



GRADUATE  
BIOMEDICAL  
SCIENCES

RESEARCH BUILDING

**2023-2024  
GBS  
HANDBOOK**

# ASSOCIATE DEAN'S WELCOME MESSAGE

*Dr. David Schneider*



Congratulations and welcome to Graduate Biomedical Sciences (GBS) at UAB. I am pleased to have you join our community of scholars on the journey toward discovery. GBS is dedicated to nurturing the curiosity of our students and equipping them with the skills to drive biomedical research forward in our state, in our country, and beyond.

My primary goal as Associate Dean is to encourage our ongoing pursuit of excellence in scholarship and research. This handbook is provided to assist you in these endeavors. In addition, GBS staff members are always on hand to support you during your transition into and through the program.

During your journey, I encourage you to take advantage of the many opportunities offered within GBS, UAB, and Birmingham. Our interdisciplinary program is designed to expose students to a wide range of experiences. In addition, we value a commitment to service as well as personal and professional development as part of your scholarly activities. We look forward to supporting your academic, professional, and personal success during your training at the University of Alabama at Birmingham and for years to come.

## DISCLAIMER

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This handbook is an overview of general academic regulations specific to the GBS program at UAB. Although UAB will make its best efforts to abide by this handbook, UAB reserves the right to interpret and apply its procedures and policies, and to deviate from these guidelines, as appropriate in the particular circumstances and in accordance with the mission and goals of the program. UAB also reserves the right to address issues not covered in this handbook and to make changes to the policy without advance notice. Changes become effective at the time the proper authorities determine so and the changes apply to both prospective students and those already enrolled. Please refer to the GBS website ([uab.edu/gbs](http://uab.edu/gbs)) for the most up-to-date version. For more complete and detailed information regarding UAB's academic regulations, see the UAB Graduate Catalog ([catalog.uab.edu/graduate](http://catalog.uab.edu/graduate)).

All students are responsible for knowing and abiding by the general University rules and regulations pertaining to graduate study at UAB and the specific academic requirements of their particular degree program. This handbook is not intended to nor does it contain all policies or regulations applicable to students. Each student is responsible for familiarizing themselves with the contents of this handbook.

Although the policies contained herein are intended to reflect current rules and policies of the University, users are cautioned that changes or additions may have become effective since the publication of this material. In the event of a conflict, current statements of Board policy contained in the Bylaws, Rules, official minutes, and other pronouncements of the Board or Chancellor, or superseding law, shall prevail.

This handbook does not constitute a contract and may not be deemed or construed as part of any contract between UAB and any student or student representative.

## EQUAL OPPORTUNITY & NON-DISCRIMINATION STATEMENT

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UAB is committed to providing an environment that is free of sex discrimination, sexual harassment, and sexual violence. If you have been the victim of sex discrimination, sexual harassment, or sexual violence as defined by UAB's Title IX Sex Discrimination, Sexual Harassment, and Sexual Violence Policy, we encourage you to file a report or formal complaint. UAB provides several avenues for reporting. For more information about Title IX, policy, reporting, protections, resources, and supports, please visit the Title IX website ([uab.edu/titleix](http://uab.edu/titleix)).

UAB also prohibits, and will not tolerate, discrimination in admission, educational programs, and other student matters on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, national origin, disability unrelated to program performance, veteran status, or genetic or family medical history. Complaints by any applicant or student who has reason to think he or she has been affected by discrimination will be considered through appropriate established procedures. For more information, please see the Equal Opportunity and Discriminatory Harassment policy ([uab.edu/policies](http://uab.edu/policies)).

UAB is committed to providing an accessible learning experience for all students. If you are a student with a disability that qualifies under Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and you require reasonable accommodations, please contact Disability Support Services for information on accommodations, registration and procedures. Requests for reasonable accommodations involve an interactive process and consist of a collaborative effort among the students, DSS, faculty, and staff. If you are registered with Disability Support Services, please contact the GBS office to discuss reasonable accommodations that may be necessary in this program. If you have a disability but have not contacted Disability Support Services, please call 205-934-4205 or visit the DSS website ([uab.edu/dss](http://uab.edu/dss)).

# UAB GRADUATE SCHOOL

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GBS is an interdisciplinary and interdepartmental umbrella PhD program under the UAB Graduate School.

## MISSION

*Inspiring minds today to transform tomorrow*

## VISION

*Improving lives through the accomplishments of our scholars*

### CORE VALUE 1

We value an academically excellent learning environment.

### CORE VALUE 2

We value and celebrate diversity, equity, and inclusion.

### CORE VALUE 3

We value a student-centered learning environment.

# PROGRAM INTRO

UAB offers a tremendous, diverse community of scientists focused on innovation in modern biomedicine. As evidence of the excellence and innovation of the research community, UAB is routinely ranked among the top research-intensive universities for extramural funding and research productivity. The thrill of discovery is evident across campus.

The Graduate Biomedical Sciences (GBS) interdisciplinary themes are designed to provide our trainees with rigorous, interdisciplinary education and mentorship in a wide array of scientific disciplines, ranging from the study of fundamental cellular processes to translational therapeutic strategies. GBS trainees can perform their doctoral research in more than 350 different labs across UAB's campus. Because of the scale of GBS and the number of affiliated faculty, GBS is subdivided into eight individual themes, based on scientific disciplines. Students enter with a chosen theme but have the opportunity to switch themes. These themes provide discipline-specific training and opportunities for smaller-scale connections within the overall community.

