hitchcock, at layne.kehl@mail.wvu.edu.
- You can also schedule by calling 304-293-1292 or 304-293-1353.
- You can request an appointment online at health.wvu.edu/bewell/request-an-appointment.
- Feel free to visit BeWell's website for more information at health.wvu.edu/bewell.

BeWell is an extension of WVU's main counseling center. Please note that if you or a friend is experiencing a more urgent or crisis situation, the Carruth Center for Counseling and Psychological Services at WVU provides crisis consultation and counseling during normal business hours (8:30 a.m. – 5 p.m.) as well as after hours.

You can access these services by calling 304-293-4431. Crisis services are also available through text: Text WVU to 741741 for support 24/7 from a trained crisis counselor.

For more mental health resources and information, visit the Carruth Center website at carruth.wvu.edu.

A.10. Changing Mentors

Like any relationship, the mentor/mentee relationship will go through times of productivity and thriving and times of challenge and tension. Please know that this is normal. People and processes are in place to support you and your mentor during these times, especially in navigating any conflicts or major concerns. These are outlined below. In very rare occasions students need to change mentors while completing their dissertation research. This can happen for a variety of reasons and may be initiated by the student or the mentor. We have outlined below the process and procedure regarding changing labs if 1) a mentor is leaving or has left the university or if 2) there is an unresolvable conflict or mismatch between the mentor and mentee.

The protocol to be followed varies depending on the reason:

I. REASON: Mentor has left the University and you are remaining at WVU.

There are many variables that can impact next steps, for instance: Does the mentor have a collaborator remaining at the university? Is your mentor willing to partner with you and a new advisor so that you complete the proposed dissertation work? Have you completed most of your experiments and are in the final stages of writing? Are you pre-candidacy or post-candidacy? ***Unless you are in the final stages of your work and are writing, typically a mentor and project change must occur.***

The Assistant Vice President (AVP) for Graduate Education and your graduate program director should be notified, and you should immediately meet with your graduate program director and mentor together to discuss whether it is an option for you to continue with the current project. If this is a possibility, you should expect to have another faculty member as an on-site advisor, and you should expect to be moved into the laboratory of the on-site advisor or another faculty member conducting similar research.

If you are not able to continue with the current project, you will need to work with the graduate program director and the AVP for Graduate Education to identify a new dissertation mentor. The new mentor must be on the current Available Mentor List approved by the HSC Office of Research and Graduate Education (ORGE) and that list must be requested from the AVP for Graduate Education at that time as there are changes throughout the year. Students should plan to complete a 3-week full-time rotation with any potential faculty member prior to joining their lab. At the 3-week point, the Graduate Program Director will check-in with both the mentor and student to see if more time is needed, another rotation is needed, or if it is a match. Students are not required to do more than one rotation but are encouraged to take their time and be thoughtful in choosing their next mentor. A student can complete up to three rotations to identify a new mentor.

- II. REASON: There is a conflict or 'mismatch' between the mentor and mentee.** Unhappiness in your chosen laboratory and/or with your mentor does not mean that you will need to leave the laboratory. The key to handling these situations effectively is to act as soon as you sense a problem. Some of the most common mentor/mentee challenges are rooted in lack of or miscommunication and expectations that are not aligned between mentor and student. If you typically do not have regular one-on-one meetings to address these types of issues, try to effectively use your annual review of your IDP as a time to bring up issues or schedule a special meeting with the mentor. If issues occur in between these reviews, don't wait, act.

Recommended Problem-Solving Structure for Mentor/Mentee Challenges that involve complaints that are not a violation of university policy:

When handling mentor conflicts, you can use the following schematic. You do not have to speak to anyone you are not comfortable with, but this represents the ideal pathway in solving mentor/mentee issues occurring at the Health Sciences Center.

- Student→Speak with mentor. Wait for a reasonable amount of time for changes to take effect. Keep an open conversation during this process if not resolved
 - Student→Speak with committee member (or bring up at committee meeting), if not resolved
 - Student→Speak with graduate program director, if not resolved
 - Student and Graduate Program Director→AVP for Graduate Education, if not resolved
-
- **STEP 1:** Discuss with your mentor what is troubling you. The mentor may not realize that you are having trouble and may be willing to work with you on a solution. Consider if you were expecting the mentor to fill too many roles and that additional mentors, either dissertation committee members or other faculty, may be helpful for concerns that are less “research-based.”
 - **STEP 2:** If talking with your mentor or spreading mentoring roles does not work, immediately involve another faculty member. Ideally, this should be a committee member, your graduate program director and/or the department chair most associated with your program as they might facilitate and resolve the issues. You might call a special meeting with your committee to get their advice and input on navigating the situation. If conversations have been had and attempts to remediate the concern have not addressed the problem, the student, in collaboration with the graduate program director and or the mentor, should reach out to the AVP for Graduate Education for guidance on next steps. The AVP or designee will facilitate a conversation among all parties involved to determine whether the lab change process will be initiated right away or whether other intervention steps need to be taken.

