Preface

This online handbook is intended to provide new and continuing graduate students in the Department of Plant Biology at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign with essential information for the smooth and successful completion of their graduate program. This handbook is not intended to provide an exhaustive resource for all our students' diverse needs. Additional online information may be found in the Guide to Graduate Life at Illinois, provided by the UIUC Graduate College. We also strongly recommend that you subscribe to the Grad College's listserv, Grad Links, which broadcasts regular email bulletins with information of interest to UIUC graduate students. Further information regarding University-wide requirements for graduate study can be found in The Graduate College Handbook of Policy and Requirements for Students, Faculty and Staff.

The Plant Biology Department

Plant Biology is the largest among the three departments that constitute the School of Integrative Biology (IB) which, along with its sister School of Molecular and Cellular Biology (MCB), form the core of basic research in biology on the UIUC campus. While some administrative functions have migrated upward to the School of Integrative Biology in recent years, the Department remains the first administrative point of contact for students with questions or problems.

The Plant Biology Department office is located in 265 Morrill Hall. Our departmental administrative assistant, Jana Lenz, can assist you with registration, payroll, and other administrative problems. The administrative offices of the School of Integrative Biology are located in 286 Morrill Hall. Our business offices are located in 506 Morrill Hall. The Office of Information Technology is located in 333 Morrill Hall.

Jim Dalling is the current Head of the Department of Plant Biology and interim chair of the School of Integrative Biology. Surangi Punyasena is the current Associate Head of Plant Biology, Director of Graduate Studies (DGS), and chair of the Graduate Affairs Committee (GAC). Other members of the GAC for the 2016-2017 academic year are Li-Qing Chen, Brenda Molano-Flores, and Katy Heath. Representing our graduate students on the committee is Chris Montes. The Associate Head and the Graduate Affairs Committee oversee all matters related to graduate education within the department and act as ombudsmen to resolve any problems related to a student’s graduate program that cannot be resolved between the student and her/his research advisor.
MASTER OF SCIENCE PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS IN PLANT BIOLOGY

The Master of Science (MS) program in Plant Biology is open to applicants who (1) do not currently intend to pursue a doctoral program in the field, or (2) applied to our doctoral program but were directed to the MS program either in lieu of, or as preparation for, the doctoral program.

The Department offers both Non-Thesis and Thesis MS degrees. The expectation is that MS students admitted into the department will complete a Thesis MS degree. Plant Biology does not typically support non-thesis MS degrees with research or teaching assistantships (RAs or TAs). The Non-Thesis option is recommended for students who (1) wish to obtain an MS in Plant Biology while concurrently working toward an MS or PhD in another program; or (2) choose to leave the Thesis MS or PhD program. In the first case, students must independently meet all requirements for completion of the Plant Biology Non-Thesis MS described below. That is, they may not use credit from any courses taken to meet both Plant Biology and their other program’s requirements.

The Department guarantees support for up to two years for students admitted for an MS Thesis, if students demonstrate sufficient progress and maintain good standing as outlined below. Students pursuing an MS are required to complete all requirements for the degree within five years of registering with the Graduate College. The Plant Biology Department’s policies regarding our MS programs conform, with some additions, to those of the University of Illinois Graduate College. Masters degrees are conferred in May, August, and December.

MS program requirements are as follows:

**First Semester Advisory Meeting**

In the first two months of the student’s first semester in the Department, the student, in consultation with his/her advisor or a temporary advisor assigned by the Associate Head, will assemble an Advisory Committee and schedule an Advisory Meeting. This committee will consist of the advisor as chair and at least two other faculty members from the Plant Biology Department or other appropriate units on campus. This committee can later serve as the student’s thesis committee (for Thesis MS students). Alternatively, the committee’s composition may be changed during the program, should alternative membership better serve the student’s needs. The Advisory Meeting is both informational and advisory. Its purpose is to discuss the student's academic background, career goals, planned course work, and (for the Thesis MS) research plan. Documentation of this advisory meeting must be included in the student’s annual progress report to the department (described in the next section).
Annual Reporting

Annual progress reports are a **requirement** of both the department and the Graduate College. Students must complete a self-evaluation form every Spring semester they are enrolled in the graduate program. Annual reports are the department’s primary mechanism for evaluating progress and providing individual feedback to students. Continued support in the program is contingent on demonstrating sustained progress toward the degree. Students failing to meet the critical milestones outlined in this handbook risk academic probation.

Non-Thesis MS students require an annual evaluation from their primary advisor. Thesis MS students require an annual evaluation from their primary advisor and documentation of an annual Thesis committee meeting. The form is available online, through ATLAS Graduate Records: [https://my.atlas.illinois.edu/gradrecs/](https://my.atlas.illinois.edu/gradrecs/).

