



DEPARTMENT OF BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES

Date: September 15, 2009

From: John Burns
Graduate Advisor (GA)

To: All Biology Graduate Students

Re: OUR RECORD OF YOUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

During your studies here at GWU you will need to pay careful attention to the deadlines for a variety of forms, exams, and other mileposts on your way to your degree. The purpose of this memo is to review the requirements for all students and for each of the degrees, and to point out some of the opportunities available to you.

The Biology Graduate Student Handbook on our web page (http://www.gwu.edu/~biology/graduate_programs/student_handbook.cfm) is your main source of information on the rules governing your work in the department, and you should read it carefully. The Columbian College Graduate Student Handbook (<http://www.gwu.edu/~ccas/grad/handbook.html>), accessible from the Biology Handbook page, will be your main source of information on the University's rules. If you have any questions about the CCAS requirements that the GA cannot answer, contact Shanisha Barnes (slbarnes@gwu.edu) about general issues or Iva Beatty (iva@gwu.edu) about teaching assistantships or questions about candidacy. You may request digital copies of nearly all of these forms when they are needed by sending the GA an email - jrburns@gwu.edu. Also note that you are responsible for the information in the Graduate University Bulletin (<http://www.gwu.edu/~bulletin>).

Herewith is an overview of your responsibilities and opportunities and a brief chronological outline of your journey through our graduate program. The timing is for full time students; part time students will of course take longer (but no more than 4 years for the Masters and 8 years for the Ph.D.). Your research advisor should provide guidance to make sure that you meet these requirements at the appropriate times, but the ultimate responsibility is yours.

ALL STUDENTS, ALL THE TIME

- 1) Make sure you are **registered on time every semester**, even if you are finished with your course work. If you are late you will be assessed a **late fee**, and if you do not register during a semester you must then apply to be readmitted. Readmission is not guaranteed.

- 2) If you are a **full time student** (other than students admitted to candidacy; see below), make sure you are registered for at least **9 credit hours per semester unless you have less than 9 hours left in your program of studies**. International visas also require students to be registered full time. As you might have noticed, tuition at this University is not cheap (over \$1,000 per credit hour), and the number of credit hours you register for constitutes a transaction for thousands of dollars; the consequences of a mistake can be very serious. Please pay careful attention to the drop/add and refund schedule noted on the Registrar's web site (http://www.gwu.edu/~regweb/web-content/registration/gen_info_fall2009.html - program adjust). This is especially important if you are funded by a TAship or Fellowship; **tuition credits represent real money** that is transferred between accounts within the University. If you take fewer credit hours any semester (e.g., if you are taking 8 one semester and 10 another), please tell the GA, and after you have registered on GWEB do not make any changes in your total number of credit hours without first consulting me. Funding generally comes with 18 credit hours a year, but additional credits may be available; consult the GA.

- 3) If you are a **part time student**, you must be registered for 6 or more credit hours. If you are taking fewer courses (e.g., you are a third year Masters student finishing your thesis) but need to be accredited as a half time student (e.g., because of student loans), you will need to complete a request form for Full/Half Time Certification (form is available at the Registrar's web site <http://www.gwu.edu/~regweb> or if you are an international student on the ISO web site <http://gwired.gwu.edu/iso> which needs to be signed by the GA and forwarded to CCAS.

- 4) If you are not working on your studies for a semester or two (total), you should petition CCAS for a **Leave of Absence**. If approved, CCAS will submit your registration paper work to the Office of the Registrar. International students should check with ISO for visa restrictions. Otherwise those semesters will be counted towards the 4 or 8 years you are only allowed to be with us.

- 5) In December of each year the GA will ask you to fill out an **annual progress report**, and one will be requested from your research advisor(s). In December or January you will meet individually with the GA to review your progress. Your progress reports will then be examined by the department's Graduate Committee to decide upon funding for the next year. In general, if you are funded by a TAship or Fellowship you will continue to be funded unless you stop making progress, up to the time limits on funding listed below, or in the case of a GTA, not performing duties satisfactorily. Funding from grants is generally at the discretion of the faculty member receiving the grant.

