

Guide for Biology Graduate Students

Graduate Program Policies and Procedures Guide for MSc and PhD Students in Biology

Concordia University (Revised February 2026)

This document contains policy statements, guidelines, and operational procedures for graduate programs in Biology. All students and faculty members are asked to review this guide and the current Graduate Calendar for information about university regulations that [govern graduate programs](#) before contacting the Graduate Project Assistant (GPA) or Graduate Program Director (GPD) if additional clarification is needed.

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Guide for Biology Graduate Students

1. Welcome Potential Graduate Students!

Thank you for your interest in joining the department of Biology's graduate programs! Our department features teaching labs with state-of-the-art equipment that introduce you to the various techniques used in biology research.

We offer **research-based [MSc](#) and [PhD](#) programs**.

Research conducted within our department covers a broad range of topics ([research areas](#)), mainly supported by tri-council funding agencies. With strengths in areas ranging from ecology and conservation, cell and molecular biology, bioinformatics, to synthetic biology and genomics, our department is home to exciting and innovative research! We encourage you to explore our [faculty listings](#) to find a potential supervisor whose research interests align with your own.

How do I apply?

Information on the application process is available [here](#). Once completed, your application will be evaluated by the Graduate Admissions Committee. Final acceptance into our MSc and PhD programs can only be granted once a supervisor has agreed to take you on as a student. It is highly recommended that you contact potential supervisors before finalizing your application. Click [here](#) to find our faculty members and a potential supervisor whose research interests align with your own. In addition, Conditional Acceptance *may* be granted in cases where official copies of application material have not been received (i.e. unofficial copies of transcripts)

You can also refer to the [Graduate Calendar](#) to verify your degree requirements.

Finding a Supervisor

When contacting potential supervisors, it is always a good idea to provide information about your academic background, research experience and research interests, and how these relate to the professor's research lab interests and focus. Do your homework and become familiar with the research focus of the professor who you are contacting. **Remember: providing more information on your background and interests makes your application stand out!**

Awards and fellowships

We offer a growing number of entrance awards, fellowships for MSc and PhD applicants, and international tuition remissions for PhD applicants. **Once you submit your application, your name will be registered for potential awards.** There is no need to apply for these awards separately. You can, of course, search and apply for awards on your own as well.

Please note: all graduate students are guaranteed a minimum stipend of at least \$15,000 for two (MSc) or four (PhD) years.

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2. FAQs

Is funding available?

Yes, a growing number of internal and external fellowships and international tuition remissions (for PhD) are available for incoming students. These are awarded on a competitive basis and there is no additional application required beyond the graduate application. Speak to your potential supervisor about possible funding opportunities. Explore [Financial aid opportunities here](#).

Do I need to identify a potential supervisor before I apply?

While not required, it is ideal to have contacted and received confirmation from a supervisor willing to take them on in his/her research group prior to applying to graduate programs. Please note: This is only required for the MSc and PhD programs. Your likelihood of successful acceptance will be stronger if you have contacted potential supervisors during the application process.

How do I contact potential supervisors?

Email is the most effective way to contact potential supervisors. Ideally, you should include a CV, academic transcripts, and a brief statement regarding your interest in the specific research topic. In the brief statement, you could include your research interests and academic experiences to date, as well as propose a possible direction of research that align to and contribute to that of the potential supervisor. Professors receive large numbers of email messages, so it important to ensure that your application/interest stands out. It is also OK to follow up with professors if you do not receive a reply from them on the first message but normally give them two weeks before following up.

Do I need to propose a specific research topic when I apply?

No. However, it can be useful to propose one in relation to the prospective supervisor's lab's research. Normally though, the specific research topic and focus is usually decided upon in collaboration with the supervisor.

Can I work with more than one supervisor?

Yes, many of our students are co-supervised both within and across departments. Co-supervision is often very beneficial and allows for students to tailor their research to very specific interests.

How many courses do I need to take?

Information regarding program requirements is available [here](#).

Can I do the program as a part-time student?

No, we only accept full-time students into the graduate programs.

What if my grades are not quite high enough?

You can take a qualifying program. This may consist of some undergraduate level courses to complete before you begin graduate level courses.

What if my undergraduate degree is not in Biology?

We accept students with backgrounds from closely related fields. If your background has some weaknesses, you may be offered admission with the provision of completing a qualifying program. This may consist of some undergraduate level courses to complete before you begin graduate level courses.

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Can I work while on a student Visa?

Please see the guide below from the ISO, however it should be noted that students admitted to the graduate programs in Biology are not ordinarily permitted to work outside the University.

<https://www.concordia.ca/students/international/working.html>

Do I need a GRE?

No, GRE results are not required for applications to our graduate programs.

How do I get a Permanent Code?

The Ministère de l'Éducation, Loisir et Sport du Québec (MELS) requires that all students who are registered at a Québec University have a "**permanent code**", a unique identifying number which is assigned by the ministry. Students who do not provide a valid code with their application must apply for one upon acceptance. Students who do not submit or apply for a permanent code will be charged an additional tuition premium.

Information on how to apply for a permanent code and a link to the on-line "Permanent Code Data" form can be found at <https://www.concordia.ca/offices/registrar/permanent-code.html> The on-line Permanent Code Data form must be completed and submitted to the Birks Student Service Centre. Please note: all students who have attended elementary, high school, or CEGEP in Québec have already been assigned a permanent code. The permanent code appears on all Québec High School Leaving and CEGEP transcripts.

