Expectations of Students in Biomedical Graduate Studies

BGS students are subject to the policies and procedures of their graduate group, BGS, and the University. These policies are summarized below. BGS and University policies relating to graduate education are available through the BGS website. Students are encouraged to become familiar with these policies and to consult their graduate group or BGS with any questions or concerns.

Student Conduct  BGS students must comply with the University’s code of general conduct and other University policies related to student conduct that appear in *The PennBook, Policies and Procedures Handbook*. These include, but are not limited to, policies on sexual harassment, acquaintance rape and sexual violence, appropriate use of electronic resources, open expression, and drug and alcohol usage. However, the judicial charter contained within that document is not applicable to BGS students. Alleged violations of the BGS Code of Academic Integrity (reproduced below) are adjudicated in accordance with the *Charter of Biomedical Graduate Studies Student Judicial System*. Alleged research ethics violations are handled in accordance with the University’s *Procedures Regarding Misconduct in Research for Non Faculty Members of the Research Community*. Students are also expected to abide by the *BGS Authorship Policy* when publishing their research. All of these documents are available on the BGS website.

**BGS Code of Academic Integrity**  The most fundamental value of any academic community is intellectual honesty; accordingly, all academic communities rely upon the integrity of each and every member. Students are responsible not only for adhering to the highest standards of truth and honesty but also for upholding the principles and spirit of the Academic Code. Violations of the Code include but are not limited to the following acts:

A. **Cheating**: using or attempting to use unauthorized assistance, material or study aids in examinations or any other academic work, or preventing, or attempting to prevent another from using authorized assistance, material, or study aids. Example: using a cheat sheet in a quiz or exam, altering a graded exam and resubmitting it for a better grade, etc.

B. **Plagiarism**: using the ideas, data or language of another without specific and proper acknowledgment. Example: copying another person’s paper, article, or computer work and submitting it for an assignment, cloning someone else’s ideas without attribution, failing to use quotation marks where appropriate, etc.

C. **Fabrication**: submitting contrived or altered information in any academic exercise. Example: making up data for an experiment, fudging data, citing nonexistent articles, contriving sources, etc.

D. **Multiple Submission**: submitting, without prior permission, any work submitted to fulfill another academic requirement.

E. **Misrepresentation of Academic Records**: misrepresenting or tampering with or attempting to tamper with any portion of one's own or any other person's transcripts or academic record, either before or after coming to the University of Pennsylvania. Example: forging a change of grade slip, tampering with computer records, falsifying academic information on one’s resume, etc.

F. **Facilitating Academic Dishonesty**: knowingly helping or attempting to help another violate provisions of this Code. Example: working together on a take-home exam, etc.

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G. Unfair Advantage: attempting to gain unauthorized advantage over fellow students in an academic exercise. Example: gaining or providing unauthorized access to examination materials, obstructing or interfering with another student’s efforts in an academic exercise, lying about a need for an extension for an exam or paper, continuing to write even when time is up during an exam, destroying or keeping library materials for one’s own use., etc.

Note: If a student is unsure whether his action(s) constitute a violation of the Code of Academic Integrity, then it is that student’s responsibility to consult with the instructor to clarify any ambiguities.

BGS Conditions of Fellowship Awards

BGS fellowships provide tuition, fees, health insurance, and a stipend for all eligible full time students in residence as long as the student remains in good academic standing.

Graduate students who accept a fully-funded fellowship from BGS are expected to devote themselves full time to their program of graduate study. Students may not simultaneously accept another appointment or be employed either within or outside the University. Exceptions may be made only with the written approval of the Dissertation Advisor (if applicable), the Graduate Group Chair, and the Director of BGS.

Funds for BGS fellowships derive from a variety of University and extramural sources. Students are generally supported by a training grant and/or a University fellowship during the first two years of study and by a training grant and/or faculty research grant resources during the dissertation phase. Some students apply for and receive individual extramural fellowships from organizations such as the National Science Foundation or the National Institutes of Health. Students are expected to abide by the conditions of their funding source. For example, students appointed to a training grant must complete the required paperwork and participate in site visits relating to the grant, and students who receive multi-year individual extramural fellowships must prepare and submit annual renewal materials.

