



## 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 SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE

##### a. Composition of the Student's Supervisory Committee

- The MSc Student's Supervisory Committee is comprised of a minimum of three faculty members, including the Research Supervisor. Half of the members, including the Supervisor, must have appointments in the Department of Medical Genetics (including Associate Faculty Members).
- The PhD Student's Supervisory Committee is comprised of a minimum of four faculty members including the Research Supervisor. Half 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.
- For a postdoctoral fellow (PDF) to join a student's supervisory committee, special approval is required. For service on PhD committees, the disciplinary Faculty and the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (G+PS) must approve; for service on MSc committees, the approval of the graduate program advisor or department head suffices. A PDF can only be considered for membership after the minimum requirement of three (3) members for an MSc student and four (4) members for a PhD student, at least 50% of them G+PS members, has been met; the PDF will be an additional committee member. Please check the [FoM Postdoctoral Fellows on PhD Supervisory Committees Guidelines](#) for further details.

The Student's Supervisory 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 Supervisory 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 Supervisory Committee

The primary role of the student's Supervisory 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 Supervisory 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 Supervisory 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. Committee Meetings

- **Initial Supervisory Committee Meeting**

It is recommended that the incoming student's Supervisory Committee be established during the first term of their program. The student should consult their supervisor for input as to what to expect from their first committee meeting (discussion of their progress to date and plans for thesis project going forward, etc.) and for suggestions as to how to prepare for the meeting. The September-start student should have their committee meeting before **May 30<sup>th</sup>** of their first year. The September-start Rotation Program student should have their committee meeting before **June 30<sup>th</sup>** of their first year. The January-start student should have their committee meeting before **November 30<sup>th</sup>** of their first year. The student's Research Supervisor is Chair of the student's Supervisory 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). **The grade is ideal to be communicated to the Graduate Program Coordinator by April 25<sup>th</sup> and will be inputted on the Supervisory Committee meeting form at the time of the committee meeting.**

- **Subsequent Supervisory Committee Meetings**

Following the initial Supervisory 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. Committee Meeting 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 is suggested to also provide the Committee with an agenda.

A committee meeting report form should be completed by the Research Supervisor at each committee meeting and signed by all attendees. Email the signed copy of the form to the Graduate Program Coordinator ([medical.genetics@ubc.ca](mailto:medical.genetics@ubc.ca)).

### e. Supervision

Both the student and their Supervisory 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 Supervisory Committee with the approval of the Medical Genetics Graduate Advisor and the supervisors involved.

## 2. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Incoming students should have a background in upper-level genetics, biochemistry, and/or 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 for any electives; and must forward a completed [Proposed Coursework Approval Form](#) to the Graduate Program Coordinator 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 Students** take 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 Students** take 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.

MSc and PhD students should be familiar with the UBC policy regarding [plagiarism](#).

Course requirements are to 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, the student's Supervisory Committee, and the Graduate Advisor.

### 3. FINANCIAL SUPPORT

#### a. Stipend Amount and Duration

Effective September 1, 2024, the recommended minimum yearly stipend for a full-time Medical Genetics (MEDG) thesis-based graduate student is as follows:

- MSc student: \$31,500
- PhD student: \$33,000

The student pays tuition from their stipend (the cost of tuition depends on whether the student is domestic or international, as well as on the amount of time spent in the graduate program). The stipend may come from an independent studentship award and/or from the Research Supervisor's research grant. Admission to the Medical Genetics Graduate Program requires 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 and a half years for an MSc student and five years for a PhD student. After the two-and-a-half year MSc and five-year PhD point, continued funding is at the discretion of the Supervisor. The Supervisor should inform the 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 on both satisfactory academic and research progress, as determined by the student's Supervisory Committee, and on the Research Supervisor's continued grant support. Funding termination for other justifiable reasons must be approved by a majority of the Medical Genetics Graduate Advisory Committee.

#### b. Recommended MEDG Student Stipends for Award Winners:

The general top-up guidelines are as follows: Students receive a \$2,000 top-up for awards in the amount of \$8,000 or less; and receive a "25% of award value" top-up for awards \$8,000 - \$39,999, with a cap at \$6,000 top-up.

See below for specific examples.

##### MSc

- MSc student wins a one-year MEDG Rotation Program or Entrance Award of \$22,000. Student's Supervisor tops up award by \$15,000. The total student stipend is \$37,000.
- MSc student wins a one-year Tri-Agency Canada Graduate Scholarship Master's (CGS M) of \$27,000. Supervisor tops up award by \$10,500. The total student stipend is \$37,500.
- MSc student wins a one-year BC Graduate Studentship of \$17,500. Supervisor tops up award by \$15,000. The total student stipend is \$35,875.

##### PhD

- PhD student wins a one-year MEDG Rotation Program or Entrance Award of \$22,000. Supervisor tops up award by \$16,500. The total student stipend is \$38,500.
- PhD student wins a MEDG Four Year Doctoral Fellowship (4YF-G) of \$18,200 plus tuition/year. Supervisor tops up award by:
  - \$20,355 for Domestic Schedule A and Domestic Continuing. The total student stipend is \$38,555.
  - \$20,800 for International Schedule A and International Continuing. The total student stipend is \$39,000.

- vi. PhD student wins a Tri-Council Canada Graduate Scholarship Doctoral (CGS D) or Vanier Doctoral award and becomes a UBC 4YF-T holder (funded through Faculty of Graduate Studies - G+PS):
  - o PhD student wins a Tri-Council CGS-D of \$40,000 stipend/ year for 3 years. Providing a top-up is at the supervisor's discretion.
  - o PhD student wins a Vanier (CIHR/NSERC) Doctoral scholarship of \$50,000/year. Providing a top-up is at the supervisor's discretion. G+PS provides no tuition support.
- vii. PhD student wins a one-year BC Graduate Studentship of \$17,500. Supervisor tops up award by \$19,875. The total student stipend is \$37,375.

