

**PLANT BIOLOGY GRADUATE  
PROGRAM  
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN**



**“Bobwhite Country after the freeze” by David Grobert**

Live oak, mountain laurel, and mixed native grasses on the  
City of Austin's Water Quality Protection Lands. Two  
burns per decade.

**2020– 2021  
GRADUATE STUDENT HANDBOOK**

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## Welcome and Overview

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We the faculty and staff of the Plant Biology Graduate Studies Committee wish to welcome you to the PB Graduate Program. We look forwards to working with you and supporting your progress towards a graduate degree in PB. We encourage you to actively use this handbook throughout your studies as it is a summary of the university, department and graduate program policies and procedures. For more complete information, please refer to our website <https://integrativebio.utexas.edu/plant-biology-graduate-program>.

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## Your Responsibilities

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You are responsible for understanding the rules and policies that govern your academic degree. Use all resources available to you and plan well in advance to meet necessary deadlines. Please feel free to ask our Graduate Coordinator about any deadlines, or issues you may have questions about.

The Graduate School website <https://gradschool.utexas.edu/> is an excellent resource for information on degree requirements, as well as policies for applying to graduate and deadlines for defenses, thesis and dissertation submissions.

The College of Natural Sciences website for Graduate Education <https://cns.utexas.edu/graduate-education/> is another great resource for graduate students. It covers college policies, graduate courses offered throughout all CNS graduate programs, as well as, professional development and career support options.

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## Graduate Program Administrative Structure

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### **The Graduate Studies Committee (GSC)**

The Graduate Studies Committee consists of faculty in the Departments of Integrative Biology and Molecular Biological Sciences, as well as faculty from other departments whose interests overlap substantially with the PB GSC. The GSC sets the policies concerning the graduate program curriculum and academic requirements within the guidelines of the Graduate School and the College of Natural Sciences.

**Associate Chair for IB Graduate Programs (Dr. Mike Ryan, [mryan@utexas.edu](mailto:mryan@utexas.edu))**

The Associate Chair for IB Graduate Programs includes EEB, PB and IB affiliated students (students in IB labs, but not in EEB or PB).

**GSC Chair (Dr. Ed Theriot, [etheriot@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:etheriot@austin.utexas.edu))**

The GSC Chair is a faculty member who oversees the PB GSC and oversees all GSC meetings. The chair also implements GSC policy regarding curriculum, and serves as a liaison to the Graduate School and the College of Natural Sciences.

**Graduate Advisor (Dr. Enamul Huq, [huq@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:huq@austin.utexas.edu))**

The Graduate Advisor is a faculty member of the PB GSC who advises graduate students and monitors their progress towards degree. The advisor also serves as a liaison to the Graduate School and the College of Natural Sciences.

**Graduate Program Administrator (Michele Davis, [michele.davis@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:michele.davis@austin.utexas.edu))**

The Graduate Coordinator keeps track of and processes funding sources, student records, and ensures forms and procedures are processed in a correct and timely manner. Questions concerning procedures should be addressed to the Graduate Coordinator, who will consult with the Graduate Advisor, College of Natural Sciences, or the Graduate School, as necessary.

**Admissions Chair (Dr. Hong Qiao, [hqiao@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:hqiao@austin.utexas.edu))**

The Admissions Chair oversees the process of recruiting, evaluating, and admitting applicants to the PB graduate program.

**GSC Faculty Members**

Faculty members on the PB Graduate Studies Committee can mentor PB graduate students, advise and vote on PB GSC policies, serve on the PB GSC sub-committees and dissertation committees. Our current list of PB GSC members can be found on our website at <https://integrativebio.utexas.edu/component/cobalt/items/1-directory?Itemid=1453>

**Assistant Director for IB (Theresa Kelly, [theresa.kelly@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:theresa.kelly@austin.utexas.edu))**

Assists the Department Chair and is the office manager for Integrative Biology. If you need a signature from the IB Department Chair, you should contact the Assistant Director.

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## Graduate Student Representatives

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PB has several students who serve as representatives for the program. The positions are usually nominated and voted on amongst the graduate students every year at the beginning of the fall semester. <https://integrativebio.utexas.edu/plant-biology-graduate-program/current-students-plantbio/administrative-graduate-student-contacts>

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## Student Advising

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Each student in PB receives a personalized education, under the supervision of a team of faculty.

