IBS Handbook

Students may not enroll part-time in the core curriculum without special permission, or take BMSC 8210, 8212 out of sequence.

Students are enrolled in the IBS for an entire calendar year. Their IBS or GW/NIH fellowship during the first year is a 12-month appointment. During the summer after the first year they are expected to be doing class work and to be completing their final laboratory rotation (BMSC 8215). Following completion of the third rotation for IBS students, or the fourth for the NIH students, students should begin work in the laboratory of the mentor they have chosen for their independent research.

Any fees incurred by a student for late action (registration, drop-add, withdrawal, etc.) shall be paid by the student and not the IBS.

Maintaining Good Academic Standing

If a student obtains below a 3.0 average in any semester, on the first occasion they will receive a written letter of warning from the Associate Dean for Graduate Studies in the Columbian College of Arts and Sciences and will be required to meet with the academic advisor to remedy the situation. If the student obtains below a 3.0 average for a second semester the matter goes to the dean, who makes a decision whether the student’s program should be terminated. If a student receives a grade below a 3.0 in a required core IBS course(s), the student is subject to academic probation.

If a student does not satisfactorily complete the required first year IBS requirements during the first academic year, the student is subject to academic probation. This includes a grade of “Incomplete” for any core course.

Academic Probation requires a meeting of the student with the Operations Committee. Courses of action can include remediation of course work, loss of stipend and/or tuition benefits, or dismissal from the program.

If a student does not gain admission to any Ph.D. program (BSB, MI, or MM) at the beginning of their second academic year, the student shall meet with the Operations Committee to determine whether the student shall transfer to a Master’s Program or have the program of studies terminated.

Procedure for Second to Third Year Transition (does not apply to NIH Partnership Students)

When a student enters the lab of the research mentor, the role of the IBS becomes one of facilitation rather than financial support. The mentor and student must sign agreements of intention, and the mentor must provide evidence of ability to financially support the student through the remaining period of training.
It is VERY IMPORTANT that the student realize that the IBS pays stipends in advance of the period of coverage, while as an “employee,” payment is made AFTER the work period. This means that for the period of transition from IBS to mentor’s lab, there will be an extended period (about 60 days) between paychecks. The last IBS paycheck will be for June and it will be received at the beginning of June, but employee checks will not be issued until the end of July.

Students who are supported by their mentors’ grants are employees, and if they are U.S. Citizens or Green Card holders are entitled to unlimited doctoral credits. International students may be limited to part-time employment and therefore be limited to 3 hours of tuition benefit per semester. U.S. Citizens, Green Card Holders, and International Students MUST apply for the tuition benefit in order to use the employee benefits. There is a six month waiting period for tuition benefits, so usually the IBS must pick up the fall tuition in the third year while the waiting period is in effect. The Departmental Administrators of the individual departments and HR staff can assist students with this. The student will receive 90% of the tuition as an employee benefit and be billed for the remaining 10%. Most mentors adjust the student’s salary to compensate for that small percentage. For hiring as employees, a long lead time is required for background checks, so please encourage your advisees and their mentors to start this process early. A waiver can be requested so that an external search does not have to be conducted. The justification is that the student has the unique experience required for the position because the student has done a full semester rotation in the lab.

The research mentor receives notice of the recommended level of salary support (see below for current levels). For details regarding setting up change in status, please see the advisor of your PI’s department.

Students who have completed the second year on an IBS stipend should have already taken 48 credits. That leaves 24 credits to be distributed for the remainder of their Ph.D. training. Clearly, the student will want to distribute the required credits over the time of training, usually about three credits per semester. The student should plan with his/her program advisor for the number of credits to be taken each semester, based upon progress toward the degree. Normally, full time status requires that students are registered for nine or more credit hours. Exceptions under which a student can be certified full time if needed for loans, visa status, etc., include:

1) a student who has all 48 hours of course work completed and is studying for comprehensive exams (this can only be done only one semester)  
2) if a US citizen needs to be certified as full-time (which is considered at the nine credit per semester level) while carrying fewer than nine credits, a form can be filled out each semester certifying full-time status stating that coursework has been completed, comprehensive exams have been passed, the student in candidacy, and work is now devoted toward dissertation research. This form is found on the registrar's website: (https://registrar.gwu.edu/sites/registrar.gwu.edu/files/downloads/HTFTcertificatonforminstructions.pdf ). The certification form must be signed by the Program
Director or IBS Director (not the research mentor). Please note that when filling out the form, one should NOT indicate that one “WORKS”. “Working” on the form is defined as activities UNRELATED to the dissertation research.

3) International students can also be certified full time when carrying fewer than nine hours. They may also be certified full time after all 48 hours of coursework have been completed, comprehensive exams have been passed, and the student is in candidacy. The form for international students can be found on the ISO website (https://columbian.gwu.edu/files/downloads/dgs/International%20Students%20Full%20Time%20Certification.pdf). The certification form must be signed by the Program Director or IBS Director (not the research mentor). Please note that when filling out the form, one should NOT indicate that one WORKS. Working on the form is defined as activities UNRELATED to the dissertation research.