Do I need to provide a TOEFL score?

If your primary language of instruction was not in English, you will need to provide TOEFL scores (or the equivalent). Please note: this applies to International Students only. Important information on language proficiency may be found [here](#). If there is any uncertainty about language level requirements, please send an email to the GPD.

What should I know about living in Montreal?

- Lowest tuition fees in Canada
- Montreal is second only to New York for the number of restaurants per capita in North America
- A UNESCO city of design since 2006
- Has an exciting summer festival scene
- Home to several professional sports teams
- More facts about Montreal - visit <http://www.concordia.ca/campus-life/life-in-montreal.html>

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3. Guidelines for PhD Students

Required Classes: BIOL 801, BIOL 802, BIOL 850

For admission and degree requirements, click [here](#).

In order to graduate, doctoral/PhD students in the regular or fast-track program must firstly take one 3 credit course of their choice; note that direct entry PhD students must firstly take **two** 3 credit courses of their choice. In addition, *all* PhD students must also complete three required classes (BIOL 801, BIOL 802 and BIOL 850) as well as successfully defend their thesis (BIOL 890).

1. **Courses.** *To graduate, students must meet the following requirements:*
 1. *3 to 6 credits (see program differences above) from BIOL 616, BIOL 670, BIOL 671, BIOL 680 or any of the Advanced Topics or Reading Courses listed at the end of the Biology calendar entry. Other courses in the list may be chosen upon recommendation of the supervisory committee and the Graduate Program Director.*
 2. **BIOL 801: Pedagogical training** (3 credits). *Candidates are required to give four lectures (normally 75 minutes each) to undergraduate classes. Two lectures are in introductory level courses (200 level classes) and two in advanced (300 and higher level classes) undergraduate courses. Tutorials are provided to introduce students to teaching methods. The course is marked on a pass/fail basis.*
 3. **BIOL 802: Research seminar** (3 credits). *Students are required to give one seminar to the Department based upon their research project. Normally, the seminar is given in the second or third years of residency. Seminars are graded on a standard scale (A+ to F). The grade is based upon the presentation, content, and the student's ability to answer questions. The grade is assigned by the Graduate Program Director in consultation with the candidate's supervisory committee and other faculty members present at the seminar.*
 4. **BIOL 850: Research proposal and qualifying exam** (6 credits). *The student prepares a written research proposal based upon the research topic chosen for thesis research. The proposal is prepared in consultation with the supervisory committee and contains a literature review, a progress report and a detailed description of future experiments. The proposal should demonstrate a good understanding of the background of the project, the questions to be answered, and the experimental approaches needed to answer these questions. Both the written proposal and an oral summary of the proposal are presented to the examining committee within one year of entry into the PhD program. Details of the BIOL 850 are below.*
 5. **BIOL 890: Research and thesis** (75 credits).
2. **Research Proposal and Qualifying Exam.** *The examining committee consists of the student's supervisory committee (supervisor+ 2 committee members), plus two additional members (most commonly from the Department of Biology) and is chaired by one of the supervisory committee members (also known as a student's 'thesis committee'). The student is evaluated based on the quality of the oral and written presentations of the proposal as well as their ability to respond to questions from the examining committee. These questions extend into general areas as well as focusing directly on the thesis topic. The examining committee assigns one of the following three grades:*
 1. **PASS:** *The student is admitted to candidacy for a PhD in Biology.*
 2. **CONDITIONAL PASS:** *The student is admitted to candidacy but is required to complete at least one additional course or independent assignment determined by the examining committee. This grade is assigned only if the background preparation of the student is judged to be insufficient.*
 3. **FAIL:** *The student must withdraw from the program.*

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If the examining committee judges that the proposal has weaknesses that can be corrected with minor revisions, it may suspend assigning a mark for a period not exceeding three months. The revised proposal then is assigned one of the three above grades.

3. **Thesis.** A major portion of the PhD program involves the planning and execution of innovative and original research under the direction of a supervisor. It is expected that this research should result in publication in reputable journals, on which the candidate is the first author and the major contributor of ideas and experimental data. The thesis will be examined by a Thesis Examining Committee and will be defended orally.

What do I need for BIOL 801, BIOL 802 and BIOL 850?

❖ BIOL 801: Pedagogical Training (3 credits)

- Candidates are required to give four lectures (normally 75 minutes each) to undergraduate classes. Two lectures are in introductory level courses and two in advanced undergraduate courses. **You cannot do the same course twice.** Any course outside of BIOL should be approved by the GPD beforehand.
 - Introductory levels courses: classes whose course code begins with '2' (ex. BIOL 201).
 - Advanced level courses: classes whose course code begin with '3' or higher (ex. BIOL 368, BIOL 466, BIOL 510).
- Tutorials are provided to introduce students to teaching methods.
- The course is marked on a pass/fail basis.
- To apply to teach the class, you must contact the professor in advance and find a compatible date to teach the class. Be sure to send an email to the Graduate Program Assistant (GPA) at biograd.fas@concordia.ca indicating the date, class number, and professor name for the classes you will be teaching.
- The GPA will provide you with the necessary digital form link through which students can provide lecture feedback, and a separate link for the lecturer version of the form for the instructor of the course to complete.
- Instructors fill out the lecturer form by following the link, where they will provide their name, the student's name, and the mark (Pass/Fail). They may then digitally submit the form and it will be added to the Graduate Program Assistant's records.
- **Note:** Students can request to review the submitted feedback by contacting the GPA.

