



**Department of Biomedical Sciences**

# **PhD Program Student Handbook**

**2025-2026**

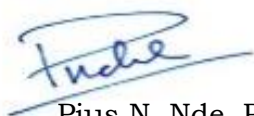


## Foreword

The School of Graduate Studies (SOGS) PhD Program Student Handbook contains a brief overview of the policies and procedures that govern your admission and matriculation in the PhD Program in Biomedical Sciences at Meharry Medical College. The procedures and steps for the completion of dissertations, theses, and comprehensive examinations as well as institutional policies on such issues as academic honesty, academic actions and program procedures are also included. This document is by no means comprehensive, nor does it attempt to deal with special situations that may arise during your matriculation in the PhD Program. Your mentor, PhD Program Director, Chair of the Department of Biomedical Sciences, Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs, Assistant Dean for Student Affairs, and Dean of the SOGS are available to assist in interpreting the rules and regulations of the program. We will assist in making your transition from undergraduate to graduate education as smooth as possible. In addition, faculty members are accessible to discuss academic policies and procedures with you.

Please read this manual carefully with special attention to important events such as the formulation of your *Dissertation Committee* and *Admission to Candidacy*, as well as the procedures and deadlines for the submission of your dissertation. These are important benchmarks that are key to the completion of your graduate studies.

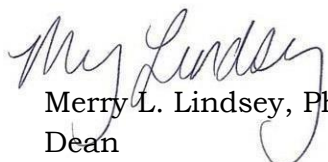
We look forward to working with each of you to ensure that you maximize your potential to attain your career goals.



Pius N. Nde, PhD  
PhD Program Director  
Department of Biomedical Sciences  
School of Graduate Studies



Pamela Martin, PhD  
Chair  
Department of Biomedical Sciences  
School of Graduate Studies



Merry L. Lindsey, PhD  
Dean  
School of Graduate Studies

## Notices

Meharry Medical College is an EOE/AA employer and does not discriminate based on gender, age, race, religion, color, national origin, handicap, veteran or immigrant status in its admissions, employment and education programs or activities. Inquiries concerning the College's non-discrimination policies may be referred to the Office of the General Counsel, S.S. Kresge Learning Resources Center, (615) 327-6102, or the Affirmative Action Officer, Office of the President, (615) 327-6904.

The information in this manual is current and accurate as of August 2025. The college reserves the right to change prerequisites for admission, programs of study, courses, requirements for graduation, fees, policies, academic programs, lecturers, faculty, teaching staff and any other matter described in the manual without prior notice.

This manual does not constitute a contract, expressed or implied, between any applicant, student, or faculty member and Meharry Medical College. The College reserves the right to request or require the withdrawal of any student who does not exhibit the personal or professional qualifications prerequisite for their chosen discipline of study.

The college provides the opportunity for students to increase their knowledge by providing programs of instruction in the various disciplines and programs through faculty who, in the opinion of the College, are trained and qualified for teaching at the college level. However, the acquisition of knowledge by any student is contingent upon the student's desire to learn and the application of appropriate study techniques to any course or program. As a result, the college does not guarantee or suggest that any student who completes a course or a program of study will necessarily acquire any specific knowledge or skills or will be able to successfully pass or complete any specific examination for any course, degree or licensure.

### **Mission: Meharry Medical College**

Meharry Medical College is a global academic health sciences center advancing health equity through innovative research, transformative education, exceptional and compassionate health services and policy-influencing thought leadership. True to its legacy, Meharry empowers diverse populations to improve the well-being of humankind.

### **Mission: School of Graduate Studies**

The mission of the School of Graduate Studies is to provide education, training, and professional skill development to enable our graduates to work across biomedical and clinical settings, with emphasis on eliminating health disparities.

### **Meharry Medical College Accreditation Status**

Meharry Medical College is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) to award master's and doctorate degrees. Degree-granting institutions may also offer credentials such as certificates and diplomas at approved degree levels. Questions about the accreditation of Meharry Medical College may be directed

in writing to SACSCOC at 1866 Southern Lane, Decatur, GA 30033-4097, by calling (404) 679-4500, or by using information available on SACSCOC's website ([www.sacscoc.org](http://www.sacscoc.org)).

## **Administrative Structure of the PhD Program in Biomedical Sciences**

The PhD Program in Biomedical Sciences is housed in the Department of Biomedical Sciences of the SOGS. The Director of the PhD Program is responsible for overseeing all aspects of the PhD Program. An Ad Hoc Examination Committee is responsible for overseeing and evaluating the Candidacy Exam of an individual student. The Dissertation Committee oversees the research and development of an individual student. The dean's office provides advice and support to the program and oversees the school-wide Academic Affairs and Student Affairs, which includes professional development.

### **Current officers of the PhD Graduate Program in Biomedical Sciences**

#### **Merry Lindsey, Ph.D.**

Dean  
School of Graduate Studies

#### **Amos Sakwe, Ph.D.**

Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs  
School of Graduate Studies

#### **Nicolle Patterson, MS**

Assistant Dean for Student Affairs  
School of Graduate Studies

#### **Lisa Johnson, MBA**

Associate Dean, Director of Strategic  
Initiatives  
School of Graduate Studies

#### **Pamela Martin, Ph.D.**

Chair  
Department of Biomedical Sciences  
School of Graduate Studies

#### **Josiah Ochieng, Ph.D.**

Vice Chair for Education  
Department of Biomedical Sciences  
School of Graduate Studies

#### **Pius N. Nde, Ph.D.**

Director, PhD Program  
Department of Biomedical Sciences  
School of Graduate Studies

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Forward.....	i
Notices.....	ii
Administrative Structure of the PhD Program in Biomedical Sciences .....	iii
How to use this Handbook .....	1
Responsibility, Ethics, and Honor Code .....	1
Goals and Philosophy of the PhD Program in Biomedical Sciences .....	2
<b>PhD Program Procedures and Guidelines.....</b>	<b>3</b>
A. Enrollment Specifications .....	3
B. Attendance .....	3
C. PhD Graduate Student Leave .....	3
Summary of Overall Requirements .....	5
<b>PhD Program Curriculum .....</b>	<b>6</b>
A. Curriculum Summary .....	6
B. Course Descriptions for the PhD Core Curriculum .....	8
C. Grading System .....	13
D. Transferring Course Credit .....	14
E. Academic Standing .....	15
F. Residence .....	16
G. Individual Development Plan (IDP) .....	17
H. Selection of Faculty Mentor (Research Advisor) .....	17
I. Dissertation Committee .....	18
J. Admission to Candidacy .....	19
K. Dissertation phase .....	20
L. Application for Graduation .....	22
M. Student Transfer from PhD to Dual Degree Program .....	23
N. Financial Assistance .....	24
<b>Resources .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Policies .....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Applicable Institutional Policies .....</b>	<b>25</b>
Student Alcohol and Drug Policy .....	25
Anti-Harassment Policy .....	25
Non-Retaliation for Reporting .....	25

