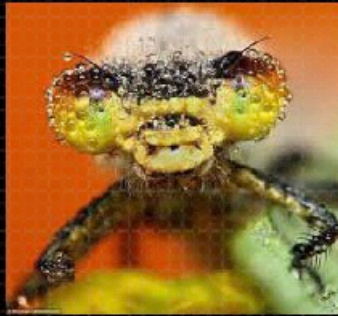
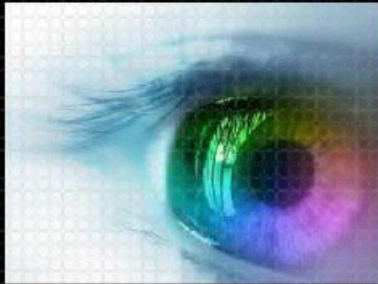
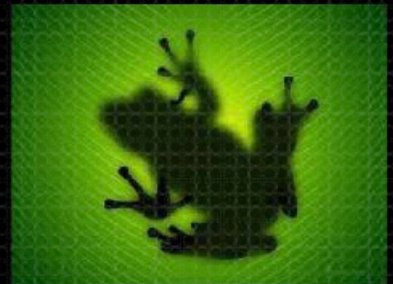
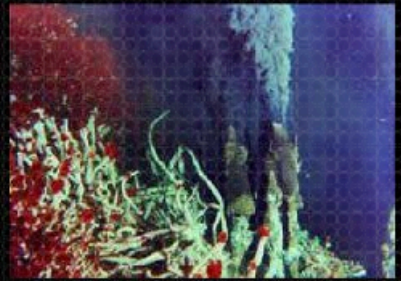


A Resource Manual for Biology Graduate Students

Updated January 2026



BIOLOGY



Contents

WELCOME TO GRADUATE STUDIES IN BIOLOGY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA	4
A NOTE FROM THE GRADUATE SECRETARY – MICHELLE SHEN	4
OFFICE STAFF	4
THE BIOLOGY GRADUATE STUDIES COMMITTEE.....	5
COMMUNICATING WITH OTHER GRADUATE STUDENTS: BIOL-GRAD LISTSERVE	5
OVERALL PROGRAM	6
NEW STUDENT CHECKLIST	6
MASTER OF SCIENCE (MSc).....	6
PHD PROGRAM	7
CONSEQUENCES OF GOING OVER FOUR YEARS IN A PHD PROGRAM -- FUNDING.....	7
TRANSFER TO PHD FROM MSc.....	7
REGISTERING / DEREGISTERING.....	8
REGISTRATION TIPS	9
COURSE REQUIREMENTS	9
BIOLOGY GRADUATE SYMPOSIUM	10
YOUR SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE	10
PROCEDURES FOR COMMITTEE MEETINGS.....	11
CANDIDACY EXAM – DEPARTMENTAL POLICY	13
FINANCIAL SUPPORT	15
SOURCES OF SUPPORT	16
<i>External scholarships</i>	16
<i>UVic Graduate Fellowships (Formerly known as UVic Grad Awards, or GRA)</i>	16
<i>Graduate Entrance awards (GEA)</i>	17
<i>Departmental and Campus-wide Awards (a.k.a. Donor awards)</i>	17
<i>Research assistantships and stipends from the supervisor’s research grant</i>	17
<i>Teaching Assistantships (TA)</i>	17
FULL-TIME REQUIREMENT, LEAVES, AND WITHDRAWAL.....	18
HOLIDAYS AND VACATION DAYS.....	19
FEES	19
THESIS/DISSERTATION PREPARATION AND EXAMINATION	19
WHAT CONSTITUTES AN “EXAMINABLE” THESIS IN BIOLOGY?	19
EXAMINATION	20
STEPS FOR THE ORAL EXAM.....	20
IMPORTANT RESOURCES	21
HEALTH AND DENTAL PLANS	21
IMPROVING SPOKEN AND WRITTEN ENGLISH FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS.....	21
OTHER SOURCES OF SUPPORT	21
CONFLICTS WITH THE SUPERVISOR	22
DEPARTMENTAL SEMINARS	22
DEPARTMENTAL AND UNIVERSITY-WIDE COMMITTEES.....	22
TRAVEL AND CONFERENCES	23
STUDENT TRAVEL GRANT	23
TRAVEL EXPENSE REIMBURSEMENT CLAIM FORM	23
SOME TIPS FOR TRAVEL CLAIM.....	23
FACILITIES AND RESOURCES	24

SCIENCE STORES (PETCH BLDG, ROOM 168 / 250-721-8853).....	24
COMPUTING	24
ANIMAL CARE/AQUATIC FACILITY	24
PLANT GROWTH FACILITY.....	24
ELECTRON MICROSCOPE LABORATORY	25
HERBARIUM.....	25
COURIER.....	25
MAIL	25
PHOTOCOPYING	25
SERVICE LAB - ELECTRONICS.....	25
SERVICE LAB - MECHANICAL AND WOOD WORKING	25
MSV JOHN STRICKLAND.....	26
UNIVERSITY LIBRARY REPS	26
VEHICLES	26
KEYS AND ACCESS TO THE CUNNINGHAM BUILDING	26
SAFETY	26
SAFETY IN THE LAB AND IN THE FIELD	26
ACCIDENTS.....	27
FURTHER QUESTIONS?	27
APPENDIX 1. A ROAD MAP FOR THE MSC PROGRAM	28

WELCOME TO GRADUATE STUDIES IN BIOLOGY at the University of Victoria

This resource manual is intended to provide Biology graduate students with an introduction to the people, facilities and resources available in the Department. It includes departmental policies and regulations, outlines steps you will need to take to complete your program and provides tips to get through the paperwork you will face along the way. If you can't find someone or something you need in this manual, ask the graduate secretary – Michelle Shen.

Students, faculty, and members of supervisory committees are bound by policies and regulations set by the Department of Biology, the Faculty of Graduate Studies (FGS), and the University of Victoria (UVic). This document describes departmental policies. A very important document for students and supervisors is the [UVic graduate supervision policy](#), which outlines the roles and responsibilities of the graduate students, supervisor, graduate advisor, committee, and Department Chair. Program regulations and university-wide regulations can also be found in the UVic [Graduate Calendar](#). As a graduate student in Biology, it is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with these three documents. You can direct questions to Michelle or the graduate advisor.

A Note from the Graduate Secretary – Michelle Shen

Welcome to the Department! My job is to help graduate students and their supervisors with the paperwork involved in the administrative side of a degree program. I'm the first point of contact if you need help, not the clerks at Graduate Records or FGS.

In order for me to be most effective in this task, it is very important that faculty and graduate students make sure that all documents (letters, memos, registration forms, travel grants, expense claims, etc.) pass by my desk first before submission to FGS or Graduate Records. Should you bypass me, it is more difficult to assist you and/or the graduate advisor in solving minor (and occasionally, major) administrative issues that may arise later and impact your program.

Please keep me updated as to any changes to your contact information (campus phone and most importantly, your email address); changes to supervisory committee or anything else you think I might need to know. The better informed I am, the better I can help you.

Office Staff

The Biology Office is open from 8:30 am – 4:30 pm Monday to Friday

- See Michelle Shen, Graduate Secretary mshen@uvic.ca or 250-721-7095 for
 - everything and anything pertaining to graduate studies
- See Jennie Bartosik, Administrative Officer jenniem@uvic.ca or 250-721-7092 for
 - Teaching Assistant positions
 - Building Safety, Lab Safety, WHMIS
 - Office or study carrel space
- See Minami Momi, Assistant to the Chair/Department Secretary minamin@uvic.ca or 250-721-7091 for
 - Human Resources (HR) appointments (for field/lab/research assistants)
 - Appointments with the Chair

- See Laura Alcaraz-Sehn, Administrative Assistant bioclerk@uvic.ca or 250-721-7095 or in her absence Minami Momi for
 - HR appointments (for casual assistants paid by timesheet, work study)
 - Photocopying and fax accounts
 - Departmental newsletter / departmental email
 - Departmental seminars
- See Laura Alcaraz-Sehn, Michelle Shen or Minami Momi for
 - Keys to buildings, classrooms and labs
 - Audiovisual equipment
 - Biology van rental
 - Room booking (Reading Room or other rooms on campus)

The Biology Graduate Studies Committee

The Biology graduate program is overseen by the Biology graduate studies committee, which is composed of faculty appointed by the Chair of the department, as well as a graduate student representative. The committee makes decisions about admission to the program, updates the graduate handbook, chairs candidacy examinations, and adjudicates graduate scholarships and award nominations. The committee is chaired by the graduate advisor (aka grad advisor), who along with the department Chair, acts as the director of the graduate program. The responsibilities and duties of the grad advisor are outlined in the [UVic graduate supervision policy](#).

