

**GRADUATE PROGRAM OF  
ECOLOGY, EVOLUTION, AND BEHAVIOR  
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN**



**"Future Apex: Baby Crocodile in the Everglades" by Tianyi Xu**

**2025-2026  
Graduate Student Handbook  
Doctoral and Master's Programs**

## Table of Contents

Welcome and Overview	3
Student Responsibilities	3
Email Communication	3
Graduate Students Bill of Rights	4
Graduate Program and IB Administrative Structure	4
Graduate Student Representatives	5
Student Advising	5
Course Advisory and Mentoring Plans	6
Annual Student Self-Assessment	7
Ph.D. Curriculum Requirements	7
Qualifying Exam & Dissertation Proposal	10
Advance to Candidacy	15
Dissertation Defense	16
Master of Arts Program	17
Registration	18
Academic Appointments and University Fellowships	19
Additional and Outside Employment	21
External to UT Fellowships	21
IB Departmental Research and Travel Funds	22
Health Insurance Benefits	23
Required Student Training	23
Crisis Procedures	24
Scholastic Probation	25

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## Welcome and Overview

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The faculty and staff of the Ecology, Evolution and Behavior Graduate Studies Committee (EEB GSC) wish to welcome you to the EEB Graduate Program. We look forward to supporting your progress towards a graduate degree in EEB. We encourage you to use this handbook proactively throughout your studies as it is a summary of the university, department and graduate program policies and procedures. Additional information is on our [EEB](#) website.

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## Student 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 Program Administrator about any deadlines, or issues you may have questions about.

The [Graduate School](#) website is an excellent resource for information on [Grad School Degree Catalog Requirements](#), as well as policies for applying to graduate and deadlines for thesis defenses and dissertation submissions. [Thesis and Defense deadline information](#) is updated the beginning of every semester.

The [College of Natural Sciences \(CNS\) website for Graduate Study](#) is another great resource for graduate students. This website covers college policies, graduate courses offered throughout all CNS graduate programs, professional development and career support options, [Elective Specialty Areas](#) (e.g., Science and Public Policy; Ethics and Social Responsibility; Concentration in Teaching and Mentoring; Concentration in Communicating Science; Data Analysis; Concentration in Leadership and Project Management), and additional Certificates that CNS students can complete in addition to their doctoral degree, such as [Interdisciplinary Portfolio Options](#) (e.g., [Computational Medicine](#)).

This [EEB Graduate Handbook](#) is regularly updated and revised; please always consult the most current version of this Handbook posted on the EEB website's info for current students. For your required curriculum, the handbook you enter under are your curriculum requirements, although you may switch to the current curriculum if you prefer.

Finally, the most important source of information about the EEB Program will come directly from your graduate program coordinators, the graduate advisor, and the Associate Chair for Graduate Education. These are the people to communicate with about all the non-research aspects of your graduate degree, including funding, courses, requirements, fellowships, and others.

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## Email communication

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Most of the communication from the EEB Program will be sent via email. It is your responsibility as an EEB student to stay on top of those communications, check your email daily, and respond promptly. Note that students may have several email addresses affiliated with UT, but all official correspondence will be sent via their [eid]@my.utexas.edu email address. It is your responsibility to make sure this email is checked regularly for updates from the EEB program and UT, otherwise you may miss important information.

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## **Graduate Students Bill of Rights**

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The [IB Graduate Students Bill of Rights](#) clarifies what graduate students can expect from their advisor(s) and the Department of Integrative Biology (IB). This Bill of Rights applies to all graduate students who are advised or co-advised by a faculty member with an IB affiliation. The IB Graduate Students Bill of Rights clarifies department-level rights not directly specified in the Graduate Students Bill of Rights & Responsibilities passed by the UT Graduate Student Assembly in 2015.

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## **Graduate Program and IB Administrative Structure**

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

The Graduate Studies Committee consists of all faculty in the Department of Integrative Biology, plus faculty from other departments whose interests overlap with the [EEB GSC](#). The GSC sets the policies of the graduate program curriculum and academic requirements within the guidelines of the Graduate School and the College of Natural Sciences.

### **Associate Chair for Graduate Education, IB (Dr. Kelly Zamudio, [kelly.zamudio@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:kelly.zamudio@austin.utexas.edu))**

The Associate Chair for IB Graduate Programs administers overarching goals pertaining to the education and support of EEB, PB and IB-affiliated (students in IB labs, but not in the EEB or PB graduate programs) graduate students and is the liaison between these programs and the College of Natural Sciences.

### **EEB GSC Chair (Dr. Justin Havird, [jhavird@utexas.edu](mailto:jhavird@utexas.edu))**

The EEB GSC Chair is a faculty member who oversees EEB-GSC policies and EEB-GSC meetings and serves as liaison to the Graduate School and the College of Natural Sciences.

### **EEB Graduate Advisor (Dr. Kelly Zamudio, [kelly.zamudio@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:kelly.zamudio@austin.utexas.edu))**

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

### **Graduate Program Administrators (Tamra Rogers, [TamraBRogers@utexas.edu](mailto:TamraBRogers@utexas.edu); Susan Stanford, [susan.stanford@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:susan.stanford@austin.utexas.edu))**

The Graduate Program Administrators maintain student records, process, and monitor student funding, and ensure forms and procedures are processed in a correct and timely manner. Questions concerning procedures should be addressed with one of our Graduate Administrators who will consult with the Graduate Advisor, Associate Chair for Graduate Programs, The College of Natural Sciences, or the Graduate School, as necessary.

### **EEB Graduate Program Admissions Chair (appointed annually)**

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

### **EEB GSC Faculty Members**

Current list of faculty members on the [EEB Graduate Studies Committee](#) who can mentor EEB graduate students, advise and vote on EEB policies, and serve on EEB GSC sub-committees and dissertation committees.

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

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

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### **Graduate Student Representatives**

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Each year, two EEB students serve as representatives for the program. The representatives attend IB departmental meetings as well as EEB program meetings. The positions are usually nominated and voted on amongst the graduate students every year at the beginning of the fall semester. Contact information for the current EEB Graduate Student Representative, the CNS Dean's Graduate Student Council Representatives, and the Graduate Student Assembly Representatives are listed here: [Graduate Student Representatives](#)

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### **Student Advising**

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Each EEB student receives a personalized education, under the supervision of a faculty committee.

#### **Major Professor(s)**

Each EEB student has a faculty member appointed as major professor (i.e., major adviser or principal investigator, 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 facilities and resources to conduct research. A major professor must be on the [EEB GSC](#). If a student elects to be co-advised, the second co-advisor does not have to be an EEB-GSC member and does not have to be affiliated with the university, although in the latter case the co-advisor must be approved by the [EEB Graduate Advisor](#) before forming your committee and the Graduate School after your exam.

It is possible to add a co-advisor or to change major professor(s), if a student feels that additional expertise amongst advisors might be beneficial, or that another lab is better suited to serve the student's academic interests. This is not uncommon but can be a stressful decision in some cases. We advise you to consult with the EEB Graduate Advisor in these situations. If any changes are made regarding major professor(s), as well as the Dissertation Committee, the student needs to notify the Graduate Program Administrator about the change as soon as possible.

First-year students may opt to intern in two or three labs during their first year with approval of the relevant faculty. These internships ("rotations") are not required but are available on an opt-in basis. Internships allow the student to learn a variety of research perspectives and methods, and to ensure that they settle in a lab that best suits their academic interests. Internships may be as simple as attending lab meetings, completing a reading project under the guidance of a professor, or may entail field or lab work. If you and a professor(s) decide on this option, you must notify the Graduate Advisor and Graduate Program Administrator immediately.