Non-Thesis MS

The formation of a committee (beyond the initial Advisory Committee) is optional for the Non-Thesis MS. Courses intended to fulfill the requirements detailed below are chosen by the student in close consultation with her/his adviser. Periodic (at minimum annual) meetings between the student and adviser are required, to plan coursework and ensure that adequate progress is being made toward the degree. Documentation of these meetings must be included in the student’s annual progress report to the department (described above). There is no teaching requirement for the Non-Thesis MS.

Coursework required for completion of the Non-Thesis MS degree in Plant Biology is as follows:

1. The completion of 32 hours of coursework at the 400 and 500 level is required, at least 16 of which must be earned in courses offered through the University of Illinois, or in other locations that have been approved by the Graduate College.
2. At least 12 of the 32 hours must be at the 500 level, of which a maximum of 8 hours may be **IB 590** (non-thesis research credit). Students receive a S/U grade based on research progress for IB 590.
3. Three areas among anatomy, biochemistry, development, ecology, evolution, genetics, molecular biology, physiology, systematics must be represented within 12 of the 32 hours.
4. Students must maintain a $\geq 3.0$ GPA to avoid academic probation by the Graduate College.
Thesis MS

Coursework requirements

Coursework required for completion of the Thesis MS degree in Plant Biology are similar to that of the Non-Thesis MS:

1. The completion of 32 hours of coursework at the 400 and 500 level is required, at least 16 of which must be earned in courses offered through the University of Illinois, or in other locations that have been approved by the Graduate College.

2. At least 12 of the 32 hours must be at the 500 level, of which a maximum of 8 hours may be PBIO 599 (thesis/dissertation research credit). S/U grades are deferred until the submission of the MS thesis for PBIO 599. IB 590 credit should not be used toward the Thesis MS degree.

3. Three areas among anatomy, biochemistry, development, ecology, evolution, genetics, molecular biology, physiology and systematics must be represented within 12 of the 32 hours. Four of these 12 hours must be outside the immediate research area of the student. If an additional area is appropriate to your program (e.g., statistics, bioinformatics, geology), it may be substituted with approval of advisor and department.

4. Thesis MS Students are required to enroll in IB 546B, IB’s Introduction to Graduate Studies course, during their first year in the program. This course provides training in the grant writing and time management skills necessary for graduate school.

5. Students must maintain a ≥3.0 GPA to avoid academic probation by the Graduate College.

Thesis Committee and Examination

Formation of a Thesis Committee is required by the end of second semester. As stated above, the committee may consist of the same members as the initial Advisory Committee or be reconstituted thereafter as appropriate. The Thesis committee is required to meet to evaluate the student’s research progress on an annual basis.

To receive PBIO 599 credit, the student is required to prepare a thesis that clearly and thoroughly documents research performed, in a format conforming to standards set by the Graduate College for all University of Illinois theses and dissertations. (Please review the section “Research Credit – IB 590 versus PBIO 599” below). A copy of the final draft of the thesis is to be provided to each member of the thesis committee two weeks prior to a scheduled full committee meeting at which the research completed is presented orally by the student. An examination by the committee follows. The student must then obtain each committee member's signature on the appropriate Graduate College form, whereupon the form will be forwarded to the Graduate College with a copy placed in the student's file. A certificate of approval signed by the Department Head is required by the College for completion of the degree. The Thesis examination should occur by the student’s fourth semester in the program. Students who anticipate problems meeting this timeframe must petition the GAC for an extension to avoid academic probation.
Teaching

There is no teaching requirement for the Thesis MS.

Transition into the Doctoral Program

Any student nearing completion of a Thesis MS in Plant Biology may petition to continue into the Department’s doctoral program. The petition package is submitted to the department and must include all of the following:

- A formal letter to the Associate Head, describing the student’s interest in continuing into a doctoral program, including specifics about the subject area and advisor of choice.
- Three new letters of recommendation from University of Illinois faculty, explicitly addressing the question of the student’s suitability for doctoral study. At least two letters should be from faculty in Plant Biology.
- An up-to-date graduate transcript
- Current curriculum vitae
- A research/personal statement

The deadline for receipt of these materials is January 1, with the transition occurring in the Fall semester. The GAC will review the application within the context of its annual review of graduate student applications. The review may include the option of interviewing the applicant beforehand. Successful completion of the MS degree does not guarantee admission into the doctoral program. Late applications will not be reviewed by the GAC until the following year.

Financial support of students who transition into the PhD program without completing an MS thesis will be the same as that guaranteed to students who began as PhD students, i.e. five years of guaranteed support from the date of initial enrollment in the MS program. Students who submit an MS thesis may petition the GAC for up to four years of support if completing their MS within two years, or up to three years of support if completing their MS within three years.