Policy for Managing Informal & Formal Student Complaints.....	25
Sexual Misconduct & Grievance Procedures .....	26
Social Media Policy .....	26
Student Professional Conduct Policy.....	26
Students with Disabilities.....	26
Whistleblower .....	27
<b>Applicable School of Graduate Studies Policies .....</b>	<b>27</b>
Final Course Grade Policy.....	27
Grade Appeal Policy.....	27
Grade Exclusion Policy.....	27
Academic Honesty Policy .....	27
Academic Dishonesty Policy .....	28
Procedure for Review & Appeal of Academic Actions .....	28
Procedure for Review & Appeal of Disciplinary Actions .....	28
Student Mistreatment Policy.....	28
Student Complaint Policy.....	29
<b>Applicable PhD in Biomedical Sciences Policies .....</b>	<b>29</b>
Student Transfer from the PhD into the Dual Degree Program Policy.....	29
Faculty Eligibility to Train PhD Students Policy.....	29
External review of graduate program in biomedical sciences policy.....	29

## How to use this Handbook

The purpose of this Program Student Handbook is to help trainees make optimal use of the time invested in their training. Thus, this Handbook outlines current Program requirements so that students understand pivotal events and achievements associated with successful completion of Meharry Medical College's PhD Program in Biomedical Sciences. This Handbook provides students with an estimate of the timing of these events. This Graduate Student Handbook should not be used as an official and immutable statement of the requirements and timetables for Meharry Medical College's PhD Program in Biomedical Sciences.

The Training Program will be modified over time according to the evolving needs of trainees and to keep the Program at the leading edge of training, innovation, and excellence. Because the Program Student Handbook will be continually updated to reflect Program modifications, the Handbook should be used as a preliminary first step for information about the requirements of the Biomedical Sciences PhD Student Training Program. Trainees are advised to always confirm Program requirements with the Director of the PhD Program. A copy of this manual is distributed to entering class of graduate students and can be retrieved from the SOGS website.

## Student Responsibility, Ethics, and Honor Code

1. **Responsibility** - The faculty and staff of the SOGS and the Biomedical Sciences Training Program are eager to assist each student through the rigors of the PhD Program, to regularly update each student on their academic progress and professional development, and to keep each student abreast of important deadlines. The Program will promptly communicate with each student as the need arises. However, it is ultimately the graduate student's responsibility to know, understand, and fulfill the requirements established by the Graduate School and this Biomedical Sciences Training Program.
2. **Ethics** - Our Training Program is designed to provide students with numerous opportunities to learn, ponder, and discuss the many ethical issues that underlie proper scientific conduct based on the principles of integrity, responsibility, and excellence. We are committed to ensuring appropriate training of students in ethics and ensuring that all scientists, faculty, staff, and trainees uphold the highest ethical standards. If you have concerns about proper conduct issues, do not hesitate to discuss these with your mentor, the Director of the PhD Program, the Chair of the Department, the Vice Chair for Education, the Assistant Dean of Academic Affairs, the Assistant Dean for Student Affairs, or the Dean of the SOGS.
3. **Statement of Professional Integrity** - As trainees in the PhD in Biomedical Sciences Program, students are asked to commit to uphold the highest standards of professional integrity, recognize that their actions and conduct reflect not only on themselves but also on Meharry Medical College and the broader academic community. Therefore,

students pledge to 1) conduct all academic and professional activities with honesty and transparency and ensure that their work is free from plagiarism, falsification, and misrepresentation. 2) Treat all colleagues, faculty, and staff with respect and fairness, and foster a supportive environment that values broad perspectives and experiences. 3) Take responsibility for their actions and decisions, acknowledge mistakes, and strive to learn from them, and seek to resolve conflicts constructively and ethically. 4) Commit to continuous personal and professional development and stay informed about advances in their field and seek opportunities for growth and improvement.

### **Goals and Philosophy of the PhD Program in Biomedical Sciences**

At the scientific level, the PhD program provides a curriculum that assures each student understands the core knowledge in their area of research and training. The expectation is that students will become scholars in at least one area of biomedical science that directly relates to their dissertation research activity. In this way, students learn the rigors and intellectual satisfaction of scholarship. Considering that these goals must be achieved before a student is adequately prepared for a career as a research scientist, only a well-balanced, multifaceted approach to graduate education can achieve the desired end. According to this philosophy, our Training Program employs several methods to ensure the successful education of its trainees. In addition, faculty within the program, and its component emphasis areas, continuously monitor the effectiveness of the various components of the training program, and adjust when deemed necessary, to achieve an optimal balance within the Program's many educational components. Consequently, the training program will continuously assess and improve quality measures and evolve as needed.

### **Summary of Overall Requirements**

The PhD in biomedical Sciences Program consists of two phases: the **Didactic Phase** and the **Dissertation Phase**. The didactic phase should be completed by the end of the second year. During the Spring Semester of Year 2, a Qualifying Examination must be satisfactorily completed before the student can be admitted to candidacy for a PhD degree in Biomedical Sciences. After a student completes the didactic coursework, and becomes a candidate, the student's efforts shall be directed at completing the dissertation research project.

Beginning with the entering class of 2013, to receive the PhD in Biomedical Sciences degree, a student must:

- a) Complete at least thirty-two (32) hours of graduate course work, of which not more than nine credit hours of graduate courses taken at other institutions may be credited toward the 32 hours.
- b) Pass a candidacy qualifying examination.
- c) Publish or have accepted for publication in a peer-reviewed research journal, a full-length manuscript based on the dissertation research of which the student is the first author, including the option of co-first author. Conference Proceedings are not generally accepted as peer-reviewed publications in biomedical sciences.



