

# **PH.D. GRADUATE STUDENT HANDBOOK**

**In**

**THE DEPARTMENT OF ECOLOGY, EVOLUTION  
AND MARINE BIOLOGY**

**2021-2022**



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## **EEMB Graduate Student Handbook: Ph.D. Degrees**

These guidelines incorporate both University and Department regulations, and are designed to help ensure that students finish their Ph.D. degrees successfully and in a reasonable amount of time. They are not designed to tie the Department's, or the student's hands. Thus, there can be exceptions to many of the rules below if asked of the Graduate Committee. If there is a reason to alter timetables, take leaves, or otherwise act outside of these guidelines, it may be possible with appropriate petitions. To prepare such petitions, it is important that the student work with their major professor, the Departmental Faculty Graduate Advisor, the Graduate Program Advisor, and possibly Graduate Division.

### **1. Ph.D. Committees:**

Students must form a Ph.D. committee during their first year. They should consult with their major professor in determining who would be the most appropriate committee members. They may also want to consult with the Departmental Faculty Graduate Advisor. The primary role of a student's committee is to act as a support system and resource, provide multiple perspectives, and broaden the expertise beyond that which a single major professor could offer. The committee will work with the major professor on advising the student on classes, exams and exam schedules, and on the student's specific research. Once formed, the committee will meet at least once a year, including the student's first year. The committee will also review the student's progress and identify any problems that may arise. The student and committee will file a "Progress Report and Study Plan" form (see page 12) every year. This serves not only as a record of progress but should also identify the student's plans for the next year. This ensures that the student and committee agree as to where a student is in their program, and what is planned for the future. These procedures ensure communication between the student and their committee to facilitate consensus on how the student can best make progress.

At a minimum, the committee will consist of the major professor and two other UC faculty members, one of whom must be from EEMB. The third member can come from another department or even another UC campus if appropriate. Professional researchers, adjunct faculty, or scientists who are not associated with UC may be added to the committee either: (1) in addition to the three core UC members or (2) instead of one of the three core UC members but only with petition and approval by Graduate Division (contact the Graduate Program Advisor for the details of this process). If any of the committee members are away on sabbatical, or other leave, a temporary member may replace them during that time. The membership of the thesis may change as a student's interests and directions shift. The committee is established within the Department and the official committee forms are filed with the UCSB Graduate Division (See Graduate Program Advisor for forms).

### **2. Ph.D. Qualifying Exam Structure & Schedule:**

Ph.D. examinations will consist of two written examinations and one oral examination.

**Written exams:** Students are required to complete both written examinations *within two years* after enrolling in the Ph.D. program.

**What to expect:** Written exams will test a student's understanding and their ability to work with material and ideas in a field at a level above that expected in an upper division undergraduate class. A student's first step in preparing for the exams should be to meet with their committee and decide the topics to be covered and who will administer the exams. Currently, written exams can take a variety of forms such as: (1) writing a review paper, (2) answering a set of questions designed by the thesis committee, or (3) completing a structured written exam (e.g., Ecological Modelling written administered by Holly Moeller, Ecology Grant Proposal written administered by Sally Holbrook and Hillary Young) . The structure of the two written exams is at the discretion

of the graduate student and their committee. There are several ways to prepare, including taking an appropriate graduate class, participating in seminars, reading a textbook, getting a reading list from the faculty member, or doing an official literature-based independent study class. In fact, a combination of the above is best. Students should plan to spend at least a few weeks of intense directed preparation immediately before the exam. Exams differ in structure and format (open vs. closed book, time limits, etc.) depending on the major advisor/committee, but they are all designed to test for the same, high level of understanding and performance.

**Failure:** Students who fail a written exam must successfully complete the same or an alternative exam approved by their committee *by the end of the following academic quarter*. Students who fail the same written exam twice will be dropped from the program. While failing an exam is unusual; conditional passes are fairly common. A conditional pass is given when the overall exam is satisfactory, but some aspect of it is weak. In such cases, the student will be expected to do more reading, and then revise the weak section. Until this is done, the exam is considered incomplete.

**Penalties for falling off schedule:** If written exams are not completed within 2 years, the student will receive a reminder from the Faculty Graduate Advisor that they are falling off schedule. After 3 years, the student will receive a warning that they are off schedule are at risk of going on Probation, which restricts access to departmental funding such as Teaching Assistantships, if they do not complete the exams within the next year.