DOCTORAL PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS IN PLANT BIOLOGY

The Departmental degree requirements outlined here have been designed specifically for graduate students in the Department of Plant Biology, as well as to assure compliance with requirements dictated by the University's Graduate College. Further information regarding University-wide requirements for doctoral degrees can be found in The Graduate College Handbook of Policy and Requirements for Students, Faculty and Staff.
What follows are requirements and not simply recommendations. However, some flexibility in program design can be exercised by both faculty and students in consultation with the GAC. Additional individualized requirements may be instituted by faculty, and students may petition to waive a particular Graduate College or Departmental requirement or regulation. Such petitions are submitted to the Associate Head/Director of Graduate Studies.

**Overall Structure of the Program**

The Graduate College divides the graduate program into three stages, defined consecutively by the completion of a qualifying exam, a preliminary exam, and a dissertation defense. Because our department does not require a qualifying exam, Plant Biology students complete Stage I and Stage II simultaneously, concluding with the successful completion of the preliminary exam and proposal defense. All incoming students in the PhD program, regardless of previous graduate work, complete both Stages I and II.

Two stages comprise the first portion of the PhD Program.

**Stage I:** This initial stage requires completion of the Master's Degree or its equivalent of 32 hours of acceptable graduate study. Students who wish to pursue a PhD degree without obtaining a formal MS are still required to fulfill the coursework requirements for the MS degree. This stage should be completed by the fifth semester and no later than the sixth semester. Students who anticipate problems meeting this timeframe must petition the GAC for an extension to avoid academic probation.

**Stage II:** The second stage is completed by passing the preliminary examination and proposal defense. This stage should also be completed by the fifth semester and no later than the sixth semester. Students who anticipate problems meeting this timeframe must petition the GAC for an extension to avoid academic probation.

Following the successful completion of the preliminary exam and proposal defense, the student is now a PhD candidate, and in the third stage of the program.

**Stage III:** The final stage of the program entails completion of an acceptable dissertation and final oral examination. The student must have accumulated a minimum of 96 hours of graduate study by the time the final examination is taken. The expectation is that in Stage III, the majority of credit hours taken by the student will be in PBIO 599. At the successful completion of this stage, the PhD degree is conferred.

**Annual Reporting**

Annual progress reports are a requirement of both the department and the Graduate College. Students must complete a self-evaluation form every Spring semester they are enrolled in the
graduate program. Annual reports are the department’s primary mechanism for evaluating progress and providing individual feedback to students. Continued support in the program is contingent on demonstrating sustained progress toward the degree. Students failing to meet the critical milestones outlined in this handbook risk academic probation.

The form is available online, through ATLAS Graduate Records: https://my.atlas.illinois.edu/gradrecs/.

First Semester Advisory Meeting

Within the first two months of the first semester, the student, after consultation with his/her advisor will assemble an Advisory Committee and schedule a First Semester Advisory Meeting. This committee will consist of the advisor who will act as chair, and two other faculty members from the Plant Biology Department or other appropriate units on campus. This meeting is informational and advisory, its purpose being to discuss the student's academic background, career goals, planned course work, and possible areas for research. Documentation of this advisory meeting must be included in the student’s annual progress report to the department (described above under “Annual Reporting”).

Guidelines for the Advisory Meeting are as follows:

1. The meeting should be informal and last no longer than one hour.
2. The student should assemble and distribute to all members of the Advisory Committee at, or prior to, the meeting a list of all relevant courses taken as an undergraduate or graduate student, as well as a list of currently enrolled courses.
3. The student should be knowledgeable about UIUC course offerings in his/her area of study and be prepared to discuss potential courses that will be used to fulfill the requirements for Stages I/II.

On Choosing Committees: Students are encouraged to select members of their Advisory, Preliminary/Final Examination and Thesis/Dissertation Committees with careful thought and consultation with their advisors. These committees provide invaluable objective evaluations and expertise, often outside that of the advisor and laboratory colleagues. Ideally, a minimally altered core committee should guide each student from the initial advisory meeting right through to the final thesis/dissertation defense. However, changes in membership are understandable and appropriate, as required by each student's needs and progress and faculty availability. Please review the requirements for the preliminary and final exam committees when choosing advisory and dissertation committees.
STAGES I/II

Stage I/II Annual Committee Meetings

Students are required to schedule annual meetings with their advisory committees. Like the first semester Advisory Meeting, these committee meetings are not examinations. The principal purpose of the meeting is to provide early advisory input and to provide students the opportunity to meet with prospective members of his/her preliminary and final examination committees. This allows committee members to become acquainted with the student's intended program of study and research and to evaluate the annual progress made by the student. In this way, faculty are able to offer more effective advice in planning coursework, preparing for the Preliminary Examination, and designing thesis research. The meeting should be informal and last no longer than one hour. Documentation of annual committee meetings must be included in the student’s annual progress report to the department (described above under “Annual Reporting”).

