

DISMISSAL POLICY

Graduate student performance is evaluated annually through student and faculty input to the Office of Graduate Studies. Near the end of each academic year (March 15 - May 15) students will meet with the Graduate Program Committee (for first year students) or their Graduate Supervisory Committee. These are formal reviews of student progress and, if there are any issues regarding continuation in the program, these issues will be discussed and documented during the meeting. Students are expected to make satisfactory progress; it is expected that this progress will be documented at the Graduate Program Committee or Graduate Supervisory Committee meeting.

Disciplinary actions, including dismissal from the Biology Graduate Program, are possible outcomes for graduate students deemed not to be making satisfactory progress. The Graduate Program Committee or individual faculty, requesting through the Office of Graduate Studies, may initiate dismissal processes of a student from the Biology graduate program and the Graduate School for failure to meet the academic requirements of the program and for academic or professional misconduct. If concerns arise due to behavioral misconduct, these issues are adjudicated through the Dean of Students Office. In any such event, the procedures outlined in the "Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities" shall be followed (<http://regulations.utah.edu/academics/6-400.php>).

Academic requirements:

Biology students must remain in good academic standing with the Graduate School (GPA \geq 3.0) or risk probation and/or dismissal. If the student is on probation from the Graduate School, one semester is allowed to increase the student's GPA before the termination of the Tuition Benefit Plan (TBP, <http://gradschool.utah.edu/tbp/tuition-benefit-program-guidelines/>) and dismissal from the program. In addition, students must pass Biology core graduate courses with a grade of B- or better. If a student does not achieve a B- or better in all Biology core courses, one additional opportunity is allowed for remediation prior to dismissal from the Biology program. The student will be informed by the Office of Graduate Studies that there is a deficiency as delineated in the Department Policies and Procedures and the Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities. If such a situation is discussed during the student's annual meeting, the student, advisor, and Department Chair will be notified in writing. If the situation is not remedied, the Office of Graduate Studies will provide a letter of notification that the student has not remedied the deficiency resulting in his/her termination.

Many conditions can cause a student to be academically deficient within the PhD program. Some examples follow. If a student meets any of the conditions below, then the student's performance is considered academically deficient unless there is a previous arrangement with the Office of Graduate Studies for deviation from the corresponding requirement.

- Academic or research misconduct.
- Failure to maintain a 3.0 grade point average (this is required by the Graduate School for the student to receive tuition benefit).
- Failure to select an advisor by the end of the second semester.

- Failure to pass both written and oral parts of the qualifying exam by the end of the third year of study.
- Failure to pass a defense of dissertation proposal by the end of the fourth year of study.
- Failure to meet other individualized requirements specified in writing by the advisor, the Graduate Supervisory Committee or the Graduate Program Committee.
- Failure to conduct research at a level needed to complete a PhD, as determined by the advisor and/or Graduate Supervisory Committee. Also see the guidelines on the student/advisor relationship below.

Students who fall behind in any of these categories, or who fail to meet other requirements specified for their program, must promptly appeal to the Graduate Program Committee if they wish to continue in the program (these deficiencies may be pointed out to the student in the annual meeting with their Graduate Supervisory Committee or in most cases even earlier). Dismissal from the Biology graduate program shall result in termination of all funding, including tuition waiver, stipend, health insurance, and loss of graduate student standing in the department.

Departmental qualifying exam:

All students must pass the Biology qualifying exam. Any student who fails the Biology qualifying exam will be allowed one additional opportunity to achieve a passing assessment by the Qualifying Examination Committee. If the student is academically in good standing but does not pass the qualifying exam a second time, s/he will be dismissed from the PhD Program, and may petition the Graduate Program Committee to request a Master's degree, which would require the student write a Master's thesis. A student will not be eligible to obtain a Master's degree unless s/he has satisfied all Department and Graduate School requirements for the degree. If this path is taken, a new three-member Graduate Supervisory Committee must be formed. The role of the supervisory committee will be to examine the qualifications of the student and determine if a Master's degree should be awarded from the department based on course work, successful completion of a qualifying exam, the quality of the thesis research, and oral defense of the thesis. The department does not grant non-thesis Master's degrees.

Students wishing to leave the graduate program:

Students should contact the Office of Graduate Studies and the Director of Graduate Studies as early as possible if they are considering leaving the graduate program. The timing of a student's departure from the program impacts whether tuition must be reimbursed and eligibility for a degree. Reimbursement for tuition is delineated on the description of the Tuition Benefit Plan on the Graduate School website: **"IMPORTANT: Students adding and/or dropping courses after the semester's published add/drop deadlines are responsible for any and all charges incurred, including withdrawals. Tuition benefit will not pay for withdrawn credit hours, and if registration falls below nine credit hours at any time during the semester, a student becomes ineligible for TBP participation and will be billed the full tuition for that semester."**

Students will not earn and receive a Master's or PhD degree if the Graduate School and Department of Biology requirements have not been met when they leave the graduate program. As such, students are advised to discuss degree requirements with the Office of Graduate Studies by requesting a special meeting before they consider leaving the graduate program. The student should recognize that s/he will be required to re-apply should s/he wish to continue in the program and work toward another advanced degree.