- d) Complete a dissertation that meets the requirements of the SOGS and approved by both the Dissertation Committee and the PhD Program Director and successfully defend the dissertation in a public seminar.

**Length of Training** - Students should work with their mentors towards the completion of their dissertation research within a period of four years of uninterrupted training in the program. All students are expected to graduate within two to three years of passing the Qualifying Examination. Support provided by SOGS to financially cover the student stipend, tuition and fees, including health insurance, is not guaranteed past two years. At the beginning of the fourth year of study, the student will receive a formal letter from the PhD Program Director requesting a plan outlining the timeline for completion of the PhD degree within the next academic year. An updated plan will be required should training extend past the fourth year. The student and mentor must additionally submit a formal petition to the PhD Program Director and the Chair of the Department of Biomedical Sciences prior to the start of the fifth year of study requesting an extension of the doctoral training period. The petition should include an explanation for the inability to complete training within the allotted time, an outline of the remaining training with a projected timeline, and a projected date for the dissertation defense that is approved by the Dissertation Committee.

## **PhD Program Procedures and Guidelines**

### **A. Enrollment Specifications**

1. **Medical Clearance** - Each new student must submit a completed medical report form to the Office of Admissions and Records. A returning student who has not registered for more than one academic year must submit a new medical report form.
2. **Enrollment Status** – During the first two years of study until the candidacy exam is passed (didactic phase), a full-time PhD student shall register for a minimum of nine credit hours during the Fall and Spring semesters and a minimum of six credit hours during the Summer semester. Once the student has passed the candidacy exam and during the dissertation phase of the PhD Program, a student may be considered full-time even though they have registered for less than these credit hours per semester. For PhD candidates, the minimum number of credit hours a student can register for and still be considered full-time in the dissertation phase is one.

### **B. Attendance**

No student is allowed to attend a class for which he/she is not officially registered by the Office of the Registrar. No credit is given for course work taken before official registration. Unexcused absences in excess of 20 percent of the scheduled classes may result in failure in the course. The PhD Program Director may grant an excuse for personal illness, death of a close relative, or financial exigencies, for time that exceeds the sick policy. If an excuse is granted, the student will not be penalized for work missed during their absence from class, although make-up for the work missed will be arranged with the Course Director and

Program Director. Being on time is considered a professional attribute. Lateness may result in deductions from grade point.

### C. PhD Graduate Student Leave

1. **Vacations and holidays** - Students receive 12 vacation days per calendar year and must be approved for vacation by their research mentor and/or the PhD Program Director before they can take it. Students shall continue to receive stipends during vacations and Meharry holidays. At Meharry, as at all other academic institutions, the time between semesters is considered an active part of the training period.
2. **Sick leave and other leave** - Students may continue to receive stipends for up to 15 business days of sick leave per year, as long as leave is formally requested and approved. Under exceptional circumstances, this period may be extended into a leave of absence by the Dean in response to a written request from the mentor, countersigned by the PhD Program Director. Sick leave may be used for medical conditions related to pregnancy and childbirth.
3. **Parental leave** - Students may receive stipends for up to 60 calendar days (or 8 weeks) of parental leave per year for the adoption or birth of each child. Either parent is eligible for parental leave. The use of parental leave requires approval by the mentor and the PhD Program Director.
4. **Terminal leave** - A period of terminal leave is not permitted, and payment may not be made from grant funds for leave not taken.
5. **Unpaid leave** - Individuals requiring extended periods away from their research training experience, that is, more than 12 vacation days, 15 business days of sick leave or more than 60 business days of parental leave must seek approval for an unpaid *Leave of Absence* from the PhD Program Director and mentor (if applicable).

**Leave of Absence and Withdrawal** - A *Leave of Absence* is an interruption of the normal course of study requested by a student and requiring prior approval by the SOGS Dean. A *Leave of Absence* shall not extend beyond one calendar year. The official date of leave shall not begin before the date of the student's request.

1. An official *Leave of Absence* form must be processed and can be obtained from the Office of Admissions and Records. A student who fails either to register or to obtain an approved *Leave of Absence* by the end of registration during a given semester will be regarded as having withdrawn and must apply as a new student to resume study.
2. A *Leave of Absence* from the college is given only to students who are in good academic standing. Any other interruption in the normal course of study constitutes a withdrawal. At the discretion of the PhD Program Director, a student may be required to take an Administrative *Leave of Absence*. A student who has obtained an approved

*Leave of Absence* may return to school by informing the SOGS in writing before the expiration of the leave. The student will be required to register during the next semester after their *leave* expires.

3. If the student does not resume their program at this time, has withdrawn from the Graduate School or has not registered for two consecutive semesters, they must reapply to the Graduate School. Provided the student left the program in good standing, in these situations they need only to fill out a new application (fee waived), write a statement that includes why they should be reinstated and have their former mentor submit a letter of recommendation. These documents will be reviewed by the SOGS PhD Program Admissions Committee who will then make a recommendation to the PhD Program Director.
4. A PhD student who has not been approved for a *Leave of Absence* and has not registered for 2 consecutive years will not be considered for reinstatement or be awarded a PhD degree.
5. A *Withdrawal* is a permanent cessation of graduate study. If a student withdraws, they must reapply to Meharry as a new student and be considered for admission by the SOGS PhD Program Admissions Committee to resume graduate work. If a student receives a medical withdrawal, they will be required to present medical clearance before being readmitted. A student withdrawing without presenting to the Director of Admissions and Records written permission from the PhD Program Director forfeits all claims for credit.

**Documentation of leave** - Vacation and planned sick leave must be requested in writing to the mentor and PhD Program Director at least 5 business days prior to the leave using the form available online ([https://meharrysogs.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/leave\\_request\\_form.pdf](https://meharrysogs.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/leave_request_form.pdf)). Notification of unexpected leave (sick or emergency) must be made to the PhD Program Director as soon as possible. The mentor and PhD Program Director will be responsible for maintaining records and accounts of leave. The College approved *Request for Leave* form will be used for both vacation and sick leave. Failure to comply with these policies will result in a reduction of pay for unaccounted time.

**Graduate Student Business Travel** - All graduate students who are traveling on official school business regardless of funding source must submit a *Travel Authorization* form to the SOGS Department of Biomedical Sciences Program Manager at least 45 business days prior to travel for travel within the United States and 3 months prior to travel for international destinations. The form and further instructions can be found online at <https://meharrysogs.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/SOGS-Student-Travel-Request-Form.pdf>.

