Department of Biochemistry Graduate Student Handbook

Master of Science (MSc) and Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) Programs

Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry | Western University

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Department of Biochemistry website | School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies

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1. Welcome to the Department of Biochemistry & How to Use This Handbook

Welcome to the Department of Biochemistry graduate program at Western University. This handbook is intended for incoming and continuing students in the MSc and PhD programs and serves as a departmental guide to graduate program expectations, degree progression, milestones, resources, and administrative processes.

The handbook brings together practical information students need at the start of the program, expectations that apply throughout the degree, and departmental procedures for Advisory Committee meetings, Pathfinder, the Qualifying or Transfer Exam, thesis planning, and thesis examination through Veritas.

Students should use this handbook as a reference throughout their program. This handbook does not replace official University or SGPS policy. Where this handbook differs from current University, SGPS, Schulich, or Department policy, the current official policy or procedure governs. Forms, deadlines, systems, and requirements may change, and students are responsible for reviewing official communications and websites for the most current information.

1.1 Key Systems at a Glance

System	Used for	Student Action
Western email	Official university communication, system notifications, meeting notices, exam and thesis updates.	Check regularly. Important program and SGPS messages are sent to Western email.
Student Center	Registration, fees, enrolment, grades, personal information, and official student record information.	Maintain registration and monitor fees and academic record.
Graduate Student Web Services Portal	Graduate student services, including Veritas thesis submission.	Use the Veritas menu when submitting thesis files for preliminary examination.
Pathfinder	Graduate degree planning portfolio and progress review.	Update portfolio information and submit when requested by the program.
Veritas	Western thesis examination platform.	Submit thesis manuscript and supplemental files
My Human Resources / MyHR	Payroll, direct deposit, tax forms, and employment information.	Set up direct deposit and review pay information if receiving funding or TA pay.
OWL Brightspace	Course materials and academic modules, where applicable.	Use for course participation and required training where assigned.

2. Quick Reference: Where to Start

Graduate students may need to connect with different offices, contacts, or systems depending on the question or task. This section provides a practical starting point to help students identify where to go for common program, administrative, academic, and support-related matters.

2.1 Who to Contact

Question or Situation	Start here	Notes
Registration, forms, milestones, committee records, funding letters, exam scheduling, Pathfinder, or Veritas coordination	Graduate Program Coordinator biochem-gradadmin@uwo.ca	Use this contact for most administrative questions.
Research project, day-to-day supervision, lab expectations, thesis readiness, authorship, or research planning	Supervisor	Meet regularly and document expectations early.
Academic progression, supervisory concerns, exceptions, appeals, or complex academic issues	Graduate Chair, Dr. Wing-Yiu (James) Choy, jchoy4@uwo.ca	Academic exceptions, appeals, supervisory concerns, or other complex academic issues. Students may contact the Graduate Chair directly for sensitive matters.
Course selection or degree requirement interpretation	Supervisor and Graduate Program Coordinator	Course choices should normally be discussed before registration.
Advisory Committee membership or meeting planning	Supervisor and Advisory Committee; copy Graduate Program Coordinator as needed	Committee member names must be submitted to the program coordinator.
Thesis examination request or Veritas timeline	Graduate Program Coordinator, Supervisor, and Graduate Chair	Start well before the SGPS minimum deadline.
Immigration, study permit, UHIP, or arrival questions	International Student Services / Western International	Students should seek advice early.
Accessibility accommodations	Accessible Education	Students are encouraged to connect well before coursework, exams, or thesis defense.
Workplace or classroom harassment, discrimination, sexual violence, or human rights concerns	Human Rights Office, Health & Wellness, Campus Safety	Emergency safety concerns should be directed to emergency services first.

2.2 Milestones at a Glance

Requirement	MSc	PhD after MSc	Direct-entry PhD	MSc-to-PhD transfer
Coursework	0.75 course credits	1.25 course credits	PhD coursework requirements apply.	PhD coursework applies after transfer; approved MSc courses may count.
Advisory Committee / Pathfinder	First term; after third term; annually thereafter.	First term; after third term; annually thereafter.	Same schedule unless otherwise directed.	Continues according to program progression.
Graduate Seminar & PhD Public Lectures / Research Showcase (0.25 credits)	Attendance required; first-year poster in January; seminar in second year.	Attendance required; first-year poster in January; seminars in years 2–5.	Attendance required; first-year poster in January; seminars in years 2–5.	Attendance required; first-year poster normally completed during MSc; seminar timing follows program year after transfer.

Transfer or Qualifying Exam	Transfer Exam only if transferring to PhD.	Qualifying Exam within 3 terms of initial registration.	Qualifying Exam before the end of the fifth term	Transfer Exam before entry to PhD; Qualifying Exam not normally repeated.
Permission to write	Advisory Committee approval required.	Advisory Committee approval required.	Advisory Committee approval required.	Advisory Committee approval required.
Thesis examination	MSc thesis through Veritas.	PhD thesis through Veritas.	PhD thesis through Veritas.	PhD thesis through Veritas after transfer.

This table provides a planning overview only. Students should consult the relevant handbook sections for detailed requirements, procedures, and deadlines.

3. Program Overview

The Department of Biochemistry offers research-based graduate programs leading to the MSc and PhD degrees. Both programs are thesis-based and centre on original research conducted under the supervision of a faculty member.

3.1 Program Pathways

Pathway	Typical entry point	Degree focus	Key components
MSc (6 terms)	Completion of a four-year undergraduate degree or equivalent.	Development of research skills through a supervised thesis project.	Coursework, seminars, Advisory Committee meetings, Pathfinder progress review, permission to write, MSc thesis examination.
PhD (12 terms)	Completion of an MSc or equivalent.	Advanced original research leading to a doctoral thesis.	Coursework as required, seminars, Advisory Committee meetings, Pathfinder progress review, Qualifying Exam, permission to write, PhD thesis examination.
Direct-entry PhD (15 terms)	Entry directly from undergraduate degree, where approved.	Doctoral research training beginning directly at the PhD level.	PhD coursework and milestones, Advisory Committee meetings, Pathfinder, Qualifying Exam, permission to write, PhD thesis examination.
MSc to PhD Transfer (15 terms from initial MSc registration)	Student begins in MSc and transfers to PhD without completing MSc.	Transition from Master's-level training to doctoral-level research.	Successful Transfer Exam, program and SGPS approval, continuation of PhD requirements.

3.2 Master of Science in Biochemistry

The MSc program provides intensive research training in biochemistry and related molecular and cellular life sciences. Students work under the guidance of a supervisor to complete a thesis research project and develop skills in experimental design, data analysis, scientific writing, oral communication, and responsible research practice.

MSc students complete required coursework, participate in departmental seminar activities, form

an Advisory Committee, meet committee timelines, and receive approval to begin thesis writing before proceeding to thesis examination. The degree culminates in submission and examination of an MSc thesis.

3.3 Doctor of Philosophy in Biochemistry

The PhD program is designed for advanced independent research training. The doctoral thesis must demonstrate the student's ability to conduct original research and make a meaningful contribution to knowledge in biochemistry or a related field.
PhD students complete required coursework, participate in departmental seminars, maintain regular Advisory Committee meetings, and complete the PhD Qualifying Exam. Students are expected to show increasing independence in research planning, execution, interpretation, communication, and scholarly contribution. The PhD culminates in submission and defense of a doctoral thesis through Veritas.

3.4 Collaborative Specialization Opportunities

Students interested in a Collaborative Specialization must first apply to and be accepted into the Graduate Program in Biochemistry. Once admitted, students may apply to an eligible Collaborative Specialization, provided their research aligns with the specialization and approval is granted by the specialization program.

Students remain registered in Biochemistry and must complete the normal requirements of the Biochemistry graduate program, including the Biochemistry seminar milestone and at least one 0.25 credit Biochemistry graduate course. In addition, students complete the specific course, seminar, workshop, committee, research, presentation, or other requirements of their selected Collaborative Specialization.

Collaborative Specializations allow students to broaden their graduate training, connect with faculty and trainees across disciplines, and access additional professional development, networking, and presentation opportunities.

Collaborative Specialization options may include:

- Machine Learning in Health and Biomedical Sciences
- Molecular Imaging
- Developmental Biology
- Scientific Computing

Resource: Collaborative Specializations

4. Getting Started in the Program

This section summarizes key steps for students beginning the graduate program and should be read together with the offer of admission, funding letter, supervisor communications, and program emails.