Students failing to successfully complete their written examinations within 4 years after enrolling in the Ph.D. program may be dropped from the program.

**Oral exams:** The oral examination is to be completed *within three years* after enrolling in the Ph.D. program. Students *must pass both written exams before* taking their oral exams.

**What to expect:** The oral exam is usually a broad-based exam testing a student's knowledge and ability to work with material in the basic science areas relevant to their research. The oral exam committee is conducted by the student's dissertation committee. In most cases, the oral exam will begin with a student's presentation of their dissertation proposal and the questioning will deal with the proposal as well as broader science topics. A student should be prepared for questions that pertain to their proposal as well as questions that pertain to general knowledge of the field at large (e.g., general topics in ecology and/or evolution). Students should expect to find themselves questioned about things that they may not know the answer to, possibly including issues where no one knows the answer. Evaluating how a student handles uncertainty is an important part of evaluating whether they are ready to be advanced to candidacy for the Ph.D.

**Passing & advancing to candidacy:** After passing the oral exam, a student will be "Advanced to Candidacy". That has two possible effects on a student's life. First, a student becomes eligible for doctoral candidate borrowing privileges at the Davidson Library. It also means that fees may be reduced. Since EEMB students generally don't pay their own fees, this may not seem important, but whatever source is supporting them (departmental funds, grants, etc.) may benefit, by allowing resources to be used to support other students. *Note, to advance to candidacy officially, you must file a form with the University and pay a fee (currently \$50).*

After advancing to candidacy by passing their written and oral exams, a student on the Ph.D. track may apply for a MA degree from the department, with approval from their Ph.D. committee, as they would have passed all necessary departmental requirements for a non-thesis MA degree. Applying for this degree only requires a few signatures and a fee of \$20 to Graduate Division. Please see this link for more details

<https://www.graddiv.ucsb.edu/academic/forms-petitions/degree-change>

**Failure:** Students who fail their oral examination are allowed to retake the exam once only. The second exam must be taken *within one year* following the original exam. Students failing their second attempt on the oral examination will be dropped from the program.

**Penalties for falling off schedule:** If the oral exam is not completed within 3 years, the student will receive a

warning that they are falling off schedule, and that the exam must be completed within the next year or they may be placed on academic probation by Graduate Division.

Students failing to successfully complete their oral examinations and advance to candidacy within 4 years will be placed on academic probation unless the Department petitions Graduate Division not to do so. This requires a solid justification.

Students who have not completed their oral exam and advanced to candidacy within 5 years after enrolling in the Ph.D. program may be dropped from the program.

### **3. Completing the Ph.D. Degree:**

After advancing to candidacy, the final hurdle for graduate students is to finish their dissertation. The official guidelines for format and filing requirements are available in the “*Guide to Formatting & Filing Theses & Dissertations*” (<http://www.graddiv.ucsb.edu/academic/preparing-filing.aspx>). During the time a student is focusing on their research and writing, it is important that they stay in touch with their committee. The worst thing that a student can hear when they think they are finished with their research is “You need to have done...” The only way to ensure this does not happen is through regular interaction with the dissertation committee.

**Normative Time:** This is the length that the Department believes is a reasonable amount of time for a student to complete a Ph.D. In EEMB, *normative time* is 6 years following enrollment as an EEMB graduate student (in either a M.A. or Ph.D. track). If a student hasn’t completed their Ph.D. within normative time, they lose the reduced fee benefit they may have received when they advanced to candidacy.

**Maximum time:** In accordance with university policy, students who have not completed their degree *within 7 years* of enrolling in the program must petition the Graduate Committee and the Graduate Dean to remain in the program. The petition must outline reasons for not completing the degree and an acceptable alternate completion schedule.

Students failing to complete their degree *in 8 years* from the time of their enrollment must retake their written examinations or prove in some equivalent way that they are fully up to date in their major field of interest. Simply completing the dissertation is **not** considered such proof, as a dissertation may be narrowly focused.

Students failing to complete the degree *in 10 years* from the time of their enrollment will be dropped from the program.