Guidelines for annual Stage I/II committee meetings are as follows:

1. Prior to the meeting, an Advisory Committee is assembled
   a. The committee will include the primary advisor and two or more additional faculty members.
   b. A faculty member from another department may serve on the committee.
   c. Membership is determined jointly by the graduate student and her/his advisor.
   d. Membership may differ from that of the student's First Semester Advisory Committee.
   e. The responsibility for initially contacting prospective members of the committee is that of the student.

2. One week prior to the meeting, the student must provide each member of the committee with:
   a. A copy of her/his complete transcript
   b. A summary of completed and anticipated courses, organized by subject area
   c. Her or his Curriculum Vitae
   d. A brief statement describing the student’s anticipated research program and timetable.

3. The Advisory Committee will evaluate the student's progress and make recommendations regarding the remaining portion of her/his graduate program. The meeting should include discussion of coursework, the thesis research subject and its scope, the timetable for the program including scheduling of the preliminary exam and plans for satisfying the teaching requirement.

Stage I/II Coursework

1. Registration in IB 546B, Introduction to Graduate Studies, is **required** for all first-year Plant Biology PhD students. This course provides invaluable practice in writing grant proposals and teaches survival skills for negotiating a smooth and successful path to an
advanced degree in Plant Biology. If another (advisor-) required course or activity precludes timely enrollment in IB 546B, then you must enroll in the following Fall.

2. Completion of 32 hours of coursework at the 400 and 500 level. Coursework must be approved by the student’s advisor and Stage I/II advisory committee.

3. At least 12 of the 32 hours must be distributed among three of the following nine areas of plant biology: anatomy, biochemistry, development, ecology, evolution, genetics, molecular biology, physiology, and systematics. If an additional area is appropriate to your program (e.g., statistics, bioinformatics, geology), it may be substituted with approval of advisor and department.

4. At least 4 of the 12 hours in Item 3 must be outside the immediate research area of the student.

5. At least 12 of the 32 hours must be at the 500 level. IB 590 (non-thesis) credit hours can be applied toward this requirement. Academic credit for field or laboratory research performed during Stage I/II is earned by registering for IB 590, not PBIO 599.

6. Students must maintain a $\geq 3.0$ GPA to avoid academic probation by the Graduate College.

7. The requirement of proficiency in a foreign language or any requirement for specific coursework is left to the discretion of the advisor and advisory committee.

8. These coursework requirements must be completed before taking the preliminary examination.

9. Students may petition for the transfer of up to 12 credit hours of credit from another graduate program to be applied to the first two stages of their doctoral degree. Transfer credit must follow the guidelines in the Graduate College Handbook.

**Stage I/II Research**

Research experience is required during Stages I/II of the doctoral program. In order to obtain academic credit for research-related field or laboratory activity, students must register for at least one credit hour of IB 590 each semester.

**Master's Thesis**

Preparation of a master's thesis is not required for students in the Plant Biology PhD program. However, should a student elect to write and submit a Master's thesis to the Graduate College, not more than 12 hours of research credit (IB 590) may be applied toward the 32 hours of coursework. Additionally, the MS Thesis may not be a chapter of the PhD dissertation. The oral examination and thesis format should follow the guidelines provided for the MS Thesis above.

A certificate of approval signed by the Department Head is required by the College. Students pursuing a Master's degree must complete all requirements for the degree within 5 years of first registering in the Graduate College.
Preliminary Examination

Students are required to take the preliminary exam in their fifth semester and no later than their sixth semester in the PhD program. Students who anticipate problems meeting this timeframe must petition the GAC for an extension to avoid academic probation. Students must be registered for the semester (fall, summer, spring) in which they take the Preliminary Exam.

Guidelines for the Preliminary Examination are as follows:

1. The PhD Preliminary Examination Committee shall be composed as follows:
   a. **No more than six faculty members representing a minimum of three of the following defined areas of plant biology**: anatomy, biochemistry, development, ecology, evolution, genetics, molecular biology, physiology, and systematics. Should a significant component of the student's research not be represented by these areas, an alternative third area (e.g., modeling, bioinformatics, biogeochemistry) can be designated by the student in consultation with her/his advisor.
   b. At least one faculty member must be from another department.
   c. At least three (3) committee members must be members of the Graduate Faculty.
   d. At least two (2) committee members must be tenured University of Illinois faculty.
   e. The choice of committee membership should be approved by the primary advisor.
   f. A member of the committee other than the advisor will be appointed Chair by the Associate Head.
   g. The Graduate College requires that student, the Chair, and one other committee member be physically present for the duration of the exam.