The eight GBS themes are:

- Biochemistry and Structural Biology
- Cancer Biology
- Cell, Molecular, and Developmental Biology
- Genetics, Genomics, and Bioinformatics
- Immunology
- Microbiology
- Neuroscience
- Pathobiology, Pharmacology, and Physiology

Our students capitalize on UAB's research team that includes many of the nation's top principal investigators. UAB is consistently listed in the top 25 in the nation on U.S. News & World Report's list of "America's Best Graduate Schools". UAB is the only Alabama university recognized by the Carnegie Foundation for both "highest research activity" and "community engagement." As a measure of this scientific excellence, UAB attracts over \$700 million per year in extramural grant support and ranks in the top 20 in the nation in National Institutes of Health (NIH) grant support among the 125 accredited medical schools in the USA.

GBS seeks to provide our students with all of the resources they need to cultivate excellence in their careers, irrespective of individual goals or aspirations. We take advantage of the exceptional research capacity of our community, the commitment of our faculty to excellence in mentorship, and modern, flexible methods for educating young professionals in advanced scientific topics. We realize that the decision to pursue a PhD in science is serious. Each trainee in our program has a different goal or dream. Our mission is to help each student reach those goals, to the best of their ability.

## COMPETENCIES

GBS offers a wide array of courses, seminars, journal clubs, research opportunities, and professional development opportunities that are designed to support the growth and development of our students. The following list consists of desirable competencies for our students to achieve while in GBS.

- Content-Specific Conceptual Knowledge
- Critical Thinking and Data Evaluation
- Quantitative Analysis
- Research Skill Development
- Communication Skills
- Professionalism
- Leadership & Management Skills
- Career Exploration and Preparation
- Personal Development
- Responsible Conduct of Research

## MISSION

*Driving biomedical discovery through interdisciplinary training and innovative research*

## VISION

*Demonstrating world-class excellence in all areas of biomedical research through the achievements of our students.*

## **ACADEMICS & REGISTRATION**

Curricular requirements can be found on the theme-specific checklists and student's GPS audits. Students are expected to be aware of their academic standing at all times. GBS highly recommends that students review their academic records through their GPS audits in BlazerNet and transcripts each semester. If problems are identified, contact the GBS Curriculum Manager.

Each student is required to register for 9 hours per semester. Students must notify GBS Curriculum Manager prior to making any registration changes to avoid incurring unexpected costs. Any courses over 9 hours must be documented and approved by the mentor and GBS Curriculum Manager. Students are required to be registered for at least one hour of GBS research credit each semester, either lab rotations, non-dissertation research, or dissertation research. If a student plans to leave their position prior to the end of the final semester, the student may complete the Final Semester Registration Adjustment form to determine the appropriate registration hours for correct stipend and tuition payment.

***GBS registration deadlines: Fall- July 1, Spring- December 1, Summer- May 1***

Students are responsible for registering for classes on time, even if they are not on campus. Incomplete or inappropriate registration can affect stipend distribution and may result in the student paying tuition and fees. If a student needs to withdraw from a class or make any changes to the course schedule after the registration date, please notify the GBS Curriculum Manager. Failure to do so may result in the student being responsible for tuition payment, late fees, etc.

## **FIRST-YEAR REQUIREMENTS**

All students are required to complete first-year fall core courses (GBS 707, 708, and 709) focused on the fundamentals of biomedical science as well as GBS 701, focused on core concepts in research pertaining to critical thinking and error analysis. All students are required to complete four spring semester modules. Reference theme checklists for recommendations and requirements by each theme. Themes may require additional courses within the first year.

Courses outside of GBS required curriculum are not allowed for students within their first 4 semesters in the program, unless approved by the GBS Curriculum Manager. Once a student joins a lab, classes outside of GBS may be taken at the discretion of the mentor.

A letter grade of "C" or below is considered a failing grade. If a student does not pass any one of the three core courses or four spring modules, they will be required to retake that course. If a passing grade is not obtained in the second attempt, the student will be dismissed from GBS. Three failing grades in any combination of first-year courses or rotations will result in dismissal from GBS. Dismissal will be effective at the end of the semester. Students may have the opportunity to appeal the dismissal. See "Appeal Process" for further information.

## LAB ROTATIONS

Research rotations provide an opportunity for each student to experience the research environment in several different labs. These experiences are critical for choosing an appropriate lab/mentor for one's dissertation work. All students receive instructions on best practices for successful lab rotations at orientation and are encouraged to work with the Theme Director(s) concerning selecting lab rotations.

Students must complete at least three lab rotations in three different labs prior to joining a dissertation lab\* in order to receive stipend support. First-year students must begin rotations as soon as they join the program. Students are expected to complete the Lab Rotation Verification Form prior to the start of each rotation. The decision to join a lab is by mutual agreement between the student and mentor, with approval by the mentor's department chair. No later than 10 days after the end of a lab rotation, the student and the mentor complete and submit the appropriate GBS mentor lab rotation evaluation form to document the lab rotation experience.

If the student does not have an agreement for a lab rotation within the first 10 days of the rotation period, the student is to provide documentation of circumstances related to this situation to the theme director(s).

All students completing their first year in GBS are expected to present a poster on one of their lab rotations at the GBS Symposium. The Symposium is an opportunity to showcase the research and achievements of GBS students and to give first-year students an opportunity to practice presentation and discussion of their research.

\*A student may join a lab after two rotations if the student can document that they have extensive research experience prior to joining GBS. To forego the third rotation, the student must have identified a lab to join and discussed the options with their Theme Director(s). Students will be expected to complete the [Rotation Waiver Form](#) to document approval between all parties

## ADDITIONAL ROTATIONS

While GBS highly encourages students to secure a permanent lab by the end of their third rotation, the GBS academic calendar is designed to accommodate four lab rotations within the fall and spring semesters for first-year students. If a student cannot identify a permanent lab after these four rotations, the student may begin a shorter series of 4-week lab rotations designed to rapidly identify a proper mentor and student match. A student will be allowed up to three additional lab rotations for seven total possible rotations. The additional rotations are expected to begin on the following working day from the previous rotation. For these rotations, students are expected to complete the Additional Rotation Form prior to the start of the rotation.