**Final Defense:** A final public defense of a student’s dissertation will be made after the written dissertation is completed. This final defense may only be waived under extraordinary circumstances requiring unanimous consent of the dissertation committee and the Graduate Committee as outlined by the UCSB Academic Senate [https://senate.ucsb.edu/manual/regulations/Chapter III/Section 4/](https://senate.ucsb.edu/manual/regulations/Chapter_III/Section_4/)

### **4. Other Academic Standards:**

**EEMB 290 Seminar for New Graduate Students:** This seminar is designed to familiarize new graduate students with the EEMB faculty and the diversity of research being conducted in the department and to provide a forum for interactions among new graduate students. It is required of all incoming graduate students unless special circumstances prevent attendance.

#### **508. Levels of Biological Organization I: Individuals & Populations**

(4) Eliason/Moeller

*Prerequisite: graduate standing. Lecture, 3 hours; Discussion, 1 hour.*

This is the first in a set of two advanced courses in ecology and evolution, and includes modules on adaptation and organismal function (including physiological ecology), life history theory and fitness, and population dynamics.

## **509. Levels of Biological Organization II: Communities & Ecosystems**

(4) Caves/Anderegg

*Prerequisite: graduate standing. Lecture, 3 hours; Discussion, 1 hour.*

This is the second in a set of two advanced courses in ecology and evolution, and includes modules on the origins of diversity, species interactions and coexistence, the causes and consequences of food web complexity, and ecosystem-level processes.

**TA requirement:** All Ph.D. students must spend at least two quarters as a teaching assistant. However, self-supported students, students on fellowships, or students working as a Graduate Student Researcher can petition the Graduate Committee to waive this requirement. Associated with being a teaching assistant are two training courses that must be taken at least once. These are:

**EEMB 500:** Campus Orientation (1 unit). This is a one-day seminar offered once a year in the fall.

**EEMB 502:** Teaching Techniques (2 units). Offered by MCDB in fall, and EEMB in winter. This may be taken in the winter of the student's first year, rather than fall, even if TAing for the first time in the fall of that year.

Additionally, a student may receive course credits for TAing. To get this credit a student must register for EEMB 501. This has a variable number of units (1-4), depending on the time commitment of the Taship. A 50% time Taship is worth 4 units.

**Minimum GPA:** Students must maintain a minimum GPA of at least 3.0 *at all times*. Graduate Division will automatically place students who fall below this on academic probation. Students who fail to bring their GPA up to 3.0 may become subject to being dropped from the program. Students **must** register for at least one class with a letter grade during their first year to establish a GPA.

**Carrying too many I, NG, or NR grades:** These are Incomplete, No Grade, or No Record, and are for unfinished courses. Students may not carry more than 12 units of such grades. The first quarter this occurs, a student will receive an advisory from the Graduate Division. The second quarter, they will be placed on academic probation. After 3 quarters without clearing up the incomplete courses, a student may be dropped from the program.

## **5. Monitoring status, Academic probation, and Academic Disqualification**

To remain in good academic standing, a graduate student must make timely progress toward degree completion and meet the following standards of scholarship established by The Academic Senate and the Graduate Council:

1. Establish a GPA by taking courses for letter grades
2. Maintain a minimum cumulative grade point average of 3.0
3. Complete course work. The standard will not be met if the student has 12 or more units of unfinished coursework: Incomplete (I), No Grade (NG), or No Record (NR)
4. Meet all departmental degree requirements, as outlined in the General Catalog
5. Doctoral students must meet departmental specific time-to-advance and time-to-degree standards based on admission year

## **Coursework performance standards**

In cases where student fails to meet coursework performance standards (points 1-3) the Graduate Dean will notify the student and the department. The first notification is a warning. The department will work with the student and their advisor to create an academic progress plan that will deliver written expectations for the student to demonstrate improvement.

If the student does not demonstrate improvement during the following quarter the department can recommend further warning status or academic probation. If unsatisfactory progress is not made after the third quarter, the graduate dean will consult the department again. At that point, if a student is not already on academic probation, they will be placed on probation. The student can also continue with their academic probation status, or the department can recommend academic disqualification. Only the Graduate Dean can disqualify a student.

## **Time to Advance and Time to Degree standards**

If a student is beyond normative time to advance (three years) or time to degree (six years), the graduate division will notify the student. The faculty graduate advisor and student's faculty advisor will work with the student to develop a progress plan which is signed by student and advisor. The student will then be placed on monitoring status for the remainder of the year or until the milestone is complete. A student is not eligible for central fellowships if they are beyond time-to-degree or normative time standards for advancement to candidacy or degree completion.

