

Valdosta State University

Biology Department

Masters of Science Program

Graduate Student Guide Book

Fall 2014

GENERAL GRADUATE SCHOOL REQUIREMENTS:

See the Valdosta State University Graduate Bulletin (also available online from the Graduate School web page) for information on student classifications and admissions criteria.

Graduate students must maintain a minimum graduate grade point average of 2.5 to be eligible for financial aid.

1. Academic GPA Requirements: For graduation, the cumulative graduate grade-point average must be **3.0** or higher on a 4.0 scale. Throughout their program, students' performance must be **acceptable** on a continuing basis. Students must at all times maintain an overall grade-point average of not less than 2.5. No grade below "C" will be credited toward a graduate degree. Any student acquiring any combination of two grades "D," "F," "WF," or "U" will be dismissed from the Graduate School. Additional requirements have been established for the Master of Business Administration program; the Master of Science programs with majors in Criminal Justice, Marriage and Family Therapy, and Sociology; the Master of Public Administration program. Please refer to the program descriptions in this Catalog.

2. Calculation of GPA: All grades received for graduate courses taken at Valdosta State University, after admission to the Graduate School, will be used to calculate the graduate cumulative grade-point average. Courses may be retaken, if desired or required, but all graduate grades received will affect this average. Cumulative grade-point averages are calculated at the close of every semester in which course work is taken. This calculation appears on the permanent record of each student. Matters requiring interpretation of a graduate record should normally be referred to the student's advisor or the Graduate School. Undergraduate grades will not be calculated as part of the graduate student's semester or cumulative average.

3. Course Load: The normal full load for a graduate student is 9-15 hours of graduate-level work per semester. Graduate assistants must register for a minimum of 6 hours per semester. The normal full load for a student with a graduate assistantship is 9 semester hours at the graduate level; however, in special circumstances, with the approval of the major professor and the department head, a graduate assistant may be permitted to take 12 hours. Graduate students may earn no more than 6 hours credit in Directed Study and/or Independent Study courses to meet the requirements of a degree-granting program.

4. Scholarly Conduct: VSU expects all students to meet high standards of academic conduct, and this expectation is particularly true of graduate students. Graduate students have been through the experience of completing undergraduate degree programs, and they should be familiar with the expected standards of conduct within Academe. Some of the key principles relating to these standards are found in the Thesis and Dissertation Guide at <<http://www.valdosta.edu/gradschool>>.

BIOLOGY DEPARTMENT REQUIREMENTS:

1. Major Advisor and Thesis Committee: Prior to the end of the first semester in the program, students, in consultation with their major advisor, will form a thesis advisory committee to oversee and direct progress towards completion of the degree requirements. Thesis committees will consist of graduate faculty members willing to serve in that capacity and include the thesis advisor and at least two other consenting faculty members with relevant interests and expertise. Additional committee members, from within or without the department, may be added as necessary and agreed upon by the student in consultation with his or her committee. The student is required to submit a Committee Composition Form (available from the Biology Department's graduate program web page), signed by the student and all committee members, to the Graduate School two weeks prior to the end of their first semester of enrollment.. A copy should also be provided to the Program Coordinator for inclusion into the student's record

2. Program of Study: Students will develop individual programs of study in consultation with their committees. Programs of study will consist of specific course work directly relevant to student interests and needs and will include a timeline for completion of all work related to the degree. A copy of the completed program of study form (available from the Biology Department's graduate program web page), signed by the student and all committee members, must be submitted to the Biology Graduate Program Coordinator for inclusion into the student's record. It is strongly recommended that this form be completed before the end of the student's first semester in the program.

3. Curriculum Requirements: All graduate programs of study will consist of 30 semester hours. Of these 30 semester hours, a minimum of 15 hours must be in courses numbered 7000 or above, including two hours of Graduate Seminar (BIOL 7900), two hours of Special Topics (BIOL 7010, 7020 or 7030), 3 hours of Experimental Design and Data Analysis (BIOL 7050) and six hours of Thesis credit (BIOL 8999). Both Special Topics and Graduate Seminar may be taken more than once; likewise, students may take as many additional hours of Thesis as desired. Even if not enrolled, students are expected to attend seminar every semester. Students may take up to six hours of approved course work outside of biology that the thesis committee deems acceptable and supportive of the program of study (e.g., math, geology, chemistry, physics, education, etc.). Students working in educational fields may use the approved six credit hours outside the major to take science education coursework that will enhance the individual's ability to teach.

A typical program of study will include:

BIOL 7010, 7020 or 7030 Special Topics	2 hours
BIOL 7050 Experimental Design and Data Analysis	3 hours
BIOL 7900 Graduate Seminar	2 hours
Courses appropriate to the program of study, numbered 7000 or above	2 hours

Biology electives numbered 5000 or above.....	up to 15 hours
Non-Biology electives numbered 5000 or above.....	up to 6 hours
BIOL 8999 Thesis.....	6 hours
Total	30 hours

4. **Thesis Proposal:** During their first semester, students must identify an appropriate research project in consultation with their major advisor and thesis committee members and submit a formal proposal to their committee for approval by signature. Proposals should include an introduction and background to the project, a discussion of the proposed research methods and a summary of the importance of the project. Approved proposals will then be submitted to the department graduate coordinator for inclusion into the student’s record. It is strongly recommended that the thesis proposal be completed and approved by the end of the student’s first semester in the program.