Students who are not placed in a dissertation lab at the end of the fourth GBS rotation period must schedule a meeting with the Theme Director(s) and GBS representative. This meeting will result in a plan tailored to the student's specific needs and will be designed to assist the student in selecting potential lab rotations that are more likely to result in a dissertation lab for the student. The plan will be based on a review of the student and mentor lab rotation evaluation forms from each of the student's previous lab rotations; results of discussions concerning the learning/work environment best suited for the student's success in the GBS program and how this relates to various laboratories of interest to the student; and input related to observations of the Theme Director(s) based on the student's experience in the program to date.

Each rotation with the potential new mentor is approximately four weeks in length. Thus, the maximum total time available for additional rotations is twelve weeks. Stipend and tuition support is not guaranteed if a student cannot identify a lab after all seven rotations.

# **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

## **ADVANCED COURSES**

At least three advanced courses are required for students in all GBS themes. Approved advanced courses are listed on the GBS Coursework page. Each theme may require more than three advanced courses, particularly if the advanced courses taken are listed for fewer than three credit hours each. Students are expected to coordinate advanced course expectations with their mentor(s) and committee members.

Advanced courses can be offered off-campus, such as those offered for students in labs outside of UAB, by Cold Spring Harbor or AAI Advance Immunology Course or by other UAB departments. In order for a student to receive credit for a 2-hour course, off-campus course, or non-GBS course as advanced course credit, the student must complete the Advanced Course Verification Form. If a student plans to enroll in an off-campus course, they must register for either GBSC 737 VTA (Advanced Course), GBSC 737 VTB (Journal Club), or GBSC 737 VTC (Seminar). Students may only complete one off-campus course without mentor and theme approval.

Completion of the course with a grade of “B” or better is required to count toward the advanced courses requirement. The three advanced courses have to be 700-level classes with letter grades assigned (not pass/fail) to count toward this requirement. Other courses, such as 500 or 600 level classes, can be taken for graduate credit, but they will not count toward the three advanced course requirement.

## **JOURNAL CLUBS**

All GBS students are required to register and attend journal clubs in the fall and spring semesters, past the first year. Journal club courses help students develop competency in several areas: fundamental understanding of modern research topics, scientific writing, critical evaluation of research findings, and oral presentation skills.

## **SEMINARS/THEME MEETINGS**

All GBS students are required to register and attend theme meetings and/or seminars in the fall and spring semesters, past the first year. Seminar/theme meeting requirements help students develop competency in fundamental understanding of modern research topics and oral presentation skills.

## **OTHER REQUIREMENTS**

All GBS students are required to complete training in biostatistics, scientific-communication/grant-writing, and ethics (GRD 717), in addition to completing research requirements in the lab each semester.

# COMMITTEE

All student committees are to be composed of at least five faculty members who maintain UAB Graduate Faculty Status and GBS Faculty Affiliation. If the student has two co-mentors who are scientifically involved in the project, the committee must have at least six members. Graduate students' dissertation committees are expected to be set up by the beginning of the second year. All committee members, including the chair, are selected by the student and mentor. For committee meetings, including the qualifying exam and dissertation defense, the majority of the committee must be present. The chair must be present at each meeting. In instances with more than one committee member outside of the institution, the student must seek their approval.

## MENTOR

The mentor is an important member of the committee and can freely participate in all regular committee meetings, but the mentor does not participate in the qualifying exam. The mentor may attend (to take notes and provide advice later), but cannot participate or answer exam questions from the student or the committee. In cases where factual interpretations are important for progress of the meeting, committee members may ask the mentor for clarification of a point. The mentor is not required to attend the exam. In cases where the mentor prefers to be absent during the examination, the committee of at least 4 faculty members will conduct the exam and inform the student of their performance.

In the event that a mentor leaves the institution, the student will work with the GBS Office to coordinate the transition process. Students will be expected to assign an active UAB faculty co-mentor if the student remains at UAB following the mentor's departure.

All new mentors will be expected to identify a senior co-mentor from the UAB faculty for the first mentee in the lab.

## QE COMMITTEE CHAIR

A committee chair for the qualifying exam will be selected by the student in consultation with the mentor and potentially other leaders within the program. The mentor cannot serve as chair. The committee chair will serve as the primary point of communication between the student and the committee members for both the oral and written portions of the exam (relaying decisions such as pass, fail, or required modifications). It is the student's responsibility to communicate with the chair of the committee and confirm their willingness to serve in that role. The GBS program will provide a description of duties/expectations to the chair and all committee members as soon as the dates of the exam are set.

# QUALIFYING EXAM (QE)

## TIMING

Since fellowship applications are more competitive when students have completed their qualifying exams, it is suggested students follow the dates below for completion of written and oral portions of the exam during their second year. This is a suggested timeline, but there will be variability between students in actual dates of accomplishment. Students who require additional time to prepare can complete the exam later; however, this delay may negatively impact fellowship and T32 applications.

**March 31:** Turn in written proposal to all committee members

**April 30:** Committee members return comments to student

**May 31:** Oral defense completed\*

\*The mentor and mentee should discuss tentative timing of the QE in agreement with either the QE chair and committee members. Once a tentative timeline is chosen, the student will fill out the QE scheduling form, which will alert all members of the committee about the timeline and expectations of committee members. Deviation from this schedule is allowed, for example, if extensive changes need to be made to the written document, preventing completion of the oral exam.