4.1 Before You Arrive

Before beginning the program, students should complete the following steps as early as possible:

Action	What to do
Accept your offer and clear admission conditions	Review your offer of admission and complete any conditions listed by Western or SGPS. International students should begin study permit and arrival planning early.
Activate your Western identity	Retrieve your Western access code, activate your Western Identity, and set up multi-factor authentication if prompted.
Access your Western email	Begin checking Western email regularly. Program, course, funding, training, and registration information is sent to this account.
Plan your arrival	Arrange housing, transportation, and arrival plans. International students should review Western International arrival information.
Connect with your supervisor	Discuss anticipated arrival date, research start date, lab or group onboarding expectations, and any preparations needed before research begins.
Review financial information	Review tuition deadlines, funding information, direct deposit requirements, and payroll steps if applicable.
Arrange your Western ONECard	Upload your photo and government-issued ID and arrange to pick up your ONECard when eligible.

4.2 During Your First Term

During the first term, students should complete the following steps:

Action	What to do
Review Student Center	Monitor registration, tuition and fees, course enrolment, contact information, and banking/direct deposit details.
Register for courses	Self-enrol in courses once registration instructions are circulated. Course selection should be made in consultation with the supervisor and, where needed, the Graduate Program Coordinator.
Set up banking information	Add direct deposit information for student financial transactions. Students paid through Western payroll, including GTAs, must also add banking information through My Human Resources.
Complete mandatory graduate training	Complete required SGPS, Schulich, and department training by the stated deadlines.
Complete role- or lab-specific training	Complete additional training required for the student's research area, workspace, GTA assignment, or project-specific activities.
Attend orientation	Attend departmental and University orientation events. Orientation details are circulated by email.
Establish your Advisory Committee	Identify committee members in consultation with your supervisor and schedule your first Advisory Committee meeting by the end of the first term.

4.3 Required First-Term Training and Milestones

Incoming graduate students must complete required University, SGPS, Schulich, and Department training during the first term. Students should monitor Western email, the Graduate Student Web Services Portal, and Brightspace for access instructions and deadlines.

Requirement	What students need to know	Timing
Academic Integrity Module	SGPS module for incoming graduate students. Completion is required for progression to the next term.	First term
Supporting Safer Professional Practice	Mandatory gender-based and sexual violence prevention education for incoming graduate students. Completion appears as a milestone where applicable.	First term
Introduction to Biomedical Sciences	Schulich milestone for research-based graduate students. Includes Responsible Conduct of Research and Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion components.	By posted deadline
Role- or lab-specific safety training	Additional training may be required depending on research space, assigned duties, lab work, GTA assignment, or project-specific requirements.	As assigned

Failure to complete required training by the stated deadline may affect academic progression, registration for the following term, transcript milestones, or funding eligibility.

4.4 International Students

International students should review Western International arrival instructions early and continue monitoring Western email for updates. Key items may include study permit requirements, registration activation, UHIP, Social Insurance Number requirements if receiving employment income, housing, health care, and settling-in resources.

Students are responsible for maintaining valid immigration, study permit, work eligibility, and employment-related documentation where applicable. Immigration and study permit questions should be directed to International Student Services / Western International. Students should seek advice early if their immigration status, study permit, work eligibility, registration, funding, GTA appointment, UHIP, or arrival timeline may be affected.

Resource: Western International

5. Funding, Tuition, GTAs, and Awards

Graduate funding may include supervisor funding, internal scholarships, external awards, Graduate Teaching Assistantships, or other approved funding sources. The offer of admission and Financial Package Letter describe the student's funding arrangement. Students should review those documents carefully and ask questions before the start of term whenever possible.

5.1 Tuition, Fees, and Payment

Tuition and fees are posted by term and are payable at the start of each term. Students receive email notification when their account is available to review in Student Center.

Graduate funding is normally applied first to outstanding tuition and fee charges in Student Center. If a student account has a credit balance after tuition and fees are applied, the remaining funds may be issued to the student through Western's graduate student payment process.

Students are responsible for reviewing Student Center regularly for tuition balances, credits, payment deadlines, refunds, and other account information. Students should also ensure that their banking information is accurate and up to date.

The most efficient way to receive student payments is by Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT). To receive payments by EFT, students must set up direct deposit banking information through Western's My Human Resources system before funds are released. Students should review the SGPS Receiving Payments webpage for current instructions, timelines, and payment-processing details.

Funding is tied to active registration. Registration, tuition, WGRS, fellowship payments, refunds, and account balances may be adjusted if a student completes the degree, changes registration status, takes a leave of absence, receives an award, or otherwise changes funding eligibility.

When a student completes degree requirements before the end of an active term, tuition, WGRS, fellowship, or other University-administered funding may be prorated or adjusted based on the final thesis submission date and applicable SGPS, Registrar, funding, and Department procedures. Students should not assume that full-term tuition charges, refunds, WGRS, fellowship payments, or stipend support will remain unchanged if they complete early in a term.

Students planning to complete in a given term should contact the Graduate Program Coordinator well in advance to confirm how final thesis submission timing may affect tuition, funding, refunds, payroll, registration status, benefits, UHIP, GTA appointments, scholarships, and convocation timing.

SGPS Receiving Payments: https://grad.uwo.ca/finances/receiving_payment/index.html

5.2 Financial Package Letters and Stipend Support

Graduate funding is outlined in the offer of admission and confirmed through a Financial Package Letter, typically issued before the program begins and updated annually where applicable.

Funding packages vary based on program pathway, registration status, supervisor support, scholarships or awards, GTA appointments, WGRS support, and other approved sources. Funding is contingent on continued registration, satisfactory academic progress, completion of program milestones, and compliance with Department, SGPS, University, funding agency, and employment requirements.

Students receiving WGRS or other University-administered support must meet applicable academic standing and funding requirements. Students should confirm current requirements through SGPS, the Department, and their Financial Package Letter.

Program Pathway	Normal funding eligibility planning period
MSc	Up to 6 terms from initial MSc registration
PhD after MSc	Up to 12 terms from initial PhD registration
Direct-entry PhD	Up to 15 terms from initial PhD registration
MSc-to-PhD transfer	Up to 15 terms from initial MSc registration

These periods are for planning purposes only and do not guarantee funding beyond what is specified in the student's offer or Financial Package Letter. After the normal funding eligibility period has ended, continuation of fellowship or supervisor-based funding is at the discretion of the

student's supervisor, provided the student remains actively registered and in good academic standing.

5.3 Graduate Teaching Assistantships

Graduate Teaching Assistantship appointments may form part of a student's funding package, where applicable. Applications for GTA positions normally open in advance of the upcoming academic year, typically in May or June. Students are notified by Western email when the application portal is available.

Students must apply each year if they wish to be considered for a GTA appointment or if they are required to apply under departmental or funding expectations. Submitting an application does not guarantee an appointment. GTA assignments depend on available positions, departmental teaching needs, funding eligibility, qualifications required for individual courses, and applicable employment requirements.

Graduate Teaching Assistantships are employment appointments and are subject to applicable University policies, employment requirements, and collective agreement provisions. Students who receive a GTA appointment are responsible for reviewing their appointment details, assigned duties, required training, deadlines, and any course-specific expectations.

Students appointed as GTAs should complete any required GTA, course-specific, laboratory, safety, or instructional training before beginning assigned duties. The Western Centre for Teaching and Learning offers teaching development resources and TA-focused training opportunities that can support graduate students in areas such as marking, facilitating discussions, leading tutorials or laboratories, communicating with students, and supporting student learning.

Students should communicate promptly with the appropriate course instructor, supervisor, Graduate Program Coordinator, or departmental contact if they have questions about GTA duties, workload, training, scheduling, eligibility, or how a GTA appointment may relate to their funding package.

Resource: Western Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies – Graduate Teaching Assistantship (GTA)
Resource: Schulich Medicine & Dentistry – Graduate Teaching Assistantships
Resource: PSAC Local 610 – Graduate Teaching Assistant Union
Resource: Western Centre for Teaching and Learning – Teaching Assistant Training

5.4 Scholarships and Awards

Graduate students are encouraged to apply for scholarships, awards, fellowships, and travel funding. Awards may be offered by external agencies, Western University, SGPS, Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry, the Department of Biochemistry, and other organizations.

Eligibility, application procedures, and deadlines vary. Students should review opportunities early, consult their supervisor, and monitor Western email for announcements. Some awards require direct application; others require departmental nomination. Students should notify the Graduate Program Coordinator of awards received, as awards may affect funding packages or GTA eligibility.

Award category	Examples
External and Tri-Agency awards	CIHR, NSERC, SSHRC, Vanier Canada Graduate Research Scholarships, professional societies, foundations, and research institutes
Provincial awards	Ontario Graduate Scholarship (OGS), QEII-GSST
Western, Schulich, and departmental awards	Dean's Research Scholarship, Collip Medal Award, Macklin Fellowships, Morris Kroll Memorial Scholarship, presentation prizes, and travel funding

Students should rely on official SGPS, Schulich, Department, and agency webpages for current award details, including eligibility, deadlines, application procedures, award values, transcript requirements, and post-award conditions. Award information may change from year to year.

