

Department of Biological Sciences

UTEP

**General Handbook and Guidelines for
Masters of Science (MS) Students**

For Planning and Advisement

2 April 2021

General Guidelines

Please be familiar with the content of this document, because failure to adhere to its rules and timelines due to ignorance of the facts is not a viable excuse for avoiding potential penalties.

Introduction

Specific Graduate School and Department of Biological Sciences requirements are spelled out in the University Catalog, and the guidelines found here are intended to supplement that document. The suggested schedule is for a two-year program for Masters of Science (MS) Degree students. Appeals related to these guidelines will be handled on a case-by-case basis by the Departmental Graduate Committee. It is highly recommended that potential MS students find a faculty member in the department to serve as their Major Professor (**Thesis Advisor**) during the application process well before the beginning of the first semester. Thesis Advisors should have similar research interests and goals as the students they mentor and most importantly, agree to admit them into their research laboratories. Some faculty members may not have room in their labs to support additional graduate students at a particular time, so failure to find a thesis advisor before starting the MS program may lead to valuable time being lost due to that situation.

The following guidelines are not proposed to burden students, but are intended to help them finish the degree program within two years. Students being funded as Teaching Assistants (**TA**) or Research Assistants (**RA**) must normally enroll in at least nine credit hours of coursework per semester (3 hours during summer session) in order to be considered full-time, although during the last semester this requirement will be reduced, if appropriate. Also, it is imperative for graduate students wanting TA positions to inform the **Department of Biological Sciences**, (Bioscience Building 2.120; biology@utep.edu; 747-5844) before the beginning of each semester; an e-mail memo requesting this information will be distributed to all graduate students before each semester begins. Make sure that the Department of Biological Sciences has updated addresses, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses, if applicable. Be aware that all MS students must bring an advising form to the **Graduate Advisor** before enrolling in classes each semester, including summer sessions. The MS Graduate Advisors are **Dr. Jerry D. Johnson**; Biology Building 205; jjohnson@utep.edu; 747-6984; and **Dr. Michael Moody**; Biology Building 306; mimoody@utep.edu; 747-5087). The following is a list of required MS program procedures and time-lines along with pertinent comments and suggestions.

First Semester

Before registering for classes, all MS students must attend an advising session with the Graduate Advisor. The student's background, areas of interest, and especially recommendations from Thesis Advisors will determine first semester course work. Specific deficiencies or conditions

of acceptance, if any, were detailed in a letter included with the official acceptance document from the Graduate School. A copy of that letter will be placed in the departmental graduate folder kept by the Graduate Secretary. At the end of the advising session with Graduate Advisor, students will receive a signed copy of academic advising forms so the advising hold for the semester can be removed, thereby allowing registration for classes. **Holds need to be removed each semester before you can register.** Students should not register for classes they were not advised to take. Only the Graduate Advisor can sign the advising forms (**not** Thesis Advisors). Any changes to advising forms must have prior approval by the Graduate Advisor before the official census day for the applicable semester. If the Graduate Advisor is unavailable, documents may be signed by Dr. Elizabeth Walsh, **PhD Program Advisor** (Biology Building 216; ewalsh@utep.edu; 747-6989) or Dr. Renato Aguilera, **Graduate Program Director** (Bioscience Building 4.144; raguilera@utep.edu; 747-6852).

During the beginning of the first semester students should learn as much as possible about the department and amenities offered by UTEP. By the middle of the first semester the Thesis Advisor will help students form a Thesis Committee, which will consist of at least three members, including Thesis Advisor, one other faculty member from the department, and one faculty member from outside the department; all three must be members of the UTEP Graduate Faculty. **Note: If students wish to have a faculty member from another university on their Thesis Committee, they should notify the MS Graduate Advisor as soon as possible since persons outside UTEP must be approved by the departmental Graduate Faculty and Graduate School.**

