



Cancer Biology Graduate Program Handbook

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Cancer Biology Graduate Program
c/o McArdle Laboratory for Cancer Research
University of WI-Madison
School of Medicine and Public Health
Wisconsin Institutes for Medical Research
1111 Highland Ave
Madison WI 53705-2275

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I. Introduction

The mission of the Cancer Biology Graduate Program is to provide graduate students with the intellectual and technical training that will enable them to carry out independent scientific research within the field of Cancer Biology. We train students to be critical, creative, independent thinkers, and scientific scholars. In so doing, we establish a robust and compelling foundation for them to embark on successful and satisfying professional careers.

Our handbook and [website](#) are intended for graduate students who are pursuing a PhD degree in Cancer Biology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. The Cancer Biology Graduate Program is administered by the McArdle Laboratory for Cancer Research/Department of Oncology in the School of Medicine and Public Health. The Cancer Biology Graduate Program consists of faculty-mentors (PIs) that span multiple academic departments across UW-Madison.

The UW-Madison Graduate School is the ultimate authority for granting graduate degrees at the University. The Graduate School's [Academic Policies and Procedures](#) provide essential information regarding university requirements. The policies in this handbook provide additional information specific to the Cancer Biology graduate program.

Degree and course requirements may change over time. Administrative procedures and processes may also change over time. Students are required to follow the procedures and processes listed in the most current handbook.

If you have any questions about the policies or guidelines outlined, please contact the [Graduate Program Coordinator](#).

II. PhD Coursework Requirements

Required Cancer Biology Courses

Cancer Biology coursework is designed to provide you with the fundamentals to become a creative and critical thinker in Cancer Biology. You are required to take the courses listed in [Table 1](#).

Table 1. Required Cancer Biology Courses

General Virology-Multiplication of Viruses	ONC 640
Carcinogenesis and Tumor Cell Biology	ONC 703
Ethics in Science	ONC 715
Readings in Cancer Biology	ONC 725
Current Problems in Cancer Biology	ONC 735

Electives and Biostatistics/Bioinformatics Courses

In addition to the required courses, you must take a minimum of 3 credits of elective courses (See [Table 2](#)) and at least one quantitative science course—either a bioinformatics or biostatistics course (see [Table 3](#)). This is a sample list—other courses may be taken with the guidance and approval of your mentor/certification committee. **In addition, each year you will be enrolled in ONC 990 (Thesis research); and ONC 901 (Trainee seminar series) the semester you present. 900 and above courses count towards your total need for graduation, but cannot be used to fulfill the elective requirement.**

Note: The availability of possible elective and biostatistics/bioinformatics courses is subject to change each semester/year. Consult [Course Search & Enroll](#) for the most up to date course offerings.

Table 2. Possible Elective Courses

FALL		
Protein and Enzyme Structure and Function	BIOCHEM 601	2 credits
Biophysical Chemistry	BIOCHEM 665	4 credits
Chemical Biology	BIOCHEM 704	3 credits
Advanced Microbial Genetics	MICROBIO 607	3 credits
Prokaryotic Molecular Biology	MICROBIO 612	3 credits
	BIOCHEM 612	
Microbial and Cellular Metabolomics	MICROBIO 626	3 credits
Toxicology I	M&ENVTOX 625	3 credits
Mechanisms of Microbial Pathogenesis	MM&I 740	3 credits
Pathogenesis of Major Human Disease	PATH 803	3 credits
Immunopathology	PATH 807	2 credits
Advanced or Special Topics in Cancer Research	ONC 675	1-3 credits

Table 2. Possible Elective Courses (continued)

SPRING		
Eukaryotic Molecular Biology	BIOCHEM 620	3 credits
Biology of Viruses	BIOCHEM 575	2 credits
Mechanisms of Action of Vitamins and Minerals	BIOCHEM 625	2 credits
Fundamentals of Stem Cell & Regen. Biology	CRB 640	3 credits
Molecular and Cellular Organogenesis	CRB 650	3 credits
Cell Signaling & Human Disease	CRB 701	1 credit
Cellular & Molecular Biology/Pathology	PATH 750	2-3 credits
Immunopathology: The Immune System in Health and Disease	PATH 807	2 credits
Molecular Mechanisms of Disease	PATH 809	2 credits

Table 3. Possible Biostatistics/Bioinformatics Courses

FALL		
Intro to Biostatistics	BMI 541	3 credits
Intro to Bioinformatics	BMI 576/COMP SCI 576	3 credits
Methods in Quantitative Biology	BME 780	1 credit
Statistical Methods for Bioscience I	STAT 571	4 credits
SPRING		
Bioinformatics for Biologists	ONC 778*	3 credits
Statistical Methods for Bioscience II	STAT 572	4 credits
Statistical Methods for Molecular Biology	STAT 877/BMI 877	3 credits
Advanced Bioinformatics	BMI 776	3 credits

*ONC 778 is recommended for 2nd year graduate students

Note: At least 50% of credits applied toward the program's graduate degree credit requirement must be courses designed for graduate work.

See more information [here](#)

Elective Waivers

In some circumstances, you may petition for a waiver of an elective course requirement because of previous graduate/medical school coursework.

