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# THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

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WASHINGTON, DC

## Department of Biological Sciences

From: Gustavo Hormiga, Director of Graduate Studies (DGS)  
To: All Biology Faculty and Graduate Students  
Date: 26 June 2019

### Graduate Program Guidelines

During your studies at GW 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 graduate students and for each of the degrees, and to point out some of the opportunities available to you.

This document should be your main source of information on the rules governing your work in the department, and you should read it carefully. The CCAS Graduate Resource Guide and the CCAS Graduate Student Handbook provide an in-depth review of all of the resources, services, offices and organizations at the GW (these links will provide the main source of information on the University's rules):

<https://graduate.admissions.gwu.edu/admitted-students>

[https://columbian.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs1971/f/downloads/HANDBOOK%202017-2018\\_MastersandCerts10.04.pdf](https://columbian.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs1971/f/downloads/HANDBOOK%202017-2018_MastersandCerts10.04.pdf)

[https://columbian.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs1971/f/downloads/HANDBOOK%202017-2018\\_Doctoral\\_10.04.pdf](https://columbian.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs1971/f/downloads/HANDBOOK%202017-2018_Doctoral_10.04.pdf)

If you have any questions about the CCAS requirements that the DGS cannot answer, please contact [ccasserv@gwu.edu](mailto:ccasserv@gwu.edu) about general issues or **Katherine Conaty** ([kconaty@gwu.edu](mailto:kconaty@gwu.edu)) about assistantship and fellowship awards. **Nicole Davidson** ([nad1@gwu.edu](mailto:nad1@gwu.edu)) handles students once they advance to candidacy. You may request digital copies of nearly all of these graduate program forms by sending the DGS an email. 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 a Masters degree and 8 years for the Ph.D. degree). Your research advisor and thesis committee 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 (currently, \$1,490 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://registrar.gwu.edu/withdrawals-refunds>). 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 DGS, and after you have registered on GWEB do not make any changes in your total number of credit hours without first consulting with the DGS. Funding (TAs and Fellowships) generally comes with 18 credit hours a year, but additional credits may be available; consult the DGS.
  
- 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 this form is available on the ISO web site <https://internationalservices.gwu.edu/> which needs to be signed by the DGS and forwarded to CCAS).
  
- 4) If a medical or family emergency occurs and you must suspend your studies, you must petition for a **Leave of Absence** (two semesters total can be petitioned) filing a "Leave of Absence Application Form" that needs to be signed by the DGS. 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 in the program.
  
- 5) In December of each year the DGS will ask you to fill out a **Graduate Student Annual Report**. The report needs to be reviewed and signed by your research advisor and your committee members. The Graduate Student Annual Report should be submitted to the DGS by **February 1st every year**. 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 satisfactory

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 course there may be problems. BISC 6295 may be taken by Masters or Ph.D. students wishing to investigate a topic in more detail under the direction of a faculty member (it used to be called “graduate independent study”) 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 6998-BISC 6999 is credit earned for laboratory thesis research and 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 8998 may be taken by Ph.D. students only, and should be taken before they are advanced to candidacy (i.e., before they 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 8999 may be taken by Ph.D. 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 BISC 6295 or BISC 8998 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.

The grades for all dissertation (BISC 8999) or thesis research (BISC 6998/6999) credits are assigned by CCAS. All students receive an "IPG" until the dissertation or thesis is finished in full, when CCAS will assign a grade of "CR" (or, "NC" if it is not ultimately completed). Letter grades should not be assigned by the Department or dissertation/thesis advisor; a letter grade is not a valid grade for these credits.

7) If you are receiving funding (TA or Fellowship) you are expected to carry a full time course load and work full time on your teaching, 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 Ph.D. program may be funded for five years. A student receiving funding must have as their Research Advisor or co-Advisor a faculty member within the Department of Biological Sciences.

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 the Spring whether it is available. Please consult your research advisor about this.

10) Limited funds for attending one scientific meeting a year are available 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 \$600 a year is funded. This amount can be applied to cover expenses of more than one meeting. Please request the funding about one month BEFORE going to the meeting.

11) A non-voting **student representative**, selected by the graduate students, joins the Graduate Committee at meetings involving policy, but not at meetings involving admissions, student evaluations, or the awarding of fellowships. The graduate student representative acts as a liaison with the DGS. 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 **Consortium of Universities of the Washington Metropolitan Area** (<http://www.consortium.org/>) you must complete a Consortium registration form (<http://registrar.gwu.edu/consortium>). If you take courses at campuses outside the Consortium while you are a student at GW 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 DGS in writing or by email.

**WARNING:** It often takes longer to complete your thesis or dissertation than you expect. Even after your research advisor has made corrections it may 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://library.gwu.edu/etd>), 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.**

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## **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 0920).

