Expectations of Students in Biomedical Graduate Studies
2026-2027

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Introduction BGS students are subject to the policies and procedures of their graduate group, BGS, and the University. The University academic policies for graduate students are described in the *University-Wide Academic Rules for PhD Programs*. Some of the BGS academic policies are described below. These and other University and BGS policies relating to graduate education are also 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. Policies are grouped as follows:

I. Student Conduct
II. Conditions of Fellowship Awards
III. Leaves of Absence
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VI. Other Policies

I. Student Conduct

BGS students must comply with the University's Code of Academic Integrity, Code of Student Conduct, and other University policies related to student conduct that are listed on the website of The Center for Community Standards and Accountability. 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. Alleged violations of the Code of Academic Integrity (reproduced below) are adjudicated in accordance with the *University's Judicial Charter*. 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.

Code of Academic Integrity

Since the University is an academic community, its fundamental purpose is the pursuit of knowledge. Essential to the success of this educational mission is a commitment to the principles of academic integrity. Every member of the University community is responsible for upholding the highest standards of honesty at all times. Students, as members of the community, are also responsible for adhering to the principles and spirit of the University's Code of Academic Integrity.

Academic Dishonesty Definitions

Activities that have the effect or intention of interfering with education, pursuit of knowledge, or fair evaluation of a student's performance are prohibited. Examples of such activities include but are not limited to the following definitions:

A. *Cheating*: using or attempting to use unauthorized assistance, material, or study aids in examinations or 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 or 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 a student'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 any provision of the Code. Example: working together on a take-home exam, etc.

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.

*If a student is unsure whether their 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.

II. Conditions of Fellowship Awards

BGS fellowships provide tuition, fees, individual health insurance (PSIP) coverage, individual vision insurance, 80% of individual dental coverage, 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 without prior written approval of the Dissertation Advisor (if applicable), the Graduate Group Chair, and the Director of BGS.

BGS students in years 3 and above are covered by the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA), which determines some benefits and processes.

Funds for BGS fellowships derive from a variety of University and extramural sources. Students are generally supported by a University fellowship during the first two years of study and by an external fellowship, institutional training grant and/or faculty research grant resources during the dissertation phase. Many students apply for and receive individual extramural fellowships from organizations such as the National Science Foundation and 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 documentation and activities 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 training in the responsible conduct of research (RCR) and scientific rigor and reproducibility (SRR), as well as the annual Individual Development Program (IDP) 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 2026-2027 BGS annual stipend is $49,000. Any supplementation of this amount must be approved by the Graduate Group Chair and the Director of BGS. See section VI below (2nd paragraph).

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 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 assistantships) 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. BGS does not observe Fall or 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 are covered by the Collective Bargaining Unit (CBA) and must observe the time-off policies determined by the CBA.

III. Leaves of Absence

The University allows graduate students to take leaves of absence with approval. The main reasons for leave are medical, family, and new parent leave. Under medical and unpaid family leaves, 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 candidacy exam may need to arrange fellowship support from a mentor in order to return; there is no guarantee that the original mentor will be able to provide financial support when the student returns from leave. 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. Students in the Collective Bargaining Unit (CBA) may be eligible for medical support continuation.

Leaves of Absence for Medical Reasons Students who wish to take a medical leave should consult with their graduate group chair and lab advisor and discuss the leave start date and anticipated return date. They should then complete this form.

Students on medical leave are expected to seek and follow the advice of the graduate group chair or their designate to remediate any work and to devise a course of study for re-enrollment. Students are also expected to make appropriate arrangements to continue any necessary treatment during the leave and to arrange for an appropriate support system. In order to return from medical leave, students must contact their graduate group chair, advisor, and BGS at least 30 days prior to the expected date of return. Students must also complete the relevant form so that Student Health and Counseling may confer with their treating professional(s). Students may not return from leave until arrangements are approved by the graduate group to resume the course of study and until BGS approves the return, in consultation with Student Health and Counseling.

