University at Buffalo
College of Arts and Sciences

Handbook for Graduate Studies in Biological Sciences

Fall 2026

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Overview

The Department of Biological Sciences offers three graduate programs of study:

- PhD program provides training for students interested in taking leadership positions in academic institutions and/or the biotech industry.
- MS program provides training in research skills for students who have not had previous research experience and/or wish to assume laboratory management positions.
- MA program introduces students to advanced topics in biological sciences, preparing students for successful careers in health professions, government agencies, and education.

Who's who in the department

Current Leadership, Administration, and BGSA

Directory information including names, office location and email address for the current leadership and administration can be found on our website.
https://arts-sciences.buffalo.edu/biological-sciences/faculty/administration.html
Directory information for Graduate Student Organizations can be found at:
https://arts-sciences.buffalo.edu/biological-sciences/graduate/organizations.html

Department Chair

The Department Chair is the department's chief executive and administrative officer. The Chair guides the department's teaching, research, and service activities; conducts its administrative operations; and represents the department to the University.

Director of Graduate Studies (DGS)

The DGS supervises the department's graduate program. The DGS is responsible for directing the recruitment of graduate students, orienting new graduate students and assigning them a temporary faculty advisor, maintaining and developing the graduate curriculum, and monitoring graduate student progress towards the completion of degree requirements.

Graduate Affairs Committee (GAC)

The Graduate Affairs Committee is an advisory body to the Director of Graduate Studies. Members of the GAC serve as first-year advisors for new PhD and MS students, approve new graduate courses, and advise the DGS on graduate policy. Students may approach any of the GAC members to discuss questions about the program. The graduate affairs committee also resolves conflicts that involve graduate students, treating all matters as confidential. If a member of the graduate affairs committee has a conflict of interest (e.g. they are on your committee or they are your PI), they will not be part of the discussion.

Director of Recruitment and Admissions for PhD and MS Students

The director of admissions oversees the review of PhD and MS applications and recruitment activities.

Recruitment and Admissions Committee (RAC)

A subcommittee of GAC is the Recruitment and Admissions Committee (RAC).

Director of the MA program

The director of the MA program supervises this program. The director is responsible for overseeing the recruitment of MA students, orienting new MA students, and monitoring students' progress towards completion of the degree.

MA Advisory Committee

This is an advisory body to the Director of the MA program. Members participate in the recruitment of MA students, serve as academic advisors for MA students, and advise the Director on MA policy.

Graduate Coordinator

The Graduate Coordinator coordinates all paperwork and logistics for the graduate program.

Research Advisor (also known as the Thesis or Dissertation Advisor)

The Research Advisor is a faculty member who provides primary supervision and guidance to the graduate student during their program of study. The advisor has the scientific expertise to guide the student's research project.
PhD and MS students identify advisors after completing at least two research rotations.
MA students identify advisors in the first semester of residence.

Biology Graduate Student Association (BGSA) officers

The BGSA is affiliated with the university-wide Graduate Student Association (GSA). The officers keep students posted on departmental and university policies and events and organize the annual symposium, journal clubs, and social activities.

Graduate Affairs Student Representative

Student representatives may attend Graduate Affair Committee meetings, although they are dismissed if sensitive student information is discussed. The representative shares graduate student concerns with the committee and reports back to other students about committee business. Nominations for the graduate affairs student representative are taken in September, and the nominee who wins by popular vote is elected to serve for a term lasting a year (September – August).

Requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) Degree

A. Course Work

REQUIRED CREDITS

72 total credit hours required to graduate, including:

- 22 credit hours formal courses*
- 4 credit hours BIO 610 (graduate student seminar)
- 4 credit hours BIO 614 (departmental seminar)
- The remaining credit hours should be earned through rotation (BIO600), research (BIO680), and supervised teaching (BIO598, BIO599)

*Formal courses enroll multiple students, who meet regularly with an instructor and are awarded a letter grade based on classroom performance.
Credits for research rotations (BIO600), graduate research (BIO680), research topics (BIO615), TA training (BIO598) or supervised teaching (BIO599) do not count towards the 22 credit hours.

Please note that the Dean's office may not provide tuition assistance to students serving as TAs if they have completed 72 or more credit hours.

COURSE SELECTION

Entering PhD students are assigned a first-year advisor by the Director of Graduate Studies. This first-year advisor assists in the selection of courses.
For the first two semesters, students must have their first-year advisor sign their course selection form prior to registration.
Once a student selects a research advisor, this research advisor assumes responsibility for advisement.
It is expected that Biological Sciences PhD students will complete course requirements by enrolling in graduate courses offered by the Biological Sciences Department. However, students may petition to take courses outside the department. To do so, the student should email the Director of Graduate Studies the syllabus of the course and an explanation of how it is important for the student's training.

REQUIREMENTS FOR GOOD ACADEMIC STANDING

Students must maintain a QPA of at least 3.0 for formal courses.
Failure to maintain the required QPA will result in a student being placed on probation.
A student on probation has one semester to restore the QPA to 3.0. If this QPA is not attained, the student will be dismissed from the graduate program.
Students will be immediately dismissed from the program if their QPA is so low as to preclude their achievement of a 3.0 QPA within one semester of further course work.
A student who has been dismissed may petition the Graduate Affairs Committee to be retained in the program. (see "Petitions" beginning on page 26)

CONTINUOUS REGISTRATION

Graduate students must register for a minimum of one credit each fall and spring term until ALL requirements for the degree are completed. If continuous registration is impossible, the student **must** secure a Leave of Absence from the Graduate School.

B. Rotations (BIO 600)

Research rotations consist of small research projects that are designed to introduce the student to the research program in a particular laboratory.
Rotations serve as an opportunity for a student and potential advisor to become acquainted and determine whether they wish to enter into a working relationship for the student's thesis project.
Students are reminded that making a positive impression during a rotation is critical to being accepted into that laboratory for thesis research. In this light, students should clearly understand the faculty advisor's expectations prior to beginning a rotation.