**** There must be multiple conversations and documented attempts at addressing any issue before a laboratory change is initiated. Exceptions being any situation that involves violation of university policy.**

- **STEP 3:** If remaining in the mentor’s laboratory is no longer an option, the student will work with the AVP for Graduate Education, to identify a new mentor. The Graduate Program Director may also be involved in facilitating this process if the student is committed to remaining in the current graduate program. The AVP will discuss with the student which faculty can be considered for as a new potential mentor (on the Available Mentor List), will contact candidate faculty regarding their willingness to consider you for their laboratory, and will then provide you a list of candidate mentors. Students should not “mentor shop” on their own without having gone through the appropriate process. This creates confusion and misunderstandings.
- **STEP 4:** Candidate mentors, identified in step 3, will need to be interviewed by the student regarding the projects/questions that they might work on. Students should plan to complete a 3-week full-time rotation with any potential faculty member prior to joining their lab. At the 3-week point, the AVP for Graduate Education and the Graduate Program Director will check-in with both the mentor and student to see if more rotation time is needed, another rotation is needed with a different mentor, or if it is a match. Students are not required to do more than one rotation but are encouraged to take their time and be thoughtful in choosing their next mentor. A student can complete up to three rotations to identify a new mentor.

- **STEP 5:** Once a new mentor is found, the student must resubmit the Student Assignment Form naming the new mentor and have this approved by the ORGE and will need to update the committee approval form. This will both indicate the new mentor and ensure that the committee is appropriate for the new project. If a student will be removing committee members, they should inform them in writing that they will no longer be on the committee and thank them for their service or willingness to serve. If the timing is such that you may be delayed in completing the candidacy exam, you need to petition the Graduate Program Director and the AVP for Graduate Education for an extension and a firm date will be determined at which time the exam will be taken.

Finally, you must **refrain from any negative comments about the previous mentors**. Professional behavior is expected at all times of both the mentor and mentee. Mentor/mentee relationships fail. Fortunately, this is not often but in each case, it reflects mutual problems that could not be overcome. No one person is at fault and thus no blame should be assigned. Maintaining a professional approach will result in a smooth transition. Regardless of the reason for the change in mentor, to continue in the PhD program you must successfully find a faculty member willing and able to advise you on your dissertation research. This mentor must be approved by the ORGE prior to joining the laboratory. Failure to find a new mentor may result in dismissal from the graduate program.

B. Academic and Professional Standards

B.1. Grades

It is expected that students will perform satisfactorily on all required courses. To remain in good standing in the Ph.D. program a student is required to maintain the following standards:

- An overall grade point average of 3.0 in graduate level coursework excluding research credits.
- No grade less than a C in all course work. Students receiving a grade lower than a C will need to repeat that course.
- An incomplete grade must be removed within one semester or summer session of their posting, unless special permission is granted by the graduate program director(s) in consultation with the student advisory committee.
- Satisfactory performance in research (BMM 797). A grade of U must be accompanied by written comments describing the rationale for the grade. Receiving a U puts the student on academic probation. The student must have a committee meeting within the semester or summer session following the receipt of a U to discuss ways to remediate the problems. Two U's will be grounds for dismissal from the program.
- Grading of courses during a leave of absence will be handled on a case-by-case basis. For defined didactic courses, the student will generally need to take an incomplete grade and work with the instructor to develop a strategy to complete the class. In the case of research (BMM 797), the student should withdraw from the course before the deadline, as there is no mechanism to fulfill an incomplete grade. If the deadline for withdrawing from the class has passed, the student will receive a grade (S/U) reflecting their participation prior to the leave of absence. Missed journal club sessions in BMM 785 will be handled by having the student complete and submit answers to the 4-question exam on the missed paper(s). Students should contact course coordinators to arrange how work will be handled during the leave of absence.

Failure to comply with these standards will result in the student being placed on academic probation and may result in dismissal from the graduate program.

B.2. Evaluation of the Student's Progress

The progress of each student will be reviewed **at least once a year** by the student's advisory committee. Following the committee meeting, the committee chair (usually the student's advisor) will prepare the [Advisory Committee Meeting Evaluation Form](#) documenting the progress of the student as evaluated by the advisory committee. This form should include written accolades or concerns by the advisor and the committee.