❖ BIOL 802: Research Seminar (3 credits)

- Students are required to give one seminar to the Department based upon their research project. **Normally, the seminar is given in the second or third year of residency and after they've completed their 850.**
- Seminars are graded on a standard scale (A+ to F). The grade is based upon the presentation, content, and the student's ability to answer questions. The grade is assigned by the GPD in consultation with the candidate's supervisory committee and other faculty members present at the seminar.
- A minimum of at least three weeks before the seminar, students must contact the Graduate Program Assistant to schedule the date and title of the research seminar with their supervisor and committee members cc'ed. It is **mandatory** that all supervisory committee members attend and grade the student's research seminar, so the student must organize and confirm the date and time of the seminar with their committee **before** contacting the Graduate Program Assistant. The department, faculty and students are also invited to attend the seminar and offer feedback. Candidates can review the feedback and integrate suggested changes to their research focus prior to

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returning the forms for the Graduate Program Assistant's records. Please note that a minimum of three faculty members is required to meet the quorum for grading the seminar or the seminar will have to be postponed; the BIOL802 seminar must also be completed before the PhD defense can proceed.

❖ **BIOL 850: Research Proposal and Qualifying Exam (6 credits)**

- The **written proposal and an oral summary presentation of the proposal** are presented to the examining committee **(1) within the first four terms of entry into the PhD program (regular program); (2) within the first three terms of entry into the PhD program (fast track program); or (3) within the first five terms of entry into the PhD program (direct entry program).** *Under exceptional circumstances, an extension to completing the BIOL850 can be approved. Requests for an extension must come from the supervisor within the last semester of the usual deadline for the student's specific PhD program and should be submitted by email to the Graduate Program Director and Graduate Program Assistant with explanatory details.*
- The **examining committee** is composed of the student's supervisory (a.k.a. thesis) committee (supervisor+2 committee members), plus two additional members of the Department of Biology, or "externals." It is chaired by one of the committee members.
- The student is evaluated on the basis of the quality of the oral and written presentations of the proposal and on responses to questions from the examining committee. These questions may extend into general areas as well as focusing directly on the thesis topic.
- The examining committee assigns one of the following three grades:
 - **PASS:** The student is admitted to candidacy for a PhD in Biology.
 - **CONDITIONAL PASS:** The student is admitted to candidacy but is required to complete at least one additional course or assignment determined by the examining committee. This grade is assigned only if the background preparation of the student is judged to be insufficient.
 - **FAIL:** The student must withdraw from the program, or in some cases the student may be given a chance to undertake revisions.
- Students must submit a written research proposal to the Graduate Program Assistant. The supervisor communicates with the Graduate Program Director regarding possible dates and prospective externals. Once the names and potential dates have been decided upon, the Graduate Program Assistant schedules the exam and circulates the proposal and any relevant documents/manuscripts. The delay between the proposal submission and the examination is normally six weeks.

Details of the BIOL 850 process requirements and proposal structure:

- ❖ The BIOL850 exam is a qualifying exam that must be completed before the end of the fourth semester for regular program students, before the end of the third semester for fast-track students (after completing three semesters as an MSc student), or before the end of the fifth semester for direct-entry PhD students. Students are encouraged to have at least one committee meeting prior to beginning the BIOL850 process. For students who fast-tracked the BIOL850 exam should be done by the end of the second semester. The purpose of the exam is to evaluate the applicant on several criteria including: 1. Their ability to ask original questions in their field of study 2. Their ability to formulate a series of cohesive projects to address those questions 3. Their ability to put into writing in a clear and concise manner a long-term work plan 4. Their ability to answer questions and defend their work plan. As such, students will be

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required to write a short proposal for their PhD work. Some students may have preliminary data that can be incorporated into the proposal (see below).

- ❖ **FORMULATION OF THE COMMITTEE** The evaluating committee is composed of the student's supervisor, two committee members, two additional members, and the chair of the examining committee (normally the graduate program director or a designated substitute). The chair is a non-voting member of the examination committee. The chair could be a committee member in which case the chair would be a voting member. The exam will take place in two phases as detailed below.
- ❖ **PHASE 1: The written document.** After consulting with the supervisor, students will write their proposal and submit to the graduate program assistant who will then disseminate the document to the examining committee. Within two weeks of receiving the document, the committee will assign a grade of SATISFACTORY or UNSATISFACTORY. The grade is assigned by a majority vote. If the grade is SATISFACTORY, the student will then arrange an oral exam based on the approved written document. The oral exam should be held within two weeks of the assignment of the grade on the written document. The oral exam can be scheduled at the time of submission. If a grade of UNSATISFACTORY is assigned, the committee must provide detailed feedback to the student on how to improve the document. In this case, the student will normally have two to three months to resubmit the document. If a second UNSATISFACTORY grade is assigned, or if the document is not submitted within this time frame, the student will be prohibited from continuing in the PhD program.
- ❖ **How to structure the written document:** The purpose of the written document is to demonstrate to the committee that the student can think beyond the "next experiments" and fill knowledge-gaps in their field. The document should contain the following as essential elements: 1. The main question to be addressed. 2. Literature pertinent to the field relevant to the proposal. 3. Objectives, rationale, methodologies. Note that details of methodologies are not required but enough detail should be provided to convince the committee of feasibility and backup plans. The rationale could include data the student has already generated and will build off of. Therefore, there is no need to show any data in the document. The committee will evaluate the document based on the following criteria: innovation, originality, feasibility, long-term and short-term objectives, anticipated impact and broader relevance.
- ❖ **How each of these essential components is formatted within the document is at the discretion of the student.** The document should be formatted single-spaced, Times New Roman font 12 point with 2 cm margins all around. It is anticipated that the proposal will be concise and range between a minimum of 5 to a maximum of 8 pages in length, not including references. An additional page with a proposed timeline and outcomes (e.g. anticipated publications, conference presentations, pedagogical training) should also be included. Students are encouraged to look at an NSERC Discovery grant proposal for samples, or past students' proposals within their own labs. Depending on the research subdiscipline in biology, some students may wish to allocate 2-3 pages of the proposal length for a literature review of core concepts relating to their thesis before introducing the general thesis objectives/questions. Others may wish to provide additional details on their study systems (e.g. study gene, organism, species, geographic location etc.) to help position their thesis work and better illustrate how it will fill existing knowledge gaps in their field.