# QUALIFYING EXAM (QE)

## WRITTEN PROPOSAL

Students are to submit a written proposal to their committee (F31 format = 1 title page, 1 aims page, 6 pages of research strategy. In addition, the student will provide an updated biosketch and career goals). Mentors can provide general guidance and structure for the student during the writing process, but the student cannot mimic or copy the mentor's proposals. This is an original proposal, by the student.

The schedule allows at least 30 days for complete review of the written proposal. Each committee member (excluding the mentor) submits a written NIH-style critique of the proposal to the committee chair. Importantly, this critique is focused on the strengths and weaknesses of the written proposal. Only significance, investigators, and approach will be scored. Rather than a numerical score, each committee member will choose one of three options: 1) Pass without revision, 2) Revise and submit a response to reviewer's criticism, 3) Rewrite and resubmit both a response and revised proposal for full review. In addition to the NIH style critique, the committee member can provide a marked-up version of the proposal (electronically or hard copy) to aid the student in revision.

The chair of the committee will collect the evaluations. In the event that a unanimous decision is not reached, the chair will discuss the written document with committee members (in person or electronically, depending on the preference of the committee) and reach a mutually agreeable decision (pass, revise, or fail). If a response to critiques is requested, the student will have two weeks to submit this document. The response is limited to two pages in length. If a re-write is required (in sum or in part) the committee will determine the time allotted for the re-write, pending the amount of revision required. It is expected that the time required to re-write will be less than four weeks, at the committee's discretion. If the revised document is unacceptable to a majority of the panel, this will be recorded as a "fail". At this point, the mentor, the committee chair, the theme director, and the student will meet and create a timeline for repeating the process. The timeline will be written and agreed upon by all parties. A second failure of the process will result in dismissal from the program. Students may have the opportunity to appeal the dismissal. See "Appeal Process" for further information.

The written and oral portions of the exam are independent of one another; however, the first evaluation of the written portion must be completed by the committee and responses returned to the student at least 1 week prior to the oral exam. This ensures that the student has sufficient time to adjust the oral presentation and the committee is informed of the details of the proposal. A committee member may choose to withhold certain criticisms of the written work from his/her written critique, in order to address this issue in the oral defense. However, major concerns (e.g. "fatal flaws") evident in the written portion must be described to the student prior to the oral defense.

## ORAL DEFENSE

The format of the presentation is tailored around the major features of a research proposal: What is the question being addressed? Why is this question significant? What research aims will be examined to address this question? The student should respond to any major shortcomings identified in the committee's critiques of the written proposal during the oral exam. Since this is an exam, the committee is expected to ask questions relevant to the project but also relevant to general knowledge for a modern scientist. The committee is encouraged to ask questions probing experimental design and creative concepts. The student is evaluated on their ability to think and reason, not simply understand their project.

After completion of the defense, the committee will hold a closed session to discuss the performance. There are three possible outcomes: 1) Pass without exception, 2) Pass with additional requirements (for example a certain course or training module can be required to fill an area or need, or certain sections of the oral defense can be redone) or 3) Fail and re-schedule. In the closed door discussion, the committee chair must work to reach a resolution acceptable to all committee members. The mentor can participate in this discussion to provide insight to the committee, but if a vote is taken, the mentor will abstain. The result of the meeting will be recorded on the GBS Qualifying Exam form, and this form will be signed by each committee member and delivered to the GBS office within two business days. In the event of a failure, the student is permitted one more attempt at the oral defense. A second failure will result in dismissal from the program. Students may have the opportunity to appeal the dismissal. See "Appeal Process" for further information.

*Additional information can be found in the [GBS handbook](#).*

# ADMISSION TO CANDIDACY

Admission to candidacy is an important transition during doctoral education. Advancement into candidacy reflects completion of the first stage of training and transitioning into dissertation research. Passage of the qualifying exam is one part of this transition.

## REQUIREMENTS

- Successful completion of all first-year courses (earning a B or better)
- Completion of ethics training (e.g. GRD717)
- Successful completion of one of the approved biostatistics courses (earning a B or better)
- Completion of 48 semester hours of coursework and pre-dissertation research (see the [UAB Graduate School Policy](#) for further details and exceptions)
- Successful completion of the written qualifying exam
- Successful completion of the oral qualifying exam

The student is to verify that these requirements have been met by contacting the GBS Curriculum Manager. Once all of these milestones are achieved, the student will communicate with their theme director and committee members to verify that progress to candidacy is approved. If approved, the student will complete the admission the candidacy form for electronic approval. If the committee would like to meet to discuss research plans prior to admission to candidacy, then the student, mentor, and committee members will work to complete that meeting as soon as possible.

Upon successful completion of the requirements, the student may apply for Admission to Candidacy. This signed form must be delivered to the GBS Finance Manager. In order to register for dissertation research credits for the subsequent term, candidacy forms must be submitted and approved by the dates posted on the Graduate School website.

It is the student's responsibility to notify the GBS Finance Manager when the official admission letter is received from the Graduate School, so that the student can receive the \$1,000.00 increase in stipend.

# DISSERTATION DEFENSE

The dissertation defense is the final certification of the student's achievement of a deep, expert-level understanding of their research area as well as the ability to critically evaluate scientific concepts and develop rationale arguments supporting their positions. Over the course of the student's training and during the dissertation defense, the dissertation committee must evaluate the student's intellectual strengths as well as evaluate their growth over the course of training. The PhD degree prepares an individual for a large variety of high achieving careers, and intellectual fortitude and acuity are key areas of competency that must be developed.

Future success in research or in related areas requires proof that a scientist has been productive. In science, original research papers are the standard currency for proof of productivity. Publications are concrete demonstrations that the student has asked important questions, answered those questions convincingly and articulated those findings concisely and compelling to the public. For this reason, GBS requires that each student publish at least one "first-author" original research paper during their training. This is the minimum requirement. Most students far exceed this level of productivity. GBS expects that most students will publish two or more first-author papers and one or more collaborative works as a result of their dissertation research.