All BGS students must observe their graduate group’s policies, BGS policies, and the University policies relating to graduate students. Each graduate group’s policies can be found on its website, and the BGS and relevant University policies can be found via the BGS website. All students must complete the annual BGS bioethics requirement.

Stipends: BGS endeavors to provide a uniform stipend to all students. Stipends for BGS fellowships are paid in equal amounts at the end of each month. The current stipend level (for academic year 2007-2008) is $26,520. Any supplementation of this amount must be approved by the Graduate Group Chair and the Director of BGS.

Cost of Education Allowances: On occasion, students may receive in addition to the stipend extra funds from a training grant or an extramural fellowship for education-related expenses, such as travel or the purchase of laboratory or computer equipment.

Taxes: All University and extramural fellowship awards in excess of tuition, general fee, and required course-related expenses (e.g., required books) are subject to Federal income

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tax. Even though they are taxable, the University is not required to withhold Federal
taxes or issue an IRS W-2 form for non-service (i.e., institutional or training grant based)
fellowships. Some fellowships (i.e., those funded by research grants or teaching
assistants) are also subject to Philadelphia city wage taxes, which are withheld from
the paycheck. The University is not qualified to provide specific tax information.
Students are urged to seek counseling directly from the IRS.

BGS Academic Calendar/Student Personal Time: BGS has a 12-month annual
training program. While BGS generally adheres to the University’s schedule for Fall and
Spring course terms, many BGS courses do not observe fall and spring breaks. BGS
students are expected to work full-time towards the degree but are entitled to take
University staff holidays and two weeks per year for personal time. Students at the
course-work stage should consult their graduate group chair with requests for any
additional time off. Students at the dissertation stage may schedule time off only with the
prior approval of their advisor.

BGS Leaves of Absence (including Parental Leave)

The University allows graduate students to take leaves of absence with the permission of
the school only during the period prior to dissertation status (see the Graduate Catalog-
Rules and Regulations for more details). Exceptions may be made for dissertation level
students, most notably for medical reasons¹ and for parental leave in association with the
birth of a child (of up to one year)². Student stipends are suspended during the leave
period and are guaranteed upon return from leave under the conditions of the original
award guarantee, i.e., as long as the student remains in good academic standing. Note
that students who have passed the prelim may need to arrange fellowship support from a
mentor in order to return. Students receiving NIH NRSA support in the form of a
training grant appointment or individual fellowship must also obtain permission for a
leave from NIH.

¹Medical Leaves of Absence

Students who wish to take a medical leave are expected to arrange for a letter from the
treating professional(s) justifying the leave. Students on medical leave are expected to
seek and follow the advice of the graduate group chair or his/her designate to remediate
any incomplete coursework and to devise a course of study for re-enrollment. Such
students are also expected to make appropriate financial arrangements to continue any
necessary treatment during the leave (e.g., payment for the Student Health Insurance
plan), to continue treatment, and to arrange for an appropriate support system. In order to
return from medical leave, students must arrange for treating professional(s) to provide
documentation of treatment and progress. Students who take a leave for psychological
reasons are expected to arrange evaluation with Counseling and Psychological Services
(CAPS) four weeks prior to the sought return date.

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2. Parental Leaves of Absence

BGS students are eligible to receive, upon request, full pay for new child leave from the same source as the stipend for 30 calendar days. In addition, students may apply their two weeks of annual vacation leave to extend the paid new child leave to approximately 45 calendar days.