Resource	Link
SGPS External Funding	SGPS External Funding
SGPS Tri-Agency Scholarships	SGPS Tri-Agency Scholarships
Canada Graduate Research Scholarship - Master's	CGRS M
Canada Graduate Research Scholarship - Doctoral	CGRS D
Ontario Graduate Scholarship / QEII-GSST	OGS / QEII-GSST
Biochemistry Department Awards	Biochemistry Department Awards
Schulich Awards	Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry Awards

6. Registration, Academic Status, Leaves, Withdrawal, and Courses

Graduate students are responsible for maintaining registration, academic standing, fee payment, and any approved registration status in accordance with current SGPS regulations. Students are also responsible for understanding SGPS requirements related to full-time status, absence from the University, and maximum time to completion.

This section summarizes common registration and status matters for Biochemistry graduate students and highlights when students should contact the Graduate Program Coordinator, Graduate Chair, supervisor, or SGPS. Students should consult the SGPS registration webpages for complete and current regulations.

Resource: SGPS Categories of Registration

6.1 Continuous Registration and Fees

Graduate students must maintain continuous registration in each successive term from initial registration until the end of the term in which all degree requirements are complete, unless an approved leave of absence or other approved status applies. Students are responsible for paying fees or making fee arrangements by the established deadline each term.

Students registered full-time are expected to pursue graduate studies as a full-time occupation and remain available for program requirements, research activities, Advisory Committee meetings, coursework, seminars, and other required milestones. Students planning significant time away from campus or research activities should discuss this in advance with their supervisor and, where needed, the Graduate Program Coordinator.

6.2 Part-Time Status

Part-time registration in a full-time graduate program may be granted only in exceptional circumstances and requires approval from the Graduate Program and SGPS. Supporting documentation is required. Part-time status is not used to reduce or avoid tuition fees, and being beyond the funding eligibility period is not, by itself, grounds for part-time status. Part-time status may affect funding, GTA eligibility, benefits, registration status, and timelines.

Resource: SGPS Part-Time Status

6.3 Leave of Absence

Graduate students may request a leave of absence to temporarily pause their studies. Leaves are approved by SGPS on the recommendation of the graduate program and are typically granted for pregnancy/parental, medical, compassionate, or approved internship reasons.

Students should consult the Graduate Program Coordinator, Graduate Chair, and supervisor as early as possible to discuss timing, academic and funding implications, transition planning, and return-to-study arrangements. Applications are submitted through the Graduate Student Web Services Portal and may require supporting documentation.

Leaves are normally approved for up to three terms, or 12 months. While on leave, students are not registered, do not normally pay tuition or fees, and are expected to step away from academic activities. Leaves typically extend degree timelines and funding eligibility by the same duration; however, payroll, scholarships, GTA appointments, benefits, and UHIP may be affected.

Before returning from leave, students must contact the Graduate Program Coordinator, supervisor, and relevant program contacts to confirm registration, funding, and academic plans. Students should not assume that funding or program activities will resume automatically.

Resource: SGPS Leave of Absence

6.4 Withdrawal

Withdrawal may be voluntary or may occur when a student fails to meet admission conditions, progression requirements, deadlines, or fee requirements. A student who has withdrawn or has been withdrawn is no longer registered and may not attend classes, receive supervision, or access University resources as a student. Students seeking to return must formally reapply and receive program and SGPS approval for any previous work to count toward the degree. Students considering voluntary withdrawal should speak with their supervisor, the Graduate Program Coordinator, and the Graduate Chair as early as possible to discuss academic, funding, registration, immigration, employment, and return-to-program implications.

Resource: SGPS Voluntary Withdrawal

6.5 Course Requirements and Registration

Biochemistry graduate courses normally have a 0.25 or 0.5 credit weight. Students are responsible for completing the minimum course requirements for their degree and should discuss course selection with their supervisor and, where appropriate, their Advisory Committee.

Program	Minimum course requirement
MSc	1.0 total credit: 0.25 credit for the Biochemistry Graduate Seminar course plus 0.75 additional graduate course credits.
PhD	1.5 total credits: 0.25 credit for the Biochemistry Graduate Seminar course plus 1.25 additional graduate course credits.

Students must normally complete at least one Biochemistry graduate course in addition to the Biochemistry Graduate Seminar course, unless otherwise approved. Students who transfer from the MSc to the PhD may be permitted to count approved courses completed during the MSc toward the PhD course requirement. Students entering the PhD after completing an MSc may have course requirements reviewed based on previous graduate coursework, where permitted and approved.

Students enrolled in a Collaborative Specialization may have additional course, seminar, workshop, committee, research, or presentation requirements. Students should confirm requirements with the Collaborative Specialization program and discuss course planning with their supervisor, Advisory Committee, and the Graduate Program Coordinator.

6.6 Course Changes, Audits, Courses Outside the Department, and Incomplete Courses

Students are responsible for reviewing course enrolment in Student Center and ensuring that all course additions, drops, audits, or changes are completed by the applicable deadlines. Course selection should be discussed before registration.

Process	Student action
Course add/drop	Obtain required Graduate Chair and offering-program approvals and complete changes by the applicable SGPS deadline. Courses dropped after the add deadline but before the drop deadline are recorded as WDN.
Courses outside Biochemistry	Complete the Request to Enrol in a Graduate Course Outside Home Program form, obtain required approvals, and submit the completed form to the Biochemistry Graduate Program Coordinator. Instructor permission alone is not sufficient.
Ontario Visiting Graduate Student courses	Consult the Graduate Program Coordinator well in advance. Program and SGPS approval are required before registration.
Auditing a course	Declare the audit by the enrolment deadline using the Graduate Course Audit Form and obtain required approvals. Audit status cannot normally be changed after the enrolment deadline.
Incomplete courses	If required work is not completed by the grade submission deadline, an INC may appear. Students must follow SGPS deadlines for completion and grade submission.
Senior undergraduate or extra courses	Consult the Graduate Program Coordinator before registering. Extra courses may result in additional fees and may not count toward degree requirements.

Resource: Administrative Forms

7. Roles, Responsibilities, and Professional Expectations

Successful graduate training depends on regular communication, clear expectations, timely feedback, and shared responsibility among the student, supervisor, Advisory Committee, Graduate Program, and SGPS. Expectations should be discussed early in the program and revisited whenever

research plans, timelines, funding, responsibilities, or circumstances change.

Students and supervisors are encouraged to discuss expectations early in the program and revisit them as needed, particularly when research plans, timelines, funding, responsibilities, or personal circumstances change. Topics may include communication frequency, feedback timelines, research goals, authorship and publication expectations, intellectual property, data management, safety training, professional development, vacation or time away, and plans for completing program milestones.

7.1 The Graduate Program

The Graduate Program provides academic oversight and administrative support for students in the MSc and PhD programs. The program supports students through admission, registration, progression, milestones, and thesis examination.

- Provide written program information, orientation, and notification of significant program or policy changes.
- Support supervisor assignment, Advisory Committee establishment, annual progress review, Pathfinder, Veritas, forms, examinations, thesis requests, and student records.
- Identify concerns about progress, academic standing, milestones, or program requirements clearly and in a timely manner.
- Provide information about available resources, supports, appeal pathways, and procedures for raising concerns.
- Document supervisory assignments and any approved changes to supervision in the appropriate student record.
- Ensure students are informed of expectations and evaluation criteria for required program milestones, examinations, progress reviews, and other academic work before those activities take place.
- Support alternate supervision arrangements where required if a supervisor departs, is unavailable for an extended period, or another supervisory arrangement is needed.
- Support early resolution of supervisory, academic, or progression concerns and provide information about appropriate contacts, resources, and appeal pathways.

7.2 The Supervisor

The supervisor is the student's primary research mentor and is responsible for guiding the student's research training and thesis development.

- Meet with the student early in the supervisory relationship to establish clear expectations regarding communication, research planning, timelines, authorship, intellectual property, data management, funding, safety, and professional development.
- Provide continuous supervision throughout the student's program and ensure appropriate arrangements are in place during any extended absence, with notification to the Graduate Program as required.
- Maintain regular communication with the student and be reasonably available for consultation and guidance.

- Provide timely, constructive, and consistent feedback on research plans, reports, proposals, manuscripts, thesis drafts, scholarship applications, and other academic work.
- Support the student's academic progress and research development, including guidance on degree requirements, milestones, and timelines.
- Encourage and support the student's professional development, including participation in relevant training, workshops, conferences, and career planning activities.
- Foster a respectful, inclusive, and professional research environment that supports student wellbeing and academic success.
- Ensure that research conducted under their supervision complies with applicable ethical, safety, and regulatory requirements.
- Work collaboratively with the Advisory Committee and Graduate Program to support the student's progress and address any concerns in a timely manner.

7.3 The Advisory Committee

The Advisory Committee supports the student and supervisor by providing additional academic guidance, research expertise, feedback, and progress review.