### Major Professor(s)

All students have a faculty member appointed as their major professor (PI) before arriving at UT. The major professor, or professors if co-advised, is responsible for providing the student with academic guidance regarding coursework, research and the access needed to the facilities and resources to conduct their research. All major PI's must be on the PB GSC; however, co-advisors do not have to be GSC members, or even affiliated with the university.

It is possible to change major professor(s) or add a co-advisor if you feel you would be better served in another lab. This is not uncommon, but is often a stressful decision for students. We advise you to consult with the Graduate Advisor in these situations. If any changes are made regarding your major professor(s), you should notify the Graduate Coordinator about the change as soon as possible.

### Diversity & Inclusivity Committee

This committee's two main efforts are (1) to address concerns or complaints about isolation, bias, harassment, mentor-student conflict, or any other inclusivity-related challenge, and (2) to assist in the support of prospective, incoming, and current graduate students through mentorship and community-building. All graduate students are encouraged to speak with one or more committee members, the GSC Chair, Graduate Advisor, or the Graduate Coordinator about any concerns they may have. We will coordinate with students on how to proceed, and will hold all their concerns in confidence. Further information, as well as a list of all current faculty and graduate student representatives serving on this committee are listed on our website at <https://integrativebio.utexas.edu/about/diversity-inclusivity-mission-statement>



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## Course Advisory and Mentoring Plan

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### Mentoring Plan Part 1

During the fall semester, all first-year students are required to complete part one of their Mentoring Plan. This is developed in consultation with the PI, and approved by the Graduate Advisor. The Graduate Coordinator will provide you with the Mentoring Plan part 1 form.

### Mentoring Plan Part 2

At the end of the spring semester, all first-year students are required to complete part two of their Mentoring Plan. This is developed in consultation with the PI, and approved by the Graduate Advisor. The Graduate Coordinator will provide you with the Mentoring Plan part 2 form.

### Additional Mentoring Plans

There are two reasons the student will need to do a new mentoring plan and another follow-up mentoring plan.

- If the student changes labs, it is a requirement to start a new mentoring plan.
- If the student's research changes are enough to warrant a new mentoring plan, then the student and/or the PI can request a new mentoring plan form from the graduate coordinator.

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## PB Annual Assessment

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All students are expected to make reasonable progress toward their degree. Beginning the student's second year, the student must meet with their PI and complete the annual assessment. Once in candidacy, the student will continue to meet annually with their PI, along with any committee member's that are available. It is the student's responsibility to set up this yearly meeting and complete the Annual Assessment by November 1st each year. Once complete, the assessment must be forwarded to the Graduate Coordinator who will then send copies of the annual assessment to the PI and the current committee members. This and other relevant forms are available at <https://integrativebio.utexas.edu/plant-biology-graduate-program/current-students-plantbio/forms>

The reports are used by the PB Graduate Student Evaluation Committee in its annual review of graduate student progress and is important evidence when the committee awards merit fellowships, research and travel funds. Flagrant or repeated violation of this expectation may affect students' eligibility for TA and GRA appointments or fellowships. A formal meeting of the Dissertation Committee can be requested at any time by the student, or any member of the Dissertation Committee, but this annual meeting is required every fall by the PB Graduate Program.

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## PhD Curriculum Requirements

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The Graduate School requires 30 credit-hours of graduate-level coursework to complete a Ph.D. This includes classes, seminar courses, research and dissertation hours. The Graduate School policy is that students must receive a minimum grade of B- or higher to receive credit towards fulfilling degree requirements. PB's policy is that students are required to fulfill the following coursework and training requirements.

### **BIO 389D – Subjects & Skills in Biological Sciences**

This core course is required for all PB graduate students during the fall semester of the student's first year. It is taken with the EEB Cohort.

### **Three Additional Lecture Courses**

In addition to the Subjects & Skills course (BIO 389D), each PB student must take a minimum of three additional graduate-level lecture courses. Lecture courses are defined as courses that meet a minimum of two hours per week, including some instructor-led content (e.g., not just student-led reading discussion), and involve both reading and graded assignments leading to a letter grade.

Two of the additional PB courses must be in the student's area of study and one must be outside the student's area of study. Typically, this is defined as organismal students will take two plant organismal courses and one molecular course, while molecular students will take two plant molecular courses and one organismal course.

All three additional courses must be graduate level and taught, or co-taught, by a PB GSC member, or a Plant Biology instructor.

### **Course Offerings**

Some of the graduate courses listed below will be offered every year, while some will be offered at least every few years, as faculty are available.