To apply for a waiver, you are required to write a justification describing the reasons for requesting the waiver, a copy of the substitute course's syllabus, and a transcript indicating the grade received in the substitute's course (unofficial copy of the transcript is acceptable). Waivers will be granted if there is evidence of previous work at the same level and content. Waivers must be approved first by the program and then by your Certification Committee. A waived course elective carries no credit toward the Graduate Schools' PhD minimum credit requirement (see [Graduate School Requirements](#)), nor will it appear on your University of Wisconsin-Madison graduate transcript.

Coursework Timeline

[Table 4](#) provides a typical course schedule by semester and year. Your choice of courses will be guided by discussions with your mentor/certification committee at your First Year Certification Committee Meeting.

Table 4. Typical Coursework Timeline

		Course Name	Catalog Number	Credits
Year 1	Fall	Carcinogenesis and Tumor Cell Biology	ONC 703	3
		General Virology-Multiplication of Viruses	ONC 640	3
		Research	ONC 990	6
	Spring	Ethics in Science	ONC 715	1
		Readings in Cancer Biology	ONC 725	2
		Elective* or bioinformatics/biostatistics course**	Varies	Varies
		Research	ONC 990	Varies***
Summer	Research	ONC 990	2	
Year 2	Fall	Elective* or bioinformatics/biostatistics course**	Varies	Varies
		Research	ONC 990	Varies***
	Spring	McArdle Trainee Seminar Presentation (Student/Postdoc)	ONC 901	1
		Current Problems in Cancer Biology	ONC 735	2
		Elective* or bioinformatics/biostatistics course**	Varies	Varies
		Research	ONC 990	Varies***
	Summer	Research	ONC 990	2
Years 3+	Fall/Spring	McArdle Trainee Seminar Presentation (Student/Postdoc) Register for the semester you will give your presentation	ONC 901	1
		Research	ONC 990	3***
	Summer	Research	ONC 990	3

*See [Table 2](#).

**See [Table 3](#)

***Pre-dissertators will take as many credits of ONC 990 needed for 15 credits total. Dissertators will take as many credits of ONC 990 needed for 3 credits total.

Additional information regarding Oncology courses can be found online through the [UW Guide](#).

Note: Pre dissertators are required to enroll full time (8-15 credits for Fall/Spring semesters, 2 credits for the Summer session). Dissertators always must register for a total of 3 credits.

Minors

The Cancer Biology Graduate Program does **not** require you to complete a minor. However, the option is available if you are interested. There are two types of available minors:

1) Program/department specific and 2) Distributed. [Table 5](#) describes these options.

The minor must be approved by your Certification Committee and must be completed along with the major curriculum requirements by the end of the second academic year. Minor coursework may count toward the required elective course requirements.

Table 5. Types of Available Minors

PROGRAM/DEPARTMENT SPECIFIC	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Complete at least 9 credits from a degree program outside of Cancer Biology.• You must abide by the minor department's requirements.• Courses cross-listed with elective oncology courses may fulfill the minor requirement, provided this is approved by your Certification Committee and the minor department.• See individual departments for specific minor requirements.
DISTRIBUTED	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Complete at least 9 credits from two or more departments outside of Oncology.• Courses cross-listed with elective oncology courses may fulfill the minor requirement, pending approval by your Certification Committee.

Graduate School Requirements

The Graduate School requires PhD students to:

- **Complete a minimum of 51 credits to obtain a PhD Degree.** The credits required to meet Graduate School requirements are fulfilled via curriculum courses, ONC 990 research credits, and electives. Courses numbered below 300, audit, and pass/fail **do not** satisfy the minimum requirement.
- **Maintain a minimum graduate GPA of 3.0.** Courses in which a grade of D or F were assigned will not be counted toward the Graduate School minimum credit requirement of 51 credits. A student may be placed on probation or suspended from the Graduate School for low grades or failing to resolve shortcomings in a timely fashion.
- **Complete all required coursework by the end of your second spring semester,** before completing the Preliminary Examination.
- **Participate in an Individual Development Plan (IDP),** communicate IDP goals to your committee, and update your IDP on an annual basis.

Discuss the following elements during a confidential, face-to-face IDP meeting with your mentor:*

- Career goals.
- Assessment of relevant skills, ranging from proficiency at the lab bench to knowledge of the literature, oral presentation, writing, leadership, collegiality, etc., as they relate to these goals.
- Achievements over the past year.
- Discussion of progress toward graduation and preparation for post-graduation professional life.

*You do not have to share the contents of your IDP with your mentor

McArdle Trainee Seminar Series

Two important steps on the ladder to becoming a contributing member of the scientific community are: 1) learning to communicate your ideas, and 2) learning from the ideas communicated by others. Toward those goals, you are required to attend the weekly McArdle Trainee Seminar Series during the academic year. Starting in Spring of your second year, you will also present in the seminar series once a year. The seminars are announced in advance, and you will receive weekly reminders.

