

Graduate student standards, conduct, evaluation, and oversight

Department of Physiology & Biophysics University of Washington

For graduate students, progress through their course of study and toward completion of their Ph.D. work will be a challenging introduction to professional life, an exciting period of learning and discovery, and hard work. There are many resources available to guide and assist students, as they advance through the program; however, it should be noted that *the responsibility for achieving the standards and milestones of progress in coursework and research deemed adequate by the student's Supervisory Committee and its Chair rests entirely with the student.*

Feedback will be given in many ways— during course work and exams; from lab personnel during rotations and by faculty evaluation of the rotation; from the first year advisor and other faculty who know the student; from the thesis advisor and supervisory committee members, and from formal examinations such as the General Examination. In addition, the Department reviews the progress of each student yearly. This annual review is a check that benchmarks are met.

Ordinarily, it should not be difficult for students to know if satisfactory progress is being made and that they are proceeding toward establishing their research careers. Rarely, a student may have some unexpected difficulty in the steps toward the Ph.D. and will receive feedback indicating unsatisfactory progress. This document concerns standards of conduct and the policies and procedures for identifying and resolving unexpected difficulties during graduate study.

Policies on Academic and Professional Standards

Our students are expected to understand and conform to the standards and regulations set by multiple authorities: the Department of Physiology and Biophysics (PBio), the UW Graduate School, the University of Washington, as well as local, state, and Federal authorities.

The faculty of the PBio Department set curriculum and performance requirements for its graduate students. The current curricular requirements are detailed in a separate document that is given to arriving students and is posted on a web page:

https://depts.washington.edu/pbiopage/ar_requirements.php

In general, the curricular requirements specify required courses and lab rotations, specify how many additional elective courses and mini-courses must be completed, and set a timeline for completion of coursework, appointment of a Supervisory Committee, completion of the General Exam, and scheduling periodic meetings of the Supervisory Committee. The PBio Graduate Program expects students to perform at a passing or above level in all coursework, to maintain a cumulative average of 3.0, according to Graduate School guidelines, and to meet all departmental and Graduate School requirements for graduation. *An absolute prerequisite for the Ph.D. degree in Physiology & Biophysics is that a student produces a body of scientific work in the form of original discoveries and writings that significantly advances our understanding of physiology—i.e., published accounts that meet the standards and pass the scrutiny of peer-review for publication in the scientific literature (i.e., journals).*

The PBio Department is committed to maintaining the highest standards of academic performance, professional behavior, personal integrity, and respect for each other as individuals. Academic and professional integrity is considered an essential personal quality for successful completion of the Ph.D. degree. The PBio Graduate Program follows the rules of the Graduate School, which are outlined in a series of Graduate School Memoranda, which are outlined in the following link:

<http://www.grad.washington.edu/policies/memoranda/index.shtml>, which includes instructions and procedures for Graduate Students and guidelines for good practice in graduate education. Of particular relevance here are the following memoranda:

The responsibilities of the Supervisory Committee are outlined in Graduate School Memorandum No. 13

<http://www.grad.washington.edu/policies/memoranda/memo13.shtml>

Policies on Continuation or Termination of Students and the Review Process for Low Scholarship and Unsatisfactory Progress are outlined in Graduate School Memorandum No. 16

<http://www.grad.washington.edu/policies/memoranda/memo16.shtml>

Academic grievance procedures are described in Graduate School Memorandum No. 33,

<http://www.grad.washington.edu/Acad/gsmemos/gsmemo33.htm>

and a revision of this document

<http://www.washington.edu/admin/hr/laborrel/contracts/uaw/contract/preamble.html>

The University of Washington. The University of Washington has defined a Code of Student Conduct.

<http://washington.edu/students/handbook/conduct.html>.)

Evaluation

PBio Student Progress Committee (SPC) — Composition

The Chair of the Dept of Physiology & Biophysics (PBio) has delegated to the Department's Student Progress Committee (SPC) responsibility for all issues related to the academic progress and professional development of students while they are enrolled in the Department's graduate program. This ranges from decisions on advancement, graduation, and leaves of absence to remediation, academic probation, and dismissal.

The SPC is composed of 5 faculty members from the Department, with one of the members serving as its chair. The Chair of the PBio Department appoints the members of the SPC, including its chair, and they serve one year, renewable terms, at the discretion of the PBio Chair. The Director of the Department's Graduate Program and the Graduate Program Coordinator are *ex officio* members of the SPC without voting privileges.

Actions of the PBio Student Progress Committee

Students may at any time request a meeting with the SPC to discuss professional or personal issues that may have an impact on their academic status or progress. The SPC may consider a student's request for a temporary leave of absence, a reduced course load, or waivers of certain requirements, as may be necessary or judicious for reasons of personal health, family emergency or other circumstances. Granting requests for these exceptional circumstances will be at the discretion of the SPC.

