

MICROBE-HOST INTERACTIONS (MHI) STUDENT-HANDBOOK

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the MHI Graduate Program! In the next few years, the goal of our program is to give you the tools you need to develop as an independent thinker and learn how to perform hypothesis-driven research in the area of microbe-host interactions. In this handbook, you will find useful information about timelines, information about [required forms](#), information on how to assemble your committee and prepare for your qualifying exam and committee meetings, as well as resources you may need to access for your well-being.

ADMISSION TO THE MHI PROGRAM

Students can enter the MHI Ph.D. program following completion of one year of studies in the Interdisciplinary Graduate Program or the Quantitative and Chemical Biology Program (QCB), or completion of 1-2 years of coursework in the Medical Scientist Training Program at Vanderbilt University and completion of research rotations, as determined by IGP, QCB or MSTP.

After students complete the required rotations, they select a laboratory for their dissertation research by late spring or early summer of their first year. This is probably the most important decision made by a student at this stage of their professional education. The choice of a faculty mentor should be based on an informed analysis of the student's intellectual needs and career goals together with compatibility with the mentor. This choice may therefore be discussed with the MHI Program DGS (Dr. Hadjifrangiskou), the Division Chief (Dr. Skaar), and the IGP, QCB, or MSTP Director.

Another entry mechanism exists for students to join the MHI program. A faculty member may recruit a student to enter his/her laboratory via direct admission. Such students participate in the graduate program offered to each IGP student but may bypass the rotation period and enter the sponsoring faculty member's laboratory immediately upon the student's arrival at Vanderbilt. In this case, the mentor provides full financial support for the student's tuition and stipend costs. Occasionally, a plan involving one or two rotations may be created in collaboration with the BRET office when a student is considering joining the MHI program from another lab at Vanderbilt or is transferring from a program at another institution.

Credit Requirements for the Ph.D. in Microbe-Host Interactions

To be awarded the PhD, IGP and direct-admit students must complete a total of **72 credit hours**. Of these, **24 credit hours must be didactic**. The remaining **48 credit hours** are registered under **M&IM 8999** (Non-Candidate Research, aka pre-qual) and **M&IM 9999**(Ph.D. Dissertation Research; you register for this as soon as you advance to candidacy).

The 24 didactic hours can be fulfilled by the Courses below:

IGP Year 1 (G1) Required Coursework – Fall/Spring

IGP 300A, Bioregulation I – Core Curriculum, FALL [8 credit hours]
IGP 300B, Modules and Electives [4-8 credit hours] **Note that if you are interested in MHI as a program, the following electives are highly recommended, although not required:*

-- **Adventure Travel Guide to the Microbial World: IGP 8002-05 [MM1] Lacy**

This module will provide an introduction to the organisms of the microbial world, their adaptations to various ecological niches, and the benefits and challenges they can cause us as visitors. Emphasis will be placed on bacteria (with some attention to fungi and unicellular eukaryotes), the toolkit for studying them, and the joy of understanding how they work. Students will be evaluated with a diverse array of writing assignments and discovery-based tasks. While geared to a student who has never had microbiology before, there should be elements of interest for all levels.

-- **Viruses: IGP 8002-16 [MM2] Ogden/Karijolic**

This module will introduce students to the amazing field of virology. We will cover the replication strategies of selected viruses and mechanisms of viral diseases. We will also discuss the utility of viruses and the contributions of virology to prokaryotic and eukaryotic molecular biology. Special topics will include the use of viruses as tools for gene delivery, the development of vaccines against viral pathogens, the development of viruses as therapies for cancer, and the emergence of viruses in human populations.

Note that for MSTP students, 1-2 years of Medical School, with corresponding transfer credits will be counted as equivalent.

Note that for Direct Admits, the didactic hours can be fulfilled by additional electives.

IGP Year 1 (G1) and direct-admit MHI-specific Required Coursework – Summer

M&IM 332 Foundations in Microbiology and Immunology I, SUMMER [2 credit hours]
Crowe **Not required for students entering via the MSTP, but required for direct admits**

The objective of this course is to familiarize learners with core concepts in immunology, microbiology, and virology. The course is divided into 10 week-long sessions in which a core component of mammalian immunity is introduced, followed by an examination of how microbial pathogens evade or dismantle the immune response.

IGP Year 2 (G2) and direct-admit MHI-specific Required Coursework

Fall - Students must complete one or both of the following courses:

M&IM 328-2. Molecular Virology. [2 credit hours] Aiken/Karjolich/Ogden

This course focuses on interactions of animal viruses with their host cells, discussed at the molecular and cellular level as model systems. Special emphasis is placed on current literature and methodology.

M&IM 8350. Bacterial Pathogenesis through the lens of nanomachines [2 credit hours]
Hadjifrangiskou

The objective of this course is to provide learners with in-depth knowledge on core concepts of bacterial physiology in the context of pathogenesis. Students will become acquainted with core bacterial processes and how these processes are engaged and altered during infection, as well as changes in the environment (manmade and not).

Spring - Students must complete:

M&IM 8335 Research Proposals: Preparation & Critical Review, SPRING. [2 credit hours] Aiken/Skaar

An essential skill for scientists in an academic setting is the ability to obtain extramural research funding through peer reviewed grant applications. This course will provide students with an introduction to scientific writing with a focus on research articles and NIH grants. The course will be mixture of lectures, large and small group discussions, “Shut up and Write” exercises, and mock study sections.

Upon completion of this course, students will gain valuable skills and best-practices relevant to scientific writing while also assembling the research proposal portion of an NIH grant application focused on their thesis work. They will also gain familiarity with the NIH grant review process. [Click here to view the syllabus.](#)

-- **Grading for M&IM 8335** - Grading is based on attendance, class participation, timely completion of assignments, and having assigned writing samples prepared for discussion.

M&IM 8334 Special Topics in Molecular Pathogenesis, SPRING. [2 credit hours].

The Special Topics in Molecular pathogenesis is comprised of a series of “nano-courses” which are 2-week long and can be selected from [a menu of available courses](#). Students must select 4 nano-courses to fulfill the 2-credit requirement. Our Program Manager, Liz Roelofsz will complete the registration for students. Please note that the nano-course selection for STMP will vary from year to year, depending on student interests, the emergence of new techniques etc.