TIMING OF ROTATIONS

In the first year, PhD students perform two 10-week research rotations with different faculty members.
The first rotation begins in the third week of the first semester.
The second rotation commences immediately after the first rotation ends.
Students should note that the second rotation includes the winter session between the fall and spring semesters. Please do not plan a long vacation during this time.
Students have the option of performing additional research rotations if a suitable research lab and advisor have not been identified after two rotations. The third rotation should commence immediately after the second rotation, and the student must inform the DGS before the end of the second rotation.

SELECTION OF ROTATION ADVISORS

During graduate student orientation, faculty present overviews of their research programs.
Students should arrange to meet with those faculty whose research is of interest. During this meeting, students should learn about rotation projects available in the laboratory and clarify whether the faculty member intends to take new PhD students in the current academic year.
By the end of the first week of classes, students should provide their top three choices for research rotations to the Graduate Affairs Committee Representative.
The Representative will assign rotation advisors based on student requests.
This selection process is repeated prior to the beginning of the second rotation period. Students should contact the faculty with whom they would like to conduct the second rotation, even if they already spoke with that faculty member prior to the first rotation.

EVALUATION OF ROTATION

After each rotation, students prepare a written report of their rotation activity and submit it to their rotation advisor. The summary report (minimum 2 pages) should provide a rationale for the work that was done, as well as experimental details and any results that were obtained. At the end of the spring semester, students will present an oral presentation describing the research performed in one of their rotations. Students may also elect to present a poster describing their first rotation at the departmental research symposium in January.
Grades for rotations are based on completion of BOTH the laboratory work and the written report.
Students must receive passing grades in two laboratory rotations to complete the rotation requirement.

C. Seminars

GRADUATE STUDENT SEMINAR (BIO 610)

The Graduate Student Seminar allows students to hone their oral presentation skills.

PhD students are required to enroll in Graduate Student Seminar each semester during the first two years in the program.
During the first year in the program, PhD students prepare written critiques of seminars presented by second year students. First-year students are graded on an S/U basis.
During the second year in the program, PhD students present two seminars in BIO 610.

- During the third semester, each student summarizes and critiques a journal article. This article cannot be authored by the student's advisor or another member of their lab.
- During the fourth semester, each student describes their proposed thesis research project. The seminar should include a presentation of the relevant background information, the major hypotheses being tested, and the planned experimental approaches. The seminar may also include results the student has obtained.

The student's PhD advisory committee will attend both seminars and will assign a letter grade for each.
To fulfill the seminar requirement the student must achieve at least a B grade for each presentation.
Students are required to present additional seminars to make up for unsatisfactory presentation grades.

DEPARTMENTAL SEMINAR (BIO 614)

The departmental seminar series features distinguished scientists from UB and across the country and offers the opportunity to become acquainted with the latest research.
PhD students are required to enroll in and attend Departmental Seminar each semester during the first two years in the program.
Senior graduate students are encouraged to attend seminars, although they do not register for credit.

D. Public Presentation of Ongoing Research

Clear oral presentation of scientific material is a critical skill for biologists. To develop this skill, PhD students are required to present their ongoing research orally at least once a year.

FULFILLING SPEAKING REQUIREMENT IN THE FIRST TWO YEARS

First year PhD students present a rotation project orally (BIO 600).
Second year PhD students present their research in graduate seminar (BIO 610).

FULFILLING SPEAKING REQUIREMENT IN YEAR THREE AND BEYOND

Senior PhD students must present their research orally in a public forum at least once each academic year between June 1 and May 31.
Options include, speaking at the annual symposium, speaking in the student research showcase, speaking at a regional or national research meeting, presenting "work-in-progress" seminar, and completing a public dissertation defense. In-house events are described below. Other public presentations of the student's research may be accepted at the discretion of the DGS.
This requirement cannot be fulfilled by lab meeting or poster presentations, although presenting a poster at a national meeting may be accepted at the discretion of the DGS.

CONSEQUENCE OF NOT MEETING SPEAKING REQUIREMENT

Senior students who do not complete the speaking requirement will receive an "Incomplete" grade in BIO 680. This grade will be changed once the requirement has been met.

In addition, students who do not speak will not be in good standing in the program and will not be eligible for TA positions.

E. Required Training

ORIENTATION

New PhD students are required to attend all programs during orientation week, including training in laboratory safety, equity, and union benefits.

RESPONSIBLE CONDUCT OF RESEARCH

All PhD candidates at the University at Buffalo are required to complete training in responsible conduct of research. This requirement is achieved through an online training module.
The University at Buffalo has an institutional membership in the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) online program, which can be accessed at http://www.citiprogram.org/
After registering on the site, PhD students in Biological Sciences should select the Biomedical Sciences Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) training. The RCR program is comprised of a series of modules, each of which consists of readings and case studies and ends with a quiz covering the material.
A minimum total score of 80% is required to pass the online course.
Once the student has successfully completed the CITI RCR program, they should print the "Completion Report" and submit it to the Biological Sciences graduate secretary.
This requirement must be completed by the end of the second year.

F. The PhD Advisory Committee

SELECTION OF FACULTY ADVISOR

After completing two or three rotations, students arrange for one of the rotation mentors to become their faculty advisor. The advisor should be identified by the end of the second semester. This advisor will guide the student through the remainder of the PhD program.
Once the faculty member has agreed to accept the student as an advisee, the student should notify the Director of Graduate Studies of this choice. The Graduate Affairs Committee oversees this process and may overrule a student joining a laboratory that cannot provide appropriate training.

COMPOSITION OF THE PHD ADVISORY COMMITTEE

After choosing an advisor, the student and advisor will select a PhD Advisory Committee. This should be complete by the end of the first summer.
The PhD Advisory committee must be comprised of the advisor and at least three additional committee members. At least three of the committee members, including the advisor, must be from the Biological Sciences Department and be members of the UB Graduate Faculty. The fourth member may be an associate member of the UB Graduate Faculty or an individual external to UB if they expand the expertise of the committee and are of significant value to the student and their research project.
The Director of Graduate Studies must be informed of the membership of the committee and should be notified of any changes, including a change in advisor.
All meetings of the PhD Advisory Committee will be chaired by a member of the Advisory Committee designated by the student. The chair must be a faculty member in the Biological Sciences Department and a member of the UB Graduate Faculty but cannot be the research advisor.