6) There is a confusing array of **courses for research**, and if you register for the wrong one there may be problems. **BISC 295** may be taken by Masters or PhD students for research, and requires a grade. It may be taken for a variable number of credits and may be repeated. Please see the instructions for registering for a variable hour course on the Office of the Registrar's web page. **BISC 299-300** is only for MASTERS students doing a thesis, and may only be taken for 3 units each. They may be taken concurrently. It is considered In Progress (IPG) until your thesis is filed. **BISC 398** may be taken by PhD students only, and should be taken before they are advanced to candidacy (i.e., pass their comprehensive exam). It is specifically for studying with a member of your examination committee for the comprehensive exam. It may be taken for a variable number of credits and requires a grade. **BISC 399** may be taken by PhD students only, and only after they are advanced to candidacy. It is considered In Progress (IPG) until you file your dissertation, and therefore will not be counted towards the 48 credits necessary to be advanced to candidacy. **IF YOU TAKE THIS COURSE BEFORE YOUR COMPREHENSIVE EXAM YOU MAY NOT HAVE ENOUGH CREDITS TO BE ADVANCED TO CANDIDACY.** If you are enrolled in 295 or 398 please remind your advisor, or the faculty member with whom you are doing the research, to assign a grade at the end of the semester. Otherwise it will be listed as In Progress (IPG) until they submit a grade to the registrar's office.

7) If you are receiving funding you are expected to carry a full time course load and **work full time** on your teaching and/or your courses and research. Additional employment either inside or outside the University is not permitted.

8) **Funding for graduate students** comes from a variety of sources – TAships, Fellowships, grants – and each has its own regulations. In general, students accepted into the Masters program will not be funded and students accepted into the PhD program will be funded for five years. A student receiving funding must have as their Research Adviser or co-Adviser a faculty member within the Department.

9) **Summer support** is generally not included in TAships and Fellowships, but it may be available from other sources. Unfortunately, because of the ad hoc nature of this funding we often do not know until late in the Spring whether it is available. Please consult your research advisor about this.

10) Limited **funds for attending one scientific meeting a year** are from the CCAS, please ask the Biology Department administrator about this. A student must be presenting a talk or poster at the meeting, and no more than one meeting a year is funded. Please request the funding about one month BEFORE going to the meeting.

11) Graduate students may elect a **graduate student representative** who acts as a liaison with the GA and meets with the Graduate Committee on certain occasions. The selection of the representative and any additional functions he or she may take on are entirely at the discretion of the graduate students (i.e., the department will not select a representative if the students fail to do so).

12) If you take courses at other universities in the DC area Consortium you must complete a consortium registration form (<http://www.gwu.edu/~regweb>). If you **take courses at campuses outside the Consortium** while you are a student at GWU you must file an exception request form with the CCAS before you take the course, requesting permission to transfer the units to GW once the course is completed.

13) If for any reason you must **leave the program**, please inform the GA in writing or by email.

WARNING: It will undoubtedly take you longer to complete your thesis or dissertation than you expect. Even after your research advisor has made corrections it will take weeks or months to go through the readers and, for dissertations, the other members of your committee. Each of these people can, and usually does, ask you to make changes. If you need to graduate in a given semester pay careful attention to the deadlines noted on the Electronic Theses and Dissertations (ETD) website (<http://www.gwu.edu/~etds>), estimate how long it will take to complete revisions, then **DOUBLE YOUR ESTIMATE. DO NOT EXPECT TO GRADUATE QUICKLY AFTER YOU FINISH A FIRST DRAFT OF YOUR THESIS OR DISSERTATION.**

MASTERS STUDENTS WITH THESIS

General:

1) You have **four years maximum** in which to complete your program, but **two years** should be your goal. It is possible to exceed four years only with the Dean's permission (i.e., you must have a very good reason), and you must apply every semester for an extension. If approved you will then be required to register (and pay) for at least one credit per semester (Continuing Research - CCAS 920).

2) **Funding** from the University is not available but you might be funded by grants to your research advisor. After two years you must still register for one credit hour a semester, so there is a strong monetary incentive to finish in two years.

3) You will need to **complete 30 credit hours of work**. If your program of studies does not require you to take a full load toward the end of your program and are still a full time student, please inform the GA and file a full time certification request available on the Office of the Registrar's website (<http://www.gwu.edu/~regweb>) or if you are an international student, on the ISO web site (<http://gwired.gwu.edu/iso>).

4) It is possible to **change to the Ph.D.** program before finishing the Masters program. You must apply to the Ph.D. program prior to the admission deadline and you will be considered along with other Ph.D. applicants for that year. If you are accepted you can either first finish your masters and be awarded that degree or, with the recommendation of your advisor, enter the Ph.D. program without finishing your masters thesis.

First Semester:

1) If you have credits from graduate courses elsewhere you must discuss this with the GA and he/she will submit a transfer credit form to CCAS if approval is recommended. Please let the GA know by email if you are a new student in this situation, or else make sure it is discussed at your first annual meeting with the GA.

2) Meet with your research advisor to decide upon the courses you will take, and file a **Program of Studies** form with the GA. In general, you should plan to take most of your course work the first year and register for 6 hours of Thesis Research (Bisc 299-300, 3-3) your last two semesters. Consider the Program of Studies to be like a contract: these courses must be completed for you to obtain your degree. If you need to change the P. of S. (e.g., a course is not offered), please contact the GA immediately - if you reach the end of your studies and have not taken all the courses on this form you may not be allowed to graduate.

3) In consultation with your research advisor, begin researching a **thesis topic** as soon as possible. It is very important that you identify a thesis project that can be finished in less than two years and begin working on it as soon as possible.

Second Semester:

1) Write a **Thesis Proposal** up to 10 pages long, which should include: 1) a brief review of literature pertaining to the problem, 2) a statement of the hypothesis to be tested, 3) an outline of the methods of investigation, 4) a statement of how the data will be analyzed, 5) a brief discussion of the scientific significance of the proposed research, and 6) a bibliography. Once it is approved by your research advisor give two copies to the GA. It will then be reviewed by another faculty member, who will file a **Thesis Topic Approval Form** with the GA once it is approved.

2) Begin **collecting data** (this is the fun part). Try to establish a schedule so that you can judge whether you can complete data collection in time to finish your thesis by the end of the second year (for full time students).

Third Semester:

1) You should plan to **finish collecting data** on your thesis topic this semester.

2) Begin **writing your thesis**, in consultation with your research advisor. Usually parts of the Thesis Proposal text are included in the thesis. For details on submitting your thesis electronically, formatting requirements and deadline dates see the ETD website (<http://www.gwu.edu/~etds>). If you plan to graduate in two years you will need to finish your first draft by the end of this semester or early in the next semester.

Fourth Semester:

1) **File an "Application For Graduation" with the CCAS graduate office** by February 1 (Spring Semester), October 1 (Fall Semester) or July 1 (Summer Semester)

informing them that you plan to graduate this semester, if that is the case. The application for graduation is available on the Office of the Registrar's web site (<http://www.gwu.edu/~regweb>). If you fail to file for graduation on time then you may not be able to graduate that semester.

2) Take the **comprehensive exam** some time this semester. The examiners include three or more faculty members chosen by your advisor in consultation with you. The exam begins with a brief presentation by you about your thesis topic, followed by questions related to your research from the examiners. However, **the exam is not a defense of your thesis** and you need not have completed the final version of it. The examining committee must file a form with the GA with the outcome. If you fail the exam, you may take it only once more, at the discretion of the committee.

3) Give the **completed first draft of your thesis** to your research advisor to read. He or she will make comments, and after you have made corrections and it is approved by your research advisor give two copies of it to the GA. To graduate on time this must happen at least four weeks before the deadline (see #4). A copy is then given to a reader, who has two weeks to make further comments, and when all corrections are made to the satisfaction of the research advisor and readers they will file a **Masters Thesis signoff form** with the GA.

4) The GA must file a **Graduation Clearance Form** with CCAS requesting that you be cleared for graduation, after having made sure you meet all the requirements. All requirements must be met by January 15 (Fall Semester), May 15 (Spring Semester), or August 15 (Summer Semester) to graduate that semester.