The format of the dissertation defense can vary between themes. It is the student's responsibility to be aware of the specific requirements of their theme, which may have requirements above those of the Graduate School and the general GBS requirements. The students should discuss their graduation plans and any/all theme-specific requirements with their theme director(s) well in advance of the defense. In addition, GBS provides a detailed [checklist](#) for all steps required to complete the PhD degree.

The written dissertation is a summary of the student's research and scholarship over several years. Each committee member is expected to read the dissertation prior to oral defense of the dissertation; thus, the student must deliver the written dissertation to each committee member at least 14 days prior to the oral defense. Failure to meet with deadline may result in rescheduling the oral defense.

## IMPORTANT

*It is the student's responsibility to be aware of the specific requirements of their theme, which may have requirements above those of the Graduate School and GBS Program requirements.*

# PROGRAM POLICIES

## DEFERRING ADMISSION

Students who have accepted GBS's offer of admission and wish to defer their enrollment should complete the student section of the UAB Graduate School's Request to Defer Admission form and send it to the GBS Admissions Manager with a statement on why the deferral is being requested. The request will be reviewed by the theme admissions committee for approval. Deferred students will be held to the academic expectations and financial support effective their first semester of enrollment in GBS.

Deferrals may be granted for the purposes of work, travel, military service, the pursuit of a special interest, health-related issues, etc. Students can defer up to a year, during which time they may not enroll in another college or university.

## TUTORING

Tutoring is available for first-year GBS students in the core courses (GBS 707, 708, and 709) and spring module courses, when deemed necessary. Student tutors will be chosen from GBS peers. If a student needs a tutor, please contact the GBS Curriculum Manager.

## DUAL-DEGREE PROGRAMS

GBS students have the opportunity to participate in a coordinated degree program through UAB's Collat School of Business with a Master's degree in Business Administration. Students must apply separately to the program, but upon acceptance to the PhD program, students will be automatically accepted to the Master's level program. Students are expected to receive documented approval from theme director(s) and mentor.

*Note:* Courses utilized towards fulfilling a Master's degree cannot be covered by GBS student tuition support.

## TIME LIMITATION

Students are generally expected to complete their program in fewer than seven years from the date of admission to the doctoral program unless an exception is granted by the Theme Director(s) and Dean of the Graduate School at the request of the student and with approval of the mentor. Students requesting to stay in the program longer than 7 years must have an approved completion plan.

## COMPLETION PLAN

A "Completion Plan" should include specific goals and specific deadlines for meeting those goals, as well as prescribed consequences if the goals are not met within the proposed deadline time points. The plan should include a stipulation that the student will meet with their committee to review progress at each of the proposed deadline times. It is recommended that the time intervals between proposed committee meetings be no longer than three months.

The plan should be incorporated into a written document, signed by the student, by their advisor, and by the Theme Director(s). The plan must be submitted to the Graduate School Dean for review and approval.

# PROGRAM POLICIES

## CHANGE IN THEME

Students have the opportunity to change themes once they are admitted to the GBS program. Students are expected to discuss the request with the prior theme director(s) and new theme director(s) before filing. Once an appropriate plan is finalized (including appropriate coursework), the student may complete the Graduate School's Change of Graduate Program form for final approval.

## LEAVE

### Approved Time Away

Students in GBS are full time and stipend supported. Due to this trainee status, GBS students are not eligible for UAB staff benefits. These policies pertain to personal time off, sick time, parental time away, and unpaid leave of absence.

Guidelines for student leave:

- A maximum of 15 personal (calendar) days off per calendar year
- A maximum of 15 days of sick leave during which time students will continue to receive their stipend, tuition and health insurance.
- Thirty calendar days of time off per calendar year upon the birth or adoption of a child. During this time, the student's stipend will continue.

These periods of leave do not accrue from year to year, and both personal time off and parental time off must be discussed with, and approved by the research mentor well in advance of the time away. This pre-approval benefits the student and the lab, ensuring that coursework and laboratory requirements are appropriately organized for coverage during the leave.

If an extended time away is required (for any number of reasons), students are eligible to apply for up to 12 months of unpaid leave, and their position in the program remains guaranteed. Notably: stipend, tuition, and health insurance are not guaranteed during these longer leaves of absence.

Additional accommodations may be available to students with registered needs. Students are encouraged to register with Disability Support Services ([uab.edu/students/disability](http://uab.edu/students/disability)) to accommodate additional needs.

Note: Graduate students (trainees and research assistants) are not eligible for Family & Medical Leave Act (FMLA).

In general, the time period between semesters is considered an active part of training and is not a vacation or holiday. The main exception to this expectation is the period between fall and spring semester of the first year. Rotation students are not expected to be present in the lab after the end of the fall rotation period or before the beginning of spring classes.

# PROGRAM POLICIES

## ACADEMIC PROBATION

In the event that expectations/requirements of GBS are not met satisfactorily, a student may be placed on academic probation. Probation is not intended to be punitive, rather, the probation system is designed to clearly identify academic issues and provide remediation plans for each issue.

Academic issues should be brought to the attention of the student's Theme Director(s) as soon as they are identified. Mentors, committee members, course directors, or GBS staff can raise issues of concern. If the Theme Director(s) agrees that probation is justified, they will discuss the issue with the Associate Dean for GBS, and if applicable, fill out a remediation plan. The remediation plan may articulate the identified issue(s), describe the benchmarks that must be reached to overcome the issue(s), and set a date by which the benchmarks must be achieved.

