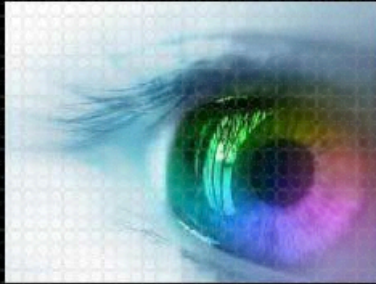
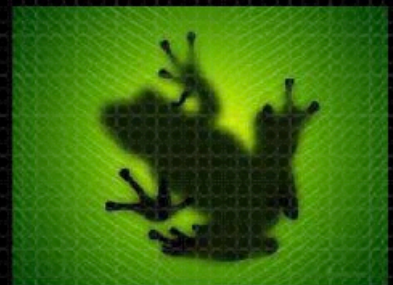
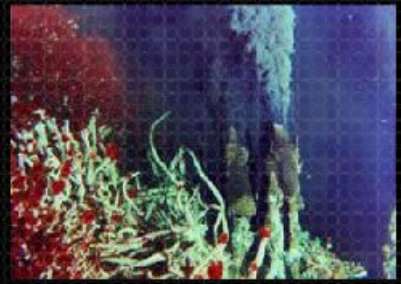


# A Resource Manual for Biology Graduate Students

Updated August 2022



## BIOLOGY



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# WELCOME TO GRADUATE STUDIES

in the Department of Biology Department  
at the University of Victoria

This resource manual is intended to provide new graduate students with an introduction to the people, facilities and resources available to you during your degree at The University of Victoria (UVic). It also outlines steps you will need to go through to complete your program and tips to get through the paperwork you will face along the way. If you can't find someone or something you need in here ask the Graduate Secretary – Michelle Shen.

A very important resource for you and your supervisor is the UVic graduate supervision policy, which is maintained and updated by the Faculty of Graduate studies. This policy outlines the roles and responsibilities of the graduate students, supervisor, graduate advisor, committee, and department chair. The policy can be found here (<https://www.uvic.ca/students/assets/docs/graduate-supervision-policy.pdf>).

## Communicating with other graduate students: Biol-grad Listserve

There is a listserv in place for graduate student communication, called biol-grad. This listserv 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 listserv may be used for non-project related messages (i.e. party invites, items for sale, etc.). Once you start the program, Michelle will add you to the list. 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](mailto:biol-grads@lists.uvic.ca) and everyone on the listserv will receive it. If you have problems, email Michelle to let her know.

The benefit of the listserv 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 the graduate advisor or graduate secretary about setting it up.

## 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 Graduate Studies

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 Graduate Studies 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 which may have an impact on 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 [biolgsec@uvic.ca](mailto:biolgsec@uvic.ca) or 250-721-7093 for
  - everything and anything pertaining to graduate studies
- See Janice Gough, Administrative Officer [bioadmin@uvic.ca](mailto:bioadmin@uvic.ca) or 250-721-7092 for
  - Teaching Assistant positions
  - Building Safety, Lab Safety, WHMIS
  - Office or study carrel space
- See Jennie Bartosik, Assistant to the Chair/Department Secretary [biology@uvic.ca](mailto:biology@uvic.ca) or 250-721-7091 for
  - HR appointments (for field/lab/research assistants)
  - Appointments with the Chair
- See Laura Alcaraz-Sehn, Administrative Assistant [bioclerk@uvic.ca](mailto:bioclerk@uvic.ca) or 250-721-7095 or in her absence Jennie Bartosik 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 Jennie Bartosik for
  - Keys to buildings, classrooms and labs
  - Audiovisual equipment
  - Biology van rental
  - Room booking (Reading Room or other rooms on campus)

## Departmental and university-wide committees:

The Department of Biology and UVic are run on the principles of collegial governance. Faculty and students participate in many committees such as animal care, biosafety, library, curriculum, etc. The membership of these committees changes every year. Many of the committees have graduate student representatives. To find out more about current committees, and which ones are seeking graduate student representatives please contact the department secretary ([biology@uvic.ca](mailto:biology@uvic.ca)) or the graduate advisor ([biology.gradadvice@uvic.ca](mailto:biology.gradadvice@uvic.ca)).

