**GUIDELINES FOR MASTER OF ART’S (MA)**

**GRADUATE PROGRAM IN BIOCHEMISTRY**

**June 2019**

**Chairman:**

Dr. Mark O’Brian  
[mrobrian@buffalo.edu](mailto:mrobrian@buffalo.edu) 716-829-3200

**Director of Graduate Studies:**

Dr. Satrajit Sinha  
[ssinha2@buffalo.edu](mailto:ssinha2@buffalo.edu) 716-881-7994

**Graduate Affairs Committee:**

Dr. Marc Halfon

[mshalfon@buffalo.edu](mailto:mshalfon@buffalo.edu) 716-829-3126

Dr. Alfred Ponticelli  
[asp@buffalo.edu](mailto:asp@buffalo.edu) 716-829-2473

Dr. Jennifer Surtees  
[jsurtees@buffalo.edu](mailto:jsurtees@buffalo.edu) 716-829-6083

**Assistant to the Chair:**  
Beth O’Brocta [eobrocta@buffalo.edu](mailto:eobrocta@buffalo.edu) 716-829-3069

**I. Admission Requirements**

A Bachelor of Arts or Science degree is required. A background in biologic and/or chemical science, with some physical chemistry and mathematics, including calculus, is typically required for admission. Master’s candidates are admitted through The Graduate School Electronic Application Manager System - Slate. Applications are assessed by the Graduate Affairs Committee (GAC).

**II. Student Classification**

Matriculating students pursue a course of study that will lead to a Master’s of Art (MA) degree. The Master’s degree requires a minimum of 30 credit hours.

**III. Student Advisors**

During the first semester, students are normally advised on academic matters by a member of the Graduate Affairs Committee, who is appointed by the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS). The Graduate Affairs committee member will advise the student on any academic matters concerning classwork and will also offer guidance on choosing an appropriate research rotation and mentor for the MA degree. Students are also encouraged to consult with other faculty members, as needed or desired. It is expected that by the end of the first Fall semester, MA students will have chosen their research advisor or mentor. The mentor should have a primary or secondary appointment in the Biochemistry department. From that time on, the mentor will be the primary advisor for the student, although the member of the Graduate Affairs Committee who was assigned to the student will continue to provide guidance as needed and will serve on the student’s Master’s Committee.

The Master’s Committee is chaired by the mentor, and consists of a minimum of three graduate faculty - the mentor, a member of the Graduate Affairs Committee (appointed by the DGS) and an additional member whose expertise is relevant to the area of research the student is planning to complete. The Biochemistry Department Chair is an *ex officio* member of all Master’s Committees and can resolve disputes if necessary.

**IV. Course Requirements for the Master’s Degree**

The Master’s degree requires a minimum of 30 credit hours that include both academic course work as well as research. In addition to these courses, students must register for at least 1 elective course to be chosen in consultation with the mentor on a topic most relevant to the research. These can be Biochemistry courses or other courses offered by the University. In subsequent semesters students should register for BCH 504 and BCH 597 –Master’s Research.

**V. The Curriculum for the Master’s Degree**

**FIRST SEMESTER - FALL**

**Course Number Title Credits**

**BMS 501 Cell Biology 4**

**BCH 503 Biochemical Principles 4**

**BCH 505 Lab Rotation 3**

**BCH 504 Graduate Student Seminar 1**

**TOTAL HOURS 12**

**SECOND/THIRD SEMESTER SPRING** †

**\* ANY TWO OF THE FOLLOWING:**

**Spring Options:**

**\*BCH 507 Protein Structure Function 2-3**

**\*BCH 508 Biochemistry of Gene Expression 2**

**\*BCH 519 Introduction to Bioinformatics & Computational 3**

**Biology**

**\*BCH 611 Advanced Microbial Genetics 2**

**Fall Options:**

**\*GGB 502 Essentials of Genetics & Genomics 3**

**\*BCH 512 Developmental Genomics & Stem Cell Biology 2**

**\*BCH 603 Signaling and Disease 2**

**\*BCH 607 DNA Replication & Repair 2**

**(1)additional elective course to be chosen in consultation with the mentor and can include one of the above noted courses**

**CONTINUOUS ENROLLMENT IN SUBSEQUENT SEMESTERS**

**BCH 504 Graduate Student Seminar 1**

**BCH 597 Master’s Research variable 1-9**

†Most MA students can complete their required coursework in the second semester. This gives students an entire year to complete laboratory research, without needing to worry about classes. However, it is possible for a student to take a class in their third semester (Fall of second year), if it better fits their research interests. Master’s students are eligible to be certified full-time status after completion of required courses. Certification of full time status is available for 2 semesters. Additional semesters would require a petition to the graduate school.

