

# Annual PhD Student Committee Meeting Guidelines

## Information and Instructions:

The goal of the annual committee meeting is for students to receive substantive and actionable feedback from committee members on student progress toward doctoral program goals and milestones. The committee should be viewed as a resource to help the student navigate the path to graduation. These annual meetings are especially important if research progress is slow or if there are concerns about the academic performance of the student. Similarly, these committee meetings are an important opportunity for the student to seek guidance regarding mentorship concerns with the thesis advisor. *The Biological Sciences PhD program expects faculty serving on thesis committees to take this instructional responsibility seriously and to actively participate in thesis committee meetings.* These annual meetings should be 1.5 hours in length to provide time for active discussion and feedback and should take place in-person. The committee chair and evaluation head should budget at least 10 minutes of discussion time at the end of the meeting, without the student present, to carefully complete the **online Biological Sciences Advancement to Candidacy evaluation form**.

The completed form will provide useful written feedback to the student and the PhD program.

## Committee Composition (Prior to Advancement to Candidacy):

Three members (four if jointly advised). Refer to the graduate [handbook](#) on committee composition requirements.

## Committee Composition (After Advancement to Candidacy):

Four members (five if jointly advised). Refer to the graduate [handbook](#) on committee composition requirements.

The chair of the committee is the Thesis Advisor (or co-chairs if jointly advised by two faculty members). Further, the student and advisor should select an Evaluation Head of the committee who will serve as the moderator for all committee meetings and complete the attached evaluation form. It is the student's responsibility to communicate the choice of Evaluation Head prior to the committee meeting.

The student is required to prepare both a written annual progress report, and an oral presentation to be delivered to committee members.

## Written committee meeting report guidelines.

The student must submit a written annual progress report to all committee members (electronically) **one week prior to the committee meeting**.

The written annual progress report should not exceed 10 pages (references excluded from this limit) and be composed of the following sections.

Specific Aims Page – 1 page

Background and Significance – 1-2 pages

Progress report for each aim following these guidelines. 2-3 pages for each aim.

Aim X:

Rationale.

Briefly restate the significance of the research question for this aim. Why is the research question interesting? What key previous results in the lab or in the literature form the basis for the hypothesis or research approach?

#### Research approach.

Justify chosen research approaches. Why is this the best method/approach to answer this research question?

#### Research progress toward aim completion.

What has been done and what is the contribution of new knowledge to the chosen research field? Include key figures as needed. If the aim has not been started, state the expected results.

#### Potential pitfalls that may limit, or are currently limiting, research progress.

What if the approach doesn't work or yield interpretable data? Have there been unexpected problems with the chosen research approach?

#### Alternative Approaches.

This section should contain a discussion of alternative approaches to overcome potential or ongoing research barriers.

Please also include a timeline for achieving research goals, including a timeline for graduation. Further, a slide that discusses future career plans should be included at the end of the presentation.

Students may alternatively elect to send a mature draft of a manuscript they are preparing in lieu of the written committee report format detailed above.

#### **Oral presentation guidelines:**

The student should present the research background, significance, and progress using a similar structure as the written report. The student should prepare meeting materials that, when presented uninterrupted, do not exceed 45 minutes in length. Emphasis should be placed on clearly communicating the rationale for the chosen research question and approaches. Committee members will evaluate research progress toward stated milestones based on the presented results and interpretation of those results.

The student can be asked to leave the room prior to the commencement of the oral presentation. During this time the committee will have a discussion with the Thesis Advisor to evaluate overall student progress, research strengths and weaknesses, and any potential concerns. The Thesis Advisor will similarly be asked to leave the room to allow time for the student to discuss any issues regarding the Thesis Advisor with committee members. If the student articulates substantial concerns regarding the Thesis Advisor that cannot be adequately addressed in the context of the committee meeting, the Evaluation Head should contact the Chair or Vice Chair of the Graduate Committee to discuss the issues and establish an action plan.

Following the student's presentation, the student may again be asked to leave the room while the committee discusses the quality of the student's oral and written presentation and the overall research progress. Once the student rejoins the meeting, the Evaluation Head will summarize the discussion and provide feedback to the student based on the attached evaluation form. Other committee members are encouraged to provide feedback as well. The evaluation head will complete the evaluation form and submit it for program review. The student should be afforded the opportunity to ask questions regarding committee feedback.

Should the committee determine that student academic progress is unsatisfactory, the student can be placed on program probation. Program probation would require the committee to collaborate with the student to establish a detailed progress improvement plan with well-defined goals and timelines for the student to establish satisfactory academic progress. The duration of

the program probation will be at least 10 weeks and can be extended up to one year. The committee will establish an appropriate timeline. The probationary process requires scheduling a future committee meeting no more than 12 months from the date of the current committee meeting.

## Annual Doctoral Student Progress Report

Please complete this form during committee discussion. The expectation is that the form will be complete when the committee meeting is adjourned.

Student:

Year of student matriculation in doctoral program:

Thesis Advisor:

Evaluation Head:

Other Committee Members:

Date of Committee Meeting:

Evaluation Scale:

1 - Outstanding: Exceeds expectations with some minor issues or flaws

2 - Satisfactory: Met or above expectations with some notable but not concerning issues or flaws

3 - Requires Attention: Did not meet expectations with major issues or flaws.

1) Did the student submit their written annual committee meeting report at least one week prior to the committee meeting?

Yes No

2) The quality of the written annual committee meeting report

was: Outstanding (1), Satisfactory (2), Requires Attention

(3)

3) The quality of the oral presentation was:

Outstanding (1), Satisfactory (2), Requires Attention (3)

4) Overall student progress since the previous committee

meeting is: Outstanding (1), Satisfactory (2), Requires

Attention (3)

5) The student's knowledge of the scientific literature relevant to the research

project is: Outstanding (1), Satisfactory (2), Requires Attention (3)

6) The student's ability to critically evaluate and interpret their

results is: Outstanding (1), Satisfactory (2), Requires Attention

(3)

7) The student's initiative and independence toward study design and project

directions is: Outstanding (1), Satisfactory (2), Requires Attention (3)

8) Is the Committee in agreement with the student's research priorities and research

timelines for the next 12 months as stated in the student's written report and oral presentation?

Yes No

If not, please explain briefly below:

9) Provide a summary on the committee's overall evaluation of student academic progress. What are the major research goals for the next year?

10) Please provide an action plan to address specific areas of training that need attention. If the committee feels that certain minimal goals must be achieved in order for the student to remain in good standing in the graduate program, please specify these here. The committee should revisit this action plan the following year to see if progress has been made.

11) Are there substantial concerns about the student's academic progress and should program probation be considered?

Yes No

Program probation would involve developing a detailed progress improvement plan with well-defined milestones and timelines. Probationary status would be communicated with the Chair of the Graduate Committee who would help facilitate development and implementation of the progress improvement plan. This would also require scheduling a future committee meeting no more than 6 months from the date of current committee meeting.

Signed by Evaluation Head  
Signed by Thesis Advisor  
Signed by Student