**Dissertation Status**

**Composition of Thesis Committees**

Within four months of passing the Candidacy Exam, the student must form a Working Thesis Committee. The first meeting of the committee must be held by December 31st of the second year in the program. The Working Thesis Committee will be comprised of four faculty, at least three of who must be members of the BMB Graduate Group.

Five Penn faculty are required for the Final Thesis Committee; four of these must be BMB Graduate Group members and one must be an External Examiner (i.e. someone from outside the University and outside the BMB Graduate Group), who is brought in as an additional examiner for the thesis defense. If it is not possible for the External Examiner to attend the oral defense, he or she will be asked to provide a written report. The report must be submitted to the Thesis Committee Chair prior to the oral defense. The Thesis Committee Chair will provide a summary of this report during the closed portion of the thesis defense, and will raise any questions or concerns from the External Examiner.

The Working and Final Thesis Committees should be constituted to include breadth as well as expertise in the particular research area of thesis work. The student and his or her advisor shall jointly select the members of the thesis committees. The student should submit in writing a list of potential committee members, indicating which faculty will serve as committee chair, to his or her Thesis Advisor and the Graduate Group Chair. The Graduate Group Chair will respond in writing to approve the composition of the committee, or make recommendations for other candidates. The Graduate Group Chair will adjudicate any disagreement on the composition of the thesis committee. The student must register the composition of his or her thesis committees with the Graduate Group Office after approval by the Graduate Group Chair.

The Thesis Advisor may not serve on the committee or vote on the thesis defense, but may attend committee meetings and the thesis defense, but may not participate in the deliberations of the committee.

**Evaluation of Student’s Progress**

The Working Thesis Committee must meet every 6 months or as determined by the Committee, to monitor the student’s progress. The Thesis Committee is permitted and indeed encouraged to interview the student in the absence of the Thesis Advisor and vice versa. A written summary will be prepared after each meeting by the Thesis Committee Chair and will be placed in the student’s academic file. Upon written approval by the Chair of the Thesis Committee, the 6-month requirement may be waived, and yearly meetings held instead.

If the Committee and/or the Thesis Advisor are not satisfied with the student's productivity, a written report will be prepared by the Committee outlining a proposed course of action. A copy of the report will be forwarded to the Graduate Group Chair, the student and the Thesis Advisor. The student will have the opportunity to reply to the written report of the Committee.
Within 6 months, an additional meeting of the Thesis Committee will take place to determine the progress. In the event that the student does not make sufficient progress, he or she will be placed on academic probation. If progress is not apparent by the next Committee meeting, the student will be asked to petition for a terminal Master’s degree.

**Preparation of Dissertation**

The thesis committee will give written approval for the student to begin to write the dissertation, but this does not automatically mean that experimental work is completed. The student should be prepared to continue experiments while writing and to rewrite or do additional experiments after the thesis defense if deemed necessary by the committee. If the student has not already done so, at this point he or she should, in conjunction with the Thesis Advisor, select the remaining two members of the committee to form the full examination committee. A draft of the dissertation must be submitted at least two weeks in advance of the defense to minimize the possibility of unexpected problems. The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences (GAS) requires a dissertation to represent a definite contribution to scientific knowledge and to show that a student possesses "power of independent research." The Graduate Group feels that the dissertation should contain experimental information that answers a stated question and should display a logical progression of scientific thought. The main information contained in the dissertation should be of a caliber sufficient for publication in a reputable refereed scientific journal.

**Thesis Defense**

The Thesis Defense will take the form of a public lecture. The private portion of the defense may be conducted solely by members of the Thesis Committee and the Graduate Group Chair and in the absence of the Thesis Advisor. The decision on approval of the thesis will be made solely by a consensus of the Thesis Committee in the absence of the student and the Thesis Advisor. Students who are defending their theses must inform the Graduate Group Office at least two weeks in advance of the defense date, and supply the title of the thesis and place and time of the defense, as well as an abstract and a figure for the monitors. The Graduate Group Office will announce the Thesis Defense to the University community. The Graduate Group Office is responsible for completing the forms indicating that the thesis has been successfully defended. Before a student makes the appointment to deposit the thesis, he or she must provide the Graduate Group Office with a copy of the abstract page, a signed copy of the title page, and postdoctoral appointment information.