### **MSc or PhD**

- viii. MSc or PhD student wins any award below \$8,000/year. Supervisor tops up award by \$2,000 over the minimum recommended stipend.
- ix. MSc student or PhD student wins a UBC Affiliated Fellowship of \$16,000 or \$18,000, respectively. Supervisor tops up award by \$19,500 or \$18,000, respectively, for MSc students; and by \$21,000 or \$19,500, respectively, for PhD students. The total MSc student stipend is \$35,500 or \$36,000, respectively. The total PhD student stipend is \$37,000 or \$37,500, respectively.
- x. MSc or PhD student wins a BCCHR graduate studentship in the amount of \$22,000/year. Supervisor tops up award by \$5,500/year over recommended minimum stipend. The total student stipend is \$37,000 (for MSc students) or \$38,500 (for PhD students) per year. If the value of the BCCHR graduate studentship is less than \$22,000 (partner awards), general top-up guidelines apply (see above).
- xi. MSc or PhD student wins Friedman Award for Scholars in Health: as per the G+PS advice, the student's sources of funding separate from the Friedman adhere to the minimum funding policy for PhD students where applicable
- xii. MSc or PhD student wins other award(s): Supervisor tops up 25% of award value for awards \$8,000 - \$39,999. If award value is \$40,000 or above, providing a top-up is at the supervisor's discretion. UBC G+PS provides no tuition support.

Additional information on award values for 4YF holders is in the [4YF Guidelines](#) on the Faculty of Graduate Studies website.

### **c. Other Funding**

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

### **d. Teaching Assistant (TA) Positions in the Medical Genetics Graduate Program**

The Medical Genetics Graduate Program offers seven 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 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 Supervisor and should be discussed between the student and the Supervisor before the student accepts a TA position (in Medical Genetics or another department).

### **TA Hours Per Week and Salaries**

MSc students – GTA II; PhD students – GTA I;

**MEDG 419, 420, 505:** nine hours per week x 16 weeks (144 hours total). Salary: \$1,403.64/month (GTA I); and \$1,351.08/month (GTA II)

**MEDG 421, MEDG 520, 525 and 530:** eleven hours per week x 16 weeks (176 hours total). Salary: \$1,715.56/month (GTA I); and \$1,651.32/month (GTA II)

**Medical Genetics TA Award**

Course Coordinators are asked to comment on the TA's performance of their duties. The Teaching Assistant Award Review Committee is composed of several members of the Research Day Committee. They receive copies of the student and course coordinator evaluations where the identifiers (the TA's name and course name) have been removed, ensuring an unbiased process of selection. On Research Day, the Medical Genetics TA Award in the amount of \$200 is presented to the TA Award winner.

## 4. ACADEMIC PROGRESS

### a. Supervisory Committee Meetings

The progress of each student working towards a MSc / PhD degree will be reviewed regularly by the student's Supervisory Committee. The student's progress must be satisfactory in their coursework, research, comprehensive examination (if applicable), advancement to candidacy (PhD students only), seminar presentation(s), and thesis / dissertation. A candidate may be required to withdraw if progress is not satisfactory.

### b. Transfer to PhD Studies and Comprehensive Examination

The MSc student who has the approval of their Supervisory Committee shall apply to the Medical Genetics Graduate Program to transfer from MSc to PhD studies before 20 months of initial registration in their program. As a prerequisite for transfer, the student will be required to successfully complete a PhD comprehensive examination. MSc fast-tracking students transfer and advance to PhD candidacy at the beginning of the next term following their comprehensive exam. 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 and advance to PhD candidacy within 20 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

Students in the MEDG graduate program are expected to give seminars on their research progress that they schedule in an appropriate venue (to be determined with their supervisor and/or the graduate program advisor). The graduate program coordinator must be advised several weeks before the seminar date so the seminar can be advertised to the MEDG community.

- **MSc Students** are expected to give a departmental exit seminar on their research near the end of their program.
- **PhD Student** are 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 MSc thesis and the PhD dissertation:

- A MSc 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 PhD 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 Supervisory 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 PhD thesis must be submitted electronically to G+PS for review immediately prior to transmission to the External Examiner.

#### e. Final MSc / PhD Oral Examination

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

#### Notes for PhD Students

- [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 the [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 Coordinator to check that the proposed external examiners have not examined other Medical Genetics PhD 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 Coordinator the departmental [PhD Student's Supervisory Committee: Approval of Thesis for Defence](#) form signed by all members of their Supervisory Committee. In exchange, the Graduate Program Coordinator will give the student the G+PS form / memo [Graduate Program Approval Form](#) signed by the Graduate Advisor. Please email the Graduate Program Coordinator your supervisor's speed-chart code for inclusion in the memo.

#### f. Program Completion

- The student must submit their [final](#) thesis electronically to G+PS. Once the thesis is accepted to [cIRcle](#), the student's program will be closed.
- Students who successfully defend their theses must apply to [graduate](#).
- 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.

## 6. NEWS DISTRIBUTION VIA THE FRIDAY EMAIL

Graduate students in the Medical Genetics program receive from the graduate program coordinator a weekly "Friday Email" with important information. They are required to review the information contained therefore to ensure they are aware of changes to policies in the program, and to learn about events in the Medical Genetics community.

## 7. MEDICAL GENETICS GRADUATE PROGRAM CONTACTS

Graduate Program Advisor  
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