Microbe-Host Interactions Timeline/Roadmap



Selecting your Thesis Committee – Tips and Forms and Deadlines

Form submission deadline – May 15 of your G3 year

Guidelines for selection –

- The Ph.D. Dissertation Committee must consist of four to five graduate faculty members in addition to the student’s research advisor.
- Three or four of the thesis committee members, including the advisor, must have appointments in the PMI Department.
- The Graduate School requires that one of the committee members be an “outside member”, who is not part of the MHI graduate program. This can be a person who would bring unique expertise or perspectives to enhance your training experience. This person can also serve as an “outside-of-the-program” voice, should an issue arise. Please contact the DGS (Dr. H) if in doubt about whether a particular faculty member will satisfy the outside member requirement.
- Clinical faculty may serve on the Ph.D. Committee with approval from the DGS and the Graduate School. Faculty from other institutions may serve on the committee, but they must be approved by the GEC and be available to attend the Qualifying Exam, committee meetings, and Dissertation Defense, via videoconference or in person. The Program cannot support the travel expenses of non-resident committee members.

What to submit for approval:

- Each student must submit a **list of proposed committee members** (approved by the mentor) and an **Abstract/Specific Aims page** describing the thesis project. The format of the abstract and specific aims page should follow that of an F31 application, as learned in the required Research Proposals course completed in the second year of graduate study.

The GEC will evaluate the proposed committee for each student and may recommend substitutions or additions. The student may appeal this recommendation by writing a letter to the Director of Graduate Studies further justifying the original selections. Any real or potential conflict of interest, such as committee members who are also collaborating with the mentor, or authority relationships between mentor and other committee members, must be disclosed to the Director of Graduate Studies and a plan for managing such conflicts provided by the mentor.

When the proposed Dissertation Committee is approved by the GEC, the student and mentor are notified, and the information is forwarded to the Vanderbilt Graduate School for official appointment of each member.

Once approved, the Ph.D. Dissertation Committee functions to:

1. Conduct the Qualifying Examination.
2. Evaluate the student's progress and offer advice on the dissertation project during biannual Thesis Committee meetings.
3. Evaluate the written dissertation.
4. Administer the dissertation defense.

Qualifying Examination (QE)– Tips and Forms and Deadlines

The purpose of the Qualifying Examination (QE) is to determine whether a student is sufficiently prepared for full-time dissertation research leading to the Ph.D. degree.

Deadline: QE should be completed by November 30 of your third year. This allows you to take your proposal and submit as an F31 application with the December 8 deadline. *There is flexibility in this deadline, depending on a student's circumstances. Please make an appointment to see Dr. H if you or your mentor think the QE cannot be completed by Nov. 30.*

The examination is conducted by the student's Ph.D. committee. The exam comprises of the following steps:

1. A written dissertation proposal prepared in NIH format with the page limit adjusted to 10 pages excluding references. Please look at relevant examples here: ***The written document is due 7 days before the oral examination***
2. An oral defense of the proposed thesis. This comprises the preparation of 20-30 slide presentation that presents: The background and significance of the proposed project; the posed hypothesis and specific aims; experiments and results or prior work that form the rationale of the hypothesis; proposed experiments to achieve the proposed aims. Expected results; possible alternative outcomes; possible pitfalls in the approach and how they can be overcome; future directions ⑦ What will you do with the information you will garner from the proposed work?

The committee will ask questions to gauge the student's ability to ***pose a scientific question, formulate hypotheses, develop reasonable strategies to test a hypothesis, anticipate experimental outcomes, and accurately interpret these potential outcomes***. Acquisition of such skills is a crucial prerequisite for success in any scientific environment and must be developed and evaluated.

The committee will ask questions throughout this presentation for 90 minutes, about background, experimental approaches, protocol design, statistical analysis, anticipated outcomes and interpretations. Following the oral questioning, the student and mentor leave the room while the committee determines the outcome of the QE. After completing the Redcap Qualifying Exam evaluation online, the committee will invite the student and mentor back into the room to discuss the outcome with the student.

QE Logistics!

- Confirm that you (will) have completed 24 didactic credit hours in the term in which your QE will occur.
- Contact your committee members for availability (date and time)
- Schedule a room for a two-hour time block (Liz can assist)
- Complete and send to Liz the “[Request to Schedule Qualifying Examination](#)” form, as required by the Graduate School, at least two weeks prior to the exam
- Liz will obtain DGS’ signature and submit to Graduate School.
- One week in advance of your scheduled exam, send your complete Research Proposal to your committee members, including your mentor.
- One day prior to your exam, send your Committee Chair the RedCap evaluation link
- Liz will send the Committee the “[Results of Qualifying Exam](#)” and obtain signatures from committee members present (must have a majority) using DocuSign.

Passing the QE results in the student becoming Ph.D. Candidate. This is not an "automatic" step in graduate education. Rather, it is an objective of the formal examination to discern whether a student can go beyond a satisfactory performance in didactic course work and competently articulate hypotheses, outline research strategies, anticipate experimental outcomes, and provide well-reasoned and accurate interpretations. Until the Thesis Committee is satisfied that these objectives have been met, candidacy will not be granted. Disapproval of the proposal or an inadequate performance by the student in the oral examination may necessitate a redrafting and second defense of the student's proposal. Failure by the student to pass the QE on the second attempt results in dismissal from the program. Upon successful passage of the QE, the Ph.D. Dissertation Committee recommends the student for candidacy by forwarding the results of the QE to the Dean of the Graduate School. The Chairperson of the committee shall provide a signed copy of the exam outcome to the Educational Coordinator immediately following the QE.

Research Proposal Hacks

Before beginning work on the Abstract/Specific Aims page, the student and advisor should thoroughly discuss the direction that the thesis work will take and how the stated objectives will be achieved. The involvement of the advisor at this planning phase is essential, as it represents a critical component of the mentor-junior scientist dialogue that should continue throughout the dissertation research. Although a cooperative effort between student and advisor is strongly encouraged during the development of ideas, **it is the responsibility of the student to write and defend the thesis proposal. While the advisor may review the student's document prior to submission to the Committee, the document should primarily represent the work of the student, not the mentor.** Prior to the examination, the mentor will be asked to comment on the level of input provided to the student during the preparation of the proposal.

Length- The written Research Proposal should not exceed 10 pages in length, excluding references and Specific Aims page, single-spaced, with margins no smaller than 0.5 inch. The requirements below were adapted from the Instructions for PHS 416-1 (Application for the Ruth L. Kirchstein Individual NIH Postdoctoral Fellowship Application).