**Writing and Defense of the Research Proposal**

Detailed instructions should be obtained from the Program Director for the chosen program (Molecular Medicine, Microbiology/Immunology, or Biochemistry/Systems Biology) prior to the initiation of the following procedures. Briefly, the student will prepare a written dissertation proposal and orally defend that proposal. The proposal will be modeled after an NIH predoctoral NRSA application. The student will discuss the proposal with the mentor, under whose guidance specific aims will be developed. The specific aims will be presented for approval to a Dissertation Research Committee, comprising the mentor plus two other faculty members chosen by the student and mentor, with the approval of the Curriculum Committee. If there is a co-mentor, that person and the mentor count as one person. The student and mentor appoint a person to be the chair. This person should not be the mentor or co-mentor, and will be responsible for keeping notes of the meeting and distributing them to the student and the committee following each committee meeting. This will ensure all members of the committee are clear about recommendations made by the committee. After approval of the proposal by the Dissertation Research Committee, the proposal is developed independently by the student with minimal direction from the mentor or other faculty. The completed document will be reviewed by the Dissertation Research Committee, which will meet to determine whether the proposal is acceptable. As a part of the Research proposal, the student and mentor should set milestones and a timeline to ensure steady and timely progress toward the completion of the Ph.D. degree.

The student will make revisions as deemed necessary by the committee. After the committee has approved the proposal, an oral defense will be scheduled. At the defense, the student will orally present the proposal to the committee, after which there will be a question and answer period. The committee will ask questions related directly to the proposal, or which seek to place the proposal in the larger context of the field. While this is not meant to be a comprehensive examination, some probing of the student's awareness of issues relevant to the proposed research is appropriate. If the oral examination results are acceptable to the Dissertation Research Committee, the student will be passed. If the defense is not successful, the student has one chance to retake the oral defense. If the second attempt is not successful, the student may be dismissed from the program. The proposal defense should be completed during the third academic year. For most students,
the summer following the second year of the program will be dedicated to completion of the written and oral portions of the proposal. If the Curriculum Committee finds that the student is not progressing sufficiently toward a timely completion of the proposal, the student may be required to suspend laboratory work until the proposal defense is successfully completed. Whenever appropriate, the student and mentor are strongly encouraged to submit a revised final version of the proposal as an NIH NRSA predoctoral application, or other application for funding appropriate to the student’s field of study.

Monitoring of Progress throughout the Research Phase of the Ph.D. Training

Students are required to prepare progress reports at six-month intervals, and present these to their Dissertation Research Committee prior to a committee meeting. At these meetings, progress will be evaluated and compared to the proposed timeline, stumbling blocks identified, and alternate strategies developed to help the student achieve his/her goals as necessary. This may include suggestion of an alternate technique to one that is not yielding results, recommending other faculty or outside scientists who might be able to assist in overcoming technical obstacles, etc. If the student has no technical problems, but is not progressing at the anticipated rate, reasons are explored and the student advised of strategies to improve progress. If at any time it appears that the student is not progressing steadily, the student may be advised that to remain in active status in the program, certain timelines must be met. If they are not met, the student may be dismissed. If a problem arises regarding incompatibility of the student and mentor, another possible mentor may be identified.

Individual Development Plan

The NIH now requires that all students supported by NIH grant funds have an Individual Development Plan (IDP). We endorse this requirement and require it for all students, regardless of support mechanism. This IDP allows students to assess their current skills and plan development of skills and competencies toward their ultimate career goals. We recommend using the tool available for such a plan at http://myidp.sciencecareers.org/. This step by step guide allows frequent updates and matches the student’s interests and skills with career paths. The IDP is required as part of the Scientific Writing course for all first year students, and a printout must be presented at biannual committee meetings for all upper level students.

Levels of support

Entering students in Academic year 2017-2018 receive a stipend of $32,000/yr. Beginning in their second year, based on appropriate academic performance, they receive an increase such that their per annum rate increases to about $33,000. However, the IBS pays for only 10 months of the second year. As stated above, the last paycheck from the IBS is for June,
paid in advance. The mentor should arrange for the student to be paid for the month of July.

Publishing

We encourage you to publish research from your dissertation. Each year your publications are proudly announced in the IBS Director’s Annual Report to the Dean of the Columbian College of Arts and Sciences. We are always looking forward to learning about our students’ accepted publications.

It is a requirement that you acknowledge your affiliation with the IBS by including the following statement as a footnote or in the acknowledgments section of your manuscript: “X is a predoctoral student in the Y Program of the Institute for Biomedical Sciences at the George Washington University. This work is from a dissertation to be presented to the above program in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Ph.D. degree.”