## Graduate Studies Committee

Chair/Graduate Advisor: Dr. Rana El-Sabaawi ([biology.gradadvice@uvic.ca](mailto:biology.gradadvice@uvic.ca))

Faculty Members: Drs. Jürgen Ehling, Bob Chow, and Amanda Bates

Graduate Student: Sarah Lane

The Graduate Studies Committee is the most important committee for graduate students as it creates policy for ratification by the department. The committee makes decisions about admission to the program. This committee also makes recommendations on graduate scholarship and award nominations. There are several other opportunities for graduate students to sit on this and other

committees, so watch for emails and get involved. Another major event that requires help from graduate students is the planning of the Annual Graduate Student Symposium.

## OVERALL PROGRAM

### 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 less than 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:

- Formation of supervisory committee: within 8 months of entry
- Completion of course work: 3 units (normally 2 courses)
- Meeting of supervisory committee: initial meeting (in first year) and then annually until completion
- Graduate symposium presentation: annually, except if in program less than eight 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. Be sure to discuss financial support with your supervisor at the onset of your program, especially what will happen after the first 2 years. As the degree exceeds the expected time of completion, students may lose eligibility for scholarship and fellowships and may drop in priority for other forms of support including TAs and Graduate Awards.

### 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)
- 3.0 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:

- 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 in first year, then annually until completion
- Graduate symposium presentation: annually, except if in program less than eight months
- Candidacy examination: within 21 months of direct entry to the PhD program
- Departmental Seminar: in 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. Be sure to discuss financial support with your supervisor at the onset of your program, especially what will happen after the first four years. As the degree exceeds the expected time of completion, students may lose eligibility for scholarships and fellowships, and may drop in priority for other forms of support including TAs and Graduate Awards.

### Transfer to PhD from MSc

Transferring from an MSc to a PhD is only possible after completing 8 months of a Master's 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 6<sup>th</sup> 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. The student's committee must meet to give approval prior to transfer. 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 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 month) was 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)
- 3.0 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 couple of years:

- 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 (in first year) and 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
- Completion of additional course work: 1.5 units (normally 1 course)
- Graduate symposium presentation: annually, except if in program less than eight months
- Candidacy examination: within 26 months of initial entry to the MSc program
- Departmental Seminar: in final year
- Dissertation submission and defense: watch for emails regarding deadlines

## Thesis/dissertation preparation and examination

Both MSc theses and PhD dissertations are examined orally. The examinations are open to the public. The examining committee for all oral examinations (MSc or PhD) must consist of the student's supervisory committee plus an external examiner. Your 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 oral the external examiner must be from outside the university. MSc and PhD external examiners can participate in the oral examination via video conference link.

## Eight Easy Steps to Thesis Completion

At the beginning of each term, Michelle sends out an email providing information about defending this term, deadlines, guidelines, procedures, etc. From start to finish, the defending process is a lengthy one. MSc students must allow at least 6 weeks and PhD students must allow at least 8 weeks from the time the supervisor allows the thesis/dissertation to go to the Supervisory Committee.



- 1) Thesis/dissertations are prepared according to guidelines available from the Graduate Studies website: <https://www.uvic.ca/graduatestudies/oral-exams/oral-exam-guidelines/index.php>
- 2) Notify Michelle of your intention to defend.
- 3) Check the deadlines for applying for graduation:
  - a. Convocation – Fall or Spring Ceremony
  - b. Deadlines for application to graduate:  
You must apply to graduate once we start the defense process.  
<https://www.uvic.ca/students/graduate/graduation-convocation/index.php>
- 4) When distributing your thesis/dissertation to your committee, check their availability for the period during which you intend to defend. On the date you distribute your thesis, email Michelle and attach a copy of your title page.

- 5) **Request for Oral Examination form (ROE).** While your committee is reviewing your thesis/dissertation, Michelle will prepare the ROE form. This form must be completely filled in before submission to Graduate Studies. 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; you should NOT take part in this process).

**Thesis/Dissertation Withholding form.** Once finished, theses are added to an online database called UVicSpace. It is highly recommended that students complete one of these withholding forms to put embargo on archiving your thesis/dissertation to UVicSpace. Some journals may reject your paper because the material is considered “published” if it is accessible via UVicSpace. Please check the UVic guidelines (<https://www.uvic.ca/students/graduate/thesis-dissertation/withholding-your-thesis-or-dissertation/index.php#ipn-before-you-withhold>) and journal guidelines. Michelle can help guide you on this process.