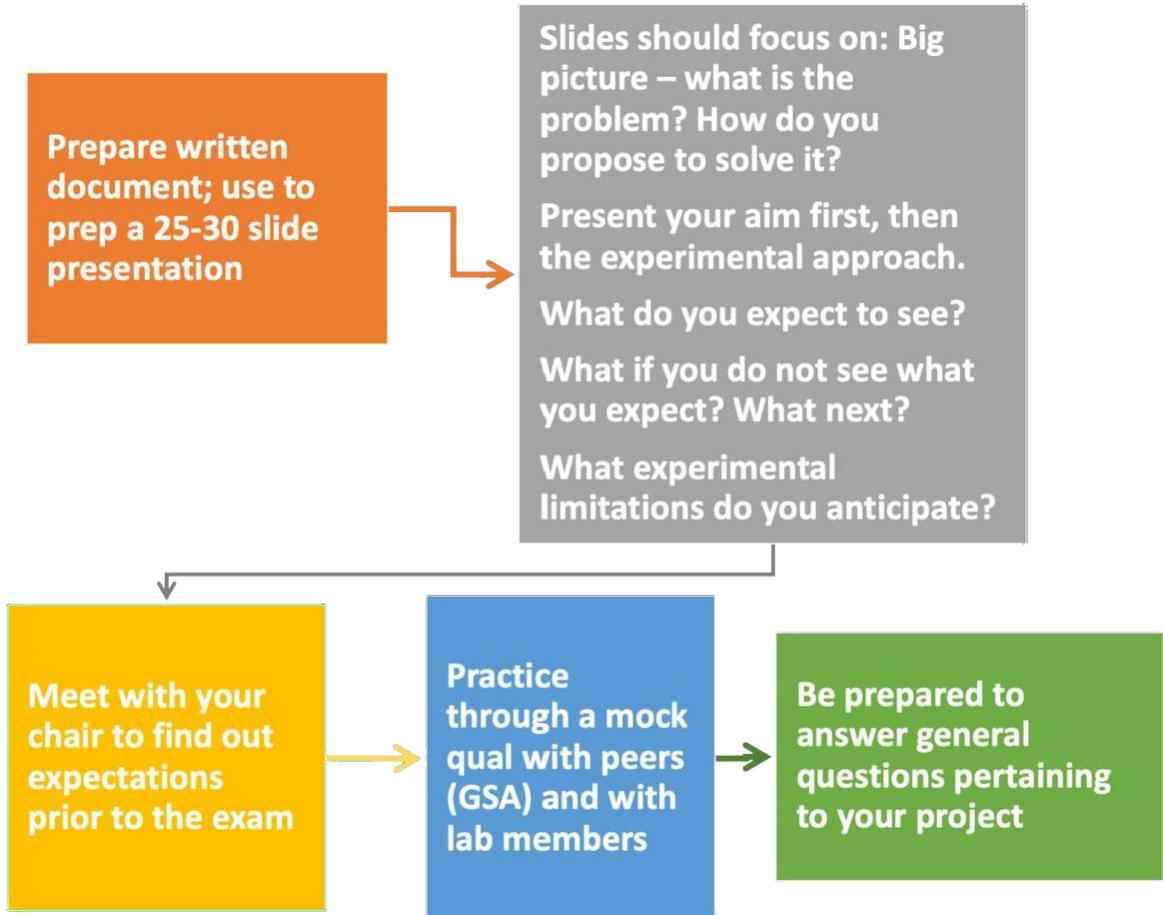
1. Title: Choose a descriptive title that states the overarching project goal.
2. Specific Aims (one page): List the broad, long-term objectives and the goal of the specific research proposed, e.g., to test a stated hypothesis, create a novel design, solve a specific problem, challenge an existing paradigm or clinical practice, address a critical barrier to progress in the field, or develop new technology.
3. Background and Significance (1-2 pages): A brief sketch of background material pertinent to the proposal, a critical evaluation of existing knowledge, and identification of specific gaps that the project is intended to fill.
4. Preliminary Studies (1-3 pages): The student should summarize their preliminary results that are relevant to the thesis proposal. The significance of these results should be interpreted in the context of the student's hypothesis.
5. Research Strategy (4-6 pages): Most research proposals have three specific aims, although 2 or 4 aims are also quite acceptable. You will need to adjust the length of the description. If we assume you have three aims, then dedicate 2 pages to the description of each aim. A good rule of thumb is to start by

thinking about why are you proposing the aim? What will its completion tell you? This is the significance. What experimental approaches do you propose to perform in order to achieve your specific aim? Describe each experiment and stand back and think: Do I have all the controls to allow me to interpret my data? What are good positive and negative controls? What do I expect to find? How do I evaluate the statistical validity of my approach? What are possible technical difficulties I will encounter? How would I overcome them? What if I do not see what I expected? Is this necessarily bad? What will I do with the data?

All these have to fit in two pages per aim!! So, please start early. Write out your thoughts. You may end up being over the page limit. Re-read the whole section. How can you condense the text without losing clarity of the document. Start early! Have it submitted for a mock review.

6. Literature Cited (no page limit): Use Endnote or another standard reference software to format this section. Each reference must include names of all authors (in the same sequence in which they appear in the publication), the article and journal title, book title, volume number, page numbers, and year of publication. Include only bibliographic citations. Follow scholarly practices in providing citations for source materials relied upon in preparing any section of the application.

Preparing your presentation:



BIANNUAL THESIS COMMITTEE MEETINGS

MHI students are required to have Thesis Committee meetings every six months after passing the Qualifying Exam. Students must identify a date and time that the Committee members will be available, reserve a room for the meeting, and notify the Program Manager of the scheduled meetings. Scheduling can be difficult with members who are very busy and travel frequently, so students must be proactive to schedule the meetings well in advance of the six-month deadlines. A minimum of four committee members should be available for the Thesis Committee meeting. In preparation for the meetings, students should prepare a written Progress Report and distribute this to each Committee Member no less than 7 days prior to the meeting. During the committee meeting, the student should describe his/her accomplishments since the previous meeting and outline plans for the next six months of work. Following the meeting, the student will be informed of the Committee's opinion of their progress by the Committee Chair in writing, including any suggestions for improvement. The Research grade will also be determined by the Thesis Committee, in collaboration with the Research Advisor. Students are required to schedule committee meetings before the end of the Fall (Nov to mid-Dec) and Spring (April to early May) semesters so the Research grades for those terms can be determined at the committee meetings.