Graduate Advisor: Dr. Steve Perlman (stevep@uvic.ca)

Faculty Members: Drs. Rana El-Sabaawi, Greg Owens, and Peter Constabel.

Graduate Student Member: Mackenzie McNiven

Communicating with other graduate students: Biol-grad Listserve

There is a listserve in place for graduate student communication, called biol-grads. This listserve was set up for graduate students ONLY to use for whatever they feel is important (i.e. new graduate students may ask questions of 'veteran' students, converse about projects, resources, etc.). Also, the listserve may be used for non-project related messages (i.e. party invites, items for sale, etc.). The listserve is also used by the graduate advisor to communicate program updates, and other opportunities. Once you start your graduate studies, Michelle will add you to the listserve. If you get missed, please notify Michelle.

You will receive confirmation once you have been added, and, once you are signed up, you simply send your messages to biol-grads@lists.uvic.ca and everyone on the listserve will receive it. If you have problems, email Michelle to let her know.

The benefit of the listserve is that it is maintained by UVic's system administrators. Should there be interest in using another form of communication that is approved by UVic (e.g. MS teams), students can approach Michelle or the graduate advisor about setting it up.

OVERALL PROGRAM

New student checklist

Starting a graduate program can feel like a daunting experience. It is important for all new students to become familiar with all policy documents relating to the graduate program (e.g. The UVic Graduate Supervision Policy, The UVic Graduate Calendar, and the Biology Graduate Handbook). In addition, each lab might have its own specific policies and culture, and is important for each student to have discussions with their supervisors about how often they should meet, protocols for lab meetings, etc. To make this transition easier the department has implemented a “new student checklist”. Students will receive this list in the first week of their studies, and should have it filled and returned to the graduate secretary by the end of the first term.

Master of Science (MSc)

The MSc program is a research degree that, nominally, lasts for 24 months. In practice, the typical time to completion is ~30 months. The maximum time allowed is 60 months. The university requires a minimum of 15 units to be completed for a master’s degree, however, Biology requires a minimum of 16 units in order to obtain a MSc in the area of Biology.

- 12 units for the thesis (BIOL 599)
- 1 unit for grad symposium (BIOL 560)
- 3 units for course work (normally 2 courses)

The following is a check list of the things you will be working towards over the next couple of years, which is further summarized in a visual road map in Appendix 1:

Requirement	Timeline
Formation of Supervisory Committee	Within 8 months of entry
Completion of Course Work	3 units (normally 2 courses)
Meeting of Supervisory Committee	Initial meeting within 8 months, then annually until completion
Graduate Symposium Presentation	Annually, except if in program less than 8 months
Thesis Submission and Defense	Watch for emails regarding deadlines

Consequences of going over two years in the MSc program -- FUNDING

Financial support for MSc students is guaranteed for 2 years (more information below). Any support after this point depends on the funding source and the ability of the supervisor to continue supporting the student. If the degree exceeds the expected time of completion, students may lose eligibility for some scholarships and fellowships and may drop in priority for other forms of support including teaching assistantships. Be sure to discuss financial support with your supervisor at the onset of your program, especially what will happen after the first 2 years.

PhD Program

The PhD program is, nominally, a 48-month research program. The current average time to completion is ~60 months. The maximum time allowed is 84 months. The university requires a minimum of 30 units to obtain a PhD degree (for students that have an MSc degree). Biology requires a minimum of 31 units to complete a PhD degree (but in reality, you will complete 32.5 units), which break down as follows.

- 24 units dissertation (BIOL 699)
- 3 units Candidacy Examination (BIOL 693)
- 1 unit grad symposium (BIOL 560)
- 4.5 units course work (normally 3 courses)

The following is a check list of the things you will be working towards over the next few years:

Requirement	Timeline
Formation of Supervisory Committee	Within 8 months of entry
Completion of Course Work	4.5 units (normally 3 courses)
Meeting of Supervisory Committee	Initial meeting within 8 months, then annually until completion
Graduate Symposium Presentation	Annually, except if in program less than 8 months
Candidacy Examination	Within 21 months of direct entry to the PhD program
Departmental Seminar	In the final year
Dissertation Submission and Defense	Watch for emails regarding deadlines

Consequences of going over four years in a PhD program -- FUNDING

Financial support for PhD students is guaranteed for 4 years (more information below). Any support after this point depends on the funding source and the ability of the supervisor to continue supporting the student. If the degree exceeds the expected time of completion, students may lose eligibility for some scholarships and fellowships, and may drop in priority for other forms of support including teaching assistantships. Be sure to discuss financial support with your supervisor at the onset of your program, especially what will happen after the first 4 years.

Transfer to PhD from MSc

Transferring from an MSc to a PhD is only possible after completing 8 months of the MSc and with agreement of the student's supervisory committee. Transfers must occur at the beginning of a term, no later than the beginning of the 6th term, i.e. within 20 months of entering the program. Financial support is guaranteed for a total of four years from initial entry point; the same funding consequences as described above apply if going over four years.

A transfer from the MSc to the PhD program has to be approved by the student's committee. To initiate this process the student must first discuss a transfer with their supervisor. If the supervisor

agrees then a committee meeting is called, and the committee is alerted to the transfer request prior to the meeting. During the meeting the student will make the case for the transfer and outline their proposed PhD project. Transfers are not guaranteed. The committee will normally base their approval of transfer to PhD based on the supervisor's support, an assessment of the student's research potential and academic ability, preliminary research results, availability of research funds, as well as performance in course work. A statement approving the transfer must appear in the committee meeting form. Depending on your transfer point, all or some of your fees paid towards your MSc degree are transferable to a PhD program. See Michelle for instructions on how to make the switch.

For MSc -> PhD transfer students the university requires a minimum of 45 units to be completed for a PhD degree (without completing the MSc). Biology requires a minimum of 46 units for the MSc -> PhD degree. The candidacy examination must occur within 26 months of the start of your graduate studies. Thus, if the latest possible transfer time (after 20 months) is chosen, the candidacy exam must take place within 6 months after the transfer. Earlier transfers allow for more time until the candidacy exam.

Here is a break-down of units required to graduate:

- 37.5 units dissertation (BIOL 699)
- 3 units Candidacy Examination (BIOL 693)
- 1 unit grad symposium (BIOL 560)
- 4.5 units course work (normally 3 courses)

The following is a check list of the things you will be working towards over the next few years:

Requirement	Timeline
Formation of Supervisory Committee	Within 8 months of entry
Completion of MSc Course Work	3 units (normally 2 courses)
Meeting of Supervisory Committee	Initial meeting within 8 months, then annually until completion
Transfer Approval Meeting of Supervisory Committee	Between 8 and 20 months of entry to the MSc program
Transfer to PhD Program	Between 8 and 20 months of entry to the MSc program
Completion of Additional Coursework	1.5 units (normally 1 course)
Graduate Symposium Presentation	Annually, except if in program less than 8 months
Candidacy Examination	Within 26 months of initial entry to the MSc program
Departmental Seminar	In the final year
Dissertation Submission and Defense	Watch for emails regarding deadlines

Registering / Deregistering

Registration in the mandatory courses (see above) is done online via MyPage. You will need your Netlink ID to proceed. However, for Directed Studies courses or to register in a course from another department, you must use paper registration forms. You can ask Michelle for details.