   It is each student's responsibility to ensure that the composition of her/his Preliminary Examination Committee adheres to Graduate College guidelines. If it does not, the Graduate College will not approve the committee and the examination cannot go forward. Please consult the table [here](#) for Plant Biology faculty and check the Graduate Faculty Database to confirm the eligibility of all members of the committee.

2. The student is responsible for initially contacting prospective members of the committee and it is the responsibility of the student to schedule and make all arrangements for the examination.

3. A written recommendation for the composition of the committee, with explanation of which areas of plant biology will be tested should be made by the student, in consultation with his/her advisor to the Associate Head. These recommendations are sent to the Graduate College after departmental approval. The Graduate College strongly recommends submission of the Request for Appointment of Doctoral Examination Committee form at least three weeks in advance of the exam date.

4. The student must prepare a Research Proposal in the format specified by the Guidelines for the Preparation of the PhD Research Proposal. The Research Proposal must be
distributed to members of the Preliminary Examination Committee at least two weeks prior to the examination.

5. Three hours should be scheduled for the exam and it should be completed within this time.
   a. During the first hour of the examination, the student will be examined on the three areas of plant biology as specified above. Students are encouraged to talk with committee members prior to the examination, in order to determine the scope of coverage of the topics and receive guidance in preparation for the exam.
   b. In the remainder of the examination, the student will orally present his/her Research Proposal, during which questions regarding the proposed research and related areas will be posed by committee members.
   c. It is the responsibility of the Committee Chair to ensure that this format is followed and that the exam is conducted in the best interests of the student.

6. The decision to pass the student on the examination must be unanimous and transmitted by the Chair to the Department and the Graduate College. If a student does not pass the examination, the committee must choose one of three of the following alternatives:
   a. Adjournment. The examination can be rescheduled after a period of time not exceeding six months.
   b. Conditional failure. The student may be given another opportunity to take the examination after completing additional course work, independent study, or research. The Graduate College must be informed of the conditional failure, and the committee chair will indicate that the student is to be given a second examination within one year after the first examination.
   c. Failure.

7. If the Graduate College is not informed of the results of the examination within thirty days after its scheduled date, an adjournment will be recorded. The paperwork is submitted by the department.

STAGE III

Overview

Upon successfully passing the PhD Preliminary Examination, the student enters Stage III as a doctoral candidate. The expectation is that students will complete all degree requirements within 5 years of entering the graduate program. Students requesting financial support beyond the fifth year must petition the GAC and demonstrate substantial progress toward completion of their degrees. The Graduate College places additional limits on time to the degree. Petitions for extensions beyond these Graduate College deadlines must be filed on a semester basis with the recommendation of the PhD Committee carefully scrutinized at both the Departmental and Graduate College level.

Requirements for Stage III are:
1. Completion of a cumulative 96 hours of coursework
2. Completion of dissertation research
3. Completion of the dissertation
4. Passing the Final PhD examination ("Dissertation Defense")
5. Deposit of the dissertation with the Graduate College

Stage III Annual Dissertation Committee Meetings

Following successful completion of the preliminary examination and proposal defense, students are required to continue to hold annual committee meetings with their Dissertation Committee until passing the final PhD examination. The format is intended to be flexible and the Dissertation Committee may have a composition different from the Preliminary Exam Committee. The meeting is not an examination. It should offer the student an opportunity to apprise the Committee of his/her progress during the past year, to outline his/her proposed plans and schedule for the next year (and beyond) of the project, and to seek advice from the Committee on current and projected problems. It is the responsibility of the student to schedule the meetings. A majority of committee members must be present at each annual meeting. Although the membership of the Final Examination Committee (the “Dissertation Defense”) may differ from that of the Dissertation Committee, it is often in the student’s interest to maintain continuity in committee membership.

Documentation of Stage III annual committee meetings must be included in the student’s annual progress report to the department (described above under “Annual Reporting”).

Coursework for Stage III

1. Academic credit for research during Stage III is earned by registering for PBIO 599 (not IB 590).
2. Sixty-four additional hours of coursework are required for Stage III. Typically, these are all research credit (PBIO 599).
3. By the end of Stage III, all students must have accumulated a total of 96 hours, including the 32 hours required for the MS degree or its equivalent. At least 64 of the 96 total hours must be earned in courses meeting on the Urbana-Champaign, Chicago, or Springfield campus, or in courses meeting in other locations that have been approved by the Graduate College. More details on credit requirements are provided in the Graduate College Handbook.
4. Registration is not required after the preliminary examination if the student is (a) making no use of University facilities, (b) has left the campus, and (c) has finished the 96-credit hour requirement.
5. **Registration is required during the semester in which the final examination is taken.** If registration is not continuous, the candidate should consult the Graduate College Handbook to determine how to proceed with reentry.
Dissertation Preparation

All candidates for the PhD degree are required to submit a dissertation. For details on dissertation format, review the requirements of the Graduate College Thesis and Dissertation Office. The Graduate College will only accept dissertations that meet the formatting requirements set by the Thesis and Dissertation Office.