- Advise on the research plan, project scope, methods, progress, challenges, and timeline to completion.
- Review Advisory Committee reports and Pathfinder portfolio information before meetings.
- Provide constructive feedback, identify concerns early, and support planning for major milestones, including the Qualifying/Transfer Exam and thesis readiness.
- Document feedback through Pathfinder where applicable.

7.4 The Student

Students are responsible for actively engaging in their graduate training, maintaining communication with their supervisor and Advisory Committee, meeting program requirements, and progressing toward timely degree completion.

- Maintain continuous registration unless an approved leave of absence has been granted.
- Monitor Western email and respond to program, SGPS, course, funding, Pathfinder, Veritas, and thesis-related communications in a timely manner.
- Communicate regularly with the supervisor about research progress, challenges, timelines, absences, and support needs.
- Complete required coursework, training, seminars, milestones, Advisory Committee meetings, Pathfinder submissions, and thesis requirements by applicable deadlines.
- Follow safety, research ethics, workplace, academic integrity, and professional conduct requirements.
- Inform the supervisor, Graduate Program Coordinator, or Graduate Chair as early as possible if concerns may affect progress.

7.5 Shared Professional Expectations

Students, staff, postdoctoral scholars, and faculty are expected to contribute to a respectful, safe,

inclusive, and professional learning and working environment. This includes respectful communication, responsible use of shared spaces and resources, appropriate workplace conduct, responsible research practices, and timely reporting of safety, conduct, or academic concerns through the appropriate channels.

Graduate students are expected to maintain consistent engagement in their research, academic responsibilities, required training, seminars, milestones, Advisory Committee meetings, and other program expectations throughout the year. Students should discuss working patterns, communication expectations, planned absences, vacation, and time away from research activities with their supervisor as early as possible.

Reasonable vacation or time away may be taken with prior approval from the supervisor, provided that research progress, employment responsibilities, funding requirements, and program milestones are not adversely affected. Students should notify their supervisor and, where appropriate, the Graduate Program Coordinator if an absence may affect coursework, GTA duties, Advisory Committee meetings, examinations, thesis timelines, or other program requirements.

Students are expected to follow Western's Student Code of Conduct and all applicable University, Schulich, SGPS, and Department policies related to academic integrity, respectful conduct, safety, research ethics, and professional behaviour.

Resource: Western Student Code of Conduct

7.6 Changes to Supervision

Students who have concerns about supervision or who wish to discuss a possible change in supervision should contact the Graduate Chair as early as possible. Supervisory concerns are best addressed early so that appropriate supports, expectations, timelines, or next steps can be identified.

Students have the right to request a change of supervisor. A request to change supervision must be reviewed through the Graduate Program and does not automatically result in a change. Supervisors may not unilaterally end a thesis supervisory relationship without following the appropriate program, Faculty, and SGPS processes.

If supervision changes, the Graduate Chair or designate will ensure that the student, supervisor, and relevant program contacts are informed and that the change is documented in the appropriate student record. The program will make reasonable efforts to support continuity of supervision; however, the program cannot guarantee a particular supervisor, research topic, or extension of degree timelines.

8. Health, Safety, Wellness, Accessibility, and Research Ethics

The Department of Biochemistry is committed to supporting a safe, respectful, inclusive, and healthy learning and research environment. Graduate students share responsibility for maintaining this environment by completing required training, following safety and research ethics requirements, treating others with respect, and seeking support early when concerns arise.

8.1 Wellness and Support

Graduate studies can be demanding. Students are encouraged to make health and wellness a priority and to seek support early when academic, research, personal, financial, supervisory, or health-related concerns may affect progress. Western provides health, counselling, wellness, accessibility, recreation, and student support services.

8.2 Accessibility and Academic Accommodation

Students who require accommodation should contact Accessible Education as early as possible to discuss documentation, accommodation planning, and available supports. Students are not required to disclose detailed medical information to their supervisor or Advisory Committee. When an approved accommodation may affect coursework, research duties, laboratory work, milestone timing, TA duties, Advisory Committee meetings, exams, or thesis timelines, students are encouraged to notify the Graduate Program Coordinator, Graduate Chair, or supervisor so appropriate coordination can occur.

8.3 Equity, Human Rights, Harassment, Discrimination, and Sexual Misconduct

All students, staff, postdoctoral scholars, and faculty are expected to contribute to a respectful, inclusive, professional, and collegial learning and working environment. This includes treating others with courtesy and respect, engaging constructively with different perspectives, and helping maintain an environment where all members of the Department can learn, work, teach, and conduct research safely.

The Department does not tolerate harassment, discrimination, sexual misconduct, bullying, intimidation, threatening or abusive behaviour, abuse of authority, or other conduct that undermines a safe and respectful learning or working environment. Concerns may involve human-rights-based discrimination or harassment, gender-based or sexual violence, workplace harassment, personal harassment, violations of the Student Code of Conduct, or other learning-environment concerns.

Students who experience or witness concerning behaviour are encouraged to seek support and report through the appropriate University pathway. Students may contact the Graduate Program Coordinator, Graduate Chair, Department Chair, Advisory Committee member, Human Rights Office, Health & Wellness, Office of the Ombudsperson, Campus Safety, or another appropriate support office depending on the nature and urgency of the concern.

If there is an immediate risk to personal safety, students should contact emergency services or follow posted emergency procedures.

Resource: Western Human Rights Office
Resource: Western Health & Wellness

8.4 Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Accessibility, and Decolonization

The Department of Biochemistry is committed to fostering an inclusive, respectful, accessible, and equitable learning and research environment for graduate students, postdoctoral scholars, staff,

and faculty. Equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility, and decolonization are shared responsibilities and are relevant to teaching, supervision, research, mentoring, committee work, professional development, seminars, examinations, and departmental culture.

Students are encouraged to learn about EDID resources, participate in relevant training or learning opportunities, and contribute to a departmental environment where all members are valued, respected, and supported. Students may consult the Department's EDID webpage, SGPS EDIDA resources, Western's Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, the Human Rights Office, or other appropriate supports for information, guidance, learning opportunities, or reporting pathways.

Resource: Department of Biochemistry Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Decolonization
Resource: SGPS Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Accessibility, Decolonization, and Indigenization in Graduate Education and Postdoctoral Studies

8.5 Training, Laboratory, Workplace, and Research Safety

The Department of Biochemistry and Western University share responsibility for promoting a safe learning, research, and working environment. Graduate students also share responsibility for maintaining safety by completing required training, following applicable procedures, using equipment and materials appropriately, and reporting hazards, incidents, injuries, exposures, spills, or near misses promptly.

Graduate students must complete all required University, SGPS, Schulich, Department, role-specific, and research-specific training by the applicable deadlines. Students must not begin laboratory work, animal work, human participant research, biosafety-regulated work, radiation work, chemical work, field work, or other regulated activities until required training, approvals, and supervision are in place.

- Complete required training before beginning applicable work.
- Follow laboratory, department, Schulich, Western, and regulatory safety procedures.
- Maintain a clean, safe, and respectful workspace and use shared research spaces, equipment, and materials responsibly.
- Use required personal protective equipment and understand emergency procedures for the work area.
- Report hazards, incidents, injuries, spills, exposures, equipment concerns, or near misses promptly.
- Ask for clarification before performing unfamiliar procedures.

8.6 Research Ethics, Academic Integrity, Regulatory Approvals, and Responsible Conduct

Students must comply with all ethics, regulatory, and compliance requirements that apply to their research. Required approvals must be in place before the relevant research activity begins. Depending on the project, this may include human participant research ethics, animal care, biosafety, radiation, controlled substances, privacy, data security, site-specific approvals, or other regulatory requirements.

Graduate students are expected to conduct research honestly, carefully, and responsibly. This

includes accurate recordkeeping, appropriate data management, proper citation, responsible authorship practices, confidentiality where required, appropriate use or disclosure of AI-assisted tools where permitted, and compliance with all applicable research ethics and safety requirements. Students should discuss research records, data storage, authorship, intellectual property, publication expectations, and research integrity concerns with their supervisor early in the program.

Graduate students are expected to uphold academic integrity in all aspects of their program, including coursework, research, writing, publishing, teaching, presentations, examinations, thesis work, and professional activities. Academic integrity includes honesty, proper citation and attribution, responsible collaboration, accurate representation of research and data, appropriate use of sources and tools, and compliance with Western's graduate academic integrity policies and procedures.

Incoming graduate students must complete the SGPS Academic Integrity Module by the required deadline. Students are responsible for understanding what constitutes a scholastic offence and for seeking clarification from the course instructor, supervisor, Graduate Program Coordinator, or Graduate Chair when expectations are unclear.

Students using generative AI or AI-assisted tools in coursework, research, writing, data analysis, proposal preparation, thesis work, publications, presentations, scholarship applications, or other academic activities must follow applicable course, milestone, supervisor, Advisory Committee, Department, SGPS, University, funder, publisher, and professional requirements.

