



Department of Biological Sciences

Handbook for the MS Program

Updated August 2026

FOREWORD

The Department of Biological Sciences welcomes you!

We are certain that you will have an excellent and enjoyable educational and professional experience during your graduate studies here at Purdue. The Office of the Vice Provost for Graduate Students and Postdoctoral Scholars (OGSPS) provides service to our graduate students from admission to graduation. The OGSPS directed by the Senior Graduate Program Coordinator, Patricia Dimmitt (LILY 1-412A, 765-494-8142, poliver@purdue.edu) is your first point of contact when you have questions on policies and procedures regarding our graduate program. This manual outlines the normal sequence of events leading to your advanced degree and should serve as your program-specific guide in addition to the regulations provided by our program and the OGSPS.

Each MS student is expected to satisfy the various program requirements outlined in this manual. Whereas the OGSPS will provide timely reminders, it remains your responsibility to meet the requirements by the established deadlines. Failure to meet deadlines could prevent you from registering for the subsequent semester and result in late registration fees and delays in receiving financial support. Scheduling annual advisory committee meetings and thesis defenses is your responsibility. We encourage students to schedule these important meetings with their committee well in advance.

Exceptions to the normal sequence of events may be requested by writing to the Director of Graduate Studies. Any request should detail a justification for the exception and be approved, in advance, by the student's advisory committee.

We wish you great success with your thesis research and graduate studies in our program!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ximena Bernal". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name and last name clearly distinguishable.

Ximena E Bernal
Professor & Director of Graduate Studies

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
General Requirements	
Time limitation.....	5
Credit hours.....	5
Grades and index requirement	6
Residence requirement.....	6
MS Thesis: Basic Steps	
Select major professor/research director.....	7
Select advisory committee	7
Thesis & Non-Thesis MS Electronic Plan of Study (EPOS).....	7
Grade Appeals.....	8
Individual Development Plan (IDP).....	8
Transfer credits	8
Transfer PhD Required Course credits taken as MS student.....	8
Annual Research Conferences	8
Identification as an advanced degree candidate.....	9
Thesis Preparation.....	9
Final Examination	9
Report on Final Examination	10
Thesis Deposit.....	10
Commencement Exercises	10
Degree Certification Statement.....	10
MS Non-Thesis: Basic Steps	
Select faculty advisor.....	12
Thesis & Non-Thesis MS Electronic Plan of Study (EPOS).....	12
Grade Appeals.....	12
Transfer credits	12
Transfer PhD Required Course credits taken as MS student.....	13
Identification as an advanced degree candidate.....	13
Commencement Exercises	13
Degree Certification Statement.....	13
Supplements	
1 – Electronic Thesis Deposit (ETD).....	14

MS Degree Objective

General Requirements

1. Time limitation

MS degrees are expected to be completed within 4 semesters (not including summer sessions). If a degree is not granted within 4 semesters, additional time must be approved in advance and is not guaranteed.

2. Credit hours

A total of 30 credit hours is required. The student's Major Professor and Advisory Committee approve the specific courses taken on an individual basis for each student, using guidelines established for their specific area of biology, and approved by the Chair of Graduate Programs. A maximum of 6 course credit hours at the 40000-level may be included.

At least one-half of the total credit hours used to satisfy degree requirements must be earned in residence on the Purdue campus where the degree is to be granted.

MS Thesis	Total Course Work Credit hrs.	BIOL 698	Thesis Defense	Time Limit
Microbiology or Ecology	21 B or higher	9 Satisfactory	An acceptable thesis is required.	2-3 years (not including summers)
General Biology	21 At least 15 must be in Life Sciences B or higher	9 Satisfactory		
Obtaining two Unsatisfactory grades in total for thesis research is grounds for dismissal from the graduate program.				
Support Limit: Funding for the MS program is not guaranteed and is contingent on the program (thesis vs non-thesis), Major Professor funding, and the availability of TAships each semester. MS candidates are not eligible for summer TAships.				
BIOL 66200 & 66300: Required during the first year.				

MS Non-Thesis	30 B or higher *	Not Required	2-3 years
*BIOL 59500: Maximum number of 8 credits allowed per the guidelines of the area of your MS Non-Thesis. Cluster-specific guidelines may supersede these general guidelines.			

Support Limit: Student should plan to be self-funded. While teaching assistantships are an option during the academic year, they are not guaranteed and are contingent on availability.

BIOL 66200 & 66300: Required during the first year.

