

## **First-Year Assessment of Graduate Students**

At the first committee meeting for each graduate student, which is to be held before the fall semester of Year 2, the student's committee will be responsible for determining if the student should continue in the Biology Department's graduate program. The following skills will be evaluated by examining the student's performance in courses, teaching assignments, research, and by the student's performance during the committee meeting.

1. Motivation
2. Logic and critical thinking (analysis of data, logical conclusions)
3. Ability to develop a testable hypothesis and design scientific studies.
4. General knowledge (general biology, areas specific to the student's research area, ability to retain information)
5. Ability to communicate

After the meeting, the student will leave the room and each committee member will fill out an assessment form to indicate if they find the student's performance in each of the 5 areas acceptable or unacceptable. These forms must be turned into the Graduate Advising Office after the meeting.

Of the 20 judgments (4 committee members  $\times$  5 areas) for a Ph.D. student or 15 judgments (3 committee members  $\times$  5 areas) for an MS student, 6 unacceptable ratings (counting no more than three unacceptable ratings from any one committee member) constitute a failure. In the case of a failure, the committee will provide a summary letter that describes the concerns of the committee and measures needed to correct these deficiencies to the student and the Graduate Advisor within one month of the committee meeting.

If the student fails in their first attempt, he or she may request a second assessment meeting to be held within 6 months of the first or choose to leave the program. The second assessment meeting will require the same assessment forms as the first, but the committee may choose to focus on only certain areas.

A Ph.D. student with 6/20 unacceptable ratings (counting no more than three unacceptable ratings from any one committee member) on the 2<sup>nd</sup> try may, at the discretion of the committee, be allowed to change to a Masters degree or will be required to leave the program. A Masters student with 6/15 unacceptable ratings (counting no more than three unacceptable ratings from any one committee member) on the 2<sup>nd</sup> try will be required to leave the program. The student may appeal the decision through the Graduate Advisor to the Department Head.

Postscript:

- 1) Sunset Clause: If the current plan is approved by the faculty, we will review the merits of the first year graduate assessment after 3 years and modify the plan as recommended.
- 2) GPC/GRAC will develop a set of questions that will provide examples for committees to use to assess each of these areas.
- 3) Each committee member will make a provisional assessment of the student individually, prior to a general discussion of the student's performance.
- 4) Evaluation of the first year graduate student assessment:
  - A. The effectiveness of the first year assessment meeting will be formally assessed each year as follows:
    - a. Determine the number of students who pass or fail on the first and/or second try each year. If the quality of the graduate students in the program is improving, we expect the overall numbers of students passing on the first try to increase each subsequent year.
    - b. Determine the average time it takes graduate students to take their preliminary exam as compared to the average time of students prior to implementation of the first year assessment.
    - c. Determine the number of students who passed or failed their preliminary exam as compared to the numbers prior to implementation of the first year assessment. We expect if the assessment plan is successful that the numbers of students that pass their preliminary exam on the first try will increase.
    - d. Determine the average and variation in time to degree of students before and after implementation of the first year assessment. We expect if the plan is successful that more doctoral students will finish their degrees within 5 to 6 years. (Currently, the mean is 6.2 years with a range between 4 and 10 years.)
    - e. Assess if the quality of our incoming graduate students and graduate student applicants is improving based on GPA, GRE scores, and research experience following implementation of the first year assessment.
    - f. We will develop a questionnaire that asks for faculty and student perspective of the first year assessment.

**Department of Biology**

**Report of the First Year Graduate Student Assessment**

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Degree: \_\_\_\_\_

Instructions: Each committee member independently rates the student's performance in each of the 5 areas as acceptable or unacceptable. Of the 20 judgments (4 committee members × 5 areas) for a Ph.D. student or 15 judgments (3 committee members × 5 areas), 6 unacceptable ratings (counting no more than three unacceptable ratings from any one committee member) for a Ph.D. student or M.S. student constitute a failure. In the case of failure, the committee will provide a summary letter that describes the concerns of the committee and measures needed to correct these deficiencies to the student and the Graduate Advisor within one month of the committee meeting.

- |   |                 |                   |
|---|-----------------|-------------------|
| 1. Motivation:  | Acceptable_____ | Unacceptable_____ |
| 2. Logical/critical thinking:   | Acceptable_____ | Unacceptable_____ |
| 3. Ability to develop a testable hypothesis<br>and design scientific studies: | Acceptable_____ | Unacceptable_____ |
| 4. General knowledge:   | Acceptable_____ | Unacceptable_____ |
| 5. Ability to communicate:  | Acceptable_____ | Unacceptable_____ |

Name of Committee Member: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Committee member: \_\_\_\_\_

**Department of Biology**  
**First Year Graduate Student Assessment**  
**Committee Chair Report**

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Degree: \_\_\_\_\_

Total number of Acceptables: \_\_\_\_\_

Total number of Unacceptables: \_\_\_\_\_

Summary and recommendation of the committee:

Signature of Committee Chair: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Student: \_\_\_\_\_