**External Experiences/Externships** - Students are encouraged to participate in professional experiences to complement their PhD graduate training. Examples of these experiences may be teaching at Meharry or institutions other than Meharry, participating in externships in industry, legal firms, or enrolling in the Robert Wood Johnson Health Policy Certificate Program. These experiences are best pursued at a certain phase of the program, to minimize

graduation delays. To be considered and approved for these experiences the following must occur:

1. The PhD student must be in good academic standing.
2. The PhD student must be a candidate for the PhD degree unless the opportunity is restricted to students in the pre-candidacy phase.
3. The experience must be approved and signed by the mentor, PhD Program Director, and the Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs regardless of if this is required by the external site.
4. If the experience lasts >15 continuous business days, any stipend covered by an NIH grant will be suspended per NIH rules. An alternate stipend source will need to be identified.
5. Students must complete a professional leave of absence form prior to departing if applicable.

**Extended Absence from Meharry Medical College** - The PhD Program in Biomedical Sciences requires continuous registration.

1. Absences of 2 weeks or longer at any time during the calendar year be reported. Students who wish to interrupt their graduate studies must apply for an authorized Leave of Absence. Those without authorized leave who fail to register for one semester shall be dropped from the Graduate School enrollment report and will not be considered students.
2. A student who withdraws from graduate school without authorized leave and later wants to resume graduate study at Meharry Medical College must submit a formal application for reinstatement to the Graduate School. There is a time limit associated with resuming graduate studies.
3. Candidates who have passed the qualifying examination or completed 32 or more credit hours toward the Doctor of Philosophy degree are not usually granted leaves of absence, except in special circumstances (e.g., maternity or medical leave). PhD Candidates who, for extenuating circumstances, decide to pursue their dissertation research or specialized training in a facility other than at Meharry Medical College will not be required to apply for an extended leave of absence, but the facility transfer process would require the approval of the PhD Program Director.

## **PhD Curriculum**

### **A. Summary of Overall Requirements**

A minimum of 32 didactic hours of graduate training is required for a PhD degree in Biomedical Sciences. Course work should be completed by the end of the second year. During the Spring Semester of Year 2, a Qualifying Examination must be satisfactorily completed before the student can be admitted to candidacy for a PhD degree in Biomedical Sciences. After a student completes the didactic coursework, and becomes a candidate, student efforts should be directed at completion of the dissertation research project.

<b>Year 1</b>			<b>Year 2</b>		
<b>Fall (12 credits)</b>	<b>Spring (12 credits)</b>	<b>Summer (6 credits)</b>	<b>Fall (12 credits)</b>	<b>Spring (12 credits)</b>	<b>Summer (6 credits)</b>
ASGS 707 (CRN 14594) Biomed I (6) M-F 1-5 pm Research Lab Rotations	ASGS752 Biomed Research (6) M-F 1-5 pm	ASGS752 Biomed Research (4)	ASGS752 Biomed Research (10)  Optional: Elective determined by dissertation committee and mentor	ASGS752 Biomed Research (12)  Optional: Elective determined by dissertation committee and mentor	ASGS752 Biomed Research (6)
ASGS 702 (CRN 14593) Biomed II (6) M-W 9-11 am Core Course	ASGS 754 Biomed III (6) M-W 9-11 am Core Course	ASGS755 Biomed IV-A (2) Professional Development	ASGS755 Biomed IV-B (2) Fellowship Grant Writing	ASGS756 Seminar/ Journal Club & Professional Development (S/U)	
	ASGS756 Seminar/ Journal Club & Professional Development (S/U)		ASGS 756 Seminar/ Journal Club & Professional Development (S/U)		
			<b>Y2: Candidacy Exam &amp; F31 submission (Dec. 8 deadline)</b>	<b>Y2: Candidacy exam &amp; F31 Submission (April 8 deadline)</b>	

Year 3			Year 4		
Fall (1 credit)	Spring (1 credit)	Summer (1 credit)	Fall (1 credit)	Spring (1 credit)	Summer (1 credit)
ASGS753 Dissertation Research (1)	ASGS753 Dissertation Research (1)	ASGS753 Dissertation Research (1)	ASGS753 Dissertation Research (1)	ASGS753 Dissertation Research (1)	ASGS753 Dissertation Research (1)
Elective determined by Dissertation committee and mentor	Elective determined by Dissertation committee and mentor				
ASGS756 Seminar/ Journal Club & Professional Development (S/U)	ASGS756 Seminar/ Journal Club & Professional Development (S/U)		ASGS756 Seminar/ Journal Club & Professional Development (S/U)	ASGS756 Seminar/ Journal Club & Professional Development (S/U)	

## B. Course Descriptions for the PhD Core Curriculum

### 1. Foundations in Biomedical Research I (Biomed I); 6 credit hours

**Course Number: ASGS 707 (CRN 14594)**

The purpose of the laboratory rotations course is to acquaint first-year graduate students with research in progress in the laboratory of two to three different research faculty. Students are required to participate in three rotations. Two must be in unique labs. If a student wishes, their third rotation can be in a previous lab, but they must petition the PhD Program Director for an exception. The student should be a participant in the research and be exposed to scientific knowledge and techniques and participate in a formal reading program designed by the course coordinator and rotation mentor to provide a literature review focused on the research of the lab. The student will select to complete 3 rotations in the laboratories of research faculty and each rotation will be six (6) weeks in duration and all will be completed during the fall semester. The rotations are to be completed before the second semester of the first year resulting in the choice of a dissertation mentor/research advisor and the formulation of a dissertation committee.