3. Grades and index requirements.

The student is expected to maintain a cumulative index of B (3.0) or better. Indices below this level are marked “low” on grade reports. The OGSPS, the Director of Graduate Studies, and the Advisory Committee will review the student’s progress each semester. A student who fails to perform at a satisfactory level may be terminated from our graduate program. All courses approved on the Plan of Study for which grades are given will be used in computing indices.

4. Residence requirement.

At least half of the total credit hours used to satisfy the MS degree requirements must be earned in residence on the West Lafayette campus where the degree is to be authorized.

5. Website updates.

Please refer to the Graduate Program website that will have updated and current information and guidelines. Students should, however, follow the guidelines that were in place at the time of their entrance into the respective graduate program.

MS Thesis Degree Objective

Basic Steps

1. Select a Major Professor.

A MS Thesis student must have a Major Professor before they are accepted into our program. The Major Professor and MS Thesis student relationship must be a mutually acceptable one. The Major Professor will act as chairperson of the student's Advisory Committee and will be in charge of the student's research and progress.

The Graduate Coordinator needs to be informed of any change with the Major Professor.

2. Select an Advisory Committee

The Thesis Advisory Committee consists of the Major Professor (also the Committee Chair) and two additional faculty members: one also from the Department of Biological Sciences and the other can be from either in or out of the department.

3. Electronic Plan of Study (EPOS)

The plan of study is submitted electronically through *myPurdue*. The graduate coordinator and all members of the Advisory Committee will receive an electronic notification of the plan of study for review and approval.

Only courses that receive a letter grade (A, B) may be included in the EPOS. Research credit hours are not allowed on the EPOS.

Due no later than the end of the graduate student's first semester.

EPOS Notes:

Biological Sciences EPOS

Major Professor = Chair

MS Thesis Advisory Committee: Major Professor + 2 committee members

21 credit hours of coursework

To make minor changes in an EPOS, the student must submit a *Request for Change to the Plan of Study* electronically, through *myPurdue*.

If the composition of the Advisory/Examining Committee changes, the student must also submit a *Request for Change to the Plan of Study* electronically through *myPurdue*.

4. Grade Appeals

For grade appeals, please refer to University Regulations, The on-line reference manual for students, staff and faculty at

http://www.purdue.edu/univregs/pages/stu_conduct/stu_regulations.html

Part 5 Student Conduct, Section F

5. Individual Development Plan (IDP)

After joining a lab, the student will submit an Individual Development Plan (IDP) annually. These IDPs are training tools to help the student assess progress and succeed in the program. Forms can be found at <https://www.science.purdue.edu/graduate/idp.html>.

The last page of the IDP should be signed by both the student and the Major Professor and then submitted to the OGSPS by the end of the student's 1st semester. Failure to submit the IDP may result in registration delays for the following semester/term.

6. Transfer credits

Only graduate-level courses that receive a letter grade (A, B) may be eligible for transfer.

Coursework used to satisfy the requirements for a previously attained degree may not be used on the plan of study (EPOS) for the MS degree.

All course transfers must be approved by the Advisory Committee, Area Convener, and Director of Graduate Studies, with the OGSPS granting final approval.

7. Transfer of credits to PhD program

A current MS Thesis student that had been approved to transfer to our PhD program, may transfer courses that meet PhD course credit requirements, as long as those courses were not required for a previously attained degree.

8. Annual Committee Meetings

The initial committee meeting should occur within one (1) month of the submission of the Final EPOS but no later than the end of the second semester and at least annually thereafter.

The Major Professor will preside during the meetings and establish the guidelines for the meetings.

No less than one-week prior to the first conference, the student must submit a written report to each committee member that includes both a literature review of relevant areas related to that project and a brief description of the proposed thesis research project and any progress that has been made on the project.

9. Identification as an advanced degree candidate

Inform the Graduate Coordinator that you are scheduling to graduate in advance so they can assist with registration and provide important deadlines.

Indicate on the course registration through MyPurdue with the appropriate CAND course. You can add this course only during the first week of each semester/term. Once you are registered, this will count toward the OGSPS count of consecutive candidacy registrations. Three (3) consecutive semesters will result in a \$200 fee on the 3rd semester.

If you need to register as candidate after the first week of each semester/term, you will need to contact the Graduate Program Coordinator.

10. Thesis Preparation

MS Thesis students must prepare their thesis prior to their final examination.