5. **Thesis Committee Meetings:** Student’s are required to hold a formal meeting with their thesis committee once each semester during their enrollment in the program. These meetings should assess the student’s progress in coursework, research and thesis to date and provide an opportunity for both the student and thesis committee to constructively address problems and developments in the student’s program. The committee will then evaluate the student’s performance and progress at the conclusion of the meeting. The major professor will then write a summary evaluation letter of the student’s progress and submit copies to the student, committee members and the Graduate Program Coordinator for inclusion into the student’s record prior to the last day of the semester.

6. **Assistantship Eligibility:** All graduate students must maintain a status of “In Good Standing” in both the Graduate School and the Biology department in order to remain in the program and to be eligible for stipend support. “Good standing” is interpreted to mean that a student is enrolled under regular admission status full time, is currently maintaining an acceptable GPA of 3.0, has completed all scheduled Graduate and Departmental requirements to date, and has demonstrated satisfactory performance and progress towards completion of the degree. Determination of “Good Standing” status will be made by the Graduate Program Committee based on a review of the student’s records, placing most emphasis on the student’s thesis committee evaluation letter at the end of each semester.

7. **Assistantship Availability:** Students are eligible for four semesters of stipend support during their degree program. Student teaching stipends are limited in number and no student is guaranteed stipend support. In cases where the number of stipends is limited assistantships will be awarded on a competitive basis depending on student progress and achievement. Requests for support beyond the 4th semester will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, and only for one semester at a time.

8. **Assistantship Awards:** The Biology Department Graduate Committee will review and vote on all requests for support. While the committee will determine which students

will be recommended for funding, final decisions about support are made by the Graduate School. Should funding be awarded, the Head of the Biology Department will determine the specific duties of each student.

9. Evaluation of Teaching Assistants: Graduate students in Biology that have been awarded a stipend often work as teaching assistants in various courses. It is the responsibility of the Biology Graduate Committee to evaluate the performance of TAs each semester. Evaluation consists of one member of the committee attending class on a day and time mutually agreed upon with the student. The evaluator will determine whether to utilize the departmental evaluation form (available from the Biology graduate program web page) or provide some other form of written evaluation. A copy of the evaluation will be provided to the student and the Graduate Program coordinator for inclusion in the student's file. Evaluations may be considered as part of the Biology Graduate Committee's review of requests for continued stipend support.

10. Annual Research Symposium: All students are required to participate in Biology's annual research symposium, which is held each fall. Students within their first year in the program (i.e., admitted in either the previous spring or fall) are required to present a poster that describes their thesis project and findings to date. Older students are required to give a 15 minute oral presentation about their research. New students (those admitted that fall) are expected to attend the symposium but are not required to present.

PROGRAM COMPLETION AND GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS:

1. **Competency Exam:** Students will be required to pass a competency exam covering general subject areas, the program of study course work, as well as specific areas related to the thesis topic prior to the completion of 27 hours of coursework. Format consists of a written component with a follow-up oral examination. Style and content of the exam will be developed and administered by the thesis committee members. Students must pass the competency exam, as determined by the examining thesis committee, to achieve candidate status for the degree and remain in the program. Students not successfully passing the competency exam may, at the thesis committee's discretion, be re-examined after completion of appropriate remedial work as determined by the thesis committee. Students failing to pass competency exams and denied a re-examination by the thesis committee will be dismissed from the program.

2. **Application for Graduation:** Students must apply for graduation one semester in advance. Students planning to attend graduation should make arrangements with the VSU Bookstore for purchase of cap, gown, and hood. The Registrar's Office and Graduate School should be consulted early in the program (at least one semester before graduation) for procedures and deadlines. A graduation fee must be paid at the Bursary prior to final evaluation. This fee is valid for one year beyond the initial term selected for completing degree requirements. A 3.0 cumulative GPA on all graduate courses completed at VSU after acceptance to the Graduate School is required for graduation. All financial obligations to the University must be cleared before an official diploma will be issued.

3. **Thesis:** Students will be required to design, conduct, and write a formal research thesis in their chosen area of study in order to earn the degree. Completed thesis research will be formally presented and defended before the thesis committee, general faculty, and student body in an open seminar. Candidates must also defend the thesis research and the formal thesis by oral exam before their thesis committee. Successful completion of the thesis and defense will require signatures of approval by the student's major advisor and all members of the thesis committee. Final approval and graduation status of the candidate will require the thesis to conform to the Graduate School format standards and to be formally accepted for publication by Valdosta State University's Graduate School. Thesis guidelines are found in the *Thesis and Dissertation Guide*, available from the Graduate School's web page.

4. Graduate School Requirements for the Defense:

“Your committee chair will inform you when the committee members consider your project ready for a defense. The defense should *be scheduled at least two weeks prior to midterm of the semester in which you expect to graduate. You must notify the Graduate School of the date, location, and time of your defense at least two weeks in advance.* Notification must include your name, your degree program, the title of your project, and a short description of the project. You may submit a copy of your abstract for this purpose. The defense is usually an oral discussion/presentation of your project and is open to the academic community and invited guests.”