Before her or his degree is conferred, a student may choose to publish some of the findings, which will later be incorporated into the dissertation. If the copyright to the published work has been transferred to the publisher (or to any other party), the student should secure written permission from the current owner of the copyright to include the previously published material in the thesis to be submitted for deposit. Two copies of these copyright permissions should be included with the student’s deposit materials.

The PhD Final Examination ("Dissertation Defense")

1. The PhD Final Examination Committee shall be composed as follows:
   a. A minimum of four (five recommended) faculty members, including the advisor.
   b. The Chair must be a member of the Graduate Faculty but need not be the advisor.
   c. At least one faculty member from another department.
   d. At least three (3) committee members must be members of the Graduate Faculty.
   e. At least two (2) committee members must be tenured faculty members.
   f. The committee chair, defending student, and at least one additional voting member of the committee must be physically present for the entire duration of the final examination. All voting members of the committee must be present in person or via appropriate electronic communication media.

   It is each student’s responsibility to ensure that the composition of her/his Final Examination Committee adheres to Graduate College guidelines. If it does not, the Graduate College will not approve the committee and the examination cannot go forward. Please consult the table here for Plant Biology faculty and check the Graduate Faculty Database to ascertain the current status of members of the committee outside of Plant Biology.

2. Once a suitable examination committee has been selected, the student must ensure that a Request for Appointment of Doctoral Examination Committee form is completed and submitted by the Plant Biology Office Administrator. The Graduate College strongly recommends submission of the Request for Appointment of Doctoral Examination Committee form at least three weeks in advance of the final examination.
3. The dissertation, in its complete and final form, must be delivered to members of the Examination Committee at least two weeks prior to the PhD examination.

4. Final examinations are oral and must take place on campus.
   a. The first hour of the examination shall consist of a public seminar covering the student's dissertation research.
   b. Members of the examination committee and the candidate shall then meet for detailed examination of the dissertation.

5. If more than five years elapse between a doctoral student's preliminary and final examinations, the student is required to demonstrate that his or her broad knowledge of the field is current by passing a second preliminary examination. The form of the second preliminary examination need not be identical to that of the first. See the Graduate College Handbook for more details.

6. Decisions of the Committee for the Final Examination are recorded on the Final Exam Result form. It is the student's responsibility to provide a hardcopy, at the examination, of the Thesis/Dissertation Approval (TDA) Form for committee signatures at the completion of the examination.

7. The voting members of the committee must make one of two decisions:
   a. Pass the candidate. The candidate passes the final exam if the Director(s) of Research vote “Pass” and no more than one of the remaining Committee members votes “Fail”. The Committee will indicate on the Final Exam Result form if revisions are required. The Committee will sign the Thesis/Dissertation Approval form after the completion of the examination and the completion of any required revisions.
   b. Fail the candidate. The candidate fails the Final Exam if a Director of Research votes “Fail” or if two or more Committee members vote “Fail”. The department may, but is not required to, grant the student another opportunity to take the examination after completing additional research or writing, as recommended by the committee. However, a new committee must be appointed by the Graduate College. The new committee may, but does not have to, consist of the same members as the original committee. After a fail result a student will only be allowed to take the final examination one additional time while working toward the completion of any one program of study.

**Deposit of the Dissertation**

Departmental review and approval is required before the dissertation can be deposited with the Graduate College. Students are expected to deposit their dissertation promptly following their final exam to preserve the currency of the research and the integrity of the document approved by the committee. Students must deposit their dissertation within three semesters (including the current semester). The deposit must be made by the published deadline for that semester. After this time, a new final examination may need to be conducted.
Teaching Requirement

Teaching is an integral component of your doctoral education. Therefore, all PhD students (domestic and international) in the Department of Plant Biology are required to complete at least the equivalent of one semester as a half-time teaching assistant prior to completion of the doctoral degree. Teaching assignments will normally be in courses in which there is direct instructional contact with students.