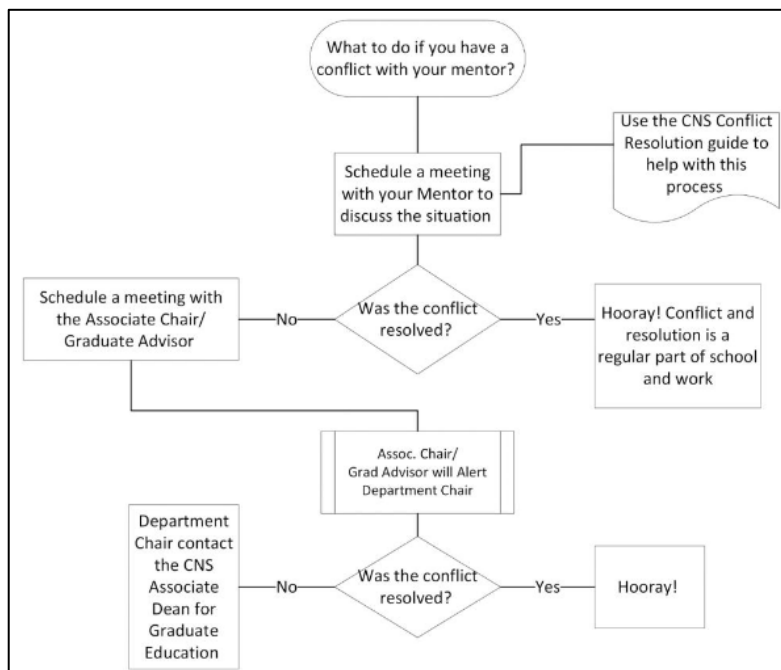
#### **Community, Accessibility, and Well-Being**

The Community, Accessibility, and Wellbeing Committee of the Department of Integrative Biology assists in the support of prospective, incoming, and current graduate students through mentorship and community-building; and addresses concerns or complaints about isolation,

bias, harassment, mentor-student conflict, or any other well-being related challenges. All graduate students are encouraged to speak with one or more of the Committee members, the GSC Chair, the Graduate Advisor, the Associate Chair for Graduate Education, or the Graduate Program Administrator about any concerns they may have. We will coordinate with students on how to proceed. We will hold all student concerns in confidence, except in Title IX incidents (sexual assault, stalking, sexual harassment, sex discrimination); Texas state law requires that everyone in the UT community is obligated to follow mandatory Title IX reporting to the [University's Title IX Office](#). Further information, as well as a list of all current faculty, staff, and graduate student representatives serving on the [Community, Accessibility, and Well-Being Committee](#) are listed on our website.

## Conflict Resolution

All students, faculty, researchers, and staff affiliated with the EEB GSC are expected to contribute to a work environment of cooperation, respect, and trust. If any conflicts develop (e.g., student-faculty or student-student conflicts), graduate students are encouraged to speak confidentially about any concerns they may have with their Graduate Advisor(s), one or more of their graduate committee members, the EEB GSC Chair, the Associate Chair for Graduate Education in Integrative Biology, or the Graduate Program Administrator. The flowchart to the right was adapted from a similar flowchart developed by the College of Natural Sciences to help navigate conflict-resolution procedures.




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## Course Advisory and Mentoring Plans

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### Mentoring Plan Part 1

During the fall semester of Year 1, each first-year student is required to complete Part 1 of a Mentoring Plan. Each first-year student develops this Plan in consultation with the student's major professor, and the Plan is then approved by the Graduate Advisor. The Graduate Administrator will provide the form for the Mentoring Plan Part 1 at the beginning of the first semester, and the completed Mentoring Plan Part 1 is due 1<sup>st</sup> October. Mentoring plans can be found online at: [Forms](#)

### Mentoring Plan Part 2

During spring semester of the first year of graduate studies, each first-year student is required to develop and complete Part 2 of their Mentoring Plan in consultation with the major professor and receive approval by the Graduate Advisor. The Graduate Administrator will provide the form for the Mentoring Plan Part 2 at the beginning of the second semester, and the completed Mentoring Plan Part 2 is due 1<sup>st</sup> February. Mentoring plans can be found online at: [Forms](#)



## Amended Mentoring Plans

A student will need to submit an amended Mentoring Plan under the following two conditions:

- If a student decides to change the major professor, it is a requirement for this student to develop a new mentoring plan with the new major professor.
- If a student's research direction changes significantly, a student may benefit from a new mentoring plan, the student or the major professor can then request development of a new mentoring plan.

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## Annual Student Self-Assessment

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All EEB students are expected to make reasonable progress toward completion of all degree requirements. Beginning with the student's second year, each student must meet with their major professor(s) and complete a required Annual Student Self-Assessment of student accomplishments and progress towards completing degree requirements. It is the student's responsibility to set up this yearly meeting and complete the Annual Student Self-Assessment by November 1st each year. Once complete, the Self-Assessment must be routed through DocuSign for signature. [Note that the *Annual Student Self-Assessment* is different from the *Annual Committee Meeting Self-Report* that is discussed below. Both the *Self-Assessment* and the *Self-Report* are written by each student, but while the *Annual Student Self-Assessment* is written by a student to summarize the student's *own views* of accomplishments and progress towards completing degree requirements, the *Annual Committee Meeting Self-Report* summarizes the decisions and recommendations agreed upon during the annual meeting by the student's advisory Committee. Both the *Annual Student Self-Assessment* and the *Annual Committee Meeting Self-Report* are used by the Graduate Advisor in their annual review of graduate student progress, and by the IB Awards Committee when making decisions on fellowships, research and travel funds. Students must be up to date on their Annual Student Self-Assessment and their *Annual Committee Meeting Self-Report* to maintain eligibility for TA or GRA appointments or for fellowship support. Annual Student Self-Assessment is available at: [Forms](#)

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## Ph.D. 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. EEB's policy is that students are required to fulfill the following coursework and training requirements, consisting of a **minimum** of six courses supplemented with research credits (many students opt to take additional courses): [Core Course Options](#)

### EEB 389D – Subjects & Skills in Biological Sciences

This core course is required for all EEB graduate students during the fall semester of the student's first year. First-year EEB graduate students attend this course together with the first-year graduate students from the PB Graduate Program.

### EEB 384L – Issues in Population Biology

Students must register for this seminar course for one semester, which consists of lectures and related discussion given by local faculty, students, postdocs, and visitors. All EEB students must register for

Issues in Population Biology for one semester. Students are encouraged to enroll in this course in the spring of a student's first year, so they may have sufficient knowledge of EEB faculty's research to form their Qualifying Exam/Dissertation Committee.

### Two Fundamentals in EEB courses

EEB students are required to take at least two of the three Fundamentals courses listed below (these are lecture courses taught by EEB GSC members at least once per year):

- EEB 390C – Fundamentals in Evolution
- EEB 390D – Fundamentals in Integrative Animal Behavior
- EEB 390E – Fundamentals in Ecology

### One Quantitative Skills Course

Each student must complete course work that emphasizes quantitative skills by completing at least one course that qualifies as “Computational/Quantitative” in the [course offerings](#) (see Courses that satisfy this requirement may include non-EEB courses in areas such as mathematics, statistics, computer programming, bioinformatics, GIS, or EEB courses with heavy computational or mathematical training. The operational definition of a quantitative course, for the purpose of this requirement, is that the course should include multiple graded assignments in which students must apply learned quantitative skills to a task, including but not limited to mathematical operations and/or programming. Also, a majority (>50%) of class time should be devoted to teaching or exercising the quantitative skills. To qualify as part of a student's Program of Work, the course must be taken for a letter grade. Which courses count as quantitative skills courses will be decided by the EEB Graduate Advisor, based on information provided in respective course syllabi. Several such courses taught recently are listed in the course offerings website linked above.