Graduate students are encouraged to use the HUB Student Center. Students have self-service access to clearly defined program requirements through their HUB Student Center via the Academic Advisment Report (AAR). The AAR is an advising tool that tracks student progress toward graduation showing how completed courses and future registration will fulfill degree requirements. By utilizing the HUB, students have improved academic planning, and as a result, potentially reduce time to degree completion.

Information on how to use the HUB Student Center can be found here:

<https://hubsupport.buffalo.edu/students/>

**VI. Description of Course Work**

The courses introduce students to the fundamental facts and principles of modern biochemistry. Topics covered include the following: genetics, genomics, enzymology, protein structure, and biophysical methods used to examine protein conformation; genetics; molecular biology; membranes and lipid chemistry; metabolism; hormones and principles and practices used in computational analysis of DNA and protein sequences. The exact topics to be covered will be governed by which choices a student makes among the courses that may be taken.

These courses will progressively deliver selected material in depth and equip students for experimental science by introducing them to the critical use of the literature. The later courses will be oriented towards problem solving. Where appropriate, the emphasis will be placed on reading and discussing the primary literature, both historical and current, i.e. in-class discussion of outside reading. Evaluation of students’ performance may include in-class written quizzes or oral exams and midterm and/or final exams.

**Academic Standing**

Students are expected to obtain a grade of B or better in all required courses and to maintain a grade point average (GPA) of 3.0 or better. A grade of B minus (B-) or below in a required course may be grounds for dismissal from the program and will be a matter of discussion by the Graduate Affairs Committee of the Department. An overall GPA of lower than 3.0 will result in academic probation. A student on academic probation has 1 semester to bring his/her GPA to 3.0. Failure to do so will result in dismissal from the program.

**Laboratory Rotations – BCH 505**

Students admitted into the Department’s Master’s program will rotate through at least one research laboratory starting approximately 1 month after joining the program. During this time, the student in highly encouraged to seek help from the assigned GAC member in deciding on the best possible laboratories that suits their research interests. It is the responsibility of the student to identify and meet the faculty with whom they would like to rotate and arrange a rotation, which will typically begin near the end of September. The rotation will last for 4-6 weeks and includes approximately 9 -12 hours per week of laboratory research under the guidance of the mentor and personnel in his/her laboratory. If both the student and the mentor agree, the student will then join that lab for the remainder of the Master’s program. However, if either the student or the mentor does not agree to continue the research, then a second 4-5 week rotation will be conducted with the student then joining the second laboratory for his/her research project. All students should have found a lab in which to do their research by the end of the winter term and should notify the GAC member of their decision.

The rotation is an extremely important aspect of the first year experience. The purposes of the rotation are to introduce students to laboratory research, to teach them a variety of lab techniques that they may draw on throughout their careers, to acquaint them with individual faculty and to provide them with information that will be essential in their selection of mentors. Students are expected to integrate into the lab research team during each rotation. A student must choose a lab in which they feel comfortable with the mentor and other lab personnel and where they find the proposed project to be exciting and worthy of study. Selection of mentors for students will require agreement of **both the student** and the **proposed mentor**.

**Research Progress**

In the early part of the Spring semester of the first year when a student will have chosen a mentor and begun a research project, the student is required to meet with their mentor to go over the proposed research project. This meeting should focus on relevant background information for the proposed project, identification of the question(s) to be addressed in the research, and the proposed aims and techniques to be used.