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Students can include Figures or Tables within their proposal. However, because these can take up considerable space, students should consult with their supervisor on the proper use/amount/nature of Figures or Tables to ensure those included are fundamental to the proposal.

Supplementary materials and appendices are not permitted along with the proposal. However, for the question period after the BIOL850 oral presentation, students may wish to prepare supplementary presentation slides to showcase preliminary data and/or results to their examination committee.

With guidance and support from their supervisor, the student is encouraged to establish their two committee members soon after starting their program. Ideally, they would have a first committee meeting within the first 6 months of their program. Here, they will share a draft template of their thesis proposal and do a short presentation. This meeting time will ensure that students receive the feedback they need early on such that all core aspects of the thesis proposal and BIOL850 preparation are conducted effectively, in relation to the timelines for completion of the BIOL850 oral exam within four semesters. This first, early committee meeting also provides an opportunity for the committee to provide individually tailored support to PhD students and their specific project contexts.

- ❖ PHASE 2: The oral exam. The oral exam will begin with a 20 minute presentation from the student that covers aspects of the written document. This includes background, the main questions, the objectives, predicted outcomes, impact, and methodologies. Presentation of some progress to support feasibility and rationale is strongly encouraged. Following the presentation, the committee will ask questions in rounds of questioning to probe the knowledge of the student relevant to their proposal, their field of study and their ability to defend their proposal. The committee will then vote to PASS, CONDITIONAL PASS or FAIL the student by simple majority. If a FAIL grade is assigned to the oral presentation, the student will not be permitted to continue in the PhD program. If a CONDITIONAL PASS is assigned, the committee will decide what is required for the student to PASS. If the student is required to redo the oral exam it must be done within 2 months. Students may also be required to do more coursework, workshops or assignments. Once successfully completed in a time frame determined by the committee, but usually as soon as possible, the grade will be changed to PASS. Only one CONDITIONAL PASS can be assigned.

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4. Your One-Stop Shop to Resources:

- ❖ **Concordia Graduate Students' Association (GSA)**: Improving the quality of graduate student life.
 - The Graduate Students' Association (GSA) represents the collective interests and promotes the general welfare of the graduate students at Concordia University
 - The GSA is located at 2030 Mackay Street, Montreal Quebec, H3G 2J1
 - Phone number: (514) 848-2424 ext. 7900
 - Email: info@gsaconcordia.ca
- ❖ **How to contact your Graduate Program Directors (GPDs) for academic advising**: Dr. Robert Weladji 514-848-2424, ext. 3408 and Dr. Dylan Fraser 514-848-2424, ext. 8729. Email : gpd.biology@concordia.ca
- ❖ **How to contact your Graduate Program Assistant**: Kelly Pingel at biograd.fas@concordia.ca, 514-848-2424, ext. 3401
- ❖ **Biology department**
- ❖ **Student Hub**: your online web tool for key academic and campus resources and service departments. Note: the registration system is accessed via the Enroll option in the Student Centre under My CU Account.
- ❖ Familiarize yourself with **Important Academic Dates** and the **Graduate Calendar**
- ❖ **Research Assistance** and **RefWorks**
- ❖ **Guidelines for Supervisors and Students**
- ❖ **International Student Office**
- ❖ **Thesis Preparation Guide**
- ❖ **School of Graduate Studies**
- ❖ **Student Success Centre**
- ❖ **Next Steps: CAPS (Career Advising and Professional Success)**
- ❖ **Access Centre for Students with Disabilities (ACSD)**
- ❖ **LIVE Centre**
- ❖ **Tech Support** – contact IITS at help@concordia.ca or 514-848-2424 ext. 7613
- ❖ **Registering for courses at another institution - BCI**
- ❖ **GradProSkills** – workshops, online resources and tools to enrich the graduate experience and transition into a future career – GradProSkills@concordia.ca
- ❖ **Tuition, fees, and financial assistance (Financial Aid and Awards Office (FAAO))**
- ❖ **What is Intellectual Property?**

Work with your supervisor to stay on track.

- ➔ Develop a written plan or timetable of target dates to help you meet the degree requirements on schedule.
- ➔ Annual Progress Report.
- ➔ It is your responsibility to be aware of and comply with the regulations and deadlines as outlined in the **Graduate Calendar**, **Graduate Registration Guide**, and **Graduate Academic Dates**
- ➔ Consider presenting scholarly papers or research at academic conferences to connect with other researchers/scholars. This will motivate you to complete your work!
 - Did you know you can apply for funding for Conference Presentations? Contact the **Graduate Awards Office**

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5. Progress Reports for MSc and PhD Students

There are two types of progress reports graduate students are required to complete during their degree program.