<b>IB Courses</b>		
BIO 389D	Subjects & Skills in Biological Sciences	Mueller, Jha
BIO 384L	Issues in Population Biology / Topics & Skills in Biological Sciences (spring only)	Wolf, Farrior
Bio 380C	Advanced Conservation Biology	Fowler
BIO 384K	Theoretical Ecology	Farrior
BIO 384K	Ecology Seminar	Wolf
BIO 389D	Fundamentals of Ecology	Jha, Keitt
BIO 384	Fundamentals of Molecular Evolution	Moran, Ochman
BIO 386K-3	Advances in Plant Systematics	Jansen
Bio 390C	Fundamentals of Evolution	Juenger, Matz, Linder, Kirkpatrick
BIO384	Molecular ecology	Havird
BIO384K	Mitonuclear ecology	Havird
BIO 382K	Python Programming for Biologists	Linder
BIO 384K	Meta-analysis	Havird

<b>MBS Courses</b>		
BIO 389	Advanced Plant Physiology	Clark
BIO 388E	Plant Growth and Development	
BIO 388M	Plant Molecular Biology	Mehdy
BIO 395	Plant Biology: Lab Studies in Plant Biology	

### **Advanced Study and Research / Dissertation Hours**

Students who have not yet advanced to candidacy should take BIO 182, 282, 382, 682 or 982 (Advanced Study and Research) as part of their course load. This provides credit in recognition of ongoing preparation to do research, but does not fulfill the lecture or seminar course requirements listed above. After admission to candidacy, students should register for BIO 399W, 699W, or 999W each semester. In all cases, the first digit 3, 6, or 9 is the number of credit hours. Nine credit hours in the long semesters



and 3 credits in the summer are required for full time status. If this becomes an issue, please contact the Graduate Coordinator.

### Summary of Curriculum Requirements

Required Courses	Number of Semesters	When to Take
Subjects & Skills in Biology	1	Fall of first year
Two PB graduate level courses in your area of study	2	Preferred before candidacy
One PB graduate level course outside your area of study	1	Preferred before candidacy
Research credit (BIO 382, 682, 982)	At least 1	Every semester until admission to candidacy.
Dissertation credit (BIO 399W, 699W, 999W)	At least 2	Every semester after admission to candidacy.

This is the minimum required coursework required by Plant Biology. However, depending on your research and previous experience, your committee may decide you need to take additional courses.

For those coming into the graduate program with a master's degree, you are still required to take the required minimum four courses. Depending on your research interests, your committee may still require additional course work.

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### Qualifying Exam

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In consultation with the Major Professor and approval by the Graduate Advisor, the student will choose a committee that will administer the Qualifying Exam. The committee must be chosen during the fall semester of the second year. The student and Major Professor(s) propose a list of five faculty to serve on the committee, which will be approved by the Graduate Advisor. The student's PI is one of the 5 members of the committee. At least three committee members must be PB GSC faculty members. One of PB GSC members must be outside the area of the student's specialization, such as, a student with a molecular or physiological interest would have one organismal faculty member on the committee. At least one member of the Dissertation Committee must be from outside the PB GSC. The outside committee member can serve on the PB GSC, but the person considered "outside" must be affiliated with another GSC. If the outside committee member is from another university or is not an official GSC member with the Graduate School, they will be required to submit a CV. One Senior Lecturer can serve on the Qualifying committee with the approval of the Graduate Advisor.

A student who wishes to schedule a Qualifying Exam must complete the Qualifying Exam application and prepare the Program of Work for Doctoral Degree. Both of these forms are available at <https://integrativebio.utexas.edu/plant-biology-graduate-program/current-students-plantbio/forms>

The Program of Work includes an approximate thesis title (in order to give the GSC an indication of the student's interests), but a research abstract is not required at this time. A draft of the Program of Work should be approved by the Graduate Advisor at least two weeks before the Qualifying Exam is scheduled to occur. The draft will then be distributed by the Graduate Coordinator to the entire GSC for comments and recommendations.

The Qualifying Exam Committee described above will administer the exam. A person on the exam committee will serve as the chair of the Qualifying Exam Committee, but that person cannot be the student's PI(s).

### **Purpose**

The purpose of Qualifying Exam is to assess whether students have the intellectual capacity, maturity, and background knowledge to conduct research. Specifically, the exam is supposed to:

- evaluate student ability to identify and justify interesting research questions, including formulating appropriate hypotheses,
- assess student ability to place research questions into context of current literature,
- assess student ability to plan strategies to answer research questions,
- evaluate the student's ability to communicate their questions and knowledge in written and oral form,
- identify gaps in student knowledge and to recommend rectification, and
- provide an incentive for student to hone skills and knowledge necessary to proceed with research in their discipline. Assessment of more general subject-matter knowledge is achieved by grades from courses.