DUTIES OF THE PHD ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The PhD Advisory Committee will administer the qualifying examination.
The PhD Advisory Committee will meet with the student at least once a year to provide guidance on the research project and ascertain whether the student is making adequate progress towards the degree.
The PhD Advisory Committee will evaluate an informal presentation of the student's thesis data and determine whether the student may commence writing the PhD thesis.
The PhD Advisory Committee will approve the thesis and certify the completion of degree requirements.

PROCEDURES FOR ANNUAL COMMITTEE MEETING

The annual committee meeting is an important opportunity for students to obtain guidance on their thesis projects. Committee members have different expertise from the primary advisor and provide valuable suggestions and new perspectives on the project.
Failure to meet with the advisory committee at least once a year may result in loss of TA support.
The advisor and at least two committee members should be present for a meeting. If a committee member cannot attend the meeting, for example if they are on sabbatical or extended leave, the student should update them separately.
For the meeting, the student prepares a thirty-minute presentation summarizing their progress. The actual presentation of this material will take longer than thirty minutes, as the committee will discuss the data and provide suggestions for further experiments.
After the presentation, the student and committee will review the student's progress and delineate a path to completion of the thesis project.
Progress will be reported to the Graduate Affairs Committee by a signed Committee Meeting Report Form (available on department website).

G. The Qualifying Exam

GENERAL POLICIES

Each PhD student must pass a qualifying exam conducted by their PhD Advisory Committee.
All Committee members must be in attendance for qualifying examinations.
Should a student fail the exam, they will have one opportunity to repeat the examination.
Failure to pass the qualifying exam twice will lead to the student's dismissal from the PhD program.

TIMELINE

Students must pass the qualifying exam in the fourth semester of the PhD program. The qualifying exam should be completed no later than the end of the ninth week of the semester and follow the below general timeline:

- In the third semester of the program, the student will identify a topic for an original research proposal and an article related to this topic. This topic may be related to the student's thesis research, but the article cannot be authored by the student's advisor or another member of their lab. The article must be approved by the PhD Advisory committee and will be presented in graduate student seminar (BIO 610).
- At the end of the third semester or early in the fourth semester of the program, the student should hold a pre-qualifier meeting. Prior to this meeting, the student should submit a specific aims page outlining the planned research proposal. At the meeting, the committee will provide feedback on the proposed aims and also discuss general knowledge topics that

will be tested. A pre-qualifier meeting report form (available on department website) should be completed and submitted to the graduate coordinator.

- In the fourth semester of the program, a written research proposal will be submitted to the PhD Advisory Committee no later than the fifth week of the semester and at least three weeks prior to the oral exam date.
- The proposal will be read by the committee members, who will provide comments and suggestions to the student at least two weeks prior to the oral exam.
- The student will then revise the proposal and provide a copy to the committee at least two days before the oral exam.
- In the event a student fails the exam, a second attempt must be completed by the end of the semester in which the first exam took place.

The completion of the qualifying exam must be reported to the Graduate Affairs Committee by a signed Report of Qualifying Exam Results (available on the department website) submitted to the graduate coordinator.
Students who do not complete the exam in the designated semester are ineligible for TA appointments until the exam has been completed.

FORMAT OF THE EXAM

Written examination

The purpose of the written examination, the research proposal, is to evaluate the student's ability to design a line of inquiry into a specific scientific topic.
The proposal should follow the format used by a major granting agency, such as NSF or NIH. It should include Specific Aims, Significance, and Approach sections. The Approach section should include data interpretation and alternative approaches. The document should be written with at least 11-point font and should be about seven pages, excluding references.
The student is strongly encouraged to consult with the research advisor and committee frequently during selection of the proposal topic and writing of the proposal.

Oral examination

The purpose of the oral examination is to evaluate both the student's ability to reason scientifically and the breadth and depth of the student's knowledge in their field of study.
The oral exam will last approximately two hours with equal weight on the proposal and general knowledge. The chair will moderate.
The student will prepare a twenty-minute presentation outlining the research proposal. The actual presentation of this material will take longer than twenty minutes, as the committee will pause the presentation to examine the student about relevant background information, the proposed experiments, and alternative strategies.
After the presentation, the student will be examined on foundational knowledge related to the broad field the student has chosen for the PhD research project.
During the oral exam, the advisor will refrain from speaking.
Following the oral questions and answers, the student will leave the room. The advisor will comment on and answer questions about the student's performance, and then leave the room.
The remaining members of the PhD Advisory Committee will determine if the student has passed the oral examination. The exam will have one of three outcomes: 1) Pass; 2) Fail-MS Eligible; 3) Fail-MS Ineligible. The student will pass the exam if there is no more than one "Fail" vote of either kind. A student is eligible to transfer to a terminal MS degree if their Research Advisor and at least one other member have indicated "Pass" or "Fail-MS Eligible".

H. MS En-Route

To obtain an MS En-Route Biology MS degree, Biology PhD students must take the required number of graded credits in graduate courses as specified by our MS degree requirements and successfully pass their qualifying exam. The Qualifying Exam will meet the requirement for a MS capstone project.
MS En-Route Degrees are not automatic and must be added to your program by contacting the department at the start of your fourth semester.MS degree conferral may affect visa status and opportunities for enrollment in programs such as Optional Practical Training (OPT). International students should understand how conferring an MS degree could affect their plans and options before choosing to confer an MS En-Route. Please consult ISS for more information.

I. Graduate Research and Thesis

After the successful completion of course work and qualifying exam, the student will devote the major portion of their time to research.
The student should hold an annual Advisory Committee meeting, complete a progress report at the end of each year and register for one credit of graduate research (BIO 680) each semester. If a student receives a grade of U for BIO 680 more than once, they will be dismissed from the program.
When a student and their advisor agree that sufficient research has been completed to comprise a PhD thesis, an informal presentation of this work will be made to the PhD Advisory Committee. A body of publishable work should be obtained prior to writing the thesis.
The Committee must give unanimous permission for the student to write the thesis and schedule the oral defense. After this point, additional thesis committee meetings are not required.
Under normal circumstances, the target for completion of the PhD thesis is five years after entrance into the graduate program.
The thesis should be written by the student with the advice and criticism of the research advisor. It should be a scholarly effort that conforms with principles of good grammar, organization, and style.
The following links provide detailed guidelines from the university on formatting the dissertation.
http://grad.buffalo.edu/study/graduate/etd.html
https://www.buffalo.edu/grad/succeed/graduate/electronic-submission.html
A public defense information form should be submitted to the Graduate Coordinator and a near final draft of the thesis should be submitted to each member of the PhD Advisory Committee at least three weeks before the defense date.
After the thesis has been read and approved by the committee, a defense of the thesis will be conducted, with the designated chair presiding. This defense will be open to all students and faculty, who will have the opportunity to pose questions.
After the presentation and question period, the Committee will meet to examine the student and then vote on the outcome of the thesis defense.