Students should review the formatting guidelines and various submission deadlines here: <https://www.purdue.edu/gradschool/research/thesis/index.html>

The Major Professor is responsible for evaluating the dissertation using iThenticate. The Graduate Program Coordinator can also assist with this if needed. This report should be appended to the thesis when shared with the Advisory Committee for review.

11. Final Examination

MS Thesis students are required to have an oral defense of the thesis. A copy of the thesis and iThenticate report must be submitted to the Advisory Committee 2 weeks prior to final examination.

The following are procedures for preparation for the Final Examination. Additional information can be found at: <https://www.purdue.edu/gradschool/research/thesis/>

- a. Scheduling your exam: Arrange the time and location for the final exam at a time convenient for your committee and report this information to the Graduate Office. <https://www.bio.purdue.edu/Resources/rooms.html>
- b. Three (3) weeks prior to your exam, submit a copy of the MS Bulletin and BIOL 04A, to the Graduate Office. The request to take the Final Examination the online GS Form 8 needs to be submitted.
- c. The Final Examination will be publicly announced on the departmental bulletin boards.
- d. Online resources are located at: https://www.bio.purdue.edu/Academic/graduate/masters/current_masters.html

12. Report on Final Examination

The Major Professor and all Advisory Committee members must sign the online GS Form 11 *Report of the Final Examination*. The examination report must be filed for candidates to receive their degrees.

Not more than one dissenting vote is acceptable in certifying the candidate to receive the degree.

If the Examining Committee decides that the examination is unsatisfactory, a second examination is required. A new request form, GS Form 8, must be submitted to the OGSPS.

13. Thesis Deposit

To initiate the thesis deposit:

1. Access your *myPurdue* page and select the Academics tab.
2. Find the Graduate Student section and click the OGSPS Plan of Study link.
3. Select Form 9 (Thesis/Dissertation Acceptance).
4. Click Initiate Thesis/Dissertation Acceptance Form. *Note: Select Form 8 for the degree you will receive.*
5. Update as needed on title > Save and Continue.
6. No change to committee > Save and Continue.
7. The remaining questions are those that were on Form 32.

Deposit Appointment with OGSPS: An appointment is required – but you do not need to be in attendance.

The thesis must be deposited no later than the date set by the OGSPS. This is usually the Friday of the last week of classes but may vary. Check with the OGSPS for specific dates each semester.

See Supplement 1 regarding electronic thesis deposit.

14. Commencement Exercises

Commencement information can be found at:

<http://www.purdue.edu/registrar/Commencement/index.html>

15. Degree Certification Statement

Individuals who have satisfied all the requirements for their degree and need documentation of that fact (as is the case for some post-doctoral appointments) prior to when the degree will be awarded, may obtain such a statement from the OGSPS (YOUNG 170).

Students failing to meet any of the academic graduation requirements by the last day of the session will not graduate and must register in a later session.

Failure to meet deadlines will result in non-approval of registration for subsequent sessions. All University fees are subject to change without notice.

MS Non-Thesis Degree Objective

Basic Steps

1. Select a Faculty Advisor.

While no Advisory Committee is required for MS Non-Thesis students, a Faculty Advisor should be selected to assist in guiding the student through the program. The Faculty Advisor would assist in course selection and ensure that all requirements are met for the degree according to the proposed timeline.

The Graduate Coordinator needs to be informed of any change with the Faculty Advisor.

2. Electronic Plan of Study (EPOS)

The plan of study is submitted electronically through *myPurdue*. The graduate coordinator will receive an electronic notification of the plan of study for review and approval.

Only courses that receive a letter grade (A, B) may be included in the EPOS. Research credit hours are not allowed on the EPOS.

Due no later than the end of the graduate student's first semester.

EPOS Notes:

Biological Sciences EPOS

Faculty Advisor = Chair

30 credit hours of coursework

To make minor changes in an EPOS, the student must submit a *Request for Change to the Plan of Study* electronically, through *myPurdue*.

3. Grade Appeals

For grade appeals, please refer to University Regulations, The on-line reference manual for students, staff and faculty at

http://www.purdue.edu/univregs/pages/stu_conduct/stu_regulations.html

Part 5 Student Conduct, Section F

4. Transfer credits

Only graduate-level courses that receive a letter grade (A, B) may be eligible for transfer.

Coursework used to satisfy the requirements for a previously attained degree may not be used on the plan of study (EPOS) for the MS degree.

All course transfers must be approved by the Advisory Committee, Area Convener, and Graduate Convener, with the OGSPS granting final approval.