5) Submit your thesis electronically (www.gwu.edu/~etds). Give a completed copy to the Department, and one to your thesis advisor. Students must submit a completed (signed by student and thesis director) ETD approval form to CCAS by the established deadline.

6) You will be asked to **give a department seminar** at the end of the Spring semester. This usually will be a 20 or 30 minute segment of a seminar involving all graduating Masters students.

Fifth or more Semesters:

1) After you have finished your course work, if you have not passed your comprehensive exam and finished your thesis you still must **register** for 1 credit hour per semester of Continuing Research (CCAS 920, listed in the Schedule of Classes under Columbian College) as long as you are within deadline or have received an approved extension on the completion of your degree requirements. If you graduate during the summer semester, you must register for 0 credit hours of Continuous Enrollment (CE) (contact your program coordinator in CCAS to complete your registration).

NONTHESIS MASTERS STUDENTS

General:

1) You have **four years maximum** in which to complete your program, **but two years** should be your goal. It is possible to exceed four years only with the Dean's permission (i.e., you must have a very good reason), and you must apply every semester for an extension. Most probably you will then be required to register for at least one credit per semester (Continuing Research - CCAS 920).

2) **You will not be funded** by the University.

3) You will need to **complete 36 credit hours of work**. If your program of studies does not require you to take a full load toward the end of your program and you are still a full time student, please inform the GA and file a full time certification request available on the Office of the Registrar's website (<http://www.gwu.edu/~regweb>) or if you are an international student, on the ISO web site (<http://gwired.gwu.edu/iso>).

4) It is possible to **change to the Ph.D.** program before finishing the Masters program. You must apply to the Ph.D. program prior to the admission deadline and you will be considered along with other Ph.D. applicants for that year.

First Semester:

1) If you have credits from graduate courses elsewhere you must discuss this with the GA and he/she will submit a transfer credit form to CCAS if recommendation is approved. Please let the GA know by email if you are a new student in this situation, or else make sure it is discussed at your first annual meeting with the GA.

2) Meet with the GA, or a faculty member chosen by the GA, to decide upon the courses you will take, and file a **Program of Studies** form with the GA. Consider the Program of Studies to be like a contract: these courses must be completed for you to obtain your degree. You should plan to be involved in some independent research for one or two semesters, e.g., working in a faculty laboratory. If you need to change the P. of S., please contact the GA immediately; if you reach the end of your studies and have not taken all the courses on this form you may not be allowed to graduate.

Second and Third Semester: Take courses, including independent research.

Fourth Semester:

1) **File an "Application For Graduation" with the CCAS graduate office** by February 1 (Spring Semester), October 1 (Fall Semester) or July 1 (Summer Semester) that you plan to graduate this semester. The form is available on the Office of the Registrar's web site (<http://www.gwu.edu/~regweb>).

2) Take the **comprehensive exam** early in the semester. The examiners include three or more faculty members chosen by the GA in consultation with you. You will either take a written exam or write a review paper assigned by the committee, and then you will be given an oral exam. The examining committee must file a form with the GA giving the outcome. If you fail the exam, you may take it only once more, at the discretion of the committee.

3) The GA must file a **Graduation Clearance Form** with the CCAS requesting that you be cleared for graduation, after having made sure you met all the requirements. All requirements must be met by January 15 (Fall Semester), May 15 (Spring Semester), or August 15 (Summer Semester) to graduate that semester.

Fifth or more Semesters:

1) After you have finished your course work, if you have not finished all your requirements, you still must **register** for 1 credit hour per semester of Continuing Research (CCAS 920, the CRN is listed in the Schedule of Classes under Columbian College of Arts and Sciences) as long as you are within deadline or have received an approved extension on the completion of degree requirements. If you graduate during the summer semester, you must register for 0 credit hours of Continuous Enrollment (CE - contact CCAS for information on registration).

Ph.D. STUDENTS

General:

1) You have **eight years maximum** in which to complete your program, but it is highly recommended that you finish in **five years** (especially if you already have a masters degree). It is possible to exceed the maximum only with the Dean's permission (i.e., you must have a very good reason), and you must apply every semester for an extension. Most probably you will then be required to register for at least one credit per semester (Continuing Research - CCAS 940).