The student should plan on having a formal Master’s committee meeting before the end of the spring semester/first year in the program. The primary goal of this committee meeting is to make sure that the student is making progress in the laboratory and has a research project lined up. The committee will ensure that the student is on track with the required coursework and that the research to be pursued in the laboratory of his/her mentor in the second year is well planned and appropriate for a Master’s Project.

A report form must be completed after the Master’s committee meeting, and an appropriately signed copy put in the student’s departmental office file. This form will be completed by the mentor and reviewed and signed by the mentor, the Master’s committee members and the student.

**Final Research Report**

Students in the Biochemistry Master’s Program will, with the advice of their mentor and Master’s Committee, submit a final Research Report which is required for degree conferral.

The Final Report document should be arranged to include a sections on (1) background material necessary to understand the significance and impact of the project and information on what was already known prior to the time the student began his/her research, (2) a clear statement of the question that the project was attempting to answer with one or more Specific Aims, (3) a description of the Materials and Methods used in the Research Project, (4) a description of results obtained and (5) a discussion of how the research has answered the question posed and how that fits into the bigger picture of the scientific area addressed as well as a description of future directions that could be taken to further the particular line of enquiry. It is understood that some students may have made more progress than others due to technical issues or other considerations. However, even if technical challenges prevented progress, the student should describe approaches tested to overcome these challenges and how or why they worked or did not work.

The Master’s Committee must approve the Final Report before a student can graduate. Since revisions may be requested by the committee, the student should plan to submit the final report at least 1-2 months prior to the time when all paperwork needs to be submitted for graduation.

The MA Student may also have a 2nd committee meeting, if advised by the mentor and the Master’s Committee Members, particularly in situations where it is deemed that the final report is unsatisfactory and/or the studentwould benefit from a formal presentation of his/her research.

**VII. Public Presentation of Research**

Part of student training and experience is oral presentation of primary research in a public format. Presentation skills are critical to success in science and our effort to provide assistance in acquiring those skills has two components as described below.

**Course Registration and Course Credit Requirements**

**BCH 504** – Graduate Student Seminar (1 credit course). Students are required to register for BCH 504 in the first year. Although registered and required to attend the presentations, master’s students will not present in this class, but are encouraged to be active participants by giving comments and asking questions. Master’s students should observe the general formats for putting together effective oral presentations with sufficient background material for the audience to understand and clear explanations of the need for the research, the aims of the project, the results obtained and the conclusions.

**Biochemistry Department Research Day**

The Biochemistry Research Day typically takes place near the end of the Spring Semester. All students are required to attend and present. In their first year in the program, MA students will not present, but will observe and take notes on oral and poster presentations by BCH PhD students to understand the general format and to get a better idea of what makes a good presentation. At the end of their second year in the program, Master’s students are required to present a poster of their research, which will include descriptions of the project to those who attend the poster session. Some students may complete their MA degree one and a half rather than 2 years in which case they will present a poster to the department at the end of their program, rather than at the Departmental Research Day.

**VIII. Financial Aid**

Normally there is neither financial support nor tuition waivers for Master’s students.

Funding for Conferences/Travel: Departmental funding up to $500 may be available for MA students who present a poster or oral presentation at a conference. Requests should be submitted in writing to the DGS.

**IX. Application for Graduation-Degree Conferral**

Students Apply for Graduation in the HUB Student Center – Select Apply for Graduation. Select the term in which you will have met all degree requirements. This usually occurs in the spring semester, 2nd year.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Deadlines to Apply for Graduation in HUB Graduation Term** | **Application Deadline** | **Conferral Date** |
| Fall | October 15 | February 1 |
| Spring | February 22 | June 1 |
| Summer | July 15 | September 1 |
|  |  |  |

**X. Student Participation in Departmental Activities**

In addition to participating in formal courses and research, students participate in the Department in numerous additional ways.

1. Students may participate in departmental teaching by registering for one credit hour of BCH 599 - Supervised Teaching. This is especially useful for students who envision a future career in teaching at the university level.

