



General guidelines and advice for graduate students In the Biology Graduate Academic Unit

Graduate Studies is very different from the undergraduate programme with which most new students are familiar. It has a separate academic calendar, regulations, and is built on a fundamentally different model of learning. The objective of this document is to clarify expectations, and assist the transition from the undergraduate to graduate programme.

I. Academic calendar.

1. The graduate academic calendar is completely separate from the undergraduate one; for example, there is no March break, no reading or exam weeks, and graduate courses may begin or end at any time.
2. The graduate programme is structured with 3 terms per year: fall, winter, and summer. You must re-register for all your continuing courses (i.e. BIOL 6000, 6913, and 6997 or 6999) and pay the required fees **each term** (i.e. three times each year) until you complete the degree requirements. Failure to do so may result in “demittance” (removal) from the graduate programme.

II. Programme structure.

1. The graduate programme is built on a mentorship (hands-on) model with few courses. The required courses (BIOL 6000, 6913, 6997 and 6999) have no tests or exams.
2. A Masters (MSc) should be completed in 2 years; a Doctorate (PhD) in 4 years. The School of Graduate Studies (SGS) has strict upper limits on times to completion which are the same whether a student is full-time or part-time.
3. Continuation in the programme is based on meeting the requirements of both the Biology GAU and the School of Graduate Studies. If any are allowed to lapse, you may be “demitted”. To be re-admitted to the programme, you would then begin at “square one” with application, and there is no guarantee of acceptance.
4. It may be useful to view the graduate programme as one big course, with a series of assignments and due dates across multiple years. You are expected to keep track of these items, to meet the requirements on time. Many of the dates can be determined months or even years in advance.

Examples: Within one month of beginning the programme, you will choose a supervisory committee and submit a *Programme of Study*; in the first year of a MSc or PhD, you will take *BIOL 6913*; in October or February of your first year in a MSc, depending on your start date, you will present a *thesis proposal*; in the second year of a MSc or PhD, you will present a *critical review seminar in BIOL 6000*.

III. Financial support.

1. Unlike undergraduates, most graduate students will receive financial support from some source. Typically, these include:
 - a. Graduate Teaching Assistantship (GTA) – from SGS; paid employment to assist with teaching labs or marking;
 - b. Graduate Research Assistantships (GRA) – from SGS, like a scholarship to work on thesis, i.e. no expectation of work other than thesis project;
 - c. Graduate Academic Assistantship (GAA) – from non-SGS source, e.g. NSERC scholarship, supervisor’s grant funds; like a scholarship, i.e. no expectation of work other than thesis project;
 - d. Research Assistantship (RA) – supervisor’s funding, employment to work on project other than thesis (rarely used by Biology).

GRA and GAA are not salaries.

2. Typically, all but scholarships continue for two years (MSc student) or four years (PhD student), and cannot be extended. (This is a good reason to finish your degree on time!)
3. You may have your tuition fees automatically deducted from your payments over the course of a year. This must be arranged through Student Accounts and Receivable Services using the [Fee Deduction form](#); email gradfees@unb.ca for further information.
4. You may track your payments and deductions on-line, using E-services. You are responsible for verifying that you are receiving the correct amounts. If you are overpaid by mistake, you will be required to pay it back.
5. *Graduate Teaching Assistantships (GTA)*.
 - a. The Director of Graduate Studies (DoGS) will distribute a list of courses needing TAs, to determine instructor needs and your level of expertise in each, and draw up a tentative assignment of TAs to courses for each term. These are subject to final approval by the Chair of the Department.
 - b. For each TA assignment, you and the course instructor will draw up an agreement as to your duties that totals no more than 104 hours per term (52 hrs per course over 12 or 13 wks).
 - c. You will be evaluated on your Teaching Assistantship. Poor performance will result in loss of future Teaching Assistantships (and funding from that source).

IV. **Time commitment.** The work schedule for graduate studies is much more intense and demanding than an undergraduate programme, and largely determined by the research project itself. It is very important to discuss the requirements of the project with your supervisor, and the work schedule that it will entail, to be sure that it is doable.