- ➔ SGS Progress Report – this is done annually every Winter semester via the Student Centre.
PLEASE NOTE: If a student does not complete their Winter SGS Progress Report before the deadline, a 'hold' may be placed on their student account, and they risk withdrawal from the program.
- ➔ Program Progress Report – you should have an annual committee meeting on the progress of your research and fill out a report for the GPD through Cognito ([M.Sc Annual Progress Report](#) or [PhD Annual Progress Report](#)). The onus is on the student to arrange the annual committee meeting with their thesis committee and book a room through the GPA.

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6. Navigating Payroll

- ❖ **Bursaries:** Most students make part of their income through their supervisor's bursary or grant. Coordinate with your supervisor to submit a bursary contract to Payroll that includes a void cheque. This ensures your banking info will be on file for future bursaries and contracts, and you will not have to provide this information again. Students and their supervisors are advised to submit bursary forms well in advance of the bursary period to avoid any unnecessary delays; if there are delays, students or their supervisors should contact Human Resources Payroll directly.
- ❖ **Direct deposit:** Concordia offers direct deposit if you are currently receiving payments via cheque. With direct deposit, we deposit automatically into your bank account, with immediate access to funds. To set up direct deposit you must sign into your [employee account](#) and access your UNITY HR Profile. You can then update your banking information and payment preference by filling in the Payment Information section.
- ❖ For information on [Graduate Fees Billing Structure and University Fees](#)
 - Includes information on Time Limit Extension (TLE), Continuing in Program (CIP), international student rates, and other fees.
 - Time Limit Extensions (TLE) are for students who have completed the academic time limit for their degree yet haven't completed the degree requirements to graduate. Students may apply for a TLE through their Student Centre and the request will be assessed by the GPD.
 - Continuing in Program (CIP) requests are usually for two types of students:
 - students who have switched programs or fast-tracked into a PhD program without completing a Master's, and this request is for the student's transcript to reflect this change.
 - students who have been accepted into a program but who are not registered for courses in their first term. A CIP is required for the system to consider the student 'active' and eligible for TA-ships.
 - [Explore the Students Accounts Office for finance related topics.](#)

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7. Thesis Submission

- ✓ **Where can I find thesis formatting requirements?**
 - For more information, see the [Thesis Preparation and Thesis Examination Regulations](#)
- ✓ **What is the deadline for submitting my thesis?**
 - All thesis deadlines can be found under [important dates](#). Be sure to verify dates with the Graduate Program Assistant!
- ✓ **How do I submit my first submission?**
 - All students must submit two electronic copies of the thesis to thesis@concordia.ca and CC the supervisor and Graduate Program Assistant (biograd.fas@concordia.ca).
 - One copy must be prepared in an editable format (i.e. Word, LaTeX etc.) and one copy must be in PDF/a format.
 - Make sure to understand the difference between Master's thesis submission requirements and Doctoral thesis submission requirements here, **but please also refer to MSc thesis submission details towards the end of this document.**
- ✓ **How do I submit my final submission?**
 - All students (MSc and PhD) must submit the final version of their thesis electronically in PDF/a format using the Library Repository, [Spectrum](#). These are available online and to the public.
 - **It is critical that you submit a Screenshot of your submission when you upload your thesis onto Spectrum and send it to your Graduate Program Assistant at biograd.fas@concordia.ca**
 - See the [Graduate Registration Guide](#) or consult the Graduate Program Assistant for exact dates of registration, dates for initial and final electronic submissions of theses through Spectrum, and for academic advice.
- ✓ **When can I defend my thesis?**
 - A Master's student can defend their thesis generally 4 weeks after the first submission.
 - For Doctoral students, the examination date must be set a minimum of 6 weeks from receipt of the thesis and the Doctoral Thesis Examination Committee Form submitted by the student's program.
- ✓ **For more information, you can contact the Thesis Office at:**
 - Sir George Williams Campus
 - GM Building, GM-930.21
 - 514-848-2424, ext. 3813

Deadlines to Graduate

- You must Apply to graduate in order to obtain your Degree or Diploma.
- **Deadline to apply for Fall Convocation: July 15**
- **Deadline to apply for Spring Convocation: January 15**
- A graduation fee of \$40 will be charged to your student account.

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8. Accelerated Admission to PhD Programs (fast tracking)

Accelerated admission (fast tracking) describes a process whereby exceptional students are admitted to PhD programs without a Master's degree in the same discipline. Students who follow this process must show high academic performance or potential evidenced by an outstanding GPA, appropriate research publications in a field of study, a research topic at the Master's level which is advanced enough for a doctoral thesis proposal, or other similar demonstrations of achievement. Students who are:

- *accepted for accelerated admission, and*
- *currently registered in a Master's degree program*

OR

- *accepted for accelerated admission, and*
- *are admitted directly from a Bachelor's degree*

are expected to complete the course component of a Master's (Thesis option) program in the same discipline in addition to the standard academic requirements for the doctoral program.

Since this is a new admission, the PhD program Academic Time Limit and nominal fees billed begin anew. All nominal fees billed in the Master's program are non-transferable and will not be applied to the PhD.

Students who have not completed a Master's degree and are admitted directly to a Concordia PhD program may be required to take a course(s) in addition to their PhD program requirements. All pre-requisite and deficiency course credits are registered under a Qualifying Program and are charged tuition & other fees on a "per credit" basis.