Use of generative AI in research, scholarship, or thesis-related work should be discussed with the supervisor and, where appropriate, the Advisory Committee. Students are responsible for ensuring that any use of AI-assisted tools is accurate, ethical, appropriately reviewed, and disclosed where required. AI-assisted tools must not replace the student's own understanding, analysis, interpretation, or responsibility for the work submitted.

Where expectations are unclear, students should ask the course instructor, supervisor, Advisory Committee, Graduate Program Coordinator, or Graduate Chair before using AI-assisted tools.

8.7 Where to Go for Help

Concern or question	Suggested first contact
Required training or first-term milestones	Graduate Program Coordinator
Laboratory, equipment, chemical, biosafety, radiation, or animal work requirements	Supervisor, lab manager, or applicable safety office
Research ethics or regulatory approval questions	Supervisor and applicable research ethics/compliance office
Academic accommodation	Accessible Education; Graduate Program Coordinator if program coordination is needed
Health, counselling, or wellness support	Western Health & Wellness or appropriate student support service

Harassment, discrimination, sexual misconduct, or human rights concern	Human Rights Office, Health & Wellness, Graduate Chair, Department Chair, or other appropriate support office
Supervisory, academic, or progression concern	Supervisor where appropriate, Advisory Committee, Graduate Program Coordinator, or Graduate Chair
Confidential guidance on academic or administrative concerns	Office of the Ombudsperson

9. Degree Requirements and Milestones

Graduate students are responsible for completing all Department of Biochemistry, SGPS, Schulich, and University requirements that apply to their program. Course requirements are addressed in Section 6. This section summarizes the major degree progression milestones and points students to the detailed sections that follow.

9.1 Requirements at a Glance

Requirement	MSc	PhD after MSc	Direct-entry PhD	MSc-to-PhD transfer
Continuous registration	Required	Required	Required	Required
Graduate Seminar / Research Showcase	Required	Required	Required	Required
Advisory Committee meetings	Required	Required	Required	Required
Pathfinder progress review	Required when requested by program	Required when requested by program	Required when requested by program	Required when requested by program
Transfer Exam	Only if transferring	Not applicable	Not applicable	Required before transfer to PhD
Qualifying Exam	Not applicable unless transferring	Required	Required	Not normally required after transfer
Permission to begin thesis writing	Required	Required	Required	Required
Thesis examination and final submission	Required	Required	Required	Required

9.2 Milestone Tracking and Student Responsibility

Program milestones are used to track progress through the MSc or PhD program. Students are responsible for knowing which milestones apply to their program pathway and for completing them by the required deadlines. Students should monitor Western email, the Graduate Student Web Services Portal, Pathfinder, Student Center, and program communications for milestone instructions, deadlines, and completion status.

Some milestones are completed directly by the student, while others are recorded by the Graduate Program after required documentation has been received. Students should contact the Graduate Program Coordinator if a milestone appears to be missing, incomplete, or incorrectly recorded.

9.3 Advisory Committee and Pathfinder Milestones

Advisory Committee meetings are required for all graduate students. The first meeting must be held by the end of the first term of registration, the second meeting within one month of completing the third term, and subsequent meetings at least annually thereafter. Students are responsible for scheduling meetings, preparing reports, and submitting materials through Pathfinder when requested by the program. Detailed procedures are provided in Section 10.

9.4 Graduate Seminar Series and Research Showcase

Attendance at departmental graduate seminar and poster sessions is mandatory for graduate students in the Department of Biochemistry, unless the student is ill or has an approved conflict such as a scientific conference or other approved academic event. The Graduate Program circulates seminar schedules and presentation requirements.

Unapproved absences may affect completion of the seminar course credit.

Student group	Presentation requirement
First-year MSc and PhD students	Poster presentation at the Dr. Harold B. Stewart Memorial Lecture and Research Showcase Day in January
Second-year MSc students	Graduate Student Seminar Series presentation
Second- to fifth-year PhD students	Graduate Student Seminar Series presentation
Year X PhD students	May opt to present, where applicable

9.5 Transfer and Qualifying Exam Milestones

MSc students who wish to transfer to the PhD program must complete the Transfer Exam and receive required approvals before entering the PhD program. Transfer must occur before the sixth term of Master's registration, and students should plan the exam early enough to allow scheduling and approval before the proposed PhD start term.

The Qualifying Exam is a required milestone for students admitted to the PhD program. PhD students entering after completion of an MSc must complete the Qualifying Exam within 3 terms of initial PhD registration. Direct-entry PhD students must complete the Qualifying Exam before the end of the fifth term. Detailed procedures are provided in Section 11.

9.6 Permission to Begin Thesis Writing and Thesis Examination

Students must obtain approval from their Advisory Committee before beginning thesis writing. Permission to write should be documented in the student's record. All MSc and PhD students must complete thesis examination and final thesis submission to complete the degree. Thesis examination is coordinated through Veritas and requires advance planning. Detailed procedures are provided in Section 12.

9.7 Maintaining Good Standing

To remain in good standing, students must maintain active registration, meet academic requirements, complete required milestones by the applicable deadlines, participate in required departmental activities, and demonstrate satisfactory research progress.

Good standing depends on both academic progress and professional engagement in the program. Students are expected to communicate regularly with their supervisor, meet with their Advisory Committee according to departmental timelines, complete Pathfinder submissions when required, respond to feedback, and follow applicable safety, research ethics, academic integrity, and professional conduct requirements.

Students should raise concerns as early as possible if academic progress, milestone completion, supervision, funding, health, personal circumstances, or other issues may affect their ability to meet program expectations. Concerns may be discussed with the supervisor, Advisory Committee, Graduate Program Coordinator, or Graduate Chair, as appropriate.

10. Advisory Committees and Pathfinder

Advisory Committee meetings are a required part of graduate degree progression in the Department of Biochemistry. These meetings provide students with structured feedback on research progress, project direction, timelines, challenges, and preparation for upcoming milestones.

Pathfinder is Western's Graduate Degree Planning Portfolio and is used by the Department to support progress documentation, Advisory Committee review, annual progress review, feedback, and student acknowledgement. Students are responsible for completing Advisory Committee and Pathfinder requirements by assigned deadlines.

10.1 Purpose of the Advisory Committee

The Advisory Committee supports the student and supervisor by providing additional research expertise, guidance, and progress review throughout the graduate program. The committee helps students develop a productive research plan, identify challenges early, and make timely progress toward degree completion.

- Review research progress, goals, challenges, and timelines.
- Provide feedback from faculty beyond the supervisor.
- Plan upcoming milestones, including the Transfer or Qualifying Exam where applicable.
- Assess readiness to begin thesis writing and document progress through Pathfinder and departmental records.

Advisory Committee meetings do not replace regular communication between the student and supervisor.

10.2 Advisory Committee Composition

Students and supervisors are responsible for identifying appropriate Advisory Committee members. The Advisory Committee consists of the supervisor and at least two additional faculty members. Faculty members from outside the Department of Biochemistry may serve when their expertise is relevant to the student's research. At least 50% of the Advisory Committee must consist of Biochemistry faculty and members must hold the appropriate SGPS membership required for their role.

Students must submit Advisory Committee member names to the Graduate Program Coordinator. Changes to committee membership must also be reported to the Graduate Program Coordinator.

10.3 Meeting Schedule

Meeting	Timing
First Advisory Committee meeting	By the end of the first term of registration
Second Advisory Committee meeting	Within one month of completing the third term of registration
Subsequent Advisory Committee meetings	At least annually thereafter
Additional meetings	As needed, particularly if research direction changes, progress concerns arise, or timelines are at risk

Students should begin scheduling meetings well in advance, especially during summer months or other periods when faculty availability may be limited. Students unable to schedule a required meeting by the deadline must contact the Graduate Program Coordinator as early as possible.

10.4 Preparing for a Meeting and Report Requirements

For each Advisory Committee meeting, the student must prepare an Advisory Committee report and submit it to committee members at least one week before the scheduled meeting. Students must also complete any required Pathfinder updates and upload supporting materials when requested by the program.

The Advisory Committee report should normally be 3 to 4 pages and must not exceed 8,000 characters, unless otherwise directed by the program.

Report component	Description
Project introduction and hypothesis	Introduce the thesis project and emphasize the key hypothesis or research question being tested.
Background literature	Describe relevant background literature. This section should normally represent approximately one-third to one-half of the report.
Methods and procedures	Describe and evaluate the procedures, approaches, or methods being used in the research.
Research progress and results	Present relevant results where available.
Future directions	Identify research directions, next steps, anticipated challenges, and planned timelines.

For the first-term report, students may not yet have substantial research results. In that case, the report should focus on background, research rationale, proposed approaches, and the research plan. Later reports should increasingly focus on progress, results, interpretation, challenges, revised timelines, and plans for completion.