III. Degree Benchmarks Toward Your Doctorate

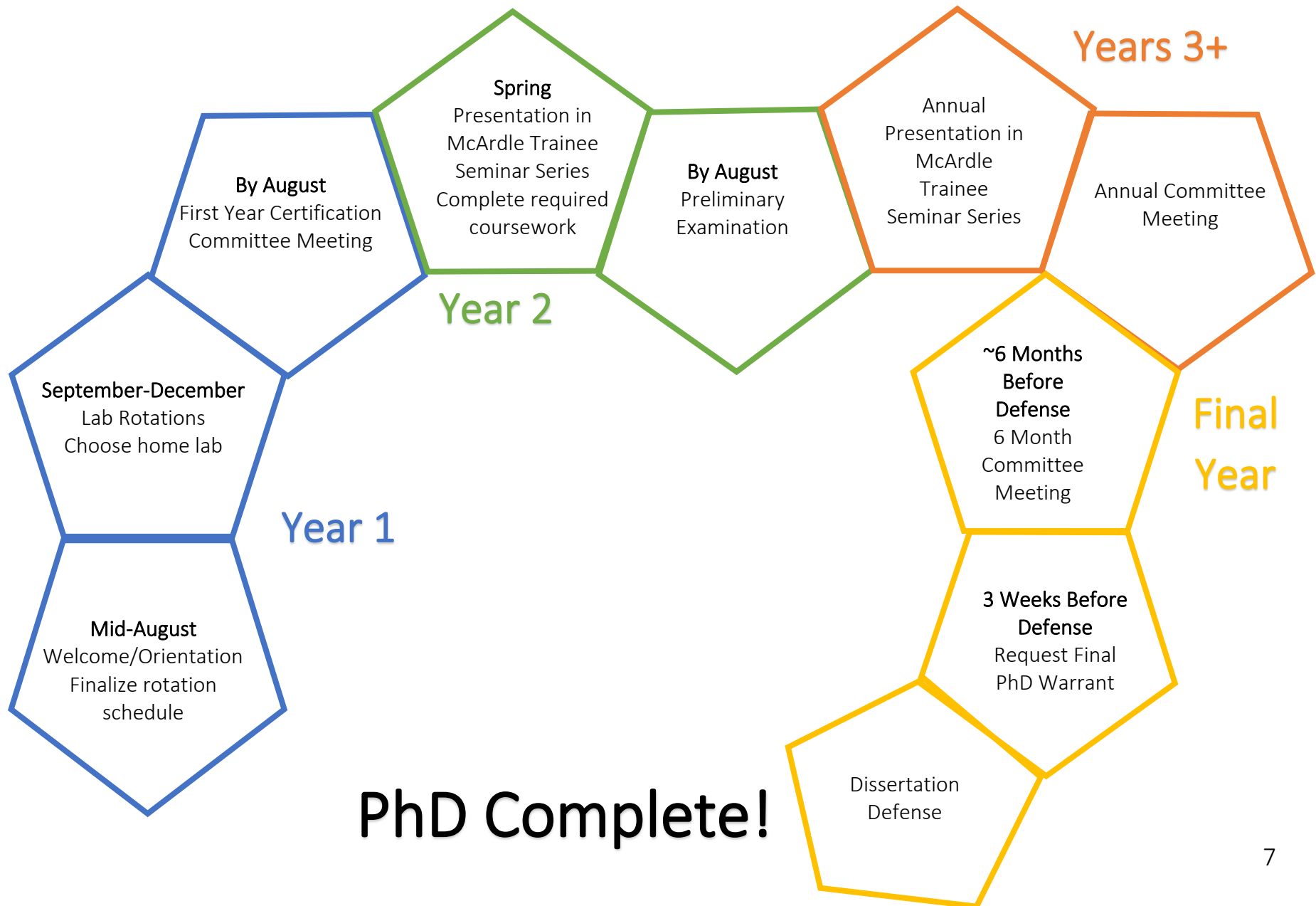


Table 6. Summary of Degree Benchmarks by Year

YEAR 1	
Mid-August	Welcome/Orientation, lab rotation presentations, enroll in courses, complete biosafety training, and finalize rotation schedule
September	Lab Rotation 1
October	Lab Rotation 2
November	Lab Rotation 3
December	Begin in home laboratory
By March 15	Establish a Certification Committee consisting of 5 faculty members and complete Certification Committee Notification Form
By May 15	Schedule First Year Committee Meeting and complete Committee Meeting Notification Form
By August 31	First Year Committee Meeting
YEAR 2	
Spring	Presentation in McArdle Trainee Seminar Series (students/postdocs)
By May 15	Schedule Preliminary Examination and Request Prelim Warrant
By August 31	Complete Preliminary Examination
YEARS 3+	
Fall or Spring	Annual Presentation in McArdle Trainee Seminar Series (students/postdocs)
By May 15	Schedule Annual Committee Meeting & Complete Notification Form
By August 31	Annual Committee Meeting
FINAL YEAR	
~6 months before the anticipated completion of the dissertation	Semifinal Report Meeting on the proposed dissertation to all members of the Certification Committee.
3 weeks before dissertation defense	Request final PhD Warrant
	Dissertation Defense: the formal, oral presentation based on the student's original, independent research.

See the [APPENDIX](#) for required forms for degree benchmarks

IV. Laboratory Rotations & Finding A Home Lab

The goal of laboratory rotations is to familiarize yourself with the breadth of research in the lab, the faculty-mentor's mentoring style, the laboratory environment, training culture, and its members (e.g., other graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, technicians, scientists, or undergraduate students), and finally, research projects available. You will complete **three** laboratory rotations during the fall semester before making a home lab choice. Each rotation lasts four to five weeks.

Complete Biosafety Training

When working in a laboratory on the UW-Madison campus, you are required to complete a basic biosafety course (Biosafety Required Training) administered by the UW Office of Biological Safety. Course information can be found [here](#). This training course must be completed **before** your first rotation.