Note: failure to schedule committee meetings in a timely manner may result in an Unsatisfactory Research grade, which is recorded on the student's transcript. In circumstances such as an extended absence owing to medical reasons, parental leave, or participation in a professional internship, the student shall notify the DGS and request an extension.

Prior to each committee meeting the student must initiate a Redcap evaluation survey link to be sent to the Committee Chair. The Chair will enter the Committee's evaluation of the student's performance at the end of the meeting so the student will have access to the evaluation. Subsequently, the student will send the Chair another link for uploading of the Committee Meeting Summary letter.

Instructions for Research Progress Reports

Please refer to this document as a [template](#):

Preparing your Committee Meeting Presentation

Follow your qualifying exam rubric, but now, instead of presenting all the aims, please present the aim(s) for which you have accomplished work and would like your committee's feedback on.

Please treat your committee meeting as a free expert consultation and not as an exam. Your committee is there to guide you and help you succeed.

Grading Process for 9999 Research Course

Passing of the Qualifying Exam results in formal advancement to Ph.D. candidacy, after which the student is enrolled in 9999 research course each term (winter, spring, and summer). The grade is based on an assessment of whether a student has made sufficient progress toward the Ph.D. in that term and is by nature subjective. To ensure that the grading is performed as fairly as possible, MHI has established that 9999 grades are to be determined by the dissertation committee rather than the advisor alone. Although 9999 grades are not used to calculate the GPA, they are included on the transcript and thus remain part of the student's academic record.

Three U grades automatically result in dismissal from graduate school. *Failure to schedule biannual committee meetings on time may constitute grounds for assigning a U grade for 9999.*

Milestones for Student Development (MSD)

MSD is a series of required tasks designed to encourage students to be proactive in career planning and development. Each activity should also be described in the corresponding biannual progress report and discussed at the committee meeting.

1st Committee Meeting: connect to committee members and the DGS via LinkedIn and develop a biosketch available for public view.

2nd Meeting: begin the meeting with a 3-minute elevator speech on their work (one slide permitted but not required). Students are encouraged to use this as an incentive to participate in the annual 3-Minute Thesis competition.

3rd Meeting: Student provides a list of 3 faculty members who have been asked to write letters of recommendation for the next stage of their career. Goal is to begin to develop relationships with the respective faculty early on.

4th Meeting: Student discusses one or more options being considered for the next step in their career.

5th Meeting: Student presents a detailed plan for approaching the next career following completion of the Ph.D.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION CHART

Sometimes conflict may arise between a student and their mentor or a member(s) of their committee. Please follow these steps:



MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS RESOURCES

Your health and wellness should always be number 1.

Please look over these [resources](#)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Parental Leave Policy (LOA):

https://gradschool.vanderbilt.edu/current_students/parental_leave.php

Student Health Center: 1210 Stevenson Center Lane, (615) 322-2427

<https://www.vumc.org/student-health>

Project Safe Hotline - (615) 322-SAFE (7233) - staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week

LGBTQI Life: (615) 322-3330 - <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lgbtqi/>

Equal Employment Opportunity – (615) 343-9336- Nondiscrimination/anti-harassment, faculty/staff accommodations, and affirmative action programs pursuant to Vanderbilt’s requirement as a federal contractor.

Student Center for Social Justice and Identity: (615) 322-5089 -

<https://www.vanderbilt.edu/scsji/>

Office of Student Care Coordination: Rand Hall, Suite 305, (615) 343-9355

<https://www.vanderbilt.edu/carecoordination/>

University Counseling Center: 2015 Terrace Place, (615) 322-2571

<https://www.vanderbilt.edu/ucc/>

Center for Student Wellbeing: 1211 Stevenson Center Lane, (615) 322-0480,

healthydores@vanderbilt.edu, <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/healthydores/>

Title IX and Student Discrimination: (615) 343-9004 - gender equity and sexual misconduct,

<https://www.vanderbilt.edu/title-ix/>

Vanderbilt Psychiatric Hospital “Respond” – (615) 327-7000

Vanderbilt Recreation and Wellness Center - (615) 343-6627

Student Access Services - (615) 343-9727- disability services for qualified students,

https://www.vanderbilt.edu/student-access/how_to/get_accommodations/index.php

Project Safe Hotline: (615) 322-SAFE (7233) - staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week

Student of Concern Report:

https://cm.maxient.com/reportingform.php?VanderbiltUniv&layout_id=4

The Vanderbilt Honor System: https://www.vanderbilt.edu/student_handbook/the-honor-system/

The ASPIRE Program (Career Development): <https://medschool.vanderbilt.edu/career-development/>

The Vanderbilt Graduate School: <https://gradschool.vanderbilt.edu/>

The Office of Biomedical Research Education and Training (BRET): <https://medschool.vanderbilt.edu/bret/>

The Interdisciplinary Graduate Program: <https://medschool.vanderbilt.edu/igp/>

Vanderbilt Training Grants: <https://medschool.vanderbilt.edu/bret/training-grant-support/>

PREPARING YOUR DISSERTATION

YES! You are here! You should be thinking about this dissertation document throughout your research training and not only during the last 4 months of your graduate student life.

It might be argued that the writing of the dissertation begins the day a student chooses a topic for thesis research. So as your DGS, I highly encourage you to look at other students' dissertations (examples can be found here:) and begin thinking of your chapters. All dissertations have an Introduction and a Conclusions/Future Directions chapter. You can start with the introduction and can alter it as your project evolves. Your chapters will be completed as you are completing your specific aims. Being proactive about learning the format and beginning to put thoughts on paper early on will be very helpful.

LOGISTICS -

Before the actual document is prepared, the student should obtain the current version of the Graduate School's official instructions for dissertations.

At the committee meeting prior to setting the thesis defense examination the student should formally request permission to defend.

During the development of the dissertation, the mentor and student must review and edit the text together on a chapter-by-chapter basis. ***In general, the dissertation should contain only the original research of the student.*** In instances in which some aspects of the work have already been published, please request the relevant permissions to reproduce from the journal in which you published. Most journals will allow you to do this. Also please clearly indicate in the chapter's title page the name of the journal in which your work has appeared.