10.5 Meeting Discussion, Feedback, and Progress Concerns

Advisory Committee meetings are intended to be interactive discussions about the student's research progress, project direction, challenges, and next steps. Students should be prepared to summarize their progress, respond to questions, discuss data or research challenges, and receive constructive feedback. Where useful, students may prepare a brief presentation or visual summary to support discussion, but the meeting should remain focused on feedback, planning, and progress toward degree milestones.

During the meeting, the Advisory Committee will assess the student's progress relative to program expectations, including research development, coursework (if applicable), and progress toward degree milestones. The Committee may provide recommendations regarding research direction, timelines, skill development, and strategies to address challenges or delays.

Following discussion, the Advisory Committee will determine whether progress is satisfactory and may identify specific expectations or action items for the next review period. These expectations should be clearly communicated to the student and documented in the Advisory Committee report. Advisory Committee reports and meetings are used for progress review and feedback; they are not assigned a formal course grade unless otherwise communicated by the program.

If concerns about progress arise, the Advisory Committee will outline the nature of the concerns and provide guidance on steps required to return to satisfactory standing. In cases where progress remains unsatisfactory, additional meetings, timelines, or formal program review processes may be initiated in accordance with program and SGPS policies.

Students are encouraged to actively engage in these meetings, seek clarification when needed, and use Advisory Committee feedback to guide their academic and research development.

10.6 Relationship to the Transfer or Qualifying Exam

Advisory Committee reports are not a replacement for the Transfer or Qualifying Exam. They are intended to support the student's development and help prepare for later milestones by encouraging early work on the research rationale, background, hypothesis, methods, and research plan. After appropriate updating and revision, portions of Advisory Committee reports may be useful in preparing the written proposal for the Transfer or Qualifying Exam.

10.7 Pathfinder Progress Review and Acknowledgement

Pathfinder is Western's Graduate Degree Planning Portfolio. The Department of Biochemistry uses Pathfinder to support graduate progress documentation, Advisory Committee review, annual progress review, feedback, and student acknowledgement.

Students will be asked to update and submit their Pathfinder portfolio when required by the program. Pathfinder may include information automatically populated from Western systems as well as information entered by the student, including research progress, thesis progress, goals, timelines, coursework, milestones, scholarly activities, publications, conference presentations, professional development, awards, service, challenges, support needs, and supporting documents.

When Pathfinder is used for Advisory Committee review, committee members review the submitted portfolio, Advisory Committee report, supporting materials, goals, timelines, and progress information. Committee members provide feedback through Pathfinder where applicable, and the Graduate Chair may also review submissions and feedback as part of the program's progress review process.

Students are responsible for ensuring that Pathfinder submissions are accurate, complete, and submitted by the assigned deadline. Students must review feedback once the review process is

complete and may be required to acknowledge feedback in Pathfinder. Acknowledgement confirms that the student has reviewed the feedback; it does not necessarily mean the student agrees with every comment.

During Pathfinder implementation or transition periods, students must follow the most recent instructions circulated by the Graduate Program Coordinator. To ensure committee members have timely access to meeting materials, students may be asked to upload the Advisory Committee report and supporting materials to Pathfinder and also email the report directly to the supervisor and committee members at least one week before the meeting.

10.8 Late, Missed, or Delayed Advisory Committee Meetings

Students must contact the Graduate Program Coordinator as early as possible if they are unable to schedule a required Advisory Committee meeting by the deadline. Late or missed meetings may affect milestone completion, Pathfinder progress review, academic standing, funding eligibility, or program progression. Where a delay is unavoidable, the student, supervisor, and Graduate Program Coordinator should discuss a revised timeline and any required documentation.

11. Qualifying Exam and Transfer Exam

The Qualifying Exam and Transfer Exam are major academic milestones in the Department of Biochemistry. The exam assesses the student's readiness for doctoral-level research, including the ability to develop a research hypothesis, explain the rationale for the proposed work, demonstrate knowledge of relevant literature and methodology, and defend the proposed research plan.

For students registered in the PhD program, this milestone is referred to as the Qualifying Exam. For MSc students seeking transfer to the PhD program without completing the MSc degree, this milestone is referred to as the Transfer Exam.

11.1 Purpose of the Exam

The exam evaluates whether the student has the background knowledge, research understanding, communication skills, and independence needed to proceed with doctoral-level research. The written proposal and oral examination should demonstrate that the student understands both the specific research project and the broader scientific context in which the work is situated.

11.2 Who Must Complete the Exam

Student group	Requirement
PhD students entering after completion of an MSc	Must complete the Qualifying Exam.
Direct-entry PhD students	Must complete the Qualifying Exam.
MSc students seeking transfer to the PhD program	Must complete the Transfer Exam before entry to the PhD program.
MSc students not seeking transfer	Not required to complete the Transfer Exam.

The Transfer Exam is not completed after transfer into the PhD program. MSc students must complete the Transfer Exam and receive required approvals before entering the PhD program. Once approved for transfer, the student continues in the PhD program and is responsible for

meeting all applicable PhD requirements from that point forward.

11.3 Timing of the Exam

Student pathway	Required timing
PhD after completed MSc	The Qualifying Exam must be completed within 3 terms of initial PhD registration.
Direct-entry PhD	The Qualifying Exam must be completed before the end of the fifth term.
MSc-to-PhD transfer	The Transfer Exam must be completed before entry to the PhD program and before the sixth term of Master's registration. Students should plan to write the exam before the end of the fifth term.

MSc students intending to transfer should discuss this pathway with their supervisor and Advisory Committee as early as possible and notify the Graduate Program Coordinator and Graduate Chair early enough to allow examination planning and administrative approval before the proposed PhD start term.

Intended PhD start term	Normal written proposal deadline
Summer / May start	February 1
Fall / September start	June 1
Winter / January start	October 1

11.4 Written Proposal

The written proposal and oral examination test the student's ability to put forward a research hypothesis and defend the rationale for testing that hypothesis. The proposal should demonstrate the student's ability to describe their own research project, think independently, and show general knowledge of the concepts described in the proposal, including background literature, methods, techniques, and experimental approaches.

Students must follow current Department, SGPS, and University expectations regarding the use of generative AI or AI-assisted tools in written proposals and examinations. Any permitted use of AI-assisted tools must be discussed in advance with the supervisor and disclosed where required. Students remain responsible for the accuracy, integrity, originality, and defense of all submitted work.

Section	Description
Title page and abstract	Includes the proposal title and an abstract of 200 words or less.
Introduction	Provides a concise review of relevant literature and introduces the research problem, significance, and rationale.
Hypothesis / Research Objectives	States the hypothesis, specific aims, and research objectives clearly and directly.
Research Progress to Date	Summarizes relevant data or progress generated to date and explains how it supports the proposed research.
Detailed Research Plan	Describes the proposed research plan, rationale for the approaches, anticipated results, potential challenges, and alternative approaches.
Concluding Paragraph	Places the proposed work in a broader context and reinforces its significance.

The hypothesis must be testable and should follow logically from the introduction and research rationale. The research plan should be realistic for one person to complete within the expected doctoral research timeline. The concluding paragraph should emphasize the significance of the proposed work and place the project in a broader scientific context.

11.5 Proposal Format Requirements

Requirement	Standard
Abstract	Maximum 200 words; word count should be included after the abstract.
Introduction	Normally no more than 4 pages.
Detailed research plan	Normally no more than 3 pages.
Margins	At least 1 inch.
Font size	No smaller than 12-point font.
Page numbers	Required.
Character limit	Maximum 24,500 characters, including spaces.
Character count	Shown at the bottom of the last page.
Exclusions from character count	Abstract, references, figures, and tables.
Figures and tables	Normally no more than one figure or table per page of text, up to 7 total figures or tables.

11.6 Submission and Preliminary Review

The written proposal must be submitted by the applicable deadline. Students should confirm submission instructions with the Graduate Program Coordinator before the deadline.

After submission, the proposal is circulated to the examiners for preliminary review before the oral examination. This review is intended to identify significant concerns with the written proposal before the oral exam. It does not replace the final assessment of the student's written and oral performance.

- Examiners complete the preliminary review within 2 weeks of receiving the proposal.
- If any examiner determines that the written proposal requires revision before the oral examination, the proposal is returned to the student with comments and suggested revisions.
- The student is given 2 weeks to revise and resubmit the proposal.
- The oral examination proceeds after the revised proposal has been submitted.
- If no revisions are required after preliminary review, the proposal proceeds to the oral examination.

11.7 Examining Committee

The examining committee is established by the Department. Students should not contact potential examiners independently unless instructed to do so by the Graduate Program Coordinator or Graduate Chair.

Committee member	Role
Chair	Oversees the examination process, manages the oral examination, records the outcome, and communicates the result.