If a student who has not completed the degree after the end of an academic year on monitoring, the Graduate Dean will ask the department to recommend and justify (a) continued academic monitoring (must involve extenuating circumstances) or (b) academic probation. Students on academic probation are not eligible for employment as an associate, teaching assistant, or reader.

If a student on academic probation fails to make adequate progress after a minimum of one quarter, the department may request from the Graduate Dean that the student be academically disqualified.

## **Departmental requirement standards**

If a student fails to pass their written or oral exams, cannot form a doctoral committee, or fails to meet other departmental milestones or University standards, the Department Chair or Graduate Advisor may recommend monitoring status, academic probation, or academic disqualification to the Graduate Dean.

## **6. Administrative Issues:**

**FAFSA forms:** All students are expected to file the “Free Application for Federal Student Aid” form *every* year. The form is available at: <http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/>. This may seem like a nuisance, but there are fellowships available through UCSB (e.g. fee fellowships) that are *not* available if you have not filed a FAFSA. The FAFSA for the following school year is usually due by early March. Make it a habit to fill this form out at the beginning of each year.

**Registration:** Students are expected to remain registered every quarter they are in the program, unless they are on approved leave.

Credit requirements: All students must register for at least 12 units each quarter to maintain their status as full time students.

Petitions: In cases where a student needs to act outside the guidelines, it likely takes a petition to either the Department or to Graduate Division. For petitions for leaves etc. the forms are available at Graduate Division. All petitions will need either the Departmental Faculty Graduate Advisor or Department Chair's signature. Please work with the Graduate Program Advisor to organize all petitions.

## **7. Graduate Student Advisory Committee**

The Graduate Student Advisory Committee (GSAC) meets monthly with the EEMB Chair, Vice-Chair, and Chair of the Graduate Affairs Committee. This committee has been formed to discuss and obtain advice on departmental and campus issues, and to engender and develop new ideas. Graduate students should feel free to meet with the Vice Chairs or Chair to discuss their concerns or departmental issues through the members of the Graduate Student Advisory Committee

## **8. Other places to go for information, advice, and help:**

In general, your major professor is the best starting point for questions and problems, but there is a variety of other people and places to go for information and advice.

Graduate Program Advisor  
*Brittney Dinelli*

Go to the Graduate Program Advisor (GPA) for technical information about administrative issues such as timetables, forms, requirements, petitions, etc. If the GPA doesn't have the answer, they will know where to direct you.

Faculty Graduate Advisor  
*Deron Burkepile*

This is a rotating faculty position. Go to the Faculty Graduate Advisor for signatures on petitions, and if you have more "academic" questions than you could ask the GPA. For example, if you want to talk about issues relating to your studies, your relationship with your major professor, etc.

Departmental Graduate Committee

This group is comprised of the Faculty Graduate Advisor and three other faculty members. They are responsible for overseeing the EEMB graduate program as a whole. When the advisor is unavailable, the other members can sign petitions and similar things.

Department Chair

The Department Chair is available if you have problems that the Faculty Graduate Advisor is not able to handle satisfactorily.

Graduate Division

Graduate Division is the administrative branch of UCSB that oversees all things relating to graduate programs. They have a lot of useful information at <http://www.graddiv.ucsb.edu>. A particularly useful document is the "*Graduate Student Handbook*" (<https://www.graddiv.ucsb.edu/handbook/index.aspx>). They also have a lot of good people who can provide you with advice on problems you may have, if you can't get the answer from the Graduate Program Advisor or Faculty Graduate Advisor.

For financial issues, Christopher Dixon (chris.dixon@graddiv.ucsb.edu or (805) 893-4653) is the one to talk to.

For academic issues, Rickie Smith (Director of Academic Services; [rickie.smith@graddiv.ucsb.edu](mailto:rickie.smith@graddiv.ucsb.edu) or (805) 893-5485) is probably the right person.

The main number of the Graduate Division is (805) 893-2277.

### **Financial Support:**

The general EEMB philosophy is that students should be properly supported so that they can focus on their academic program. This support may be in the form of teaching assistantships (TA), University fellowships, departmental fellowship support, graduate student research (GSR) positions, extramural funding, or some combination of these. In EEMB, most sources of support are coordinated through the student's major professor.