More details of the fast-track program are found within section 12 on checklist for MSc thesis submissions

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9. Leaves of Absence from Program

If circumstances in your life prevent you from being able to meet the requirements of your degree for the semester (i.e. injury, pregnancy, parental leave) and you do not wish to withdraw from the program, you may submit a Leave of Absence request.

There are three types of requests:

- Leave of absence with access - permits the student access to university services (example: library). There is a fee associated with this type of leave. This is granted in exceptional circumstances.
- Leave of absence without access - the student has no access to the university services. Students with healthcare should consult their provider to ensure they remain covered.
- Parental leave - the student has access to university services. There is no fee for this type of leave. It's applicable for maternity or paternity leave and a proof of birth or doctor's note is required.

More information and steps on how to request a Leave of Absence through your Student Hub can be found [here](#).

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10. Life as a Graduate Student

Teaching Assistantships

Many students' financial support packages include Teaching Assistantships or TAs. "Eligible students" are those who are within normal residence, have been offered support for less than a total of two years in the MSc program or four years in the PhD program, are enrolled on a full-time basis, and do not hold a scholarship equal or greater in value to two teaching assistantships (i.e.: \$8,496.80 for 2026-27).

Students who are provided TA-ships on their admissions letter **must apply annually each fall** to have them formally established, for a maximum of two TA-ships per year. Failure to apply will result in forfeiting the TA-ship to another student. Under exceptional circumstances on a case-by-case basis, students may be awarded additional TA-ships past the two-year point for MSc students or four-years for PhD students, but they must still apply for these when the call goes out in the fall.

A contract and TA workload form must be signed by both the professor teaching the course and the student. The TA workload form is a contract which outlines all expectations in terms of marking, attendance at lectures, etc. The TRAC (Teaching and Research Association of Concordia) form must also be signed before the TA contract can be sent to Payroll. Students are notified of their TA assignments and sign their workload form and contract as they become available, normally 1-2 weeks after notification.

What does it mean to be a Research Assistantship (RA)?

Many faculty members provide graduate students with financial support to continue their research, this is the bursary for continued graduate research or Research Assistantship. If the faculty member has a lab space, a [key request](#) is needed to ensure necessary access. Ian Tonnies (ian.tonnies@concordia.ca) should be put down as the approver of the request.

Receiving Office Space

Most Biology faculty members provide their graduate students with desk space in their laboratories, and many are provided desk space in an office as well. Biology graduate students may be assigned a carrel for studying, correcting, or writing.

Requests for key assignments must be made with the Biology Department Administrator, Ian Tonnies, at ian.tonnies@concordia.ca. Students must apply to receive an office space.

Support for attending and/or presenting at international conferences

Student conference travel support

- Funding is provided by the [School of Graduate Studies](#) and the [Faculty of Arts and Science \(FAS\)](#). Typically, the FAS matches support offered by the department.
- Students need to fill in and submit the online [form](#) for Conference Travel Support; see Ian Tonnies for a separate guide for this process.

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11. Biology Department PhD Thesis Completion and Defense Checklist

The purpose of this checklist is to familiarize students and faculty members with the EXPECTED timeline for PhD thesis submission and completion. All efforts will be made to ensure the efficient processing of all requirements (pre-submission, submission, defense, corrections, and final thesis deposit to Spectrum). Following the steps described below will assist with the successful completion of this process.

What you need to know about submitting your thesis:

A major portion of the PhD program involves the planning and execution of innovative and original research under the direction of a supervisor. It is expected that the research should result in publication in reputable journals, on which the candidate is an author and the major contributor of ideas and experimental data.

The thesis will be examined by a Thesis Examining Committee and will be defended orally.

The **Thesis Examining Committee** is composed of:

- Supervisor(s)
- Two committee members
- Two external examiners (One external to the university and one arm's length)
- Chair

The thesis is evaluated on two levels:

- Accepted (as is, with minor modifications or with major modifications)
- Not accepted

Example PhD Study Plan (4-years)

Year One – Entry into the program	Have your advisory committee formed (supervisor and two committee members) and arrange a first committee meeting within six months. Discuss this with your supervisor: Supervisory committee = supervisor + 2 committee members from the biology department. Exceptionally one of the members maybe from outside the department after approval of the GPD
	Complete the Research Proposal and Hold a committee meeting
	Within the first 4 terms (regular program), first 3 terms (fast-track program), or within the first 5 terms (direct entry program) , complete the BIOL 850 Research Proposal and Qualifying Exam
	Course work: One 3 credit course (regular entry or fast-track) or two 3 credit courses (direct-entry program) from BIOL 616, BIOL 670, BIOL 671, BIOL 680 or any of the Advanced Topics or Reading Courses listed at the end of the Biology calendar entry. Other courses in the list may be chosen upon recommendation of the supervisory committee and the Graduate Program Director. If course taken is not a Biology course, you must have supervisor permission and professor of the course permission by email as this will be required to complete a student request for a course substitution for our Biology 600 level courses
	Plan data collection (experiment, lab, field, etc.), plan analysis