Additional training may be required depending on each laboratory (for example, if your work involves the use of animals, human subjects, and/or radiation), training must always be completed before beginning the research. If you have questions about required training, speak to your faculty-mentor(s).

Welcome/Orientation

During Orientation, faculty-mentors who are hosting fall rotations will give 15-minute presentations about their research. These presentations, along with the faculty-mentor's website and publication list, allow you to learn more about the science conducted in their laboratories.

Since not all faculty-mentors who are hosting fall rotators are available to present during our Welcome/Orientation, we encourage you to not limit your rotation search based on these presentations. Instead, reach out to the [faculty mentors](#) listed on our website.

Schedule Laboratory Rotations

Following our Welcome/Orientation, you will schedule meetings with faculty-mentors to discuss potential rotations. To schedule these meetings, send a professional email introducing yourself, briefly explaining your interest in their lab, and request a meeting to discuss a potential rotation. Include a copy of your CV in the email and mention that your grad application can be sent to them by the Graduate Program Coordinator. Remember to use your full name and introduce yourself as a Cancer Biology graduate student. You are encouraged to meet with at least six faculty-mentors before finalizing your three lab rotations.

Maximize Your Rotation Experience

During each rotation, remember that you are not the only one evaluating a possible home lab placement. The faculty-mentor and their lab members are also evaluating you. It is important to be on time, attend lab meetings, and communicate effectively with the entire lab.

Things to think about during your rotation:

- Reflect on your past mentoring experiences and identify qualities in a mentor that promoted your learning.
- What is the mentoring style of the faculty-mentor/advisor? How much time does the faculty-mentor spend interacting with graduate students individually and as a group?
- Are there regularly scheduled meetings, both individual and group? Is constructive criticism given? Are ideas freely shared?
- What is the intellectual culture/environment of the lab—friendly, supportive, and co-operative? While in the lab, how interactive were the other graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, and/or undergraduate students? Given a choice, would current lab members choose this lab again?

Plan to present your findings from your rotation project at a lab meeting during the last week of each rotation. This will give you, the mentor, and laboratory members a chance to interact.

You should request an “exit” meeting with the faculty mentor near the end of the rotation. This is an opportunity for you to ask questions about the lab, e.g., possible research projects.

As you progress through your rotations, it is important for you to reflect on your experiences. You should think about which labs you can see yourself doing research in and having a successful graduate career. Even after the rotation is over, feel free to contact the faculty mentor if you have additional questions.

ACTION ITEM

You are required to notify the Graduate Program Coordinator after finalizing your rotation schedule by submitting the [First Year Rotation Schedule Form](#) prior to the start of fall classes.

Please reach out to the Graduate Program Coordinator as soon as possible if you are experiencing difficulties at any time. The Graduate Program Coordinator can be a great sounding-board to help you organize and clarify your thoughts. Don't be shy!

You will meet monthly with the Graduate Program Coordinator to discuss your rotation experiences. In addition, the Graduate Program Coordinator will ask you to complete a written evaluation for each rotation.

Making a Home Lab Decision

Home lab decisions are made by mutual agreement between you and the faculty-mentor. Following the completion of your final rotation in the beginning of December, contact faculty-mentors whose laboratories you are interested in joining to discuss possible dissertation-research projects. Give yourself adequate time to think about each rotation. If your rotation went particularly well, make sure to let the faculty mentor know that you had a good experience, but do not ask to join a lab until you have had the opportunity to complete all of your rotations.

During your meeting to discuss home lab placement, take the opportunity to fully understand what the faculty-mentor expects from you and what you expect of them during your PhD training. Faculty mentors will not make a decision until all rotators have completed their rotations. It is an important decision for everyone, so it is good that these decisions are made thoughtfully.

Be aware that The Cancer Biology graduate program is not the only program currently with students looking for home laboratories. Be timely about contacting faculty whose labs you are interested in joining.

ACTION ITEM

You are required to notify the Graduate Program Coordinator of your home lab selection by completing the [Home Lab Selection Form](#) as soon as a decision has been agreed upon.

In the rare event a home lab cannot be identified by early December you will need to meet with the Graduate Program Coordinator ASAP to begin the process of scheduling a 4th rotation.

Joining Your Home Lab

Once you have identified a home lab by mutual agreement with the advisor, you should start in that lab immediately. Don't wait until January to start.

When you start in your home lab, you should discuss with your advisor your travel plans for the upcoming holidays. It is key to discuss expectations for holidays and vacations with your advisor prior to making travel plans so that there is no confusion.

Note that as a graduate student, your schedule is **not** tied to the undergraduate academic calendar.

ACTION ITEM

Discuss your planned spring course selection with your new advisor. It is possible that your advisor will suggest an alternative elective course. You must enroll **prior** to the start of Spring Semester.

Vacation

Your vacation allocation for each fiscal year (July 1 through June 30 of the following year), will be 90 hours. Vacation may not be used in increments of less than one hour. Vacation requests should be made in advance and require supervisor approval. You should plan on using any accrued vacation time prior to the end of your appointment, as no lump-sum payment will be made for unused vacation balances, nor will it be carried over after the appointment end date. Other than periods when you receive approval to use earned vacation time, the appointment extends throughout the period noted above, except for holidays when State offices are officially closed.