If benchmarks for remediation are not achieved, the student may be dismissed from the program. The timing of this dismissal will be agreed upon by the Associate Dean for GBS, research mentor, Theme Director(s) and student. It is expected that in most cases, dismissal will occur within 30 days of the failure to comply with the remediation plan and the indicated deadline. If a student wishes to appeal dismissal, they can follow the GBS appeal process.

## CHANGING LABS

This policy covers students who need to change laboratories due to circumstances out of their control, which may include but is not limited to, the following: mentor leaving UAB, mentor illness or death, incompatibility between mentor & student.

When the consideration of a change in mentor/mentee relationship begins, the first step toward resolving the issue is to hold a scheduled meeting between the mentor and mentee to discuss concerns and potential remediations. It is expected that these meetings will fall under the normal professional communications of the relationship.

The mentor and mentee are encouraged to seek advice from 1) committee members, 2) theme directors, 3) the Associate Dean, and/or the UAB ombudsperson ([uab.edu/ombuds](http://uab.edu/ombuds)). In the event that a resolution is not reached, a meeting will be arranged between the mentee, mentor, GBS representative, and Theme Director(s) to allow the mentor and mentee to express their concerns and points of view on the situation. If the request to change labs pursues, the person who wishes to end the mentor/mentee relationship is to provide written documentation explaining why, on the date that the decision is communicated. At least 2 weeks will elapse between the initial discussion of concerns regarding the mentorship arrangement and the commencement of rotations in a new lab.

Rotations for students changing labs are expedited. The entire time between departing one lab and joining the next is expected to be eight weeks or less. The rotation with the potential new dissertation mentor may be up to four weeks in length. If a second rotation is necessary, it can also be up to four weeks in length. Thus, the maximum total time available for a student changing labs to settle in a new dissertation lab is eight weeks. Continued support of stipend, tuition, and fees is not guaranteed beyond the eight-week period.

The time taken to find a rotation lab is included in the eight-week period. Thus, a student who requires 4 weeks to identify a rotation lab may only have time to have one rotation before they are either accepted for dissertation research by a new mentor or terminated from GBS. If the student changing labs has not identified a rotation lab within four weeks of leaving the original dissertation research lab, then the student may be dismissed.

During the transition between labs, the students stipend, tuition, and fees will be split evenly between the previous mentor and the newly identified mentor. Permission for more than two four-week rotations may be given on a case-by-case basis in consultation with the Associate Dean of GBS, Theme Director(s), and initial Department Chair. If additional rotation time is warranted beyond the initial eight weeks, stipend may not be provided to the student during that rotation time unless special permission is granted. The student and the "additional" rotation mentor will be informed, in writing, of this condition.

# PROGRAM POLICIES

## ACADEMIC ETHICS AND CONDUCT

GBS students will be informed of UAB Academic Ethics and Conduct guidance contained in the Graduate School [Handbook](#) during new student orientation. Students are expected to be and stay familiar with the guidance as well as the [UAB Academic Integrity Code](#) and will sign a copy of the UAB Academic Integrity Code, to be retained in their student files. GBS students are expected to follow the steps outlined in the Graduate School handbook in the event of a suspected violation of the Academic Integrity Code.

Issues regarding potential infractions must be reported to the Academic Integrity Coordinator of the Graduate School and also directly to the relevant faculty and instructor(s) of record. Sanctions for academic misconduct will not be imposed without following the procedures outlined in the Academic Integrity Code. GBS will adhere to the Academic Integrity Code, Section G, for the process for reporting and resolution of academic misconduct allegations.

## NON-ACADEMIC STUDENT CONDUCT

The university is a community of scholars and learners; therefore, all participants are expected to maintain conduct that (1) facilitates the institution's pursuit of its educational objectives, (2) exhibits a regard for the rights of other members of the academic community, and (3) contributes to the maintenance of a healthy learning environment. Community Standards & Student Accountability and the Vice President of Student Affairs have the responsibility for coordinating policies and procedures regarding students' non-academic misconduct.

Through appropriate procedures, action will be taken in response to behavior that violates these principles. Community Standards & Student Accountability supports the mission of the university by protecting the rights of all members of the university community and by promoting civility, integrity, responsibility, openness, mutual respect and justice by enforcing community standards. A more detailed description of non-academic misconduct can be found in the UAB Student Handbook. It is the student's responsibility to be fully aware of the policies and procedures described.

## ETHICAL STANDARDS IN RESEARCH & SCHOLARLY ACTIVITIES

Allegations of GBS student research misconduct will be managed according to [UAB Responsible Conduct of Research policies](#). Proper procedures for reporting concerns about proper procedures for reporting concerns about potential research/scholarly activity misconduct at UAB.

For most cases, reports should follow the "chain of command". The immediate supervisor should be first notified unless the problem involves that individual, in which case the next highest supervisor should be notified. Any situation that endangers personnel safety should be reported directly to [UAB Police](#), [Occupational Health and Safety](#) (205.934.2487), [Facilities](#), or others as appropriate with subsequent notification of a supervisor. Problems related to personnel issues should be reported through the supervisory chain of command unless it is more appropriate to go directly to [Human Resource Management Relations](#) 205.934.4701.

Scientific misconduct, defined as "fabrication, falsification, plagiarism, or other practices which seriously deviate from those that are commonly accepted within the scientific community for proposing, conducting, or reporting research" should be reported to the UAB Research Integrity Officer. UAB's Policy Concerning the Maintenance of High Ethical Standards in Research and Other Scholarly Activities provides information about the ethical standards expected of UAB faculty and staff. Concerns about research or research administration can also be reported directly to the UAB University Compliance Office or through the hotline maintained by this office. Anonymous reports are accepted.