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Year Two	BIOL 801 – Pedagogical Training in at least two lower-level classes (200-levels), ideally more.
	If not done yet – BIOL 850 MUST be completed in the first term of year 2 (regular entry), third semester of year 1 in the PhD program (fast track program) or second term of year 2 (direct-entry program)
	Collect data, start analysis, start writing manuscripts
Year Three	BIOL 801 – Pedagogical Training in two higher-level classes (during first term). A total of four classes are required to be completed
	BIOL 802 – Research Seminar
	Continue writing manuscripts for publication
Year Four	Finalize manuscripts; although Biology does not require that thesis chapters be accepted for publication by the time of the PhD defense, a general guideline is that one thesis chapter should be published or accepted for publication, and a second chapter submitted, by the time the PhD defense takes place. Subdisciplines in biology vary in this regard, and students should meet with their supervisors by year 3 of their studies to discuss publishing expectations and strategies.
	Complete and defend thesis

First submission deadlines are:

- February 11 for Spring Convocation
- July 14 for Fall Convocation

See details:

<https://www.concordia.ca/gradstudies/students/thesis-based/process/send-your-final-submission.html>
<https://www.concordia.ca/academics/graduate/calendar/current/thesis-regulations.html>

Final submission deadlines are:

- April 1 for Spring Convocation
- September 1 for Fall Convocation

Students must [apply to graduate](#) by January 15 for Spring Convocation and by July 15 for Fall Convocation

The Thesis Office

School of Graduate Studies, 1550 de Maisonneuve West GM building 930-21
 Contact Email: thesis@concordia.ca

See details: <https://www.concordia.ca/gradstudies/students/thesis-based/thesis-preparation.html>

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PhD Thesis Defense – Process

- 1) When the PhD thesis is completed, the supervisor sends an email to the Graduate Program Assistant and Graduate Program Director confirming the thesis is ready for submission along with examining committee information in #2 below.
- 2) The supervisor is responsible for arranging the Examining Committee (that includes the name of the examiner exterior to the university along with their CV and address). Once this information is sent to the GPA and GPD, the Chair of the defense will be confirmed, but the supervisor is encouraged to check the following link to see who the next Chair will be: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1SBj2d2HPwXj0FRWhJNemzQ2DFZqxjll4jbdCszW2MY/edit?usp=sharing>. The supervisor then arranges for a potential date for the defense. The student's thesis supervisor(s) should have had no demonstrated collaboration (joint research, grants, or publications) with the suggested external examiner for at least six years. For more details, please refer to the [Thesis Regulations](#).
- 3) The student completes the Doctoral Thesis Examining Committee form and sends it to the GPD for approval (<https://www.concordia.ca/content/dam/sgs/docs/forms/phd-committee-form.pdf>).
- 4) Once approved by the GPD, the GPA sends the thesis submission form to the School of Graduate Studies (SGS) with the examining committee members, along with proposed dates and times for the defense.
- 5) The student delivers the thesis to the SGS following the thesis submission guide found here: <https://www.concordia.ca/gradstudies/students/thesis-based/process/send-your-initial-submission.html>
- 6) The SGS schedules the defense, the examination date must be set **a minimum of 6 weeks** from receipt of the doctoral examination committee form. SGS sends the thesis as well as the thesis evaluation forms to all committee members, and a chair is appointed (the GPA will look for a chair, but the supervisor may recommend).
- 7) The candidate **MUST** attend the defense in person. If the external to the university is unable to attend in person or via videoconference, he/she can submit questions to the Graduate Program Director in advance and the chair will read those during the defense.
- 8) A thesis defense report is filled out by the chair of the exam and returned to the GPA or Thesis office.
- 9) If the external examiner is participating by videoconference, the chair signs on their behalf.
- 10) If the thesis is accepted with major modifications, the Biology GPD and GPA need to be informed, and the agreement of the entire examining committee is necessary in order to complete the grade form.
- 11) Signature pages are provided by the Thesis office and not by the student.
- 12) If minor revisions are required, then once corrected and approved by the supervisor by email, the student can submit the thesis to SPECTRUM.
- 13) Completed thesis is submitted as per the Doctoral thesis final submission guidelines (<https://www.concordia.ca/gradstudies/students/thesis-based/process/send-your-final-submission.html>)
- 14) Once the final submission is done, and a screenshot of the SPECTRUM confirmation is sent to the GPA, then the Grade completion form for the thesis Biol 890 is signed by the supervisor, the GPD, and Department Chair and sent to the Dean's office.
- 15) Once completed at the Dean's office, it is sent to the Registrar's office for processing. Only after this will the grade appear on your transcripts.

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12. Biology Department MSc Thesis Completion and Defense Checklist

The purpose of this checklist is to familiarize students and faculty members with the EXPECTED timeline for MSc thesis submission and completion. All efforts will be made to ensure the efficient processing of all requirements (pre-submission, submission, defense, corrections, and final thesis deposit to Spectrum). Following the steps described below will assist with the successful completion of this process.

What you need to know about submitting your thesis:

A major portion of the MSc program involves the planning and execution of innovative and original research under the direction of a supervisor. It is expected that the research should result in publication in reputable journals, on which the candidate is an author.

The thesis will be examined by a Thesis Examining Committee and will be defended orally.