#### Course Objectives:

Upon completion, the student will be able to:

1. Identify a specific scientific question to be addressed during the laboratory rotation

2. Read and analyze literature to determine various approaches to answering the question(s)
3. Communicate a written summary of the literature review
4. Collect, analyze and interpret experimental data accurately
5. Communicate the findings in oral presentations

**Course Duration:** Fall semester 18 weeks

- **Day 1 (Aug 4, 2025):** Faculty introductions, radiation safety, lab safety, how to choose a mentor
- **Weeks 1-6 (Aug 5-Sept 12, 2025):** Rotation 1 (oral presentations on Sept 12)
- **Weeks 7-12 (Sept 15-Oct 24, 2025):** Rotation 2 (oral presentations on Oct 24)
- **Weeks 13-18 (Oct 27-Dec 5, 2025):** Rotation 3 (oral presentations on Dec 5)

**Meeting Days:** Monday - Friday

**Meeting Times:** 1:00 – 5:00 PM and as available

**Meeting Location:** Rotation labs

## **2. Foundations in Biomedical Research II (Biomed II); 6 credit hours**

**Course Number:** ASGS 702 (CRN 14593)

This course will provide foundational knowledge and develop student critical thinking skills in the context of biomedical research. Basic concepts in physiology, biochemistry, cell signaling, and genetics will be introduced within the framework of cardiovascular disease, cancer, and infectious disease. Primary literature that provides fundamental understanding of the related organ systems will be used as course material. We will cover various aspects of biomedical research, including research design, data analysis, interpretation, and ethical considerations. This course is designed to provide lectures and small group problem-solving sessions to give the student mastery of the organization, composition, and function of the cell from the molecular to whole organ level.

**Course Objectives:** At the end of this course, students should be able to:

1. Comprehend the fundamentals of the basic sciences focused on molecular and cellular components of cardiovascular disease, cancer, and infectious disease.
2. Follow current developments in these fundamental and rapidly expanding areas of research.
3. Deconstruct a journal article to derive the experimental design, hypothesis tested, and background leading to hypothesis-generation and discuss gaps and future directions that still need to be addressed.

**Course Duration:** Fall Semester (18 weeks)

**Meeting Days:** Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday

**Meeting Times:** 9-11 am

## **3. Foundations in Biomedical Research III (Biomed III); 6 credit hours**

**Course Number:** ASGS 754 (CRN 14655)

This course is a continuation of Biomed II and will further develop student critical thinking skills in the context of biomedical research, focusing on the emphasis area chosen by the student and their research advisor and including scientific communications. We will cover various aspects of biomedical research, including extended data analysis and writing of manuscripts. This course is designed to provide lectures and problem-solving sessions designed to give the student mastery of their research area. Primary literature that provides fundamental understanding of relevant organ systems will be used as course material.

**Course Objectives:** At the end of this course, students should be able to:

1. Comprehend advanced topics of their emphasis area.
2. Follow current developments in these fundamental and rapidly expanding areas of research.
3. Given a series of review articles on a topic, construct a hypothesis to be tested and experimental design, with consideration for most appropriate positive and negative controls.
4. Write a draft review article on the emphasis area of their choice.

**Course Duration:** Spring Semester (18 weeks)

**Meeting Days:** Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday

**Meeting Times:** 9-11 am

#### **4. Foundations in Biomedical Research IV- A, B, (2 credit hours each)**

**Course Number:** ASGS 755 (CRN 14656)

This course will equip students in the PhD in Biomedical Sciences program with the essential skills required for effective scientific communication, with a specific focus on grant writing for securing funding from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and other relevant sources in biomedical research. Students will learn how to craft compelling grant proposals, enhance their oral scientific communication skills, build professional networks, and effectively disseminate research findings. In addition, this course will provide students with a conceptual understanding of Responsible conduct of Research (RCR), range of skills for professional development in biomedical sciences, including networking, career planning, and navigating the academic landscape.

The course will follow this concept outline (3 separate courses offered) based on semester and year:

##### *Foundations in Biomedical Research IV A:* Summer year 1

This subpart of the course provides professional development training for the students in the PhD Program, including F31 grant writing boot camp. Students will develop various components of the NIH Ruth L. Kirschstein National Research Service Award (NRSA) F31 fellowship proposal.



- F31 grant writing boot camp- writing specific aims, NIH biosketch, applicant's background and goals for fellowship training, selection of sponsor and institution, inside NIH review perspective
- Exploring availability other grant opportunities- NIH- F99/K00, NSF, American Heart Association, Komen Foundation

#### Foundations in Biomedical Research IV B: Fall years 2-4

This subpart of the course will provide students with a structured timeline and constructive feedback on their F31-grant application in preparation for submission in December deadline to the funding agency NIH. Students will develop various components of the NIH Ruth L. Kirschstein National Research Service Award (NRSA) F31 fellowship proposal.

- General professional development topics
- Year 2 students: Prepare F31 for Dec submission; weekly review of documents with peer team
- Year 3 and 4 students: Peer review year 2 student applications

**Course Objectives:** At the end of this course, students should be able to:

1. Understand the fundamentals of scientific communication in the context of biomedical research.
2. Develop proficiency in writing grant proposals tailored to NIH and other funding agencies' requirements.
3. Students assemble an F31 grant application.
4. Gain insights into the peer review process and how to respond to reviewer feedback.
5. Proficient to Peer review each other's grant drafts
6. Enhance oral presentation skills for effectively communicating scientific research to diverse audiences.
7. Learn strategies for successful networking within the scientific community.
8. Explore avenues for disseminating research findings beyond traditional academic channels
9. Recognize the professional development opportunities available to them.
10. Understand the core principles and guidelines for RCR designed to ensure integrity, transparency, and ethical conduct of research activities.

#### **Course Expectations:**

1. Students are expected to attend all classes and participate in class discussions, read assignments prior to class, and critically evaluate writing by other students.
2. Students are expected to develop and strengthen professional written communication skills

**Course Duration:** Summer year 1, Fall and Spring years 2-4

**Meeting Days:** As assigned

**Meeting Times:** As assigned

#### **5. Biomedical Research; up to 8 credit hours**

**Course Number: ASGS 752 (CRN 14653)**

Students are required to conduct original research, culminating in the preparation and defense of a dissertation that is acceptable, at least in part, for publication in a professional journal.

**Course Objective:** At the end of this course, students should be able to fully conduct a research project, including the planning phase, execution of experiments, and writing up the results for publication.

**Course Duration:** Every semester beginning with the 2<sup>nd</sup> semester of year 1

**Meeting Days:** Monday to Friday and as needed to conduct research

**Meeting Times:** 9 am -5 pm and as determined by mentor and mentee agreement

**Meeting Location:** Laboratory of the research mentor

**6. Seminar, Journal Club and Professional Development; Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory (S/U)**

**Course Number: ASGS 756 (CRN 14657)**

This course is designed to enhance critical thinking, scientific communication, and literature evaluation skills among PhD students in Biomedical Sciences. Through seminars and journal club discussion of contemporary topics in biomedical research.