This policy is designed to provide roughly the same benefit as the NIH policy for students who receive NIH NRSA support, which is as follows: Trainees may receive stipends for up to 15 calendar days of sick leave per year. Sick leave may be used for the medical conditions related to pregnancy and childbirth pursuant to the Pregnancy Discrimination Act (42 USC 2000 e(k)). Trainees may also receive stipends for up to 30 calendar days of parental leave per year for the adoption or the birth of a child when those in comparable training positions at the grantee institution have access to paid leave for this purpose and the use of parental leave is approved by the program director. (Note that BGS provides two weeks of vacation leave to all students, but no sick leave.)

Academic Requirements During the first two years, BGS students take a combination of didactic courses, seminars, laboratory rotations, and independent studies. In general they take the equivalent of four course units in the fall and spring semesters and two course units in the summer sessions. After completing their coursework, students are required to undergo the preliminary examination, which is administered by the graduate group. They then arrange to complete their dissertation research in the laboratory of a faculty advisor with the approval of the graduate group. The dissertation progress is monitored by a dissertation committee, which consists of faculty engaged in relevant research. Students are required to meet regularly with their dissertation committee, on a schedule determined by their graduate group. Students who wish to conduct dissertation away from the Penn campus must receive prior approval from the graduate group and BGS. Each graduate group sets its own specific curriculum requirements.

Academic Standards According to University policy, a graduate student must maintain a B average or better to be considered in good academic standing. The Biomedical Curriculum and Academic Standards Committee reviews the record of any student who receives an unsatisfactory grade (less than a “B”) in a course or who does not meet the University policy of a B average to decide whether the student should be placed on academic probation.

Dissertation Policies Students are expected to abide by the policies of their graduate groups at the dissertation stage. Moreover, the Biomedical Advisory Committee has established several policies for all BGS students at the dissertation stage relating to changing mentors, leaving the lab prior to defending, and writing and defending the dissertation. These policies are available on the BGS website.

Timely Degree Progression Each student’s progress is monitored to facilitate timely completion of the degree. University standards mandate that PhD students complete all course requirements and examinations within a period of seven consecutive years. BGS

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students are reviewed at the start of the seventh year if they have not completed their program. The student and the dissertation advisor are asked to provide details of the goals of the research, a progress report specifying the work remaining, and an estimate of the amount of time until completion of the research and a successful defense. The report is reviewed by the Director of BGS, who must approve the plan for the student to remain in good standing. Failure to submit a report will result in a second request, and if not heeded, may lead to termination of the student’s enrollment in BGS. This mechanism serves as an early warning to students and their advisors. In addition, students who remain at dissertation for more than five years must be “re-certified” by their graduate groups.

**Bioethics Training**  Training in research bioethics is a requirement of all BGS students and mandated by NIH training grants. The BGS Office coordinates this training. Students in year one complete training on-line; students in years two, three, and four are required to attend small-group workshops arranged by the BGS office. Students in their fifth year and beyond are given several options, such as attending seminars sponsored by the Center for Bioethics or co-facilitating a workshop. Information about bioethics training is emailed to students annually.

**Student Teaching**  In general, BGS students are not required to teach and are not supported by teaching assistantships. The exception is Neuroscience students, who are required to teach for a semester in their third year of training. Students in any graduate group who wish to obtain teaching experience may apply for TA positions offered by departments sponsoring undergraduate courses and for a few BGS-related TA positions. Teaching opportunities are announced by email. However, students may not accept TAships without prior approval of their thesis advisor (if applicable), Graduate Group Chair, and the Director of BGS. In addition, students may serve as TAs or conduct other approved tasks for a maximum of two semesters only. (Note that BGS students are not permitted to serve as Resident Assistants, given the substantial demands associated with these positions.)

**Student Problems**  Students who have any sorts of concerns about the program should first consult with individuals within their graduate group: chair or coordinator, academic review committee members, dissertation advisor, or dissertation committee members. If the student’s concerns persist, he or she may consult with the BGS office staff or director. Students in serious distress should contact Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS), 133 S. 36th Street, 2nd floor, at 215-898-7021 during normal business hours or 215-349-5490 after hours.