Shippensburg University Biology Department
Graduate Program Policies and Procedures (updated 11/16)

The Shippensburg University Graduate Catalog contains the policies and procedures for the Shippensburg University School of Graduate Studies. It is your responsibility to be familiar with and adhere to these policies. A pdf version of the catalog is available at:

Several University policies of particular importance to note are:

*Minimum Academic Standards* - As a graduate student at Shippensburg University, you are expected to maintain satisfactory academic standing, which requires a cumulative QPA of 3.0 (B) or better in your total program of courses. If your cumulative QPA drops below 3.0 or you earn one C grade in a graduate course, you will be placed on academic probation. Students on probation must raise their QPA to 3.0 by the end of the next semester (or full summer term) in which they register. An additional probationary semester may be granted at the discretion of the college dean. If you fail to meet the conditions of academic probation you are subject to dismissal.

*Dismissal for C Grades* - You may earn only one C grade in any graduate course taken at Shippensburg University. This includes any courses that have been repeated and replaced with a higher grade. If you earn two C grades you will be dismissed from the university. A C grade earned at Shippensburg University may not be made up at another institution of higher learning for the same course.

*Dismissal for F Grades* - If you earn an F grade in any graduate course taken at Shippensburg University, you will be dismissed from the university. An F grade earned at Shippensburg University may not be made up at another institution of higher learning for the same course.

*Dual-Level (400) Courses* - Courses with numbers from 400 to 499 are open to graduate and advanced undergraduate students. Graduate students enrolled in 400-level courses are expected to meet the customary standards appropriate to graduate-level studies. These standards are reflected in the specific requirements found in syllabi for each of the 400-level courses. A maximum of 12 semester hour credits of 400-level courses may be applied to the master’s degree requirements.

*Biology (M.S.) Graduation Requirements*

Each candidate for a degree must complete a minimum of 31 semester hour credits. All candidates must complete BIO593 Biometry and BIO515 Scientific Communication in Biology. At least 25 credits must be earned in biology courses (including biology-numbered courses offered by the Marine Science Consortium at Wallops Island). A maximum of six credits may be selected, with advisement, from courses such as chemistry, physics, mathematics, computer science, or geography/earth science. Candidates simultaneously working towards secondary certification may count EDU440 Teaching of
Specific Requirements:

Master of Science in Biology (non-thesis track)

In addition to completing BIO593 and BIO515, candidates must complete 27 semester hours, including completion of a capstone experience consisting of three semester hours of Internship (BIO 609) or Graduate Research (BIO 605-606). Research can include field, laboratory, or library research, and is expected to culminate in a substantial final paper and/or presentation. Completion of the capstone experience should normally be undertaken during the second year of enrollment for full-time students, or after at least 18 credits have been accumulated in the program. If opting for internship, students are strongly encouraged to complete this during the summer. Candidates may count up to six total semester hour credits of graduate research and internship towards their graduation requirements (i.e., six credits of research, six credits of internship, or combination of research and internship). For students simultaneously seeking secondary certification, EDU 495 Student Teaching and Professional Practicum counts as the capstone experience, but does not count toward the biology credits required for graduation.

Master of Science in Biology (thesis track)

In addition to completing BIO593 and BIO515, candidates must complete 27 semester hour credits including six semester hour credits of Thesis I and Thesis II (BIO 612 and BIO 613). Candidates may count up to three semester hour credits of graduate research and three semester hour credits of internship towards their graduation requirements.


1. The thesis must be written in manuscript style format with any material not appropriate for a scientific manuscript (i.e., voluminous tables) included as appendices. The specific style will depend on the requirements of the individual journal to which the manuscript will be submitted.

2. An oral thesis defense, including a formal seminar on the thesis research, advertised and open to the university community, is required. The oral defense must be advertised by e-mail to all Biology graduate faculty and graduate students, and by signs placed in Franklin Science Center, at least one week (five work days) prior to the date of the defense. Thesis committee members must be provided with a final, edited copy of the thesis a minimum of one week (five work days) in advance of the thesis defense. The defense must be scheduled on a day when on-campus classes are in session.

3. Two copies of the completed and approved thesis must be submitted to the Registrar’s Office. One copy of the thesis will be housed in the Lehman Library; the other copy will be housed in the Biology Department.
**Thesis Guidelines**

Incoming students usually spend their first semester choosing a thesis advisor and research topic. During the second semester, the thesis committee is established, a research proposal is written, and the student presents the research proposal at a meeting of the thesis committee. The committee should meet and approve the student’s research plans before the student can register for Thesis I. It is the student’s responsibility to organize the committee meeting, complete the **Arrangements for Completing the Thesis Requirements for the Masters Degree** form, and return the form to the Biology Department office.

The thesis committee consists of three Shippensburg University faculty members, including the thesis advisor and two other faculty members chosen by the student. With advisement from the thesis advisor, the student may choose additional committee members from outside the university; however at least three Shippensburg faculty members must approve the thesis. While outside members may sign, they are essentially in an advisory role, and do not have the power to hold up or advance approval of the thesis.

Students completing a thesis may sign up for up to three hours of research credit. Appropriate activities for thesis research include reviewing the pertinent literature, planning the thesis research, and conducting research/collacting data. For a student planning to complete a MS degree within two years, research credit is usually awarded in the spring or summer of the first year.