Examiner familiar with the research area	Normally a Biochemistry faculty member familiar with the student's research area and often a non-supervising member of the Advisory Committee.
Two additional faculty examiners	At least one must be from the Department of Biochemistry. These examiners should not include remaining members of the student's Advisory Committee.
Supervisor	Attends the examination but does not question the student and does not vote.

The supervisor may address the examination board before the vote on the student's performance. The supervisor is not an examiner. A co-supervisor may not serve as an examiner. Examiners should review the proposal independently and should not discuss the proposal with other examiners before the examination.

11.8 Oral Examination Format

The oral examination focuses on the written proposal and the student's understanding of the research area. Questions must relate to the proposal but may address any aspect of the proposal, including background knowledge, methodology, experimental approaches, interpretation, feasibility, and broader scientific context.

At the student's option, the exam may begin with a 5- to 10-minute oral presentation and may include no more than 3 slides. Questioning normally includes a first round of up to 15 minutes per examiner followed by a second round of up to 10 minutes per examiner. The Chair does not normally question the candidate.

11.9 Assessment Criteria

The exam assesses whether the student is prepared to complete the proposed research and, where applicable, write and defend a doctoral thesis. Student performance is assessed based on understanding of basic principles, feasibility of the project and approach, clarity of communication during the oral presentation and questioning, and adequacy of the introduction and literature review.

The examining committee considers both the written proposal and the oral examination when determining whether the student is recommended for transfer or continuation in the PhD program.

11.10 Assessment Process and Outcomes

After questioning is complete, the student will be asked to leave the room. The supervisor may be invited to comment on the student's performance and on the suitability of the direction of questioning. The supervisor will then leave before the examining committee discusses the student's performance and reaches a decision.

Each examiner completes an evaluation indicating whether the student is recommended or not recommended for progression or continuation to the PhD program. The Chair records the final examination outcome on the Chair Report. The vote and committee discussion are confidential.

Outcome	Meaning

Pass	The student has met the required standard and is recommended for transfer or continuation in the PhD program, as applicable.
Fail / Not Recommended	The student has not met the required standard and is not recommended for transfer or continuation in the PhD program.
Distinction	Distinction may be recorded when a passing performance is judged to be exceptional. Distinction may be unanimous or by majority decision.

For MSc students completing the Transfer Exam, the examining committee's decision determines whether the student is recommended to proceed directly to the PhD program or should continue toward completion of the MSc degree. For PhD students, the decision determines whether the student is recommended for continued enrolment in the PhD program. If a PhD student is not recommended to continue, registration may be changed to the MSc if recommended by the examining committee and if the student does not already hold an MSc from the Department of Biochemistry.

11.11 Role of the Chair

The Chair is responsible for ensuring that the examination is conducted fairly, consistently, and according to departmental procedures.

- Confirming the examining committee and ensuring the examination follows the required format.
- Managing the order and timing of questioning and ensuring questioning remains appropriate and on track.
- Noting areas where the student excelled or had difficulty and recording relevant supervisor comments.
- Overseeing the confidential assessment process, counting votes, recording the final result, and communicating the result to the student, supervisor, and Graduate Chair.

11.12 Appeals Procedure

A student who wishes to appeal the result of a Qualifying Exam or Transfer Exam must submit a written request to the Graduate Chair, or designate if the Graduate Chair is unavailable, within one week following the exam. The written request must state the basis for the appeal.

Appeals are not intended to repeat the exam or re-evaluate scientific merit except in exceptional circumstances. Appeals should identify procedural concerns, fairness concerns, or other grounds relevant to the conduct or outcome of the examination.

Upon receiving an appeal, the Graduate Chair will form a three-member appeals committee. Members will normally be selected from the Graduate Studies Committee and must have no direct involvement with the student and no conflict of interest. The appeals committee will review relevant documentation and normally meet within one week to reach a decision. If the appeal is successful, the student will repeat the exam with the same examining board where possible, unless circumstances require a different arrangement. Further appeals must follow applicable Department, Schulich, SGPS, and University appeal procedures.

12. Thesis Planning, Examination, and Veritas

All MSc and PhD students must complete a thesis examination and final thesis submission to complete the degree. Thesis examination is coordinated through Veritas and requires advance planning by the student, supervisor, Advisory Committee, Graduate Program, examination board, and SGPS.

This section provides a departmental overview of the thesis process. Students must also review the current SGPS thesis webpages for official thesis formatting, submission, examination, final submission, embargo, and convocation requirements.

12.1 Thesis Readiness and Permission to Write

As students approach thesis submission, the Advisory Committee plays an important role in assessing readiness for examination and supporting final-stage preparation. The Committee may provide detailed feedback on the overall scope and coherence of the thesis, ensuring that the work meets program expectations for originality, depth, and scholarly contribution. This includes evaluating whether the research objectives have been adequately addressed, whether the data and analyses are complete and appropriately interpreted, and whether the thesis is organized in a clear and logical manner.

The Advisory Committee may also offer guidance on readiness for examination by identifying any remaining gaps in the research, analysis, or written document that should be addressed prior to submission. In addition, the Committee may help the student anticipate potential areas of questioning during the defense, including conceptual understanding, methodological choices, interpretation of results, and the broader significance of the research within the field.

To support successful preparation, the supervisor and Advisory Committee may recommend an additional meeting or structured practice discussion (e.g., a mock defense or informal presentation). These sessions provide an opportunity for the student to refine their ability to clearly communicate their research, respond to questions, and engage in scholarly discussion. Such preparation can help build confidence, identify areas requiring further clarification, and ensure that the student is well prepared for the formal thesis examination process.

12.2 Planning the Examination Timeline

Students should begin thesis examination planning well before the intended defense date. Examiner availability, SGPS timelines, departmental approvals, Veritas processing, room or technology arrangements, revisions, final submission, and convocation deadlines all require advance coordination.

SGPS minimum timelines are:

Degree	Minimum SGPS timeline before proposed examination date
PhD	At least 6 working weeks

MSc	At least 4 working weeks

These are minimum SGPS timelines. Students and supervisors should begin planning earlier to allow time for examiner selection, conflict-of-interest review, request preparation, approval routing, and scheduling.

12.3 Departmental Thesis Examination Request and Veritas

The thesis examination process begins with departmental approval of the proposed examination board. Before examination details are finalized, the supervisor and/or student must submit the Proposed Examiner form to the Graduate Program Coordinator for review and approval by the Graduate Chair.

After the proposed examiners have been approved, the supervisor and student may proceed with confirming examiner availability and examination arrangements. Once the exam date, time, format, and examiner participation have been confirmed, the supervisor and/or student must submit the completed Thesis Exam Request form to the Graduate Program Coordinator.

The Thesis Exam Request form should include all required examination details, including:

Required information	Notes
Student information	Name, program, degree, supervisor, and thesis title
Approved examiners	Examiner names and roles, as approved by the Graduate Chair
Confirmed examination date and time	Must meet SGPS and departmental timelines
Examination format	In person, remote, or hybrid, where permitted
Public presentation details	Required for PhD candidates and where applicable
Accessibility or technology needs	Should be identified as early as possible
Embargo, confidentiality, or publication considerations	Should be discussed before the request is submitted

After the completed form is received, the Graduate Program Coordinator enters the thesis examination request through the appropriate system. Required approvals are then circulated electronically. Signatures are not required on the departmental request form unless specifically requested.

The student submits the thesis manuscript and any supplemental files separately through the Graduate Student Web Services Portal using the Veritas menu once instructed to do so. Students should not submit thesis files in Veritas until the departmental request process has been initiated.

Students should not contact proposed examiners unless specifically instructed to do so. Examiner communication and confirmation must follow departmental and SGPS procedures.

12.4 Thesis Format and Reference Style

The Department of Biochemistry does not require one specific reference style for MSc or PhD

theses. Students should use a consistent scholarly reference style that is appropriate to the discipline, often based on the format of a journal commonly used in the student's research area.

Students are responsible for ensuring that the thesis meets current SGPS formatting and technical requirements. SGPS requirements may include title page formatting, page numbering, file format, copyright permissions, supplementary files, metadata, and publication requirements.

Students should review SGPS thesis formatting instructions early in the writing process.

12.5 Examination Board and Conflicts of Interest

The thesis examination board is selected according to SGPS and departmental requirements. The supervisor works with the Graduate Program to identify appropriate examiners for approval.

Proposed examiners must have appropriate expertise and must not have conflicts of interest that could affect the fairness or independence of the examination. Potential conflicts may include close personal or professional relationships, recent collaboration, shared publications or funding, direct involvement in the thesis research, prior supervision, a vested interest in the research, or other circumstances that could reasonably affect impartiality.

Concerns about examiner eligibility or conflicts of interest should be raised with the Graduate Program Coordinator or Graduate Chair before the thesis examination request is submitted.