2) Funding from the University is not available but you might be funded by grants from 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 (24 hours plus 6 of Thesis). 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 DGS 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 (<https://internationalservices.gwu.edu/>).

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 DGS and he/she will submit a transfer credit form to CCAS if approval is recommended. Please let the DGS 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 DGS.

2) Meet with your research advisor to decide upon the courses you will take, and file a **Program of Studies** form with the DGS. In general, you should plan to take most of your course work the first year and register for 6 hours of Thesis Research (BISC 6998-6999, 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 Program of Studies (e.g., a course is not offered), please contact the DGS 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. The thesis topic must be approved by the faculty members who will direct the thesis. All theses must have a director and a reader. If your director is outside GW and has been approved by your department, you must have a Biology faculty member serve as co-director. 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:

- i) a brief review of literature pertaining to the problem,
- ii) a statement of the hypothesis to be tested,
- iii) an outline of the methods of investigation,
- iv) a statement of how the data will be analyzed,
- v) a brief discussion of the scientific significance of the proposed research, and
- vi) a bibliography.

Upon submission of the Thesis Proposal to your graduate advisor, a copy of the proposal will be given to one biology faculty member for review. The student and the research director may suggest additional reviewers. The reviewers must report their approval or disapproval of the proposal and/or make any pertinent comments to the graduate advisor within 14 days of receipt

of the proposal. Once approved by the graduate advisor and reviewers, a **Thesis Topic Approval Form** should be filed with the DGS. In most cases, the reviewer will serve as the departmental **Reader** of the completed thesis. Major revisions of research procedures during the course of the work must be reported to the graduate advisor and approved by the faculty reviewer. Students are urged to consult with the faculty reviewer at any appropriate time.

2) Begin collecting data. 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://library.gwu.edu/etd>). 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 Form** 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. Application for graduation is now submitted through GWEB (<http://registrar.gwu.edu/online-graduation-application-instructions>). If you fail to file for graduation on time then you may not be able to graduate that semester.

2) Take the **Master's 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 exam should be no more than two hours in length. The examining committee must file a form with the DGS with the outcome. A student who does not pass the examination will be allowed one re-examination, at the discretion of the committee. If you fail a second time, no further opportunity to take the examination is permitted, and your degree candidacy is terminated.

3) Give the completed first draft of your thesis to your thesis advisor to read. He or she will make comments, and after you have made corrections give two reading copies of the draft to the DGS and the Reader. To graduate on time this must happen at least four weeks before the deadline (see #4). Any suggestions for changes should be made by the Reader within 14 days after receipt of the draft. Changes should be made to the satisfaction of thesis director and the Reader, and the draft should be resubmitted to the Reader for formal approval within one further week. Unresolved differences of opinion will be decided by the thesis director. When all corrections are made to the satisfaction of the thesis director and Reader they will file a **Masters Thesis signoff form** with the DGS.

4) The DGS 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 December 14 (Fall Semester), May 15 (Spring Semester), or August 15 (Summer Semester) to graduate that semester.

5) Submit your thesis electronically (<http://library.gwu.edu/etd>). 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 departmental seminar at the end of the 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 Master's Comprehensive Exam and finished your thesis you still must register for 1 credit hour per semester of Continuing Research (CCAS 0920, 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 1 credit hour 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 0920).

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 DGS and file a full time certification request available on the Office of the Registrar's website (<http://registrar.gwu.edu>) or if you are an international student, on the ISO web site (<https://internationalservices.gwu.edu/>).

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 DGS and he/she will submit a transfer credit form to CCAS if recommendation is approved. Please let the DGS 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 DGS.

2) Meet with the DGS, or a faculty member chosen by the DGS, to decide upon the courses you will take, and file a Program of Studies form (available from the DGS) with the DGS. 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 Program of Studies, please contact the DGS 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 Form** 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. Applications for graduation are now processed through GWEB (<http://registrar.gwu.edu/online-graduation-application-instructions>).

2) Take the **Master's Comprehensive Exam** early in the semester. The examiners include three or more faculty members chosen by the DGS 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 DGS giving the outcome. A student who does not pass the examination will be allowed one re-examination, at the discretion of the committee. If you fail a second time, no further opportunity to take the examination is permitted, and your degree candidacy is terminated.

3) The DGS 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 December 14 (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).

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## **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 0940).

2) You may be funded by the University with either a TAship or a Weintraub or King Research Fellowship. You may also be funded by grants to your research advisor. Your funding may be renewed each year based on evidence that you are making satisfactory academic progress (see #5 in the "All Students ..." section) and satisfactorily performing your 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), in addition to satisfactory academic progress. Funding is generally not possible for more than five years. Exceptions will have to be considered on a case-by-case basis and you will need to file a "Petition for Additional Funding" form with the DGS by January 15, explaining the reasons for needing further time. The form is signed by your advisor and two thesis readers.