Directed Studies courses require a pro forma form. Non-BIOL courses (i.e. from other UVic departments) require submission of a Graduate Registration Form. Please note that an undergraduate course cannot typically be counted towards your graduate degree, but exceptions can be made with approval from your supervisory committee and the graduate advisor.

You may drop a course you are registered in online. Upon dropping the course, please email Michelle so that she can update your file. This applies to all courses including BIOL 599, 699, 693, 560 (i.e. if you are temporarily withdrawn). It is important to adhere to the deadlines in the [UVic calendar](#). The penalty for late registration is a \$35 late fee. The penalty for dropping or withdrawing late could result in paying fees for the entire term. Be sure you know these dates!

Registration Tips

- You must either be registered or officially withdrawn (temporarily for one term at a time or withdrawn with permission for a period of time, see below for more details on leaves) for all 12 months of every year of your program. If you have difficulties registering or deciding on which withdrawal option to use, contact Michelle.
- Course work: depending on the type of course, there are different registration methods.
- Thesis/Dissertation: you must be registered in BIOL 599 (MSc thesis) or BIOL 699 (PhD dissertation) in every term that you are a registered student.
- Candidacy Examination (BIOL 693): all PhD students must register in this course until such time as the candidacy examination requirements are met.
- Graduate Symposium (BIOL 560): Note that this is not a weekly course. The symposium takes place once per year. However, all students must be registered in this course in every term you are a registered student.
- Forest Biology Seminar (FORB 560): all graduate students whose supervisor is a member of the Centre for Forest Biology must register for this course in every term you are a registered student. Please see the Centre for Forest Biology Graduate Student handbook for more information about additional opportunities and requirements for FORB students.
- There are two sessions (three terms) per academic graduate student year:
Winter session (Sept to April) is comprised of two terms (Sept-Dec) and (Jan-April).
Summer session (May-Aug) is comprised of just one term for graduate students.
- When completing the registration documents (i.e. Pro forma or add/drop forms), bring these forms to Michelle. The graduate advisor signs these forms – not your supervisor. Incomplete forms will be returned by Graduate Records, possibly causing delays. Michelle also requires copies of these forms for your file

Course Requirements

The MSc program requires a minimum of 2 courses (3 units in total) and the PhD program requires a minimum of 3 courses (4.5 units in total) of 500 level course work (NOTE: a 'term' course typically equals 1.5 units).

Decisions on course load are made by the student and their supervisor, with recommendations from the student's supervisory committee. Courses are selected to expand a student's expertise, to

strengthen their background knowledge, to develop a technical ability, or to provide theoretical background critical to the execution of the proposed research.

A list of graduate level courses offered in Biology and other departments can be found in the [calendar](#). Note that some of the courses listed are combined undergraduate/graduate courses. Students should therefore consult with the course instructor as well as their supervisor to determine whether a course of interest is appropriate given the student's academic background.

If you cannot find suitable courses within the department, consider the following options:

- Try finding a faculty member to develop a Directed Studies course to suit your particular need. For MSc students, both required courses can be Directed Studies, but only one can be with your supervisor or co-supervisor. PhD students may take up to two Directed Studies courses (for a maximum of 3.0 units), but only one of the two can be with your supervisor; a co-supervisor may instruct the second Directed Studies.
- Course offerings from other centres, schools or departments at UVic can help to broaden your perspective and options. Some additional places to look for useful courses include the Centre for Forest Biology, the School of Earth and Ocean Sciences, the School of Environmental Studies, and the Departments of Mathematics and Statistics, Biochemistry and Microbiology, Computer Science, and Geography. The Bamfield Marine Sciences Centre also offers many useful courses.
- The Western Dean's Agreement (WDA,) provides graduate students in BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba with the opportunity to do their course work at a variety of participating postsecondary institutions.

The WDA can facilitate a student's collaboration with professors at other institutions (e.g. independent or directed studies courses), which can form an integral part of your graduate program as well as earn you course credit. However, students interested in pursuing studies with off-campus researchers under the WDA should anticipate roughly 6 months of pre-planning before coursework begins, since application requirements vary among the institutions. See Michelle for help with WDA requests.

Biology Graduate Symposium

The Annual Biology Graduate Symposium is a 2-day event organized by graduate students. It is an opportunity to share research and socialize with other members of the department. Students are required to present every year, except if they have been in the program for 8 months or less. After the 8 months, students are required to participate in the symposium every year of their program except when exempted by the graduate advisor. Historically the symposium was offered during the fall break in November but has recently been moved to the spring term. The graduate advisor or Michelle will send out an email about the grad symposium in the beginning of the term in which is held. The symposium is considered a required course (BIOL 560) for all graduate students (as outlined above).

Your Supervisory Committee

All Biology graduate students are supervised, or co-supervised by an academic supervisor who is a faculty member in Biology. The supervisor is your main source of guidance on all matters relating to

your studies and research. The role and responsibilities of the supervisor are outlined in the [UVic graduate supervision policy](#).

In addition, each student will have a supervisory committee. The roles of your supervisory committee are to help guide you through the academic part of your program, to provide a formal review of your progress, and to provide feedback on your research. The committee is also required to make a recommendation to the Dean of Graduate Studies in cases where students receive a grade lower than B in a course taken for credit in the FGS (as outlined in the [UVic graduate supervision policy](#) and [the graduate calendar](#)).

The establishment of a supervisory committee and changes to the committee membership are handled by your supervisor, but students can assist with this task. To fulfill the FGS's requirements for committee composition, ALL MEMBERS of a committee must be members of the FGS and must hold a PhD degree. Please talk to Michelle about the process to obtain FGS membership if your committee member is outside of UVic. If a committee member does not hold an academic appointment with UVic, they can apply for affiliate membership, but this does not permit them to supervise or co-supervise graduate students.

The Department of Biology requires the following minimum compositions for graduate supervisory committees:

- MSc Committee requires 3 members including the supervisor. An outside member is not required. At least two members need to be from the Biology department. The third member can be from Biology or can be from outside the department or UVic.
- PhD Committee: requires 4 members including the supervisor. An outside member is required, and can be from outside the Biology department or UVic.

Any exception to the above must be approved by the graduate advisor. There are a variety of combinations available to fulfill committee requirements. If you wish to have someone on your committee who does not meet the criteria stated above, see Michelle for options. Remember that large committees can increase the difficulty in scheduling meetings and may lead to longer meetings and exams.

It is an expectation that all committee members participate in every committee meeting, the candidacy exam, and the final oral examination (i.e. defense).

Procedures for committee meetings

Please review the [UVic graduate supervision](#) policy for policies regarding supervisory committee meetings.

Frequency and scheduling: You must have at least one committee meeting per year. Normally, the supervisor calls and chairs committee meetings, but students can call for meetings and assist with scheduling. If the student or supervisor encounters difficulty in getting a committee to meet, they should contact the graduate advisor. Once a meeting is set up, let Michelle know so that she can book a room and arrange the paperwork. Students and committee members should allow 1.5 hours for the committee meeting.

Research proposals and progress reports: For the first committee meeting students must submit a thesis proposal. The proposal must not exceed 4-5 pages (single-spaced, 12 pt. font, 2 cm (0.75 inch) margins) not including figures or references. The proposal should provide research objectives, overview of the background literature, proposed methods including hypotheses and plans for statistical analysis (if applicable), contingency plans, timelines for completion, and the significance or potential impact of the work. Proposals will vary depending on the nature of the project, so it is important to discuss the structure of the proposal with your supervisor well ahead of the first committee meeting. A draft of the proposal should be reviewed by the supervisor before it is sent out to the committee. The proposal must be sent to the committee at least 1 week before the meeting.