The SPC reviews students' records at least on an annual basis to ensure that satisfactory progress is being made in all of the requirements for graduation. Progress towards this goal as determined by the Student's Supervisory Committee is a condition for continuation in the program. The SPC may recommend opportunities for additional study to address deficiencies or problems *Although the student's advisor, members of the student's Supervisory Committee, and other faculty can be expected to offer their advice and counsel on how to achieve this objective, the ultimate responsibility for achieving adequate progress and , in a timely fashion, rests entirely with the student.*

The SPC will make recommendations when there are issues of academic or personal/professional conduct as outlined in the next section. A pattern of documented deficiencies such as low grades or unsatisfactory progress at the bench, regardless of extenuating circumstances, may indicate unsatisfactory performance—despite the fact that a student may have achieved passing grades in required courses and satisfied other requirements. Under such circumstances, if the student fails to maintain an acceptable academic and scientific record of achievements, fails to follow academic directives provided by the Supervisory Committee, or fails to develop professional attitudes and behaviors that are consonant with the goals of the graduate program, the SPC may recommend dismissal from the Department's Graduate Program—regardless of whether the student has been placed on probation. The SPC may also place a student on academic probation based on an unsatisfactory record of scientific progress and accomplishments, as determined by the student's Supervisory Committee.

Students will be afforded careful and deliberate decision-making by the SPC. Students will receive oral and written notification of areas of deficiency and be given guidelines for remediation. Students will be offered an opportunity to meet informally with the SPC. The Committee's decisions will be based on the professional judgment of its faculty members after reviewing the student's entire academic record, the annual Progress Report, and the student's record of scientific achievements. The participation of a student's legal counsel is not permitted, as a formal hearing and/or an appeal is not part of this academic review process. The student may appeal any decision to the Chair for final adjudication.

The Chair of the Department of PBio has final judgment over the SPC's recommendation for dismissal of any student from the Graduate Program.

Issues of Academic and Personal/Professional Conduct

It is expected that students will maintain the highest standards of academic and professional conduct in all aspects of their training, and any failure to do so may be grounds for being placed on academic probation and/or dismissal. Infractions of the applicable policies, standards, laws, and regulations that occur in connection with any University or PBio program activity may result in a sanction being imposed by the SPC— notwithstanding whether the conduct is also the subject of formal civil or criminal proceedings. For any infractions related to personal/professional behavior and conduct, the SPC's review process will be followed.

Below are broad categories of personal/professional behavior and conduct that fall under the purview of the SPC as part of the overall professional/personal standards applicable to students in the PBio program. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list, but rather to serve as general guidelines for students.

Low scholarship and unsatisfactory progress

Failure to perform at a passing level in all coursework or to maintain a cumulative average of 3.0, or to meet departmental and Graduate School graduation requirements.

Inappropriate or Illegal Interaction with Peers, Staff, Faculty of the University

Harassment or abusive behavior
Assault

Illegal Behavior in Connection with PBio Program Activities

Commission of any misdemeanor or felony in connection with PBio program activities

Unlawful harassment or abusive behavior in connection with PBio program activities

Cheating/Plagiarism/Scientific Misconduct

Cheating:

- Cheating on any examinations, including midterm take-homes, or
- Copying work of others

Plagiarism (may also be considered Scientific Misconduct):

- Careless attribution of sources
- Intentional misrepresentation

Scientific Misconduct:

- Fabrication, falsification of data and/or plagiarism of written materials
- Stealing/violating agreements related to materials/procedures protected by copyright or intellectual property rights

Academic Warning and Probation

The guidelines below follow Graduate School Memorandum 16, cited earlier.

Academic Warning

Students may be warned formally or informally by the Chair of their Supervisory Committee, the SPC, or the Director of the Graduate Program about low scholarship or unsatisfactory process. A pattern (more than one quarter) of low scholarship (e.g., low grades) or unsatisfactory progress (e.g., failure to achieve certain scientific benchmarks or incomplete course work) will automatically result in a student being placed on Academic Probation.

Academic Probation

All students in the graduate program are expected to maintain unqualified passing grades in coursework, satisfactory performance in their bench work (scientific research), and high standards of professional behavior. Academic Probation is a formal and serious warning to the student that she/he must show satisfactory improvement in any and all areas deemed unsatisfactory or the student will be dismissed from the program. A student may be placed on academic probation if, in the judgment of the student's Supervisory Committee and SPC, the student is not making satisfactory progress in any area that falls under the Committee's purview related to graduation criteria, including coursework, bench work (scientific research), and matters of academic and professional integrity.

A student whose cumulative GPA falls below 3.0 is on academic probation. If the student is unable to remediate an unsatisfactory GPA in accordance with the SPC's specified timetable or demonstrate significant and meaningful progress in their doctoral research, the SPC may recommend dismissal from the program.

Status while on Academic Probation

"While on Academic Probation, students are expected to meet any and all requirements imposed by the Student's Supervisory Committee and/or SPC at the time the student is placed on probation.

Final Probation

Failure to meet standards established by the Student's Supervisory Committee and/or SPC may be the basis for Final Probation, after which a student may be dismissed from the PBio graduate program.