Student's progress and goals will be evaluated at least once a year by the student's advisory committee (see Section C3).

All graduate students at the WVU Health Sciences Center are required to carry out an Individual Development Plan (IDP) self-evaluation annually. IDP self-evaluation is required for students supported by NIH, NSF, and many training fellowships. Information on IDP can be found [HERE](#).

Please note that unique IDP forms are filed at different stages of the Ph.D. program. As the student progresses, some questions in the IDP evolve to help facilitate discussion between the student and mentor about career path opportunities and expected thesis defense timelines.

The Biochemistry and Molecular Medicine director(s) and the chair of the student's advisory committee will monitor that program requirements are being met in a timely fashion. When a student is overdue for the completion of a requirement, the committee will first contact the advisor. Failure to complete the requirement within a reasonable time thereafter may result in action by the committee.

B.3. Student Code of Academic and Professional Integrity

Developing and practicing high standards for professional conduct are critical for the scientist. Both the University Graduate Council and the Graduate Faculty consider maintaining scientific integrity to be of utmost importance. All students are required to take a course in scientific ethics as part of the integrated first year curriculum. These standards are to be adhered to throughout the student's graduate education and into his or her career. All students are directed to be familiar with the University's policy on this subject. This can be found [HERE](#).

Students should pay particular attention to the avoidance of plagiarism in all scientific writing. The University's definition and position on plagiarism is: "Plagiarism is defined in terms of proscribed acts. Students are expected to understand that such practices constitute academic dishonesty regardless of motive. Those who deny deceitful intent, claim not to have known that the act constituted plagiarism, or maintain that what they did was inadvertent are nevertheless subject to penalties when plagiarism has been confirmed. Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to: submitting, without appropriate acknowledgement, a report, notebook, speech, outline, theme, thesis, dissertation, or other written, visual, or oral material that has been copied in whole or in part from the work of others, whether such source is published or not, including (but not limited to) another individual's academic composition, compilation, or other product, or commercially prepared paper."

Students who have any questions regarding what constitutes plagiarism should request clarification from the faculty before embarking on any writing assignment. Failure to adhere to these standards of scientific integrity will result in disciplinary action by the graduate faculty and may jeopardize the student's status in the graduate program.

B.4. Appeals Policy

Students may appeal any academic penalty or sanction imposed by an instructor, the institution or its constituent academic units, as prescribed in the "Academic Rights, Penalties and Appeal Procedures" section of the WVU Graduate Catalog. Students should consult the following link if they want to appeal an academic penalty or grade:

<http://catalog.wvu.edu/graduate/enrollmentandregistration/#appealstext>

C. Ph.D. Candidacy and Dissertation

A doctoral student is admitted to candidacy by successfully completing a formative assessment and dissertation proposal defense. ***The expectation is that students complete their Ph.D. by the end of the 5th year of study.*** See section C.7 for details.

C.1. Formative Assessment

A written formative assessment occurs in June-August (dependent upon scheduling) prior to the beginning of the second year of graduate study.

The purpose of the formative assessment is to gauge the student's general knowledge of biochemistry and molecular medicine, and to identify gaps early in the student's training to ensure their success in the program. **The formative assessment is NOT graded pass/fail**; however, the committee will provide recommendations to the student, their advisor, and dissertation committee for areas to focus improvement. Recommendations to address gaps in knowledge, presentation, or scientific writing skills may include suggested attendance of specific lectures, coursework, or participation in an F31 writing group.

The assessment consists of questions in each of the general areas of biochemistry and molecular medicine including protein structure and function, enzymology, metabolism, molecular biology and genetics, cell structure and function, and signal transduction. An examination committee composed of five faculty members from the BMM program will prepare questions on each topic and will provide a guideline for how long an answer should be. The student will have one week to write essay answers to the questions. The assessment will be completed in an open book format, in the student's own words, and without consultation with other students. The committee will meet with the student within 1-3 weeks after completion of the assessment to discuss their answers. The examination committee will provide a written summary of their performance for the student's file. ***In addition, the student will submit the [Doctoral Preliminary Examination Form](#) to the Health Sciences Center Graduate Programs Office.*** This form should be filed no later than October 1st of the student's 2nd year.

C.2. Student Advisory Committee & Meeting Schedule

A student advisory committee will be ***chosen by the end of the Spring semester of their 1st year of study*** to evaluate the student's progress in research, to provide a sounding board for problems encountered or progress made, and to examine the student during the proposal and dissertation defense seminars (see below). The members of this committee will be selected by the major professor and the student.