Family Leave University policy allows PhD students to take a Family Leave of Absence for the birth or adoption of a child, child care, or care of an immediate family member (spouse, domestic partner, child, or parent) with a serious health condition. Students who are new parents may receive stipend support during the leave. Details, including a link to the leave request form, are provided in the University's Graduate Catalog – Family Friendly Policies for PhD Students.

IV. Academic Requirements

During the first two years, BGS students take a combination of didactic courses, seminars, laboratory rotations, and independent studies. Each graduate group sets its own specific curriculum requirements. In general, students 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 candidacy 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. Students are expected to abide by BGS' registration policies.

Academic Standards According to University policy, a graduate student must maintain a B average or better to be considered in good academic standing. The graduate group 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 if the student should be given an academic warning or 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.

University Academic Rules for PhD Students The University confers the PhD and establishes rules and procedures for all PhD students at Penn. Details are available in the University's Graduate Catalog – Academic Rules for PhD Programs.

V. Grievance Policy

A BGS student who wishes to register a grievance regarding the evaluation of his/her academic work or a matter related to the program or a course should discuss the matter with the instructor or the appropriate Graduate Group Chair. If the grievance is not addressed, the student may bring the issue to the Director of BGS. Students may also take concerns to the University Ombuds, whose mission is to "ameliorate those conditions that may impede community members finding satisfaction with their lives at Penn." More information can be found by visiting the Office of the Ombuds. Students experiencing adversity or distress in the BGS community may also consult with a member of the Trainee Advancement Alliance, which is coordinated through Research Training Affairs (RTA).

There is a separate grievance policy for students in the Collective Bargaining Unit (CBA) relating to service (non-academic) work.

Appeal of a Grade Evaluation of a student's performance is the responsibility of the Instructor. Should a final grade in a course be disputed, the student must submit a written appeal to the Instructor within the first two weeks of the academic semester immediately following the semester in which the grade was received. The Instructor must respond in writing to the student within two weeks of receiving the written appeal from the student. If, after receiving the written response to the appeal from the Instructor, the student still believes that the grade has been unfairly assigned, the student must submit a written appeal to the student's Graduate Group Chair. If the Chair believes the appeal demonstrates evidence of negligence or discriminatory behavior, an advisory committee will be formed to review the student's appeal and make a recommendation to the Chair. The decision of the Chair is final.

Course Attendance Attendance at all scheduled class meetings is expected and Instructors may base final grades on attendance. Absences from class for medical reasons or family emergencies are acceptable excuses. If requested by the Instructor, written documentation must be submitted for an absence to be excused. BGS reserves the right to withdraw students from courses for failure to attend the first class meeting.

VI. Other BGS Policies

Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) and Scientific Rigor and Reproducibility (SRR) Training Training in research conduct and scientific rigor and reproducibility is required of all BGS students; it is also mandated by NIH and NSF for trainees who receive support from training grants and individual fellowships. The BGS Office coordinates this training. Students in year one participate in an introductory RCR session at orientation and complete additional training on-line; students in years two, three, and four are required to undertake additional online training and to attend small-group workshops arranged by the BGS office. Students fulfill SRR training through formal training in statistics and experimental design, generally in year one, and in a workshop in year two. In addition, all faculty who train BGS students are required to devote one lab meeting/year to RCR issues and one lab meeting/year on SRR issues and to report the meetings to BGS.

Student Teaching and Other Supplemental Activity In general, BGS students are not required to teach and are not supported by teaching assistantships. Students in the graduate groups in Epidemiology & Biostatistics and in Neuroscience are required to teach for a semester, usually 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 that require 100 hrs or more for a maximum of two semesters only. Students who wish to participate in a 3rd semester of teaching for the CETLI fellowship program or a 3rd semester of supplemental activity for the PCI program may do so with the permission of mentor and graduate group chair. 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 Student Counseling and Wellness, 3624 Market Street, First Floor West, at 215-898-7021, which has a clinician on-call 24/7.

As a student in BGS, I certify that I have received and read the documents entitled ***Expectations of Students in Biomedical Graduate Studies***, and I agree to abide by all applicable policies and procedures.

Student Name (printed)

Student Signature

Student Graduate Group Date