12.6 Defense Arrangements and Examination

Thesis examinations may be held in person, remotely, or in a hybrid format where permitted. The examination format must be confirmed as part of the thesis examination request and recorded in Veritas.

Students should confirm the examination date, time, location, remote access information, public presentation details where applicable, and any technology or accessibility needs with the Graduate Program Coordinator before the defense date.

Students should be prepared to discuss the thesis, defend the research methods and conclusions, respond to questions, and place the work in the broader context of the field. Examination conduct, attendance, questioning, deliberation, and outcomes follow SGPS procedures.

12.7 Revisions, Final Submission, Embargoes, and Convocation

After a successful thesis examination, students must complete any required revisions and submit the final thesis according to SGPS procedures and deadlines. The thesis requirement is not complete until the final thesis has been submitted, reviewed, approved, and published through Western's final thesis submission process.

Students and supervisors should discuss whether an embargo is needed before final submission. An embargo may be appropriate where immediate public release could affect publication plans, intellectual property, patent considerations, confidential information, or other approved reasons. Embargo requests are made during the final submission process and must follow SGPS requirements.

Completion of the thesis examination does not by itself complete the degree. The degree is

complete only after all program requirements have been satisfied and the final thesis submission has been approved. Students planning for convocation should review SGPS and Registrar deadlines early.

Final thesis submission date may affect tuition, registration, WGRS, fellowship or stipend payments, refunds, benefits, UHIP, GTA appointments, and convocation timing. Students should confirm completion timing and financial implications with the Graduate Program Coordinator before finalizing thesis examination plans.

12.8 Student Responsibilities

Students are responsible for managing their part of the thesis process and meeting all applicable deadlines.

Students must:

- discuss thesis readiness with the supervisor and Advisory Committee;
- obtain permission to begin thesis writing;
- review SGPS thesis formatting and submission requirements;
- plan examination timelines well in advance;
- monitor Western email and Veritas notifications;
- submit the thesis and supplemental files by the required deadline;
- prepare for the oral defense;
- complete required revisions by the deadline;
- complete final thesis submission; and
- confirm that all degree requirements have been recorded as complete.

Students should contact the Graduate Program Coordinator as early as possible with questions about thesis forms, Veritas access, examination timing, final submission, or convocation planning.

SGPS Thesis Information: https://grad.uwo.ca/academics/thesis/index.html
SGPS Preliminary Examination: https://grad.uwo.ca/academics/thesis/preliminary_submission.html
SGPS Final Submission: https://grad.uwo.ca/academics/thesis/final_submission.html

12.9 Thesis Defense Only Status

Thesis Defense Only status may apply when a student has completed all degree requirements, including thesis submission by the applicable SGPS deadline, but has not completed the thesis examination before the end of the current term. Students should review the current SGPS Thesis Defense Only Status webpage early, as required forms, thesis upload deadlines, fees, and eligibility conditions are set by SGPS. Where applicable, the student is responsible for completing the required Thesis Defense Only/Intent to Submit step and thesis upload through Veritas by the applicable SGPS deadline.

Thesis Defense Only status is not automatic and may affect registration, fees, funding, benefits, UHIP, and convocation timing. Students who are aiming to complete by the end of a term should consult the Graduate Program Coordinator well in advance to confirm thesis submission timing,

Veritas requirements, examination planning, and final submission deadlines.
Resource: SGPS Thesis Defense Only Status

13. Student Resources and Representation

Graduate students are encouraged to take advantage of the academic, professional, wellness, community, and student support resources available through the Department of Biochemistry, Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry, SGPS, Western University, and graduate student organizations.

13.1 Biochemistry Graduate Students' Association

The Biochemistry Graduate Students' Association provides opportunities for graduate student community, representation, peer support, and departmental engagement. Students are encouraged to participate in BGSA activities and respond to opportunities for student representation on departmental committees where applicable.
Resource: biochem.gradstudent.association@gmail.com

13.2 Society of Graduate Students and GTA Representation

The Society of Graduate Students (SOGS) represents graduate students at Western and provides information about advocacy, health and dental plans, events, and graduate student services. Students holding Graduate Teaching Assistantships may also be represented by the applicable GTA union and should review current employment-related information circulated by Western, Schulich, or the Department.

13.3 Campus and Student Support Services

Students may use campus resources related to health and wellness, accessibility, recreation, housing, parking, ONECard, technology support, the Registrar's Office, Western International, and the Office of the Ombudsperson. Contact information and links are provided in Section 14. Students are encouraged to use Western's Graduate Student Life website as a central hub for graduate student services, supports, events, community opportunities, and campus life resources. Students who are travelling for research, conferences, field work, collaborations, or other University-related activities should discuss funding eligibility, expense reimbursement, required approvals, insurance, and travel or safety requirements with their supervisor and the appropriate departmental contact before making arrangements. Students should not assume that travel, registration, vehicle rental, mileage, accommodation, poster printing, or other research-related expenses will be reimbursed unless approval and funding source information have been confirmed in advance.

13.4 Professional Development

Students are encouraged to pursue professional development opportunities that support research, teaching, communication, leadership, career planning, and transferable skills. Opportunities may be offered through the Department, Schulich, SGPS, Western, professional societies, conferences, and external organizations.

Western's Own Your Future program provides career and professional development opportunities for graduate students. The program helps students identify and articulate transferable skills, explore academic and non-academic career pathways, and participate in workshops related to career engagement, leadership, thriving, communication and relationship building, and teaching and learning.

Students should review Own Your Future opportunities regularly and consider discussing professional development goals with their supervisor, Advisory Committee, or Graduate Program Coordinator as part of broader degree and career planning.

Resource: Own Your Future

14. Key Contacts and Important Links

Students should contact the appropriate departmental, Schulich, SGPS, or University office when they have questions about academic requirements, registration, funding, milestones, thesis examination, student supports, or administrative processes. Contact information may change and should be reviewed before publication.

14.1 Department Contacts

Area	Contact
Graduate Program Coordinator	Megan Luckovitch, mluckovi@uwo.ca
Graduate Chair	Dr. Wing-Yiu (James) Choy, jchoy4@uwo.ca
Graduate Associate Chair	Dr. Caroline Schild-Poulter, cschild-poulter@robarts.ca
Department Chair	Dr. Greg Gloor, ggloor@uwo.ca
Manager, Administration & Finance	Jessica Jamieson, Jessica.jamieson@schulich.uwo.ca
Manager, Operations & Safety	Boun Thai, Boun.Thai@schulich.uwo.ca
Financial Assistant	Charlotte Cheng, cchen626@uwo.ca
Department Website	Biochemistry Department website

14.2 SGPS, Schulich, and Western Resources

Resource	Link / contact
School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies	SGPS website
Graduate Student Web Services Portal	Graduate Student Web Services Portal
SGPS Thesis pages	SGPS Thesis Pages
Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry Graduate Studies	Schulich Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs
Office of the Registrar	Office of the Registrar
Student Center	Student Center
Western International	Western International

14.3 Student Support Contacts

Support Area	Link / contact
Health & Wellness support	Western Health & Wellness

Accessible and academic accommodation	Accessible Education - Graduate Students
Human rights, harassment, discrimination, or sexual misconduct concerns	Human Rights Office
Confidential guidance on academic or administrative concerns	Office of the Ombudsperson
Graduate student advocacy, benefits, and student representation	Society of Graduate Students
GTA and postdoctoral union representation	PSAC Local 610
Urgent safety, emergency response, or campus safety concerns	Campus Safety and Emergency Services
Student conduct expectations	Western Student Code of Conduct
Graduate student services, events, supports, and campus life	Graduate Student Life
Fitness, recreation, intramurals, and active living	Campus Recreation
Off-campus housing support	Off-Campus Housing Services
Parking and transportation information	Parking Services
Department EDID information and resources	Department of Biochemistry Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Decolonization
Graduate EDIDA information and resources	SGPS EDIDA in Graduate Education and Postdoctoral Studies
Western equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility resources	Western Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

14.4 Academic, Research, and Professional Resources

Resource	Link / contact
Western technology support	Western Technology Services Helpdesk
Library research support and resources	Western Libraries
Writing and communication support	Writing Support Centre
Career planning and employment support	Career Education
Teaching assistant training and teaching development	Western Centre for Teaching and Learning
Human participant research ethics	Human Research Ethics
Required health and safety training	Western – Required Training Biochemistry - Required Health and Safety Training Safety Training Checklist
Accident, illness, incident, or near-miss reporting	Accident, Illness, Incident, or Near-Miss Reporting
Graduate professional development and career planning	Own Your Future
Generative AI guidance for graduate studies	SGPS Guidance for the Use of Generative AI in Graduate Studies
Graduate academic integrity requirements and resources	SGPS Academic Integrity

Travel, expense reimbursement, and University business processes	Western Financial Services - Expense Reimbursements