The **Thesis Examining Committee** is composed of:

- Supervisor(s) (Co-Supervisor, if any, should be clearly marked)
- Two committee members
- One external examiner (ideally from the department)
- Chair (appointed by the GPD, usually one of the committee members)

The thesis is evaluated on four levels:

- Accepted (as is, with minor modifications or with major modifications)
- Not accepted

Example MSc Study Plan

Year One – Entry into the program	Complete the course work, i.e. three 3-credits courses (9 credits) within the first 2-4 terms. Discuss this with your supervisor which courses to take. If the course taken is not a Biology course, you must have email permission from your supervisor and the professor teaching the course as this will be required to complete a student request for a course substitution for our Biology 600 level courses. Scientific communication (BIOL670) is offered every fall for graduate students. Another to note here is Advanced biostatistics (BIOL422) each winter, which is cross listed for graduate students and is another option that many graduate students take.
	Have your advisory committee formed (supervisor and two committee members). Discuss this with your supervisor and inform the GPA of the names by email and copy all members as confirmation. Supervisory committee = supervisor + 2 committee members from the biology department. Exceptionally one of the members maybe from outside the department after approval of the GPD
	Complete the Research Proposal and hold a committee meeting. Discuss this with your supervisor.
	Present proposal at our “ MSc Interim Progress Seminar ” that occurs in late April or May (this is a 10-minute presentation with 3-5 minutes of questions).

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	All students MUST complete this even if they started in January or May of the previous year.
	Plan data collection (experiment, lab, field, etc.), plan data analysis
Year Two	Collect data, analyse data, start writing manuscripts
	Finalize manuscript(s)/thesis
	Complete and defend thesis

Accelerated admission to PhD (fast-tracking):

This is a process whereby exceptional students are admitted to the PhD program without completion of an MSc degree in Biology. Students who follow this process must show high academic performance evidenced by an outstanding GPA, a research project that is appropriate to a doctoral level and excellent progress on their MSc research. The request to transfer should be normally made during the first term of the second year of the MSc program at the latest (but ideally it should be done the last term of year 1). A justification letter by the supervisor endorsing the supervisory committee recommendation should be included in the transfer request.

The student must meet following requirement to be considered for fast tracking into the PhD program.

- Have completed the graduate courses and attained an A- average in the MSc program
- Show evidence of outstanding academic performance through research publications and/or manuscripts under review and/or draft manuscripts suitable for publication in leading journals, and conference presentations
- Submit a research proposal outlining the background of the project, the questions to be answered, and the experimental approaches needed to answer these questions. The proposal should include 1) Abstract, 2) Introduction, 3) Objectives, 4) Methodology, 5) a progress report and 6) Literature cited. The maximum length of the text of the proposal should be 5 single spaced pages (excluding Literature cited, Tables and Figures) with a Times New Roman font size of 12 points and 2 cm margins all around. This proposal is viewed as a template for the more enriched one expected once the student enters the PhD program and conducts the BIOL 850.
- Approval by the student's supervisory committee (committee meeting - progress report) [here](#)

MSc Thesis Defense - Process

- 1) When the MSc thesis is completed, the supervisor sends an email to the Graduate Program Director and the Graduate Program Assistant confirming the thesis is ready for submission. In this email, the supervisor should include information on the external examiner (name, email address, CV), and a potential date suitable to all examining committee members for the defense.
- 2) The student submits the thesis to the GPA who schedules the defense, **generally 4 weeks** from the submission date (i.e. after examining committee is formed and a potential defense date is known).
- 3) The GPA sends the thesis as well as the thesis evaluation forms to all examining committee members (Evaluation forms to be returned 1 week before the defense), and the GPD appoints a chair.
- 4) The candidate MUST attend the defense in person. If a member of the examining committee is unable to attend in person or via videoconference, he/she can submit questions to the Graduate Program Director in advance and the chair will read those during the defense.
- 5) A thesis defense report is filled out by the chair of the exam and returned to the GPA.
- 6) If a committee member is participating by videoconference, the chair signs on their behalf.

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- 7) If there is a major revision, the agreement of the entire examining committee is necessary in order to complete the grade form.
- 8) If minor revisions are needed, then once corrected and approved by the supervisor by email, the student can then submit to SPECTRUM.
- 9) Completed thesis is submitted as per the Master's thesis final submission guidelines (<https://www.concordia.ca/gradstudies/students/thesis-based/process/send-your-final-submission.html>)
- 10) Once the final submission is done, and a screenshot of the spectrum confirmation sent to the GPA, then the Grade completion form for the thesis Biol 696 is signed by the supervisor, the GPD, and Dept Chair and sent to the Dean's office.
- 11) Once completed at the Dean's office it is sent to the Registrar's office for processing. Only after this will the grade appear on your transcript.

First Submission

Deadline to submit to students' department are:

March 4 for Spring Convocation

August 4 for Fall Convocation

See details <https://www.concordia.ca/gradstudies/students/thesis-based/process/send-your-initial-submission.html>

<https://www.concordia.ca/content/dam/sgs/docs/forms/masters-examiner-evaluation-form.pdf>

<https://www.concordia.ca/content/dam/sgs/docs/forms/masters-thesis-committee-report.pdf>

Final Submission

Final submission deadlines are:

April 1 for Spring Convocation

September 1 for Fall Convocation

Students must apply to graduate by January 15 for Spring Convocation and by July 15 for Fall Convocation

See details <https://www.concordia.ca/gradstudies/students/thesis-based/process/send-your-final-submission.html>

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13. Useful links to forms

Useful from links

[BIOL 801 Supervisor Lecture feedback](#)

[BIOL 801 Student Lecture feedback](#)

[BIOL 802 Appraiser Evaluation Form](#)

[BIOL 802 Student Evaluation Form](#)

[BIOL 850 Examination Report](#)

[Biol 850 Proposal Evaluation Report](#)

[PhD Annual Progress Report](#)

[M.Sc. Annual Progress Report](#)

[BIOL Form for Faculty Members Wishing to Recruit](#)