# PROGRAM POLICIES

## GRIEVANCE POLICY AND PROCEDURES

Although rare, disagreements can arise that may affect a student's progress towards the completion of the degree. The parties involved in such a dispute should make a good faith effort to discuss and resolve the disagreement. The following guidelines may be helpful.

*Step 1.* Identify the problem; clearly define what you believe happened and what you perceive is needed to resolve the issue.

*Step 2.* Approach the other person or group involved with the dispute one-on-one. Set up a mutually agreeable time to talk; listen and ask to be listened to; use "I" statements when speaking; avoid assigning blame or leveling accusations.

*Step 3.* If these steps do not culminate in a resolution, the parties involved with the dispute should agree to approach an impartial third party, a mediator, who will respect confidentiality and with whom the situation can be discussed. The Theme Director(s) will suggest such a third party if asked. The mediator may be able to help the parties involved reach a resolution.

*Step 4.* If no resolution is found then you may submit the disagreement to the Graduate Program for resolution with each party in the dispute submitting a written description of the disagreement to the Theme Director(s) and, if necessary, the department Chair. Please include a description of the actions taken to resolve the dispute to date and the name of the mediator who was involved. The Associate Dean for GBS will review the written documents and consult with the GBS Theme Director(s) to determine if the disagreement is program-related and thus appropriate for resolution at the program level. If the dispute is found to be Program-related, the Associate Dean, together with the GBS Theme Director(s), will form a Committee to resolve the dispute. If the dispute involves the Associate Dean, Theme Director(s), Associate Director or any member of the GBS staff, then that individual will be excused from the deliberations. The Committee may request additional information from the parties involved. The Committee will meet to discuss the problem within 14 calendar days following receipt of the written documents or following the receipt of any additional materials. The result of the group's deliberations will be communicated via UAB email to the parties involved in the dispute within seven (7) calendar days after the meeting.

*Step 5.* If a party involved in the dispute is not satisfied with the outcome of the resolution process, an appeal may be submitted.

*Note:* This procedure does not apply to alleged violations of UAB student academic or non-academic misconduct nor to be used to resolve complaints alleging discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex (including harassment), age, religion, sexuality, national origin, disability, veteran or marital status. Students with such complaints will be referred to the appropriate university administrators.

# PROGRAM POLICIES

## APPEAL PROCESS

A student who wishes to appeal a dismissal decision must file a written appeal to the Associate Dean for GBS. The Associate Dean will present the appeal for consideration by the Graduate School Senior Leadership Team (consisting of the Graduate Dean and all Associate Deans). Examples of dismissals include, but are not limited to, academic dismissal; the failure of a student to secure a permanent lab and mentor; and also in cases in which a student has requested to change labs and is unable to secure a new permanent lab and mentor within the established time-frame, in accordance with GBS policy.

Appeals must be submitted within 30 days of the notification of dismissal and must include supporting documentation on behalf of the student. Documentation should address the reasons for dismissal, specific actions the student believes that they have taken to remedy the reasons for dismissal, and a realistic completion plan for graduation that includes a listing of GBS requirements yet to be met with a timeline for each.

The Associate Dean for GBS will notify those individuals whose decisions are being appealed and will request additional relevant information, as needed. Documentation, including the proposed remediation plan, will be transmitted to the Graduate School Senior Leadership Team for consideration. If any member has a conflict, they will not serve on the team. The leadership team will include two current GBS students in the evaluation and deliberation of the appeal's merits. The students included in the appeal process will be selected by the leadership team on an ad hoc basis. The appeal materials will be discussed in an in-person or virtual private meeting, and the group will render a decision based on the documentation provided.

A member of the Graduate School Senior Leadership Team will communicate the decision on the appeal to the parties involved in writing (typically via UAB email) within 7 calendar days of the appeal review. The findings and recommendations of the Graduate School appeal review will be final.

If an appeal is granted, a written remediation plan and expectations will be provided. This plan will detail the benchmarks that must be reached and allotted time for completion. Failing to reach the benchmarks indicated will result in dismissal from GBS.

# FINANCES

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Traditionally accepted GBS students receive an annual stipend and fully paid tuition and fees. Funding is guaranteed for at least 5 years as long as the student remains in good academic standing. The sources of support for students vary, but generally Graduate School Fellowships support the first 4 semesters for each student. In subsequent years, students are supported by their mentors' research grants, institutional funds, or training grants. All students are encouraged to apply for individual fellowship awards, with the guidance and assistance of their mentors. Upon successful completion of requirements for admission to candidacy, the GBS student's annual stipend will increase by \$1,000.

## STIPEND INCREASE FOR ADMISSION TO CANDIDACY

Upon successful completion of the qualifying exam, GBS students applying for admission to candidacy will receive a \$1,000 stipend increase effective the start of the next pay period following the GBS Finance Manager receiving documentation that the candidacy paperwork has been approved by the Graduate School. It is the student's responsibility to follow up with the GBS Finance Manager, after receiving an approval email from the Graduate School.

## FINANCE POLICIES

Graduate students in GBS are awarded a tuition scholarship, which covers in-state tuition and fees until the degree requirements for the student's theme have been met. As a condition to receiving this tuition scholarship:

1. Students must register for and successfully complete 27 hours (9 hours per semester) of approved graduate credits each year. Any hours taken above 27 semester hours must be approved by the student's theme director and mentor.
2. Courses offered by entities outside of the GBS curriculum must be pre-approved by the student's mentor and Theme Director(s) in advance.
3. Students must remain in good academic standing. This tuition scholarship may be terminated for students who fail to meet requirements outlined by academic probation.

All coursework must either fit within the student's theme checklist or be pre-approved by their research mentor and/or dissertation committee. If not, the student will be responsible for the associated tuition/fees and may be subject to non-resident tuition rates.