2) You may be **funded** by the University with either a TAship or a Weintraub or King Research Fellowship. Your funding may be renewed each year based on evidence that you are making academic progress (see #5 in the "All Students ..." section) and satisfactorily performing GTA duties. Generally, students who are funded will TA the first two years and receive a fellowship afterwards, but this depends upon the demographics of the graduate student population (i.e., how many funded students graduate a given year making their TAships or Fellowships available). Funding is generally not possible for more than five years. You may also be funded by grants to your research advisor.

First Year:

1) If you have credits from graduate courses elsewhere (e.g., a Masters degree) we must **petition the CCAS for transfer credit**. Please let the GA know by email if you are

a new student in this situation, or else make sure it is discussed at your first annual meeting with the GA.

2) In your first or second semester meet with your research advisor and your **General Examination Committee**, formed of 4 or members in consultation with your advisor, to formulate a **Program of Studies** and give it to the GA. Consider the Program of Studies to be like a contract: these courses must be completed for you to obtain your degree. If you need to change the P. of S. (e.g., a course is not offered), please contact me immediately - if you reach the end of your studies and have not taken all the courses on this form you may not be allowed to graduate.

3) You should begin investigating possible **dissertation topics**. Your dissertation topic should be based upon original research, so you should first read the relevant literature to find out what has been done in the area of interest. It should also be a project that can be finished in a timely fashion, something your dissertation director will advise you on.

4) In consultation with your research advisor, identify possible members of your **Dissertation Research Committee** (director/co-director and two readers). At the time of the final defense, you will add two additional members, the examiners, one of which is outside the department/university.

Second and Third Year (depending on how many courses are transferred into the department):

1) Continue taking courses and investigating dissertation topics.

2) Once you have finished your course work, the **General Examination** must be taken within one semester. You must have **48 credit hours** of approved graduate level course work to be advanced to candidacy; if you are a full time student with no transfer credits you should take it at the end of your third year and if you transferred with a Masters (24 credits) you should take it during your third or fourth semester. The examination is composed of a written examination followed by an oral examination before the examining committee. Three fields of study are identified, and each examiner contributes a question or questions from one. The examiners view the completed written exam prior to the oral exam, which is then taken within one week of the written exam. A single grade is given by majority vote of the committee, which then submits its results to the GA. If you fail the exam, you may take it only once more, at the discretion of the committee.

3) The GA will submit a form to CCAS requesting that you be **advanced to candidacy**.

4) Soon after you are advanced to candidacy you will write a **dissertation proposal** up to 10 pages long in consultation with your research advisor that includes: 1) a brief review of literature pertaining to the problem, 2) a statement of the hypothesis to be tested, 3) an outline of the methods of investigation, 4) a statement of how the data

will be analyzed, 5) a brief discussion of the scientific significance of the proposed research, and 6) a bibliography. Once the written proposal is approved by your advisor you will give an **oral presentation to your Dissertation Research Committee**, who will submit its approval to the GA along with a copy of the proposal. The Dissertation Research Committee comprises your advisor(s) and at least two other researchers; it need not be identical to the General Examination Committee. This committee will advise you during your dissertation work, and they will read your dissertation and examine you during your Dissertation Defense.

Subsequent Years:

1) After you are advanced to candidacy you must **register for BISC 399 each semester, for at least 3 credit hours**, until you complete all the necessary requirements (i.e., 72 credit hours). If you need to be certified full or half time during this period, you must complete a certification request each semester. Certification forms are available on the Office of the Registrar's web site (<http://www.gwu.edu/~regweb>) or if you are an International Student, on the ISO web site (<http://gwired.gwu.edu/iso>). You must then register for 1 credit hour of Continuous Research (CR) each semester. The CRN for CCAS 940 can be found in the on line schedule of classes under Columbian College.

2) You should **meet with your Dissertation Research Committee** periodically to discuss your progress. Meetings of the entire committee may be difficult to arrange, but frequent meetings with your research directors are strongly encouraged

3) Once your research is finished you will begin **writing your dissertation**. For details on the accepted format, see the Electronic Theses and Dissertations (ETDS) website (<http://www.gwu.edu/~etds>) It will save you much time and agony if you discuss with your advisor the format and style of the dissertation and submit an outline before you begin. You should also consider the format it will take when submitted to a journal for publication. If you submit papers for publication that will later be incorporated into your dissertation, the manuscripts should be reviewed by the Readers on your Dissertation Committee (see #6 below) before submission.