International Students

Students whose first language is not English are required to satisfy the University of Illinois standard for spoken English proficiency for teaching. Prior to receiving a teaching assistantship, you are required to earn a score ≥24 on the speaking section of the TOEFL iBT or ≥8 on the speaking section of the IELTS. The exams may be taken no more than two years before enrolling in the Plant Biology graduate program. If neither applies, then you must take the English Proficiency Interview (EPI) test administered by the Center for Innovation in Teaching and Learning and earn a score of 5 or higher. You may attempt the EPI a maximum of three times. Students cannot register themselves for the EPI test; our departmental office administrator must do it for you. A student may also retake the TOEFL as many times as necessary.

Applicants may now also be considered for a TOEFL waiver with completion of at least two years of professional work experience in a country where English is the primary language within five years of the proposed term of initial enrollment at the University of Illinois.

It is each international student's and her/his advisor's responsibility to ensure that the language proficiency prerequisite for teaching at the University of Illinois is fulfilled prior to the semester during which the student is expected to teach.

INFORMATION FOR ALL GRADUATE STUDENTS

Dates and Deadlines for Graduation

MS and PhD degrees are awarded in May, August, and December. If needed, a letter certifying that the student has completed the degree may be obtained from the Graduate College only after completion of all requirements, including deposit of the thesis. Please consult the departmental administrative assistant well in advance of submitting your thesis or dissertation to ensure you have completed all the necessary requirements.

Progress toward the degree
Each student is expected to make satisfactory annual progress towards the MS or PhD degree. Satisfactory progress is defined as meeting all degree requirements, including satisfactory grades in coursework ($\geq 3.0$ GPA), performance in teaching and research (based on ICES/instructor evaluations and annual reviews, respectively), and passing examinations on or before their required dates. A finding of unsatisfactory progress can be made at any time during the student's time in the program and will be reported by the GAC to the student, the major advisor, and the department head. This will result in the student being placed upon academic probation. Two findings of unsatisfactory progress will be cause for dismissal from the program.

Masters students are typically expected to complete their degree within two years, depending upon prior experience. Doctoral students are typically expected to complete their degree within five years, depending upon prior experience. For all students, the required annual meeting with their Advisory or Thesis/Dissertation Committee will provide the major input for evaluations of progress.

**Minimum grade point average**

The Plant Biology Department requires a minimum GPA of 3.0 in classroom courses. A student may be placed on academic probation (limited status) for either of the following reasons: (1) if the student is initially admitted to the graduate program with an undergraduate GPA of less than 3.0 on the last 60 hours of undergraduate work; or (2) if the student's GPA falls below 3.0 during graduate study. If the student's GPA is not raised to 3.0 or above at the end of the first term on limited status, the student will be prohibited from further registration. No advanced degree will be awarded to a student on limited status. The department may request that a student be changed from limited status to full graduate standing in all cases except when the student's GPA is less than 3.0, in which case the change in status must be made by the Graduate College. Please refer to the Graduate College Handbook’s guidelines on Academic Standing.

**Registration**

**UI Direct**

Registration for classes is completed online by going to [www.illinois.edu](http://www.illinois.edu). Under “Resources for: Current Students”, select “Register for Classes, Check Records, Financial Aid”. On the Enterprise Applicants Self-Service page, select “University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign” and sign in using your [University of Illinois NetID and password](http://www.illinois.edu).
Students are expected to enroll during the appropriate registration period. Any late registration charges must be paid by the student and will affect the stipend support received that semester.

**Number of Credit Hours**

To be considered a full-time student, all graduate students must register for a minimum of 8 credit hours each semester in Fall and Spring every year. For Summer semester, the minimum registration for full-time status is 4 credit hours (but see below – summer registration is not required). These minima are set by the Graduate College. Students on fellowship may be required to register for additional credit hours. Please check the terms of your fellowship.

Some or all of the required 8 credit hour minimum per semester may be contributed by registering for IB 590 (Stage I/II PhD) or PBIO 599 (Stage III PhD/Thesis MS).

**Research Credit – IB 590 versus PBIO 599**

Students should sign up for the appropriate CRN assigned to their primary advisor. Be aware that the CRN number is specific for the advisor and the term of registration; it changes every semester.

PhD students should register for **IB 590 before they pass their Preliminary Exam** (Stage I/II) and **PBIO 599 for all of Stage III**. Thesis MS students should register for PBIO 599. Non-Thesis MS students should register for IB 590. IB 590 is graded satisfactory/unsatisfactory (S/U). Grades for PBIO 599 research are deferred (grade of DFR) until the student submits a PhD dissertation or MS thesis. The student's advisor must fill out a "Change of Grade" form to replace the DFR with an S or U grade when the dissertation or thesis is completed. No credit will be given for PBIO 599 unless a dissertation or thesis is deposited.

**Summer Registration and Health Coverage**

Continuing graduate students are not required to enroll and/or register for credit hours during the Summer session unless:

1. You are supported by a fellowship that requires you to be a registered student to receive funding,
2. You plan to take your Preliminary Exam during Summer semester, or,
3. You plan to take your Final Examination (thesis/dissertation defense) during Summer semester.