1. Students help to plan and organize the Annual Biochemistry Research Day as well as participating by presenting their research. Students identify and invite the keynote speaker for this event and host the speaker while he/she is in Buffalo.
2. Students plan and organize several department social events including the December Holiday Party and the Summer Picnic.
3. Input from graduate students on any aspects of graduate life or issues in the graduate program is encouraged and may be given to the Director of Graduate Studies, a member of the GAC, and/or the Chair of the Biochemistry Department.
4. When new faculty are being recruited, students are expected to participate actively in the evaluation of candidates for these positions. In addition to attending the candidates’ seminars, the students meet with prospective faculty members to discuss their research and ideas concerning graduate training. Written evaluations solicited from students are useful to the search committees in assessing teaching abilities, communication skills and interpersonal skills.

**XI. Student Leave Policies**

1. Vacation Leave

Department policy is that students will have available to them 2 weeks of leave per year to use for vacation. Those students who need a longer vacation period because of extended travel times may pool two years’ allowance into a single trip; otherwise, the annual leave time shall be non-accumulating. However, Master’s students who are not U.S. citizens and who travel home to foreign countries should be aware that visa renewals may take extensive time to process or may be rejected. Thus, it is not generally recommended that students travel outside the country unless necessary. In regards to vacation leave, the period chosen should result from discussion between the student and mentor and should be consistent with the educational and research commitments associated with the student’s academic and research objectives and responsibilities.

Students shall also be allowed reasonable medical absences for sickness or treatment. Time spent fulfilling Departmental or Medical School assignments or responsibilities are not considered vacation or leave time (*e.g.*, assisting in courses, student mentoring and recruitment, organizing Research Day).

Two principles shall be followed by the student and mentor in discussing leave time: 1) the student and mentor have made a mutual commitment to training and research objectives; and 2) achieving these mutually reinforcing objectives requires flexibility in effort and time-of-effort. Although the mentor cannot forcibly deny a leave request, she or he can certainly view such a request as inconsistent with the student’s commitment to these training and/or research objectives. If disagreements arise which student and mentor are unable to resolve, the Department Chair and Director of Graduate Studies should be informed by either the student or mentor or both and an effort will be made to mediate the dispute.

1. Maternity Leave

Students requesting maternity or paternity leave will be granted up to 8 weeks continuous absence during which registration will be continued. A more prolonged leave may be negotiated by mutual consent of student and advisor. A student taking such leave shall not take additional vacation during that year.

**XII. Petitions**

Petitions must be submitted to the Assistant to the Director of Graduate Studies and/or the Graduate School for the following purposes:

A. Extension of time limit for completion of degree. Students must submit a petition listing justifying reasons for an extension beyond two years for completion of the M.A. degrees.

B. Leave of absence. If a student wishes to take a leave of absence a petition must be submitted detailing the reasons for the leave.

C. Change of status. A petition to change status from M.A. status to PhD status (upon approval by the mentor) must be submitted in the form of a letter to the Director of Graduate Studies. The Graduate Affairs Committee will discuss the petition and either approve or deny it. A copy of the petition letter and the Graduate Affairs Committee approval must accompany the student’s program form when it is submitted to the Graduate School. A petition for a switch from the M.A. to the Ph.D. program is subject to the admissions process and will only be approved if the student has shown adequate abilities in their coursework and research.

D. Change of Dissertation Advisor. The same procedure for a letter is followed as in C, above.

E. Course requirements. If a student requests that an exception be made to the normal course requirements, the same procedure is followed as in C, above.

**XIII. Grievance Procedure**

Students should feel free to contact the Director of Graduate Studies or the Chair of the Department on personal and academic matters or with grievances. On matters under departmental jurisdiction in which a student believes he/she has been aggrieved, a formal grievance review may be requested. The request must be in writing from the student concerned to the Chair of the Department and must be filed within one month of the alleged grievance. It must clearly state the charge of grievance, its effects, and summarize the particulars concerning it. The Chair of the Department, in consultation with the concerned parties, will appoint an *ad hoc* committee with student representation to investigate the grievance. The *ad hoc* committee’s action is restricted to procedures or administrative matters, as opposed to judgments of academic performance. All hearings of the Grievance Committee will be closed. No formal minutes will be taken. The committee will report its recommendation for resolution of the grievance within one week after filing. Grievance reviews for graduate students are also available through the Graduate School.