**Course Objective:** To enable students to increase their knowledge and understanding of a topic and provide opportunities for them to present critical evaluations of journal articles and ask questions of seminar speakers. To enhance understanding of current research trends and methodologies in Biomedical Sciences.

**Course Duration:** Fall and Spring Semesters

**Course Format:** The course will consist of weekly seminars and journal club meetings. Each seminar will be presented by a student or faculty member on a selected research topic. Journal club meetings will involve discussions of recent publications in Biomedical Sciences.

**Substitution:** With written approval of the Director of the PhD Program, students may substitute for attending another seminar series and journal club.

**7. Dissertation Research; 1 credit hour**

**Course Number: ASGS 753 (CRN 14654)**

This course is the culmination of the dissertation research experience. In the course, students will assemble, analyze and present (defend) the experimental data from their dissertation research projects. Students are required to register for this course every semester from the third year of the program or upon successful admission into candidacy (whichever comes first) until they defend their dissertation. The course includes professional

development essential for success in the field of biomedical sciences. Students will explore various aspects of professional growth, career advancement, personal development to thrive in academia, industry, or other career paths within the biomedical sector. The topics covered will include CV-building, resume-writing, communication skills, leadership development, time management, wellness, networking strategies, and career planning.

In the semester students plan to defend their dissertation, the course is completed, and a grade is reported only after an electronic PDF of the finalized dissertation with all signatures is submitted to SOGS Academic Affairs.

### **Course Objectives:**

This course is designed to meet the following objective: to ensure that all graduating students submit an approved and properly formatted and signed dissertation to the SOGS in a timely manner.

### **Outcome Objectives:**

By the end of the semester the following objectives are expected to be achieved using verbal and written exercises:

- 1) oral defense describing the dissertation research,
- 2) approval of the written dissertation by the dissertation committee, and
- 3) submission of an electronic PDF of the finalized, properly formatted and signed dissertation to SOGS Academic Affairs.

## **C. Grading System**

1. Grades for didactic courses taken for graduate credit are A, B+, B, C+, C, F, S, U, IP and I. Grades for dissertation research in the PhD program are S and U; grades for thesis research in the MSCI program are letter grades. Grade point averages (GPA) are calculated on the basis of A=4, B+=3.5, B=3, C+=2.5 C=2, F= 0. S and U grades are not computed into students' GPA and are not converted to A, B+, B, C+, C, or F grades when students complete the requirements for degrees. All final grades shall remain on the student's permanent transcript. Students receiving a D grade in an off-campus course because of cross-registration will receive a grade of F.
2. The grade of I (Incomplete) indicates that the student has satisfactorily completed at least three-fourths of a course and may be given at the instructor's discretion to a student when illness, necessary absence, or other reasons beyond the control of the student prevent completion of course requirements by the end of the academic term. A student cannot receive an I grade if failing a course. A student receiving an I grade must complete the requirements for the course to remove the I by the end of the next semester the course is offered. If the requirements are not completed within the specified time, no credit will be given, and the Office of the Registrar will automatically record the final grade as F.
3. The symbols WV and WA indicate that the student Withdrew Voluntarily or was Withdrawn Administratively by the Dean. The symbols WP and WF indicate that the student Withdrew Passing or Withdrew Failing and are used only when the student

has withdrawn after at least six weeks of attendance in a course during the fall or spring semester or after two weeks during the summer semester. For either, if the student returns to the course, they must take it over in its' entirety.

4. The In Progress (IP) is awarded for certain courses that are continuous over more than one semester and, as such, are not finally evaluated until the conclusion of the sequence. Final grades are given in such courses only at the end of the final semester of the course sequence. A record of academic progression, however, shall be reported in the Office of the Registrar at the end of any given semester using the designation In-Progress (IP). Quality points will be calculated using the total hours of the course.

**Adding or Withdrawing Course(s)** - First-year PhD students will not be allowed to withdraw from the Core Curriculum. To *add or withdraw* from course(s), a student should get the appropriate form from the Office of the Registrar. The student is required to receive the approval of the PhD Program Director and Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs before returning the signed approval form to the Office of the Registrar. A student may add a course before the end of the 3rd week of classes during the regular semester and the 1st week of classes during the summer session.

A student may receive a grade of W if they withdraw from a course prior to the end of the 6th week of classes during the regular semester or prior to the 2nd week of classes during the summer session. However, grades for courses progressed beyond this period will be recorded on the official record as WF or WP.

## **D. Transferring Course Credit**

**Advanced Placement** - A student may attempt to obtain an exemption from one or more of the core courses by requesting permission from the course coordinator, in writing, to take an advanced placement examination. If the course coordinator grants the request, the instructors in the course will prepare and administer an examination. If the student's performance meets or exceeds the minimum pass level established by the program offering the courses, the student will be (1) exempted from the core course; (2) receive a grade equivalent to the numerical value of the examination; and (3) receive a number of credit hours equal to the number of credit hours ordinarily awarded for that core course.

**Transfer Credit** - After a doctoral student begins the major emphasis phase, they may petition to receive credit for graduate work done at other accredited institutions or from this institution for courses taken before admission to the SOGS provided that the total number of credits transferred for both core courses and advanced courses does not exceed nine. Grades earned on transferred work must be equivalent to B or better; dissertation credit is not transferable. To approve the transfer, the PhD Program Director completes a grade change form, requests endorsement from the Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs who transmits the form to the Registrar's office for the credits to be applied on the student's Meharry transcript. Grades earned in courses at other schools prior to admission to Meharry are not included in computations of a student's average nor entered on the Meharry transcript, while grades

earned in graduate school courses at Meharry before the student matriculates (e.g., post-bac, Master of Health Sciences and, joint programs, etc.) are computed in the student's GPA. Students can take a course elsewhere to remediate a failed MMC elective course.

Graduate courses taken at other institutions may be evaluated for transfer of credit by the Dissertation Committee, in accordance with Graduate School policies. Courses taken at Vanderbilt University by Meharry Graduate Students will automatically be accepted due to the existing cross registration between Meharry and Vanderbilt.