The committee will consist of five members:

- Three members must be on the faculty of the Biochemistry and Molecular Medicine Graduate Program, including the student's mentor who will act as chair. If the mentor is not a member of the Department Biochemistry and Molecular Medicine, they will serve as co-chair along with a BMM faculty member.
- One must be a faculty member from another program (including adjunct faculty) within the University.
- The fifth member can be either from within the Biochemistry and Molecular Medicine Graduate Program or from another graduate program.
- Generally, all committee members should hold Regular Graduate Faculty Member status; however, one committee member is allowed to not be a Regular Member (e.g. outside of WVU; or Associate member within WVU).

Selection of each committee member will be based on the nature of the research to be carried out and on the student's interests. The composition of the student advisory committee is subject to final approval by one of the Biochemistry and Molecular Medicine Graduate Program Directors.

A [Committee Approval Form](#) should be sent to the Health Sciences Center Graduate Programs Office.

All student advisory committee members must be present for the proposal defense and the dissertation defense. One member may be absent for other meetings, but this should be avoided if possible. Although not encouraged, Zoom is an option to help navigate unexpected scheduling difficulties should they arise.

Program Year	Fall Semester	Spring Semester	Summer Semester
Year 1 (Rotation & Join)	Rotations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formative Assessment & Form their Dissertation Committee (June) • Committee meeting focused on project brainstorming (July-Sept) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Students will provide a specific aims page ahead of the meeting b. Students are provided a specific aims template and examples to work from c. Complete Plan of Study paperwork 	
Year 2	Check-in (if necessary)	Formal committee meeting (can line up with Research Forum)	Check-in (if necessary)
Year 3 (Candidacy)	Proposal Defense by Nov 1st	Mandatory Check in by June 30th <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Format – Template provided to students, due ahead of the committee meeting</i> • <i>In person meeting is highly encouraged for the committee to provide feedback and encouragement</i> 	
Year 4	Check-in (if necessary)	Formal Committee Meeting	Check-in (if necessary)
Year 5 (Defense)	Formal Committee Meeting	Defense / Check-in (if necessary)	Defense or formal committee meeting to plan towards graduation

****Students beyond the 5-year graduation expectation are required to have a committee meeting at least every six months**

The first meeting with the advisory committee should occur during the Spring/ Summer of the student's 1st year. ***The student must submit an NIH-style Specific Aims page to their committee at least 3 business days prior to the meeting.*** A template / guide to writing this page is provided in the program's SOLE site. During this initial meeting the student will present their research project and preliminary progress. ***The student should also present their intended plan of study to their advisory committee at this time.*** This initial meeting will allow the advisory committee to comment on the scope and direction of the intended project to help ensure a successful proposal defense. After this first meeting an [Advisory Committee Evaluation Form](#) and the approved [Plan of Study Form](#) should be submitted. A template of a typical BMM student plan of study can be found [here](#).

The second meeting with the advisory committee should occur during the Spring of the student's 2nd year. ***Students must submit a [pre-meeting progress report](#) for each committee meeting.*** A template for this report is available on the program's SOLE site. The completed document must be shared with the full committee ***at least 3 business days prior to the scheduled meeting.*** The purpose of this meeting is to ensure that the student is on a strong track for their proposal defense in the Fall semester of their 3rd year. Committees will work with the student to ensure projects are hypothesis driven and appropriate in the scope of work. The committee will also generally assess the students' progress in broad foundational knowledge.

The third advisory meeting will immediately follow the student's research proposal seminar. During this meeting, the student will present a progress report of their research findings since the last committee meeting and discuss plans for future experimentation. The advisory committee will provide criticism and suggestions to help move the project forward. They may also examine the student in broad areas of Biochemistry and Molecular Medicine including an understanding of the techniques used in the proposal and the student's ability to use deductive reasoning. The student's advisor will prepare a written critique of each advisory committee meeting using the [Advisory Committee Evaluation Form](#). The completed evaluation form is signed by the committee members and placed in the student's file. Upon successful defense of their thesis proposal students must also file a [Doctoral Proposal Defense Form](#).

Following successful completion of the proposal defense and admission to candidacy, ***the student is required to meet with their advisory committee at least once a year*** to evaluate progress on the goals of the proposed research. ***Students entering their 6th year in graduate school must have committee meetings every 6 months to monitor progress.*** Failure to meet the committee meeting requirement may result in suspension of the student's stipend and tuition waiver until this requirement is met.