#### First Year:

1) If you have credits from graduate courses elsewhere (e.g., a Masters degree) you must petition the CCAS for transfer credit. Please let the DGS 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 DGS.

2) In your first semester meet with your research advisor and your **General Examination Committee**, formed of three or more members in consultation with your advisor, to formulate a **Program of Studies** and give it to the DGS. The Program of Studies specifies three "Areas of Study for the General Examination." 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 Program of Studies (e.g., a course is not offered), please contact the DGS 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); often this committee includes the same members of your General Examination Committee. At the time of the final defense, you will add two 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. A minimum of 48, but no more than 60, of the 72 hours must be taken in Pre-Candidacy in preparation for the General Examination. The remainder of the 72 hours is taken in Candidacy as Dissertation Research credits, which must be taken in multiples of three. CCAS requires students to take a minimum of 6 Dissertation Research (BISC 8999) credits; exceptions

to this require the approval of the Associate Dean. 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 (up to 30 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 General Examination Committee. Each examiner contributes a question or questions to each of the three “Areas of Study for the General Examination” that were specified in the Program of Studies. The examiners read 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 DGS. If you fail the exam, you may take it only once more, at the discretion of the committee.

3) After you pass the General Examination, the DGS 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:

- i) a brief review of literature pertaining to the problem,
- ii) a statement of the questions and hypotheses to be addressed, and how these will be broken into the thesis chapters
- iii) an outline of the methods of investigation,
- iv) a statement of how the data will be analyzed,
- v) a brief discussion of the scientific significance of the proposed research, and
- vi) 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 DGS along with a copy of the proposal. The **Dissertation Research Committee** comprises your advisor(s) and at least two other researchers; although it need not be identical to the General Examination Committee, it often has the same committee members. The director or co-director must be a member of the department of Biology. 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 8999 each semester until you complete all the necessary requirements (i.e., 72 credit hours). Students are required to graduate with at least 6 credits of BISC 8999 (and no more than 24). BISC 8999 is typically taken after advancement to candidacy, but you need to make sure that you do not reach 72 credits without the required 6 credits of BISC 8999 (if that is the case, you can enroll in 8999 before advancement to candidacy so when the 72 credits are reached it includes 6 credits of BISC 8999).

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://registrar.gwu.edu>) or if you are an International Student, on the ISO web site (<https://internationalservices.gwu.edu/>). You must then register for 1 credit hour of Continuous Research (CR) each semester. The CRN for CCAS 0940 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://library.gwu.edu/etd>). 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 and 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 for publication in peer-reviewed journals as much as possible of your dissertation research before you graduate.

5) File an **Application for Graduation Form** 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). Graduation application submitted through GWEB (<http://registrar.gwu.edu/online-graduation-application-instructions>). If you graduate during the summer semester, you must register for 1 credit hour of Continuous Enrollment (CE - contact CCAS for information on registration).

6) Your dissertation director/s must approve the **dissertation** before the review process by other members of the Dissertation Research Committee begins. The review can be done in individual chapters to speed the process, but the entire dissertation manuscript must be completed before being approved by the dissertation director. The approved dissertation is first given to the two members of your committee designated as 'Readers.' It may take them one month to read the dissertation. They will make edits, suggest corrections, and once these are made the readers and dissertation director sign off on the **Dissertation Committee Thesis Approval** form that is submitted to the DGS. The corrected dissertation will be given to two 'Examiners' at this time. Examiners cannot have had a direct role in the dissertation research process. One examiner must be from within the Department of Biology, with the other examiner coming from outside of the Department. The version of the dissertation that is to be defended must be circulated to all examination committee members at least one month prior to the examination. The dissertation defense is scheduled, through the DGS, at least 14 days in advance and preferably one month in advance. You will submit an abstract of your dissertation and other relevant information (composition of examining committee, place, date and time of the defense, etc.) to the department secretary (at least two weeks ahead of the defense date), who will collate it into an announcement that will be sent to all members of the Department.

7) The **Dissertation Defense (Final Examination)** will be chaired by a faculty member who will moderate the examination, and will be attended by your examiners (including the readers), and your dissertation director. The chair will be chosen by the research advisor in consultation with the DGS. You will begin the defense by giving a departmental seminar about your dissertation work (45-60 minutes). Both the seminar and the subsequent examination are open to the public. The committee will start the examination part of the defense by discussing the procedure with the candidate out of the room. The committee deliberations (before and after the actual defense) are closed. After the seminar, 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 DGS on the **Dissertation Examination Defense Form** (See [Appendix 1](#) for a detailed description of the CCAS Ph.D. Defense procedures).