**Other Conditions for Transfer Course Credit** - Correspondence or Extension courses cannot be transferred for credit. Course(s) taken on a Pass-Fail or Satisfactory-Unsatisfactory basis are not eligible for transfer credit. Course credits earned in a Professional School such as a School of Law, Medicine, Dentistry, or Divinity may not be transferred for graduate degree purposes. Exceptions to this rule are courses cross listed as Graduate School courses which carry graduate credits at the institution where they were taken. Students seeking a PhD degree in addition to the MD, DDS or other professional degree may receive graduate credit for certain approved courses in the Medical, Dental or Graduate School at Meharry, and a B grade or better must be earned in these courses.

## **E. Academic Standing**

A report is generated at the end of each semester indicating the performance of each student. A student must maintain a grade point average (GPA) of 3.0 to remain in good academic standing.

**Academic Probation** - A student whose GPA falls below 3.0 may be dismissed or given up to one calendar year to raise their GPA back to 3.0; during this period the student is said to be on academic probation. During the dissertation phase, if progress is considered unsatisfactory (a C grade or less), a student will be placed on academic probation and will be informed by the SOGS Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs in a letter with a copy to the Dean, PhD Program Director, and the student's Mentor. The PhD Program Director and mentor will meet with the student to develop a written plan of action to ensure student success in the program. If the student is unable to bring the GPA to 3.0 or greater by the end of a designated period of academic probation, they may be dismissed from the SOGS per the recommendation of the Student Evaluation and Promotion Committee (SEPC).

In addition, if, in the judgment of the SEPC, a student fails to make satisfactory progress towards the completion of the degree or to demonstrate sufficient promise in the chosen discipline, the student may not be allowed to continue in the SOGS. A student in the PhD program may also become academically ineligible to continue in the SOGS if they receive a grade of F or C grades with a semester or cumulative GPA of below 3.0. Receipt of a second grade of F will result in automatic dismissal.

First year PhD students who receive a C in a core course will need to repeat or remediate the course and receive a B grade or better before being allowed to take advanced courses in their

program. When a course is repeated, the first grade will remain on the student's transcript and be calculated as part of the student's grade point average. Students are allowed to repeat a course only once.

**Academic Dismissal** - All cases go before the SOGS Student Evaluation and Promotion Committee made up of members from each of the Graduate Programs and a representative of the Registrar's Office. Graduate students who do not meet the written terms of their academic probation may be academically dismissed from a program. Such dismissals shall be made in a timely fashion. In most cases, this will occur no later than three weeks after completion of the term. Dismissal decisions may be appealed to the Dean of the SOGS and can only be made based on procedural errors.

**Award of Terminal Masters** - 1) If a student fails the qualifying exam after 2 attempts, the Student Evaluation and Promotion Committee (SEPC) will recommend the student for a terminal master's degree (MS in Biomedical Sciences) or dismissal from the program. 2) If a student passes the qualifying exam but fails to progress in the dissertation research phase, they will be referred to the SEPC which can recommend the student be issued a terminal master (MS in Biomedical Sciences).

## **F. Residence**

Graduate students in the PhD Program must remain in residence until completion of the candidacy examination. To be in residence a student must register for at least nine (9) credit hours during the Fall or Spring semesters, and at least six (6) credit hours during the Summer semester of the first two years of training, at a least one (1) credit hour per semester every year thereafter until program completion. All requirements for the PhD degree are expected to be completed within four to five years after admission to the SOGS. If a student has been *Admitted to Candidacy* but has not completed their studies within the five-year period: (1) the student may be given up to two semesters to finish the PhD, or (2) the student may be issued a terminal master's degree (MS in Biomedical Sciences). A student's PhD program of study cannot extend beyond seven years.

## **G. Individual Development Plan (IDP)**

The IDP is a tool to assist in the planning of a student's training to help the student reach their career goals. This includes developing a mentoring plan that assesses the needs and goals of each student, describes short- and long-term career objectives, and identifies professional development activities needed to reach the career objectives. An IDP should be viewed as a dynamic document that is periodically reviewed and updated throughout an individual's training. IDP forms for beginning and advanced students are in the Appendices. Completed IDP forms for beginning and advanced students shall be submitted to the PhD Program Director and Assistant Dean for Student Affairs on the second Friday in August of each year.

## **H. Selection of Faculty Mentor (Research Advisor)**

**Selection of Mentor** - A key element of the PhD Program is laboratory research. To speed up the process of choosing a preceptor and initiate their research projects, first year graduate students would begin the process of selecting a faculty mentor during the Fall semester of the first year, through Foundations in Biomedical Research I (Biomed I) course. This includes research rotations in three laboratories of their choice. These rotations provide a short laboratory experience of 6 weeks, access to a potential faculty mentor, and the ability of the new students to interact with senior (advanced) students. The purpose of these rotations is for the students to sample different research areas and experience the excitement of working in a particular laboratory or research area. No later than January of the first year,

**Approval of Selected Mentor** - The faculty mentor must be a regular graduate school faculty, an appointed or an adjunct faculty member who is active in research and selected from a current list of mentors who have formally taken the Center for the Improvement of Mentored Experiences in Research (CIMER) or another approved mentor training. First year students must have chosen a mentor and begin their thesis research by the end of the third rotation of the Biomed I course. If undecided and upon approval by the PhD Program Director, a student may be allowed to take a fourth rotation. The selection of a Faculty Mentor must be discussed and approved by the PhD Program Director, who will facilitate the signing of the mentor-mentee agreement. The final mentoring agreement shall be signed by the student, the mentor, the PhD Program Director, the mentor's department chair (if different), and the Department of Biomedical Sciences chair no later than January 31 of the first Spring semester.

**Role of Mentor** - The mentor will serve as the Chair of the Dissertation Committee and has primary responsibility for guiding the student through all phases of graduate study and should represent the student's best interests in a variety of academic and administrative matters. This includes:

- a. Assess and guide the research training and progress including set milestones, professional development and overall student performance in the program.
- b. Provide the PhD Program Director with a comprehensive summary of committee meeting minutes approved by the Dissertation Committee.
- c. Facilitate and lead the dissertation defense by the student; and communicate the outcome of the process including any additional dissertation document revisions to the student and the PhD Program Director.