### One Additional Lecture or Seminar Course

In addition to EEB 389D, EEB 384L, two fundamentals' courses, and one quantitative skills course, each EEB student must take a minimum of one additional graduate-level lecture or seminar course. Lecture courses are defined as courses that meet a minimum of two hours per week, including some instructor-led content (e.g., more than student-led discussion of readings), and involve both reading and graded assignments leading to a letter grade. Which courses count as lecture courses will be decided by the EEB Graduate Advisor, based on information provided in respective course syllabi. The additional course may also be a seminar course, which is defined as a journal club, reading group, or seminar-type class that meets less regularly than a lecture course and where grades are usually based mostly on participation. This additional course must be a graduate-level EEB courses that are taught by [EEB GSC](#) members, although students may petition the EEB Graduate Advisor if they wish to take a related class to fulfill this requirement.

### Department and Other Seminar Series

EEB expects that graduate students will regularly attend the seminar presentations given in the Integrative Biology departmental seminar series:

- Integrative Biology Seminar Series. Monday's 3-4 PM. Weekly departmental seminars during fall and spring semesters.

Additional seminar series with lecture presentations that may be of interest to EEB students include:

- Brain, Behavior, and Evolution Seminar (**EEB 384K.45**) Fridays 12-1. Lectures mostly given by local researchers, focusing on animal behavior, neurobiology, behavioral physiology, behavioral genomics, and related topics.



- Molecular Biological Sciences. Wednesdays 4-5 and Thursdays noon-1. Seminar series for the MBS Department.
- Eco Lunch. Wednesday from 1-2 pm. A forum for informal presentations of developing research projects or emerging ideas surrounding ecology (broadly defined) and adjacent fields.

## Course Offerings

The list of course offerings you may take to fulfill your core degree requirements is listed on our website at [EEB Core Course Options](#). Any other courses not listed will need approval by the Graduate Advisor.

## Advanced Study and Research / Dissertation Hours

Students who have not yet advanced to candidacy must take EEB 182, 282, 382, 682 or 982 (Advanced Study and Research) as part of their course load (the first digit, such as 3, 6, or 9 of a course number, such as EEB 682, indicates the number of credit hours of a particular course). Enrollment in one of these courses provides credit in recognition of ongoing preparation to do research but does not fulfill the lecture or seminar course requirements listed above. If an EEB student fails to register for these research credits on a regular basis (e.g., 3 credits per semester), the EEB Graduate Advisor will consult with the major professor about the student's research progress. After admission to candidacy, students must register each semester for either EEB 399W, 699W, or 999W. Nine credit hours in the long semesters and 3 credits in the summer are required for full time status as graduate student. Please contact the Graduate Program Administrator if you need help deciding which of these courses is appropriate for you in a particular semester or summer.

## Teaching Assistant Experience

EEB students are required to hold a Teaching Assistant (TA) position for a minimum of two long semesters (either fall or spring) during their time as a graduate student. Exceptions can be made for students who have served as a TA in a previous graduate program.

## Oral Presentations

Beginning with their second year, all EEB graduate student are required to present a talk on their research at least once a year. Qualifying events include lectures in public venues such as the Population Biology Seminar Series; the Brain, Behavior & Evolution Seminar Series; the annual Integrative Biology Graduate Student Research Symposium (note that faculty do not participate in this student symposium, per wishes of the graduate students); seminar series at other universities, departments, or institutions; or oral presentations at conferences. Lab meeting presentations or poster presentations at conferences do not satisfy this requirement. Oral student presentations should be a minimum of 15 minutes to qualify. Students may split a one-hour seminar timeslot (e.g., in the Brain, Behavior, and Evolution Seminar Series) into two or three presentations by several EEB students.

## Summary of Curriculum Requirements

Required Courses	Number of Semesters	When to Take
EEB 389D Subjects & Skills in Biology	1	Fall of first year
EEB 384L Issues in Population Biology	1	Spring of first Year
EEB Fundamentals	2	Take 2 of the 3 EEB Fundamentals course preferably before candidacy
Lecture course with quantitative requirement	1	Preferably before candidacy

At least 1 additional lecture or seminar course	1	Preferably before candidacy
Research credit (EEB 382, 682, 982)	Ongoing	Every semester through admission to candidacy.
Dissertation credit (EEB 399W, 699W, 999W)	Ongoing	Every semester after admission to candidacy.
Teaching Assistant Experience	2	Any 2 semesters before graduation
Oral Presentation	Ongoing	Starting Year 2, give at least one presentation every year

### Summary Timeline of Milestones

Time	Requirement
Year 1, fall	Complete <b>Mentoring Plan Part 1</b> , due Oct 1 <sup>st</sup> of Year 1
Year 1, spring	Complete <b>Mentoring Plan Part 2</b> , due Feb 1 <sup>st</sup> of Year 1
Year 1, spring	<b>Form Qualifying Exam/Dissertation Committee before end of the semester</b>
Starting with Year 2, by Nov 1 <sup>st</sup>	Complete <b>Annual Student Self-Assessment</b> form, due each year by Nov 1 <sup>st</sup>
by end of Year 2	Present <b>Research Talk</b> , and continuing each subsequent year
Year 2	Complete <b>Qualifying Exam</b> before end of the summer, can petition the EEB Graduate Advisor to take Qualifying Exam in fall of Year 3
Post-Candidacy, by Nov 1 <sup>st</sup> each year	<b>Annual Committee Meeting Self-Report</b> , each student summarizes in a report the Committee's recommendation after the annual Committee meeting, has this report approved by <i>each</i> Committee member, then files the fully approved report with the Graduate Program Administrator (see below).
Year 5	<b>Thesis Defense</b> , can petition for extension; celebrate Ph.D.!

### Course work completed during Master's studies prior to EEB graduate studies

Students who already completed a Master's degree (or a graduate level class as an undergraduate) may appeal to the Graduate Advisor to waive a particular course requirement. Having a course waived does not reduce the number of courses that are required but allows a student more flexibility in choosing coursework. For example, having one of the Fundamental courses waived does not change the requirement of a quantitative lecture course. The operating principle is that we do not want our coursework to duplicate courses the student has already taken in a Master's program. The maximum number of courses that can be waived is two, and only one of the Fundamentals courses can be waived. The final decision on a waiver will be made by the Graduate Advisor in consultation with faculty who are experts in the field of a proposed course waiver. To justify the waiver request, the student must supply the Graduate Advisor with a copy of the syllabus of the relevant course/courses from their previous Master's program.

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## Qualifying Exam & Dissertation Proposal

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### Qualifying Exam Committee (i.e., the Dissertation Committee)

In consultation with the Major Professor and with approval by the Graduate Advisor, each student chooses a committee that will administer the Qualifying Exam. This Qualifying-Exam Committee must be chosen during the second long semester (spring) of the first year or the first long semester (fall) of the second year. The student and major Professor(s) propose a list of at least four faculty to serve on the committee, which will be approved by the EEB Graduate Advisor. The student's Major Professor is one of the 4 members of the Qualifying-Exam Committee. At least three Qualifying-Exam Committee

members must be EEB GSC faculty members, and at least one member must be from outside the EEB GSC (this “outside” committee member cannot be a member of the EEB GSC). If the “outside” member is from UT-Austin, this outside member must be affiliated with another GSC at UT-Austin. If the outside committee member is from another university or is not an official member of a GSC recognized by the UT Graduate School, the outside member will be required to submit a CV to the Graduate Program Administrator for approval by the Graduate Advisor. The CV will then be forwarded to the Graduate School when applying to candidacy after the qualifying exam. One Senior Lecturer from UT-Austin can serve on the Qualifying-Exam committee with the approval of the Graduate Advisor.