5. Transfer of credits to PhD program

A current MS Non-Thesis student that had been approved to transfer to our PhD program, may transfer courses that meet PhD course credit requirements, as long as those courses were not required for a previously attained degree.

6. Identification as an advanced degree candidate

Inform the Graduate Coordinator that you are scheduling to graduate in advance so they can assist with registration and provide important deadlines.

Indicate on the course registration through *myPurdue* with the appropriate CAND course. You can add this course only during the first week of each semester/term. Once you are registered, this will count toward the OGSPS count of consecutive candidacy registrations. Three (3) consecutive semesters will result in a \$200 fee on the 3rd semester.

If you need to register as candidate after the first week of each semester/term, you will need to contact the OGSPS.

7. Commencement Exercises

Commencement information can be found at:

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Individuals who have satisfied all of the requirements for their degree and need documentation of that fact (as is the case for some post-doctoral appointments) prior to when the degree will be awarded, may obtain such a statement from the OGSPS (YOUNG 170).

Students failing to meet any of the academic graduation requirements by the last day of the session will not graduate and must register in a later session.

Failure to meet deadlines will result in non-approval of registration for subsequent sessions. All University fees are subject to change without notice.

Supplement 1

Electronic Thesis Deposit (ETD)

Prior to submitting, you are encouraged to review the Thesis Templates & Guidance website:

<https://www.purdue.edu/gradschool/research/thesis/index.html>

Once you have been approved to submit your ETD, the following procedures apply:

1. Access the Purdue ETD site and establish a personal account:
<http://dissertations.umi.com/purdue/>
2. Choose “Submit Your Dissertation/Thesis” at the bottom of the page.
3. Read submission guidelines. Be especially careful when inputting all data since you may not be able to go back and revise it afterwards. Post-facto data changes require action by the Thesis and Dissertation Office!
4. Read ProQuest Information & Learning (PQIL) release.
5. Enter personal contact information.
6. Enter requested thesis and academic information (e.g., title, advisor, abstract, etc.).
7. Upload full text.

NOTE: Candidates must ensure they receive, complete, and attach the special OGSPS Form 30, “Thesis Acceptance,” as the front (i.e., first) page of their thesis prior to submission to the OGSPS Thesis/Dissertation Office. The GS Form 30 must be properly re-saved as a PDF document so it cannot be edited afterwards! You must perform this task on a computer loaded with Acrobat Professional since computers loaded only with “Reader” will not be sufficient. Acrobat Professional should be available on most, if not all, Purdue computer lab machines.

8. Select whether or not ProQuest/University Microfilms International will file optional “copyright registration” and enter additional data (if applicable).
9. Choose whether to order additional copies of their thesis (this is optional).
10. Review your order and enter credit card information as requested. This will show any copyright or publication fees charged.
11. If applicable, fill out any feedback surveys required by ProQuest.
12. Review uploaded data and revise submission as needed.
13. The ETD will be sent to the Administrator (Thesis/Dissertation Office) who will review it. Candidates will be notified by e-mail if they have either been approved or if they need to make revisions and resubmit.

The following items still need turned in at their deposit appointment, which must be scheduled at least 24 hours in advance of their requested day and time:

1. Original, signed G. S. Form 9 "Thesis Acceptance." G. S. Form 9's are still needed to confirm that theses have been accepted by departments and will be permanently filed at the OGSPS.
2. Completed and signed G. S. Form 32 "Thesis/Dissertation Agreement, Publication Delay, and Research Integrity & Copyright Disclaimer Form" This will be forwarded to ProQuest Information & Learning, along with electronic submissions, by the OGSPS.

3. If applicable, copyright permissions (e.g., in “hard” form—letter, e-mail, or fax). These will be forwarded to ProQuest Information & Learning by the OGSPS.

NOTE: Candidates who include copyrighted material in their thesis/dissertation not qualifying for an exemption under the copyright law must submit written permission from the copyright holders to the Thesis/Dissertation Office. The T/D Office forwards the permissions to ProQuest Information & Learning to ensure theses are published in their original and complete forms. Failure to provide required permissions will result in identified material being expunged prior to publication by ProQuest.

4. NOTE: Candidates submitting confidential theses must also submit their “hard,” departmental copies at their final deposit appointment!
5. Survey of Earned Doctorate and Grad School exit survey. Please complete and turn them in to the OGSPS prior to commencement.

Questions? Please contact the Thesis/Dissertation Office: markj@purdue.edu, 63157, or www.gradschool.purdue.edu/thesis.cfm