### **Prerequisites**

Prior to taking the Qualifying Exam, students should have completed, or at least be currently enrolled, in the four courses required by the program. If a course isn't offered in time to take it before or during the semester of your qualifying exam, and the committee and the Graduate Advisor approve, the student may still go ahead and take the Qualifying Exam.

### **Scheduling**

It is the student's responsibility to set up a date, place and time for the exam when all the committee members can meet. You should schedule a three-hour time slot,

however, if you would like extra time to set up, be sure to allow additional time when reserving the room.

The oral exam should take place by the end of the student's second year (fourth long semester or the subsequent summer). Students seeking to take their exam in their third year must petition the Graduate Advisor to approve the delay. Students who have not completed the Qualifying Exam before the end of their fifth long semester risk being re-routed by their committee or the GSC to the Master's degree track.

### **Qualifying Exam Procedure**

At least two weeks before the exam, the dissertation proposal must be sent to the PI for approval. Once approved and at least one week before the exam, the student must email a copy of the proposal to each of their committee members. It is a good idea to remind each committee member the day before or the morning of the exam about the location and time of the exam.

Students take a single oral exam. The first portion focuses on general knowledge questions about the student's dissertation research. The student is assessed for sufficient general knowledge and course preparation to successfully carry out the research and interpret the results at the level expected for a PhD. The proposal is judged on whether the research is novel and feasible.

The exam will focus on the student's development of questions, hypotheses, and experiments. The exam is also an opportunity for the student to get feedback from their committee. The proposal must include an abstract, introduction, questions and/or hypotheses, explanation of significance, proposed methodology, feasibility and potential pitfalls, and a brief literature review. Three or more chapters should be planned. It is the responsibility of the examining committee to ensure that you have a sound understanding of plant biology, particularly in the areas central to your proposed work. All voting members of the committee will have the opportunity to ask questions on any topic they deem relevant to your research until satisfied.

At the end of the exam, with the student out of the room, the faculty consult about a decision. With feedback from the mentor, the committee may opt to:

#### **General Knowledge**

1. Pass without conditions. Continue to dissertation proposal.
2. Pass with condition(s) listed below. Continue to dissertation proposal.
3. Pass with condition(s) below. Reschedule dissertation proposal
4. Re-examination at a later date.
5. Termination of the PhD program.

#### **Dissertation Proposal**

1. Admit to candidacy.

2. Pass with condition(s) listed below. Continue on to candidacy
3. Pass with condition(s) below. Rewrite Proposal. Do not admit to candidacy.

The Qualifying Examination Results form must be signed by all committee members. This form is completed through DocuSign and this process must be initiated by the graduate student. The student should go to the webpage with EEB forms, <https://integrativebio.utexas.edu/plant-biology-graduate-program/current-students-plantbio/forms> and then to Qualifying Exam Results, which links to the relevant DocuSign portal. Once initiated by the student the forms will be forwarded to the committee members for their signatures. If any additional coursework is required, it should be added to the student's Program of Work for the Doctoral Degree.

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### **Advance to Candidacy**

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When the dissertation proposal has been accepted by the committee and the results form has been signed by the student's committee, the student must return the form to the Graduate Coordinator. The GC will send the student the online form to apply for candidacy with the Graduate School. You are not officially in candidacy until the online form has been final approved by the Graduate School.

Students should also check with the Graduate Coordinator during this time to be sure all your degree requirements have been met. Students do not want to get to their defense to realize something was missed.

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### **Dissertation Defense**

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The semester the student intends to graduate a Graduate Application must be submitted online with the Graduate School.

<https://gradschool.utexas.edu/academics/theses-and-dissertations/doctoral-candidacy>  
This application is due fairly early in the semester, so if you think you may defend, go ahead and submit the application. If by chance you don't defend, or you are still making corrections when the deadline passes, you will just need to apply to graduate again the following semester. It is free to apply to graduate; you can apply multiple times, if necessary.

The students meet with their Dissertation Committee on an annual basis once admitted to candidacy. Critically, they meet within one year prior to the Dissertation Defense to review progress towards completion and get approval of an approximate date for the exam.

