GRADUATE COMMITTEE MEETINGS
(revised November 2018; approved by the GPC November 2018)

As outlined in the “BIOLOGY DEPARTMENT GUIDELINES FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS” (http://ase.tufts.edu/biology/graduate/documents/GradGuidelines.pdf) MS thesis and PhD candidates are required to conduct two committee meetings each year.

BEFORE EACH SEMI-ANNUAL MEETING THE COMMITTEE SHOULD RECEIVE:
(1) A brief update outlining your progress three to four working days before each semi-annual meeting. The reports should be brief, not exceeding 2 pages, excluding figures and tables. Figures can be simple and hand-drawn, but should be clear and easily interpreted and must include complete figure legends. The report should contain the specific aims of the research (for rotations, the limited aim of that period), approaches used, results obtained, and a brief discussion. The report should conclude with research plans for the next six months.
(2) An updated copy of the student’s curriculum vitae (CV), with additions since the last committee meeting highlighted.
(3) The Graduate Progress Report for Committee Meetings fillable PDF form, with the green highlighted areas filled out by the student (http://ase.tufts.edu/biology/graduate/documents/GradProgressReport.pdf).

Note: Students should bring their lab notebooks containing the original data to the scheduled meetings. For first year students, see specific guidelines below.

AT THE COMMITTEE MEETING: Items such as courses taken and those to be taken, research progress, goals for the next 6 months, exam scheduling, and work as a teaching assistant should be discussed. The chair of each student's committee will fill out the rest of the Graduate Student Progress Form (http://ase.tufts.edu/biology/graduate/documents/GradProgressReport.pdf).

AFTER THE COMMITTEE MEETING: At or directly after the meeting, the Progress Form should be circulated to all committee members for additions and/or corrections and signatures. The committee chair should give a final copy to the student within one week of the committee meeting, but preferably directly after the meeting. Students should check that they receive this final copy and are responsible for sending it and their CV to the Graduate Program Coordinator. Students have the right to add comments to their files in response to the minutes of committee meetings. These reports and CVs will be kept in the student's folder.

EACH SEMESTER, THE CHAIR OF THE STUDENT’S COMMITTEE SHOULD GIVE A COPY OF THE COMMITTEE FORM (SIGNED BY MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE THAT ATTENDED THE MEETING) TO:
  1) THE STUDENT,
  2) THE MEMBERS OF THE THESIS COMMITTEE, AND
  3) THE STUDENT’S GRADUATE FOLDER (via the Graduate Program Coordinator- who after recording the date of the meeting will place it in the student’s folder)

EACH YEAR, ANY NIH FUNDED STUDENT MUST SEND A COPY OF THE IDP FORM TO:
  1) THEIR THESIS COMMITTEE
  2) THE DEAN OF A&S
  3) THE STUDENT’S GRADUATE FOLDER (via the Graduate Program Coordinator)
Committee meeting guidelines –

1. In your first year, you will be assigned an entrance committee. You should meet with this committee before registration in the fall semester, to go over your plan for courses and rotations. This first meeting normally occurs upon arrival at Tufts, and no report is needed.

   A second meeting should be scheduled in the spring within 2 weeks of your rotation talk. At this meeting, a 1st year progress report form should be filled out by the chair of your entrance committee and submitted as described above. The entrance committee dissolves after the first year, and is replaced with a thesis committee chosen by the student and their research advisor (see below). It is the student’s responsibility to ask each potential member to serve on their committee. Evaluation of the second rotation should be included in the fall committee meeting of the second year using page 2 of the Year 1 Progress Form.

2. In your second year, once you have finalized who your research advisor will be and have an idea of your potential thesis project, you should put together a thesis committee, consisting of 3 members of the Biology department, including your advisor. The thesis committee should include expertise in the area of your proposed project and should include and be formed in consultation with your research advisor. The thesis committee does not carry over from your entrance committee, so if you want to include faculty that were on your entrance committee, they should be asked just like any other faculty. For PhD students, this committee will also be your “PhD Qualifying Exam committee”. The first time you meet with your thesis committee, which should be in the fall of your second year – you will need to provide both background and rationale for your proposed thesis project and a summary of your second rotation. Typically, 60 minutes is sufficient for the first meeting.

