



THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
MEDICAL GENETICS GRADUATE PROGRAM
GUIDELINES FOR STUDENTS IN THE MEDICAL GENETICS GRADUATE PROGRAM

INTRODUCTION

Membership in the Medical Genetics Graduate Program requires a serious commitment on the part of both the student and the Research Supervisor. Prior to entering their program, the incoming student is urged to discuss this commitment and associated responsibilities with their Supervisor. See: [Handbook of Graduate Supervision](#).

[Policy 85](#) stipulates that before commencing research projects, the student should receive a letter from their principal investigator (Supervisor) outlining research conditions and expectations. For a sample letter, see: [Student Supervisor Agreement](#).

1. STUDENT'S ADVISORY COMMITTEE

a. Membership:

- i. The MSc Student's Advisory Committee is comprised of a minimum of three faculty members, including the Research Supervisor. At least two of the members, including the Supervisor, must have appointments in the Department of Medical Genetics (including Associate Faculty Members).
- ii. The PhD Student's Advisory Committee is comprised of a minimum of four faculty members including the Research Supervisor. At least three of the members, including the Supervisor, must have appointments in the Department of Medical Genetics (including Associate Faculty Members). The majority of the Committee members must hold PhD degrees.

The Student's Advisory Committee will be chosen in consultation with the Research Supervisor and the Graduate Advisor. In accordance with the Faculty of Medicine policy for graduate students in an industry-supported environment, if a student is associated with an industry-sponsored project, the majority of the Student's Advisory Committee members must not have a personal association with the same industry sponsor. The student must work in the laboratory of their Supervisor for the majority of their time while in their graduate program.

b. Function of the Student's Advisory Committee:

The primary role of the student's Advisory Committee is to offer advice and encouragement throughout the student's training. The Committee is responsible for ensuring that the student generates high quality research. The student is responsible for taking advantage of the expertise and experience of their Committee members.

The MSc student planning to fast-track to the PhD program must arrange to meet with their Advisory Committee to receive their approval to transfer and to take the comprehensive examination. Prior to taking the comprehensive exam, the student must have their research proposal approved by their Advisory Committee. At the end of their program, the MSc / PhD student must meet with their Committee and obtain its written approval to write-up and defend their thesis.

c. Initial Advisory Committee Meeting:

It is recommended that the incoming student's Advisory Committee be established during the first term of their program. The September-start student should have their committee meeting before **May 30th** of their

first year. The January-start student should have their committee meeting before **November 30th** of their first year.

The student's Research Supervisor is Chair of the student's Advisory Committee meetings; and ensures that the Medical Genetics Guidelines are followed. The Committee is expected to have input into grading the student's progress in MEDG 548 (directed studies).

Subsequent Advisory Committee Meetings:

Following the initial Advisory Committee Meeting, the student must arrange for at least one committee meeting annually. Additional committee meetings can be called when useful such as for approval to take the comprehensive exam, write up the thesis, etc. It is important that **all** committee members be present at every meeting.

d. Documentation:

The candidate is expected to provide each committee member with an outline of their research a minimum of three working days before the meeting. This outline will be comprised of one to three pages of text and up to six tables of figures detailing progress since the last meeting. It would be helpful to also provide the Committee with an agenda.

A *Graduate Student's Advisory Committee Meeting Form* is to be completed by the Research Supervisor at each committee meeting and signed by all attendees. The signed copy of the form, along with the research progress report, should be emailed to the Graduate Program Assistant (medical.genetics@ubc.ca).

e. Supervision:

Both the student and their Advisory Committee are responsible for ensuring that the student's progress meets the requirements of the [Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies](#) (G+PS) and the Medical Genetics Graduate Program. The final responsibility rests with the student. The student has the privilege to change Research Supervisors and members of their Advisory Committee with the approval of the Medical Genetics Graduate Advisor and the supervisors involved.

2. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

The incoming student should normally have a background in upper level genetics, biochemistry, and statistics (biometrics). If the student lacks any of these prerequisites, they may be required to make up the deficiency during their first year in addition to the required graduate course load. The student must consult with their Supervisor before registering in any electives; and must forward a completed *Proposed Coursework Approval Form* to the Graduate Program Assistant by the first week of classes.

Core (required) courses for MSc and PhD Medical Genetics students:

- **MEDG 520** - Advanced Human Molecular Genetics (3 credits)
- **MEDG 530** - Human Genetics (3 credits)
- **MEDG 548** - Directed Studies (3 or 6 credits over two terms)
- **MEDG 549** (MSc) / **MEDG 649** (PhD) - Thesis Course

MSc Student: takes a minimum of 18 credits of core and elective courses in addition to the 12-credit MSc thesis, MEDG 549, for a total of 30 credits.

PhD Student: takes 12 - 18 credits of courses. The number of total credits required depends on the student's previous degree and coursework, and is subject to approval by the Graduate Advisor. The student entering PhD studies from a first-class BSc degree generally takes coursework as outlined for the MSc student. The student entering PhD studies from an MSc degree usually takes MEDG 520, 530, 548 and any other courses recommended by their Research Supervisor.