Students who hold at least a 25% assistantship during Spring semester will automatically receive a tuition waiver if they register (again, only required if one of three above conditions apply) for Summer session. The minimum credit load for Summer is 4 hours of either IB 590 (Stage I/II) or PBIO 599 (Stage III/Thesis MS).

Students registered during Summer semester enjoy the same (fee-requiring) health coverage as during Fall and Spring semesters. However, if you do not register for Summer semester, you will need to pay separate fees for McKinley Health Services and for insurance over the summer. See more about Summer Health Coverage for Graduate Students at the Graduate College's website.

Registration After Completion of Degree Credit Requirements

Students are expected to be registered full time if they are performing research toward their degree. All doctoral candidates must be registered for the entire semester or term during which they take the final examination. At the time of dissertation or thesis deposit, neither master's degree students nor doctoral degree students are required to be registered. If enough credit hours have already been accumulated, registration for 0 credit hours is acceptable at that time.

There is one exception to the above registration requirement. A student who was registered during Summer session need not register for the Fall semester if the final examination occurs on or before the final October examination deadline for the doctoral degree students. This date is published by the Grad College Thesis Office. This exception provides a grace period at the beginning of the Fall semester for students who are unable to assemble their dissertation committees over the summer.

Financial Support

Continued financial support in the graduate program (through either teaching or research assistantships) is contingent on satisfactory progress as assessed by a student’s advisor and advisory/thesis/dissertation committee and reported in the annual review. (Please see “Progress Toward the Degree” above).

Students in the first five years of our graduate program receive priority for teaching assistantships. Students requiring support into their sixth year must petition the GAC. The petition should include a letter addressing why an additional year is required and a timeline for the completion of the degree. Although we make every effort to provide support for students making satisfactory progress, the Department generally does not support students past their sixth year.
Funding Opportunities for Graduate Students in Plant Biology

Acquiring grantsmanship skills is a critical aspect of every scientist's professional development. Plant Biology graduate students are therefore expected to develop their skills at preparing and submitting grants to fund their research, regardless of their support circumstances during their graduate training at Illinois.

Below is a list of funding sources to which such applications can be submitted. In addition, our PEEC program's website provides a good list of funding sources for students in the PEEC program, most of which are applicable to at least some Plant Biology students. All applications should be prepared in close consultation with your advisor, who should provide substantial input on the document's form and substance. In addition, the Graduate College offers one-on-one personal advising for students applying for external fellowships. Your contact and Director of External Fellowships at the Grad College is Ken Vickery. Students in their penultimate year of graduate school are encouraged to seek support from the Graduate College’s Dissertation Completion Fellowship.
Yearly Checklist for PhD Students

Semesters 1-2:
- Enroll in IB 546B (Fall)
- Select First Semester Advisory Committee (Fall)
- Hold First Semester Advisory Committee meeting (Fall)
- Select Stage I/II Advisory Committee (Spring)
- Hold annual Advisory Committee meeting (Spring)
- Complete Annual Progress Report (Spring)

Semesters 3-4:
- Initiate planning for Preliminary Exam and Proposal Defense
- Hold annual Advisory Committee meeting
- Complete Annual Progress Report (Spring)

Semesters 5-6:
- Select Preliminary Exam Committee and register with Grad College
- Pass Preliminary Exam (plan for 2 attempts)
- Hold annual Advisory/Dissertation Committee meeting
- Complete Annual Progress Report (Spring)

Semesters 7-8:
- Hold annual Dissertation Committee meeting
- Initiate planning for Final Exam and Dissertation Defense
- Complete Annual Progress Report (Spring)

Semesters 9-10:
- Select Final Exam Committee and register with Grad College
- Hold annual Dissertation Committee meeting OR pass Final Exam
- Complete Annual Progress Report (Spring) OR deposit dissertation

Semesters 11-12 [if applicable]:
- Select Final Exam Committee and register with Grad College
- Pass Final Exam
- Deposit dissertation
Yearly Checklist for Thesis MS Students

Semesters 1-2:
- Enroll in IB 546B (Fall)
- Select First Semester Advisory Committee (Fall)
- Hold First Semester Advisory Committee meeting (Fall)
- Select Thesis Committee (Spring)
- Hold annual Thesis Committee meeting (Spring)
- Complete Annual Progress Report (Spring)

Semesters 3-4:
- Hold annual Thesis Committee meeting OR Thesis Defense
- Complete Annual Progress Report (Spring) OR deposit Thesis

Semesters 5-6 [if applicable]:
- Hold Thesis Defense
- Deposit Thesis