J. Annual progress report

At the end of each year, PhD candidates must complete an annual progress report. The student should meet with their advisor to discuss progress in the last year and goals for the next year. Together, the student and advisor should complete the progress report form, which is available on the department website. The completed form should be submitted to the graduate coordinator within one week of grades being posted.

K. Suggested Timeline to complete PhD requirements

FIRST SEMESTER	Attend orientation program Two formal courses (6-8 credit hours) Grad student seminar (BIO610; 1 credit) Department seminar (BIO614; 1 credit) TA training (BIO598; 3 credits) if serving as TA Research rotations (BIO600; variable credits) Total credits 19
SECOND SEMESTER	Two formal courses (6-8 credit hours) Grad student seminar (BIO 610; 1 credit) Department seminar (BIO 614; 1 credit) Supervised teaching (BIO 599; 3 credits) if serving as TA Research rotations (BIO 600; variable credits) Oral presentation on rotation research Identify advisor and begin thesis research Submit annual progress report Total credits 19
FIRST SUMMER	Continue thesis research Select advisory committee Begin developing proposal topic for qualifying exam
THIRD SEMESTER	One or two formal courses (4-6 credit hours) Present journal article at graduate seminar (BIO 610; 1 credit) Department seminar (BIO 614; 1 credit) Supervised teaching (BIO 599; 3 credits) if serving as TA Thesis research (BIO 680; variable credits) Total credits 19
FOURTH SEMESTER	Complete 22 credit hours of formal courses and 64 total credits Present research project at graduate seminar (BIO610; 1 credit) Department seminar (BIO 614; 1 credit) Supervised teaching (BIO 599; 1 credit) if serving as TA Continue thesis research (BIO 680; variable credits) Pre-qualifier meeting early in semester Complete written and oral qualifying exam by ninth week Complete training in Responsible Conduct of Research Submit a meeting report form Submit application to candidacy Submit annual progress report
YEAR 3 AND BEYOND	Submit annual progress report each year Hold Annual Advisory Committee meeting Submit advisory meeting report form each year Give at least one oral presentation each year Submit oral presentation form each year Present thesis research in public seminar Register for 1 credit research each semester (BIO680)
FINAL SEMESTER	Register for 1-3 Thesis Guidance each (BIO 700)

Ensure at least 72 total credits will have been completed.
Prepare dissertation
Present thesis research in public seminar
Defend dissertation to PhD advisory committee
Submit All Required Graduation Documents:
https://www.buffalo.edu/grad/succeed/graduate/requirements.html
Submit Departmental Survey

LINK TO FORMS

https://arts-sciences.buffalo.edu/biological-sciences/graduate/forms.html

Requirements for the Masters of Science (MS) degree

A. Course Work

REQUIRED CREDITS

32 total credit hours required to graduate, including:
- 18 credit hours in formal courses*
- 4 credit hours BIO 610 graduate student seminar
- 4 credit hours BIO 614 departmental seminar
- The remaining credit hours should be earned through rotation (BIO600) and research (BIO680)

* Formal courses enroll multiple students, who meet regularly with an instructor and are awarded a letter grade based on classroom performance.
Credits for research rotations (BIO600), graduate research (BIO680), research topics (BIO615), TA training (BIO598) or supervised teaching (BIO599) do not count towards the 18 credit hours.

Note: If you are considering switching to the PhD program, please ensure that the courses you take conform to the PhD requirements.

COURSE SELECTION

Entering MS students are assigned a first-year advisor by the Director of Graduate Studies. This first-year advisor assists in the selection of courses.
For the first two semesters, students must have their first-year advisor sign their course selection form prior to registration.
Once a student has selected a research advisor, this advisor assumes responsibility for advisement.
It is expected that Biological Sciences MS students will complete their course requirements by enrolling in graduate courses offered by the Biological Sciences Department. However, students may petition to take courses outside the department. To do so, the student should email the Director of Graduate Studies the syllabus of the course and an explanation of how it is important for the student's training.

REQUIREMENTS FOR GOOD ACADEMIC STANDING

Students must maintain a QPA of at least 3.0 in formal courses.
Failure to maintain the required QPA will result in a student being placed on probation.
A student on probation has one semester to achieve the cumulative QPA of 3.0. If this QPA is not attained, the student will be dismissed from the graduate program.
Students will be immediately dismissed from the program if their QPA is so low as to preclude their achievement of a 3.0 QPA within one semester of further course work.
A student who has been dismissed may petition the Graduate Affairs Committee to be retained in the program. See page 26 "Petitions" for procedures.

CONTINUOUS REGISTRATION

Graduate students must register for a minimum of one credit hour each fall and spring term until ALL requirements for the degree are completed. If continuous registration is impossible, the student **must** secure a Leave of Absence from the Graduate School.

B. Rotations (BIO 600)

Research rotations consist of small research projects that are designed to introduce the student to the research program in a particular laboratory.
Rotations serve as an opportunity for a student and potential advisor to become acquainted and determine whether they wish to enter into a working relationship for the student's MS project.
Students are reminded that making a positive impression during a rotation is critical to being accepted into that laboratory for thesis research. In this light, students should clearly understand the faculty advisor's expectations prior to beginning a rotation.

TIMING OF ROTATIONS

In the first year, MS students perform two 10-week research rotations with different faculty members.
The first rotation begins in the third week of the first semester.
The second rotation commences immediately after the first rotation ends.
Students should note that the second rotation includes the winter session between the fall and spring semesters. Please do not plan a long vacation during this time.
Students have the option of performing additional research rotations if a suitable research lab and advisor have not been identified after two rotations. The third rotation should commence immediately after the second rotation, and the student must inform the DGS before the end of the second rotation.