Sick Leave

You are also eligible to earn sick leave. At the beginning of each appointment period, you will be credited with a bank of sick leave hours. The number of hours credited to your sick leave bank will be 96. Sick leave may not be used in increments of less than one hour. Unused sick leave will carry over from appointment period to appointment period only within the same department. Any combination of sick leave carry over and newly accredited sick leave cannot exceed 96 hours. In the event of an unanticipated absence, you must contact your supervisor before the start of your scheduled work shift.

Please see [Graduate Assistantship Policies and Procedures](#) for more information.

V. Certification Committee Meetings by Year

Year 1

1. Forming a Certification Committee

After joining a home lab, you will form a [Certification Committee](#) with the advice of your mentor. The Certification Committee consists of four members plus your faculty-mentor (PI). This committee must meet at least once per year. Your annual meetings with your committee are meant to help guide you through the process of earning a PhD degree.

Things to think about when forming your committee:

- What are the areas of focus for my PhD work?
- What areas of expertise, beyond my mentor's, will be helpful in developing my project?
- Will specialized techniques be employed and are there faculty who can advise me on the use of those techniques?
- What faculty can challenge my thinking in a constructive manner?

At least **three** members, including your advisor, must be trainers in the Cancer Biology Graduate Program and at least **one** member from outside your mentor's home department. If you opt to complete a Department/Program specific minor, you may choose to have one member on your committee to represent the minor department. **All committee members must be tenure-track faculty.**

ACTION ITEM

You are required to notify the Graduate Program Coordinator by completing the [Certification Committee Notification Form](#) by March 15th of Year 1. If anytime during your course of study, committee membership is updated, you are required to submit an updated form to the Graduate Program Coordinator.

2. First Year Committee Meeting

The goal of the [First Year Committee Meeting](#) is to discuss appropriate coursework and briefly introduce your research project/direction to your committee. The goal is to have all your committee members attend your annual meeting. At least **three** committee members, including the faculty-mentor, must attend. If necessary, you should plan to meet individually with committee members who cannot attend the meeting.

This meeting must be scheduled by **May 15th** and it must be held **by August 31st** of the same year. To ensure you have sufficient time to prepare, you are strongly discouraged from scheduling your meeting **before** July 1st.

A. By May 15th

- Determine a date for your First Year Committee Meeting based on the availability of your committee members. This can be done using polls such as Doodle polls (doodle.com) or When2meet (when2meet.com).

WARNING and Pro-Tip: Summers are busy travel times for meetings, conferences, and vacations. This can make scheduling a meeting tricky, so make sure to do this well in advance of the deadline (i.e., between the middle to end of the spring semester).

- Ask one of the committee members (**not** your mentor) if they are willing to chair the meeting. Include in your request a link or copy of the [First Year Committee Meeting Form](#) so they are clear of the expectations. The chair is responsible for guiding the discussion of the meeting and writing up a description of the discussion and outcomes on the First Year Committee Meeting Form.
- Submit the [First Year Committee Meeting Notification Form](#) to the Graduate Program Coordinator.

B. Before the Meeting

- Fill out the First Year Committee Meeting Form, including the names of your committee, the coursework, and whether you have created an IDP.
- Complete a Written Proposal: Provide a brief description (**not to exceed one page**) of your research project including a general background of the idea being investigated and a basic description of the approach.
- At least 10 days prior to this meeting, distribute your First Year Committee Meeting Form with pages 2 and 3 filled out, and written proposal to your Certification Committee. Remind the chairperson of his/her role.
- Prepare an oral presentation (not to exceed 20 minutes). Remember the focus of the first meeting should be on coursework.

Things to include in your oral presentation:

- A brief introduction of yourself and your education and research background.
- The courses that you have taken toward your PhD degree and any relevant courses that you took prior to graduate school that provided additional background knowledge.
- The courses that you plan to take and what requirements that they fulfill.
- A brief general description of your PhD project; the question that you plan to address and approaches that you will take to address that question.
- Professional development activities in which you have or plan to participate.
- Long term career goals (optional).

C. The day before the committee meeting

Send a reminder to your committee members of the time and location of the meeting.

D. Day of First Year Committee Meeting

Bring copies of the First Year Committee Meeting Form to the meeting.

NOTE: Failure to submit required information will result with an academic hold being placed on your account and could result in late enrollment fees of up to \$100.00 and delayed payroll. If you are having difficulty in scheduling this meeting by August 31, it is your responsibility to contact the Graduate Program Coordinator.

Year 2: Preliminary Examination

The Preliminary Examination consists of a written research proposal and oral defense of the written proposal. The proposal is based on your proposed dissertation research and is evaluated by your Certification Committee.

Purposes of the Preliminary Examination:

- Evaluate your understanding of relevant background material.
- Evaluate whether you have mapped out a sound approach to an important and answerable question.
- Present your ideas in a clear and logical fashion in written document and oral presentation.
- Answer questions in a straight-forward and compelling way.

You are required to schedule your Preliminary Examination by **May 15th** and it must be held by the conclusion of Year 2, **August 31st**. Writing your prelim proposal will be an iterative process involving multiple drafts, evolution of the underlying ideas and concepts, and fine-tuning and polishing to articulate your ideas in a concise and clear manner. Don't underestimate the how time-consuming this process will be. Along these lines, we encourage you to consider scheduling your prelim within the months of July or August. All Certification Committee members are required to attend this meeting. In special circumstances, a one-semester extension will be granted when justified in writing by you and your Advisor.