- 6) 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.
- 7) **Pre-Oral and Post-Oral Emails.** One week prior to your oral, 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
- 8) **Defend!** Suggestions for the examination:
  - Bring your Thesis/Dissertation approval form to obtain original signatures from your committee members and the external examiner after your oral. If members are participating remotely, the Chair of your oral exam can sign on behalf of these

members (including the external examiner!). If the Chair misses to sign on the form, Michelle will scan the form to obtain signatures. One way or the other, please make sure you bring the form back to Michelle.

## FINANCIAL SUPPORT

PhD or MSc students, who do not bring scholarships or outside funding with them, are supported by a mix of funding from faculty research grants and departmental sources, such as Teaching Assistantships and fellowships. All Biology graduate students are guaranteed a minimum of \$22,000 per annum for 2 years (MSc), or 4 years (PhD) by their supervisors. Changes in the level of support from the department are to be made up by an adjustment in faculty research grant support to ensure student support does not drop below this level. It is up to you to negotiate with your supervisor regarding extra monies won/earned (i.e. internal scholarships and awards) as to whether these are included in the minimum support to graduate students or become financial support beyond the guaranteed minimum.

### Departmental and Campus-wide Awards/Scholarships

Graduate students may be eligible for a number of departmental and Faculty of Science or campus-wide awards / scholarships. To qualify you must be enrolled full-time. The Annual Competition for these internal awards/scholarships takes place in mid to late summer.

Michelle sends out email notices about deadlines for the awards / scholarship competition sometime in July. It is up to students to apply for each award/scholarship for which they feel qualified and are eligible for. Selection of nominees is done by the department's Graduate Studies Committee (grad student representative excluded).

Additional funds, in the form of UVic Graduate Awards, are awarded by the Department's Graduate Studies Committee. These funds are allocated to the Biology Department by the Faculty of Graduate Studies and are normally awarded in both the fall and the spring terms. These awards are paid directly to the student. Graduate students are eligible for these awards provided they meet the following eligibility criteria: GPA not below 6.5; enrolled full time; 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 combinations of scholarships/awards equivalent to or exceeding \$22K. Biology graduate students do not need to apply for these awards.

### Teaching Assistantships

Teaching Assistantships (TAs) are assigned by Janice Gough, Administrative Officer. The goals of TAs are: (i) to ensure that financial support of students is adequate and (ii) to provide teaching experience. Graduate students always get first choice at 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 TAs, applicants are given priority based on the amount of financial support they receive from outside sources. Graduate students lacking outside support are generally placed in teaching assistantships before graduate students with such support. Graduate students with outside support who have a strong desire to have the teaching experience need to make this clear on their application to TA. Students must have the agreement of their

supervisor on their teaching load, as there are times when teaching may pose an unreasonable burden on the progress or completion of the graduate program. Students are limited to a maximum of 2/5 teaching load per term (equivalent to 14 hrs per week). As a Teaching Assistant (TA), you are a member of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE local 4163. TAs, Research Assistants, Computer User Services employees, ESL instructors and sessional instructors are part of this union, which is the largest on campus. A copy of the agreement between the University of Victoria and CUPE 4163 can be obtained from the administrative officer in the department, or from the CUPE 4163 office located in the Business & Economics Bldg., Room 396.

Please contact the staff in the CUPE 4163 office if you have any questions or concerns regarding the contract and/or CUPE 4163. The contract is also available on-line here:

[https://www.uvic.ca/hr/assets/docs/labourrelations/collectiveagreements/local\\_4163\\_comp\\_3\\_2\\_019\\_2022.pdf](https://www.uvic.ca/hr/assets/docs/labourrelations/collectiveagreements/local_4163_comp_3_2_019_2022.pdf).

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

### **Holding an outside job, full-time requirement, leaves, and withdrawal**

All Biology graduate students are full-time students and are expected to devote all 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.

However, 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 the graduate secretary, 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 Faculty of Graduate Studies.

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, Graduate Studies 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 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 possible 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 grad advisor to learn about new initiatives.

## Holidays

Each scholarship has holidays stipulated and students are required by the scholarship to abide by these conditions. Students supported by faculty members must establish holidays by discussion with their supervisor.

## 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 Tuition:

<http://www.uvic.ca/vpfo/accounting/services/tuition/index.php>

They accept 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
- UBus Pass
- Extended Health and Dental fees (see below for more information)

Once you have paid the maximum fee instalments (6 for MSc or 9 for PhD), you are assessed the smaller re-registration fees 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 large fee instalments.

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

## Health, dental and mental health support

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. ( for more information see <http://www.health.gov.bc.ca/msp/>).

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. For more information visit <https://gss.uvic.ca/health-dental/>

UVic also offers a range of mental health supports. For more information visit <https://www.uvic.ca/students/health-wellness/mental-health-services/index.php>

## 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 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)

The deadline for dropping courses or temporarily withdrawing for the term is usually much earlier than the deadline for adding or being registered for the term (except in the Summer Term, where these two deadlines are much closer together). The penalty for late registration is a \$35 late fee but the penalty for dropping or withdrawing late could mean that you are assessed fees for the entire term. Be sure you know these dates! Check the calendar or check with Michelle.

### Registration Tip

- You must either be registered or withdrawn (temporarily for one term at a time or withdrawn with permission for a period of time) 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 a copy for your file

## Course Requirements

The MSc program requires 2 courses (3 units in total) and the PhD program requires 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 develop a technical ability, or to provide theoretical background critical to the execution of the proposed research. In some cases, the course load is designed to strengthen a student's perceived challenges.

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 aforementioned institutions. See Michelle for help with WDA requests.

## Biology Graduate Symposium

The Annual Biology Graduate Symposium (BIOL 560) is a required course for all graduate students. Historically the symposium was offered during the fall break in November, but has recently been moved to the spring term. Students are required to present every year, except if they have been in the program less than eight months. After the eight months, students are required to participate in the symposium every year of their program except when exempted by the Graduate Advisor. Watch for emails that begin to late in the fall term. Details such as what is required, when it is required and exemption criteria will be provided.

## Your Supervisory Committee

The role of your supervisory committee is to help to guide you through the academic part of your program. Your committee should meet annually to evaluate your progress. Establishment of a supervisory committee and changes to the committee membership are handled by your supervisor, but remember that you also have a say in deciding who should be on your committee. It is up to you to ensure you have one committee meeting per year as this is for your benefit. It is student's responsibility to schedule a committee meeting. Once you have set up a meeting, let Michelle know so that she can book a room and arrange the paperwork.

Typically, you should have a small presentation prepared (10-15 min talk, visuals help) for each meeting to update your members on your progress in the past year; it is strongly recommended that you also provide your committee with a progress report at least 4 days before the committee meeting. Remember to provide Michelle with a copy of your progress report for your file. If you encounter difficulty in getting your committee to meet with you, contact the Grad Advisor.

To fulfill the Faculty of Graduate Studies requirements for committee composition, ALL MEMBERS of a committee must be members of the Faculty of Graduate Studies and must hold a PhD degree. Please talk to Michelle how to obtain FGS membership if your committee member is outside of UVic. Without academic appointment with UVic, committee members can apply for AFFILIATE membership which is not permitted to supervise/co-supervise graduate students.

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

- MSc Committee: requires 3 members in total, an outside member is not required. At least two members need to be from the Biology department, and the third can be, but does not have to be an outside member (an outside member can be someone outside the Dept. of Biology or UVic)
- PhD Committee: requires 4 members in total, an outside member is required (an outside member can be someone outside the Dept. of Biology or UVic)

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 longer defenses.

It is an expectation that all committee members participate in every committee meeting, candidacy exam and oral defense.

It is also useful to consult the Faculty of Graduate Studies guidelines governing the supervisory relationship, as outlined in the graduate supervision policy:

[https://www.uvic.ca/students/\\_assets/docs/graduate-supervision-policy.pdf](https://www.uvic.ca/students/_assets/docs/graduate-supervision-policy.pdf)

## Candidacy Exam – Departmental Policy

Background: Students in the Biology Ph.D. program are termed “provisional Ph.D. candidates” until they have successfully passed the candidacy examination. The examination must be held within 21 months of a student entering the Ph.D. program. Students transferring from the M.Sc. to the Ph.D. 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 permission of the Graduate Advisor. All provisional Ph.D. 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 Ph.D. and to assess the student's competence to do research that will culminate in the Ph.D. dissertation. As such, it will consist of preparation of a thesis proposal followed by an oral examination on material considered necessary for successful completion of a Ph.D. in the student's subject area.

***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 verbal guidelines for what material will be covered. The material to be examined will be that considered necessary background for the student to successfully complete a Ph.D. in their subject area (see examples below), and thus includes everything discussed in the thesis proposal.

***The thesis proposal:*** The thesis proposal will outline a research plan for the Ph.D. thesis project and should not exceed 10 single spaced pages (excluding references and figures). 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, and (iv) proposing the methodology for undertaking the research that will constitute the thesis. A brief discussion of preliminary results may be included, if appropriate. The thesis proposal must be provided **to the entire committee 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. In this case the examination will be postponed, and the student will be given three weeks to submit a revised proposal. The rescheduled examination will 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.

**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 Ph.D. 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 (~15 minutes) presentation by the student that provides the background for the project, updates the committee on the research carried out to date, and introduces the proposed future research. The exam proceeds with a round of oral 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. Questions are aimed at determining the student's understanding of background knowledge required to undertake the proposed research, and on any other related subject areas as identified in the pre-examination meeting

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 and assign a grade of pass, fail, or adjourn. Reasons to adjourn the exam include but are not limited to: further work is required or the thesis proposal is acceptable but the student has failed the oral portion of the exam.

**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 Ph.D. candidacy and will continue in the program.

**Fail** - Candidates receiving two or more votes of fail will be required to withdraw from the Ph.D. 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 Ph.D. If the student does not pass the second exam, they will be required to withdraw from the Ph.D. program.

## 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.

## 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 upgrade their 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 (<https://continuingstudies.uvic.ca/elc>).

## Trouble with your supervisor?

The Faculty of Graduate Studies has clearly outlined the Graduate Supervision policy: <https://www.uvic.ca/students/assets/docs/graduate-supervision-policy.pdf>

If you encounter troubles with your supervisor that cannot be easily resolved, you should seek additional help or advice – please see the Graduate Advisor.

## TRAVEL AND CONFERENCES

### Student Travel Grant

The Faculty of Graduate Studies provides funding to partially cover the cost of travel for both research and conferences; more details can be found on FGS website here: <https://www.uvic.ca/graduatestudies/finances/travel-and-conference-funding/index.php>

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 Graduate Studies. The department will not accept the application after your travel. Graduate Studies 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.

In addition to these, there are often society or group 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 advise 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 at <http://www.uvic.ca/vpfo/accounting/assets/docs/acctpayable/TER.pdf>. 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. She 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 record before submitting them to GS 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( <http://netlink.uvic.ca>). 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](mailto:helpdesk@uvic.ca); <https://www.uvic.ca/systems/services/helpsupport/computerhelpdesk/>). UVic is part of the Digital Research Alliance of Canada high-performance computing facility (<https://alliancecan.ca/en>). 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 can only be submitted by your supervisor.

Animal Care contact:

The animal services liaison 250-853-3187 or [animalethics@uvic.ca](mailto:animalethics@uvic.ca)

Dr. Michele Martin, Veterinary Director 250-853-3694 or [acsvet@uvic.ca](mailto:acsvet@uvic.ca)

Aquatic Facility contact:

250-721-7139 or [acsqua@uvic.ca](mailto:acsqua@uvic.ca)

## 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 (<https://www.uvic.ca/research/centres/forestbiology/facilities>). If you need plant growth space for your research, please get in touch with the secretary of the Forest Biology program, Andrea Roszmann ([forestbiology@uvic.ca](mailto: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. Contact Brent Gowen, CUN 065 ([bgowen@uvic.ca](mailto:bgowen@uvic.ca) or 250-721-7132) for more information.

## 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](mailto: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 mail boxes 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 Jennie. 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 is first and foremost, preceding research requirements and student needs. Personal use for non-research purposes is forbidden.

## Service Lab - Electronics

Located in CUN 163. The technician, Mike Delsey ([mdelsey@uvic.ca](mailto:mdelsey@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).

## MSSV John Strickland

The university owns a research vessel (MSSV 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 Administrative Officer, Dean of Science Office ([sciadmin@uvic.ca](mailto: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 Jennie ([biology@uvic.ca](mailto: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 forbidden. 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 small deposit per key is required and is reimbursed when the key is returned.

Please, 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 (OSHE).

(<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. WHIMIS, Biosafety, handling radioactive chemicals, hazardous chemicals, field work risk assessment etc.).

If you are handling any hazardous chemicals then 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 which 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](mailto: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 the graduate advisor or the graduate secretary. 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 ---