Most students opt to keep the same members of their Qualifying Exam Committee to serve on their Dissertation Committee after advancing to candidacy (see below).

The student will also designate an **acting committee chair** from their committee, who is not their Major Professor. The role of the acting committee chair is to advocate for the student and to help mediate conflicts between the student and PI, particularly related to research progress and graduation time. Specifically, the acting committee chair will:

- Provide scientific input at annual meetings and on a more frequent basis, as warranted.
- Together with the PI, student, and other members of the committee, set expectations for the research projects consistent with the general expectations for a PhD in EEB
- Make sure the expectations of the student are kept consistent
- Work with the PI and other members of the committee to monitor the student's progress toward this established set of expectations, and to communicate the committee's evaluation to the student
- Work with the PI to ensure that the student gets the professional development they seek, given their proposed career path (including but not limited to meeting opportunities, appropriate publication authorship, etc.).

### Scheduling the Qualifying Exam

A student who wishes to schedule a Qualifying Exam must complete the Qualifying Exam application form and prepare the Program of Work for Doctoral Degree. Both forms are available on the website at [Forms](#).

The Program of Work includes an approximate thesis title (to give an indication of the student's research interests), but a research abstract is not required at this time. A draft of the Program of Work needs to be approved by the Graduate Advisor at least two weeks before the Qualifying Exam is scheduled to occur.

The Qualifying Exam Committee described above administers the exam. The EEB Graduate Advisor will choose the chairperson of the Qualifying Exam Committee from among the committee members who are not the student's major professor(s), often the acting committee chair.

### Purpose of the Qualifying Exam

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

- evaluate student ability to identify and justify interesting research questions, including formulating appropriate hypotheses and predictions;
- assess student ability to place research questions into the 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 recommend remedies; and
- provide an incentive for the student to hone the skills and knowledge necessary to proceed with research in their specific discipline. More general subject-matter knowledge is evaluated by grades from coursework completed by a student.

## Prerequisites

Prior to taking the Qualifying Exam, students should have completed most of the required courses based on consultation with the major professor(s) and the newly selected Qualifying Exam Committee.

## Scheduling

It is the student's responsibility to set up a date, place, and time for the exam when all committee members can meet. Students should schedule a three-hour time slot, however, if they would like extra time to prepare for or finish up the meeting, they can book additional time when reserving a room for the exam. Given University policy at the time of the exam, it is possible that some committee members can meet over Zoom. The student should check with the Graduate Program Administrator or the Graduate Advisor regarding these details.

The oral portion of the Qualifying Exam should take place no later than 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 by the GSC to the Master's degree track.

## Qualifying Exam procedure

- 1) Students identify a Qualifying Exam Committee of at least four faculty in the spring of their first year or fall of their second year, as described above. The Qualifying Exam Committee membership can change up until the submission of the application form for the Qualifying Exam (see above, no later than two weeks before the Qualifying Exam is scheduled to occur). Many students choose members for the Qualifying-Exam Committee that later also become members of the Dissertation Committee that supervises student progress after a student passes the Qualifying Exam, but it is also possible to substitute or add committee members between the Qualifying Exam and the formation of the Dissertation Committee. Note that the members of the Qualifying Exam Committee require approval only by the EEB Graduate Advisor, whereas the members of the later Dissertation Committee (details below) also require approval by the Graduate School after a student has passed the Qualifying Exam.
- 2) To clarify expectations for the exam, once the Qualifying Exam Committee is set, each student will meet individually, one-on-one, with each Qualifying Exam committee member to discuss the student's research interests, possible research questions to be addressed, research strategies and techniques, relevant training, and funding. Each committee member should discuss with the student how the committee member's research expertise can help facilitate the student's training. Each committee member should also suggest and agree with the student on coursework, workshops, and independent reading assignments, to help train the student on agreed-upon topics relevant to the student's interests. Optimizing a training plan and research strategy may require follow-up meetings with each committee member or clarification/finalization of readings via email. The emerging recommendations represent a plan for the student's studies during their second year and define the topics that may be covered during the general knowledge portion of the Qualifying Exam. To formalize this plan, and to help prepare for the Qualifying Exam, each student should establish a cloud document (e.g., a Google Doc) where each faculty lists their assigned readings and expectations, and committee members can understand each other's expectations and assignments

for the student, in preparation for the Qualifying Exam. The recommendations compiled in this document serve to define the scope of what is expected of the student in the general knowledge part (see below) of the Qualifying Exam.

- 3) Students are expected to take the Qualifying Exam by the end of their second year (by the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> long semester). In exceptional cases, students may appeal with the Graduate Advisor to take the exam during their third year (5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> semester).
- 4) At least 4 weeks before the Qualifying Exam, each student must submit a 10-15 page Dissertation Proposal to their committee, as the written portion of the Qualifying Exam. In the communication to the committee, the student must also indicate the due date for feedback (within 2 weeks of submission, see below). The students are highly advised to provide the Committee with at least one reminder in the interim, ideally 1 week after the Dissertation Proposal submission. The student *should work closely with the Major Professor(s)* to create this Dissertation Proposal, which will typically discuss:
  - a. a succinct and clear summary of the existing literature on a topic the student aims to investigate;
  - b. an overarching research question that a student plans to address in the dissertation research, and a clear explanation of why the question is worth answering;
  - c. any preliminary data to motivate the question, as well as information or data that demonstrate that the planned work is feasible;
  - d. a description of the research methods, planned data analyses, and possible interpretations of expected data;
  - e. an explanation of how the research will be partitioned into dissertation chapters and eventual publications (at least three dissertation chapters, each corresponding to a journal article, is a common expectation);
  - f. a timeline for completion of the research and all dissertation work;
  - g. a description of the resources and funding required to complete the work, and how those resources and funding will be acquired or have already been acquired.

The proposal should be in 11- or 12-point font with 1-inch margins and single spaced. References do not count against the page limit of 10-15 pages.

If the student does not submit the proposal on time to the committee (no later than 4 weeks before the scheduled Qualifying Exam), the Qualifying Exam must be rescheduled to allow the Committee sufficient time to give helpful feedback before the Qualifying Exam takes place.

- 5) No later than 2 weeks before the exam, each committee member must provide written feedback to the student and Major Professor on each of the projects and thesis chapters in the student's Dissertation Proposal. Committee members may provide individual comments as a written review of the student's Dissertation Proposal, or as track-changes or comments added to the student's word-document of the Dissertation Proposal. The comments accumulated from all committee members provide essential early feedback that the student should use to adjust the proposed research plan *before the actual Qualifying Exam*. Students are encouraged to describe these changes to the research plan in their presentation within the *Dissertation Research part of the Qualifying Exam* (described below).

In the same communication as the Dissertation Proposal written feedback, no later than 2 weeks before the scheduled Qualifying Exam, each committee member will make a recommendation on how to proceed with the Dissertation Proposal:

- a. **The Dissertation Proposal is ready** for discussion at the scheduled Qualifying Exam; no substantial revision of the Dissertation Proposal is necessary, but the student should consider the comments by all committee members and refine the student's presentation of the research at the Qualifying Exam accordingly.

