

Biology Master of Science Timeline and Checklist**

Giant Steps to Completing the MS Degree

First/Second Semesters

1. **Selection of a Faculty Mentor/Advisor.** Should occur either during the application process or before the end of the first semester. The major advisor must be able and willing to mentor the student and is someone who will counsel the student on their Plan of Study, development of a thesis project, and pursuit of career goals.
2. **Selection of Thesis Committee.** The student, in consultation with the major advisor, should form a Thesis Committee no later than the end of the second semester. See Biology Handbook for policies regarding the composition of the committee. Once the Thesis Committee has been formed, the student should schedule a meeting with the committee **as soon as possible**. This meeting should involve discussion of the planned thesis research, the Plan of Study, and career goals.
3. **Plan of Study (POS).** The **Coursework Summary/POS Form** must be filed with The Graduate School **prior to completion of 15 credit hours** (i.e. 50% of program completion). This form can be found in the Biology Graduate Handbook and must be approved by the Thesis Committee and the Director of Graduate Studies before submission to the Graduate School. Note that extension credits (e.g. BIO 801 and 803) cannot be included in the POS and do not count toward completion of the degree requirements.
4. **Thesis Proposal Presentation and Defense.**
 - Should be held by the end of the second semester, but not later than the end of the third semester if necessary. The thesis proposal should not occur during the same semester as the final thesis defense. Summer proposals are strongly discouraged.
 - The proposal document must be submitted to committee members at least one week prior to the proposal presentation and defense meeting.
 - The proposal title and date must be advertised to the Biology Department (via email and flyer) no later than one week before the defense.
 - Bring the **Thesis Proposal Presentation and Meeting Approval Page** (See Biology Graduate Handbook) to the meeting. After committee member signatures have been collected, forward the form to the Director of Graduate Studies for approval. Copies will

then be filed with the Graduate School and the Department of Biology.

- If the proposal defense is the first meeting of the Thesis Committee, the committee should discuss the Plan of Study and, if approved, sign the **The Coursework Summary/POS Form**.

Third Semester

5. **Submit Annual Report:** Students will submit a report detailing their research and academic progress during the preceding year and proposing a plan of action for the current year. The **Annual Report Form** can be found in the Biology Graduate Handbook and is due each year by noon on the first Friday of September.
6. **Complete Lecture-Based Coursework.** By the end of the third semester, all formal coursework should be completed (not including BIO 695 and BIO 699) .
7. **Thesis Proposal Presentation and Defense.** Must be completed no later than the end of the third semester. **The thesis proposal should not occur during the same semester as the final thesis defense.** Summer proposals are strongly discouraged. See Item 4 of Year 1 for more information.

Fourth Semester

8. If necessary, changes to the Thesis Committee and/or the Plan of Study can be made by submitting a revised **Coursework Summary/POS Form** (Biology Graduate Handbook) to the Director of Graduate Studies for approval and then submission to the Graduate School. The revised plan of study must be submitted to The Graduate School by the end of the third week of classes of the semester in which the student applies for graduation.
9. **Application for Graduation.** Is always due by the end of the first week of classes of the semester in which the student plans to graduate. Students should visit the Graduate School [Website](#) to view all pertinent information regarding graduation.
10. **Thesis Document.** Students must submit a complete draft of the thesis document to the Major Advisor for review. It is the advisor's role to determine when the written thesis is acceptable and defensible. Students should expect multiple revisions. The thesis must be sent to the rest of the Thesis Committee **no later than one week prior to the scheduled defense**. Students who fail to meet this deadline will not be allowed to defend in that semester. Help with thesis preparation can be found at the Graduate School's **Electronic Thesis or Dissertation (ETD) Site** and the **Guide to Theses and Dissertations (PDF)**.
11. **Schedule the Thesis Defense.** In consultation with the Thesis Committee, the student will schedule the thesis defense. The defense title and date must be advertised to the Biology

Department (via email and flyer) **no later than one week before the defense**. Summer defenses are strongly discouraged.

12. **The Thesis Defense**. The thesis defense begins with a presentation of the thesis research that is open to the university community. After a period of questioning open to all in attendance, a closed session will be held in which thesis committee members ask the student questions related to the thesis research and its intellectual foundations. The committee will then deliberate to assess the performance of the student with three possible outcomes: acceptance, provisional acceptance, and rejection.

The student should bring a copy of the **Final Thesis Acceptance Approval Page** (see Appendix of Biology Graduate Handbook) to be signed by the thesis committee, and then by the Director of Graduate Studies, before forwarding to the Graduate School.

28. **File one approval copy of thesis**. The process for submitting the approval copy of the thesis to the Graduate School has two components: submitting the approval and title pages (requires signatures), and electronically submitting the document - see **Electronic Thesis or Dissertation (ETD) [site](#)** and the Graduation [site](#) for deadlines and other valuable information.
29. **File FINAL copy of the thesis with the Graduate School**. After completing the formatting revisions requested by the Graduate School, submit the FINAL electronic copy of the thesis. Failure to meet the submission [deadline](#) will delay graduation until the following semester.
30. **Return your keys** or you will not be able to get your transcripts or diploma.
31. **Attend Graduation**. There, you may thank and celebrate with your thesis advisor, committee members, family, and friends.

**** This document provides guidelines for making progress on the degree. However, it is the absolute responsibility of the student to be aware of and follow the policies and procedures detailed in both the [Biology Graduate Handbook](#) and the [University Catalog](#). Moreover, it is the responsibility of the student to be aware of and to meet all deadlines associated with the degree requirements (see [Graduate School Calendar](#)). Finally, continued Departmental support is contingent on the student meeting, in a timely fashion, benchmarks that are listed here and detailed in the Biology Graduate Handbook.**