SELECTION OF ROTATION ADVISORS

During graduate student orientation, faculty present overviews of their research programs.
Students should arrange to meet with those faculty whose research is of interest. During this meeting, students should learn about rotation projects available in the laboratory and clarify whether the faculty member intends to take new MS students in the current academic year.
By the end of the first week of classes, students should provide their top three choices for research rotations to the Graduate Affairs Committee Representative.
The representative will assign rotation advisors based on student requests.
This selection process is repeated prior to the beginning of the second rotation period. Students should contact the faculty with whom they would like to conduct the second rotation, even if they already spoke with that faculty member prior to the first rotation.

EVALUATION OF ROTATION

After each rotation, students prepare a written report of their rotation activity and submit it to their rotation advisor. The summary report (minimum 2 pages) should provide a rationale for the work that was done, as well as experimental details and any results that were obtained. At the end of the spring semester, students will present an oral presentation describing the research performed in one of their rotations. Students may also elect to present a poster describing their first rotation at the departmental research symposium in January.
Grades for rotations are based on completion of BOTH the laboratory work and the written report.
Students must receive passing grades in two laboratory rotations to complete the rotation requirement.

C. Seminars

GRADUATE STUDENT SEMINAR (BIO610)

The Graduate Student Seminar allows students to hone their oral presentation skills.

MS students are required to enroll in Graduate Student Seminar each semester during the first two years in the program.
During the first year, students prepare written critiques of seminars presented by second year graduate students. First year students are graded on an S/U basis.
During the second year, MS students present one seminar in BIO 610 describing their research project.
The presentation will be graded by three faculty members, including the student's advisor and reader. Generally, the third grader is the instructor for the seminar course, but the student may select another faculty member.
This grading committee will attend the seminar and assign a letter grade.
To fulfill the seminar requirement, the student must achieve at least a B grade for the presentation.
Students are required to present additional seminars to make up for unsatisfactory presentations.

DEPARTMENTAL SEMINAR (BIO614)

The departmental seminar series features distinguished scientists from UB and across the country and offers the opportunity to become acquainted with the latest research.
MS students are required to enroll in and attend Departmental Seminar each semester they are in residence.

D. Research Experience

An important component of the MS program is the completion of a significant experimental research project. One of the research rotations may be used as part of this research project.
To fulfill the degree requirements, a written report of the research project must be approved by the faculty member in whose laboratory the research was performed and by a "reader," who is a member of the UB Graduate Faculty.
The reader must be identified to the graduate affairs committee by the end of the third semester.
The written report should have the format of a research article. It must include sufficient background to explain the rationale for the project, the objectives of the project, the methods used, the results of the investigation, and the interpretation of these results.

E. Annual progress report

At the end of the first year, MS candidates must complete an annual progress report. The student should meet with their advisor to discuss progress in the last year and goals for the next year. Together, the student and advisor should complete the progress report form, which available on the department website. The completed form should be submitted to the graduate coordinator within one week of grades being posted.

F. Suggested Timeline to complete MS requirements

FIRST SEMESTER	Attend orientation program Two formal courses (6-8 credit hours) Grad student seminar (BIO 610; 1 credit) Department seminar (BIO 614; 1 credit) Research rotations (BIO 600; 2-4 credits) Total credits 12
SECOND SEMESTER	Two formal courses (6-8 credit hours) Grad student seminar (BIO 610; 1 credit)

	Department seminar (BIO 614; 1 credit) Complete rotations (BIO 600; 2-4 credits) Identify advisor and begin research project Submit annual progress report Total credits 12
THIRD SEMESTER	Continue research project (BIO 680; 1-2 credits) Grad student seminar (BIO 610; 1 credit) Department seminar (BIO 614; 1 credit) Select Reader Register for Graduation in HUB Complete 18 credit hours of formal courses
FOURTH SEMESTER	Finish research project (BIO 680; 1-2 credits) Present seminar on research project (BIO610; 1 credit) Department seminar (BIO 614; 1 credit) Research report approved by advisor and reader Submit M form

LINK TO FORMS

https://arts-sciences.buffalo.edu/biological-sciences/graduate/forms.html

Requirements for the Masters of Arts (MA) degree

A. Course Work

CREDITS REQUIRED

30 total credit hours required to graduate, including:

- 18 credit hours in formal* courses, including 8 credit hours in BIO courses
- 6 or more credit hours of study with a faculty member on scholarly project
- 2 credit hours graduate student seminar (BIO 610)
- 2 credit hours departmental seminar (BIO 614)**

**Formal courses* are those that enroll multiple students, who meet regularly with an instructor and are awarded a letter grade based on written performance.
** Students must complete a minimum of one credit hour of BIO614 and may petition the MA Committee to accept enrollment in a different department seminar on campus as a substitute for BIO614 for the second credit hour of departmental seminar.

COURSE SELECTION

On entering the program, the student will be assigned an academic advisor by the director of the MA program. The student will meet with this advisor to arrange a program of study and select appropriate course work for the first semester.
Once the student has chosen a project advisor and a reader, these faculty may also advise the student on course work, as well as the project.

RESEARCH CREDIT HOURS

MA students should register for research credit hours (BIO615 or BIO680) under their Academic Advisor or the MA Program Director until they have joined a lab and submitted the Research Agreement Form. Once a student is actively pursuing their scholarly project, they should enroll under their Research Advisor's research course, if possible and agreeable by the Research Advisor. In the event that the Research Advisor does not have a research course available or does not want the student to enroll underneath them, students may continue enrolling in BIO615 or BIO680 under their Academic Advisor, Second Reader, or the Program Director.

Each credit hour is expected to reflect roughly three hours of work per week towards the project during the semester. Students are strongly encouraged to speak with their Academic Advisor and/or Research Advisor prior to registering so that they do not over or under enroll. It is acceptable for students to enroll for additional research credit hours in the spring in anticipation of summer efforts, as well as enrolling for more in the fall to account for time spent over the summer.

Students are not required to enroll for credit hours during the winter or summer sessions, even if they are actively working on their research projects during this time.