C.3. Dissertation proposal defense

The purpose of the proposal defense is to evaluate whether the student is prepared to undertake doctoral research. It consists of two parts: 1) a written proposal of the dissertation research project and 2) an oral presentation and defense of the project to the student's advisory committee and the BMM Faculty. ***In the student's third year their dissertation proposal seminar may be used to fulfill the Research Forum presentation requirement***

The format of the written proposal is the same as that of a NIH F31 predoctoral fellowship. Information and directions on how to prepare a F31 application can be found at: <https://researchtraining.nih.gov/programs/fellowships/F31>. The Office of Research and Graduate Studies has also developed a guide on how to prepare a F31 application. This information can be accessed through SOLE under Health Sciences Center Graduate Programs. The content section of this site contains a folder entitled "Information for Fellowship Applications". The format of the NIH predoctoral fellowship application is very similar to that of other funding organizations such as the American Heart Association (AHA).

The following sections must be included in the written dissertation proposal:

1. Abstract and narrative
2. Table of contents
3. Biographical sketch. To download form, click [HERE](#).
4. Specific aims – should contain at least 2 aims - 1 page limit
It is understood that these aims may change over the course of the research just as they do for the mentor's grants. A preference is for more aims rather than less to demonstrate the scope and potential of the project. Students commonly revise their proposals during the course of their dissertation research. Thus, it is not necessary for students to have a complete set of preliminary data supporting the aims of the proposal.
5. Research Strategy - 6-page limit
Each Aim should contain the following sections:
 1. Rationale
 2. Experimental plan and specific methods as appropriate
 3. Expected results
 4. Alternative approaches
6. Literature cited (no page limit)

Note: The page limits are for single spaced type. The allowed fonts are Arial, Helvetica, Palatine Linotype or Georgia and a font size of 11 or 12 points. The type density should be no more than 15 characters per inch and six lines per inch. One-half inch margins should be used on all sides but not greater than 1 inch. The page limitations of the proposal will be strictly enforced.

The student should consult with their advisor in determining the aims of the project. The student should also consult with their advisor on writing style and grantsmanship issues. During the summer semester of the second year of study, students take a scientific writing course (BMS 720) where one of the class projects is to prepare a predoctoral fellowship application in consultation with their advisor. This class project could be student's dissertation proposal.

The student should provide their advisory committee with a copy of the written proposal at least two weeks before the oral defense to allow sufficient time for the committee to evaluate the project. The student will present their proposal in a public seminar in front of their advisory committee and the BMM faculty. Following the seminar, the student will meet with their advisory committee to evaluate the proposal in depth. During this meeting, the advisory committee will be charged with examining the student in broad areas of biochemistry and Molecular Medicine including an understanding of the techniques used in the proposal and the student's ability to use deductive reasoning. Following the proposal defense, the advisory committee will recommend that the student be 1) advanced to candidacy or 2) allowed to remediate deficiencies of the proposal defense. If the advisory committee recommends remediation of the proposal defense, this must be performed within two weeks of the original oral defense date. If the advisory committee judges that the proposal defense remains unsatisfactory after the remediation attempt, the committee will recommend that the student be dismissed from the Ph.D. program with or without the option of continuing in the Master's of Science program in the Biomedical Sciences.

The deadline for completing the proposal defense is November 1st of the 3rd year.

In extenuating circumstances, such as a change of advisor, the student may petition the BMM graduate director(s) and the student's advisory committee to delay their proposal defense for a period not exceeding eight months.

Failure to defend the dissertation proposal by November 1st, or the end of the student's third year if granted a special exception, will result in dismissal from the Ph.D. program.

The format and timing of the proposal defense has been designed to facilitate the timely submission of predoctoral fellowship applications. Students typically submit AHA and NIH predoctoral fellowship applications during November and December of the third year of study, respectively. If the student chooses to submit a fellowship application, they will need to consult the directions for the additional sections required by the grant agency. In the case of the NIH F31 fellowship, these sections include Applicant's Background and Goals of Fellowship Training, Respective Contributions, Selection of Sponsor and Institution, Training in Responsible Conduct of Research, Sponsor and Co-sponsor Statements, Letters of Support, Institutional Environment and Commitment to Training, Vertebrate Animals, and Resource Sharing Plan.

C.4. Admission to Candidacy

Based upon the advisory committee's recommendation, with satisfactory performance on the proposal defense, the BMM Graduate Program Director(s) will recommend that the student be elevated to candidacy for the Ph.D. degree. The following forms must be filed before admission to candidacy:

- [Formative Assessment completion form](#), which should be filed by October 1st of the 2nd year of study.
- [Plan of Study Form](#), which should be completed and submitted to the Graduate Programs Office after the students first committee meeting in their 2nd year of study. An example course schedule is provided on page 19-20.
- [Doctoral Proposal Defense Form](#), indicating successful completion of the oral exam. It is expected that the proposal defense will be completed by Nov 1st of the 3rd year of study.
- Students are responsible for timely submission of the Advisory Committee Meeting Evaluation Form. This form must be filled out after each committee meeting (including proposal defense).