For subsequent committee meetings students must provide the committee with a short, written progress report, which must not exceed 4-5 pages (single-spaced, 12 point font, 2 cm (0.75 inch) margins) not including figures or references. A draft of the progress report should be reviewed by the supervisor before it is sent out to the committee. The report must be sent to the committee at least 1 week before the meeting.

During the meeting: the student typically gives a short presentation (~15-20 min) to describe project objectives and to update the committee on progress. Committee members will discuss progress with the student and are expected to ask questions and provide feedback on the work. The student can use this as an opportunity to ask committee members for help or advice on academic or research-related matters. Concerns about the student's progress by committee members should be raised during the meeting, allowing the student to address them directly. If the student is in or beyond the 2nd year of the MSc or 4th year of the PhD program, they should also provide a timeline for completing their thesis.

The in-camera meeting: At the end of each meeting, the student will be asked to leave the room, and the committee will deliberate and discuss recommendations for the progress report. The report will summarize points of discussion, and make suggestions for improvement, especially if there are any concerns about the student's progress. The report also sets out expectations for future work or meetings and include a plan for thesis completion for MSc students in the 2nd year and PhD students in the 4th year.

The committee will decide how the student is progressing and can choose among three options:

- Satisfactory progress: The student has progressed sufficiently since the last meeting, or since the beginning of their studies.
- Some concerns: Examples might include that the student has struggled to meet program milestones, research progress is less than what it is expected, or there are other concerns about the ability of the student to complete their studies. The committee must make detailed suggestions on how to improve and can set milestones to be met by the next committee meeting. The committee can decide to meet sooner than the 1-year interval.

Unsatisfactory progress: Examples might include that student has failed to meet expectations or milestones, that the student has failed to maintain contact or communication with the supervisor, that there has been a serious lack of research progress, or there have been other major issues (e.g. disregard for safety, inability to perform basic techniques, etc.). The first time an "unsatisfactory" rating occurs the committee must provide detailed suggestions for improvement, and must set

milestones to be met by the next committee meeting. The committee should meet sooner than the 1-year interval. Note that in accordance with the UVic graduate supervision policy, two committee meetings with a ranking of “unsatisfactory performance” that are a minimum of 8 weeks apart, might result in the student having to withdraw for failure to meet academic standards.

After the meeting: After the committee agrees on the report, they must sign it to indicate agreement with the recommendations, and the supervisor must share the report findings with the student in a timely manner, ideally within a week after the meeting. The student’s signature on the form indicates that they have read and understood the report.

If the report is filled out on paper then the student must then deliver the signed form to Michelle, who will ask the graduate advisor to review and sign it. If the form is submitted electronically, then the student, supervisor, committee, and graduate advisor must be cc’d on the email. The signature of the graduate advisor on the report indicates that the student’s progress has been properly documented, and they might ask the committee for clarifications and make recommendations as needed.

If you have any concerns about your committee, committee meetings, or committee meeting reports, you can discuss them with your supervisor and/or the graduate advisor.

Candidacy Exam – Departmental Policy

Please consult the [UVic graduate supervision policy](#) for university-wide policies surrounding candidacy exams.

Background: Students in the Biology PhD program are termed “provisional PhD candidates” until they have successfully passed the candidacy examination. The examination must be held within 21 months of a student entering the PhD program. Students transferring from the MSc to the PhD program must complete the exam within 26 months of their original entry into the MSc program. An extension of these time limits may be granted only under exceptional circumstances with the permission of the graduate advisor. All provisional PhD students must be registered in BIOL693 (Candidacy Examination) in the term in which they are sitting the candidacy examination. The purpose of the examination is to test the student's understanding of material considered essential to the completion of a PhD, and to assess the student’s competence to undertake the necessary research. The first stage of the candidacy is to write a thesis proposal, which is then followed by an oral examination.

Pre-examination supervisory committee meeting: At least **3 months prior to the candidacy exam** the supervisory committee will meet with the student to set a date for the exam and provide the student with guidelines for what materials will be covered. The material to be examined will include any necessary background for the student to successfully complete a PhD in their subject area and thus includes anything discussed in or relevant to the thesis proposal. In addition, the committee may also provide the student with readings or ask them to become familiar with a topic or area of research. The progress report from the pre-examination committee meeting should summarize these readings or topics for future reference. Some students find it useful to organize readings in a shared document that is accessible to all committee members. Once the exam date is set, Michelle will arrange for an exam chair.

The thesis proposal: The thesis proposal will outline a research plan for the PhD thesis project and should not exceed 10 single-spaced pages (excluding references and figures). Fonts should be no

smaller than 12pt and margins no smaller than 2 cm (or 0.75 inches). Figures and tables, if included, should be clear, and their captions should be complete.

The proposal should follow the format of a grant proposal by: (i) providing the scientific background and rationale for the proposed research, (ii) presenting hypotheses and/or research questions to be addressed, (iii) identifying research objectives, (iv) proposing the methodology for undertaking the research that will constitute the thesis, and (v) stating the significance and impact of the work. A brief discussion of preliminary results may be included, if appropriate, but the emphasis of the proposal should be on proposed work, and not on preliminary results.

A common question is whether students are allowed to ask their supervisors or peers for feedback on their proposal. This is strongly encouraged, but it is imperative that the final proposal is the work of the student.

The thesis proposal must be provided **to the entire committee, as well as the exam chair, at least three weeks prior** to the candidacy exam. Any committee member who requires revisions to the proposal before it can be defended must notify the graduate advisor at least one week prior to the scheduled date of the examination. If the proposal requires revision the examination will be postponed, and the student will be given three weeks to submit a revised proposal. The rescheduled examination will normally take place not more than two weeks following submission of the revised proposal. Any committee member who wishes to delay an examination to allow for revision of the proposal will consult with the student's academic supervisor and at least one other member of the examining committee before making the request.

If no committee members require revisions, the proposal is deemed suitable for examination, and the student is considered to have passed the written component of the exam. This does not preclude examiners from requesting clarifications on the proposal following the oral exam.

The examination: The exam is chaired by the Biology graduate advisor or a faculty member of the Biology Graduate Studies Committee if the graduate advisor is unavailable. The examination committee consists of the student's PhD supervisory committee. Normally the candidacy examination is closed to all except the supervisory committee and chair of the examination. The candidacy exam starts with a brief (maximum 15 minutes) presentation by the student that provides the background for the project, introduces the proposed future research, and updates the committee on the research carried out to date. The exam proceeds with a round of questions from the supervisory committee, with the external committee member being first and the supervisor(s) being last to question the student in each round. There may be more than one round of questions, although the entire exam does not normally exceed two hours.

The questions are aimed to determine the student's understanding of background knowledge required to undertake the proposed research, and any other related subject areas or readings as identified in the pre-examination meeting. In addition, students must demonstrate the ability to think critically about their research, to place it in the broader context of the field of study, to explain and understand the jargon used in the field, and to have a clear understanding of the methods that they plan to use, including potential shortcomings and contingencies.

At the end of the examination, the student will leave the room and the chair will then ask each member of the committee to review the performance of the student's exam and assign a grade of pass, fail, or adjourn.

Possible outcomes: There are three possible outcomes to the candidacy exam:

Pass - The student receives no more than one vote of either fail or adjourn. Candidates who pass the exam will have successfully advanced to PhD candidacy and will continue in the program.

Fail - Candidates receiving two or more votes of fail will be required to withdraw from the PhD program.

Adjourn - The student receives either (a) one vote of fail and one or more votes of adjourn, or (b) more than one vote of adjourn. In such cases the candidate will be offered the opportunity to take a second (and final) candidacy exam within three months. In the event of a second exam, the candidate will not be required to revise his/her thesis proposal but will be given a second opportunity to defend the proposal and to demonstrate suitable background and competence for successful completion of a PhD. If the student does not pass the second exam, they will be required to withdraw from the PhD program.

After deliberations, the student is called back into the exam room and is informed of the outcome. Shortly after the exam, the committee will complete a progress report summarizing the outcome of the exam and recommendations (if any).