1. Before the Preliminary Examination Meeting

A. By May 15th:

- Identify a date for your prelim exam. Ask your committee members for a date before August 31st that will work for your meeting.
- Ask one of the committee members (this person should **not** your mentor, but should be a Cancer Biology trainer) if they are willing to chair the meeting. The chair is responsible for guiding the discussion of the meeting and will be responsible for writing up a description of the discussion and outcome of the meeting on the [Preliminary Exam Form](#). Include in your request a link or copy of the [First Year Committee Meeting Form](#) so they are clear of the expectations.
- Submit the [Preliminary Exam Warrant Request Form](#) to the Graduate Program Coordinator. The Graduate Program Coordinator will then request the warrant from the Graduate School at least 3 weeks prior to your prelim.

Note: The chair of your preliminary examination **does not** need to be the same as the chair of your First Year Certification Committee Meeting.

B. Begin working on the preliminary examination written proposal

Do this well in advance of the date of the exam. The Preliminary Examination proposal is written by you. You are encouraged to consult with your advisor and other colleagues during the planning and writing of the research proposal. Writing a scientific proposal is an iterative process and will undergo multiple drafts. You should expect to go back and forth with your advisor with new drafts throughout this process.

Format for the Written Proposal

The length of the proposal should not exceed 20 pages, double-spaced (Arial, 12-point, 1-inch margins), excluding title page and literature cited. Number the pages consecutively beginning with the title page. Adherence to this format will be considered in the final evaluation.

Table 7. Example Format for Written Proposal

Title Page	Descriptive title of proposal. Your name. Date, time, and location of the oral defense. Names of all committee members. Not included in page limit.
Abstract	Less than one page. Summarize the research proposed and clearly describe the objectives.
Specific Aims	Less than one page. State the broad, long-term objectives and describe concisely and realistically what the specific research is intended to accomplish and any hypotheses to be tested.
Background & Significance	2-3 pages. Briefly sketch the background to the proposal, critically evaluate the existing knowledge, and specifically identify the gaps the project is intended to fill. Concisely relate the specific aims to the broad, long-term objectives.
Preliminary Studies	Use this section to provide an account of preliminary studies by you (and/or the members of your laboratory with proper credit) pertinent to this application and/or any other information that will help to establish the experience and competence of you to pursue the proposed project.
Experimental Design & Methods	Outline the experimental design and the procedures to be used to accomplish the specific aims of the project. Include the how the data will be collected, analyzed, and interpreted. Describe any new methodology and its advantages over existing methodologies. Discuss potential difficulties and limitations of the proposed procedures and alternative approaches to achieve the aims. Provide a tentative timetable for the investigation.
Figures & Tables	Figures and tables (with legends) critical to the proposal must be included within the 20-page limit. You will have the opportunity to present additional figures during the oral presentation.
Literature Cited	Not included in the page limit. Each citation must include the names of every author, title, book or journal, volume number, page numbers, and year of publication. Make every effort to be judicious in compiling a relevant and current list of literature citations.

C. Prepare your oral presentation.

- The oral presentation should not exceed 20 minutes. It should give an overview of your research proposal. Discuss the content of the presentation with your mentor.
- The oral presentation should **not** cover every detail of your experimental plan. Those details are in your written proposal, which everyone has read. You're encouraged to have slides in reserve that might aid in answering questions following your presentation.
- Practice your oral presentation with your mentor, lab-mates, and fellow students.

Table 8. Example Format for Oral Presentation

Background	Background introduction of key evidence in the field that led to your question
Proposed model and Preliminary data	Key findings that support your hypothesis and your proposed model based on background information and your new data
Specific Aims	Brief reminder of the aims that you propose
Expected outcomes	What are the possible outcomes of the experiments that you propose?
Significance	Restate the larger picture of your question and how it addresses an important concept in Cancer Biology.

D. At least 14 days before the preliminary exam

Complete the written proposal and get approval from your faculty mentor to distribute it to your committee.

E. At least 10 days before the preliminary exam

- Distribute your finished written proposal to your committee.
- Distribute a completed Preliminary Exam Form to your committee. Remind the chairperson of their role.

F. The day before the Preliminary Examination meeting

Send a reminder to your committee members of the time and location of the meeting.

2. Day of Preliminary Examination Meeting

- Bring a copy of the Preliminary Exam Form and the Preliminary Warrant you received from the Graduate Program Coordinator to the meeting for the chairperson.
- The chairperson leads the meeting. The meeting begins with your 20-minute oral presentation. Then the question period begins. The chairperson will open the floor for questions. Your mentor will not be allowed to answer questions for you. Please allow a three-hour period for your exam (it is unlikely to last that long).

- At the conclusion of the question period, you will leave the room and the committee discuss your performance and fill out the written evaluation section of the Preliminary Exam Form. Then they'll call you back into the room and discuss the outcome. Their discussion is summarized by the chair when you rejoin the meeting.
- You are responsible for obtaining your Certification Committee's signatures on both the Preliminary Exam Form and your Preliminary Exam Warrant.

Note: Failure to submit required information will result with an academic hold being placed on your account and could result in late enrollment fees of up to \$100.00 and delayed payroll. If this meeting is not possible, it is your responsibility to contact the Graduate Program Coordinator.

