

Memorandum of Understanding

Graduate Student Academic and Financial Responsibilities

Graduate education is supported by the University at many levels, including the Graduate School, the individual colleges, departments, and graduate training programs. Faculty advisors and thesis advisory committee members guide graduate student training and development. In the BioMolecular Sciences, students are expected to spend the majority of their time on independent research projects, after completion of introductory coursework, laboratory rotations, and in most cases a teaching experience. The provision of adequate financial support for these students is an essential foundation that allows students to make timely progress in their research. When not teaching, students are funded from faculty funds. In some cases, students are supported from training grants or independent pre-doctoral grants.

Students entering the BioMolecular Sciences (BMS) Umbrella program have the flexibility to choose six graduate programs: BMB, PSL, MMG, PHM/TOX, CMB, and GEN, and are able to join research laboratories of BMS participating faculty located in units across the university or the Van Andel Institute. BMS-participating faculty must be tenure stream primary or joint appointees in the BMB, PSL, MMG, or PHM/TOX departments or members of the CMB or GEN programs. Faculty at VARI must be adjunct appointees in the BMB, PSL, MMG, or PHM/TOX departments. Often, the student's graduate program will be different from the advisor's department.

The responsibility for financial support of students is primarily that of the Ph.D. mentor, who should accept a student only when suitable funds are in place to support that student. A teaching experience is an important component of graduate student training, however supporting a student primarily on teaching assistantships is not a good foundation for research productivity and progress in the graduate program. In cases where funds for student support run out, the primary responsibility for financing the stipend and tuition of the student rests with the Ph.D. mentor's department, because the success of the faculty member's research directly impacts that department. If a faculty member has a joint appointment in two departments, the support will follow the percentage appointment, with a minimum of 20% share, even if the appointment is less than 20% (includes adjunct and 0% appointment). The total support from one or more departments will represent 75% of costs. The degree-granting program will cover the remaining 25% share of the total cost until the time when the mentor/mentee recovers funding. The program support for the student may be in the form of TA-ship, RA-ship, or fellowship. This arrangement requires that departments be aware of students from various graduate programs and departments who are working in the laboratories of their faculty, as it represents a clear financial responsibility to that student.

Departmental and interdepartmental graduate programs, with the Graduate School, are responsible for supporting scientific development of their students. These activities include suitable curricular offerings, provision of required TA opportunities, and professional training opportunities. In addition, the programs are responsible for establishing and supporting thesis committees and tracking their regular interactions with the student, overall student progress, and guidance through the qualifying exam. Monitoring progress to ensure that training milestones are being met is ultimately the responsibility of the graduate director for the trainee's program. The thesis advisor is expected to maintain regular communication with the graduate director to advise on progress. Programs are responsible for helping students obtain an optimal training environment, and identifying situations that may hinder progress to the degree. If a student needs to switch laboratories, the graduate student's program will work to identify suitable resources to support the transition, if necessary with the support of the Colleges and the Graduate School.

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Agreeing to supervise a Ph.D. student is a commitment of a significant investment of time and resources. Faculty mentors and guidance committee members are responsible for close supervision of students to ensure their timely progress in the Ph.D. program, including attendance at guidance committee meetings, qualifying exam presentations, and Ph.D. defense.

Agreement and signing of this document is a pre-requisite for any training relationship to proceed, and the document should be revisited annually. This agreement is valid for four years from the date of the earliest signature unless it is replaced by a new one. The agreements will be kept by the graduate program of the student.

SIGNATURES

Student Name:

Signature:

Date:

Faculty Advisor:

Signature:

Date:

Director of Student's Graduate Program:

Signature:

Date:

Chair of Advisor's Department:

Signature:

Date:

**Chair of Department from
student's graduate program (not for Genetics or CMB students):**

Signature:

Date: