

Morningside Graduate School  
of Biomedical Sciences  
Student Handbook  
2025-2026

# Disclaimer

The contents of this Handbook do not, in whole or part, constitute a contractual obligation on the part of the University of Massachusetts, its employees or agents, nor does any part of this Handbook constitute an offer to make a contract. While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information in this Handbook, the University reserves the right to make changes at any time. The information in this Handbook is provided solely for the convenience of the reader, and the University expressly disclaims any liability, which may be otherwise incurred.

The Student Handbook will be updated annually, with the new version available by September 1 each year. Edits for clarity or accuracy that do not constitute policy or practice change may be made during the academic year.

The student body will be informed by email of any substantive policy or practice changes.

Matters related to academic policies and decisions, such as curriculum, degree requirements, grading, and progression standards, are governed by faculty through academic governance processes and are not subject to collective bargaining. We welcome student input on academic matters through those established academic channels

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# Section One: Degree-granting programs

The Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences has five degree-granting programs

1. PhD in Biomedical Sciences

Within the PhD in Biomedical Sciences degree program, there are academic plans:

- [Biochemistry and Molecular Biotechnology](#)
- Biophysical, Chemical, and Computational Biology
- [Cancer Biology](#)
- [Immunology and Microbiology](#)
- [Interdisciplinary](#)
- [Millennium](#)
- [Neuroscience](#)
- [Population Health Sciences](#)
- [RNA Therapeutics and Biology](#)
- [Systems, Computational and Quantitative Biology](#)
- [Translational Science](#)

2. Quantitative Computational Bioscience and Bioengineering\*

*\*This academic plan has a separate admissions pathway and can only be accessed by students who have been admitted to this academic plan.*

3. [MS in Clinical Investigation](#)

4. MS in Biomedical Sciences

5. MS in Medical Science

6. [MD/PhD\\*](#)

\*This program is also called the Medical Scientists Training Program (MSTP).

# Section Two: Technical Standards, Core Competencies, Accommodations, and Professionalism

## Technical Standards

Technical standards refer to non-academic proficiencies that are essential for meeting the academic requirements of the Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences. Students must demonstrate proficiency in intellectual and physical tasks that together represent the fundamentals of biomedical research.

Students must possess abilities and skills that allow for observation, intellectual and conceptual reasoning, motor coordination, and communication.

Students must meet the prescribed technical standards, with or without accommodations that may be prescribed by the Academic Accommodations Committee (see below). A student's judgment must be based on their own powers of selection and observation. Service animals, as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act, are allowed in campus facilities in accordance with federal law and institutional guidelines.

### *Observation*

Students must be able to acquire and assimilate knowledge by direct observation (visual, auditory, and tactile) of experiences within the research and instructional settings.

### *Intellectual/Conceptual Abilities*

Students must be able to measure, calculate, analyze, reason, integrate and synthesize information to solve problems.

### *Motor Skills*

Students must possess sufficient postural, neuromuscular, and eye-to-hand control to independently use standard equipment and to execute standard procedures in their field.

### *Physical Stamina*

Students must possess motor skills and physical and intellectual stamina necessary to engage independently in research activities within the chosen discipline. This

includes but is not limited to: (1) Design and execution of research strategies, (2) Acquisition, analysis, and interpretation of data, (3) Diagnosis of barriers to research progress and revision of strategies, (4) The ability to work for a minimum of 40 hours per week at the research site or at a location that allows full access to research tools.

### *Communication*

Students must have the ability to observe, comprehend, and participate in classroom and laboratory instruction and discussion. Students must be able to effectively analyze and present literature and research data in large and small group settings and to individuals. During presentations and in other educational settings, students must be able to process and respond to questions in a manner that demonstrates adequate comprehension.

Students must be able to communicate, verbally and/or in writing, in a professional manner to meet timelines.

### *Behavioral and Social Attributes*

Students must possess the emotional and mental proficiency required for full utilization of their intellectual abilities, the exercise of good judgment, the socio-cultural interactions required for collaborative teamwork, the ability to follow timelines and meet deadlines-and the ability to understand and comply with ethical standards for the conduct of research.

### *Integrity*

The student must demonstrate integrity and ethical behavior, including the ability to comply with professional standards, academic honesty policies, and legal requirements

## **Core Competencies of the Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences**

The Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences has specified competencies that are central to successful doctoral training. These competencies describe the knowledge, skills and attributes students will develop through our curriculum and research training programs. Proficiency in these competencies and their related objectives is assessed in individual required courses for each academic program, Qualifying Exams, Thesis-Advisor Research Evaluations, annual TRAC meetings, and at the Dissertation Defense. Graduating students will have attained all the following competencies.

*#1. Knowledge-based problem-solving ability and critical thinking: identify important biomedical and/or population health problems and conduct original research.*

Demonstrate knowledge mastery; integrate information from prior research experiences and the literature to identify novel, unanswered biomedical and/or population health questions as the basis for one's original thesis research project.

Design a research strategy, including appropriate quantitative, analytical, qualitative, or theoretical methodologies, to explore components of the problem and begin to address the question.

Independently analyze, assess, and critically evaluate one's own scientific work and the work of others to determine research directions.

Demonstrate mastery and appropriate application of a range of research approaches and techniques used in their field.

Generate original research outcomes that meet dissertation standards.

Demonstrate the ability to conduct and lead research efforts in a productive and efficient manner.

*#2. Communication: successfully engage in written and oral scientific discourse*

Describe scientific information accurately; articulate the outcomes, progress, limitations, and challenges of one's own scientific work.

Compose and deliver accurate, organized oral and written communications of scientific ideas, analyses, and arguments.

Articulate the background, significance and impact of one's research and place it in the context of their field as well as more broadly in the context of scientific advancement.

Demonstrate the ability to respond to and address scientific inquiries and constructive criticisms from others, including from colleagues, peers and members of the scientific community.

*#3. Responsible Conduct of Research: students comprehend and apply ethical standards to research and decision-making*

Adhere to ethical principles and recognize potential sources of bias applicable to research, free from scientific misconduct.

Demonstrate an understanding of and compliance with appropriate regulations and institutional policies regarding lab biosafety protocols and protection of animal and/or human subjects.

Adhere to the highest ethical standards related to honesty, integrity, and transparency.

Identify and use appropriate attribution in both oral and written communications, including but not limited to presentations and publications.

Conduct research with scientific rigor and ensure reproducibility.

*#4. Professionalism and career advancement: students exhibit professional behavior and attitudes*

Demonstrate the ability to work in collaborative and team settings involving colleagues with expertise in other disciplines.

Recognize the value of collaborative teamwork and engage in efforts to support an intellectually vibrant environment.

Demonstrate professional and organizational skills including time management, setting and meeting deadlines, and project management.

Apply leadership principles including creating a vision, planning strategies to determine and achieve short- and long-term goals, fostering collaboration, empowering others, and guiding decision making.

Seek and leverage mentorship and professional networks to advance one's professional development and career goals.

## Accommodations for Disabilities

In accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the ADA Amendments Act, and [UMass Chan Medical School policy](#), no qualified individual with a disability shall, on the basis of that disability, be excluded from participation in UMass Chan Medical School programs or activities.

UMass Chan Medical School will provide reasonable accommodation to a qualified individual with a disability.

All admitted students who are seeking accommodations in order to successfully fulfill program requirements are entitled and encouraged to initiate, prior to matriculation or at any time after matriculation, discussions with the Director of Student/Learner Accommodation Services and to apply for accommodations via UMass Chan Medical School [procedures](#). Accommodations cannot be applied retroactively, and do not supersede academic policy.

Only the Academic Accommodations Committee can approve academic accommodations. Neither course directors, graduate program directors, thesis advisors, thesis research advisory committee members, nor the Dean nor any member of the Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences administration or staff can grant accommodations. Course directors, graduate program directors, thesis advisors, thesis research advisory committee members, and the Dean and their designees are obligated to honor all accommodations granted.

## Professionalism

All standards of civil, state, and federal law governing professional conduct are required to be upheld by all persons on the UMass Chan Medical School campus. A list of [resources, policies, procedures, and guidelines](#) is provided by the Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences. Unprofessional conduct related to any policies will be handled in accordance with those policies.

# Section Three: Academic Policies and Regulations

All academic policies, including degree requirements, statute of limitations on enrollment, qualifying exams, academic standing, and satisfactory progression, are established and maintained by the faculty through academic governance processes. These matters are not subject to collective bargaining.

## Academic Freedom

Students in the Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences enjoy academic freedom as learners and emerging scholars. This includes the freedom to engage with ideas openly, ask questions, participate in debate, and pursue coursework, rotations, and research training aligned with their academic interests and program requirements.

Dissertation research occurs within a mentored scientific environment. The scope and direction of a student's research are shaped by the laboratory's scientific focus, the advisor's expertise, and standards of rigorous, ethical research. Students contribute creatively while working within these discipline-specific expectations.

Some students are also supported through externally funded research grants. When a student is appointed to such a position, a defined portion of their time constitutes research service and must be devoted to the work of the sponsored project. These responsibilities are distinct from academic freedom as students and are governed by the scope of work of the funded research.

## Statute of Limitations / Expected Graduation Term

The Statute of Limitations (SOL) is the period within which all PhD degree requirements must be completed.

The Expected Graduation Term is the last term during which a student may register before their Statute of Limitations expires.

## Implementation of SOL for Completion of the PhD Degree

For PhD students starting in Fall 2021 or later and MD/PhD students starting in Fall 2020 or later, the SOL is set at five (5) years once candidacy is achieved.

## Candidacy for the PhD Degree

Advancement to Candidacy for students in the BBS Program is required by the end of the fourth (4th) semester, by the second PhD semester for MDP students in a BBS Program, or by the Summer in Year 2 for students in the Population Health Sciences (PHS) Program, including MD/PhD students in the PHS Program. An extension by one semester requires a petition to the Dean or their designee with academic justification and a proposed examination date.

Advancement to candidacy is achieved upon passing all components of the qualifying examination (QE).

Failure to achieve candidacy by the stated deadlines will result in review by the Academic Standards Committee, which may result in withdrawal from the Morningside GSBS.

## Statute of Limitations Extensions

The SOL may be extended by one semester or term if all the following conditions are met:

- The student provides an academic justification for extension. This justification includes only specific information about what remains to be accomplished to complete degree requirements, and a proposed expected graduation term. This justification does not include non-academic information or information about past events.
- The thesis advisor agrees to provide continued financial support through completion of the work plan through the proposed completion date.
- The thesis research advisory committee (TRAC) approves the plan.
- The Graduate Program Director approves the plan.
- The Dean approves the plan.
- A maximum of two extensions is permitted.

## Requirements for Academic and Research Activities

Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences students who receive a stipend are non-benefitted employees.

## *Graduate Research Assistantship Appointments*

A stipended Graduate Research Assistant (GRA) appointment includes **15.2 hours per week of research service** performed for the supervising faculty member (PI). Beyond this service component, students — in consultation with their advisor, advisory committee, and program director — determine how to allocate their remaining effort toward degree milestones and scholarly requirements appropriate to their stage of enrollment.

### Rationale:

The 15.2-hour structure ensures compliance with federal regulations, including the 20-hour per week limit on paid employment for international students, and aligns with institutional policies on employee classification and benefits eligibility. This structure preserves student flexibility, enabling each doctoral candidate to devote the time necessary for independent scholarship — such as coursework, qualifying exam preparation, dissertation research, publishing, and professional development — without these activities being subject to employment hour restrictions. This approach reflects the central purpose of the doctoral degree: the cultivation of scholarly independence, guided by the student's faculty committee.

## Student Benefits

The cost of a Health Insurance premium and tuition and educational fees, are not charged to students who receive a stipend.

## Paid Time Off

Students who receive a stipend are entitled to 20 academic break days per year, in addition to all [University holidays](#). It is the student's responsibility to ensure that all academic requirements and professional obligations to the research group are met.

## Additional Paid Work

Students with GR100 appointments can be compensated for up to four hours per week of additional employment through the Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences (example: teaching assistantships, etc.).

## International Students

Administrative responsibility for UMass Chan Medical School student visas rests with [Immigration Services \(IS\)](#). It is the responsibility of the Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences and the student to work with IS to complete the necessary

documentation for issuing, maintaining, and renewing a visa. Loss of visa status will automatically result in being placed on Leave of Absence.

## Tuition Credits

Students appointed as CR100 receive tuition credits that cover the cost of tuition. Students in the MSCI program may be eligible for tuition credits and are advised to consult with the Graduate Program Director to discuss eligibility.

## Stipend and Benefits

Eligibility for employment as a research assistant is contingent on a student's enrollment and academic status and progression in their graduate program. Academic decisions determine employment eligibility.

Compensation and all benefits are subject to a collective bargaining agreement between UMass Chan Medical School and the union representing the student workers.

## Curricula

Students experience a set of required classroom and research courses and academic plan-specific requirements. Students must adhere to the requirements of their [degree program and academic plan](#).

Syllabi for courses are required and must incorporate essential elements as outlined on the Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences [website](#).

Student evaluations of courses and instructors are completed at the end of each semester or term and are delivered to Graduate Programs and Pathway Directors and Course Organizers. Graduate Program are required to attest to the Graduate School that student feedback about the course and instructors has been reviewed, and they must summarize, if appropriate, changes that will be made or that are being considered.

## Course Waiver Policy

- Up to two Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences elective courses may be waived by Graduate Program Directors.
- Any graduate level course taken by the student may be considered for a waiver for an existing Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences elective course. The student must have received a grade of "B" or better in the course.

- The Graduate Program Director offering the course to be waived is responsible for reviewing the syllabus of the graduate level course that was taken as well as the student's transcript showing the grade received for the course. The documents must be English language versions.
- Electronic versions or scans of these documents will accompany the Graduate Program Director's attestation (via the [Course Waiver](#) form (GSBS73)) that the previously completed course is an acceptable substitute for a specific course offered by the graduate program.
- No UMass Chan Medical School credits are received for a course taken elsewhere prior to matriculation or for a waived course. With Program Director approval, classes offered at other UMass campuses through the Intercampus Course Exchange Program may be taken for credit.
- A waived course may not subsequently be taken for credit.

## Grading

All courses are required to have a grading policy presented by the course director at the start of the semester. Grading policy for each course is reviewed by the Curriculum Committee and approved by the Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences Assembly.

## Research Courses

All PhD students must be registered for one of four types of Research Courses during each semester and term of every academic year. Evaluation of research course performance is an academic assessment of scholarly progress toward the degree and does not constitute an employment evaluation. Effective Spring 2026, all Research Courses are graded as Satisfactory (S) or Unsatisfactory (U).

### *Research Rotations*

Following matriculation, some students register for Research Rotations with Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences Faculty each semester until a dissertation advisor is approved.

### *Pre-Qualifying Research*

Following approval to join a dissertation research group, students register for Pre-qualifying Research each semester until they have successfully completed the Qualifying Examination.

### *Thesis Research*

Following satisfactory completion of the Qualifying Examination, students register in Thesis Research each semester until they accumulate 90 credit hours of training (classroom study and research).

### *Graduate Research*

Upon completing 90 credit hours of training (classroom study and research), students register each semester for Graduate Research.

Research course performance is evaluated as Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory.

### *Academic Activities Beyond Course Curricula*

Individual academic plans may require participation in seminars, workshops, journal clubs, or tutorials.

### **Attendance**

Course directors for Graduate School classes are required to provide an attendance policy (including, but not limited to, mechanisms for handling absences, tardiness, deadline postponements, or assignment/participation makeup), at the start of the semester. Students are required to adhere to the attendance policy. Rotation and Thesis Advisors are required to make attendance expectations known to students working in the research group.

### **Holidays**

The institution recognizes federal, state, and religious holidays when scheduling required activities. Students should consult the Human Resources list of [recognized holidays](#) and determine whether additional formal accommodations from the Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences are necessary. Students are responsible for work missed, even when formal accommodations are granted.

### **Drop**

Each term contains a defined period during which a student may unenroll for a class with no record of the class on the student's transcript. Outside of this defined time, a student must Withdraw to unenroll. The Drop Deadline is indicated for each semester or term on the [Academic Calendar](#).

## Withdrawal

Students may withdraw from a course and receive a grade of withdrawn (W) if  $\leq 75\%$  of the semester is complete. The course will remain on the transcript with a grade of W. Matriculated students must carry nine credit hours of study in a semester through the end of year 3 or the end of the second year of PhD research for MDP students. The Withdrawal Deadline is indicated for each semester on the [Academic Calendar](#).

## Incomplete

A student who is unable to complete a course due to unforeseen circumstances and who has completed at least 75% of the coursework with a passing grade may petition the course director for a grade of Incomplete (I). The student must complete the coursework in the time determined by the course director. The course director will change the student's grade upon completion of the work.

Failure to complete the course work within the defined time will result in a grade of Fail (F).

Incompletes may not be given for research courses.

## Course Evaluation by Students

Courses and course instructors are evaluated by students during or upon course completion. These on-line, anonymous evaluations are initiated and coordinated by the Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences.

## Grade Appeals

Grievances related to academic policies and decisions are addressed through academic appeals processes. Employment-related grievances are governed by the terms of the collective bargaining agreement.

### *Appeals Procedure*

The student must first seek to resolve the issue by appealing directly to the faculty member who issued the grade. If unsuccessful, the student must appeal in writing, via email, to the Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences Assembly Chair within twenty business days of the original decision. The timeline begins when the grade is communicated to the student in a documented manner, or when the grade is entered into the system of record, whichever is sooner.

A grade may be appealed only on procedural grounds. The student must identify the procedural irregularities that contributed to the decision to issue the grade.

The Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences Assembly Chair (convenor) reviews the appeal to determine whether the student's grievance identifies a valid procedural deviation. The convenor does not determine whether a procedural deviation contributed to the outcome. If a valid procedural deviation is identified, an ad hoc Appeals Committee will be convened to consider the appeal. In the absence of a valid procedural claim, the appeal will be rejected and the grade upheld. The GSBS Assembly Chair must provide the Dean with a written justification for convening the committee or rejecting the appeal.

If convened, the Appeals Committee will consist of three tenured Professors who have no conflicts of interest and who are drawn from a standing roster of faculty who are eligible and willing to participate. The Assembly Chair does not take part in the appeal committee's inquiries, review, or deliberations.

If the Assembly Chair has a conflict with the particular case, the Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences Assembly Vice-Chair will act as convener.

### *Review*

The Appeals Committee will review the evidence to determine whether established procedures were followed in the case at hand. The appeal committee is not charged with a review or assessment of the student's academic standing.

The Appeals Committee may request written/electronic communications pertaining to the appeal, interviews with relevant parties, and Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences records relevant to the case.

### *Finding*

The Appeals Committee may recommend either to uphold or vacate the original grade. The Committee must provide written justification for their decision in a written report to the Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences Assembly Chair.

If the original decision is vacated, the Assembly Chair will notify the faculty member(s) who issued the grade. The faculty member who issued the grade must address the issues raised by the Appeals Committee and provide written description to the Assembly Chair of his/her reassessment of the grade, including justification for his/her decision to change or maintain the grade that was issued.

The Assembly Chair will report all proceedings to the Dean, who will consider the findings and recommendations and issue a decision.

If the grade is upheld, the Assembly Chair reports the committee's findings directly to the Dean.

The Dean will provide a written summary of the final decision to the Assembly Chair, to the Appeals Committee, and to the student.

## Good Academic Standing

Good Academic Standing requires a GPA of  $\geq 3.0$  with no grade of F.

## Satisfactory Academic Progress

Satisfactory Academic Progress is determined by the most recent research evaluation and, if applicable, the most recent TRAC evaluation.

Satisfactory Academic Progress also requires that the student successfully meet the milestones outlined in the table below by the date indicated or the end of the indicated academic year.

<b>Year of Study</b>	<b>Requirements</b>
Year 1	the student has obtained a thesis advisor commitment for thesis research and submitted the completed <a href="#">Thesis Advisor and Department Financial Agreement</a> by June 1
Qualifying Exam Year	the student has passed the Qualifying Exam
Years 1-5 post-Candidacy	the student has completed the annual TRAC assessment and earned a grade of Satisfactory based on progress toward the dissertation and development of scholarly and professional skills
Years 6+ post-Candidacy	No student in this category is making Satisfactory Academic Progress

## Review of Academic Standing

Academic Standing and Academic Progress are reported to the Academic Standards Committee each semester or term. The Academic Standards Committee

will conduct a comprehensive holistic review and make recommendations for specific action or withdrawal when one or more of the following conditions occur:

- A student is in poor academic standing *and* making unsatisfactory academic progress
- A student has initiated a transition, such as leave of absence, advisor change, or deferred advisor selection, and is *either* in poor academic standing or making unsatisfactory academic progress
- A student who falls out of good academic standing or satisfactory academic progress more than once
- Other reasons that the Academic Standards Committee can justify based on the academic standards and competencies of the Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences

Additional cases for comprehensive, holistic review by the Academic Standards Committee include:

- A student who receives a final grade of Fail for the Qualifying Exam
- A student who does not complete the Qualifying Exam by the end of the term following the standard timeline for the student's Pathway.
- A student who is recommended by the TRAC or advisor to complete the program with a MS degree

There are two possible outcomes: continue in graduate studies with an approved remediation plan, or withdrawal from the Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences. The Academic Standards Committee is charged with developing a remediation plan in collaboration with the Pathway or Graduate Program Director, a specific course director, the research advisor and/or the Thesis Research Advisory Committee (TRAC). The remediation plan will contain specific benchmarks and expected times of completion. The Academic Standards Committee will review progress toward remediation and will advise the Dean whether it finds the remediation to have been successful.

## Academic Accommodation for Student Parents

Graduate students who become new parents may request an academic accommodation period of up to eight weeks, during which expectations for academic progress, including coursework and dissertation milestones, will be adjusted in consultation with their instructors and academic advisors. For post-candidacy students, the accommodation plan must be approved by the TRAC Chair.

No academic requirements will be waived, but timelines for completion may be modified to reflect the demands of new parenthood.

The timing of parental accommodation can be consecutive or nonconsecutive.

After eight weeks, the student will return to full-time academic responsibilities or will initiate a Leave of Absence. Parental Accommodation may not be used to extend enrollment in the time periods post PhD defense or post-transition to the MS in Biomedical Sciences pathway.

This accommodation pertains to **academic expectations** and is separate from any employment-related collectively bargained benefit.

### Leave of Absence (LOA)

Note: Receipt of a graduate student stipend is contingent upon continuous enrollment in the PhD program. A leave of absence is a change in enrollment status; therefore, eligibility for funding ends automatically upon the effective date of the leave.

An academic Leave of Absence can be initiated at any time. However, because it is a change in enrollment status, return from Leave of Absence may only occur at the start of a term.

#### *Initiating LOA*

Students may request a leave of absence (LOA) for up to one year. All leaves of absence require a meeting with the Dean or Dean's designee. Students may be provided with specific conditions of return set by the Dean, the Thesis Advisor, and/or TRAC.

#### *Types of LOA*

There are 2 types of LOA: Personal and Medical.

Personal LOA is a leave for any reason of the student's choice.

Medical LOA requires a letter from a treating medical professional with appropriate expertise relevant to the diagnosis who (1) prior to Medical LOA being approved, attests that a medical condition prevents the student from being able to participate in their educational training, and (2) prior to approval of return from Medical LOA, attests that the medical condition that warranted a Medical LOA has resolved to a

sufficient degree for the student to be able to participate fully in their educational training.

Disclosure of the medical condition is not required.

#### *During LOA*

During a LOA, the student remains enrolled but does not receive stipend. The stipend end date is the effective date of the LOA. Enrollment requires that the student show proof of health insurance coverage. The Student Health Insurance plan is available for purchase by the student if the leave of absence extends past the time covered by the annual premium.

#### *Return from LOA*

A student may only return from a LOA on the first day of a semester or term.

A student in thesis research must have commitment of financial support from the existing or from a new thesis advisor to return.

Four weeks prior to return from LOA or earlier, a student must indicate in writing to the Dean or the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs their intention to return. A meeting with the Dean or the Dean's designee is also required.

If the leave of absence was initiated less than six weeks before the end of a semester, the LOA must extend through the following semester. For students taking a continuous, one-year LOA, the return would be the start date of the first semester following the one-year LOA period.

If the student does not return to school at the end of the one-year LOA period, the student will be withdrawn from the Graduate School. A one-time request for an extension beyond one year may be made via a written communication to the Dean that includes a proposed new enrollment date and academic justification for the extension.

International students wishing to take a LOA must coordinate the leave and the return with Immigration Services.

#### **Withdrawal and Dismissal from the Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences**

A student may voluntarily withdraw from the Graduate School at any time by informing the Dean in writing.

A recommendation for withdrawal or dismissal can occur for continued unsatisfactory academic performance that is documented by evaluation(s) from the Academic Standards Committee.

Following review and recommendation by Academic Standards or other appropriately empowered body, the Dean may request that a student withdraw or may dismiss a student from the Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences. The effective date for withdrawal will be 30 days after documented notification unless the student requests an earlier date.

## Advisor Change Policy

### *Faculty Advisor–Graduate Student Relationship*

The faculty advisor–graduate student relationship is a core academic partnership that plays a central role in the student’s scholarly development. This relationship is established through mutual agreement, based on alignment of research interests, professional goals, and academic expectations.

The Graduate School recognizes that, in some cases, either the student or the faculty advisor may determine that it is in the best interest of the student’s academic progress to end the advising relationship. When such a change is requested, the Graduate School provides a structured process to support a smooth transition, ensuring that students making satisfactory academic progress may remain enrolled and continue to receive stipend support during the process.

The assignment and change of graduate academic advisors are academic matters governed by faculty oversight and graduate school policy. These procedures are designed to support the student’s academic progress and ensure appropriate scholarly mentorship. They are not employment actions and are therefore not subject to collective bargaining or grievance procedures related to employment conditions.

The policy outlines expectations for good faith efforts to resolve concerns, as well as the procedures for initiating, reviewing, and implementing a change of advisor. These procedures are academic in nature and are governed by faculty and Graduate School policy.

The following policy governs any change in research supervision when progress concerns or advisor–student conflict impact a student’s ability to continue making academic progress.

This policy applies to all PhD students engaged in dissertation research.

Changing advisors, regardless of which party initiates the change, does not alter the enrollment timeline governed by the Statue of Limitations policy.

*Student-initiated change:*

A change of advisor is not guaranteed and may proceed only if another faculty member is available and academically appropriate to assume advising responsibility. The Graduate School cannot compel a faculty member to serve as an advisor.

*Acceptable reasons for advisor/dissertation research changes are:*

- Irreconcilable interpersonal or professional conflicts Advisor departure from UMass Chan, if student does not wish to relocate and cannot continue current project in advisor's absence
- Advisor departure from UMass Chan, if student does not wish to relocate and cannot continue current project in advisor's absence
- Documented advisor misconduct

*Eligibility criteria:*

- The student must have an acceptable reason for initiating an advisor change (see above).
  - The student must be in the pre-candidacy stage of PhD research or within the first two semesters post-candidacy unless the PhD mentor departs UMass Chan or there is documented advisor misconduct.
  - A documented attempt to resolve advisor-advisee conflicts must have been made. The student and advisor will be required to meet with the GSBS Dean or Associate Dean.

*Required documentation:*

- The student is required to petition the Dean or Associate Dean in writing for an advisor transition, including
  - A justification
  - A summary of efforts to resolve the issue
  - A statement indicating whether a new thesis advisor who will fund the student in future thesis work has been identified or whether the student will require GSBS funding to identify a new thesis advisor

- A letter of approval from the graduate program director
- A summary from the Dean/Associate Dean about meetings with the student and advisor is also required.

*Limits on repeat transitions:*

A student may request a change of advisor only once, unless one change is in response to the advisor's departure from UMass Chan or documented advisor misconduct.

*Advisor-initiated discontinuation of mentorship*

The Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences is committed to ensuring fair, transparent, and academically sound processes when concerns arise in the advisor–student research relationship. A student who is in good academic standing and making satisfactory academic progress must be allowed to complete the program with appropriate mentorship and oversight. Consequently, an advisor may not discontinue mentorship without just cause and documentation. However, in specific circumstances, a mentor may discontinue mentorship.

*Acceptable reasons for terminating an advising relationship include:*

- Unsatisfactory research and academic progress despite documented efforts of the advisor to support improvement
- Professional or ethical breaches by the student
- A significant and documented interpersonal conflict between the student and the advisor and/or research group

An advisor may recommend discontinuing supervision due to concerns over unsatisfactory research progress if the following conditions are met:

**1. Unsatisfactory Grade (U)**

The advisor must assign a grade of Unsatisfactory in the student's research course for the term in which concerns arise. The U grade constitutes the formal academic notification that progress is below expectations.

**2. Written Remediation Plan (60–120 Days)**

In addition to the U grade, the advisor, in consultation with the student and the TRAC, must implement or have implemented a **Remediation Plan** of no fewer than 60 and no more than 120 days.

The Plan must specify:

- specific concerns about academic and research progress
- measurable expectations
- defined deliverables or milestones
- a timeline appropriate to the expectations and deliverables

The Plan must be shared with and reviewed by the Office of Academic Affairs, the student's TRAC, and the Academic Standards Committee

#### *TRAC Review*

At the conclusion of the remediation period, the student must undergo a **TRAC review**, resulting in a written assessment stating:

- whether expectations were met
- whether progress has improved
- whether continuation with the advisor is academically appropriate
- any recommendations for next steps

The TRAC review will include a grade (S/U) that becomes part of the academic record.

#### **Possible TRAC Outcomes:**

##### **A. If the advisor and TRAC agree that the student should continue with the advisor**

- **The ASC is informed**, but **no formal review** is required unless concerns emerge.
- The student continues working with the advisor.
- A TRAC meeting will follow in the next semester to monitor continued progress and development. The outcome of that TRAC meeting will be conveyed to the ASC.

##### **B. If the advisor and TRAC agree that the advising relationship should end, the ASC will review the case.**

The ASC will evaluate the decision for fairness and consistency. The ASC will also conduct a holistic assessment of the student's academic progress. This review will determine whether:

- the student should be withdrawn,
- the student may secure a new advisor
- the student may complete remaining work under a Completion Plan (see below)

**Completion Plan if additional research is needed when mentoring is discontinued:**

If TRAC determines that an advanced student requires additional research to complete degree requirements and the advisor-student relationship will be discontinued, the TRAC will develop a **Completion Plan** in coordination with the student and advisor.

The Completion Plan must include:

- clearly defined remaining work
- a reasonable timeline
- required resources
- workspace and group-dynamic boundaries
- communication expectations
- responsibilities of the advisor, student, and TRAC

The advisor remains financially responsible for the student's stipend, health insurance, tuition and fees, and research costs.

**C. If the advisor and TRAC disagree on whether the advising relationship should end, the ASC must review and determine:**

- whether the student continues with the advisor, with an assigned co-advisor and mandated communication structure if necessary
- whether the student transitions to a new advisor

- or whether the student should be withdrawn

#### **D. Pre-Qualifying Exam Students**

Because pre-QE students do not yet have a TRAC:

GSBS will assign an **ad hoc TRAC committee** to review progress and develop a remediation plan. The TRAC must implement or have implemented a **Remediation Plan** of no fewer than 60 and no more than 120 days.

- With the approval of the ad hoc TRAC, GSBS will assume financial support of the student through the completion of the QE process. The student must adhere to the expected QE timeline as outlined in the GSBS handbook.
- After the QE:
- If the student passes, the student may seek a new advisor in accordance with existing policy.
- If the student fails, the ASC will perform a holistic review as outlined.

#### *Transition Funding Policies*

Transition funding is an important safety net, but clear time limits and accountability measures, are required to prevent prolonged use of these resources by any individual at the expense of others who may also need support. Therefore:

- *Time Limits:* Transition funding will be limited to six weeks. If a student has not obtained a dissertation advisor commitment within that time, they will be withdrawn from the Graduate School.

#### *Eligibility limits:*

- Transition funding will not be provided to students who have entered the fourth or higher year of study, except in the case of documented advisor misconduct
- Transition funding will not be provided more than once

Transition funding is provided as a temporary academic support mechanism and does not constitute a continuation of employment under any collective bargaining agreement. Funding is contingent on satisfactory academic progress, availability of funds, and approval by the Dean at the recommendation of the faculty.

*Accountability for Advisors:*

Advisors who repeatedly terminate advising relationships will be reviewed by the Faculty Review Committee for possible termination of GSBS affiliation.

All advisor assignments, changes, and transitions are determined through academic governance procedures. The Graduate School reserves the sole authority to oversee these academic matters in accordance with institutional and accreditor standards. These decisions are not subject to external employment review or grievance.

## Thesis Advisor Leaves UMass Chan Medical School

*Pre-Qualifying Exam Completion*

If the student wishes to remain enrolled in the Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences, the student must identify a new thesis advisor. If the student wishes to join their thesis advisor at the new institution, they will be unenrolled from the Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences.

*Post-Qualifying Exam*

If the student wishes to accompany the advisor to the new institution, they may do so while maintaining their enrollment at UMass Chan Medical School. The student is required to meet all Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences and academic plan requirements, including course work and completion of TRAC requirements. A student who is working at another institution is required to meet twice per year with the TRAC.

Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences students conducting thesis research at other campuses must be compensated at equal to or greater than the total Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences compensation (stipend plus full value of the Student Health Insurance Plan). Compensation will be specified in a signed agreement between the Dean and the dissertation advisor when the student leaves campus.

## Visiting Students

A student enrolled in another institution but is conducting thesis research in the laboratory of a UMass Chan Medical School faculty member may register as a Visiting non-Degree student. Visiting non-Degree students are appointed annually and are not subject to Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences academic requirements.

The conditions for Appointment and renewal are:

- The appointment must commence at the start of an academic term, and continue through at least two consecutive terms
- The student must enroll in BBS990 each term (Graduate Research)
- Total annual stipend level, from all sources, must meet or exceed the Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences stipend
- Student Service Fees must be paid by the research advisor or host department
- [The Program Fee](#) must be paid to offset Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences administration costs
- The Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences must receive annual verification of enrollment from the home institution that the student is enrolled in a PhD program and is meeting all academic requirements of the degree program at the home institution.

## Non-Degree Students

Courses may be taken by non-degree students with the permission of the course coordinator and in compliance with the [Non-Degree Registration Policy](#).

# Section Four: GSBS Standard Operating Procedure for Reporting and Managing Grievances in the Research Training Environment

The Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences (GSBS) is committed to maintaining a research training environment that is respectful, inclusive, and conducive to academic and professional growth. Our grievance reporting and resolution process is guided by the AAMC *Appropriate Treatment of Research Trainees (AToRT)* guidelines and adapted to reflect the needs of our GSBS community.

This procedure outlines the levels of response, from early informal resolution to formal corrective action, and ensures that all reports are handled with fairness, timeliness, and where possible, confidentiality.

## Scope of The Appropriate Treatment of Research Trainees SOP

This Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) applies to behaviors within the research training environment that may fall short of violations covered by other institutional policies, but that nonetheless impact the quality, safety, or professionalism of the mentoring and training relationship.

Examples include unprofessional communication, unreasonable workload expectations, lack of timely feedback, **interfering with student's academic freedom**, or other conduct that negatively affects the research training climate.

When GSBS receives a report that indicates potential violations of other institutional policies, we will immediately refer the matter to the appropriate office or committee for review and resolution. Such matters include, but are not limited to:

- **Research Integrity** – referred to the Office of Research Integrity
- **Animal Mistreatment** – referred to the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC)
- **Title IX** – referred to the Title IX Coordinator
- **Discrimination** – referred to the Office of Diversity and Inclusion and/or Title IX Coordinator

- **Hazing** – referred to the Office of Student Life

While these matters will be handled under the relevant institutional procedures, GSBS will remain informed, as appropriate, and will provide support to the complainant throughout the process.

Relevant institutional policies are found here:

<https://umassmed.sharepoint.com/sites/policies/SitePages/homepage.aspx>

### *Confidentiality in Reporting*

GSBS will make every effort to respect the confidentiality of individuals who report grievances. Reports will be shared only with those who have a legitimate need to know.

However, if we receive multiple confidential reports about the same individual or behavior, our responsibility to maintain a safe learning environment may require us to take action. In such cases, we will strive to protect the complainant's identity, but complete anonymity cannot be guaranteed when institutional judgment mandates intervention.

GSBS administrators are mandated reporters for violations of applicable institutional policies listed above and are obligated to notify the appropriate office of any relevant complaints. We will protect the complainant's identity where possible; however, in most cases the complainant may be contacted directly as part of the inquiry process.

### *Reporting Channels*

Trainees may report concerns to any of the following institutional representatives:

- Associate Dean for Student Success and Engagement
- Associate Dean for Academic Affairs
- Dean
- Program Directors
- Pathway Directors

We acknowledge that trainees may feel more comfortable reporting to other stakeholders (e.g., TRAC committee members), but all stakeholders are responsible for forwarding complaints to GSBS.

All complaints, regardless of the point of entry, will be documented with GSBS. The GSBS Associate Dean(s) in collaboration with the stakeholder who receives the complaint will determine the level of the complaint.

## Retaliation

Retaliation against any individual who reports a concern, participates in an inquiry or investigation, or supports another person in bringing forward a complaint is strictly prohibited.

While GSBS cannot guarantee that retaliation will never occur, we are committed to responding promptly and decisively when it is suspected or reported. Retaliation may include, but is not limited to:

- Adverse changes in assignments or resources
- Unwarranted negative evaluations or feedback
- Exclusion from meetings, communications, or opportunities
- Intimidation, threats, or hostility directed toward the complainant or a witness

Any instance of retaliation will be treated as a separate violation and will automatically elevate the underlying complaint to the next response level under this SOP. In addition, suspected retaliation will be reported immediately to Employee Relations and other appropriate institutional offices.

## *Levels of Response*

### *Level 0 – Non-policy Concerns*

Definition: Complaints determined to be based on misalignment of expectations and not requiring formal action

Actions:

- GSBS Associate Dean(s) make the final determination on whether a Level 0 complaint reflects a *misalignment of expectations*
- Associate Dean(s) coach trainee on realigning expectations
- No further action taken unless additional reports are received
- Complaint will be documented in a confidential file

### *Level 1 – Confidential Complaints*

If a student requests confidentiality and asks that no action be taken when raising a concern about faculty conduct, GSBS will honor that request—except in the circumstances outlined above in the **Scope** section, where we are obligated to refer the matter to the appropriate office. In all cases, the information will be documented internally.

However, if multiple confidential reports are received regarding the conduct of the same individual, GSBS has a responsibility to take appropriate action to protect the research training environment. In such situations, we will proceed as described in the SOP, while continuing to safeguard the complainant's identity to the greatest extent possible.

### *Level 2 – First-Time, Non-Egregious Offenses or Multiple Confidential Reports*

Definition:

- First-time incidents of unprofessional behavior that are non-egregious, OR
- Multiple Level 1 confidential complaints regarding the same faculty member

Actions:

- Associate Dean(s) coach trainee on engaging with the advisor and self-advocating
- Faculty member will be informed of the complaint
- Associate Dean(s) will offer facilitated discussion between mentor and mentee with regular check-ins
- Program Director will initiate general faculty meeting discussion on expectations
- Student will be referred to support resources, including mental health services

GSBS will prepare an annual report of de-identified Level 2 complaints and their resolution, and share with the Office of Student Life.

### *Level 3 – Egregious First-Time Offenses or Repeated Non-Egregious Offenses*

Definition: Serious one-time incidents or a pattern of non-egregious behavior despite prior intervention

Actions:

- GSBS Associate Dean(s) conduct interviews with all parties
- GSBS Dean notified; communication initiated with Department Chair
- Dean and Department Chair develop a Performance Improvement Plan for the faculty member
- Documentation included in Departmental Promotion and Appointment Committee (DPAC) reviews for tenure/promotion (mentorship performance section)
- Student referred to support resources, including mental health services
- Report shared with the Office of Student Life

*Level 4 – Repeated Egregious Behavior or First-Time, Inexcusable Misconduct*

Definition: Persistent serious misconduct or a one-time offense that is inexcusable (e.g., harassment, discrimination, retaliation, safety violations)

Actions:

- GSBS Associate Dean(s) or Dean conduct interviews with all parties
- Dean notifies Department Chair, Faculty Review Committee, and will refer the complaint to the appropriate offices, including but not limited to:
  - Title IX Coordinator (for discrimination/harassment)
  - IACUC (for animal welfare violations)
  - Institutional Biosafety Committee (for biosafety violations)
  - Employee Relations (for retaliation)
- If not under another office's purview, Dean and Department Chair implement a Performance Improvement Plan
- The Dean may suspend GSBS membership and refer the case to the Faculty Review Committee for termination of GSBS membership
- Trainees given options to remain in the research group with a managed mentoring plan with both the original Principal Investigator and a new co-mentor, or transfer to a new research advisor, research group, and dissertation project with financial support guaranteed
- Documentation may be included in Department Personnel Action Committee faculty review/tenure evaluations

- Student referred to support resources, including mental health services
- Report shared with the Office of Student Life

*Key Stakeholders in the Process*

- GSBS Dean
- Associate Dean for Academic Affairs
- Associate Dean for Student Success and Engagement
- Associate Dean for Postdoctoral Affairs
- Program Directors, Pathway Directors, TRAC Committee Members
- Department Chairs
- Director for Positive Learning Environment
- Office of Student Life
- Diversity and Inclusion Office
- Human Resources

# Section Five: Doctoral Student Milestones

## Thesis Advisor Selection

Students matriculating through the Basic Biomedical Sciences Umbrella Pathway select a thesis advisor after completing rotations in three distinct research groups.

Students matriculating through the Biophysical, Chemical, and Computational Biology Pathway must perform at least three rotations with different research groups and may perform up to four rotations prior to selecting a thesis advisor.

Students who worked in paid or unpaid research settings at UMass Chan Medical School in the three years prior to matriculation, including students in the PREP program, are not permitted to rotate in the research group of their previous mentor prior to the final rotation session.

Students matriculating through the MD-PhD pathway select a thesis advisor following one or two research rotations, at the discretion of the MD-PhD Program Director.

Thesis advisor selection for students matriculating through the PHS or Millennium pathways occurs at admission and does not require research rotations.

## Training Capacity and Support Commitments

Training capacity for dissertation advising is determined by the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences based on two criteria:

1. **Faculty Commitment and Qualifications:** The faculty member must hold a GSBS faculty appointment, adhere to GSBS mentoring standards, and affirmatively commit to providing dissertation mentorship.
2. **Financial Support:** The faculty member, in consultation with the department chair and financial administrator, must have access to adequate resources to support a graduate research assistant for the duration of dissertation training. These resources may include grant funding, startup packages, departmental or institutional funds, or training grants.

Decisions regarding dissertation advising, lab placement, and training capacity are **academic determinations**, governed through faculty governance and institutional commitments, and are not considered employment assignments. Individual grant

awards or timelines do not create trainee “positions” or guarantee eligibility for dissertation placement.

The Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences provides financial support through the entirety of their first academic year for all students matriculating in the BBS Umbrella, the BCCB, and the PHS Pathways, and for the first two years for students matriculating in the MD-PhD pathway.

[Thesis Advisor and Department Financial Agreement forms](#) are due by June 1 of the first academic year for BBS, PHS and BCCB students. Forms for MDP students are due by Sept. 1 of the year they start PhD research.

## Direct Affiliation

A student admitted into the BBS Umbrella Pathway who has been employed as a research associate (or similar) with a Morningside GSBS faculty member for at least 18 months at the time an offer of admission is received may opt to select their supervisor as their thesis advisor. In this case, the thesis advisor assumes funding responsibility for the student at the time of matriculation, and the requirement for research rotations is waived. The [Thesis Advisor and Department Financial Agreement](#) form is due by October 15 of the first year of graduate studies.

## Pre-Qualifying Evaluation Milestone Process (PHS and MD/PhD in PHS Track only)

- Students register for CTS604 in the Summer of Year 1. Students apply what they have learned across multiple courses completed in the Year 1 curriculum to develop a manuscript.
- The thesis advisor works with their student to identify a study question (and feasible dataset appropriate to evaluate the research question) suitable for the student to develop a first author manuscript. The thesis advisor’s involvement in the development of the manuscript ends at this point. The first-year student cohort meets weekly and is guided the CTS604 Course Director, who facilitates discussion and student peer review.
- The project allows the student to demonstrate competence in organizing, pacing, and producing the manuscript within a set time frame. Students demonstrate their ability to provide justification and rationale for their work, demonstrate their ability to develop and implement an appropriate analysis plan, interpret findings, discuss the findings in light of existing literature, and acknowledge the strengths and limitations of their work.

- The manuscript undergoes an independent review process whereby three faculty members with full membership in the Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Science each write an independent review of the student's manuscript. Typically, the review team consists of a substantive expert (typically the thesis advisor), an epidemiologist, and a biostatistician. In a session that is open to all and is scheduled for late July or early August, each student gives a 15-minute oral presentation, followed by a 15-minute period of questions from the three faculty reviewers and the audience. The CTS604 Course Director assigns a course grade of Pass or Fail.
- Immediately after the presentation, the student receives reviews from the faculty review team. The student subsequently prepares a response to the reviewers' comments, prepares a revised manuscript, and submits their work to the three faculty reviewers before or on the Tuesday after Labor Day. The review committee completes their evaluation of the revised manuscript and response to reviewers' comments and communicates their decision to the PHS Program Director by September 15.

The possible outcomes of this pre-qualifying process evaluation milestone are:

- **Pass** – No further action is needed to complete this Evaluation Milestone
- **Improvement Plan Required** – Any of the three reviewers and/or the CTS604 Course Director may provide specific action items to be included in the improvement plan. The expected timeframe for completion of each action item is provided. Note: Students may proceed to the next step in the Qualifying Exam Process while completing the improvement plan.
- **Fail** – A student fails if two members of the review committee votes for failure or if the student does not complete the assigned improvement plan by the assigned due date. Failure of the Pre-Qualifying Evaluation Milestone will result in review by the Academic Standards Committee and may result in withdrawal of the student from the Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences.

It is possible that the student meets the requirements to pass CTS604, but does not pass the pre-qualifying exam milestone. Students initiate the [Pre-Qualifying Exam Milestone Process Outcome form](#) (PHS13).

## Qualifying Exam (QE)

### *Preparation for the QE exam*

BBS and BCCB students are expected to register for BBS602, Preparation for the QE, in the semester prior to the QE. Students in the Immunology and Microbiology

program may opt out of BBS602 if registered for BBS821, Molecular and Cellular Immunology.

PHS students and MDP students affiliated with PHS participate in six **mandatory** sessions on developing Specific Aims, synthesizing background literature, and identifying research gaps led by the PHS Program Director and a PHS faculty member holding an appointment in the Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences.

### *Overview of the QE Process*

The QE is conducted in multiple parts:

- Written Qualifying Exam (PHS and MDP-PHS students only). Upon completion, students will initiate the [Written Qualifying Exam Outcome form](#) (PHS11).
- Specific aims meeting
- Creation and submission of a written proposal
- Public presentation of the proposal (PHS and MDP-PHS students only)
- Oral examination

### *QE Timeline*

In the Table below, the QE Timeline is shown for students affiliated with the BBS and BCCB Programs and for those affiliated with the PHS Program. Any changes in the overall timeline must be communicated to and approved by the Dean or their Designee.

Table. Timeline for Key Steps in the Qualifying Exam Process

<b>Key Step</b>	<b>BBS and BCCB students in year 2 and MDP students affiliated with these Pathways in year 1 of PhD research</b>	<b>PHS and MDP students affiliated with PHS</b>
Schedule Date of Written QE with Graduate Program Director or their Designee	Not applicable	No later than September Year 2; Specific dates for the Written QE will be determined by the PHS Program Director between late November and mid-December.
QE Committee formed and approved by Graduate Program Director and the Dean or their Designee	No later than January 31	No later than September Year 2
Specific Aims Meeting(s) Date Set	January/February	The PHS Program Director sets the dates for the Specific Aim meeting no later than September Year 2. Specific Aims Meetings are held in early to mid-December. The date for a 2 <sup>nd</sup> Specific Aims meeting, if needed, will be scheduled for mid-January.
Specific Aims Page Due to QE Committee	One week before any Specific Aims Meeting and no later than March 15	One week before Specific Aims Meeting (for students requiring a 2 <sup>nd</sup> specific aims meeting, one day before the meeting)
Schedule Oral QE	No later than March 15	No later than September, Year 2. Oral QEs will occur in mid to late March, Year 2.

Written Proposal Due to QE Committee	4 weeks after successfully completing the Specific Aims Meeting	Students Register for CTS875 in Spring Year 2.  One week before Oral QE
Complete Oral QE	No later than May 1 and no more than 7 weeks after completing Specific Aims Meeting	No later than the last two weeks of March, Year 2
Revision or retest (if required by the QE Committee)	The QE Committee determines the timeline within 4 weeks of initial Oral QE attempt. If more than four weeks is deemed necessary for revision or a retest, the QE Committee must provide a written justification to the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs.	The QE Committee determines the timeline within 4 weeks of initial Oral QE attempt. If more than four weeks is deemed necessary for revision or a retest, the QE Committee must provide a written justification to the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs.

### *Delayed QE*

A student may petition to delay the QE. The student must discuss their situation with the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and must provide the following written documentation for review:

- A justification based on emergent circumstances necessitating the use of academic break days
- A proposed schedule for QE completion
- A statement from their thesis advisor(s) signifying continued financial and educational support throughout the QE completion timeline

The Associate Dean for Academic Affairs will make a recommendation to the Dean, who will approve or decline the request for delay.

Failure to complete the QE by the end of the term following the standard timeline will result in referral to the Academic Standards Committee for holistic review and recommendation for continued enrollment or for withdrawal.

### *Selection of QE Committee Members*

The committee consists of four members. Three members are chosen by the graduate program, or, if permitted by the graduate program, are chosen by the student and advisor, and subsequently approved by the graduate program. The fourth member is the General Examiner, appointed by the Dean or their designee.

Only members of the Qualifying Exam Committee (QEC) may be present for all parts of the Examination, which includes the Specific Aims meeting and for the subsequent oral examination. Note that anyone may attend the public presentation of a PHS QE proposal prior to the oral examination.

All members of the Qualifying Exam Committee (QEC) must be primary members of the Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences faculty. Affiliate Faculty are not permitted to serve on a QEC. No QEC member can be the current or former spouse or a relative of the student or the dissertation advisor.

The QE committee Chair and the GE must be an Associate Professor or Professor. Neither the Chair nor the GE may be co-advisor, co-author, or have or have had any collaborations of any kind with the student. Any collaborations between other members of the QE committee and the student must be declared at the time of committee selection.

The final QE committee selection will be submitted to the GSBS using the [QEC Selection form](#) (GSBS03), including the Chair, will be approved by the student's program director and the Dean. No portion of the QE may proceed without approval of the QE committee by the Dean.

### *Specific Aims Meeting Guidelines*

No Specific Aims meeting will proceed in the absence of any member of the QE Committee. If a member of the QE Committee cannot be present, the Specific Aims meeting must be rescheduled.

During the Specific Aims meeting, the student will articulate the hypothesis or question to be investigated and the rationale for undertaking these studies. General approaches will also be discussed so that the committee can evaluate the feasibility of the proposed Aims. During this meeting, the committee may suggest revisions to the Aims, including the removal or substitutions for Aims more suitable for testing the student's competency during the subsequent exam.

This meeting also provides an opportunity for faculty to communicate areas of investigation or concerns that the student should expect to address during the

formal exam. The primary purpose of the Aims meeting is to help the student prepare for the subsequent exam.

- A student who has previously submitted an NIH F31 or grant application of similar length with substantial input from their thesis advisor is expected to develop at least one Aim not contained within the jointly developed application. Previously submitted grants must be disclosed and submitted to the QE committee prior to the Specific Aims meeting.
- The meeting must not exceed one hour in duration unless discussion of revisions requires additional time.

*Format for Specific Aims and Specific Aims Meeting*

- The student will prepare a 1-page Specific Aims page (single spaced; 11 pt NIH-approved font (e.g., Arial); 0.5" margins). References are optional, but if included must be on a separate page.
- BBS and BCCB students and MDP students affiliated with these Pathways must prepare a brief PowerPoint presentation (no more than five minutes and 10 slides) to provide an overview that includes the question(s) being asked, the significance of the work to be proposed, and a brief outline of each Aim. Experimental details or preliminary data, if applicable, will not be presented. The five-minute overview will be presented at the start of the meeting and will be uninterrupted. Students should expect to be engaged in discussion and to address questions throughout the rest of the meeting.
- PHS students and MD/PhD students affiliated with PHS prepare a 15-minute presentation (with slides) to introduce background sufficient for the committee to understand the research gap that the dissertation seeks to address. The student articulates the hypotheses or questions to be investigated and the rationale for undertaking these studies. The student provides a brief overview of the approach for each aim. The QE Committee will evaluate the rigor of the approach, as well as the feasibility given the typical timeframe for PHS PhD completion.
- The transcript will be reviewed by the committee at this time.
- The thesis advisor can have input on the Specific Aims before this meeting.
- Only QE Committee members and the student are present at the meeting.
- The outcome of the meeting, including details of any substantial revisions to the Specific Aims, must be communicated to the student in writing by the QE Chair.

### *Specific Aims Meeting Outcomes*

- The Specific Aims are approved, and the student may begin preparing the full proposal. PHS students register for CTS875 in the Spring Semester year 2.
- The Specific Aims must be revised according to committee recommendations. Revisions must be submitted by email to committee members within one week. The Chair, in consultation with the rest of the QE Committee, will communicate approval of the revised Aims or requests for additional revision within the subsequent week.
- The QE Committee may call an additional Specific Aims meeting at their discretion if extensive revision of the original Specific Aims is warranted. A second Specific Aims meeting is at the discretion of the QE Committee. If an additional Specific Aims meeting is required for a BBS/BCCB student, the QE Committee will inform the student at or prior to scheduling whether the initial five-minute overview presentation is expected or whether a shorter overview or no overview is expected.
  - Only one additional Specific Aims meeting is permitted. After the second meeting, the student proceeds to the Proposal stage.

Regardless of the outcome, BBS and BCCB affiliated students will initiate the [Specific Aims outcome form](#) (GSBS72).

### *QE Proposal and Examination Format*

- The written proposal must be in F31 (F30 for MD/PhD students) format: 1-page specific aims (single spaced), 6-page (single spaced, NIH-approved font, 0.5-inch margins) proposal, including figures but not references. PHS students, in consultation with their thesis advisor and the PHS Program Director, may elect an alternative format. The alternate proposal format will include the Specific Aims page, the introduction, methods, and shell tables/figures for each of the Specific Aims, and a discussion of the strengths and limitations of the proposed research.
- For BBS students, the written proposal is due 30 days after the approval of the Specific Aims. The QE committee has discretion to permit minor extensions. Failure to submit a proposal or submission of an incomplete proposal automatically cancels the scheduled exam and the matter is referred by the QE committee Chair and/or GE to the Dean or the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs for resolution. The examination should be scheduled 5-7 weeks after approval of the Specific Aims.
- For PHS students, the written proposal is submitted to the QE Committee one week before the Oral QE date, which is determined in Sept. of year 2 (see above chart).

- The exam room must be scheduled for a 2-hour time period. BBS and BCCB exams will be limited to 90 minutes with a maximum of 15 minutes for QE committee discussion prior to the exam and at least 15 minutes following the exam for the QE committee to discuss and determine the exam outcome as well as complete the evaluation form. The QE committee will then meet with the student to discuss the outcome. QE committee Chairs are required to ensure that all QE committee members have the opportunity to ask questions and to monitor time to ensure the exam is completed in 90 minutes.
- The Thesis Advisor may not be present at the QE exam.
- No QE will proceed in the absence of any member of the QE committee. If a member of the QE Committee cannot be present, the QE must be rescheduled.
- BBS and BCCB students must prepare a brief overview of their entire proposal that does not exceed five minutes and ten slides. The student will be allowed to present this overview uninterrupted for five minutes at the beginning of the exam. Additional slides can be prepared to provide visual aids that facilitate further discussion during the exam. Only the QE Committee and the student are present for the Exam.
- For PHS students, the Oral Qualifying Exam consists of four components: 1) a student presentation open to the public (~30-40 minutes); 2) public Q&A period (~15 minutes); 3) closed exam (~30 minutes); and 4) QE Committee discussion and voting (~30 minutes). The public Q&A period begins with one or two rounds of questions from the QE Committee. It is expected that the student will prepare backup slides in anticipation of questions from the QE Committee and audience members. Once the public portion of the exam is complete, the audience is dismissed, and the student and the committee continue the question/answer exam period in a closed session. Once complete, the student is dismissed, the committee deliberates, and the members vote on the outcome of the exam.

### *Outcomes of the Qualifying Exam*

- **Pass:** The proposal and exam performance meet or exceed expectations, and the student displayed proficiency in all exam competencies. This outcome requires that at least three QE Committee members vote to pass the student.
- **Not Passed – Revise:** The student is required to revise the QE Proposal and may not enter into doctoral thesis research until the revisions have been approved by the committee. The QEC sets the timeline for completion of revisions. If the timeline exceeds four weeks, the QE Chair will advise the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs in writing. Revisions are not complete until all members of the committee approve.

- **Not Passed – Retest:** The student must retest as they did not display proficiency in exam competencies and may not enter doctoral thesis research until passing the retest. At the direction of the QE Committee, this may require that some or all of the proposal be re-written. The QE Committee sets the timeline for completion of revisions and the retest. If the timeline for revisions and/or retest exceeds four weeks, the Committee Chair will provide written justification for the request to the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs. Prior to or at the time of the retest scheduling, the QE Committee will inform the student whether the five-minute overview presentation of the proposal is expected or whether a shorter overview or no overview is expected.
- **Fail:** The student does not meet the specified objectives of the QE upon a retake. A student fails if more than one member of the committee votes for failure. Failure of the QE will result in review by the Academic Standards Committee and will result in withdrawal of the student from the Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences.

In all cases, students will initiate the Qualifying Exam outcome form ([GSBS04](#) for BBS/BCCB students; [PHS12](#) for PHS students).

#### *Responsibilities of the Student*

Students are required to obtain the Dean's approval of their QE Committee prior to initiating any part of the QE process.

BBS and BCCB students are required to complete every QE assignment and report and any other academic communication through Canvas.

BBS and BCCB Students are required to initiate the [Specific Aims outcome form](#) and the [QE outcome form](#). If a revision/re-test is required at either stage, the student completes an outcome form after the initial outcome and a second outcome form at the completion of the process. PHS students are required to initiate the [written qualifying exam outcome](#) (PHS11) form prior to the written examination and the [student oral qualifying exam outcome](#) (PHS12) form prior to the oral exam.

#### *Responsibilities of the General Examiner (GE)*

The GE is responsible and empowered to ensure that the examination is fair and rigorous, that the exam follows the procedures outlined here, and that student assessment is based on the approved learning objectives and is consistent with QEs of other students.

For BBS and BCCB students, upon completion of the exam, in the presence of and in consultation with the other members of the QE Committee, the Chair completes the

evaluation section of the [QE outcome form](#). If a revision or re-test is required, the GE, in consultation with the other members of the QE committee, completes a new QE outcome form upon completion of the remediation. The GE also initiates, completes, and submits the [GE checklist](#).

#### *Responsibilities of the QE Committee Chair*

For BBS and BCCB students, the Chair of the QEC will require documentation of QE Committee approval prior to proceeding with scheduling any portion of the QE. The PHS Graduate Program Director schedules the oral QE and communicates the dates to students and QE Committees.

The Chair is responsible for informing the student of exam procedures and assuring compliance with the expected timeline of the QE process. Prior to the start of the Specific Aims meeting, the Chair will lead a review, if necessary, of the student's transcript and will determine whether program requirements have been met. The Chair will ensure fair treatment of the student during the exam, will lead the committee's deliberation to determine exam outcome, and will communicate the outcome and the committee's evaluation (from the QE outcome form) to the student. The Chair also will communicate the outcome with the student's thesis advisor upon request by the thesis advisor.

#### *Appeal of QE Outcomes*

An appeal of a QE outcome will follow the same procedure as described for grade appeals. The student must initiate an appeal in writing, via email, to the Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences Assembly Chair within twenty business days of the conferral of the outcome, which is the day of the QE.

### **Thesis Research Advisory Committee (TRAC) Meetings**

The TRAC meeting is a formal, required course for PhD students in the Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences curriculum. Students are administratively enrolled each semester following completion of the qualifying exam. Failure to complete TRAC requirements will result in a grade of Unsatisfactory.

#### *Selection of Committee Members*

The TRAC is composed of the thesis advisor and three additional members. Students will select TRAC members according to the rules of the Graduate Pathway and/or Program. A Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences Faculty appointment is required for service on a TRAC. The Chair of the TRAC must hold the rank of Associate Professor or Professor. The Chair cannot be a collaborator on the

student's thesis research. If the Chair subsequently becomes involved in a collaboration with the student, the Chair may remain on the TRAC but must resign as Chair and another Chair must be selected.

Students will submit the [TRAC selection form \(GSBS78\)](#). Forms are due no later than August 1 prior to the start of the academic year in which the first TRAC meeting will be held. Pathway and/or Program Director approval is required.

### *TRAC Meetings*

Students are required to submit a written progress summary to the TRAC and to Canvas at least three days prior to the day of the scheduled TRAC meeting. The TRAC may require the student to reschedule the meeting if the summary is not provided three days in advance.

Attendance at the TRAC meeting is limited to the student and TRAC members. No others will be present. No TRAC meeting will be held without at least three TRAC members. The thesis advisor may be present for the TRAC meeting. However, the presence of the thesis advisor is not a requirement.

If scheduling conflicts prevent the timely convening of a TRAC meeting, the meeting may proceed with one member absent. If a member of the TRAC is absent, the student must meet individually with the member after the meeting to review progress.

The presence of the TRAC Chair is required. If the Chair is unable to attend, another TRAC member must serve as Chair for the meeting, fulfilling all obligations and responsibilities of the Chair, or the meeting will be rescheduled.

If the PhD advisor is present at the TRAC meeting, the TRAC will meet separately with the thesis advisor in the absence of the student and will also meet separately with the student in the absence of the thesis advisor.

### *TRAC Outcomes*

After the discussion has concluded, the TRAC will determine the outcome of the meeting. The TRAC Chair will communicate the outcome to the student. The student will submit a written summary that incorporates discussion from the TRAC meeting to the TRAC Chair and to the GSBS via Canvas.

PHS students will initiate the [PHS TRAC outcome form](#) (PHS10). BBS/BCCB students will initiate the [GSBS07 TRAC outcome form](#).

*Approval of Proposed Dissertation Timeline by the TRAC (BBS, BCCB, and MDP students in BBS or BCCB research groups)*

A student who has concluded that their dissertation research is nearly complete must propose a timeline for completion and meet with the dissertation advisor and the TRAC for review and approval of the proposed timeline.

At the TRAC meeting, the student must present:

- A draft of the dissertation abstract
- An outline of the dissertation, including a detailed outline of the Introduction and Discussion
- A summary of published work that will be included in the dissertation
- Any data that are unpublished or previously unseen by the TRAC, that will be included in the dissertation. These data should be presented in publication-ready form.
- A proposed date range for the dissertation defense
- A proposed list of external examiners

The TRAC will Approve or Defer to a later timeline.

Approval of the student's proposed dissertation timeline indicates that:

- The student is not required to complete additional research or data analysis
- There are no outstanding obligations defined as required by the thesis advisor or the TRAC, that would prevent the student from focusing entirely on dissertation completion
- The student has presented a draft of the dissertation abstract and a detailed outline, and the TRAC has provided feedback
- The student has identified potential external examiners, and the TRAC has deemed these appropriate

If the TRAC Approves, the student must return the completed [TRAC approval of proposed dissertation timeline form](#) (GSBS70) to the Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences office as soon as approval has been granted. **Providing the form to the office will NOT initiate any actionable deadlines.**

If the TRAC Defers to a later date, the TRAC must communicate the expectations for completion to the student, including research or analyses that remain to be

completed, and the expected status (submitted or accepted) of publications authored by the student before the defense timeline can be set. The TRAC may recommend an expected timeline. The TRAC must also communicate to the student whether a TRAC meeting will be required for approval of the revised timeline, whether approval can be achieved via email, or whether a meeting with the TRAC chair is sufficient.

The student should submit a regular [TRAC Meeting report](#) (GSBS07) with a brief post meeting report that outlines the TRAC's expectations for completion. When the student has completed the assigned work and approval from the TRAC is obtained, the student must submit a [TRAC approval of proposed dissertation timeline form](#) (GSBS70).

### *Enrollment Status and Stipend leading up to the Dissertation Defense Examination*

During the TRAC-approved timeline for dissertation preparation, the student remains enrolled and supported by stipend. If a student takes a Leave of Absence (LOA) after TRAC approval of the dissertation exam timeline, but prior to the defense, the defense examination must be completed prior to the expiration of the LOA. If the dissertation exam is not successfully completed within this timeframe, the student will be withdrawn, and no degree will be issued.

### *Responsibilities of the Student*

BCCB and BBS students are required to complete every TRAC assignment and report and any other academic communication through Canvas. Students are required to distribute their pre-TRAC meeting summary to each member of the TRAC at least three days prior to the TRAC meeting. Students are required to distribute their post-TRAC meeting summary to the TRAC within one week of the TRAC meeting.

### *Appeal of TRAC Outcomes*

An appeal of a TRAC outcome will follow the same procedure as described for grade appeals. The student must initiate an appeal in writing, via email, to the Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences Assembly Chair within twenty business days of the conferral of the outcome, which is the day of the TRAC meeting at which the outcome was determined.

## Dissertation Defense Examination

The Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Biomedical Sciences is conferred by the authority of the faculty of the Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Science. This authority is exercised through the Dissertation Examination Committee, which is responsible for evaluating whether a student has met the academic standards and research contributions required for the degree.

### *Formation of Dissertation Exam Committee*

The Dissertation Examination Committee (DEC) consists of five members. Four members must be Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences Faculty Members. One of these must be designated as the DEC Chair. The DEC Chair must be appointed with the rank of Professor or Associate Professor. Affiliate faculty members are not eligible to serve on the DEC unless they have been in continuous TRAC service for the defending student. The dissertation advisor is not a member of the DEC.

An External Examiner must be selected and approved by the Dean. The purpose of the External examiner is to represent the academic community at large in upholding the standards of the PhD degree. Therefore, the External Examiner must:

- Hold a doctoral degree
- Be currently engaged in research in the field
- Be primarily appointed as a faculty member at a PhD-granting institution or appointed at a government or other non-profit institution with a secondary appointment at a PhD-granting institution.

### Co-authorships and Conflict of Interest exclusions

- The DEC may consist of no more than two members who are prior, current or intended future co-authors with the student.
- Neither the DEC Chair nor the External Examiner can be a current or intended future co-author with the student regardless of whether the co-authored work is related to the dissertation.
- No DEC member can be the current or former spouse or a relative of the student or the dissertation advisor.
- Post-qualifying students who move to a different institution with their advisors may not choose anyone who is affiliated with the new institution as either the external or an internal DEC member.

### *Preparation for the Defense Examination*

- The student will schedule the defense examination (DE).
- The student will submit the [DE Committee Selection Form](#) (GSBS14) at least 30 days prior to the DE.
- The student will submit the [Request for Posting of Dissertation Defense](#) (GSBS11) along with an ~250-word research summary at least 21 days prior to the defense.
- The student will distribute the final copy of the dissertation to the DEC at least 21 days prior to the DE.
- Within 7 days of receipt, the DEC Chair will review the thesis for general acceptability. Graduate School staff will provide the DEC Chair with the Checklist for [Dissertation Examination Committee \(DEC\) Chair Review of Submitted Theses](#) (GSBS83) to evaluate the suitability of the Dissertation document for oral examination.

If acceptable, the defense notice will be posted and electronically distributed by the Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences within 2 weeks of the defense. The defense notice will not be posted until confirmation that the defense can move forward has been received from the DEC chair.

If the Dissertation document is unacceptable, the DEC Chair will inform the student and the dissertation advisor and will provide a written summary to all members of the DEC and the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs detailing the deficiencies. The Dissertation Examination will be cancelled.

In consultation with the DEC, the Associate Dean will set a new and final deadline for the student to submit an acceptable thesis document.

### *The Defense Exam*

The defense exam consists of a public seminar followed by a closed defense examination. The public seminar is a 45–50-minute summary of the dissertation, followed by questions from the audience. For PHS students, the public seminar will also include a round of questions from the DEC. The closed defense examination will take place immediately after the public seminar. The dissertation advisor cannot be present during the closed defense. All DEC members must be present for the exam. The absence of one or more members requires rescheduling of the exam. No others may attend the closed portion of the exam.

## *DE Outcomes*

- **Pass:** A student earns an outcome of Pass when the DEC unanimously decides that the defense examination is satisfactory, and the written dissertation is acceptable as presented.
- **In Progress - Minor Revisions:** A student earns an outcome of Minor Revisions when a majority of the DEC decides that the defense examination is satisfactory, and the written dissertation requires only minor revisions that do not materially affect the content of the dissertation.
- **In Progress - Major Revisions:** A student earns an outcome of Major Revisions when a majority of the DEC decides that the defense examination is satisfactory and the written dissertation requires substantial revisions to the text. Major revisions include any that materially affect the content of the dissertation, including the addition of significant content to the Introduction or the Discussion.
- **In Progress – Retest:** A student earns an outcome of Retest when a majority of the DEC decides that the oral examination is unsatisfactory. The dissertation may be acceptable or may require minor or major revisions. Only one retest is permitted.
- **Fail:** A student earns an outcome of Fail when the DEC unanimously decides that the defense examination and/or written dissertation is unacceptable and cannot be improved to the point where the DEC could find both acceptable.

Upon approval of the DEC, a student who has failed the dissertation examination will change programs to the MS exit pathway and may submit the written dissertation in partial fulfillment for the degree of MS.

## *Post-Defense Completion of Dissertation*

The DEC Chair, in consultation with other DEC members, is responsible for approving a revised dissertation prior to deposition into eScholarship, though the DEC may require approval from all members.

The student has 120 days post-defense to retest, if necessary, to submit the revised and approved dissertation, and to complete all degree requirements. If all degree requirements are not completed within 120 days of the defense, the student will be withdrawn from the Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences and will receive no degree. Extensions will be considered only with documentation of extreme extenuating circumstances.

### *Enrollment Status and Stipend During Preparation for and after the DE*

During the TRAC-approved timeline for dissertation preparation, the student remains enrolled and supported by stipend. After the defense exam, the student can receive up to three weeks of stipend. Up to six weeks of stipend may be approved with academic justification and agreement of the thesis advisor, however, the stipend cannot be extended beyond six weeks post-defense. A student remains enrolled until all requirements, including post-defense requirements, are completed.

### *Completion of Degree Requirements*

All [requirements for degree completion](#) must be completed by the student before a degree will be conferred.

### *Degree Conferral*

UMass Chan Medical School confers degrees four times each year (the Sunday after Memorial Day (Commencement), August 31, December 31, and March 31). A student's degree will be conferred on the first date following completion of all requirements.

### *Dissertation Completion and Commencement*

The preparation for the annual Commencement ceremony introduces deadlines that are not controlled by the Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences. If a student wishes to participate in Commencement, each of the following requirements must be satisfied without exception:

- The student must submit their Dissertation Examination Committee selection form to the Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences office no later than March 1
- The student must submit their [Request to Post Dissertation Defense Notice](#) (GSBS11) no later than March 10
- The student must submit their Dissertation to their DEC no later than March 10
- The student must successfully defend their Dissertation no later than April 1
- The student must complete their Dissertation edits, have them approved by the DEC Chair, and deliver the appropriate signed defense outcome form indicating this approval to the Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences office no later than May 1

# Section Six: Masters Student Procedures and Milestones

## Master of Science in Clinical Investigation (MSCI) Thesis

Students in the MSCI program must complete and present a thesis as a requirement of the degree program.

### *Thesis Advisor and Readers Selection*

The MSCI Thesis Advisor provides ongoing supervision and consultation for conceptualization, design, conduct, analysis and interpretation of the research project. The selection of a Thesis Advisor is usually informed by the topic a student wishes to pursue. The Thesis Advisor must have a faculty appointment in the Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences. In addition to the Thesis Advisor, the student must select two readers from among the Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences faculty. The Thesis Advisor and two readers must be identified and the student schedules an initial meeting as soon as the student has selected a topic. This must occur no later than the beginning of the first, second, or third semester for those completing the degree in one year, 18 months, or two years, respectively. Students will complete the MSCI [Thesis Advisor and Selection of Readers](#) (MSCI18) form.

### *Thesis Research Meetings and Thesis Proposal Presentation*

During the initial meeting, the student will present the study aim, the background literature, rationale, and data resources to be used for the thesis. The Thesis Advisor and two readers will provide input regarding the feasibility of the research, including suggesting modifications to the study aim and clarifying the roles and expectations of the Thesis Advisor and two readers. During this meeting, the date and time for the Thesis Proposal Presentation is set for later in the semester. The Thesis Proposal Presentation includes a 15-20 minute open oral presentation of the study aim, background, detailed methods, and analytic approach. Refinements to the approach may be made based on feedback from the Thesis Advisor and the two readers. The Thesis Advisor, with input from the readers, determines the point at which the student has successfully completed the stated research project. Students will complete the [MSCI Thesis Proposal Presentation Form](#) (MSCI04).

### *Thesis Presentation/Seminar Notification*

As part of the thesis process, all students orally present the completed project. This is scheduled by submitting the [Request for Posting of MSCI Thesis Presentation](#) (MSCI17) form at least 20 days prior to defense/seminar to provide sufficient time for posting. The thesis defense is posted 15 days prior to the exam date. The written version of the thesis must be formatted and sent to the committee at least a week before the presentation. The student and committee may collectively decide to incorporate comments offered during the oral presentation.

### *Submission of Thesis to the Graduate School*

Following the oral presentation, the student has up to 21 days to complete edits to their thesis dissertation, complete the (MSCI08) form, upload the thesis to e-Scholarship, and complete all post-defense requirements. A one-time request for extension that provides academic justification and a proposed timeline for completion may be made to the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs.

### **Master of Science (MS) in Biomedical Sciences degree**

Students enrolled in doctoral study who opt to withdraw prior to completion of requirements for the PhD may be eligible to complete the requirements for a MS in Biomedical Sciences. Completion with a MS degree may be initiated by the student, or a recommendation for completion with an MS degree may be an outcome of a TRAC meeting. Eligibility for MS completion requires:

- Completion of at least 55 credits
- Successful completion of the qualifying exam
- Meeting with the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs
- Research accomplishments that can be presented in a thesis formatted as directed by the [Guidelines for MS thesis Preparation](#) (GSBS24).

If a student wishes to complete the program with a MS degree, a TRAC meeting will be convened to review and approve the student's proposed pathway for completion of the MS. If the student has not yet formed a TRAC, the student's QE Committee will substitute. If the committee does not approve the proposal for MS completion, the student will withdraw with no degree.

Upon approval, the student will form a MS thesis committee to review the MS thesis. The committee will consist of three members:

- A member of the current TRAC (or QE Committee).
- Two other Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences Faculty members.
- One committee member shall be designated Chair and will assume responsibility for all communications with the student pre- and post-submission of the MS thesis.

Thesis Advisors/Co-Advisors are excluded from the committee.

The student is granted sixty days of stipend support from the time of approval of the program change date for MS completion, during which time it is expected that a thesis is completed and approved by the committee for final submission to the Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences. The stipend ends in sixty days regardless of whether the student has completed the requirements for the MS degree. If the stipend is terminated before the MS thesis is approved, the student will be placed on LOA and will have until the start date of the first semester following the one-year LOA period to complete all MS requirements, including those requirements that are post-thesis approval. Failure to complete the MS dissertation will result in withdrawal with no degree.

# Section Seven: Awards and Recognitions

## Applications for External Funding

Students are encouraged to apply for external funding when they meet the eligibility criteria. All applications for external funding must be prepared in collaboration with the student's home Department, which is the Department in which the student's thesis mentor holds their primary faculty appointment, and must be routed through the Office of Sponsored Programs prior to submission to the granting agency. If the student does not yet have a thesis advisor, the Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences is the home Department.

## Incentives for Individual, Competitive External Funding

Please note: the policy and practice described here is a mandatory subject of bargaining with the union representing student workers. This portion of this document will be updated upon completion of a bargaining agreement.

All students who are awarded a qualifying external award (administered through the University, includes stipend and educational costs) will be awarded an Incentive Award.

The Incentive Award is a payment of \$5500 per year in the form of an Ad Comp (additional compensation). Funds will be provided by the pre-award funding source.

The Incentive Award will terminate when the fellowship terminates.

Students supported by non-individual fellowships are not eligible for this incentive award.

## Section Eight: Academic Student Resources

[Center for Academic Achievement](#)

[Coaching Program for Academic Success & Student Well-Being](#)

# Section Nine: Student Health and Wellness

## Health Insurance

The Bursar's Office is responsible for assisting students with health/dental insurance enrollment. Please contact the Bursar Office at (508) 856-6612 with any questions related to enrollment in the BC/BS plan offered.

### [Student Health Services](#)

### [Student Counseling Services](#)

## Mental Health Emergencies

If a mental health emergency arises during business hours, please call the Department of Psychiatry Clinical Services office first at 508-856-3220. In the event of an emergency at any time, call Emergency Mental Health (EMH) at 508-856-3562, your local ER or 911.

### [Fitness Center](#)

UMass Chan Medical School hosts a fitness center at the Albert Sherman Center on the University Campus in Worcester. GSBS student memberships are paid by the GSBS or by the student's thesis advisor.