When the dissertation is essentially in its final form, it is circulated to the Dissertation Committee. When all members of the committee agree, the final oral exam should be scheduled with the Graduate School by completing the Request for Final Oral Exam form. You can access the form on our EEB webpage at the same “Forms” link that is given above. At this point, all deadlines and paperwork are with the Graduate School, not the PB Graduate Program.

Following procedures specified by the Graduate School, the student should give copies of the dissertation to all committee members at least four weeks prior to the defense. The Request for Final Oral Examination must be signed by all members of the committee and the Graduate Advisor, then submitted to the Graduate School at least two weeks prior to the exam. This is all done through DocuSign. No committee member is expected to sign the Request for Final Oral Examination until they have had sufficient time to examine the dissertation.

The oral defense consists of two parts. The first is a public seminar that is open to members of the University and the public at large. Immediately following the seminar, the student meets privately with the Dissertation Committee to answer any questions that the committee members may have. Once all corrections have been made to the dissertation and at least four members of the committee approve, the GSC Chair or PI (GSC Chair representative), may sign the Report of Dissertation Committee form to notify the Graduate School Dean of successful completion of the defense and all degree requirements. As with other procedures. This form can be accessed on the “Forms” page of the PB website and must be initiated by the graduate student.

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## Master of Arts Program

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The Graduate School has two programs leading to a Master of Arts (MA) Degree that are applicable to Plant Biology and is expected to be completed within two to three years.

- MA with Thesis. This is the usual degree taken in this program. Six hours of “Thesis” are taken as part of the 30 hours of coursework. A written thesis is presented and read by two members of the faculty, your advisor and one other member.
- MA with Report. Three hours of “Report” are taken as part of the 30 hours of coursework. A report instead of a thesis is written. This report is based on work done in one of the courses. The report is read and signed by two members of the faculty, your advisor and one other member.

## Course Requirements

- For the Thesis option, 24 hours of coursework, plus BIO 698A & 698B Thesis (taken sequentially) which counts for 6 hours for a total of 30 hours. For a MA with Report option, BIO 398R must be taken and counts for 3 hours, in addition to 27 hours of coursework, for a total of 30 hours.
- A minimum of 15 hours of coursework in PB is required. PB courses are defined as courses taught or co-taught by a member of the Plant Biology GSC. In rare cases, a course taught by a faculty member who is not a member of the PB GSC may be acceptable but must be approved by the Graduate Advisor. Research courses (BIO 182, 282, 382, etc.) cannot be used to fill this requirement. The student can use no more than one conference course to fulfill the 15-hour requirement.
- As part of the 15 hours of coursework, the student must take three hours of BIO 389D Subjects & Skills in Biological Sciences. This is a core course for first-semester students in the Plant Biology graduate program and is co-taught with the EEB first year students.
- An additional six hours of work acceptable for graduate credit must be outside the major area of Plant Biology.
- No more than 9 hours of senior level college courses may be counted toward the MA degree, and no more than 6 of these can be in PB or the minor area. Courses with a middle digit of 8 or 9 should be chosen where possible.
- No more than six hours of Credit/No Credit courses can be counted. Approval of the Graduate Advisor is required prior to registration for a Credit/No Credit course.

### **Program of Work**

The semester the student intends to graduate, an online graduate application and Program of Work must be submitted. You should contact the Graduate Coordinator to submit the Program of Work online. Once complete, you may then submit the graduation application.

### **Thesis Defense**

Your thesis must be read by your Supervising Professor and one other faculty member. The Reader does not have to be on the PB GSC, nor do they have to be a faculty member, but they must have the PhD credentials to evaluate your Thesis properly.

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### **Registration**

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In general, students must be enrolled for classes whenever they are receiving services from The University, such as course instruction, faculty interaction, employment, fellowship or training grant stipends. Please read the following section carefully and check with the graduate coordinator if you have any questions regarding course load requirements.

### **Full-Time Registration**

In most cases, all PB students must be enrolled full-time during the fall and spring semesters. Since we guarantee support for the first five years, you must be registered full-time, which is 9-hours in the long semester and 3-hours in the summer. In some cases, students do not have to be registered in summer. For these few exceptions, the Graduate Coordinator will inform students if this is an option. If it isn't clear at the time of summer registration, then do register. Registration will zap later if tuition isn't paid, but what we don't want is the student to have to late register and incur a late fee.

Regardless of which semester it is, the university will not pay more than the full-time cost for registration. If you have more than 9 hours in the long semester, or 3 hours in the summer, contact your Graduate Coordinator for advice in meeting the desired 9/3 credit hours goal.