If a student has passed with either one vote of adjourn or fail, or if during the exam the committee identifies a knowledge gap or an area where the student should improve, the committee can make specific recommendations for future improvement, which might include but are not limited to: additional readings, additional coursework in that specific area, or answering a few questions in writing. In the event of such a recommendation, the committee should be as clear as possible on the requirements, the desired outcome, and a timeline for completion. The committee can also choose to meet sooner than the typical 1-year timeline for committee meetings. The committee can use that committee meeting report to indicate whether the student has completed the post-candidacy requirement.

Advice for students: The candidacy exam is the most important milestone in the PhD program. Students must take it seriously, and ensure that they have sufficient time to prepare for it, and avoid over-scheduling themselves in the period leading up to the exam. Excellent time management is key for success. Students can follow up with their supervisor and committee members if they need more clarification on required readings, proposal expectations, post-candidacy recommendations, etc. The grad advisor can help the student and committee members navigate any concerns that come up during the candidacy exam process. Finally, it is important that students do not isolate themselves as they prepare for the candidacy exam. Many PhD students have their candidacies in the spring of their second year, which means that there is usually a cohort of PhD students that is preparing for the candidacy exam at the same time, providing opportunities for a peer-support group.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Biology graduate students are guaranteed a minimum of \$26,000 per annum for 2 years (MSc), or 4 years (PhD). The minimum stipend is made up of different components, including external scholarships, funding from the FGS, teaching assistantships, funds from the supervisor's grant, etc. The minimum stipend guarantee means that these sources must add up to at least \$26,000 per year. The relative contribution of these components varies among students depending on their circumstances, such as whether they hold external scholarships, how many teaching assistantships they have, and how much financial support their supervisors are able to provide from research grants. Each year, students will also have the opportunity to apply for internal UVic (donor) awards, which

are considered “on top” of the guaranteed minimum (with provisos detailed below). The total amount of financial support for each graduate student will therefore vary between years and among students.

After 2 years (MSc) program or 4 years (PhD) program, the minimum is no longer guaranteed, and instead the stipend depends on the availability of funds from the supervisor’s research grants, awards, or on the availability of teaching assistantships. Students also no longer receive funding from FGS. Some awards have terms of reference that disqualify students from applying if they are over the time limit.

All graduate students are responsible for paying their own tuition and fees. Note that the stipends are meant to help students with the cost of living and tuition during their graduate degrees, and are not meant to pay for research costs (e.g. materials, samples analysis, etc.). Research costs are normally covered separately by research grants awarded to the student’s supervisor or to the student.

It is strongly recommended that students discuss the breakdown of their stipends with their supervisor before entering the program, and that they review this information with their supervisor at the beginning of each term. Each term, every student will receive a funding memo, which provides a detailed breakdown of their current funding.

Sources of support

External scholarships

These include large awards (>\$17,500) offered by the Canadian Tri-council research agencies (NSERC, CIHR, or SHRC), or other organizations (e.g. MITACS). Applications for Tri-council awards are normally due in the fall term. Students might apply for these awards before coming to UVic but can also apply while in the program as long as they are within the eligibility window for the award. These awards are highly competitive. The applications are lengthy, involving a proposal, references from two referees, and a detailed CV. It is important to start the application process early. The Faculty of Graduate Studies offers coaching and information sessions for these awards early in the fall. UVic currently offers a “President’s Scholarship”, which is a supplement of \$5,000 per year for Tri-council award holders. These scholarships are administered by FGS. Currently, Biology offers students who enter the graduate program with a Tri-council MSc award a \$15,000 university graduate fellowship from the department in their second year. External awards normally count towards the minimum stipend.

UVic Graduate Fellowships (Formerly known as UVic Grad Awards, or GRA)

Every year FGS gives the department a budget for supporting graduate students, which is then distributed among eligible students by the Biology Graduate Committee (grad student representative excluded). These funds are normally awarded in the fall and the spring terms, and their amount varies depending on the allocated budget and how many eligible students are in the program. These fellowships are paid directly to the student. Graduate students are eligible for these awards provided they meet the following criteria: GPA not below 6.0 (or second class for new international students); enrolled full time; Registration status (no less than 1.5 units per term); length in program (within 2 years of the start of an MSc program, 4 years of the start of a PhD program); and not holding a combination of other scholarships/awards equivalent to or exceeding \$22,000. Biology graduate students do not need to apply for these fellowships; they are automatically considered if they are registered in the program. These fellowships normally count towards the minimum stipend.

Graduate Entrance awards (GEA)

Each year Biology is allocated a few scholarships for students entering the program who have excellent GPA and outstanding applications. All new students are automatically entered in the competition, and the awardees are selected by the Biology Graduate Committee (grad student representative excluded). In order to be considered for these awards, it is recommended that students submit their applications for the graduate program by Feb. 15 (for fall entry). Occasionally, entrance awards are available for the January term. Entrance awards normally count towards the minimum stipend.

Departmental and Campus-wide Awards (a.k.a. Donor awards)

Graduate students may be eligible for a number of internal UVic awards. An annual competition for these awards/scholarships takes place in the early summer. Students can apply for as many awards as they can, provided that they meet the terms of reference, which might include research topic, GPA, academic achievements, teaching experience, volunteering, and/or community outreach. Selection of nominees is done by the Biology Graduate Committee (grad student representative excluded). These awards normally do not count towards the guaranteed minimum stipend. However, if the student's stipend includes a teaching assistantship and the student decides to forgo the assistantship because they have won a donor award, then an equivalent value from the donor award can count towards the minimum.

Research assistantships and stipends from the supervisor's research grant

In many circumstances, a proportion of the \$26,000 stipend will come from a research grant that has been awarded to the student's supervisor. These grants vary in amount and duration, and each is governed by their own terms of reference. In addition, grants vary by research discipline and are often awarded to address a specific research question. A student supported by a funding from a grant is therefore expected to work on the subject for which the grant was awarded. These funds can be allocated as a research assistantship (where the student is employed by a grant for a specific task) or as a stipend. Furthermore, the terms of reference of the grant can dictate the amount of funding that can be allocated to student stipends. As a result, there is considerable variation among supervisors in how much research funding can be used to support students, and the contribution of research grants to a student's stipend might vary over the length of the degree. Funding from the supervisor's grant normally count towards the minimum stipend.

Teaching Assistantships (TA)

These include assisting with undergraduate teaching by providing lab instruction, fieldwork instruction, tutorials, or marking. They provide an important source of financial support for graduate students as well as valuable teaching experience and other skills. Twice a year the administrative officer will email graduate students with a list of courses offering teaching assistantships, including the number of hours required. Whenever possible, graduate students will get the first choice of these positions. However, students can lose their right to a teaching assistantship if their performance is judged inadequate. In the case of competition among graduate students for teaching assistantships, applicants are given priority based on the TA Appointment Procedures 13.02 of the CUPE4163-Comp 1&2 Collective Agreement that includes other sources of graduate student financial support being received. Graduate students with external scholarships or support who have a strong desire to have teaching experience need to make this clear on their application.

Students should discuss their proposed teaching load with their supervisors, specifically how it might affect the progress of their studies. Employees registered in an academic degree program will normally be limited to a maximum of fourteen (14) hours of work per week on average over the term

of appointment. They will require their supervisor and union's permission to have a TA appointment exceeding the 14-hour weekly maximum.

Teaching Assistants are members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE local 4163-Component 1 & 2). University-funded academic, research, or scientific assistantships, laboratory instructors and other bargaining unit Specialist Instructional positions are part of this union, which is the largest on campus. A copy of the collective agreement between the University of Victoria and CUPE 4163-Comp 1&2 can be obtained from the administrative officer in the department, online from the [HR website](#) or from the CUPE 4163 office located in the Health and Wellness Building Room 244 and Room 246.

It is important to be aware of your rights as an employee. Please contact the CUPE 4163 office at cupe4163@uvic.ca or 250-472-4778 for any questions. More information can be found [here](#).