REQUIREMENTS FOR GOOD ACADEMIC STANDING

Students must maintain a QPA of at least 3.0 in formal courses, and an overall QPA of at least 3.0.
Failure to maintain the required QPA will result in a student being placed on probation.
A student on probation has one semester to achieve the cumulative QPA of 3.0. If this QPA is not attained, the student will be dismissed from the graduate program.

Students will be immediately dismissed from the program if their QPA is so low as to preclude their achievement of a 3.0 QPA within one semester of further course work.

CONTINUOUS REGISTRATION

Graduate students must register for a minimum of one credit hour each fall and spring term until ALL requirements for the degree are completed. If continuous registration is impossible at any time, the student **must** secure a Leave of Absence from the Graduate School.

B. Seminars

GRADUATE STUDENT SEMINAR (BIO610)

The Graduate Student Seminar course allows students to hone their oral presentation skills and develop other professional skills.
MA students are required to enroll in Graduate Student Seminar in each of the first two semesters in the program.
In one semester, MA students prepare written critiques of other students' presentations. They are graded on an S/U basis.
In the other semester, MA students present and discuss progress on their scholarly projects. The project does not have to be complete at the time of the presentation; this is NOT a final defense. Instead, the students should clearly define the rationale and supporting literature for the investigation, the methodology employed, any results (if applicable), and conclude with a comprehensive discussion about the impact of the project. Students are not evaluated on the quality or quantity of their data, but rather the quality of their presentation and the depth to which they understand the project.
The presentation is graded by the student's Research Advisor, Second Reader, and the course instructor.
This grading committee will attend the seminar and assign a letter grade.
To fulfill the seminar requirement the student must achieve at least a B grade for the presentation.
Students are required to present additional seminars to make up for unsatisfactory presentations.
Once a student has earned a grade of B or better in BIO610, they are no longer required to register in BIO610. Students may petition the MA Committee to be exempt from BIO610 before they have met their graduation requirement, due to a course, research, or employment conflict.

DEPARTMENTAL SEMINAR (BIO614)

The departmental seminar series features distinguished scientists from UB and across the country and offers the opportunity to become acquainted with the latest research. MA students are required to complete at least two semesters of BIO614. Students may petition the MA Committee to accept another seminar series across campus if they have a significant course, research, or work conflict, as a substitute for one semester of BIO614.

C. Scholarly Project

MA candidates pursue an original scholarly project under the supervision of their Research Advisor, who must be a member of the graduate faculty at UB.
This project is tailored to the student's interests and career goals. Examples of projects include investigating a particular scientific question or public health issue, analyzing a case study in environmental law, developing and evaluating curriculum for a biology course, or assessing a new application in biotechnology. Project methodologies range from bench research to reviewing and evaluating scholarly literature, to analyzing existing data to answer a new

question, to product development. Scholarly projects must contain a central question that the student attempts to answer through experiments, data analysis, or literature search. Examples of projects that are invalid include summarizing literature as a review, data entry (without analysis or investigation), or other supplemental laboratory assistance/housekeeping. Students may collaborate with other members in their laboratory however each MA student should have their own independent question and project.

Research Advisors may be member of the Biological Sciences department or another department at the university. In addition to the Research Advisor, students must also have a second faculty member serve as a Second Reader, who must also be a member of the graduate faculty at UB. At least one of the Research Advisor or Second Reader must be faculty members in Biological Sciences.

Students are encouraged to use the Research Agreement form as they begin their projects and discuss expectations with their committee. Projects will not be accepted, or research credit hours graded until the Research Agreement form is completed and submitted to the Program Director or Graduate Secretary.

RESEARCH SUMMARY

Upon the completion of the project, usually in the second or third semester of study, the MA candidate prepares a written report.
The exact format of the report is determined in conjunction with the advisor, but it should be written in a format appropriate to the subject, including a description of the problem or questions, a literature review, and a summary of the findings.
This report is read and evaluated by the candidate's faculty mentor and reader. Once the document is deemed acceptable, committee members sign the G-form, and the student submits the completed form to the Program Director for processing.

D. Progress reports

MA candidates are required to check in with their Academic Advisor or Program Director regularly throughout their time in the program, at a minimum of once per semester.

E. Suggested Timeline to complete MA requirements

FIRST SEMESTER	Two formal courses (6-8 credit hours) Grad student seminar (BIO 610) Department seminar (BIO 614) Identify advisor for scholarly project Begin project (enroll in BIO 615 under Academic Advisor) Submit progress report
SECOND SEMESTER	Two formal courses (6-8 credit hours) Present scholarly project at grad student seminar (BIO 610) Department seminar (BIO 614) Continue project (enroll in BIO 615 under Academic Advisor) Select reader for project Submit progress report Register for Graduation in HUB
THIRD SEMESTER	Complete 18 credit hours of formal coursework

Department seminar (BIO 614)
Complete scholarly project
Project report approved by advisor and reader
Submit G form

LINK TO FORMS

https://arts-sciences.buffalo.edu/biological-sciences/graduate/forms.html

Grading procedures in the graduate school

Letter grades and QPA

Letter grades carry the following weights:
A = 4.0, A- = 3.67, B+ = 3.33, B = 3.0, B- = 2.67, C+ = 2.33, C = 2.0, D = 1.0, F = 0
QPA is calculated as follows:

- For each course, the weighted grade is multiplied by the credits attempted.
- The adjusted grades (multiplied by credit hours) are added.
- The sum of the adjusted grades is divided by the total number of credits attempted.
- If a course is repeated, both grades count in the calculation of the QPA.

Other grades

Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory (S/U)
S indicates credit earned. U indicates no credit earned. These grades do not count in the QPA.

Resign (R)
A student may resign from a course through the 11th week of the semester. This course will not be included in QPA calculations. An R will appear on the transcript.

Graduate School policy on QPA

It is the policy of the UB Graduate School that students must attain a QPA of at least 3.0 to earn a graduate-level degree.

Grades will be determined on a standard scoring system. The grade will be the average of the performance on each of the sections of the course. Cheating, plagiarism, and other attempts at academic dishonesty will result in a failing grade for the section, and a failing grade for the course. For information on proper academic performance, see this site: https://catalog.buffalo.edu/policies/integrity.html.