3. For PhD students, after you pass your qualifying exam, you should form a Dissertation Committee. Usually this will be the same as your qualifying exam committee, but it is also possible to make changes at this time, for example, if your project has changed so that you need different expertise, or a new faculty member is available that would provide needed expertise. It is also possible to add an extra committee member at this stage (beyond the 3 from the Biology department) if it would be helpful (for example, someone with expertise at the Tufts Sackler School, Vet or Nutrition school, Engineering, etc.), but this is optional. Before your defense, it is required to add a fourth member from outside the university (see Grad Guidelines).

4. General Guidelines for committee meetings: Two committee meetings per year are required be held. Summer funding may be contingent on fulfilling this requirement and submitting the appropriate paperwork. One of the committee meetings per year should be held after (within two weeks) of your department seminar. Since committee members should make every effort to attend the seminars of the students they are serving – a formal PowerPoint presentation given during this meeting would be redundant. Instead use a more informal format (chalk talk style or a few slides to use as a basis for discussion). During your meeting (~60 minutes), provide an update of your research progress since your last meeting (6 months of work) to your committee. Use this time wisely – you can discuss any problems, obstacles, alternative approaches, manuscripts and conferences. Timelines should also be discussed to make sure everyone is on the same page. The second meeting of the year can be more formal with a PowerPoint presentation and discussion; plan for ~60 minutes. See paragraph 1 for instructions on the report and annotated CV to be submitted 3-4 days before the meeting.

5. For NIH funded graduate students, you are additionally required to fill out and submit the Tufts A&S IDP (Individual Development Plan) Progress Report: A&S Annual IDP Progress Report Form. The “Initial IDP Plan” must be filled out before your first committee meeting when you are NIH funded, and sent to your committee. It should be reviewed at your committee meeting, and any changes can be made at this time. After the committee meeting, a copy of the Initial IDP Plan must be sent to your advisor and to the Dean of A&S. After this, the IDP form should be discussed once a year at one of your committee meetings and progress evaluated, recorded on the form, and sent with all notes to your advisor and the Dean of A&S as above. See the Graduate Student Self-Assessment and IDP Process document for more details and instructions about how to submit your IDP form.
6. For ALL graduate students, you are encouraged to fill out the Graduate Student Self Assessment Worksheet and review it once a year. This is a self-evaluation tool provided to help prepare scholars and students to complete the Individual Development Plan. This form is for the graduate students or postdoctoral scholars use only. It will not be archived and need not be shared with faculty advisors, mentors, or principal investigators.

If anyone has any questions – or suggestions regarding the graduate program – please do not hesitate to see me.

Catherine Freudenreich
Biology Graduate Program Director

HOW TO SCHEDULE A COMMITTEE MEETING

Getting a bunch of faculty to all commit to arrive at the same time and place – can be difficult – but not impossible (even though at times it can feel like ‘herding cats’). Here are some tips from Jan Pechenik that might facilitate the process:

How to Schedule a Committee Meeting (without driving anyone crazy)

Committee meetings are usually scheduled for late in the semester, but the earlier you start, the better your chances of getting the date you want, and the better your chances of having all committee members present. Faculty schedules start filling up before the semester even starts, so impress the [heck] out of us and get your meeting scheduled in the first few weeks of the semester.

You should schedule one of your meetings sometime in the week or two after you give your departmental seminar.

Doodle Poll method: You can use a website such as: “Doodle” (http://www.doodle.ch/main.html) - to create an online meeting planner to coordinate schedules for committee meetings. To avoid having to create a huge poll, it is a good idea to first narrow it down to a few possible days that all members are in town and have some open time in their schedules by either a preliminary poll, email, or in person conversations. Then create a poll listing possible times during those days.

Once you find a day and time that works for everyone, send out a notice to your committee immediately to lock in the date and time. Make sure you also schedule a ROOM for your meeting. Our conference rooms, Robinson 357 and rm 4747 and 4745 at 200 BA, fill up quickly during the semester. They may be reserved through the online system by one of the Biology department staff members. There are also rooms in the SEC, the 2nd floor conference room at 200 Boston Ave, or other rooms on campus that can be booked online.

About a week before the meeting, send a polite reminder to all committee members, reminding them of the date, place, and time of the meeting. Don’t forget that within 3-4 days of your meeting, you are required to send your committee members a 1-2 page summary of your progress to date, the partially filled out committee meeting form, and your annotated CV. If appropriate, include your IDP plan (initial or with progress notes) and any questions or issues that you would like to discuss at the meeting.