Students generally sign up for Thesis I and Thesis II during their second year, when they are analyzing data that has already been collected and writing the thesis. Although both Thesis I and II may be taken in the same semester, students usually sign up for Thesis I the semester prior to the thesis completion/defense and sign up for Thesis II the final semester.

The thesis committee plays an integral role in the thesis process. Therefore, it is important for the student to keep thesis committee members informed on progress towards completion of the thesis. In addition to the initial meeting in which the student presents the research proposal, the student must also meet with thesis committee (either as a group or individually with each committee member) prior to registering for Thesis II. During this meeting, the student should describe progress to date, deviations from the original research proposal, and any impediments to completion of the thesis. The committee members must be satisfied that adequate progress is being made towards completion of the thesis, and sign the **Permission to Register for Thesis II** form, before the student is allowed to register for Thesis II. It is the student’s responsibility to return the signed form to the biology department office.

When the thesis is complete, the student should schedule a thesis defense. The defense has two components: a formal seminar on the thesis research, advertised and open to the university community, and a closed-door session with questions from the committee. At this session, committee members will often suggest final revisions to the thesis. Revisions must be completed and committee member signatures obtained prior to submitting the final version of the thesis to the Registrar’s Office.
Suggested timeline for thesis completion in 2 years (Fall start):

Semester 1: Explore topics, READ, talk to possible advisors. Choose an advisor and topic by the end of the semester, or early semester 2 at the latest.

Semester 2: Thesis proposal completed and presented to committee by early April. A public presentation of the proposal is strongly suggested. Make revisions as necessary and begin planning research activities. Schedule Thesis I for Fall of year 2.

Summer 1: Field/lab work to be completed largely during the summer following year 1. Planning and often initial work should be well underway by the end of semester 2. Begin writing the methods section while this work is ongoing.

Semester 3: Finish field and lab work, analyze data, finish methods section, begin writing the results section. A meeting with the committee should be scheduled for mid-semester (October) of year 2 to review data collected and make adjustments if needed. Committee should approve plans to schedule Thesis 2 for Semester 4.

Semester 4: Finish writing and formatting thesis. Schedule the thesis defense, ideally for 4-5 weeks before the end of the semester. Provide a complete, edited draft (usually revised several times with advisor by this point) to the committee at least ONE WEEK before the formal thesis defense. Note that this ‘final’ draft may still need further revision based on feedback from the committee during the defense. The final, approved thesis, with signatures, should be submitted to the Registrar’s office at least 30 days before your intended graduation date.

Summer 2 (if needed): Don’t let thesis completion stretch beyond this period. History suggests that the likelihood of successful completion drops precipitously after this period. Though technically you have until one year after registering for Thesis II to complete (i.e., December if you began Thesis II in January), it is inadvisable to wait this long. If the defense is scheduled in the summer, it must be during a period when classes are in session, and all committee members must be willing and able to attend the defense.

Graduate Assistantships

The Biology Department has several graduate assistantships that are awarded on an annual (or occasionally semester) basis. These assistantships provide a salary and tuition waiver. During each semester, full-time graduate assistants are required to work 250 hours (approximately 15 hours per week) and maintain full-time student status (9 hours of graduate [400-699] level coursework). Graduate assistants must work at least 90 percent of the required hours in order to qualify for the tuition waiver. Assistants working less than this amount will be required to pay for a portion of tuition. The criteria used for awarding assistantships to incoming students include previous academic and professional achievement and a personal statement of interest. Preference is given to students with an interest and potential to complete a thesis.
Graduate assistants who are adequately performing their work duties and making progress towards completing a thesis and obtaining their MS degree are generally awarded a second year of funding. However, this second year of funding is not guaranteed and is contingent on sufficient progress. Specifically, students desiring a continuation of funding should meet the following requirements:

1) Professional completion of assistantship duties as evaluated by the supervising faculty member(s).

2) Cumulative QPA of 3.0 (B) or better, full-time student status.

3) Progress on a thesis research project, as demonstrated by choosing a thesis advisor and thesis committee, writing a thesis research proposal, and presenting the proposal at a meeting of the thesis committee. As graduate assistantships are usually awarded in April, students who complete these steps by the end of March have the best chance of being awarded an assistantship for a second year. Thesis track graduate assistants are encouraged to follow the above timeline for thesis completion closely to maintain their GA award.

Graduate students seeking secondary certification are not eligible for an assistantship during the semester that they are completing their student teaching.

A Note on Internships:

In a recent survey of employers, internship experience was the top criterion in hiring recent college graduates. Internships provide a valuable opportunity to gain work experience, learn and practice skills and techniques, and network with people in the profession. Non-thesis students are strongly encouraged to conduct an internship for their capstone experience. Thesis students may also benefit from an internship experience. Internships are commonly offered by state (e.g., DCNR, DEP) and federal (e.g., USGS, NRCS) agencies, nonprofit organizations (e.g., Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, Nature Conservancy), and private companies (e.g., environmental consulting firms). Although faculty in the department will provide advice on internship opportunities, it is the responsibility of the student to find and obtain the internship and to fill out the appropriate paperwork.

Important Contacts:

Graduate Coordinator: Dr. Tim Maret, 717-477-1170, tjmare@ship.edu

Department Chair: Dr. Todd Hurd, 717-477-1401, tmhurd@ship.edu

Department Secretary: Ms. Joan Carson, 717-477-1401, jmcars@ship.edu