Graduate student standing

The Director of Graduate Studies, the director of the MA program, and the advisory committees jointly monitor the progress of graduate students in Biological Sciences.
For PhD students, the PhD Advisory Committee and faculty advisor also assess the student's progress.
For MS and MA students, the faculty advisor monitors progress.
Graduate students will be in good standing provided that the requirements outlined in this handbook are met in a timely fashion and that the research project is judged to be progressing satisfactorily.
Unsatisfactory performance in any phase of the degree program may lead to the student's dismissal from the graduate program.

Generative AI policy

The following policy governs the use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools by graduate students in the UB Department of Biological Sciences. This policy applies to all aspects of graduate study, including coursework, teaching responsibilities, and graduate research projects. Graduate students are expected to familiarize themselves with and adhere to all sections of this policy. Additional guidance may be provided by individual instructors, principal investigators (PIs), and relevant journals or conferences.

1. Student Accountability and Academic Integrity

Graduate students bear full responsibility for all work they submit, regardless of whether generative AI tools were used in its preparation. The use of generative AI does not diminish a student's scholarly obligation to ensure the accuracy, integrity, and originality of their work. Students will be held accountable for any content that is inaccurate, falsified, plagiarized, or derived from AI-generated hallucinations, as well as for any material that infringes on copyright. Students are expected to carefully proofread and critically evaluate all work prior to submission, including any content generated or modified with the assistance of AI tools

2. AI Use in Coursework and Teaching Assistantships

Graduate students must comply with AI-use policies established by the instructors of any courses in which they are enrolled. This obligation extends equally to graduate students serving as teaching assistants (TAs): TAs are expected to follow both the course instructor's policies for enrolled students and any TA-specific guidance regarding the use of AI in grading, preparation of lecture or discussion materials, provision of written feedback to students, and other instructional responsibilities.
Instructors are strongly encouraged to explicitly outline their expectations regarding AI use at the beginning of the course, addressing both student-facing and TA-specific contexts.

3. AI Use in Graduate Research: PI Oversight and Lab Policy

Graduate students are required to discuss their use of generative AI with their PI for any work related to their graduate research project, and to follow their PI's guidance. This requirement applies broadly across all phases and activities of the research enterprise, including but not limited to:
Ideation, hypothesis generation, and scientific springboarding
Data analysis, interpretation, and visualization
Writing, editing, and revision of manuscripts, grants, or reports
Literature searching, summarization, and synthesis
Coding, programming, machine learning
PIs are encouraged to establish clear, written lab-level policies regarding acceptable AI use that reflect the norms of their discipline and the expectations of relevant funding agencies and journals. In the absence of a formal lab policy, students should seek explicit approval from their PI before using generative AI in any research context.

4. Generative AI Disclosure Requirements

Graduate students are required to include a generative AI disclosure statement in any work for which AI use is not already governed by course policies, PI or lab policies, or applicable journal and conference submission guidelines. This requirement applies to candidacy exam documents, dissertation proposals, master's and doctoral dissertations/project summaries, and any other scholarly work prepared in the absence of superseding guidance.
The disclosure statement must include:
A description of how generative AI tools were used in the preparation of the document
The name(s) of the AI model(s) used
The disclosure statement does not need to include the specific prompts used.
Example Attestation Statement
An example of a complete AI attestation statement is provided below for reference:
I attest that any use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools in the preparation of this document has been fully disclosed. All substantive ideas, analyses, interpretations, and

conclusions are my own unless otherwise cited. Generative AI tools were used in an editorial capacity during the preparation of this dissertation. Specifically, Claude (Anthropic) was used to suggest alternative wording, refine sentence structure, and assist with grammar and clarity during revision of Chapter 3. All scientific interpretations, experimental designs, data analyses, and conclusions are solely my own. No AI tools were used to generate data, figures, or substantive scientific content.

5. Alignment with Journal Policies and Data Confidentiality

Graduate students are strongly encouraged to familiarize themselves with and adhere to the AI use policies of major scientific journals and conferences relevant to their field, particularly when preparing manuscripts for submission. Many journals have adopted specific requirements regarding the disclosure or prohibition of AI-generated content, and non-compliance may result in rejection or retraction of submitted work. Students are encouraged to review the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) for guidance on AI in publishing. https://publicationethics.org/
Students should also be mindful that information entered into publicly available large language models (LLMs) may be incorporated into those models' training data or otherwise enter the public domain. Accordingly, students must exercise caution when sharing the following with external AI systems:
Unpublished research data, results, or findings
Proprietary methods, protocols, or materials
Confidential patient, participant, or clinical data
Manuscript or grant content that has not yet been submitted or published
When in doubt, students should consult with their PI before entering any research-related content into an AI system. Use of institutional or otherwise privacy-preserving AI platforms, where available, is encouraged for sensitive research activities.

Petitions

Graduate students have the right to petition any decision regarding their standing in the graduate program or to request a change in any of the requirements set forth in this document. Such petitions should be addressed to the Graduate Affairs Committee and must clearly state what requirements are being petitioned and the justification for the request.
For PhD and MS students, the Graduate Affairs Committee will decide upon such petitions.
For MA students, the MA Advisory committee will decide upon such petitions.

Instructions for preparing a petition to switch from MA to MS or from MS to PhD programs

The student must formally petition the Graduate Affairs Committee to switch programs.
The petition should include:

- Current transcript
- Letter of petition from the student which includes the reason the student is requesting the change as well as a justification for the change.
- Letter of support from the student's advisor, including an assessment of the student's ability to complete the degree program under consideration and a description of financial support available for the student.

Petitions will be considered twice a year and should be submitted within a week after grades are posted for the semester.
Students should complete at least two semesters prior to requesting a switch.
Multiple criteria are considered when a student wishes to change programs, including:

- Performance in coursework and lab work

- Acceptance as a student into a research lab
- Appropriate support from the advisor
- Changes in career goals

Students will not be allowed to switch from the MS to PhD program if they wish to work in a lab that does not appear likely to have sufficient resources for the student to finish their thesis research. However, qualified students will be allowed to join the PhD program if they find a lab that does have appropriate resources.