- b. **The Dissertation Proposal needs minor revision**; the student should complete revisions no later than 3 days before the Qualifying Exam and send a revised version of the Dissertation Proposal to all committee members. The revised Dissertation Proposal should provide the committee with a written description of any minor or substantive changes to the original research plan.
- c. **The Dissertation Proposal needs major revision**; the Qualifying Exam and defense of the Dissertation Proposal should be rescheduled for a later date so the student has time to complete these major revisions. The Major Professor must notify the committee if one committee member has made this particular recommendation so that a later date can be decided.

If Committee members disagree in their recommendations (e.g., some Committee members recommend minor revision, other members recommend major revision and therefore rescheduling of the Qualifying Exam), the entire committee should discuss their diverging recommendations expediently via Email or Zoom meeting to formulate a consensus recommendation.

- 6) A Committee member, someone other than the major professor(s), is assigned by the Graduate Advisor the responsibility as Chair of the Qualifying Exam (usually the “acting committee chair”, see above). The Chair is responsible for strictly enforcing the exam rules, such as format and timing. The Chair should also communicate with the student during the week before the Qualifying Exam to clarify any questions that a student may have about format of the Qualifying Exam.
  - a. The proceedings of the Qualifying Exam are initiated with a brief discussion among the Committee members (the student steps out of the room) about the student’s progress and prospects for further work. At this stage the faculty mentor(s) should provide a brief summary of the student’s accomplishments and performance as an EEB graduate student. The Chair should briefly summarize the format, rules, and goals of the Qualifying Exam as a reminder to all Committee members.
  - b. General-knowledge part of the Qualifying Exam: The first portion of the exam (no longer than 1-hour duration is recommended, to leave sufficient time for the dissertation research part of the Qualifying Exam) addresses general knowledge questions about topics decided upon as described in point 2) above. The major professor(s) do not ask questions or comment during this general-knowledge portion of the Qualifying Exam. Prior to the Qualifying Exam, the student may make a recommendation to the Chair of the Qualifying Exam which committee member should be first to ask questions during the general knowledge portion of the Qualifying Exam. At the end of the 1-hour general-knowledge portion of the Qualifying Exam, the committee will discuss these following options i.-v. (but will not share this discussion with the student until the end of the overall exam, except in the below cases iv. and v.):
    - i. Pass general-knowledge part without conditions, and continue to discussion of the Dissertation Proposal.
    - ii. Pass general-knowledge part with condition(s) to be recorded by the Chair of the Qualifying Exam, and continue to discussion of the Dissertation Proposal.
    - iii. Fail the general-knowledge part for reasons to be recorded by the Chair of the Qualifying Exam, and continue to discussion of the Dissertation Proposal.
    - iv. Reschedule the Qualifying Exam for a later date (e.g., if a student appears unusually nervous and the student would benefit from a fresh start with an Exam at a later date).
    - v. Termination of the Ph.D. program.
  - c. Dissertation Research part of the Qualifying Exam: In the second portion of the Qualifying Exam (minimum 1-hour duration, ideally 1-2 hours to allow sufficient discussion of the proposed research), committee members ask the student questions that address the specific research plan outlined in the Dissertation Proposal and submitted by the student 4 weeks before the Qualifying Exam (see points 4 & 5 above), and provide feedback on research feasibility. The Committee should determine through the questioning whether the student has sufficient knowledge and critical thinking skills to pursue the work effectively. To facilitate the research portion of the Qualifying Exam, *the student should prepare a brief power point presentation (~15-20 minutes) given at the*



start of the research portion of the Exam to guide the discussion. In this presentation, a student should specify where the student has made changes based on feedback given earlier by the Committee. The student, Qualifying Exam Chair, and major professor should decide ahead of the exam if questions will be asked during this presentation, or held until after the presentation is complete. The major professor(s) should take a back-seat to this discussion, but may contribute.

- d. The entire Qualifying Exam should not exceed 3 hours, with a short break between the general-knowledge and the research parts of the Qualifying Exam. Ideally, more time should be allocated for discussion of the Dissertation Proposal (1-2 hours) than for assessment of general knowledge (no more than 1 hour).
- e. At the end of the Qualifying Exam, the student leaves the room and the committee members consult about their decisions. Each committee member provides a separate evaluation for the student's written research proposal, general knowledge, and research plan of the Dissertation Proposal. By weighting these considerations, with feedback from the major professor(s), the committee will decide between these options:
  - i. Admit to Candidacy.
  - ii. Pass with condition(s) recorded by the Chair of the Qualifying Exam; continue to Candidacy.
  - iii. Pass with condition(s) recorded by the Chair of the Qualifying Exam; required rewrite of dissertation proposal, and/or required re-examination of general knowledge; do not admit to Candidacy.

In their deliberations following the Qualifying Exam, the Qualifying Exam Committee may consider not only responses to questions during the exam, but also the successful completion of formal coursework, prior research experience, and other evidence of academic achievement. When the committee has completed its deliberations on the student's performance and has decided on a recommendation, the student will be invited back before the committee to discuss the results of both parts of the examination. Approval of the dissertation proposal should occur no later than the end of fifth long semester in residence, with admission to Candidacy no later than the sixth long semester.

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 after the Qualifying Exam. The student should go to the [EEB forms](#) webpage, then to Qualifying Exam Results, which links to the relevant DocuSign portal. Once initiated by the student, the forms will be routed to each committee member for their signatures. If any additional coursework is required by the committee, the student and the major professor(s) should make sure to add this coursework to the student's Program of Work for the Doctoral Degree.

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### Advance to Candidacy

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When the student has passed the Qualifying Exam, the Dissertation Proposal has been accepted by the committee, and the Qualifying Examination Results form (see preceding paragraph) has been signed via DocuSign by all members of the student's committee, the student must return the signed form of the Qualifying Exam Results to the Graduate Program Administrator, who will then send the student the **online form to apply for Candidacy with the Graduate School**. In the application for Candidacy with the Graduate School, the student must list all official members of the Dissertation Committee, which the student should discuss in advance with the major professor(s) and the Qualifying Exam Committee members. Most EEB students keep the same committee members from the qualifying exam as members on their Dissertation Committee. A student is not officially in Candidacy until the online form listing all members of the Dissertation Committee has been approved by the Graduate School.

After the Qualifying Exam, each student should check with the Graduate Program Administrator to be sure all the degree requirements (e.g., coursework) will be met well in advance of the Dissertation Defense.

All students are expected to make reasonable progress toward the degree. Once a student has been admitted to Candidacy for the Ph.D., the Dissertation Committee will meet with the student annually to review progress. It is the student's responsibility to set up these annual meetings. After each of the annual meetings, the student will prepare a written summary of recommendations that emerged from the meeting, the Annual Dissertation Committee Meeting Self-Report. See link to Forms at <https://integrativebio.utexas.edu/current-students>. Each member of the committee will indicate approval by signing the Annual Dissertation Committee Meeting Self-Report, and the final signed document has to be submitted by the student to the Graduate Program Administrator to become part of the student's file. The Annual Dissertation Committee Meeting Self-Report must be submitted by November 1<sup>st</sup> of each year. Together with the Annual Student Self-Assessment (also due November 1<sup>st</sup> of each year), the Annual Dissertation Committee Meeting Self-Report is used by the Graduate Advisor in their annual review of graduate student progress, and both reports are important evidence when the IB Award Committee awards merit fellowships and research and travel funds. Flagrant or repeated violation of filing the Student Self-Assessment and the Committee Meeting Self-Report may affect a students' eligibility for TA/RA 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.