The Thesis Advisor and Graduate Advisor should be consulted when students fill out the Preliminary **Degree Plan (Form 1)**. This Form lists tentative courses to be taken, names of the Thesis Committee members, and must be signed by the Graduate Advisor, Dean of Science, and then sent to the Graduate School for final approval; a copy will be placed into the students file located in the Biology Department office file. The form should list at least 30 course units, nine of which are required. The nine required course units are three hours of Seminar (BIOL 5130; 3 separate classes) and six hours of Thesis (BIOL 5398 and BIOL 5399). BIOL 5398 should not be taken until the semester before students plan to graduate, normally the third semester on the Degree Plan. BIOL 5399 will be taken during the semester you plan to graduate, normally the fourth semester on the Degree Plan. If for some reason students do not graduate during the expected semester, they must enroll in BIOL 5399 every semester until they do graduate. The remaining 21 hours of course units will be selected from 5000 level graduate courses and approved upper division undergraduate courses (3000 and 4000 level courses), although MS students will be required to do extra work in the undergraduate classes; a maximum of nine credit hours can be upper division undergraduate courses. It may also be possible to enroll in 6000 level courses (PhD level), with permission from your Thesis Advisor, Graduate Advisor, Graduate School, and from the faculty member teaching that course. Of the 5000 level graduate course

units, no more than six units (two classes) can be in BIOL 5302 (Research in Biological Science); only once in the case of the BIOL 5502 research course. Course credits from outside the UTEP Department of Biological Sciences must have prior approval by the Thesis Committee, Graduate Advisor, and Graduate School, and listed on the **Degree Plan**.

Second Semester

Students must complete and file the preliminary Degree Plan before registering for the second semester. Copies of that form, signed by the MS Graduate Advisor and Dean of Science, should be turned into the department office and a copy sent to the Graduate School for final approval. Advising holds must be removed before you can register. During the second semester (or summer session), you should present a **Thesis Proposal** to your Thesis Committee for approval.

The Thesis Proposal is required and must be defended and approved before the **beginning** of your third full semester. **Note: Students normally will not be eligible for UTEP funding appointments for the third or subsequent semesters if the thesis proposal has not been successfully presented and defended.** The Thesis Proposal must be presented and approved by your Thesis Committee, and defended **at least one semester prior to the final Thesis Defense** (summer counts as one semester). The Thesis Proposal will be presented as a written document and defended orally to the student's Thesis Committee and interested faculty and students at a prearranged time and place. The Thesis Advisor must announce through an e-mail to the faculty and others, at least seven day in advance, that the MS student will be defending the proposal on a given date, time, and location; a copy of that memo will be placed in the student's file. MS students are also required to place a written typed copy of the proposal in the Biology Office (Bioscience Building 2.120) for public review at least seven days before the proposal will be defended. After a successful defense, the student's Graduate Committee will sign the **Thesis Proposal Application Form (Form 2)** and submit a copy to the Graduate Advisor and Biology Graduate Secretary for placement into student's file in the Biology Office. A copy will also be sent to the Dean of Science and Graduate School. If Thesis Proposal is unacceptable to the Thesis Committee, the Committee will present in writing a document outlining necessary remedies needed to resolve the issues, which could include taking additional course work, or in the worst case scenario, dismissal from the MS program. If the recommendation is for dismissal from the program, student's may request from the Graduate Program Director another chance to propose the thesis, but the request will only be granted if the Director is provided with evidence of extenuating circumstances (illness, prejudice, procedural or other errors, etc.).

Third Semester

During the third semester, you should be well into your thesis research and enrolled in BIOL 5398 (Thesis). By this time your approved Thesis Proposal Application form must be on file. It is important to remember that students who want teaching assistantships will only be approved for a second year if the signed proposal form is on file. Any conditions of acceptance into the program must also have been removed by the beginning of the third semester.

Fourth Semester

During your fourth semester, MS students should be concentrating on finishing their written thesis, time, and location for the defense, along with placing a copy of your written thesis in the departmental office for comments, at least seven days prior to the thesis defense. A copy of student's formal announcement will be placed in their file in the Biology office. The copy of your thesis to be defended should be in nearly final form, so post-defense modifications will be minor in nature. If for any reason your Thesis Committee fails to approve the thesis defense or written thesis, students will be required to correct deficiencies and defend or resubmit at a later date. This may require enrollment for an additional semester, if necessary. The Thesis Committee will provide in writing a description of the deficiencies needed to be addressed before approving your thesis defense. You will have the opportunity to successfully defend the thesis one more time. If unsuccessful, you will be given a letter from the Graduate Program Director stating that you will no longer be allowed to remain in the MS program in Biological Sciences.