Instructions for preparing a petition to remain in program after academic dismissal

A student who has been dismissed due to lack of academic standing may petition the Graduate Affairs Committee to remain in the program.
The petition should include:

- Current transcript
- Letter of petition from the student which accounts for the academic deficiencies and lays out a plan to remedy these deficiencies within one semester.
- Letter of support from the student's advisor, including an assessment of the student's ability to complete the degree program under consideration and a description of financial support available for the student.

Petitions should be submitted within a week after grades are posted for the semester.

Financial support for graduate students

General Policy

Support of PhD students is guaranteed for ten semesters, provided adequate progress is made. Support is generally extended beyond this time depending on resources. Support of PhD students is generally provided through teaching assistantships (TAs), research assistantships (RAs), or fellowships.

Teaching assistantships

Biological Sciences graduate students in good standing are offered teaching assistantships during their first four semesters in the graduate program. Continuing support during this period is contingent upon the student's carrying a full course load.

International students who have been awarded Teaching Assistantships TA) must pass the below speaking scores:

Test Name	Minimum SPEAKING Sub-Score
TOEFL IBT Speaking	25
IELTS Speaking	7.5
DET (Duolingo English Test) Speaking	145

Any student awarded a TA, whose speaking sub-scores are below these thresholds but not lower than 22 on TOEFL iBT Speaking, 6.5 on IELTS Speaking, or 120 on DET Speaking, is considered a *candidate* for TA responsibilities and must be approved for teaching assignment through a successful in-person teaching demonstration conducted by UB's English Language Institute (ELI) and home department faculty representative(s). A student awarded a TA appointment, who upon arrival to campus fails an in person speaking or teaching demonstration, or whose speaking scores are lower than candidate minimums, must enroll in and successfully complete *ELI512, Oral Communication for International Assistantships* prior to being assigned assistantship duties at UB.

An unsatisfactory grade in the teaching assignment or a complaint by a supervising faculty member can result in immediate loss of support. However, such loss will not occur without a thorough investigation by the Graduate Affairs Committee.
After the fourth semester and during the first summer of residence PhD students are usually supported by their advisor's research grants or their own external fellowships.
Students who do not have a pre-doctoral fellowship and are working with a research advisor who does not have grant support may request support from departmental funds. These requests will be considered on an individual basis.
If a faculty member loses their research funding, all senior (past second year) students in good standing will be considered for teaching assistantships until such time as the faculty member regains funding or the student(s) graduate.
Departmental support is not available for students of research-track and adjunct faculty. Research-track and adjunct faculty are expected to support their graduate students immediately upon accepting them into their labs. If funding should fail for a research/adjunct faculty member, they may request support for their senior Biological Sciences students.

Other sources of funding

Several university fellowships are awarded to incoming students, including the UB Presidential Fellowship, the College of Arts and Sciences Dean's Scholarship, and the Arthur A. Schomburg Fellowship. The Graduate Affairs Committee evaluates all new applications and selects candidates to nominate for these university awards. Students selected for these awards will be notified.

The Mark Diamond Research Fund gives grants to graduate students for research expenses related to their thesis or dissertation. PhD students may apply for up to $3,000 and Master's students for up to $1,500. The MDRF grant is only for University at Buffalo graduate students in programs participating in the Graduate Student Association and who have not waived the student activity fee. For more information: http://gsa.buffalo.edu/student-resources/mdrf/

College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) dissertation fellowships are available to senior students who are preparing their dissertations. Application materials are generally due to the director of graduate studies in mid-March and are then forwarded to the College of Arts and Sciences Dean's office.

Travel awards are available through the Graduate Student Association.

Graduate student organizations

The Biology Graduate Student Association (BGSA)

The BGSA is comprised of and governed by graduate students in the department. It is affiliated with the university-wide Graduate Student Association (GSA). In addition to keeping students posted on departmental and university policies, procedures, and events, the organization assists in planning the annual symposium as well as journal clubs and social activities in the department. All graduate students are welcome and encouraged to participate in the group. Meetings are usually held monthly. Meeting announcements are made through the email listserv.

Graduate Student Employees Union (GSEU)

The GSEU is the collective bargaining unit for Teaching Assistants (TAs) and Graduate Assistants (GAs) employed by SUNY and paid by the State of New York. All TAs and GAs employed by SUNY are part of the GSEU bargaining unit and pay the union a percentage of their income. However, to obtain full union benefits you must fill out a yellow membership form and return it to a union officer (your department rep, Chief Steward, or Business Agent) or mail it to the address on the form. These forms are distributed at health orientations, GSEU meetings, and general orientation activities. For more information visit the Website: http://gsa.buffalo.edu/gseu/

Department events

Annual Research Symposium

The annual Biological Sciences Research Symposium provides an opportunity for students to share their research results with members of the department. The Symposium takes places in January and is organized by the BGSA. Students are encouraged to present their research either as a poster or short talk. It is suggested that each laboratory be represented by no more than two talks.

Departmental Seminar Series

Weekly departmental seminars feature distinguished scientists from within and outside the university and introduce students to cutting edge research. Seminars take place Thursdays afternoons. For many seminars, students have the opportunity to talk with the seminar speaker over lunch.

Graduate Student Research Showcase

Each showcase features two students or postdocs who have a fairly complete research story. Speakers are selected by the Seminar Committee. Showcases take place during department seminars, on Thursday afternoons.

Work-in-Progress Seminar Series

This seminar series runs in the spring semester and provides graduate students the opportunity to share their ongoing research with the department. Each session includes three 15-minute talks.

The seminar will be open to the department, and the speakers' thesis committees and other seminar participants will be in attendance. The talks will not be graded but could occur shortly before a thesis committee meeting.

Alumni Career Workshop

Alumni who have succeeded in a variety of careers return to campus to speak about their jobs and to network with current students.

Departmental Fall Meet and Mingle

Social gathering during the annual new graduate student orientation, faculty, staff, incoming and current grad students are invited.

Departmental Winter Party

Social gathering at the end of the fall semester, faculty, staff, grad students are invited.

Departmental Commencement

Reception on the morning of graduate commencement, graduating students, family members, faculty and staff are invited. Please RSVP.