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## Dissertation Defense

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During the semester the student intends to graduate and defend the Dissertation, a [Graduate Application](#) must be submitted online with the Graduate School with the [Graduate School](#). This application is due early in the respective semester, so if you think you may defend, go ahead and submit the application. If by chance you don't defend that semester, or you are still revising the Dissertation when the deadline passes, you will just need to apply to graduate again the following semester. The Graduate Application is free, and a student can apply multiple times, if necessary.

Each student must meet with their Dissertation Committee on an annual basis once admitted to candidacy (see above). Critically, each student must meet within one year prior to the Dissertation Defense to review progress towards completion and obtain the Committee's 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](#) on the EEB webpage to route through DocuSign. For additional information on graduation deadlines, submitting materials, etc. see [Graduate School website](#). At this point, all deadlines and paperwork are with the Graduate School, not the EEB Graduate Program.

Following the procedures prescribed by the Graduate School, a student should give copies of the complete 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. No committee member is expected to sign the Request for Final Oral Exam until they have had sufficient time to examine the Dissertation. The [Request for Final Oral Exam](#) form is routed through DocuSign for signature. After all committee members and the Graduate Advisor have signed, you will then download the form and email it to [Graduate School Services](#), along with anything else they may request. DocuSign is only for inhouse routing only, not submission to the Graduate School. Please ask the Graduate Program Administrator if you have any questions.

The oral Dissertation Defense consists of two parts. The first part is a public seminar that is open to members of the University and the public at large. Immediately following that seminar, the student meets privately with the Dissertation Committee to answer any questions that the committee members may have, and to discuss possible corrections or amendments to the written Dissertation. Once all corrections have been made to the Dissertation and at least four members of the committee approve, the entire Dissertation Committee and then also the EEB GSC Chair or Graduate Advisor need to sign the [Report of Dissertation Committee](#) form (via DocuSign). The Graduate School sends this form via email, with additional instructions. Please use the form in DocuSign for easy signing, but follow all other processes in the printed version the Graduate School sends to you. Once the Report of Dissertation is complete you will download the form and email to [Graduate School Services](#) 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 EEB 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 Ecology, Evolution and Behavior and is expected to be completed within two to three years.

- MA with Thesis. This is the usual degree taken if a student decides to complete a Masters. A student needs to register for six hours of “Thesis” as part of the minimally 30 hours of required coursework. The student needs to write a Master’s thesis that is read by two members of the faculty, the major professor and one other member of the EEB GSC.
- MA with Report. A student needs to register for three hours of “Report” as part of the minimally 30 hours of required coursework. Instead of writing a thesis, the student writes a Report, which is based on work done in one of the courses completed by the student. The report is read and signed by two members of the faculty, the major professor and one other Reader. The Reader does not have to be a member of the EEB GSC, and the Reader does not have to be a faculty member, but the Reader must have the Ph.D. credentials to evaluate the Master’s Report properly. The Graduate Advisor must approve the appointment of a Reader.

### Course Requirements for completion of a Master of Arts

- For the Master’s Thesis option, 24 hours of coursework, plus EEB 698A & 698B Thesis (taken sequentially), which counts for 6 hours for a total of 30 hours, are required. For the Master’s Report option, EEB 398R must be taken and counts for 3 hours, in addition to 27 hours of coursework, for a total of 30 hours.
- Completion of a minimum of 15 hours of coursework in Ecology, Evolution and Behavior is required. EEB courses are defined as courses taught or co-taught by a member of the EEB GSC. In rare cases, a course taught by a faculty member who is not a member of the EEB GSC may be substituted, but this substitution 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 (e.g., a non-lecture graduate course focused on discussion of readings) to fulfill the 15-hour requirement.
- As part of the 15 hours of coursework, the student must take three hours of EEB 389D Subjects & Skills in Biological Sciences. This is a core course for first-semester students in the EEB graduate program and is co-taught with the PB first year students (see above).
- An additional 6 hours of work acceptable for graduate credit must be outside the major area of EEB.

- No more than 9 hours of senior level college courses may be counted toward the Master's degree, and no more than 6 of these can be in EEB 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.

### **Graduation Application and Program of Work, Master of Arts**

The semester the student intends to graduate, an online graduate application and Program of Work must be submitted. The Graduate Application is submitted by the student and the Program of Work is submitted by the Graduate Program Administrator. Contact the Graduate Program Administrator to submit the Program of Work first, once done, then you will be able to complete and submit the [graduation application](#).

### **Thesis Defense, Master of Arts**

Your thesis must be read and approved by the Supervising Professor (major professor) and one other Reader. The Reader does not have to be a member of the EEB GSC, and the Reader does not have to be a faculty member, but the Reader must have the PhD credentials to evaluate the Master's Thesis properly. The Graduate Advisor must approve the appointment of a Reader by submitting a CV. This same CV will then be emailed to [Graduate School Services](#) along with other documents. The complete list of documents and procedures are on the [Graduate School](#) website.

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## **Registration**

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Students must be enrolled in classes whenever they are receiving services from UT- Austin, such as course instruction, faculty interaction, employment, fellowship or training grant stipends. Please read the following section carefully and check with the Graduate Program Administrator if you have any questions or see [Texas One Stop](#) for complete information for the Registrar's Office and Student Record's.

### **Full-Time Registration**

In most cases, all EEB students must be enrolled full-time during the fall and spring semesters. Because the EEB program guarantees support for the first five years, students must be registered full-time, which is 9-hours in the long semester and 3-hours in summer. In some cases, students do not have to be registered in the summer. For these few exceptions, the Graduate Program Administrator will inform students beforehand if this is an option. Students need to register in time, to avoid registering late and incurring a late fee.

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 Program Administrator for advice in meeting the desired 9 credit hours (long semesters) and 3 credit hours (summer) goal.

### **Tuition Waiver for TAs and GRAs**

Employment as a teaching assistant (TA) or Graduate Research Assistant (GRA) qualifies non-Texas residents to receive resident tuition. The waiver must be requested online and is applied directly to a student's fee bill. Each student needs to apply for a Tuition Waiver every semester when appointed as a TA or GRA.

For students who are supported by a fellowship, please DO NOT fill out the online Tuition Waiver. The Graduate Program Administrator will take care of submitting the forms for your Waiver, as those are processed differently for fellowship recipients. Please contact the Graduate Program Administrator 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 for a typical 9 credit hour course load per long semester (if a student wants to take more, they must pay for the extra courses). 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 a \$10 General Deposit required for first-year students (this is a fairly UT specific fee designed to offset the cost of any property loss or damage and nonpayment of any University billing). Because students can request reimbursement for this fee after graduation, the University cannot cover it. Other examples of additional fees are sports packages (for use of sports facilities at UT that a student opts into) and possible late fees incurred by a student.

### **Confirming Registration**

All students must confirm their tuition bill after all payments are applied, or registration will be cancelled. To confirm your registration, go to the tuition payment website and click the “CONFIRM” button. The Graduate Program Administrator will send you a notice when it is time to confirm, but if you happen to log on and read the prompt to “confirm”, please go ahead and confirm. If your tuition bill is NOT confirmed by the 5:00 pm deadline, then your registration will be cancelled, and you will be charged a late fee when you re-register. 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 3 hours for all long semesters (Spring and Fall) until completion of the degree. Students must petition the Graduate School if they intend to take a medical leave of absence during a long semester. The Graduate Program Administrator will be able to help you with the petition.