Note that unlike scholarships, income from teaching is taxable. Teaching assistantships normally count towards the minimum stipend.

Full-time requirement, leaves, and withdrawal

All Biology graduate students are full-time students and are expected to devote their working hours to research. The only exception is the allowance for time involved in 1/5 or 2/5 Teaching Assistantships, which is considered a form of training. Biology does not allow part-time studies.

Some students run into personal financial difficulties and others face crises in health, to name but two of life's nasty surprises. It is possible to temporarily withdraw (TWD) for a term or more, but you are advised to check with your supervisor and Michelle, in that order, so appropriate arrangements can be made. Withdrawal time may or may not stop the clock on your program, depending upon the type of withdrawal. Funding may also be affected. Check the restrictions stated in any scholarships that you hold, as well as those of the FGS.

If you do accept other work, contracts and so on, you must make your supervisor and the supervisory committee aware of these obligations. If this outside work will have a detrimental effect on your research, then it is necessary for the supervisory committee to decide if it is in the student's best interest to continue.

Withdrawal from a program can be of two types - with or without permission. The latter will dramatically affect your ability to re-enter graduate school. The former requires both your supervisor's permission and permission from the Dean of Graduate Studies. Michelle will be able to help you with the proper paperwork and procedure involved in these two options.

If you do not withdraw officially, FGS will consider you withdrawn without permission which can lead to major difficulties. There are several options when considering withdrawing, so check with Michelle.

Currently, students can take a parental leave using the same process as outlined above. Unfortunately, at the time of writing UVic does not offer parental leave financial support. However, some of the major funding agencies such as NSERC and CIHR are beginning to develop parental leave plans for students supported by these grants. Students planning to take a parental leave should discuss the matter with their supervisor as soon as they are able to so that arrangements can be made with the funding agencies. The policies around parental leave are expected to evolve, so please get in touch with the graduate advisor to learn about new initiatives.

Holidays and vacation days

Graduate students are “entitled to a minimum of 10 working days of vacation per year (i.e. 10 days that do not include weekends, statutory holidays or the December university closure)” as stated in the [UVic graduate calendar](#). Students normally decide on the timing of their vacation in consultation with the supervisor. Some scholarships or grants have holidays stipulated and students are required by the scholarship to abide by these conditions.

Fees

Fees are due at the end of the first month of each new term. If you have questions regarding your fees and tuition, please contact the registrars’ office or consult the [website](#).

UVic accepts various but not all forms of payment. Be sure to familiarize yourself with the deadlines for paying fees. Every term that you are registered, you are assessed a fee for that term based on the following schedule:

MSc

- 6 full instalments (over 2 years)
- if you complete in 18 months, you only pay 5 instalments

PhD

- 9 full instalments (over 3 years)
- if you complete in 2.5 years, you only pay 7.5 instalments

Your fee instalments cover the following –

- Tuition plus GSS fees
- Athletic fees
- Extended Health and Dental fees (see below for more information)
- U-pass bus pass

Once you have paid the maximum fee instalments (6 for MSc or 9 for PhD), you are assessed a smaller re-registration fee until you reach your time limits (MSc 5 years and PhD 7 years). If you exceed the time limits, an extension must be requested and your fees are once again assessed at the larger fee instalments.

Fee appeals to tuition are made to the Grad Fee Reduction Appeals Committee (Grad FRAC), c/o Tuition Fee Assessments, Accounting.

Thesis/dissertation preparation and examination

What constitutes an “examinable” thesis in Biology?

Theses in Biology are expected to be a scientifically sound and original work by the student that advances their field of study. However, the nature and amount of this work is hard to quantify because it depends on the discipline, nature of the research question, and methodology. It is difficult to specify the number of pages, chapters, etc., that will be required for any given thesis. However, the scope of your thesis must fit into the timeline of the degree. We recommend that you discuss thesis expectations with your supervisor early in your degree. Sometimes it is helpful to read former theses from your lab group. All UVic theses are available from the library.

Mapping out a proposed timeline of your research is highly recommended and can be done as early as your first committee meeting. Timelines, however, might change as your project evolves. You should therefore maintain good communication with your supervisor and your committee with regards to expectations and progress. Before a thesis can proceed to the final oral examination, the supervisory committee has to agree that the thesis is examinable (more details on this process below). Many factors go into determining what constitutes an examinable thesis. You must discuss these factors with your supervisor and committee.

Examination

Both MSc theses and PhD dissertations are examined orally (this is also called a defense). The examinations are open to the public. The examining committee for all final oral examinations (MSc or PhD) must consist of the student's supervisory committee plus an external examiner. The supervisor is responsible for finding an external examiner and graduate students are not to have contact with their external examiner prior to the oral exam.

For MSc oral examinations, the external examiner may be from within the university but must be from outside the home academic unit. For a PhD the external examiner must be from outside the university. MSc and PhD external examiners can participate in the oral examination via video conference link.

Steps for the Oral Exam

At the beginning of each term, Michelle will send out an email providing information about defending that term, deadlines, guidelines, procedures, etc. From start to finish, the defending process is a lengthy one. MSc students must allow at least 35 business days and PhD students must allow at least 45 business days from the time the supervisor allows the thesis/dissertation to go to the Supervisory Committee. Please note that the days of submission are not included in the review period.

- 1) Please follow the [Thesis and Dissertation Formatting guidelines](#) set by FGS. Formatting and stylistic decisions not covered by the FGS guidelines (e.g. font, size, margins...) are up to the student as long as they are reasonable and consistent.
- 2) Notify Michelle of your intention to defend.
- 3) You must [apply to graduate](#) once the defense process has begun.

Check the [deadlines](#) for applying for graduation.

- 4) When distributing your thesis/dissertation to your committee, please ensure that you include Michelle on the email. No revisions can be made to your thesis/dissertation until after your oral exam takes place. Michelle will forward your thesis/dissertation to FGS. FGS will forward the same copy to the external examiner.

Check with your committee members for their availability for the period during which you intend to defend. You can also tentatively schedule your oral exam.

- 5) **Request for Oral Examination form (ROE).** Michelle will prepare the ROE form for you after you distribute your thesis/dissertation to your committee. This form must be completely filled in before submitting to FGS. You will need the signatures of your committee members and the graduate advisor, your examination date/time, the room

booking for your examination, and your external examiner's information (Michelle will work with your supervisor to confirm this information).

Thesis/Dissertation Withholding form. Michelle will prepare the Thesis/Dissertation Withholding form for you. Your thesis/dissertation will be archived to an online database called UVicSpace. This form puts an embargo on your thesis/dissertation in UVicSpace for 1 year. Some journals may reject your paper because the material is considered “published” if it is accessible via UVicSpace. Please check the [UVic guidelines](#) and journal guidelines.

PhD students – arrange your Departmental seminar in the term prior to the one you plan to defend in, or at the latest in the same term you plan to defend. Contact the Seminar Committee to arrange a seminar.

- 6) **Pre-Oral and Post-Oral Emails.** One week prior to your defense, Michelle will send you a pre-oral email with many helpful reminders for your big day. Attached to this email will be your Thesis/Dissertation Approval form. Immediately after your defense, Michelle will send you a post-defense email that will explain step-by-step what you must do to complete the defending process
- 7) **Defend!** Bring your Thesis/Dissertation approval form to obtain original signatures from your committee members and the external examiner after your defense. Supervisors will obtain signatures from members who participate remotely. Please make sure you bring the form back to Michelle to keep.

Important Resources

Health and dental plans

All students must have basic health coverage [through MSP services](#). For international students, there is a 3-month waiting period. Apply as soon as you are accepted as a student at UVic.

The Graduate Student Society (GSS) offers extended [health and dental plans](#). If you have questions, call 250-721-8816. Whether you are required to enroll or can opt out depends on when you have registered in the program, and your status as an on- or off-campus student.

Improving Spoken and Written English for International Students

Students for whom English is a second language should consider improving their written or spoken English, as this will help them significantly when it comes to presenting seminars and writing a thesis. In addition, students should have strong skills in both written and spoken English before accepting a teaching assistantship. We recommend that you consider the offerings from the [English Language Center and Continuing studies at UVic](#).