C.5. Out of Area Seminar

After achieving candidacy, the student is required to present an out of area seminar. The student should register in BMM 796 in the semester they intend to fulfill this requirement.

Option #1 - The student chooses a topic they are interested in that is ***unrelated to their thesis project***. After the student, advisor, and the BMM 796 course director agree that the chosen topic is appropriate, the seminar may be scheduled. The out of area seminar is intended to provide the student with the opportunity to broaden their knowledge, and to demonstrate their ability to clearly present a topic outside of their immediate area of expertise.

Option #2 - **Students may fulfill this requirement through participation in department-sponsored public science outreach activities.** These activities should involve communicating scientific concepts to a non-scientific audience using accessible language, clear explanations, and, where applicable, simple visual aids. Students will be evaluated on their ability to effectively engage the public, explain scientific ideas without jargon, and respond to questions clearly. Participation may be reviewed or assessed by faculty and/or members of the community involved in the outreach event.

The out of area seminar is graded as either P (pass) or F (fail) by the Department of Biochemistry Faculty. In the case of a failing grade, the student must remediate the grade within one semester. The form of this remediation will be determined by the student's advisory committee.

C.6. First author publication graduation requirement

When research has progressed to a point that is considered satisfactory by the major professor and the advisory committee, the student will write their doctoral dissertation according to Graduate Council guidelines. A copy of these guidelines can be obtained from the Health Sciences Graduate Programs Office. A draft of the dissertation will be approved by the student's advisor and the advisory committee before the final oral defense. This draft must be given to the committee members one month prior to the defense. Exceptions to this time schedule are strongly discouraged and will require the approval of every member of the advisory committee.

In almost all cases, students will not be permitted to defend their dissertation without at least one first-author research paper accepted or in press in a peer-reviewed journal.

A student may defend their dissertation before the final acceptance of the first-author paper. *Still, the paper must have been submitted with positive feedback from the journal, indicating likely acceptance.* The individuals making this determination that the defense can proceed before paper acceptance are the graduate program director (in consultation with the student's committee as deemed appropriate) and the Assistant Vice President for HSC Graduate Education. They are to be provided with documentation from the journal for consideration. Their approval is conveyed through their two signatures on the official Request to Schedule Final Defense Form. This allows students to proceed with the defense but does not exempt them from the first-author paper acceptance requirement to graduate.

Joint first-author manuscripts:

In the case of joint first-author manuscripts, the publication can typically only fulfill this requirement for one author. However, there are situations where the body of work is substantial and high impact enough to warrant inclusion in the dissertations of two students. For a joint paper to meet the first-author requirement for two students, both authors must make very distinct and significant contributions to a large and impactful study that will be included, in part, in both dissertations. The contributions must be clearly independent and distinct, each warranting a unique chapter within the dissertation document. The determination as to whether the published research is "large and impactful" will be determined by the student's respective dissertation advisory committees. The dissertation advisory committee must unanimously endorse the quality and quantity of the work meeting this requirement. For the final approval of a joint first-author manuscript meeting the graduation

requirement for two students, there must be unanimous agreement among the paper's senior author, the mentor(s) of both PhD students, and the respective graduate program director.

6th Year (and beyond) Considerations

In cases where a student is in their 6th year of doctoral study or beyond and has completed all other degree requirements except having the final acceptance of a first-author paper related to their dissertation work, certification of the degree may be granted in the following circumstances:

Awaiting final acceptance of a promising paper.

- A manuscript submitted to a journal has been returned from peer review, requesting the authors to revise and resubmit. The revision request must not require a significant paper overhaul or new experiments or studies. The primary mentor, dissertation advisory committee, and program director all endorse acceptance as the likely outcome after reviewing journal feedback based on their expertise.
- The student is expected to participate actively in the editing and resubmitting. However, the student will not be delayed in obtaining their degree if the process requires them to enroll in an additional semester, taking them into their seventh year of study. If the student does not fulfill their commitment in the publication resubmission process, their original authorship position may change at the discretion of the senior (corresponding) author.