Each term, the deadlines for tuition payments are posted on the UAB Academic Calendar. Students are also sent emails from Student Accounting in regards to the student account balance. It is important that students are aware of these deadlines and emails regarding their student accounts be forwarded to the GBS Finance Manager, if appropriate. It is the student's responsibility to notify the GBS Finance Manager concerning an outstanding student accounting balance. Students who do not contact the GBS Finance Manager in a timely manner are responsible for any late fees incurred on their student account. If for some reason there is an over-payment on the student account, immediately notify the GBS Finance Manager. In cases where the over-payment is not adjusted prior to the payment deadline for the following term, the student will be responsible for repaying the amount of the over-payment to offset a portion of the tuition balance for the current term.

# STUDENT HEALTH INSURANCE



All students in the GBS program are required to have single-coverage health insurance. Students may choose to be covered by UAB student health insurance or provide their own private insurance. If the student elects to be covered by their own private insurance and waive UAB student health insurance, verification of comparable coverage must be on file with the UAB Student Health Services. Support is available for single coverage health insurance only. Family coverage (for spouses or dependents) can be obtained at additional cost to be paid for by the graduate student.

For additional information regarding health insurance and policies, visit UAB Student Health Services Insurance & Waivers at:

[uab.edu/students/health/insurance-waivers](http://uab.edu/students/health/insurance-waivers).

UAB provides prevention, counseling, and treatment services to students through the UAB Student Health Services. Detailed information about services and operating practices is located on the UAB Student Health Services website:

[uab.edu/students/health](http://uab.edu/students/health).

# GBS OFFICE

Check out the GBS website ([uab.edu/gbs](http://uab.edu/gbs)) for more information & support services (i.e. professional development, mental health, diversity support) offered by the GBS office and institution.

## GBS CONTACT INFO

(205)996.6752  
grad-gbs@uab.edu

Lister Hill Library, G10  
1700 University Blvd  
Birmingham, AL 35233

## GBS OFFICE STAFF

### DAVID SCHNEIDER, PHD

*Senior Associate Dean for  
Graduate and International  
Education*  
(205)934.4781  
[dschneid@uab.edu](mailto:dschneid@uab.edu)

### JENNY KEOGH

*Communications & Events Specialist*  
(205) 934 .1372  
[jkeogh@uab.edu](mailto:jkeogh@uab.edu)

### TIFFANY HEARNS

*Curriculum Manager*  
(205)934.7034  
[thearns@uab.edu](mailto:thearns@uab.edu)

### CLAY WALLS

*HR & Finance Manager*  
(205)934.1033  
[claywalls@uab.edu](mailto:claywalls@uab.edu)

### SAM DILLON

*Program Administrator*  
(205)934.7810  
[samdlln1@uab.edu](mailto:samdlln1@uab.edu)

### JACOB NANCE

*Program Manager I - HR, Finance, GBS Website*  
(205)934.3857  
[jnance@uab.edu](mailto:jnance@uab.edu)

**BIOCEMISTRY & STRUCTURAL BIOLOGY (BSB) THEME****THOMAS RYAN, PHD**

*Theme Director*  
(205)996.2175  
tryan@uab.edu

**CHAD PETIT, PHD**

*Theme Co-Director*  
(205)975.3398  
cpetit@uab.edu

**CANCER BIOLOGY (CANB) THEME****LALITA SHEVDE-SAMANT, PHD**

*Theme Director*  
(205)975.6261  
lsamant@uab.edu

**SOORY VARAMBALLY, PHD**

*Theme Co-Director*  
(205)996.1653  
soorya@uab.edu

**CELL, MOLECULAR, & DEVELOPMENTAL BIOLOGY (CMDDB) THEME****JOHN PARANT, PHD**

*Theme Director*  
(205)975.8469  
jparant@uab.edu

**JIANBO WANG, PHD**

*Theme Co-Director*  
(205)996.9594  
jl8wang@uab.edu

**GENETICS, GENOMICS, & BIOINFORMATICS (GGB) THEME****ELIZABETH WORTHEY, PHD**

*Theme Director*  
(205)688.9285  
lworthey@uab.edu

**ANNA THALACKER-MERCER, PHD**

*Theme Co-Director*  
(205)975.9143  
athalack@uab.edu

**IMMUNOLOGY (IMM) THEME****LOUIS JUSTEMENT, PHD**

*Theme Director*  
(205)934.1429  
lbjust@uab.edu

**LAURIE HARRINGTON, PHD**

*Theme Co-Director*  
(205)996.9795  
lharrington@uab.edu

**CRAIG MAYNARD, PHD**

*Theme Co-Director*  
(205)996.0136  
clmaynard@uab.edu

**MICROBIOLOGY (MIC) THEME****JANET YOTHER, PHD**

*Theme Director*  
(205)934.9531  
jyother@uab.edu

**SUNNIE THOMPSON, PHD**

*Theme Co-Director*  
(205)996.7101  
sunnie@uab.edu

**NEUROSCIENCE (NESC) THEME****MICHELLE GRAY, PHD**

*Theme Director*  
(205)996.4748  
mccgray@uab.edu

**C. RYAN MILLER, MD, PHD**

*Theme Co-Director*  
(205)934.7320  
rmiller@uab.edu

**CRISTIN GAVIN, PHD**

*Theme Associate Director*  
(205)934.6433  
cgavin@uab.edu

**PATHOBIOLOGY, PHARMACOLOGY, & PHYSIOLOGY (P3) THEME****ROBERT VAN WAARDENBURG, PHD**

*Theme Director*  
(205)934.4572  
rvanwaar@uab.edu

**SELVARANGAN PONNAZHAGAN, PHD**

*Theme Co-Director*  
(205)934.6731  
pons@uab.edu