Termination of student-faculty research relationship:

Faculty members have an obligation to inform students of the reasonable expectations for research progress and scope at the time a student joins a faculty research lab. The student implicitly accepts those research expectations upon joining the research laboratory.

On rare occasions after a Graduate Supervisory Committee has been established, it becomes necessary to make changes, including the extreme condition of terminating a graduate student-faculty advisor research relationship. The following guidelines have been jointly approved by the Faculty and the Graduate Program Committee of the Department Biology to address these rare situations, looking out for the best interests of both the student and faculty supervisor.

Either the graduate student or the faculty advisor may initiate a request to terminate a student/advisor research relationship. It is important that both parties respect the needs of the other. The following guidelines are designed to help accomplish this.

If a faculty advisor is dissatisfied with the progress and/or direction of a student's research effort, the advisor should make every effort at an early stage of the dissatisfaction to communicate to the student and the Graduate Supervisory Committee the concerns s/he may have about the level of quality of research performance. If the deficiencies persist, the faculty advisor should identify to the student in writing the unsatisfactory aspects of the student's research performance, and allow the student a reasonable time (at least 30 days) to correct the deficiencies. A copy of this letter signed by both the advisor and the student should be sent to the Office of Graduate Studies.

If the deficiencies are corrected in the probationary period, the faculty advisor should notify the student in writing that s/he is no longer on probation (copy of the letter signed by both the advisor and the student should be sent to the Office of Graduate Studies).

In addition to the written letter, the Graduate Supervisory Committee should be notified and a committee-wide assessment of the research project should be undertaken. If the supervisory committee determines that there is a lack of research progress, this should be identified in the progress reports provided to the Office of Graduate Studies and the student notified that such a deficiency could lead to dismissal if it is not corrected within 6 months.

If the deficiencies persist at the end of the formal probationary period, it is the prerogative of the research advisor to terminate the student-advisor research relationship and expect the student to conduct research in another research laboratory. The procedure should be:

- a. To notify the student (as well as the supervisory committee), in writing, giving reasons for the termination of the student-advisor relationship, indicating a formal termination date at least 15 days after the date of the letter. A copy of the letter should be sent to the Office of Graduate Studies and Department Chair.
- b. If the student is being paid as a Research Assistant (RA), the student should be kept on the payroll for 15 days after the date of the notification letter to allow time to obtain a new research advisor, unless a new research advisor puts the student on a payroll before the end of the 15 days.
- c. If the student is being paid as a teaching assistant (TA), the department will continue the current TA support until the end of the termination semester, contingent, of course, on TA duties being carried out conscientiously.

A student who wants to leave a faculty member's research group should give the faculty advisor 30 days written notice and outline the reasons for leaving the group. All notebooks and data supported by the advisor's research grants must be returned to the research advisor before the student is put on another faculty member's payroll or within the 30-day notice period, whichever comes first. Students should be aware that it is impossible to make TA appointments in mid-semester and should plan accordingly.

When changing a research lab to be supervised by another faculty member, the student must contact the Office of Graduate Studies and the Director of Graduate Studies as early as possible before they make arrangements to leave a research lab. This is to ensure the student understands the potential liabilities of the transition, including issues obtaining a degree, tuition support, stipends, health insurance and potentially visa status.

Once the student has move to a new lab s/he should reconstitute their Graduate Supervisory Committee if necessary, e.g. if they have switched primary research areas. If the student has already successfully completed his/her qualifying exam and defense of the thesis research proposal, s/he must prepare a brief (2-5 page) summary outlining the new dissertation project within five months of joining the new research group. Based on this preliminary information, the supervisory committee has the right to call for an oral defense of the new project by the student. An oral defense would be considered normal for a student that switches primary research areas or makes a substantial change in their research direction. The student is ultimately responsible for ensuring all graduate school and departmental requirements are met and forms are submitted for the transition. As a matter of policy, the department does not provide stipend support for students as they rotate to find a new research lab.

It is the student's responsibility to identify a faculty research advisor to advise and mentor the student during the pursuit of his/her PhD. If, after the termination of a student-faculty research relationship, the student is unable to identify a new faculty member to undertake this role within one semester, the student will be dismissed from the program. Upon dismissal the student will lose all university-sponsored funding, including tuition wavier, stipend, health insurance, and loss of graduate student standing in the department.

Teaching Assistant Performance

Students holding Teaching Assistant (TA) positions are expected to perform competently and conscientiously in that role. TAs will receive periodic evaluations of their job performance, will be notified of any deficiencies, and will be monitored for improvement in job fulfillment. TAs who fail to meet their responsibilities after notice of deficiencies and an opportunity to improve may be terminated from their TA position. The Department of Biology follows University of Utah policies delineated in University Policy 6-309 for the termination of an educational trainee position (<http://regulations.utah.edu/academics/6-309.php>).