3. After the Preliminary Examination

- Once all signatures are obtained, the signed documents should be delivered to the Graduate Program Coordinator within **one week** of your exam.
 1. Preliminary exam packet: bring a physical copy, or email an electronic copy to Hilary Berry (hilary.berry@wisc.edu)
 2. Prelim warrant: Collect e-signatures. Refer to [Instructions for collecting e-signatures on warrants](#).
- Shortly after the submission of a signed Preliminary Exam Warrant to the Graduate School, you will receive an email confirming your dissertator status for the following semester and admission to candidacy for your PhD degree.
- You have 5 years from the date of passing the Preliminary Examination to take your final oral examination/defense and deposit your dissertation. Failure to complete your degree within this 5-year period may result in you having to retake the preliminary exam and be re-admitted to candidacy.

Note: Dissertator status is a university fee status in which you have completed all necessary PhD requirements, except the thesis/dissertation. To reach dissertator status, you must complete all course requirements and pass your Preliminary Examination.

Years 3+: Annual Committee Meetings

The [Annual Committee Meeting](#) ensures that you are making satisfactory research progress toward the PhD Degree. At least **three** committee members, including your Advisor, must attend. If necessary, you should meet individually with committee members who could not attend after the meeting.

You are required to schedule your annual committee meeting by May 15th and it must be held by August 31st.

1. Before the Committee Meeting

A. By May 15th

- Identify a date for your committee meeting. Ask your committee members for a date before August 31 that will work for your meeting.
WARNING and Pro-Tip: Faculty schedules are still crazy. Do this well in advance!
- Ask one of the committee members who is not your mentor if they are willing to chair the meeting. The chair is responsible for guiding the discussion of the meeting and will be responsible for writing up a description of the discussion and outcome of the meeting on the [Annual Committee Meeting Form](#). Include in your request a link or copy of the Annual Committee Meeting Form so they are clear of the expectations.
- Submit the [Annual Committee Meeting Notification Form](#) to the Graduate Program Coordinator.

B. Complete a Written Proposal

In addition to completing pages 2-3 on the Annual Committee Meeting form, provide your committee with a concise written report (1-2 pages) describing your accomplishments during the past year and outlining plans, including anticipated plans for publishing.

C. At least 10 days prior to this meeting

Distribute your completed Annual Committee Meeting Form and written proposal to your Certification Committee.

D. Prepare an oral presentation.

Remembering that the focus is your research progress, plan a brief oral presentation, not to exceed **20 minutes**.

Things to include in your oral presentation:

- A brief refresher for your committee on the rationale and background of your project.
- Discuss progress toward previously described plans or new directions that your research has taken. Address your committee's comments/concerns/suggestions from your last Annual Committee Meeting form.
- Describe your accomplishments and specific plans to move forward.
- Professional development activities in which you have or plan to participate.

E. The day before the committee meeting

Send a reminder to your committee members of the time and location of the meeting.

2. At the committee meeting

Bring copies of the Annual Committee Meeting Form to the meeting for your committee.

Note: Failure to submit required information will result with an academic hold being placed on your account and could result in late enrollment fees of up to \$100.00 and delayed payroll. If this meeting is not possible, it is your responsibility to contact the Graduate Program Coordinator.

Semi-Final Report Meeting

Approximately 6 months before the anticipated completion of your dissertation, you must present a research report on your proposed dissertation to your Certification Committee. The goals of this “6-month” [meeting](#) are to inform the committee of the proposed content of your dissertation in detail and to seek the committee’s approval for that proposed content.

Your proposed dissertation outline must be approved by your advisor prior to being shared with your committee. The dissertation outline must be sufficiently detailed so that the committee can evaluate the questions addressed, the exact experiments used to address the questions, and any other information needed to determine that satisfactory progress has been made toward a PhD.

At least 10 days prior to this meeting, you are required to distribute the completed Annual Committee Meeting Form and proposed dissertation outline to all committee members.

ACTION ITEM

Students are required to notify the Gradate Program Coordinator of the meeting and designated chair by submitting the [Semi-Final Report Meeting Notification Form](#) at least 3 weeks prior to meeting.

Table 9. Sample Thesis Outline for Six-Month Committee Meeting

Title Page	Descriptive title of proposal. Your name. Names of all committee members.
Chapter 1	Introduction
Chapter 2	Paper 1 (published, submitted, or in preparation) Provide a chapter title that encapsulates the topic for the entire thesis
Chapter 3	Paper 2 Provide the paper title. It would also be helpful to include subheadings (A,B, C...) with the major findings of the paper
Chapter 4	Paper 3 (same as Chapter 2)
Chapter 5	Conclusions and Future directions
Appendix 1	Unpublished data Provide a title for data that do not fit into one of the paper chapters but constitute an important part of your thesis research. Each appendix could include single or multiple figures.
Appendix 2	Unpublished data (same as Appendix 1)

VI. Dissertation Defense/Degree Conferral/Dissertation Deposit (Payroll End Date)

The [Dissertation Defense](#) is a formal, oral presentation based on your original, independent research. Following the seminar presentation is a closed meeting with your Certification Committee. Per Graduate School policy, the Dissertation Defense must be completed within **five years** after passing the Preliminary Exam. The dissertation must be formatted according to the guidelines of the Graduate School. Instructions for preparing and electronically depositing the dissertation can be found [here](#).

Before Your Defense

- Keep Hilary Berry updated on your defense date by submitting a [PhD Warrant Request](#) at **least 3 weeks prior** to the meeting.
- About 3 weeks before your defense, email [Hilary Berry](#) with your defense title, headshot, and logistics of your defense (date, time, location, Zoom link).
- Distribute copies of your thesis to all members of the Certification Committee at least **10 days prior** to the scheduled Dissertation Defense. You should be prepared to provide printed-paper or electronic copies depending on committee members' individual preferences.