Note: *Students who graduate without all the papers published in their dissertation work are not guaranteed the original authorship position depending on the amount of work and writing required to finalize the publication. This is at the discretion of the senior/corresponding author of the paper and should be discussed and agreed upon before the student finalizing their graduation.*

Appeal of First-Author Paper Program Requirement

If a student has completed their fifth year of study and all other degree requirements except for the acceptance of a first-author manuscript, **they may appeal the requirement to graduate** if they believe that due process was not followed or that a penalty was imposed unfairly or inconsistently with course, program, and university standards and regulations. This may include their belief that reflects a capricious, arbitrary, or prejudiced evaluation or reflects discrimination based on criteria listed in [BOG](#) Governance Rule 1.6, Section 1.2. Examples may include significant delays in response time by coauthors after the planned work for the manuscript has been completed and a manuscript drafted for submission, unusual delays in initiation and management of the review process on the part of the publisher, conflicts among collaborating co-author faculty which significantly delay the submission and review process, failure of the university or other entity to give clearance for publication due to Intellectual Property or other issues not related to the quality and integrity of the research.

Individuals and committees reviewing appeals may convene individual or joint meetings or request additional materials to collect further evidence. The student may be accompanied to meetings concerning appeals by a person of his or her choice from the institution. Such advisors may consult with but may not speak on behalf of their advisees or otherwise participate directly in the proceedings unless they are given specific permission by the individual or committee conducting the appeal.

Students are strongly encouraged (but not required) to discuss with their dissertation advisory committee chair and faculty mentor before filing an appeal.

Level 1 Appeal: Appeal to PhD Program

- The student may begin an appeal by submitting a written appeal via WVU e-mail to their primary PhD Program Director. The student's appeal must consist of the documentation and evidence forming the basis of their appeal.
- The student's primary mentor, advisory committee chair, or advisory committee members should provide information to the appeal reviewers upon request with a copy of any information they provide given to the student.

- The appeal reviewer(s) assesses the available evidence and consults with those involved in making programmatic decisions to decide about the appeal based on the presented evidence.
 - Note: This appeal review process should be outlined at the program level, based on which individuals or bodies are involved in the decision-making. For example, the reviewer may interface with an affiliated department chair, a scholarship committee, or a program advisory committee (not the program faculty).
- Within ten days, the PhD Program Director communicates the decision in writing via WVU e-mail to the student, dissertation advisory committee chair, and the HSC Assistant Vice President for Graduate Education. The reviewer retains all documentation related to the appeal for five years.
- If the student accepts the Level 1 appeal decision, the appeal is concluded.

Level 2 Appeal

- If the student does not accept the Level 1 appeal decision, they may continue their appeal by submitting a written appeal to the dean or dean's designee of the respective school within ten working days after the decision at Level 1 is sent.
- The Level 1 appeal reviewer forwards all materials included in the appeal to the Level 2 reviewer on request. The student and other involved parties may provide additional information if they wish.
- The Level 2 appeal reviewer assesses the available evidence and consults with appropriate parties to decide the appeal outcome.
- Within ten working days after the student has submitted the appeal, the Level 2 appeal reviewer communicates the decision in writing via WVU e-mail to the student, the Level 1 appeal reviewer, the dissertation advisory committee chair, and the HSC Assistant Vice President for Graduate Education.
- The reviewer retains all documentation related to the appeal for five years.
- The appeal process is concluded at Level 2. The decision of the dean is final.
-

The appeal process should be handled with absolute discretion and comply with FERPA guidelines. The HSC Assistant Vice President for Graduate Education may advise during the process and assist involved parties as needed.

C.7 Dissertation Preparation, Seminar, and Defense

The final examination for the Ph.D. degree will consist of presenting a dissertation seminar before the advisory committee, the Biochemistry and Molecular Medicine Graduate Program, and any other interested parties, after which the student will continue with their dissertation defense in a separate session with their advisory committee.

A Shuttle Sheet Request Form (click [HERE](#) to download) must be submitted to the Health Sciences Graduate Programs Office two weeks prior to the defense date.

If performance in the oral defense is judged satisfactory by the advisory committee, the granting of the Ph.D. degree will be recommended. Following the satisfactory defense of the dissertation, the student must prepare the dissertation for electronic submission to the University (For instructions, click [HERE](#)). Approval of the written dissertation and the electronic submission, which includes signatures from all committee members, must be completed before the Ph.D. can be conferred. Students should not make firm commitments for start dates in postdoctoral positions or other employment prior to completion of these requirements. A checklist of requirements for graduation with a degree in Doctor of Philosophy at the WVU Health Sciences Center can be downloaded by clicking [HERE](#).

C.8. Deadline for completion of the degree

Students should complete their degree within 5 years of matriculating into graduate school provided they have demonstrated a strong work ethic in both academics and research.

University policy requires students to complete their PhD within 5 years of successfully being admitted into candidacy. Typically, this is 5 years after passing their candidacy exam/proposal defense. In extraordinary circumstances, students can petition to extend the time to a degree. This petition must be approved by both the graduate program director and the Assistant Vice President for Graduate Education, with final approval from the Associate Provost for Graduate Academic Affairs. Only one extension will be allowed and will not exceed 1 year.