### **Tuition Waivers**

Employment as a TA or GRA qualifies non-Texas residents to receive resident tuition. The waiver is requested on line and is applied directly to your fee bill. You will need to do this every semester you are appointed as a TA or GRA.

For those who are on fellowship, please DO NOT fill out the online tuition waiver. The Graduate Coordinator will take care of submitting the forms for your waiver, as those are processed differently. Please contact the Graduate Coordinator if you are not sure which type of tuition waiver you need.

### **Tuition Bill**

Between the University, CNS and the Department, tuition is covered in full for the first 5-years. The payments usually happen in stages, as different accounts and departments cover different parts of the tuition bill. If you owe additional fees that are not covered under the regular tuition and required fees, then you will need to pay the remaining balance once the University has applied all other payments. These fees include the \$10.00 General Deposit for first year students. Since students can request reimbursement for this fee after graduation, the university cannot cover it. Other examples of additional fees are sports packages and late fees.

### **Confirming Registration**

All students must confirm their tuition bill after all payments are applied or it will be cancelled. To confirm your registration, go to the tuition payment website and click the “CONFIRM” button. The Graduate Coordinator will send you a notice when it is time to confirm, but if you happen to log on and notice, please go ahead and confirm. If your tuition bill is NOT confirmed by the 5:00 pm deadline, then your registration will zap, and you will be charged a late fee when you reregister. In this case, the student is responsible for covering any late fees accrued.

### **Continuous Registration**

The Graduate School requires all students to be continuously enrolled for at least three hours for all long semesters (Spring and Fall) until completion of the degree. Students who need to take a medical leave of absence during a long semester, must petition the Graduate School. The Graduate Coordinator will be able to help you with the petition.

### **Add/Drop or Credit/No Credit**

Students may add and/or drop courses without penalty during the add/drop period, which is the 12<sup>th</sup> class day during long semesters and the 4<sup>th</sup> class day in summer. After that date students must petition the Graduate School, which petitions of this nature are rarely approved. If a student must drop a course after the deadline and the petition letter is approved, the student will have to pay to add a course to keep full-time status due to having a TA/GRA or fellowship. The cost to add a course is about the same cost as summer registration.

A student may change the grade status to CR/NC until about half-way through the semester. Courses required in the Program of Work cannot be taken CR/NC.

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## **Outside Employment**

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Additional Employment and Outside Employment: IB graduate students are not allowed to have outside employment such as part-time positions in restaurants, retail, etc. or any type of job that interferes with completion of coursework or research. On occasion, students may have 5-10 hours of additional or outside employment that is related to their role as graduate students, such as paid grader positions, but only after the completion of the first year. International students are not eligible for additional employment beyond their current 20 hour/week GRA or TA appointment. Before accepting any additional employment, students should first consult their supervising professor and inform the Graduate Program Administrator. You are required to disclose all outside activity that may result in a conflict of interest with your appointment at UT Austin. Information about this can be found on the UT Human Resources website at <https://hr.utexas.edu/current/compliance/outside-employment>

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## Academic Appointments and University Fellowships

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The primary means of support from the University is through an academic appointment, which are covered by Teaching Assistantships, Graduate Research Assistantships or University fellowship. A student appointed as a 20-hour TA or GRA, or on a fellowship of at least a \$1000, qualifies for resident tuition rates.

### Teaching Assistantships

Prior to holding a Teaching Assistant position, the student must take a short training workshop offered prior to the start of their first semester to TA. The workshop is typically held the Friday before the week classes start, so please keep this date in mind as you make travel plans.

Students are considered for these positions by request. Students who hold a TA must reapply each long semester. Once you have accepted a TA position from The Biology Instructional Office, you are responsible for that position. You are not allowed to pull out of the TA without having someone else to replace you. It has been a number of years since we have had a waitlist, so students should never anticipate they can cancel their TA appointment.

### Graduate Research Assistantships

Many faculty members have research grants that allow them to appoint students as GRA's. Students should check with their supervising professors concerning the availability of such appointments before submitting a TA request.