ACTION ITEM

Students are required to notify the Graduate Program Coordinator regarding their meeting and designated chair information by submitting a [PhD Warrant Request](#) at **least 3 weeks prior** to the meeting.

After Your Defense

- Collect e-signatures on your PhD warrant. Refer to [Instructions for collecting e-signatures on PhD warrants](#).
- Make sure that you make all your committee's corrections before you deposit your thesis. Review your thesis for proper pagination, spacing, font, numbering, etc. before calling it final.
- Follow all the Graduate School steps to depositing your thesis and completing your degree: <https://grad.wisc.edu/current-students/doctoral-guide/#defend-and-deposit-your-dissertation> and <https://grad.wisc.edu/current-students/doctoral-guide/#graduation>
- Be aware of the degree deadlines (<https://grad.wisc.edu/deadlines/>) for determining when you deposit your thesis

- Request a “*Degree Completion Letter for Graduate Students*”, which indicates that you have fulfilled the PhD requirements, since most future employers will require it. Complete and submit the request at: <https://registrar.wisc.edu/verification/>.
- You are required to provide the program with 3-4 printed copies of your corrected, final dissertation for binding. Bound copies will be provided to you, your faculty-mentor, and the program at the expense of the program.
- Update your contact information: <https://cancerbiology.wisc.edu/alumni-address-update-form/>.

You will remain on payroll or stipend support until the date of your dissertation deposit. Please keep Hilary Berry and your department payroll contact updated on the date you plan to deposit your thesis.

VII. STUDENT RESOURCES

Below is a list of some resources available on UW Madison’s campus for students. For additional resources, please reach out to the Graduate Program Coordinator.

Category	Resource
Academic	Cancer Biology Program Website
	Creating an Individual Development Plan
	Minimum Graduate Course Requirements
	Completing Your Degree
	Cancer Center Shared Resources for Trainees
	Graduate School Academic Policies and Procedures
	Data Science Hub
Funding	External Funding Opportunities Database
	Libraries Micro-course on Grants and Funding
	Grants Information Collection
Professional Development	Office of Postdoctoral Studies
	DiscoverPD
	Delta Program
	Professional Development Events
	For Future Faculty
	Beyond the Tenure Track
	The Versatile PhD
	Morgridge Professional Development Series
Jobs and Careers	Cancer Biology Job Opportunities Page
	UW Madison Postdoctoral Opportunities
Events	McArdle Events Calendar
	UW Madison Events
Well-Being	Campus Mental Health Resources
	Employee Assistance Office
	Graduate Student Support Services
	Report Hate or Bias Incident
	Sexual Misconduct Resource and Response Guide
	University Health Services
	Student Support Services
Extracurriculars	Get Involved on Campus

VIII. APPENDIX

Deadlines and Forms

Program Year	Form	Deadline	Link to Form
1	First Year Rotation Schedule	Mid-August	https://cancerbiology.wisc.edu/first-year-rotation-schedule-form-2/
	Home Lab Selection	December	https://cancerbiology.wisc.edu/first-year-home-lab-selection-form/
	Certification Committee Notification	March 15	https://cancerbiology.wisc.edu/first-year-certification-committee-form/
	First Year Committee Meeting Notification	May 15	https://cancerbiology.wisc.edu/annual-committee-notification-form/
	First Year Committee Meeting	By August 31	https://cancerbiology.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/503/2022/08/First-Year-Committee-Meeting-Form_2022.docx
2	Preliminary Exam Warrant Request	May 15	https://cancerbiology.wisc.edu/warrant-request-prelim/
	Preliminary Exam	By August 31	https://cancerbiology.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/503/2022/08/2022_Prelim_Form.docx
	Instructions for collecting e-signatures on prelim warrants	1 Week after preliminary exam	https://cancerbiology.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/503/2024/07/eSignature_student_Instructions.pdf
3+	Annual Committee Meeting Notification	May 15	https://cancerbiology.wisc.edu/annual-committee-notification-form/
	Annual Committee Meeting	By August 31	https://cancerbiology.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/503/2022/06/Annual-Committee-Meeting-Form_2021.docx
Final Year	Semi-Final Report Meeting Notification	~6 Months before the anticipated completion of the dissertation	https://cancerbiology.wisc.edu/annual-committee-notification-form/
	Semi-Final Report Meeting		https://cancerbiology.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/503/2022/06/Annual-Committee-Meeting-Form_2021.docx
	PhD Warrant Request	3 weeks before dissertation defense	https://cancerbiology.wisc.edu/warrant-request-phd/
	Instructions for collecting e-signatures on PhD warrants	After defense	https://cancerbiology.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/503/2024/07/eSignature_student_Instructions.pdf

Note: All student forms are centrally located [here](#).

Program Contacts

Hilary Berry

Graduate Program Coordinator

6435 WIMR II

608-262-4682

hilary.berry@wisc.edu

Eric Johannsen, MD

Program Director

6531 WIMR II

608-262-9952

ejohannsen@medicine.wisc.edu

Grievance Procedures

Updated [Grievance Policies and Procedures](#), including program contacts, are listed on the Cancer Biology Graduate Program's website.