1. The time commitment of a graduate programme is at least the equivalent of a full time job, i.e. 36.25 hrs per week, over 5 days per week, is rarely enough to complete a degree within the time allotted.
2. Because research project demands, circumstances, and student skills and efficiency vary tremendously, the best guidelines for setting an appropriate workday/week are:

- a. productivity. You will need to work as much time as it takes to meet the milestones and deadlines set by the programme and your supervisor.
- b. flexibility. Some projects may require flexibility in your schedule (e.g. weekend work, early morning or late night work). This should be discussed with your supervisor to reach an agreement on what is required, understanding that a period of hard work and long hours may be followed by a more relaxed period.
- c. time to completion. Both internal and external forces set limitations on the duration of a graduate degree programme. (The GAU has set guidelines intended to have a MSc completed in 2 yrs and a PhD in 4 yrs.)

V. **Vacation/Time off.** While graduate students (as all academics) are normally expected to work as much as is needed, rather than "by the clock", everyone needs an occasional rest. What constitutes "vacation time", and the allowable duration of a vacation, must be discussed with your supervisor, to reach a consensus on your mutual expectations.

1. NSERC scholarship holders are expected to follow the policies of their institution.
 2. There is no UNB-level policy, but the Biology GAU recommends that each student be allowed a minimum of the equivalent of statutory holidays plus 10 working days of vacation plus those days that the university is closed.
 3. Vacation time cannot be accumulated/carried over from year to year.
 4. Vacation time does not include medical or dental appointments, travel to/from conferences, or other professional activities.
 5. Whatever policy is used, any vacation time must:
 - a. not interfere with teaching and research responsibilities, and
 - b. be approved by the supervisor in advance.
- ➔ Vacation plans should therefore be discussed with supervisors and course coordinators well in advance.
6. *Leave of absence.* If a longer period of time away from the thesis is required, students may apply to the School of Graduate Studies (with the Supervisor's permission) for a leave of absence. During a leave of absence, a student is not required to register, no fees are assessed, and the time granted is not counted in the maximum time period permitted for the completion of a graduate degree. Furthermore, the student is NOT expected to work on his/her thesis research, and Revenue Canada does not grant student status for taxation. As per existing SGS regulations, a student may normally apply for only one leave of absence during a degree program and normally a leave of absence will not exceed 12 months.

VI. **Academic integrity.** Honesty and transparency are arguably two foundations of science. You are expected to learn about professional ethics through your interactions with your supervisor, as well as in parts of BIOL 6913.

1. Data must be collected and presented accurately.

2. Written work must be original. Plagiarism includes any use of intellectual property (ideas, words, organization, illustrations) without explicit citation of the source. See [Academic integrity](#).

TIPS

1. Discuss expectations (especially time commitment and vacation time) with your supervisor at the start of your degree, and record your agreement on the GAU expectations form.
2. Time management is one of the most important skills you can develop – and lack of it can cause the biggest headaches! The following tips address this skill.
3. Plan to work long days and at least part of most weekends.
4. Clarify milestones and their deadlines for GAU requirements. Be proactive in meeting them, i.e. don't wait for reminders. For example, you are expected to hold supervisory committee meetings and submit progress reports twice each year, in May and December.
5. Regularly review and clarify milestones and deadlines set by your supervisor.
6. Be realistic about timelines. Note that writing the thesis and preparing it for the defence take much longer than most students estimate, generally at least one full semester after data collection and analysis are complete. Similarly, the final stages of thesis examination take longer than most students expect, and they cannot be “expedited” to meet individual schedules.
7. Do not plan vacation times or book flights without first consulting your supervisor and the coordinators for any courses in which you are registered -- well in advance.
8. Keep track of your financial support. Record the amount you expect to receive as e.g. Teaching or Research Assistantships, the date of the final payment for the term, and your biweekly payments – and budget accordingly. (If you are * overpaid* you will be required to repay the extra.)

Approved by Biology GAU, July 2012