4) During your last year begin **looking for post-doctoral and job opportunities**. Faculty positions are usually advertised in the Fall to interview in the Spring and begin the following Fall, and many post-doctoral fellowship applications will take six months or more to process. Plan to **present your research at a scientific meeting** to advertise your availability and learn about opportunities for after graduation. It is also highly recommended that you **submit at least one paper** to a peer-reviewed journal for publication before you graduate; your chances of being hired in a university faculty position without any publications are essentially zero.

5) **File an "Application for Graduation" with the CCAS graduate office** the semester that you plan to graduate by February 1 (Spring Semester), October 1 (Fall Semester) or July 1 (Summer Semester). The application for graduation is available on the Office of the Registrar's web sit (<http://www.gwu.edu/~regweb>). If you graduate

during the summer semester, you must register for 0 credit hours of Continuous Enrollment (CE - contact CCAS for information on registration).

6) You are expected to give a **departmental seminar** on your research before you leave. Often this is done during the last semester, before the defense.

7) Your dissertation director(s) must approve the dissertation before it begins the process of review by other members of the committee. Often this is done in individual chapters to speed things along, but the entire manuscript must be finished before being approved. The approved dissertation is first given to the two members of your committee designated as **Readers**. It will generally take them at least two weeks to read the dissertation. They will suggest corrections, and once these are made the readers and dissertation director sign off on the **Dissertation Research Committee Signoff form** that is submitted to the GA. The corrected dissertation will be given to two **Examiners** at this time (one of whom is from outside the department). The **dissertation defense is scheduled**, through the GA, no earlier than 14 days in advance and preferably one month in advance. Note that it is often difficult to find a time when all the examiners and your advisor can meet, so try to anticipate this as much as possible. You will submit an abstract of your dissertation and other information to the department secretary, who will collate it into an announcement sent to all members of the department. The first part of your defense is open to anyone who wishes to attend, but the deliberations are closed.

8) The **Dissertation Defense** will be chaired by a faculty member who will moderate the examination, and will be attended by your examiners, your dissertation director, and other members of the department. The chair will be chosen by the research advisor in consultation with the GA. You will begin the defense by giving a brief oral presentation of your work (less than 10 minutes). The examiners (but not your dissertation director/s) will then ask you questions about your research, until there are no more questions. You and the audience will then leave the room while the committee deliberates, and after it has discussed and voted the committee will inform you of its decision and any requirements it may have for changes. The committee decides either to accept the dissertation as written, accept the dissertation after revisions that they specify (the most common result), or reject the dissertation (an extremely rare occurrence). The committee then submits its results to the GA on the **Final Examination Committee Signoff form**.

9) Once you have completed any final changes to the dissertation and your dissertation director approves it by filing a **Dissertation Signoff form**, the GA will submit the **Graduation Clearance Form** to the CCAS requesting that you be cleared for graduation. All requirements must be met by January 15 (Fall Semester), April 1 (Spring Semester), or August 15 (Summer Semester) to graduate that semester. If you do not meet this deadline by the Spring semester you will not be allowed to take part in graduation ceremonies that year.

10) By the established deadline, your dissertation must be submitted electronically on the ETD web site (<http://www.gwu.edu/~etds>). The library will review

your dissertation and contact you if any revisions are needed. The dissertation will then be forwarded to CCAS who has final approval. Again, you will be contacted if any revisions are required. You must also submit to CCAS the completed ETD approval form (signed by the student and the dissertation director) and the Survey of Earned Doctorates. The Survey can be completed on line (<http://survey.norc.uchicago.edu/doctorate>) or submitted in hard copy (available from the GA). If done on line, you must send CCAS the confirmation email sent to you by NORC. You will give one copy **of the completed, unbound dissertation** to the Department, and one to your dissertation advisor. It is courteous to offer a copy of the dissertation to the other members of the examining committee, but this is not required.