**Teaching assistantships:** The major professor will make requests to the Department for teaching assistantships for their students. Each professor can generally count on TA support for one student per year (three quarters total support). How they allocate this among their students is up to them. Faculty requests for TA support are then balanced against the courses that need TAs and the particular expertise needed for those courses. The balancing of requests and needs is done by the Staff Graduate Advisor and the Graduate Committee. Other programs also occasionally have TAs available that are open to students from other departments. The Environmental Studies program is a one such program, and takes applications during winter quarter. A student may TA up to a maximum of 18 quarters during their graduate tenure. This cap is set by the University of California system.

**Departmental funds:** The Department receives a modest sum of money every year to use for supporting graduate students. Most of that money is used to pay out-of-state tuition and first year fellowship packages for incoming students. Typically, there is enough money to only support several quarters' worth of continuing graduate students. These funds generally are used to help advanced Ph.D. students get their research done and finish their dissertations. Individual faculty members are responsible for nominating students for departmental graduate support funds, which are then allocated based on a combination of merit, need, and the student's past history of receiving these funds.

**Graduate student researcher positions:** Individual faculty may have research grants with graduate student support incorporated into them. They are entirely responsible for allocating these funds among graduate students.

**Fee fellowships:** Each year the Department is allocated a small amount of money to use to help students cover fees. These fellowships may only be awarded to students who are considered "financially needy" (which includes most students). This *requires* that students have filed the FAFSA form. Students can apply directly to the Department for these funds. Calls for requests will go out each spring quarter.

**Extramural funding:** There is a wide range of fellowships that students may apply for. Students are encouraged to visit Graduate Division's on-line newsletter, at <https://www.graddiv.ucsb.edu/our-services/extramural-funding>. This has good records of programs, requirements, deadlines, etc.

## **Recommended Schedule:**

*There is some flexibility in a Ph.D. degree schedule, but keeping close to this will help ensure finishing in a reasonable amount of time.*

### **Year 1**

- Before Fall Quarter: Meet with major professor and plan fall classes, discuss ideas for beginning research, etc.
- Fall quarter: Establish an initial advisory committee. Meet with them. Discuss course plan for the first year or two, research ideas and plans, and target areas for written exams.
- Winter quarter: File FAFSA form in January.
- Spring quarter: Meet with advisory committee. File progress report. Possibly take first written exam.

### **Year 2**

- Fall quarter: Take first written exam (if you didn't do it during the first year).
- Winter quarter: File FAFSA form in January. Take second written exam (taking it winter quarter leaves time to wrap up a possible conditional pass and to plan for summer research in Spring quarter).
- Spring quarter: Finish up course work. Meet with committee; discuss written exams, preliminary research done so far, and dissertation plans. File progress report.

### **Year 3**

- Fall quarter: Continue research and develop dissertation plan. Meet with committee members regularly to get their advice and input on the plan.
- Winter quarter: File FAFSA form in January. Continue developing research plan.
- Spring quarter: Oral exams and advance to candidacy\*. File progress report.

**\*The Graduate Division will place you on monitoring status if you exceed the four-year deadline to advance to doctoral candidacy set by Graduate Council.**

### **Year 4**

- Focus on dissertation research.
- Winter quarter: File FAFSA form in January.
- Spring quarter: Meet with whole committee. Discuss research progress to date and last studies that are needed to complete the research program. File progress report.

### **Years 5 &6**

- Complete research, write dissertation.
- Winter quarter: File FAFSA form in January
- Spring quarter: Either file the dissertation or file a progress report.

# Progress Report and Study Plan for Ph.D. Students in EEMB

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

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

Year Began: \_\_\_\_\_

Expected Completion Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Exams: (*fill out when exams are to be taken or when they were passed*)

Written # 1: Date: Topic/Examiner:

Written # 2: Date: Topic/Examiner:

Orals: Date:

Performance to date:

**On track**  **some problems**  **Unsatisfactory**

*If there have been problems, note below what they are and what will be done to solve them.*

Progress & Accomplishments this year:

Expectations for next year:

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## Committee Signatures

Chair: \_\_\_\_\_

Member #3: \_\_\_\_\_

Member #2: \_\_\_\_\_

Member #4: \_\_\_\_\_