There is such a thing as self-plagiarism! It is disallowed for the student to copy and paste their published journal article. Please be mindful of that!

In cases where work was performed collaboratively, please indicate which experiments that were performed by other individuals with appropriate attribution. It is not acceptable to include entire bodies of work (e.g., from publications) in which the student played a minor part as chapters in the dissertation.

Once both the mentor and the student concur that the dissertation is complete, a

copy should be provided to each member of the Thesis Committee. The committee members should be asked to evaluate a document that the student and thesis advisor concur is the final draft. This final draft should be distributed to the committee **at least two weeks** before the defense. The Dissertation Defense includes the written dissertation and an oral defense. Successful completion of both requirements, followed by approval of the dissertation by the Graduate School, results in awarding of the Ph.D. degree.

Each student must notify the Program Manager (Liz Roelofs) of the dissertation title, defense date, time, and place **at least two weeks** in advance of the defense to allow time for notification of the Graduate School. The scheduling of the defense must be done in communication with the mentor, committee members, and Liz to avoid conflicts.

Dissertation Defense

The MHI Ph.D. defense is divided into two parts. In the first part (Closed Defense), the student will submit their written dissertation to the committee two weeks before the scheduled meeting. The dissertation must have been read and approved by the mentor prior to distribution. The Closed Defense (CD) must be scheduled such that a minimum of four committee members can attend. Upon receipt of the dissertation, the committee will immediately examine the document (within 1-2 days), and if it is incomplete or of poor quality, the Chair will notify the student that the meeting must be cancelled, and the student will have to reschedule it *after submitting an improved version of the dissertation*. The Chair will communicate to the student the changes that are necessary.

If, after initially examining the dissertation, the committee decides to proceed with the CD, the committee will read the dissertation thoroughly with the goal of informing the changes of improvements that will be necessary for approval. At least one day prior to the CD, the student shall send the Chair a Redcap link for submitting the defense evaluation. At the CD, the student will also be examined orally on their understanding of the research and familiarity with the relevant literature. The student shall consult the committee Chair in advance for specifics regarding the format of the meeting, which will normally require a presentation.

Permission to schedule the Open Defense (OD) seminar will be determined by a simple majority vote of the committee members at the CD, including the mentor. If the vote is a tie, permission will not be granted. If the dissertation is satisfactory (i.e. deficiencies are minor and the student can easily correct these) and the student demonstrates satisfactory knowledge of their research, permission to schedule the

OD will be granted. In the event permission is not granted, the committee will communicate the deficiencies that must be corrected, including changes in the dissertation, prior to scheduling the OD.

Scheduling the Open Defense. The Graduate School must be formally notified by submission of an official form two weeks in advance of the scheduled OD. *Because formal permission to schedule the OD is not granted until the CD, the OD should not be scheduled any earlier than two weeks after the CD.* One week prior to the OD, the student shall submit the final version of the dissertation to the committee, with changes from the original version clearly indicated (e.g. via the “compare documents” or markup feature in MS word), which can be done electronically. The student should bring the title pages to the defense for signature. Following the OD there will be a brief meeting during which the committee signs the Graduate School form and, if approved, the Dissertation Title Page.

Student Defense Scheduling Process

1. Inform Liz of the date, time, and room of your scheduled CD meeting.
2. Two weeks before your CD, send your Dissertation to all your Committee Members. If they request a printed version, provide that as well.
3. You may unofficially schedule a date, time, and room for your OD at any time, but this is not binding, and the DGS will not sign the form communicating the defense scheduling to the Graduate School until approval at the CD. (Implication: students should be very careful about encouraging relatives to book travel until scheduling the CD is approved.) The OD should not be scheduled for a date earlier than two weeks following the CD to allow the required advance notice to the Graduate School.
4. Notify Liz when the committee has approved the scheduling of the OD. There is a form that must be completed and signed by the DGS prior to submission to the Graduate School for the Open Defense to be officially scheduled. While the MHI Program requires completion of both the Closed and Open Defenses, the Graduate School recognizes the Open Defense as the official PhD requirement.
5. Send your revised Dissertation to your Committee one week in advance of the OD.

Training Grants and MHI requirements

Upon entry into the MHI Program, a student may be selected for appointment to an NIH training grant. Each student should meet with the Director of the corresponding training grant to be informed of any specific academic requirements. When the requirements of the specific Training Grant conflict with the MHI Program requirements, the student should discuss the situation with their PI, Training Grant Director, and Director of Graduate Studies to resolve the conflict.

Teaching Opportunities

Teaching is a useful component of graduate training and can help students develop skills that are invaluable for careers of many kinds. Currently, there is no specific teaching requirement for earning the Ph.D. in the MHI program. To enhance the graduate education experience, the program encourages Ph.D. candidates to participate as teaching assistants (TAs) in various undergraduate and graduate-level courses. Students should consult their research advisor for guidance regarding time management before entering into teaching commitments that may be time consuming.

SEMINARS

Effective communication is essential for progress in science and nearly any scholarly endeavor. Seminars are the ideal forum for scientific debate and for the development and refinement of communication skills. Attendance and participation in seminars is essential for honing such skills, for becoming informed on important topics, and most importantly, for learning by example how to construct and test a hypothesis.

Graduate students in MHI are expected to:

1. Attend and participate in the Molecular Pathogenesis Training (**MPT**) seminar series. Department faculty and staff have carefully organized the RIP seminar series to provide students with a forum to present their research accomplishments. The experience is critical for learning to develop and present scientific seminars (25-50 minutes in length).
2. Attend and participate in **Departmental Retreats and Symposia**. The

retreats provide an opportunity to develop skills for presentation of research at scientific meetings (both talks and posters).

3. Regularly attend seminars in areas related to their scientific interests. The PMI seminar series hosts speakers in both basic and clinical research disciplines. Students are also encouraged to attend the Discovery Lectures as well as lectures in other areas relevant to their research.

Students are also expected to fulfill all training requirements of the particular Training Grant to which they are appointed, including courses and seminars.