- MSc and PhD students in the Medical Genetics Graduate Program are expected to obtain a grade of 75% or above in each of the core courses, MEDG 520, 530 and 548.
- The student should be familiar with the UBC policy regarding [plagiarism](#).
- Course requirements should be completed during the **first two terms** of the graduate program. If the student needs to take a course after their first year, including auditing a course, they must receive permission from their Research Supervisor, Advisory Committee and the Graduate Advisor.

3. FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Stipend Amount and Duration:

The recommended minimum yearly stipend for a full time Medical Genetics (MEDG) graduate student is **\$22,000**. The student is expected to pay tuition from their stipend. This stipend may come from an independent studentship award and/or from the Research Supervisor's research grant. Admission to the Medical Genetics Graduate Program normally includes a commitment from the Supervisor to ensure that each student is supported to the recommended funding level. Exceptions to this policy may be granted under unusual circumstances. Financial support from personal resources is not acceptable as "funding" for incoming students in the Medical Genetics Graduate Program.

The duration of the annual stipend is normally two years for an MSc student and four years for a PhD student. After the two-year MSc and four-year PhD point, continued funding is at the discretion of the Supervisor. The Supervisor should inform their student in writing (with a copy to the Medical Genetics Graduate Program office) at least six months prior to the end-date of the student's stipend.

Funding depends both on satisfactory academic and research progress, as determined by the Student's Advisory Committee, and on the Research Supervisor's continued grant support. Termination of funding for other justifiable reasons must be approved by a majority of the Medical Genetics Graduate Advisory Committee.

Stipends for Award Winners:

If a student wins a Four Year Doctoral Fellowship (4YF), Rotation Program Award, or external award valued over \$14,000 and under \$27,000 (and no other top-up is received), the Medical Genetics Graduate Program recommends that the Supervisor top-up the award by at least \$4,000 over the minimum stipend (\$22,000) to a maximum stipend of \$27,000/year.

Examples of Recommended MEDG Student Stipends for Award Winners:

- i. Student wins 4YF (\$18,200 / year plus full tuition) funding through the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (G+PS). The student's Research Supervisor tops-up the stipend by \$4,700. The total student award is approximately **\$27,200** (due to variation in tuition rates).
- ii. Student wins a one-year Rotation Program Award of \$17,000. Student's Supervisor tops up by \$6,000 (to bring to minimum level of \$22,000) plus \$4,000 for a total top-up of \$10,000. Total Rotation Program Award and student stipend is **\$26,000**.

- iii. Student wins a one-year Canada Graduate Scholarship-Master's (CGS M) of \$17,500 from CIHR or NSERC. Supervisor tops-up by \$4,500 (to bring to a minimum stipend of \$22,000) and then a further \$4,000 for a total top-up of \$8,500. Total student stipend is **\$26,000**.
- iv. Student wins an NSERC Postgraduate Scholarship Doctoral (PGS D) award of \$21,000. The student becomes a 4YF holder and G+PS pays tuition. This brings the student stipend to \$25,300. Then the recommended top-up from the Supervisor would be \$1,700. Total student stipend is **\$27,000**.
- v. Student wins any award over \$30,000 - Supervisor does not pay student a top-up. This includes NSERC / CIHR Canada Graduate Scholarships Doctoral (CGS D) for \$35,000/year; NSERC / CIHR Vanier Scholarships for \$50,000/year; and University Doctoral Fellowship for \$30,000/year plus tuition.
- vi. Student wins any award below \$14,000. Supervisor brings salary up to the minimum stipend of **\$22,000** and tops up the stipend by \$2,000.

Other Funding:

Financial support from personal resources is not acceptable as "funding" for incoming students in the Medical Genetics Graduate Program.

Teaching Assistant (TA) Positions in Medical Genetics:

MEDG 419, 420, 421, 505, 520 and 530

The Medical Genetics Graduate Program offers six part-time Teaching Assistant (TA) positions that are posted in March each year. The Program encourages every student to TA once during their graduate career and thus encourages the Research Supervisor to not reduce the student's stipend the first time their student TA's. Whether funding from subsequent TA positions is considered "part of" or "in addition to" a student's stipend is at the discretion of the individual Supervisor and should be discussed between the student and the Supervisor before the student accepts a TA position (in Medical Genetics or another department). No student should spend more than twelve hours per week in employment at or outside of UBC that does not relate to their thesis research.

Duties: May include attending lectures, grading reports and exams, holding tutorials and group review sessions, posting course information on *Connect* and helping students on an individual basis, with specific weekly office hours provided when necessary. Some positions may also involve maintaining or improving web pages.

Teaching Assistants - Hours and Salary:

PhD students – GTA I; MSc students – GTA II

MEDG 520: five hours per week x 16 weeks (**80 hours total**): \$626.71/month (GTA I); and \$603.06/month (GTA II)

MEDG 419, 420, 505: nine hours per week x 16 weeks (**144 hours total**): \$1,128.08/month (GTA I); and \$1,085.51/month (GTA II)

MEDG 421 and 530: eleven hours per week x 16 weeks (**176 hours total**): \$1,378.76/month (GTA I); and \$1,326.73/month (GTA II)

For more information, see the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies [policies and procedures](#) for graduate teaching assistantships; and teaching assistant workshops offered by the Centre for Teaching, Learning and Technology (CTLT).