During this final semester and after successfully completion the final defense, students will have their Thesis Committee sign and submit to the Graduate Advisor, Dean of Science, and Graduate School, for their signatures, the original **Completion/Defense Form (Form 3)**, **Application for Graduate Degree (Form 4)**, and **Graduation Final Degree Plan (Form 5)**. Students should also provide copies of those forms to the Graduate Secretary for placement into their departmental files. In addition, a digital copy of the thesis must be submitted to the Graduate School within the time-line indicated for approval, including examination for correct style. It is also customary to provide a courtesy copy of a bound thesis to your Thesis Advisor, if requested.

FORMS

1. **Degree Plan.** Preliminary 1st semester; final 4th semester.
2. **Thesis Proposal Application (*Proposal Defense*).** 2nd semester or summer.
3. **Completion\Defense Form (*Thesis Defense*).** 4th semester.
4. **Application for Graduate Degree.** 4th semester.
5. **Graduation Final Degree Plan.** 4th semester.

See Graduate School Website for Forms: <https://www.utep.edu/graduate/forms.html>

GRADUATE STUDENT EMPLOYMENT AND STIPENDS

Eligible graduate students at UTEP may be employed or supported by the University in a variety of positions reserved specifically for them. Eligibility criteria and applicable benefits depend upon whether the position or support is (a) salaried, (b) hourly, or (c) a stipend.

I. **Salaried positions** include the following

- Teaching Assistant
- Assistant Instructor (Doctoral Student)
- Research Assistant
- Research Associate (Doctoral Student)
- Graduate Intern

Eligibility Criteria for Salaried Positions

Enrollment of at least nine semester hours (three hours in summer) for the term in course work listed on the Degree Plan. Exceptions to the nine hour rule will be made for the final term of enrollment (three hours, BIOL 5399) if all other course requirements have been satisfied.

- Admitted (either conditionally or unconditionally) to a degree program,
- Good academic standing,
- Degree Plan approved and on file in the Graduate School,
- International Students seeking appointment as Teaching Assistants or Assistant Instructors who have not received a university degree from a U.S. institution must

have a TOEFL score of 550 (paper) or 79 (web based) if their work will include verbal contact with students.

II. **Hourly Employees** may be eligible for benefits if

- The appointment is for 50% time, and if
- The appointment is for the entire term

Benefits may include a variety of health and insurance programs through Human Resources Services.

Non-resident (including International) students who are eligible for benefits may be entitled to pay the resident tuition rate if the appointment is within their academic department or is directly supporting their academic degree. Students seeking a waiver of the non-resident tuition rate must submit the appropriate form, approved through their academic department, to the graduate school prior to the beginning of classes for the term.

III. **Stipends**

Eligibility criteria to receive a stipend include:

- Enrollment of at least nine semester hours (three hours in summer) for the term in course work listed on the Degree Plan. Exceptions will be made for the final term of enrollment (three hours – BIOL 5399) if all other course requirements on the Degree Plan have been satisfied.
- Admitted to a degree program
- Good academic standing
- Degree Plan approved and on file in the Graduate School
- Satisfactory progress towards the completion of the degree.

Stipend support does **not** constitute employment by the University. Student stipends do **not provide** University benefits. Non-resident students are **not** eligible to pay the resident tuition rate unless their stipend support has been specifically approved by the office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs. Academic departments may request an application for approval from the graduate School.

	Teaching Asst. Asst. Instructor	Research Asst. Research Assoc. Graduate Intern	Asst. (Grad) Student Asst.	Stipend
Minimum Enrollment LS/Summer	9/3	9/3	9/3	9/3
Admitted to Degree Program	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Good Academic Standing	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
DP on file	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
TOEFL	550/79 TA	550/79	550\79	No
Maximum Appointment	50%	50%	20 Hrs/Week	–
Benefit Eligible	50% for whole term	50% for whole term	50% for whole term	–
Resident Tuition for Non-Residents	50% for whole term	50% for whole term	Yes	Stipend of \$1,000 Or more

Note: Per Graduate School: registration of 3 hours course work for summer is satisfactory.