Removal from Academic Probation

A student is eligible for consideration of removal from Academic Probation when the following condition(s) has/have been met: (1) satisfactory remediation of all incomplete, failed or unsatisfactory coursework, or bringing the cumulative GPA back over 3.0 in accordance with Graduate School guidelines, and/or where relevant significant improvement and tangible progress in the student's laboratory/scientific work to the satisfaction of the student's Supervisory Committee; and (2) the absence of any other issues of concern to the student's Supervisory Committee and the SPC.

Guidelines for Due Process for Students

Infractions of personal and professional conduct related to the activities of the University of Washington will be handled as a **disciplinary review**. The disciplinary review process follows University guidelines. If an incident has been reported, the student is asked to meet with the Chairman of the Department. If the Chair is unavailable, he/she may appoint another appropriate administrative official to adjudicate the review process. At the discretion of the Chair, this may be the SPC or a newly appointed committee. The student is advised of his or her rights, and then decides if he or she wishes to proceed with the meeting with the Chairman or to request the presence of an advocate, who in this disciplinary process may be an attorney. It should be noted that an attorney, if present, may act only in the capacity of an advisor to the student; this is not a legal proceeding. If after the facts are disclosed, there is evidence that the incident does not involve a breach of the standards of personal and professional conduct of a scientist-in-training, the Chairman determines the appropriate resolution. If after the facts of the incidents are disclosed the student acknowledges culpability for the alleged infraction or violation, the case will be referred to the SPC to be managed under the **academic review** process. If the student does not acknowledge culpability, an *ad hoc* committee of appropriate faculty members will be convened to review the facts and make a determination of culpability. If the *ad hoc* committee determines that the student is, in fact, culpable, the matter is then referred to the SPC for final adjudication.

Within the **academic review** process, there are opportunities for the student to request a review meeting with the SPC (as set forth in more detail below), if the student believes that all information was not considered in the Committee's deliberation process or if the student wishes to request a different course of action than recommended by the Committee

For issues related to, leaves of absence, remediation, reprimand, probation, or temporary suspension, the student may request a review meeting with the Committee to request reconsideration of the Committee's recommended remediation plan. The decision of the SPC following such a review meeting is final, and the course of action will then be implemented. The Chairman works with the student and the Faculty Graduate Program Coordinator to schedule the plan directed by the SPC.

For issues involving a dismissal recommendation, the student is informed by the SPC of the deficiencies on which the dismissal recommendation is based. (In most cases, there has been at least one previous letter informing the student of deficiencies and the expected level of performance if the student is to continue in the program.) When the student is informed of a dismissal recommendation, he or she has two options. One is to submit a letter of withdrawal to the Chair. The second is to request a dismissal review meeting with the SPC. This meeting should occur as soon as possible but not later than the next routinely scheduled meeting of the SPC unless a delay is approved by the Committee. The format of the dismissal review meeting has three components. During the first segment, the Committee members review the student's entire graduate school record and any additional information requested by the Chair, the Graduate Program Coordinator or the Committee, and any information submitted by the student

about his or her performance or extenuating circumstances interfering with performance. In addition, the student may request to have individuals write letters of support for the student's continuance in graduate school.

The second segment of the meeting is the interview with the student. At this time, the student can make a presentation to provide the Committee with any additional information the student wishes to have the Committee consider, including his or her perspective on his or her performance, and there is an opportunity for questions and answers between the student and the Committee members. In addition, the student is permitted to have present a member of the department faculty as an advocate; however, the student is not permitted to have legal counsel at this hearing. The faculty advocate may present information to the Committee and/or participate as needed during the question and answer period. The level of participation of the faculty advocate is a decision the student makes in consultation with his or her advocate. Once all the information that the student wants to share with the Committee is presented and there are no more questions, the student and the faculty advocate are asked to leave the meeting room.

During the third segment of the meeting, the Committee meets in executive session and makes a decision on the dismissal recommendation. The student is invited to wait in the area of the Departmental main office so that he or she can be informed by the Chair of the Committee of the decision immediately. The Committee's decision is also sent to the student in writing.

It is important that to note that the academic review process differs from a disciplinary or courtroom process, where there may be multiple levels of appeal. There are three components to the academic review process: 1) The student is informed of the academic and/or professional standard deficiency; 2) an informal (i.e., an attorney is not permitted) meeting with the SPC takes place; and 3) a careful and deliberate committee decision-making process occurs. The review meeting with the SPC is the **last** opportunity for the student to provide relevant information that he or she believes the SPC needs to know before making a final decision. When the student is in the dismissal review process, the SPC will determine whether it is appropriate for the student to continue in coursework and research.

If the SPC sustains the dismissal recommendation and the student does not withdraw from the program, the Committee's recommendation is forwarded to the Chair for a review and a final decision, which is then sent to the Graduate School. The student may also appeal an SPC recommendation for dismissal to the Chair of PBio for final adjudication. Adjudication of academic grievances may also be sought through a mechanisms outside of the Department of Physiology & Biophysics, as described in Graduate School Memorandum No. 33, <http://www.grad.washington.edu/policies/memoranda/memo33.shtml> and a revision of this document <http://www.washington.edu/admin/hr/laborrel/contracts/uaw/contract/preamble.html>.