### Pay Period for Teaching Assistants and Graduate Research Assistants

TA's and GRA's are paid in arrears, so September's paycheck will pay out on October 1. Appointments are processed by the semesters, which are broken down as:

- September 1 – January 15
- January 16 – May 31
- June 1 – August 31

### Graders

Each semester we have a few grader appointments available through the Biology Instructional Office. Notice of these appointments are made at the beginning of each semester, and all students have an opportunity to request a grader appointment in addition their TA or GRA, as long as the student does not exceed the appointment limit. The maximum number of hours allowed for all TA/GRA appointments is 30 hours. The two exceptions to this rule are:

- 1) First year students can only be assigned up to 20 hours.
- 2) International students are only allowed to be assigned for 20 hours.

## University Fellowships

Each year the Graduate School accepts nominations from each graduate program for Continuing Fellowships, which provide a year-long stipend. To qualify, you must be in candidacy, or have passed your qualifying exam and in the process of applying to candidacy. The PB Graduate Student Evaluation and Fellowship Committee determines whose name(s) will be submitted to the Graduate School. Nominees for these awards are selected by the Committee based on the strength of their application and on their records of performance.

## Pay Period for Fellowships

Fellowships paid by the Graduate School are paid in advance, meaning you are paid September 1 for the month of September. These fellowships include some Recruitment Fellowships, Continuing Fellowships, NSF and any other type fellowship paid by Graduate School funds. Be sure to budget for the last month you are on fellowship. When your fellowship ends in August, you will receive your August check August 1, but you will not receive your TA/GRA, or fellowship from other sources for September until October 1, so please budget for this extra month accordingly.

- Grad School fellowship paid for August on August 1
- September's stipend is paid on October 1, leaving a two-month gap

There is a similar situation for those who were a TA or GRA in the spring and then go on a fellowship for only the summer. You will receive two stipends on June 1, so hold one of those checks till September 1.

- June 1 – Receive Grad School fellowship for June
- June 1 – Receive TA/GRA and some fellowships for May
- August 1 – receive Grad School fellowship for August
- October 1 – receive stipend for the month of September, leaving a two-month gap

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## Prestigious Outside Fellowships

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Students with strong GRE scores and grade point averages should apply for federally funded fellowships, such as the NSF GRFP, NRSA fellowships from NIH, Howard Hughes Medical Institute International Student Pre-Doctoral Fellowship.

For those with prestigious fellowships, or looking to apply for a fellowship outside UT where the stipend isn't as high as our stipend, or the health insurance and/or tuition isn't fully covered, please let the Graduate Coordinator know as soon as possible. We encourage all prestigious fellowships, but we also have to ensure your stipend, tuition and insurance are covered. If one of the above isn't fully covered, payment will be determined on a case-by-case basis with the PI.

### **Graduate School Prestigious Outside Fellowship Supplement**

Each spring semester the Graduate School holds a fellowship competition for those who hold a prestigious outside fellowship, typically \$15,000 or more. The supplement is a one-time stipend distributed on or around September 1<sup>st</sup> for a \$1000. With this supplement the student may qualify for in-state tuition rates for fall, spring and summer of that academic year. The student may apply for this fellowship each year they hold a qualifying fellowship.

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### **Department Fellowship Competition**

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Every fall and spring Integrative Biology has funds that are allocated competitively to graduate students to help them achieve their career goals. Students can apply for up to \$12,000 during their time as a graduate student. Two types of fellowships are awarded, allowing about 6 months for the funds to be claimed, otherwise, the funds are forfeited and the student has to reapply during another competition. If the student doesn't claim all their awarded funds, the funds will remain available to them to apply for at a later date. The deadline to claim awarded funds, is October 1 and March 1 of each year.

Please note, all funds for research and travel awards are taxed, as the funds are paid from endowments directly to you, which is considered income.

### **Research Awards**

At this time, the total amount allowed for Research Awards during your graduate time here is \$12,000. You may apply for up to \$2500 each spring to be used anytime through March 1 of the following year. Research funds will be paid in two separate payments. After completing any required paperwork, such as thank you letters to donors, the Graduate Coordinator will process the first half of your research grant award. You will need to keep your receipts and submit them to the GC to receive the second half. Once you have spent the second half, submit those receipts to the GC. Students will not be allowed to receive additional funds in another competition until all outstanding receipts have been received, or outstanding funds have been reimbursed to the GC.

Funds for the Research Grants are to be used for research expenditures such as equipment, supplies and travel to research field sites. You may also use these funds to

attend a workshop or training. The funds should not be used for travel to meetings, your stipend, or costs for undergraduate assistants.