Students entering their 6th year in graduate school must have committee meetings every 6 months to monitor progress. Failure to meet the committee meeting requirement may result in suspension of the student's stipend and tuition waiver until this requirement is met.

D. M.D. / Ph.D. Students

1. Two years of the medical school curriculum will satisfy the first-year course requirements. The medical school curriculum includes an introduction to statistics as part of the Evidence Based Medicine course
2. Laboratory long rotations are chosen through the M.D./Ph.D. program and are completed prior to entry of the student into the Ph.D. portion of the curriculum.
3. The formative assessment and proposal defense will follow the same guidelines as regular graduate students. It is recommended that the formative assessment be taken in the summer after one year in the mentor's laboratory. **The research proposal should be completed by Nov 1st of the student's second year in the BMM graduate program.**
4. Other course work and seminar requirements are: **one** advanced course such as Advanced Protein Chemistry and Enzymology or Advanced Molecular Biology, journal clubs, three formal seminars (proposal, out of area, dissertation defense), participation in the BMM research forum, and one credit of experiential learning as required of other students in the Ph.D. program.
5. Students will take the course in scientific ethics taught by the Office of Research and Graduate Studies.

SAMPLE COURSE SCHEDULE
 (Note: this may vary by student)
BIOCHEMISTRY AND MOLECULAR MEDICINE
PH.D. PROGRAM

To retain full time student status and to qualify for the graduate tuition waiver, students must register for a minimum of 9 credit hours each regular semester and 3 credit hours during the full summer session (May to August).

For more information, see: <http://graduateeducation.wvu.edu/forms-procedures/academic-services-policies-and-procedures/summer-enrollment-guidelines>

<u>1st Year</u>		<u>Credit Hours</u>	
Semester 1 - Undifferentiated Curriculum:			
	Professional Development for Scientists 1	1	
	Experimental Design and Analysis	2	
	Scientific Integrity	1	
	Biomedical Lab Experience	2	
	Introduction to Biomedical Sciences Disciplines	3 (total)	Research
<u>3</u>	Total	12	
Semester 2:			
	Molecular Genetics	3	
	Scientific Rigor & Ethics	1	
	Professional Development for Scientists 2	1	
	Biochemistry and Molecular Medicine Journal Club	1	
	Research	<u>3</u>	
	Total	9	
Summer:			
	Research	3	
<i>Written Formative Assessment in July</i>			
<u>2nd Year</u>			
Semester 1:			
	Advanced Course (possibly Mol Mech Human Disease)	3	
	Biochemistry and Molecular Medicine Journal Club	1	
	Research	<u>5</u>	
	Total	9	
Semester 2:			
	Advanced Course (possibly Protein Structure and Enzymology or Advanced Molecular Medicine offered on alternate years)	4	
	Biochemistry and Molecular Medicine Journal Club	1	
	Scientific Writing	1	
	Research	<u>3</u>	
	Total	9	
Summer:			
	Research	<u>3</u>	
	Total	3	

3rd - 5th Year

Semester 1:	Biochemistry and Molecular Medicine Journal Club	1
	** Out of area seminar & One credit Experiential Learning	1 (2)
	Research	<u>7</u>
	Total	9

Student must complete their dissertation proposal defense by November 1st of the 3rd year

Semester 2:	Biochemistry and Molecular Medicine Journal Club	1
	Research	<u>8</u>
	Total	9

Summer:	Research	3
---------	----------	----------

** Experiential learning and out of area seminar requirements can be completed at any time after the student achieves candidacy.

The expectation of the BMM program is that students will complete their thesis defense by the end of their 5th year. University policy requires students to complete their PhD within 5 years of successfully being admitted into candidacy.

Signature Page

I have read and understand the Handbook of the Graduate Program in Biochemistry and Molecular Medicine for the Ph.D. and M.S. degree programs. I agree to abide by the requirements outlined in this document as well as the University requirements governing these degrees.

Signature: _____

Name
(printed): _____

Date: _____

I pledge to adhere to the Student Code of Academic and Professional Integrity for the Ph.D. and M.S. degree programs (section B.3 of this handbook) and to maintain the highest standard of scientific integrity in all that I do.

Signature: _____

Name
(printed): _____

Date: _____

I agree to adhere to all Federal, State, and University policies and requirements for the conduct of work in the laboratory. I will remain up-to-date on all certifications for both laboratory conduct and the responsible conduct of research.

Signature: _____

Name
(printed): _____

Date: _____