

Neuroscience Graduate Program
Seminar Milestone
July 1, 2025

Starting September 2025, several changes to the attendance requirements and absence reporting procedure will come into effect for the Seminar Milestone. The changes result from discussions at the Neuroscience Graduate Program Committee and reflect the importance of the Seminar Milestone to the educational experience in our graduate program. They also represent policies and procedures that are more consistent with other graduate programs at Western.

The Seminar Milestone is a key part of the program requirements in the Neuroscience Graduate Program. The seminar runs in-person Tuesday mornings 9:00 am – 10:00 am starting in September and ending in April. All MSc and PhD students attend the seminar classes in each year of their studies, and starting in the second year of their studies, all MSc and PhD students present a scientific talk each year based on their graduate research.

The Seminar Milestone is a central component of the scientific development of graduate students in our program. A key pedagogical component of the milestone is that in classes, students are exposed to and learn from scientific talks across a broad range of neuroscience disciplines and methodological approaches represented by neuroscience research labs across Western.

Students learn from scientific talks across almost every subfield of Neuroscience, from cellular/molecular work to animal work to human experiments, and techniques ranging from single cell patch clamping to circuit-level electrophysiology, neuroimaging and human behaviour, to computational neuroscience modeling approaches. In addition, students benefit from the experience of designing, preparing, rehearsing, and delivering focused scientific talks based on their thesis research projects. MSc students deliver 1 talk in their second year, and PhD students deliver 3 talks in years 2-4. Direct entry or PhD transfer students will deliver 4 talks in years 2-5.

Starting in September 2025, attendance at all weekly seminar classes is mandatory for students in the Neuroscience Graduate Program. This includes attendance when guest lectures present talks in class as part of the Perspectives in Neuroscience Speaker Series. To achieve the Seminar Milestone in each year of their studies, students are expected to attend all seminar classes. Students in Year-X and beyond are not required to complete the Seminar Milestone. Students arriving late will be marked absent and must use the [absence reporting form](#) to report the reason.

The Neuroscience Graduate Program recognizes that occasional absences may occur due to several recognized legitimate reasons, including but not limited to illness, attending a conference, family emergency, etc. As of September 2025, all absences must be reported, before class, to the Neuroscience Graduate Program office and the reason documented using an online web form. If a last-minute emergency precludes reporting an absence before class, the student should report the absence as soon as possible afterwards and provide a suitable rationale.

Absence reports will be audited throughout the year and if a student has several absences, this will result in a conversation with the Director about the reasons why. At this time the Director may require all further absences to be routed through Western's [Academic Accommodations process](#). In this case any further absences that are not approved by Academic Accommodations will result in the Seminar Milestone not being achieved.

If a student becomes aware of the need to miss one or more seminar classes in the future, for example due to upcoming research scheduling, they may, together with their supervisor, approach the Director to request accommodation. However, this request must occur in advance of the absence(s), and the Director has the discretion to approve or deny these requests.

Important: In previous years there has been an unofficial policy to allow “remedial work” to make up for missed seminar hours in the summer, e.g. by attending PhD public lectures. As of September 2025, this will no longer be an option. Any unapproved absences from class will result in failure to achieve the Seminar Milestone.

Important: In previous years, the requirement has been to attend at least 75 % of the Seminar Milestone classes, without the need to self-report absences up to 25 % of classes. As of September 2025, this will no longer be the policy, attendance at all classes is mandatory. Absences must be self-reported with reasons given, as outlined above.

If the Seminar Milestone is not achieved, this may result in the student being asked to withdraw from the Neuroscience Graduate Program.