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

Students may add and drop courses without penalty during the add/drop period, which ends on the 12<sup>th</sup> class day during long semesters and on the 4<sup>th</sup> class day in summer. After that date, students must petition the Graduate School for late add/drop, but such petitions are rarely approved. If a student must drop a course after the deadline and the petition is approved, the student will have to pay to add another course to maintain full-time status required for TA/GRA support or fellowship support. 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 a long semester. Courses required in the Program of Work cannot be taken CR/NC.

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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, such as Teaching Assistantships (TAs), Graduate Research Assistantships (GRAs), or various University fellowships. A student appointed as a 20-hour TA or GRA, or on a fellowship of at least a \$1000, qualifies for resident tuition rates. For additional information on graduate [student employment conditions](#) and [fellowship conditions](#) click on the link provided for each.



## Teaching Assistantships

EEB graduate students are required to hold a Teaching Assistant (TA) position for at least two semesters. TA positions are generally plentiful, but students are not guaranteed their top choice in what they will TA. EEB students are enrolled in the Biology Instructional Office Teaching Assistant Matching System (TAMS) to match students with faculty instructing classes that need TA's. The EEB Graduate Administer will enroll students that need to TA into TAMS. To increase chances of getting a desirable TA position, students should email relevant faculty at least the semester before the class is taught to inquire what their prospects may be (e.g., some faculty will already have a TA lined up). Students then list their top choices in TAMS and faculty choose from this TA pool by listing their own top choices to TA their class. Generally, TAMS acts to match students and faculty with the best available choices, but this process isn't perfect and many first time TAs, or those who have rarely been a TA, may end up with assignments that are not in their top choices. Reaching out to faculty and informally trying to get a "match" will increase the chances of getting a top choice.

Prior to holding a TA position, the student must take a short training workshop offered prior to the start of their first semester during which a student serves as TA. The workshop is typically held the Friday during the week before classes start.

Once a student accepts a TA position by signing the contract with the Biology Instructional Office, a student is obligated to serve for that teaching position and is not allowed to cancel the appointment ad hoc. A student is not allowed to opt out of a TA contract without finding someone else who is qualified to serve as TA as a replacement. Students should never anticipate they can cancel their TA appointment and find a replacement.

## Graduate Research Assistantships

Many faculty members have research grants that allow them to appoint students as Graduate Research Assistants (GRAs). Students should check with their major professor(s) concerning availability of such appointments before submitting a TA request. Once a student accepts to serve as a TA in a particular semester and signs the contract with the Biology Instructional Office, a student is not allowed to switch to GRA support if such support becomes available (e.g., if major professor is awarded new research funds).

## **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 1<sup>st</sup> October. Appointments are processed by semesters, which are broken down as:

- Fall semester - August 16 – December 31 (4.5 months)
- Spring semester - January 1 – May 15 (4.5 months)
- Summer semester - May 16 – August 15 (3 months)

## **Appointment as Grader**

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

- 1) First year students can only be appointed for a maximum of 20 hours per semester.
- 2) International students can only be appointed for a maximum of 20 hours per semester.

## **University and IB-Administered Fellowships**

Each fall and spring semester the Graduate School, CNS, and other relevant UT sources hold competitions for various kinds of fellowships. Most [Graduate School fellowships](#) require nomination by the



EEB Graduate Program or by EEB faculty. The Graduate School will notify the graduate programs in advance of the application deadline. These fellowships usually provide a year-long stipend. The IB Awards Committee usually determines whose name(s) will be submitted to the Graduate School for consideration of Graduate School fellowships (e.g., the Continuing Fellowship). But other ad-hoc committees make decisions on other types of fellowships (e.g., the Stengl-Wyer Graduate Fellowships).

### **Pay Period for Fellowships**

Fellowships paid by the Graduate School are paid in advance (i.e., a student receiving a fellowship is paid September 1 for the month of September). These fellowships include some Recruitment Fellowships, Continuing Fellowships, NSF-GRFP support, and any other type of fellowship paid through the Graduate School. When your fellowship ends in August, you will receive your August check on August 1, but you will not receive your TA/GRA, and some fellowship checks for September until October 1, so please budget for this extra month accordingly. There is a similar situation for those who serve as a TA or GRA in the spring semester and then are supported by a fellowship for only the summer; in such a case, you will receive two stipends on June 1, so hold funds from one of those checks until 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

### **Switching from Fellowships to TA/RA and vice versa**

Because pay periods and other details differ between TA/RA and fellowship-based appointments, it is highly recommended that students switching between these appointment types contact the Graduate Program Administrator in anticipation of such a switch to ensure payment, insurance, and other details are all taken care of without surprises.

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## **Additional and Outside Employment**

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### **Additional and Outside Employment**

IB graduate students are not allowed to have outside employment (e.g., part-time positions in restaurants) or any type of job that interferes with the completion of coursework or research. On occasion, students may have 5-10 hours of additional University-related employment if the employment is related to their role as graduate students, such as paid grader positions for courses taught at the University, but such employment is possible 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 with their supervising professor and inform the Graduate Program Administrator. Students are required to disclose all outside activity that may result in a conflict-of-interest with student appointment at UT-Austin. Information about additional employment and conflict-of-interests can be found on the [Conditions for Student Employment](#) on the Graduate School website.

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## **External to UT Fellowships**

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Students with strong accomplishments in research and broader impacts should apply for federally funded fellowships, such as the NSF GRFP and NRSA fellowships from NIH. We encourage all students to apply to such outside fellowships or international fellowships, and the required course EEB 389D Research Skills

in Biological Sciences (required for all incoming graduate students in EEB) focuses on development and writing of effective fellowship and research-grant proposals. Information on internal, external, and international fellowships can be found on the [Fellowships](#) page of the Graduate School website.

For those with prestigious fellowships, or looking to apply for a fellowship outside UT where the stipend is not as high as the typical stipend paid to EEB students, or the health insurance and/or tuition is not fully covered, please let the Graduate Program Administrator know as soon as possible, and payment of full stipend, health insurance, and tuition will be determined on a case-by-case basis with the major professor.

### **Fellowship Supplements**

A Fellowship Supplement is a one-time stipend of \$1000 distributed around September 1<sup>st</sup>. With this supplement a student may qualify for in-state tuition rates for fall, spring and summer of that academic year. Students holding a qualifying external fellowship may apply for this fellowship each year. Please write to the Graduate Program Administrator about Fellowship Supplements available through the EEB program.

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### **IB Departmental Research and Travel Funds**

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Every fall and spring semester, the IB-Department provides funds that are allocated competitively to EEB and PB graduate students to help them achieve their career goals. Students can apply for up to \$12,000 during their time as a graduate student, for example to cover purchase of supplies, research-related travel, or workshop fees. Please note that these funds are not guaranteed but awarded by the discretion of the IB Awards Committee. Once funding is awarded to a student, the student has about 6 months to claim these funds, otherwise the funds are forfeited, and the student must reapply during another competition. If the student does not claim all awarded funds, the funds will remain available to them to apply for in future competitions. The deadlines to claim awarded funds are October 1 and March 1 of each year.

Please note, all funds for research and travel awards are taxed (see below), as the funds are paid from endowments directly to a student, and these payments are considered student income.