4. ACADEMIC PROGRESS

a. Advisory Committee Meetings:

The progress of each student working towards a Master's / Doctoral degree will be reviewed regularly by the student's Advisory Committee; and at least once each year by the Medical Genetics Advisory Committee; and the Dean of the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies. The student's progress must be satisfactory in their coursework, research, comprehensive examination (if applicable), advancement to candidacy (Doctoral students only), seminar presentation(s), and thesis / dissertation. A candidate may be required to withdraw if progress is not satisfactory.

Medical Genetics graduate students are required to meet with the Graduate Program Assistant once a year to discuss academic progress and next steps in their program; and any issues or concerns.

b. Transfer to PhD Studies and Comprehensive Examination:

The Master of Science student who has the approval of their Advisory Committee shall apply to the Medical Genetics Graduate Program to transfer from MSc to PhD studies within 18 months of initial registration in their program. As a prerequisite for transfer, the student will be required to successfully complete a PhD comprehensive examination. If the student is unsuccessful in this exam, they will remain in the MSc program with no effect on eligibility for acceptance into PhD studies after completion of the MSc degree. The comprehensive exam is not required for any student completing their MSc degree.

The student who is currently registered in PhD studies should take the comprehensive exam by 18 months and no later than 24 months of initial registration in their program.

Consult the [Medical Genetics Guidelines for the PhD Comprehensive Examination](#) for more information.

c. Seminar Requirement:

- **MSc Student:** is expected to give a departmental exit seminar on their research near the end of their program.
- **PhD Student:** is expected to give at least two departmental seminars on their work - a mid-point seminar at two to two-and-a-half years after admission, and an exit seminar near the end of their program.

d. Dissertation and Thesis Preparation:

The term "thesis" is used collectively to refer to both the Master's thesis and the Doctoral dissertation:

- A Master's thesis must demonstrate that the student knows the background and principal works of the research area, and can produce significant scholarly work. It should contain some original contribution whenever possible.
- A Doctoral thesis must contain a substantial contribution of new knowledge to the field of study. It presents the results and an analysis of original research, and should be significant enough to be published.
- Before proceeding to write the thesis, the MSc / PhD student must meet with their Advisory

Committee to review the proposed contents of the thesis with respect to scientific adequacy, and to receive formal approval to write-up.

- The Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (G+PS) sets the criteria for [dissertation and thesis preparation](#).
- Students should forward a draft thesis to G+PS for a [pre-review](#) early in the preparation stage; and also when the thesis is nearly ready for examination. The Doctoral thesis must be submitted electronically to G+PS for review immediately prior to transmission to the External Examiner.

e. Final Master of Science / Doctoral Oral Examination:

- The final Master of Science oral examination is overseen and scheduled by the Medical Genetics Graduate Program. See the Medical Genetics [Master of Science Thesis Defence Guidelines](#).
- The final Doctoral oral examination is overseen and scheduled by G+PS.

Notes for the Doctoral Student:

- G+PS *Nominations for External Examiner* form must be signed by the student's Research Supervisor and the Medical Genetics Graduate Advisor and submitted **at least two months** prior to forwarding the thesis to the External Examiner.
- Review G+PS "Selecting the External Examiner" section of the [Doctoral Exam Guide](#). Before the Graduate Advisor signs-off the *Nomination for External Examiner Form*, it must be forwarded to the Graduate Program Assistant for checking that the "arm's length requirements" have been met, and that the proposed external examiners have not examined other Medical Genetics doctoral students' dissertations in the last three years.
- Prior to submitting the thesis for transmission to the External Examiner, the student must submit to the Graduate Program Assistant the departmental [PhD Student's Advisory Committee: Approval of Thesis for Defence](#) form signed by all members of their Advisory Committee. In exchange, the Graduate Program Assistant will give the student the G+PS form / memo [Graduate Program Approval Form](#) signed by the Graduate Advisor. Please email the Graduate Program Assistant your supervisor's speed-chart code for inclusion in the memo.

f. Program Completion

- The student is expected to submit their [final](#) thesis electronically to G+PS. Once the thesis is accepted to CIRcle, the student's program will be closed.
- Every successful candidate for a degree must apply to [graduate](#).
- Prior to conferral of their degree, the student may request a "[Graduate Program Completion Letter Request](#)" from G+PS.
- Reimbursement of tuition: After completing their program, the student may request reimbursement of tuition. Contact the Tuition Fee Payment Office at Brock Hall, 2016-1874 East Mall, to request a refund of any remaining portion of the term's tuition fees. Only full months of tuition can be refunded.

5. GRADUATE STUDENT VACATION POLICY

Graduate students are entitled to three weeks of [vacation](#) (15 working days) from their academic obligations per academic year.

MEDICAL GENETICS GRADUATE PROGRAM CONTACTS

Medical Genetics Graduate Advisor

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