Other sources of support

[The Graduate Student Society](#) (GSS) is a democratic, student-run, non-profit society dedicated to serving the interests of graduate students at UVic. They offer a range of supports, advocacy, and services that can be found on their website. The GSS runs several social events that can be a great opportunity to meet other graduate students on campus.

[The Ombudsperson](#) provides confidential, impartial and independent advice and assistance to students who are experiencing issues of fairness in the university system. They help resolve student

problems or disputes fairly. They can help you understand your options, rights and responsibilities, and facilitate communication.

[The International Centre for Students](#) provides services, information and programs for international graduate students from pre-arrival to degree completion.

[The student wellness center and multifaith center](#) offer a variety of services to support students' mental, physical and spiritual health, including counselling services.

[SupportConnect](#) is a free, confidential mental health support service for UVic students that can connect students with qualified counsellors, consultants and life coaches anytime, anywhere.

The [Office of Indigenous Academic and Community Engagement](#) supports the success of Indigenous students attending UVic. They can connect you with the educational, financial and cultural resources available on campus and in local communities.

The [Centre for Accessible Learning \(CAL\)](#) provides programs, services and support to facilitate accessible learning for students with disabilities.

[Equity and Human Rights](#) (EQHR) provides support for sexualized violence response, and discrimination, harassment, and bullying. They are also a resource to access education on equity and inclusion practices across campus and consult on how to implement the work.

[Here2talk](#) is a BC government program that connects students with mental health support when they need it. Through this program, all students – domestic or international – currently registered in a B.C. post-secondary institution have access to free, confidential counselling and community referral services, conveniently available 24/7 via app, phone and web.

More resources: A [wider list of student support](#) is maintained and updated regularly by the student wellness center and in the [UVic Graduate Calendar](#).

Conflicts with the supervisor

If you experience a conflict with your supervisor that cannot be easily resolved, you should seek additional help or advice. Make an appointment with the grad advisor as soon as you can. Be aware of other sources of support available to you including FGS and the resources listed above. Consult the [graduate supervision policy](#) to familiarize yourself with UVic policies around conflict and supervision.

Departmental Seminars

The department hosts weekly speakers from other organizations and institutions. They cover a wide range of topics. Graduate students and faculty are expected to attend Departmental seminars. The seminars are an important avenue to the outside world and should be treated as a worthy bonus in departmental life. The seminars seemingly furthest away from your topic of research can be the most inspiring ones. Unless otherwise advertised, the seminar takes place every Friday afternoon at 3:30pm from September to April.

Departmental and university-wide committees

The Department of Biology and UVic are run on the principles of collegial governance. This means that they are self-governed by members of the UVic community. Faculty and students participate in

many administrative committees including the seminar committee, graduate committee, EDI (Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion), biosafety, animal ethics, etc. The membership of these committees changes every year. Many of the departmental committees have graduate student representatives. Graduate representatives sometimes serve on faculty-wide or university-wide committees, such as the UVic senate. Getting involved in a committee is a great way to learn about UVic and to become involved in the university community. To find out more about current committees, and which ones are seeking graduate student representatives please contact the department secretary (biology@uvic.ca) or the graduate advisor (biology.gradadvice@uvic.ca).

TRAVEL AND CONFERENCES

Student Travel Grant

The FGS provides funding to partially cover the cost of travel for both research and conferences; more details can be found on FGS website [here](#)

The Biology Department also provides \$50 per student per fiscal year for those presenting either a talk or a poster at a conference. To apply for the \$50 departmental travel fund (in addition to the GS travel grant), please ensure you bring the [GS Travel Grant Application form](#) to Michelle prior to submitting it to FGS. The department will not accept the application after your travel. The FGS allocates travel grant money each month and this money is distributed on a first-come first-serve basis. Some months experience a heavier demand, so apply as soon as possible. Please note that first time applicants are considered first.

There are often society or group travel awards from the organizing body of the conference. You must apply well in advance for these. If there is an important society in your field of study, we suggest that you get a student membership. One of the benefits of membership is being aware of such awards. Some societies will, if you are one of the individuals selected, pay for the entire costs of your trip. Michelle can provide you with a letter confirming student status, which you may need for this purpose.

Travel Expense Reimbursement Claim form

To be reimbursed for your travel and conference expenses, you must submit a 'Travel Expense Reimbursement Claim form' when you return from your trip. You must do so within 30 days of your travel. You can find the form online from the [Financial Services website](#). Use only one claim form (for FGS and departmental travel fund) to claim your expenses. If you have applied for the departmental contribution, fill out the form and bring it to Michelle, who will obtain the signature required for the departmental contribution. The expense claim form is then sent to the FGS for them to process and then forwarded to the Financial Services. If you ONLY apply for the FGS travel grant, you can submit the form to the FGS directly after you complete the form. You will eventually be reimbursed. It can take some time.

Some Tips for Travel Claim

Since most graduate students are not in a position to carry the costs that accompany long distance flights and registration fees, we advise that you see your supervisor about getting an advance from their account to cover these expenses for you.

Here is the form for travel advance.

<https://www.uvic.ca/vpfo/financial-services/assets/docs/acctpayable/Accountable-Advance-Request.pdf>

If you have purchased the ticket and paid for the accommodation, you can also fill out this form to get reimbursed before the travel takes place.

<https://www.uvic.ca/vpfo/financial-services/assets/docs/acctpayable/TER.pdf>

Original receipts must be provided for registration expenses, lodging, and ground transport (gas, rentals, taxis, public transport etc.). Make a scanned copy of all your receipts and the claim form for your records before submitting them to FGS for reimbursement.

FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

The Biology Department has a number of facilities available for faculty and graduate students. For the sake of clarity and to prevent ambiguity, the general rule of thumb is that these facilities exist for research purposes only. University facilities and equipment purchased or supported by taxpayers' funds should never be used for personal and/or unrelated activities, nor should they be extended to outside interests without having been cleared by the Chair of the Department.

Science Stores (Petch Bldg, Room 168 / 250-721-8853)

Supplies for research purposes are restricted by individual faculty research accounts. Provision of materials is entirely up to the individual supervisor. It is important to discuss exactly which supplies and materials a grant holder is willing to cover to avoid misunderstandings.

Computing

Graduate students need a [Netlink ID](#) for access to many UVic online services for the duration of their program. If you have trouble with computers supported by the university, or with software which is supported by a site license, you may wish to contact the [UVic Computer Help Desk](#) (250-721-7687; helpdesk@uvic.ca). UVic is part of the Digital Research Alliance of Canada [high-performance computing facility](#). Please talk to your supervisor to get access to this research facility.

Animal Care/Aquatic Facility

If your research requires animal care facilities, then your research program must first be approved by the [University's Animal Care Committee](#). The application forms and procedures can be found on the [Animal Care Services](#) website, and applications must be submitted after they have been approved by your supervisor. Animal Care Services also offers a number of training modules that are required if your research requires working with animals. Talk to your supervisor and consult with the Animal Ethics Liaison.

Plant Growth Facility

The Centre for Forest Biology operates the Bev Glover Research Facility including an outdoor field site as well as [greenhouse and controlled environmental](#) chambers on campus. If you need plant growth space for your research, please get in touch with the secretary of the Centre for Forest Biology, Andrea Roszmann (forestbiology@uvic.ca or 250-721-7119).

Electron Microscope Laboratory

The Electron Microscope (EM) Laboratory functions as an electron microscopy resource center for the Biology Department, other departments within UVic, and external non-UVic researchers. The EM Lab operates on a cost-recovery basis. Training for specific techniques or contract work by the lab manager can be arranged. At the time of writing the position of lab manager for the EM facility is vacant and in the process of being filled. Speak to your supervisor if you wish to use the EM facility for your research.