**Scheduling the Dissertation Defense.** Your dissertation defense is a key aspect of academic life. It is crucial that you attend the dissertation seminars of your colleagues, and reciprocally, that you schedule your dissertation defense at a time that will maximize attendance during the regular school year (Spring or Fall). Committee members can have travel obligations and are usually not paid by their institutions in the Summer, meaning their academic duties do not include committee work.

For these reasons, it is strongly recommended that finishing PhD and Master students schedule their Dissertation Defense on a **Friday morning at 11am during either the Spring or Fall semester**. The public presentation will be followed by the examination by the Dissertation Committee. Please contact the Director of Graduate Studies to plan and schedule your thesis defense, at least 6 months before the target date.

8) Once you have completed any final changes to the dissertation and your dissertation director approves it by filing a **Final Dissertation Committee Sign-off**, the DGS will submit the **Graduation Clearance Form** to the CCAS requesting that you be cleared for graduation. All requirements must be met by December 14 (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.

9) By the established deadline, your dissertation must be submitted electronically on the ETD web site (<http://library.gwu.edu/etd>). 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 DGS). 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.

## Appendix 1

### Columbia College of Arts and Sciences *Graduate Committee*

#### Procedures for Ph.D. Examinations *December 6, 2011*

This document lays out requirements and best practices for Ph.D. examinations in Columbia College. **Bold** text indicates Columbia College requirements.

##### *1. Construction of examination committee*

**Examination committees must be composed of at least six members, allocated in the following manner.**

- a. The dissertation committee—A director and two readers who have advised the student during the dissertation research process. It is permissible for the director to be drawn from outside of the academic unit in which the student is enrolled. **If the director is from outside of the academic unit, then the committee must also have a co-director from inside the unit.**
- b. Two examiners—**Examiners cannot have had a direct role in the dissertation research process. One examiner must be from within the academic unit, with the other examiner coming from outside of the academic unit.**
- c. The chair of the examination—The examination is chaired by a member of the academic unit in which the student is enrolled. **The chair cannot be drawn from the dissertation committee or examiners.** It is recommended that the director of graduate studies, if not an examiner or on the dissertation committee, serve as chair. The chair takes no part in the examination itself, except, if asked, to pose an introductory question to elicit an opening summary from the student.

##### *2. Pre-examination preparation*

The members of the examination committee should be chosen by the dissertation director, in consultation with the student. If there is a difference of opinion, then the director of graduate studies should get involved in the selection process.

**The version of the dissertation that is to be defended must be circulated to all examination committee members at least one month prior to the examination.**

Ph.D examinations should be announced in the academic unit at the time the dissertation is circulated to examination committee members, one month prior to the examination.

##### *3. Examination procedures*

- a. The chair of the examination assembles members of the examination committee. While the student and any observers are outside of the room, the chair discusses examination procedures with committee members. Issues that are discussed should include the

number of rounds of questioning, the order of questioning, and the time allocated for questioning. Typical practices include two rounds of questioning, the outside examiner questioning the student first, and each committee member questioning the student for 10-15 minutes per round. **The dissertation director does not participate in the questioning.**

- b. Opening the examination—The student, dissertation director, and examination chair all stand at head of table for the following introduction.

*Chair: This is a final examination for the degree of doctor of philosophy. I call on the director of the candidate's research to present the candidate.*

*Director: It is my pleasure to present [student name], who has completed all of the requirements for the degree of doctor of philosophy. [Student name] and her/his dissertation are before the committee for examination.*

- c. The student, director, and chair are seated, and the examination begins. Typically, the student provides a brief (10 minute) summary of the research question, methodology, and main findings. This presentation can be omitted if the student has already made a presented the dissertation in the academic unit.
- d. **When the questioning is completed, the student and any observers leave the room.** The dissertation director is called upon to make a case for the merits of the dissertation and the student's performance at the examination.
- e. Each examiner and dissertation committee member offers an evaluation of the dissertation and examination.
- f. The examination committee must decide (1) whether the student has passed or failed the examination and (2) if the student has passed, what revisions to the dissertation, if any, are required? **The decision to pass the dissertation and defense is reached by a majority vote.**
- g. In the event that revisions are required, the examination committee must decide which members wish to see and approve the revised dissertation, as well as the deadline by which revisions must be submitted. Ordinarily, only the dissertation director reviews the revisions, but other committee members can be involved if they wish. Regardless, the director should be given clear instructions to convey to the student regarding the nature and timing of expected revisions.
- h. Once these matters have been decided, the student and any observers are invited back into the room. The student stands with the chair of the examination at the head of table. If the student has passed, all members of the examination committee should be standing when the student re-enters the room. The chair announces the results of the examination.
- i. The dissertation director or chair of the examination reports the results of the examination to the director of graduate studies, who then completes the requisite paperwork and submits this paperwork to Columbian College.