## **Travel Awards**

The total amount allowed for Travel Awards during your graduate time here is \$2,000. These grants are used to defray the cost for students to attend professional meetings. The funds are normally reserved for students who (a) will present a paper or poster, and (b) are approaching the end of their graduate career and thus need the opportunity to line up postdoctoral fellowships or other job opportunities. Cost matching by the Major Professor is encouraged. Travel awards are divided up into two categories:

- 1) Travel to present at meetings, which are capped at \$2,000 for his/her graduate career.
- 2) Travel to attend a workshop or training. These funds may be covered by research funds if the student has funds available, otherwise, travel award funds can be used, but those funds are still capped at the \$2,000 total.

## **Fellowship Payments are Taxed**

All fellowships are taxed. UT policy prohibits us from establishing a UT account with endowment funds, so awards are paid directly to the student and therefore considered taxable income. Payment for services within the University, such as sequencing and imaging, must be paid from a UT account. In these cases, the student will have to write a check to reimburse the PI's Department. In most cases, this will be Integrative Biology (IB) or Molecular Biosciences (MBS).

As a matter of best practices, we suggest that awardees create a separate personal account for fellowship money to avoid co-mingling personal and University funds and to facilitate auditing if that were to become necessary.

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## **Health Insurance Benefits**

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All GRA, TA and full Fellowship recipients will be covered by Blue Cross Blue Shield (BCBS) academic health plan through Student Health Services.

You will be automatically enrolled each semester when you have an Academic student employee Workday appointment. If on Fellowship, you must enroll yourself.

<https://utaustin.myahpcare.com/>

Student health insurance is considered gold plan under the Affordable Care Act.



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## Required Student Training

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UT requires all graduate students to take several trainings. Most are only once, but some are required every two to three years. For those that require a refresher, you will receive a notification shortly before it is due.

The Graduate Program requires the following on-line training to be taken by all graduate students (see below). This is not a complete list. Depending on your research, you may be required to take additional short courses. You can find the link on our program website at <https://cns.utexas.edu/eeb-graduate-program/current-students/safety-training>.

### Ethics and Compliance Training

Ethical conduct and compliance are personal responsibilities, and each student will be held accountable for his or her conduct and decision making. Our graduate program has a **zero-tolerance policy regarding academic dishonesty** and students found to be participating in any form of academic dishonesty will face immediate dismissal from the program. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, collusion, and falsification of data or records.

If you hold a position as a TA, GRA, or another position on any University campus or property, the State of Texas wants you to uphold certain ethical behaviors. Graduate students must be aware of and in compliance with State law and University policies related to sexual harassment, equal opportunity, human research, integrity, IT security, and so forth.

### Teaching Assistant Workshop

The Biology Instructional Office requires completion of a teaching assistant (TA) workshop prior to serving as a TA. The workshop is typically on Friday, the week before classes start each fall and spring semester. Further details will be provided by the Biology Instructional Office prior to the first semester a student is to TA.

### Lab Safety Training

- OH 101 Hazard Communication – general
- OH 201 Laboratory Safety
- OH 202 Hazardous Waste Management
- FF 205 Fire Extinguisher Use
- OH 238 Laboratory Safety Refresher (required every 3 years after Lab Safety)

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## Crisis Procedures

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PB strives to provide a highly supportive environment to aid students through difficulties in the event of crises such as health problems (including mental health problems), assault, or professional conflict (e.g., with the Major Professor, or other students or postdocs). Students in need of advice or help may contact any member of the faculty or staff with whom they feel comfortable, but may also contact the Diversity & Inclusivity Committee (as mentioned above), the Graduate Advisor, the GSC Chair, the Associate Chair for Graduate Education, your PI, or the Graduate Coordinator. Such discussions will be held in complete confidence and nothing will be disclosed unless the student specifically requests disclosure.

In the event of an urgent issue, students in need of assistance (especially those at risk to themselves) can use the contact list below to call for help immediately.

- Call 9-1-1 if you are hurt or in danger
- 24/7 UT Counseling and Mental Health Center Crisis Hot Line - 512-471-2255
- UT Counseling and Mental Health Center, Monday – Friday 8am – 5pm - 512-471-3515
- Student Emergency Services, Monday – Friday 8 am – 4 pm - 512-471-5017
- University Ombud's Office – Student Ombud's – 51-471-3825

For further information, you can visit the PB website under the current student tab.

### Mental Health Resources

<https://cns.utexas.edu/plantbio-graduate-program/current-students/mental-health-resources>

### Campus Safety

<https://cns.utexas.edu/plantbio-graduate-program/current-students/campus-safety>