

The Biochemistry Biophysics and Chemical Biology Ph.D Program: A Time Line

This is a broad outline of the major academic time lines and deadlines throughout your Ph.D at UPenn, excluding course related timings and deadlines. Pre-dissertation students should consult the [university academic calendar](#) for course related deadlines. Some timings are approximate and especially beyond 4th year will vary from student to student. FYI, the median time to degree as of spring 2022 is 6.3 yrs. The time line for combined degree students up to the candidacy exam will differ substantially from that described below. Consult the combined degree office and the graduate chair for details. For items with specific dates, such as course advising, candidacy exams, you will receive notification of the exact date and time in advance from the BBCB coordinator.

Many steps require a form signed by the appropriate person(s) in BBCB. All forms can be found on the [BBCB website](#) under the “Resources for Students” menu.

Pre-1st year

May

If planning to matriculate in summer: Reply to BGS upon receiving appointment letter. Contact BBCB faculty to secure your summer rotation

June

Summer matriculation starts

August

The BBCB coordinator will distribute a rotation brochure listing labs with openings for students to rotate in the coming year. Start contacting faculty in the rotation brochure to choose fall rotation. Note there may be additional opportunities not listed in the brochure as lab situations evolve and not all faculty respond in time for the brochure, so keep checking and contact the BBCB chair or the rotation director for more information. You may also set up spring and summer rotations at this time, depending on the availability of rotation slots in particular labs.

BGS orientation (usually 3rd week in august)

BBCB orientation (usually 4th week in august). Fall course advising and registration happens here
BIOMED 600 Cell Biology prep course.

1st Year

Early fall semester

Choose rotation, and start working in the lab.

Early to mid fall semester

If needed, contact BGS about tutors for BIOMED 600 Cell Biology course

Mid to late fall semester

Contact faculty about spring rotation
Prepare fall rotation presentations

Late fall semester

Spring course advising.

Early spring semester

Start spring rotation

Mid to late spring semester

Contact faculty about summer rotation (except summer matrices)
Prepare spring rotation presentations

Late spring semester

Summer course advising

Summer I

Summer matrices: Pre-dissertation independent study in thesis lab
Others: Summer rotation

Summer II

By summer II have decided on Ph.D advisor(s). Send completed thesis advisor approval form to BBCB coordinator.
Pre-dissertation independent study in thesis lab
Fall course advising for 2nd year

2nd Year

Fall semester

Complete remaining electives (4 credits total)

Mid to late fall semester

Start developing and refining the topic of your research proposal, in preparation for the candidacy exam class in spring.
2nd years plan to meet with a select group of 3rd years for a preview and tips for candidacy exam process

Late fall semester

Spring course advising

Spring semester

Candidacy exam class: work on preparing written proposal, oral presentation and defense

Late spring semester

Candidacy Exam

Summer

Attend dissertation and working thesis committee advising session

Choose working thesis committee. Return working thesis committee approval form to BBCB coordinator by 31st Aug

3rd Year

First thesis committee meeting by 31st Oct.

Thesis committee meeting every 6 months thereafter

4th year onwards

Thesis committee meeting every 6 months.

Some or all of the following may apply in 4th year or 5th year, depending on student and dissertation progress:

Initiate dialog with thesis committee and advisor about post-graduation career plans. Identify your reference letter writers, and contact them to confirm their willingness to write recommendation letters for you.

Start using career services offered by UPenn and BGS to refine career plans and develop job seeking skills like resume writing, networking, interviewing.

Lead times for various career paths vary widely, but in all cases prior preparation is key. Given a preliminary inquiry along with your expected time of graduation, most prospective employers will tell you when you should apply. Timings for the following two tracks are approximate.

Academic postdoc: One year prior to expected defense date start exploring options with your advisor's input. Academic post-docs sometimes require a long lead time because support is usually obtained via research or fellowship grant applications

Industry post-doc: 6 months prior to expected defense date, contact companies.

Defending your thesis and graduating

At some point in your dissertation work, by mutual agreement between you, your thesis advisor(s) and thesis committee, you will ask for permission to schedule your defense. Exactly when this happens will vary from student to student, the median time to degree currently being 6.3 yrs (as of spring 2022).

Permission to schedule often is granted at one of your 6-monthly meetings, but it can be arranged between meetings if the timing is better. Your defense must be scheduled within 6 months from

granting of permission. If necessary a 3 month extension can be obtained, but it is better to seek permission only when you are confident of defending within 6 months. At this point, the BBCB coordinator will provide you with a checklist and details of graduation specific deadlines (registering for the degree, depositing thesis etc.) You can also find a link to the checklist on the forms page.

Your degree date

Once you have defended and the necessary electronic forms are signed by advisor(s), committee and graduate group chair you have officially graduated and have your PhD. Congratulations! You can be hired as a post-doc or to any position that requires a PhD. In parallel with this you will have registered for one of the three official University of Pennsylvania degree dates: May, August or December. This will merely be the date on your diploma. You do not have to wait for this date for anything requiring a PhD. The BGS registrar will, upon request, provide official proof you have your PhD. However the diploma date does start the eligibility clock for any fellowships and such like that have a time limit from granting of the Ph.D. So there is no need to rush your defense and thesis deposit to make a particular degree date, unless there are other reasons. Graduates with August and December degree dates of the prior year, and May graduates of the current year are eligible to attend the BGS graduation and hooding ceremony in May.

kas, revised Apr 2024