

Procedures for Monitoring Student Progress in the Neuroscience Graduate Program

In the Neuroscience Graduate Program, the progress of students is primarily monitored by their mentors and their Graduate Advisory/Thesis Committees, and overseen by the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS). The BIMS Academic Progress and Achievement Committee (BAPAC) reviews and acts on all recommendations from the Neuroscience Graduate Program regarding students failing to remain in good standing based on achievement in coursework, other academic performance issues and/or failing to meet professional standards or exhibiting unethical or unprofessional behaviors. The academic standards are set by the Neuroscience program, and the professionalism standards are set by the school and/or the institution. The BAPAC monitors the implementation of Neuroscience policies regarding student remediation and dismissal, ensuring due process for students.

Students in the Neuroscience graduate program are required to satisfy all departmental requirements as described in the NGP student handbook and in UVA The Graduate Record. The program communicates with its students through the email system of the University of Virginia. Each student is required to maintain their University email account in an active state and check it routinely.

Given the diversity of research projects and graduate student trajectories, it is difficult to define a single policy that can consider every possible scenario that may arise. Instead, these guidelines are intended to establish clear procedures for monitoring progress and for ensuring that students are clearly notified of concerns and their potential consequences. The procedures are organized by program stage and milestone.

Achievement in Coursework

All graduate students are expected to: 1) earn a passing grade in all coursework, 2) achieve a minimum 3.0 grade point average (GPA) in each academic term and 3) maintain a cumulative GPA of at least 3.0. A passing grade is A+, A, A-, B+, B or B- in graded courses and S in courses graded S/U. A grade of NC (no credit) is not considered a passing grade. Failure to achieve any of these expectations places a student at risk of dismissal from the Neuroscience program due to failure to make satisfactory academic progress.

If a student fails to meet one or more of these expectations, the DGS will work with the student's mentor to determine the consequences. These can include dismissal from the program or a remediation plan. In the event that program determines that the student should be offered an opportunity for remediation, this plan will outline specific steps and a timeline for the completion of each. The student will be notified in writing of the expectations and the timeline and this notification will include a clear statement that failure to adhere to the plan will place him/her at risk of immediate dismissal from the program.

If it is determined that the student must leave the program but the student has satisfactorily completed sufficient hours of graduate credit, the DGS and the student's thesis committee will determine whether the student's achievements merit award of the Master of Science in Biological and Physical Sciences.

Advancement to Candidacy Exam

The Neuroscience Graduate Program requires completion of an area paper/qualifying exam at the end of the second year in order to be advanced to PhD candidacy. This exam is conducted by a thesis/graduate advisory committee, the composition of which is defined in the Neuroscience Graduate Program student handbook . The satisfactory completion of this exam will be determined by this committee. The Neuroscience Graduate Program qualifying exam consists of two parts: a written document and the oral defense. There are three possible outcomes for each component of the exam: Unconditional Pass, Conditional Pass and Fail. The student must pass both components of the exam in order to advance to candidacy. This milestone will be documented in SIS.

In the case of a conditional pass on either portion of the exam, the committee will communicate the deficiencies to the student orally at the conclusion of the exam, along with the expectations for remediation and timeline for their completion. In addition, the chair will assemble a written report that summarizes the outcome, the expectations and timeline. This report will be distributed via email to the student, the mentor, the DGS and the members of the thesis/graduate advisory committee within two weeks of the meeting. This report will include a clear statement that, should the student fail to meet the expectations set forth in the report in the time established, it will place him/her at risk for dismissal from the program.

If the thesis advisory or examination committee's final determination is that the student has failed his/her qualifying exam, the student will not be advanced to candidacy and will be dismissed from the program. The outcome will be clearly documented by the committee chair in consultation with the DGS within two weeks of the point at which the determination is made and the student will be formally notified of the outcome in writing. The DGS, in consultation with the graduate/thesis advisory committee, will determine whether the student's achievements merit award of the Master of Science in Biological and Physical Sciences.

Academic Progress after Advancement to Candidacy

Monitoring of academic progress after the advancement to candidacy exam is the purview of the graduate/thesis advisory committee, with input from the DGS except in the case of the coursework/grade milestones defined above. The Neuroscience Graduate Program requires that this committee meet at least once annually. However, the graduate/thesis advisory committee may require more frequent meetings. At these meetings, the committee will hear from the student and his/her mentor about the progress towards completion of the PhD. Criteria for satisfactory academic progress may include:

On time scheduling of graduate/thesis advisory committee meetings.
Attendance at/participation in required programmatic activities e.g. seminar, Journal Club, Retreat etc.
Adherence to programmatic policies.
Research progress towards the goals established at prior committee meeting.

At the close of the meeting, the committee chair will document the goals for the next period and a clear timeline for their achievement. The committee may, at its discretion, require a more frequent scheduling of committee meetings. If they do, this becomes the expectation for the student, supplanting the basic programmatic requirement of annual meetings. This report will be prepared and distributed via email to the student, the mentor, the DGS and the members of the committee within two weeks of the meeting.

In the event that the committee expresses concern about the student's progress, this will be conveyed orally to the student at the close of the meeting. A written committee report will be prepared and distributed by the committee chair as described above. This report will include a clear statement that concerns were raised regarding the student's progress and that this outcome places the student at risk for dismissal from the program due to failure to achieve satisfactory academic progress. The report will summarize the committee's expectations as well as a timeline for their completion. As above, the committee may require a more frequent meeting schedule, which will then become the expectation.

If a determination is made that the student has not met the expectations established in prior committee reports, the committee may elect to dismiss the student from the program. If so, this outcome will be communicated orally to the student at the conclusion of the meeting. The committee chair will work with the DGS to prepare a final committee report documenting this outcome. This report will be provided to the student within two weeks of the committee meeting.

Failure to Comply with Programmatic, School of University Policies

Graduate students in the Neuroscience Graduate Program are expected to comply with all applicable University and School of Medicine policies, including but not limited to those governing responsible conduct of research, safety, student conduct, academics, and the Code of Honor. Failure to comply with these policies will immediately place the student at risk of dismissal from the program. Violations will be considered on a case-by-case basis, with the adjudication process dependent on the nature of the violation and the University/School-based procedures in place to handle each.