Herbarium

Collections in the UVic Herbarium are available for student use for plant identification and plant taxonomic studies. Loans of material from herbaria around the world can be arranged through the curator, Dr. Terri Lacourse (tlacours@uvic.ca).

Courier

The department and university use a number of courier services. Choose the service most appropriate to the destination and the price that the account holder (your supervisor) is willing to pay. There are a few options to choose from -- cheap 3 and 4 day cross-continental couriers, as well as expensive next day ones. All courier packages are sent from Science Stores (Petch Room 168). You will need an account number from your supervisor.

Mail

The Biology Office staff will sort incoming mail, which comes once per day around 9:30 am. Graduate students pick up their mail from the alphabetized slots (yellow labels) in the Biology Office. Outgoing mail service may only be used for research purposes. Do not put envelopes with stamps on them in the outgoing mailboxes in the office. There are appropriate mail drop boxes on campus for this purpose.

Photocopying

Access to photocopying is by faculty account, and is therefore at the discretion of individual faculty members. To set up an account see Laura or Minami. There are two photocopiers in the department, one in the Biology Office in Cunningham, and another just outside the office door. The office photocopiers have prioritized usage - office or teaching use precedes research needs. Personal use for non-research purposes is prohibited.

Service Lab - Electronics

Located in Cunningham 163. The electronics technician, Ryan Erdman (ryanerdman@uvic.ca or 250-721-7116), handles the departmental electronics, and also repairs electronic or mechanical equipment. Access to this service is by a work order, which must be approved by your supervisor. Work orders are obtained from the Service Lab.

Service Lab - Mechanical and Wood Working

Work should be referred to the Chemistry Lab (mechanical, glass and instrument shops) or the Physics Lab (mechanical and electronics).

MSV John Strickland

The university owns a research vessel (MSV John Strickland), which is operated by the faculty of Science, and which can be used by student and faculty for field work. For information on booking ship time contact the administrative officer, Dean of Science Office (sciadmin@uvic.ca or 250-721-7060). A valid FAST account and approval from your supervisor is required at the time of booking.

University Library Reps

If you wish to order monographs or books, have your supervisor make a request to faculty on the library committee. To find out who is the library rep contact Minami (biology@uvic.ca).

Vehicles

The Department keeps a vehicle available for research and teaching purposes which can be booked from the Biology Office. Payment for these activities is from research or course accounts. You must provide a valid FAST account from your supervisor when picking up the key from the Biology Office. Day rates and mileage rates are subject to change without notice. Private use is prohibited. Check with the office staff to sign out the vehicle.

Keys and access to the Cunningham Building

Building hours are 7:00 am to 10:00 pm Monday to Friday. Access after hours or on weekends is by key only. Keys are signed out in the Biology General Office. You need to have a form signed by your supervisor; a deposit for each key is required and is reimbursed when the key is returned. Never lend your keys and report lost keys to the Biology Office immediately. Lost keys can be replaced but the deposit increases per key.

SAFETY

Safety in the Lab and in the Field

You are required to obtain relevant training on occupational health and safety. Depending on the nature of your research, multiple certificates may be required. These are offered by the university through the Department of Occupational Health, Safety and Environment (OHSE).

(<http://ohs.uvic.ca>) OHSE also has information on the requirements necessary to perform field work

Please consult with your supervisor to determine which courses you need to take (i.e. WHMIS. Biosafety, handling radioactive chemicals, hazardous chemicals, field work risk assessment etc.).

If you are handling any hazardous chemicals, you must take a Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS) course offered by the university (<https://www.uvic.ca/ohse/>). You must know how to store and dispose of any chemicals that you may be required to use. If in doubt, contact OHSE (250-721-8879). You are obliged to wear lab coats. Lab coats are not to be worn outside the lab.

If you are working with microorganisms and carrying out recombinant work, or with an organism that requires containment, then you must complete the Biosafety requirements and you must include your research description in your supervisor's application to the University's Biosafety Committee. You are obliged to wear lab coats. Lab coats are not to be worn outside the lab.

To handle, use and dispose of radioactive chemicals you must take and pass a Radiation Safety course given by OHSE. You can only use these chemicals in approved locations. You are obliged to wear lab coats. Lab coats are not to be worn outside the lab.

If you plan to perform fieldwork, make sure you discuss with your supervisor which procedures and regulations apply (e.g. related to Off-Campus Activity Risk Management, Boating, or Scientific Diving). Note that new safety requirements for field work have been implemented by UVic. Check with your supervisor and with OHSE.

The scientific diving program is outlined in the UVic Guide for Scientific Diving Safety (<https://www.uvic.ca/ohse/research/diving/index.php>). In order to participate in scientific diving, you must register to become a scientific diver. You must also complete a project proposal form before beginning your scientific diving project. For more information, please contact OHSE at ohs@uvic.ca or 250-721-8971.

Accidents

You must report EVERY ACCIDENT to Jennie Bartosik in the Biology Office, no matter how trivial. This includes 'near-misses' where a piece of equipment or infrastructure comes close to injuring someone and warrants investigation by the safety committee.

Unless unavoidable, you should not work alone in labs. If you do, keep the number for Campus Security posted nearby (7599). Make sure you know where first aid kits are kept. For accidents/injuries involving no time loss and/or medical expense, the incident is recorded in an Accident Record Book when you report it to Jennie.

Those students paid through the university (e.g. NSERC scholarships administered through the university, RA monies, TA monies, etc.), are covered by the Workers Compensation Board of British Columbia (WCB). For accidents/injuries involving time loss and/or medical expense, the department head/designate completes WCB Form 7 and sends it to the Occupational Health, Safety and Environment (OHSE) office. Accident investigators will complete an Accident Investigation Report. The injured employee (student) completes WCB Form 6A. All forms are returned to OHSE and forwarded to WCB. Students that are being paid via graduate student support stipends (GSSP) are not covered by WCB as this money is not a salary.

Further questions?

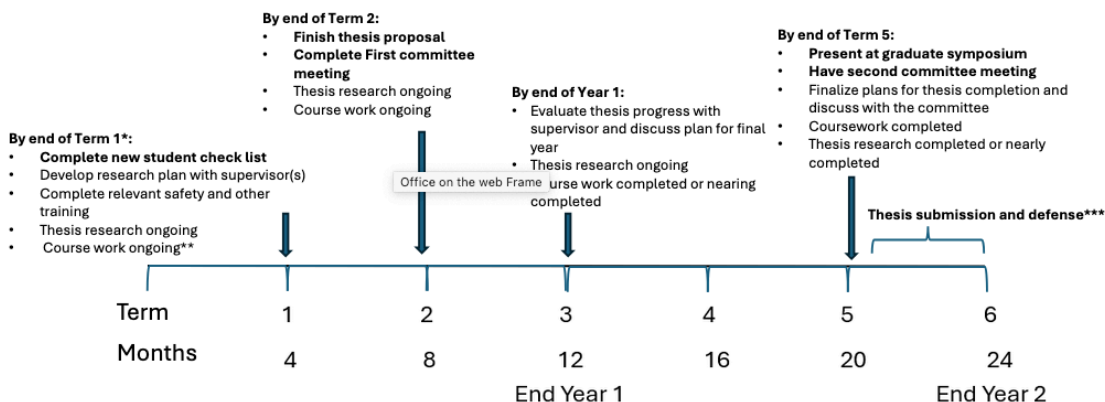
If you have questions about the material in this manual or the program, please do not hesitate to contact Michelle or the grad advisor. Please also get in touch if you want to donate art or photos for the handbook, or if you spot any errors or dead links.

Welcome to the Biology graduate program!

--- THE END ---

Appendix 1. A road map for the MSc program

A road map for the Biology MSc program



*The figure assumes September entry into the program, but the timeline is applicable to Jan and May entry

**Required courses can be completed in any term, but ideally should be completed early in the program

***Timelines for thesis completion vary depending on many factors. Many students defend in the 7th term. Note that FGS requires 6 weeks between thesis submission and final defense. Please confirm submission and defense deadlines with the Graduate Secretary