Conflict of Commitment Policy for Students working on Industry-Sponsored Projects

Doctoral students are free to choose their research projects in consultation with their dissertation mentors. Students are never to be assigned to projects sponsored by industry; their associations with industry-sponsored projects must be voluntary. Moreover, faculty who have their own consulting practices or companies must be sensitive to conflict of interest issues if they contemplate involving students voluntarily in their activities and should discuss such issues openly with the student(s).

Students must be able to discuss their work with teachers, advisors and committee members. Students must also be able to present their work at seminars that may be a component of their required curriculum, as well as in written progress reports to their Dissertation Research Committees or PhD programs as required.

Doctoral students must have the full traditional freedom to publish and present promptly all results of research. Reasonable delays will be accommodated for consideration of filing patent applications. The delay should be no more than 60 days. Delay may be extended by up to 90 days if the reasons are specifically stated in a formal agreement between the sponsor and the University.

Doctoral students are expected to be engaged in full-time research, with the exception of attending or preparing for seminar or classes, or preparing manuscripts on their own research. Regardless of the sponsorship of their work, and with the understanding that not every experiment will necessarily become a part of the dissertation, they are not to be employed excessively for technical assistance for work unrelated to their own projects.

Are you ready to graduate?
Meet with your committee and obtain their permission to write. There is no formal document required. Agree on who your readers will be. You need two in addition to your mentor. For NIH Partnership students, your two mentors count as one person only. You need two additional readers.

Write your dissertation. All dissertations must now be submitted electronically. Detailed instructions are available at http://library.gwu.edu/etd. A template is provided for your convenience. As a reminder, abstracts should be limited to 350 words or anyone ordering a paper copy in future will receive a truncated version.

Students are encouraged to work with mentors during the writing process. Most mentors are happy to receive sections and provide feedback as writing progresses. In addition, the students are encouraged to meet with their Program Director or for general advice on dissertation writing and the expectations of the committee at the defense. After the mentor has seen the dissertation, it should be distributed to the two readers. The mentor and both readers must sign off on the document before it is given to the rest of the committee. The form for this is called “Dissertation Research Committee Sign-Off” and is on the DGS resources webpage (accessible only to Program Directors). This form should be returned to the Program Director BEFORE the defense is scheduled. The committee consists of the mentor (who will not participate in the questioning), the two readers, and at least two additional examiners, who should not have been on the Dissertation Advisory Committee. This is to allow persons with a fresh perspective to evaluate the work. One of these examiners must be an “outside” examiner. The “outside” examiner must be outside your program, and may be outside the institution. A CV of the outside examiner must be provided to the Program Director to ensure the outside person is appropriate. Give them ample time to review. Obtain the sign-off form from your Program Director. Distribute the revised (if necessary) dissertation to your whole committee. Your Program Director may also want a copy. When you distribute, you can inquire about defense dates. If the committee is willing to permit you to schedule a date before they read, you may do so. It is their prerogative, however, to have time to finish reading the dissertation before the scheduling of a defense.

When you have chosen a defense date acceptable to your committee, you must identify and schedule a chair to officiate at the defense. This should be a Program Director, Chair, or other senior faculty member.

All information for the defense should be submitted to the IBS office at least two weeks prior to the defense to allow time for the generation of a program. IBS staff have a template for this document; however if you do not turn it in to the IBS Office in a timely manner they may not have time to prepare and format the program – please do not submit it at the last minute! The information that they will need includes: your name, prior degrees, abstract, committee members, and a list of your publications. They can provide you with an example for reference.

A seminar should be given prior to the defense. It is best if the seminar can immediately precede the defense, but not required. Your Program Director will provide information to
the IBS office for advertising the seminar. You will need to plan on an hour for the seminar and about two hours for the defense.

At the defense, the chair should have a form indicating the results of the examination. It is called the “Final Examination Committee Sign-off” and is located on the advisors’ webpage. If revisions are required, there is also a space on the form that indicates who needs to see revisions before the dissertation is accepted. Once those revisions are made, each person who wishes to see the revised version must sign off on the form entitled “Final Dissertation Approval.” Again, this is available on the advisors’ webpage. When the student gets the required signatures, the form is returned to the Program Director, who files the “Graduation Clearance” form at the Graduate School. This must be submitted by the Program Director and not the student.

The seminar is open to the public. The defense is open to the GW Academic Community. Students are welcome and encouraged to attend so they can be prepared when their time comes!

Please contact your Program Director with any unanswered questions or concerns.

Submission of the final dissertation

As stated above, all dissertations must now be submitted electronically. Information is available at http://library.gwu.edu/etd. Two forms are also required. The first form, called the UMI form, is submitted electronically with the dissertation. The second form is the electronic dissertation approval form. This is a paper form that must be signed by the student’s Program Director and the student, and certifies that the electronic dissertation submitted is the final, corrected version. This form must be turned in to Nicole Davidson (nad1@gwu.edu) in CCAS (Room 107 Phillips Hall) following electronic submission of the dissertation.