MPT Seminar Guidelines

- **The student shall submit an abstract via email to Dr. Sebastian Joyce two weeks prior to the scheduled date of presentation.** The Abstract must be reviewed and approved by the mentor prior to submission. Submission of the abstract is the student's responsibility and that they will not receive multiple reminder emails. The format is shown on the following two pages.
- **For the first presentation, students should give a 25-minute talk, two of which may be given during the hour. A student's second MPT talk should be 45 minutes in length.** These time limitations permit questions during and after the seminar within the one-hour time frame. While the seminar should be moderated by the host (see below), it is also the presenter's responsibility to control the flow of his/her seminar. Thus, it is important to allow sufficient time for pertinent questions during the seminar, but the speaker should also minimize irrelevant tangents that are not pertinent to the seminar.
- **Speakers are to be hosted by the previous week's MPT speaker.** For example, if John Smith is presenting in week 1 and I am presenting in week 2, it is John's responsibility to introduce me and moderate questions for my presentation. Hosting duties include introducing the speaker (provide a brief background of the presenter's education, etc.), and regulating the flow of questions during the presentation and post-seminar session. A good moderator maintains the "flow" of the seminar and enhances the effectiveness of the presentation. Because some faculty may interrupt with questions, presenters and moderators may wish to designate stopping points for questions (particularly in 45-minute talks) and may postpone entertaining to some questions in the interest of time.

MPT Abstract Format:

Molecular Pathogenesis Training

Seminar Series

THURSDAY, DD Month 2019

Time: 1:00 PM • Place: MRB III 1220

First & Last Name

PhD Candidate, the Last Name Laboratory

**A title of ~10 words/100 characters with spaces
not to run beyond two line; no font or size change**

You should care because ...

- State the question/hypothesis being addressed/tested: no more than 150 characters including spaces
- State what you discovered: no more than 150 characters including spaces
- State a conclusion by connecting bullet point 2 with bullet point 1: no more than 150 characters including spaces

- Consult last several announcements both for the textual and graphical abstracts.

Examples:

Cover art: 19 April 2007 issue of *Cell Host Microbe*; vol 1, issue 2.

Graphical abstract: 16 August 2016 issue of *Cell Reports*; vol 16, page 1800.

- Provide a simple graphical abstract that captures a seminal finding and/or the conclusion/implication/s of your findings.
- Make your best attempt. I can help if you give me something to work with.

Additional instructions from Dr. Joyce:

I can make specific recommendations when I get the material as a Word document. This allows me to work with ‘track changes’ on. It would be ideal if you can provide the graphical abstract as a power point slide; this will allow me to suggest or make changes as need be.

If this is an original art, then there is no need for acknowledgement. But if the art work is an adaptation or a replication of a published matter, please include an abbreviated citation in the following format (example):

NE Putnam, et al. [OR NE Putnam & J Cassat] *Abbreviated Journal title* **Vol:** inclusive pages; year. If, however, this is a modified art from a published work/s, then say: Adapted from NE Putnam, et al. [OR NE Putnam & J Cassat] *Abbreviated Journal title* **Vol:** inclusive pages; year.

Please include your mentor in all correspondence regarding this matter so that they will be fully aware of our exchanges.

Graduate Student Association(GSA)

The PMI Graduate Student Association consists of students in the MHI and Molecular Pathology and Immunology (MPI) programs. GSA officers are elected annually by graduate students in the Program. The primary goals of the GSA are to improve communication between the student body and the program GECs, to help prepare students for their Qualifying Exams, and to foster communication and social interactions among our students.

The GSA works closely with the DGSs and the GECs to communicate student concerns and suggestions. The GSA executive council attends at least two GEC meetings annually to offer ideas on many aspects of departmental life, including coursework organization, the Qualifying Exams, and scientific retreats.

To assist students with the Qualifying Exam, the GSA administers practice exams in which the third-year students present their thesis proposal to the student body and field questions from senior students.

Finally, the GSA works to maintain an enjoyable and supportive social atmosphere within the MHI and MPI Programs. Student-only gatherings with refreshments are held and student nights out are also organized. The GSA may also coordinate outreach events to improve departmental involvement in the greater Nashville community (e.g. Habitat for Humanity). Students are encouraged to participate in GSA-sponsored activities, but they should be careful to avoid participating in extracurricular activities to an extent that would undermine the effectiveness of their research training and progress.

The Honor System

The essence of graduate studies in a professional school setting is the student's maturation into a scientist whose competence, creativity, critical thinking and collegiality are built upon a solid foundation of professional ethics and conduct. To this end, strict adherence to the Honor Code of Vanderbilt University is necessary.

The following information concerning the Vanderbilt University honor system was excerpted from the [Vanderbilt University Graduate Student Handbook](#):

Graduate and professional students are subject to the jurisdiction of the student body that implements the Honor System in the Graduate School and professional schools - Graduate Honor Council and Student Honor Council of the School of Medicine.

Students are required to acquaint themselves with the provisions of the Honor System. http://www.vanderbilt.edu/student_handbook/the-honor-system/

The Honor System presumes that all work submitted as part of academic requirements is the original work of the student unless credit is given with proper footnoting and bibliographic techniques or as prescribed by the course instructor.

Cheating, plagiarizing, or otherwise falsifying results of a study is prohibited, and may constitute grounds for dismissal from graduate school. The honor system applies not only to examinations, but all work handed in, such as papers, reports, solutions to problems, tapes, films and computer programs, unless accepted by the instructor. For graduate students, this especially applies to Research Proposals and Dissertations.

Students are responsible for obtaining from their professors an explanation of the freedom they may exercise in collaboration with other students or in the use of outside sources, including the student's own work prepared and submitted for another course. In the event that a student does not obtain a clear definition of the application of the Honor Code from a professor in any class, the student must assume that the Honor Council will follow the strictest interpretation of the Honor Code with respect to that class.

Faculty members do not routinely monitor tests and examinations to apprehend violators. Instructors who remain in examination rooms are there primarily to give assistance.

Breach of the Honor Code

Without the support and cooperation of the entire student body, the Honor System will not work. Students must insist on the absolute integrity of themselves and their fellow students. It is the obligation of every student who suspects an honor violation to take action in one of the following ways, determining the choice of action by the flagrancy and/or certainty of the violation.

If a student has reason to suspect that a breach of the Honor Code has been

committed, they must:

1. Issue a personal warning to the suspect, or
2. Report the incident to the Honor Council for action by the president. An official warning will be issued by the Council to the suspect or a hearing will be held by the Council, or
3. Inform the instructor in the course of the suspicions and identify, if possible, the person(s) suspected.

In addition, any Microbe-Host Interactions instructor, course, director, or thesis advisor having reason to suspect a student of breaching the Honor Code is expected to issue a warning or report the violation to the Honor Council.