### **Research and Travel Awards**

Each EEB student may apply for up to \$2500 research or travel funds each fall and spring semester to be used anytime through February for the research-award competition in fall, and through September for the research-award competition in spring. Once an award has been made, the student will receive a letter from the Graduate Program Administrator stating the funds are awarded. The student and major professor must then sign the form attached to the award letter certifying that the funds will be used for the intended purpose. Only after the Graduate Program Administrator receives this signed form will the fellowship funds be processed. Once funds are spent, the student awardee must email to the Graduate Program Administrator a single PDF document that includes (a) a budget table summarizing all expenses incurred (including the sum total), signed by the student and major professor to confirm these expenses; and (b) e-copies of all receipts of the expenses listed in that budget table (all receipts have to be included in the single PDF rather than be sent separately). It is a student's responsibility to save all receipts, and document all expenditures listed in the budget table. If a student does not submit this budget table and corresponding receipts, no other funds will be distributed in future award competitions until received.

Funds for research are to be used for research expenditures such as equipment, supplies, microscopy time, DNA sequencing, travel to research field sites, or research-related workshops or training. Research awards cannot be used to cover salaries for undergraduate assistants. If purchases of supplies are made through UT Market, then those purchases will be charged a 5% fee to be reimbursed back to the University in an account for your use. If supplies are purchased through UT Market, then the purchase

becomes property of the University. If you purchase outright yourself (i.e., not through UT Market), then the property is yours, since it is being purchased by a fellowship.

Like the research awards, travel awards are capped at a maximum of \$2,500 per application. Travel awards are for students who (a) will present an oral talk or poster at a professional meeting, 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(s) is encouraged. A student may apply for several travel awards during the time as an EEB graduate student, but the total amount in funds received (travel awards *plus* research awards combined) cannot exceed the maximum of \$12,000 of total funds potentially available for each student (see above).

Students who are near their thesis defense and who wish to self-support during their last semester may apply for a \$1000 fellowship, which then gives them in-state tuition rates. The major professor needs to provide a letter in support of this arrangement, and the \$1000 fellowship must be used to help off-set the cost of tuition. This fellowship is available only to those students who still have unexpended funds available of the maximum of \$12,000.

### **Fellowship Payments are Taxed**

Because UT policy prohibits us from establishing a UT account with endowment funds, research and travel awards are paid directly to the student and therefore are considered taxable income. Payment for services within the University (e.g., DNA sequencing, microscopy time), must be paid from a departmental account, which the student then will need to reimburse from the Research Award. In most cases, the departmental account to be reimbursed will be Integrative Biology (IB) or Molecular Biosciences (MBS). We suggest that awardees create a separate personal bank account for fellowship money to avoid co-mingling personal funds and research-award funds and to facilitate auditing if that were to become necessary.

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### **Health Insurance Benefits**

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All Graduate Research Assistants (GRAs), Teaching Assistants (TAs), and full Graduate Fellowship recipients are covered by [AcademicBlue<sup>SM</sup>](#) Student Health Plan through Blue Cross Blue Shield (BCBS) of Texas and through Student Health Services. A student will be automatically enrolled in this Student Health Plan each semester when a student has an academic student employee appointment through Workday. If supported by a Fellowship during a given semester, a student must enroll personally (click *Begin Enrollment* at [UT Health Services](#)). The student health insurance offered by the University of Texas at Austin is considered a gold plan under the Affordable Care Act. It is highly recommended that students switching between appointment types contact the Graduate Program Administer in anticipation of such a switch to ensure continuation of health insurance benefits.

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### **Required Student Training**

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The University of Texas at Austin requires all graduate students to take several trainings at the beginning of graduate studies. Some trainings must be completed only once (e.g., training in the use of a fire extinguisher), but some are required every 2-3 years (e.g., Compliance Training, Responsible Conduct of Research, Laboratory Safety). Students will receive an email notification before the training is due and to complete in [UTLearn](#).

The Graduate Program and the Biology Instructional Office, the office where TAs are assigned, require some additional lab training. You will also receive an email for these trainings when they are assigned to you through [UTLearn](#).

### Ethics and Compliance Training

Ethical conduct and compliance are personal responsibilities, and each student will be held accountable for their own conduct and own decision making. The EEB 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/fabrication of data or records.

If a graduate students hold a position as a TA, GRA, or another position on any University campus or property, the State of Texas expects these students to uphold certain ethical behaviors. Graduate students must be aware of, and be in compliance with, State law and University policies related to sexual harassment, equal opportunity, human research, recombinant DNA, integrity, IT security, and other such policies. Online training regarding relevant laws, protocols, procedures, and resources is therefore required by the University. The specific training courses assigned to a student can be accessed through the UT Austin's employee training management system at [UTLearn](#). Each student will receive annual email notifications for required training modules that must be completed by a deadline. Additional training courses are also available through [UTLearn](#).

### Teaching Assistant Workshop

The Biology Instructional Office requires completion of a teaching assistant workshop prior to serving as a TA. The workshop is given typically on a Friday during the week before classes start each long semester.

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### Crisis Procedures

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The EEB Graduate Program strives to provide a highly supportive environment to aid students through difficulties in the event of crises such as assault, health problems (including mental health problems) or professional conflict (e.g., with the major professor, or with 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 Graduate Advisor, the GSC Chair, the Associate Chair for Graduate Education in Integrative Biology, your major professor, the Graduate Program Administrator, or the [Community, Accessibility and Well-Being Committee \(CAW\)](#). Such discussions will be held in complete confidence, and nothing will be disclosed unless the student specifically requests disclosure, within the Title IX constraints that all UT employees are mandatory reporters (see above).

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

For further information, please visit the EEB website under the Current Student tab.

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### Scholastic Probation and Dismissal

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Every graduate student must make satisfactory progress toward their degree or risk scholastic probation or dismissal from the program. Satisfactory progress includes research progress, completion of coursework, and good performance in TA/GRA duties.

- To stay in good academic standing the student must have an overall GPA at or above 3.0.
- To stay in good standing with a GRA appointment the student must be making satisfactory progress in the project that is supporting the GRA.
- To stay in good standing (with or without GRA support) the student must be making satisfactory progress in thesis or dissertation research. Satisfactory research progress will be determined by discussions between the student, the advisors, the student's committee, and the Graduate Program Advisor, including during the annual review process each year.
- To stay in good standing with a TA appointment the student must perform their duties as a TA satisfactorily in the classroom, lab and/or discussion sections, office hours, grading, and/or other TA duties. Satisfactory performance is determined by the instructor(s) of the course(s) and the Director of the Biology Instructional Office. Complaints will be communicated to the student as soon as possible following the report of poor performance.
- If the student's GPA falls below 3.0, the student will be given a full semester's notice to bring their GPA above 3.0.
- If the student is not making satisfactory progress in research or teaching, they will be notified of this by the GSC chair and given explicit guidance on pathways to correct any deficiencies in performance. Students will have the opportunity to correct the inadequacies in their research progress or classroom during the following full semester.
- Failure to perform satisfactorily as a TA or GRA will likely result in the loss of further financial support of that type.
- Satisfactory performance also includes ongoing student engagement and communication with academic advisors, program advisors, or members of the GSC. Students should be pro-active in communicating any challenges that might be delaying progress in PhD and/or the need for accommodations for those challenges.

If a student is not making satisfactory progress in the areas listed above and does not correct the deficiencies within the semester assigned for improvement, the GSC, upon consultation with the academic advisor and graduate program advisor can begin the process of formal request for dismissal with the graduate school. The Graduate Program will follow all timelines and procedures outlined by the Graduate School for dismissal, including formal reporting, a relevant probation period, student grievances, and formal adjudication procedures.