Violations of the Honor Code

Violations of the Honor Code are cause for disciplinary actions imposed by the appropriate honor council. The following are included as violations:

1. Cheating on an exercise, test, problem, or examination submitted by a student to meet course requirements. Cheating includes the use of unauthorized aids (such as crib sheets, discarded computer programs, the aid of another instructor or any action designed to deceive a member of the faculty or a fellow student on a take-home exam, etc.); copying from another student's work; soliciting, giving, and/or receiving unauthorized aid orally or in writing; or similar action contrary to the principles of academic honesty.
2. Plagiarism on an assigned paper, theme, report, or other material submitted to meet course requirements. Plagiarism is defined as using concepts or words from an outside source, whether in the form of a direct quotation or of a paraphrase. Credit must be given to the original source for each idea by footnote or other technique acceptable to the instructor. For example, should the student forget to note on research cards the source of material and then fail to footnote the source when the paper or report is prepared, use of texts or papers prepared by commercial or noncommercial agents and submitted as a student's own work the student is still committing a plagiaristic act. Not knowing how or when to footnote is not considered a sufficient excuse.
3. Falsification of results of study and research.

4. Failure to report a known or suspected violation of the Code in the manner prescribed.

The Honor Code Applied to Preparation of Papers

- Papers are to express the original thoughts of the student. If a topic for a paper has been discussed fully among students prior to an assignment, then the students should consult the instructor about writing on that particular topic.
- Failure to indicate the source of ideas, expressions, phrases, or sentences constitutes plagiarism.
- A student may not submit papers substantially the same in content for credit in more than one course, without specific and prior permission of all instructors concerned.

Students often have trouble distinguishing between privileged information and common knowledge. An idea may be considered common knowledge if it is encountered at least three times in separate sources during one's research into a particular subject. (Reprints of one source do not constitute separate sources).

Students are expected to follow the general rules of footnoting for each discipline. One footnote is not sufficient if additional material from the same resource is included in a work. Footnotes should express the extent of ideas or expressions of others that are used. All direct quotes must be in quotation marks or in block quote format. Simply providing a footnote without using quotation marks or block quote format is a violation. For further information about footnoting, refer to [A Manual for Writers](#) by Kate L. Turabian, or the *MLA Style Sheet*.

A general rule is **when in doubt, always cite!**

The written pledge (refer to "Undergraduate Honor Pledge" in the Student Handbook) signifies that the work submitted is the student's own and that it has been completed in accordance with the requirements of the course as specified by the instructor. In addition, each student and faculty member are expected to establish a clear understanding of the requirements in each course. Any student uncertain about the application of the pledge in a particular course requirement should always consult the instructor. The Honor System pledge, or an abbreviation, should be included in all written work completed by the student and submitted for a grade. Any work handed

in for credit, however, will be considered pledged unless otherwise accepted by the professor.

Process for Laboratory Change

MHI/MPI Policies and Flowchart on Changing Research Groups

BRET stated language on changing labs:

“Experience has taught us that despite a rotation system for choosing a mentor, not all mentor-mentee matches are successful in the long term. If a student has consulted with their thesis committee chair (provided they are sufficiently advanced to have one), their Director of Graduate Studies, and an Auxiliary Mentor of their choosing, and come to the decision that changing mentors will allow them to thrive in their graduate studies, the BRET Office will provide financial support to the student during the transition to a new group. Specifically, the BRET office will support any student who matriculated through the IGP, QCB, or was a direct admit to a School of Medicine program that accepts students from the IGP and QCB, to conduct up to two month-long rotations in any group within the School of Medicine led by a member of the graduate faculty that has expressed an interest in considering the student for pursuit of their thesis research. To begin this process, please contact the Senior Associate Dean for BRET.”

Nutshell: BRET will support a student for two months so that they can test out a new lab. To begin the transition process, please contact Senior Associate Dean for BRET.

Such a decision can be very stressful. Please remember that you can reach out to your Director of Graduate Studies, or your Committee Chair, or both to discuss any issues that make your mentee-mentor relationship, or lab situation difficult. Below is a flowchart of steps to follow when a specific mentor-mentee relationship is not progressing as planned.

Mitigation Flowchart or issues brought up between mentor and mentee

- 1) The student should meet with the DGS, with or without the committee chair or an auxiliary mentor (list of auxiliary mentors can be found here: <https://medschool.vanderbilt.edu/bret/auxiliary-mentoring/> to discuss the issue(s) and see if there is any avenue for resolution.
- 2) The student can also choose to meet with their thesis committee chair, or auxiliary mentor without the DGS, to discuss issues and intent to transfer labs.

Note that the student's committee should be vigilant regarding changes in the mentor-mentee relationship, altered performance or mental state of the student, or if the student or mentor bring up issues citing established and discussed expectations between mentor and student. In that case, the committee Chair should contact the DGS to make them aware of these observations and seek feedback.

3) If the issues cannot be resolved, and the student decides to leave a research group, they should first contact the Senior Associate Dean for BRET and their DGS to initiate the process for interim support. At this point, the student should also notify their thesis committee of this decision. This is important, so as to maintain a professional relationship with the original thesis committee members, especially if some of these individuals may serve on the new committee, upon selection of a new thesis lab.

4) The student – as is typical for any professional environment – should give adequate notice (minimum 2 weeks) to the current research group. This should be done in writing, via email and the DGS should be copied for record keeping. This should allow the student to close out their work in the lab with minimum inconvenience to the PI and laboratory. This is viewed as a component of professional development. The student should also again notify the thesis committee, as this committee will change with the change of labs. Before leaving their current laboratory, the student must submit their up-to-date lab notebook and records to their previous PI and a document containing the location and description of any materials they have generated or procured in the lab. Students may not remove materials or intellectual property (including unpublished data) from their old lab without specific permission from the former mentor. This is in accordance with procedures currently in place for departing lab members (graduates or summer students and staff).

5) If the student wishes to stay within MHI or MPI, they must find a new lab by contacting program faculty in whose research they are interested. The DGS can assist in this, but it is the student's responsibility and success is not guaranteed by the program. A proposed new mentor must be willing to provide bench space, funds for the stipend and student fees including health insurance, all remaining tuition payments, supplies for the proposed project, and, of course, mentoring. If the student happens to be supported by a T32 Training Grant, ongoing support may be possible pending approval of the Training Grant Director. However, the student cannot assume that their training grant will continue to support them after they change labs. If the student is supported by an Individual Fellowship, they must contact their Program Official to determine whether their Fellowship support will continue following the change in mentorship. Documentation of approvals and confirmation of continued support need to be submitted to the DGS for final

approval before the switch in labs can be made.

6) Once a new lab is selected, the student will reset their thesis committee in concert with the DGS and new PI. Once the new committee is assembled it is sent to the GEC for approval.

Note that a student moving to another MPI /MHI laboratory will need to select a new Dissertation Committee and propose a new project that is distinct from that in the former laboratory (unless the former PI agrees to allow the student to use some of their data or if the former PI has died). The new committee may require that a student demonstrate sufficient knowledge in the new area of study through a formal exam, a written proposal, or both. In the event there appears to be overlap between the new and previous research projects or between the new project and other work in the former mentor's lab, the DGS, in collaboration with the Graduate Education Committee, will evaluate this. If they find that too much overlap exists, a new project must be conceived.

7) The final thesis committee will make the decision regarding whether the total body of work constitutes a thesis. During the first meeting the new committee will outline expectations and how the process will move forward. If the student includes data from their first laboratory in their thesis, the original PI will have the opportunity to review the thesis. If the PI finds an issue with the included content, the GEC will be consulted to arbitrate.

8) Students should note that the Graduate School expects students to complete the Ph.D. requirements within 4 years after passing the Qualifying Exam. Thus, students who change labs should expect to expend more effort to graduate in a timely manner, or be in contact with the DGS, along with their new mentor to request the appropriate extensions - as needed - from the graduate school.

Do not wait until it is too late! If you have something to discuss, please reach out to Jay or Maria.

Vacation Policy

Graduate study is a mentally challenging and physically demanding pursuit that requires a student's full dedication. Intensive study and research on the part of a student naturally requires vacations so that students can relax and reconnect with loved ones and family members. Students should establish an understanding of the policies and expectations of his/her research advisor when deciding to join a particular laboratory. Faculty members are likewise encouraged to establish clear and equitable vacation policies for students in their laboratories. In general, students

should be permitted a minimum of two weeks of vacation time per year, which should be scheduled in cooperation with the research advisor.

Leave Policy

The MHI policy regarding leave of absence is that set by the Graduate School as described in the Vanderbilt University Graduate Student Handbook. If a student is experiencing serious physical or emotional difficulties, s/he is highly encouraged to communicate this to the research advisor, the Director of Graduate Studies, and/or the Program Director.

The parental leave policy can be found at:

https://gradschool.vanderbilt.edu/current_students/parental_leave.php

Unsatisfactory Performance and Dismissal from the Graduate School

MPI AND MHI PROCEDURES AND GUIDELINES

After completing their didactic course requirements, students will register for research hours. Performance in the “research” course is graded as satisfactory (S) or unsatisfactory (U) by the student’s mentor for fall, spring and summer semester.

Receiving 3 unsatisfactory (U) grades will result in dismissal from the Graduate School. Moreover, no course credits are given when a “U” is awarded.

A student is required to meet with their advisory committee at least once every six months. During the meeting, the student will update the committee on their progress and receive advice. Following the meeting, the committee chair will submit a report and an overall evaluation of the student’s progress as assessed by the committee members.

If a student receives a “U” grade for research hours, receives an unsatisfactory (U) overall performance evaluation by their advisory committee, or if performance issues are reported to the Director of Graduate Studies by the mentor, a formal review of performance will be initiated.

What to expect on behalf of the mentor:

- A student in danger of receiving a “U” in their research should be informed of poor performance during the semester and given a chance to

improve their performance. “Satisfactory” performance is that which the committee determines represents adequate progress toward the Ph.D. degree during the six-month evaluation period. While this is by nature subjective, it involves substantial effort from the student and full involvement in the expected activities of the laboratory, including presentations at group meetings, participation in seminars and conferences, preparation of manuscripts, study of the literature, and regular meetings with the mentor. Students are expected to schedule their committee meetings on time and meet the program's deadlines. A Satisfactory can be awarded in periods in which no publishable results are obtained if the committee determines that the student's research efforts and involvement during that period were appropriate. An Unsatisfactory grade can be awarded when students show a pattern of insufficient effort, inadequate preparation, inadequate poor attendance in lab, or unwillingness to cooperate with the mentor.

At any point, if a mentor deems that a student is performing below expectations, they should initiate a discussion with the student regarding how to improve performance. If the student continues to perform below expectations, the mentor should notify the Director of Graduate Studies.

The Director of Graduate Studies will independently discuss performance issues with the student, the mentor, and the student's Thesis Advisory Committee. Following this, the Director of Graduate Studies will arrange a meeting, attended by the Director of Graduate Studies, the student, the mentor, and, if necessary, the Thesis Advisory Committee. This group will discuss and document any performance issues and agree upon steps to be taken to remediate performance issues. A memo summarizing the meeting will be provided to all who attend the meeting and copied to the Graduate School. The summary will clearly outline how the student will remediate performance issues and will provide a reasonable timeline for completing the remediation. If the student repeatedly fails to meet the clearly stated deadlines, resulting in two more consecutive “U”s, the student's graduate program (Molecular Pathology and Immunology or Microbe Host Interactions) may submit the documentation of failure to the Graduate School and recommend that the student be dismissed from the Graduate School.

If the Director of Graduate Studies or the Molecular Pathogenesis Division Chief has a conflict of interest which would prevent them from being impartial in examining performance issues and help devise remediation plans, the corresponding Graduate Education Committee will designate a faculty member to oversee discussions and planning. If the student feels that the graduate

program has not been fair in assessing their progress and their attempts at providing adequate guidance to remediate performance issues, the student may appeal to the Associate Dean for BRET for mediating a resolution. All students may also seek a successful planning meeting with the Graduate School's Senior Academic Life Coach (https://medschool.vanderbilt.edu/bret/wellness_resources_student_faculty/), for advice and perspective on their situation.

Graduate School Catalog

Information for current Vanderbilt graduate students can also be accessed through the Graduate School catalog or online at:

<https://www.vanderbilt.edu/catalogs/graduate/graduate-school/>

The website and catalog also provide information regarding Thesis and Dissertation guidelines, Graduation Forms, Registration Instructions, Honor Council information, Travel Grant Applications, Change of Address, and additional helpful information.