## **I. Dissertation Committee**

**Composition and Selection of Dissertation Committee Members** - The Faculty Mentor (Dissertation Committee Chair) and student shall propose members of the Dissertation Committee which must be approved by the PhD Program Director no later than April 30 in the Spring semester of the first year. Committee members should not be invited until approval is obtained by the PhD Program Director. The Dissertation committee shall be a team with multidisciplinary expertise composed of at least 5 members as follows:

- a. The thesis advisor/mentor (Chair);

- b. At least 3 faculty members from Meharry who are on the approved list of mentors; and
- c. At least one faculty member from another institution with expertise in the research emphasis area of the student.

The Dissertation Committee shall:

- a. Oversee the student's graduate studies and progress of dissertation research and aid the mentor in ensuring student progress in the program.
- b. Monitor the progress of the student through mandatory Dissertation committee meetings in the Spring and Fall semesters.
- c. Provide advice on course selection and research training opportunities.
- d. Certify the student's fulfillment of program requirements for admission to candidacy examination.
- e. Approve the outline for the student's dissertation by the end of year 1 in the program.
- f. Read and approve the final draft of the dissertation.
- g. Administer and evaluate the final oral dissertation defense and present a summary of their evaluation to the PhD Program Director who then recommends the approved dissertation to the SOGS.

**Dissertation Committee Meetings** - The Dissertation Committee shall meet at least once in the Fall and Spring semesters, beginning in the Fall semester of year 2. For the first meeting, the plan must include all required and elective courses identified for the student and a preliminary plan of research that the mentor has approved. For subsequent meetings, students should follow the SOGS Committee Meeting Template. The faculty mentor and student shall provide a Dissertation Committee approved meeting report to the PhD Program Director on the student's academic and research progress, which will be used to determine the research grade for the semester.

It is the responsibility of the students to ensure that these meetings are scheduled and that they occur on time. The deadline for submitting the progress report for the Fall semester is November 15<sup>th</sup>, and the deadline for the Spring semester is April 15<sup>th</sup>. In order to meet the deadline, the Dissertation Committee Meetings should be scheduled for no longer than one week before the deadline, to give the student and mentor time to prepare the report and submit. Note that these deadlines are the last dates to submit the DC report and/or final grades, and failure to submit the reports on time will result in an Incomplete or failing grade for research for that semester.

**Probation and Remediation during the Dissertation Phase** - In instances of unsatisfactory progress (probation) and other issues impacting student progress during the dissertation phase of the PhD program, a Dissertation Committee Moderator will be appointed by the Department Chair in consultation with the PhD Program Director. The Moderator shall recommend a remediation plan that will include ad hoc Dissertation Committee remediation meeting(s), with clear plans to improve progress on research milestones with firm deadlines. The Moderator will ensure that the student receives consistent, structured guidance throughout the remaining dissertation phase of the PhD program.



## **J. Admission to Candidacy (Qualifying) Examination**

### **The Preliminary (Candidacy) Qualifying Examination and Admission to Candidacy -**

Admission to Candidacy recognizes the achievement of a significant milestone in the academic progress of a doctoral student. A student is *Admitted to Candidacy* after they have completed all required course work (with a minimum of 32 didactic credit hours with at least a B in all courses and a GPA of at least 3.0) and passed the qualifying examination.

**Guidelines for the PhD Candidacy Qualifying Examination** - The PhD candidacy examination can be taken as early as the Fall semester of Year 2 and no later than March 31 of the Spring semester of Year 2. Examinations outside of this period shall only be allowed under extenuating circumstances and approved by the DC and PhD Program Director. The PhD candidacy examination shall consist of a written and an oral section. The examination will be based on the student's proposed dissertation research project, which should be formally approved by the student's mentor and DC.

A Candidacy Examination Committee shall be set up for each student by the PhD Program Director and shall be composed of five faculty members. Three members will be selected from the student's DC. The final two members will be faculty members who do not serve on the student's DC, and at least one member may be from an institution other than MMC or the Department of Biomedical Sciences. The PhD Program Director shall appoint the Chair of the Candidacy Examination Committee. The Chair of the Candidacy Examination Committee shall be responsible for scheduling meetings between the student and the Candidacy Examination Committee. Detailed guidelines for the PhD Candidacy Qualifying Examination can be found here: [PhD Candidacy Qualifying Examination Policy and Rubrics](#).

The Chair of the Candidacy Examination Committee shall communicate the outcomes of the candidacy examination to the PhD Program Director. A score of at least 80% for each section (written and oral) is considered a pass grade, which cumulatively will be at least 80% total score. If a student fails only the written section of the exam, they shall rewrite and submit the document within 60 days of the exam. If a student fails only the oral section of the exam, they must retake the oral section within 60 days of the first attempt. If a student fails both sections of the candidacy qualifying examination, the Chair of the Examination Committee will meet with the student within one week after the exam and advise the student on how to prepare to retake the exam within 60 days of the first attempt. A student is permitted only one re-take of the entire or any section of the examination. If a student fails the qualifying exam after 2 attempts, the Student Evaluation and Promotion Committee (SEPC) will recommend the student for a terminal master's degree (MS in Biomedical Sciences) or dismissal from the program.

## **K. Dissertation Phase**

The dissertation phase of the program begins after the student has been Admitted to Candidacy for the PhD degree in a Biomedical Sciences emphasis area. The student is then designated a Candidate for the PhD degree. During this phase the student completes their

dissertation research, writes and publishes an original manuscript from the research, and writes a dissertation on the research project, the outcomes of which contributes new knowledge to the field of study. The student follows the established SOGS guidelines to defend their dissertation in a public seminar once the student meets the following requirements:

- a. Publishes a full-length original research manuscript based on their dissertation research, of which they are the first author.
- b. The manuscript is published or accepted for publication in a peer-reviewed journal indexed in PubMed and other databases. Data published in conference proceedings or as expanded abstracts with figures and tables do not qualify as full-length original journal manuscripts. All decisions regarding the applicability of a manuscript for criteria completion are made and executed by the PhD Program council and the PhD Program Director.
- c. A draft of the dissertation in the approved dissertation template that has been read and approved for defense by the Dissertation Committee. [Dissertation Template](#)

**Public Seminar and Defense of Dissertation/Thesis** - A student who has met the above requirements must successfully defend the dissertation research in a public seminar presented on a weekday between 8:00 am and 5:00 pm, and the seminar must be widely publicized. The process would require at least one month to complete as follows:

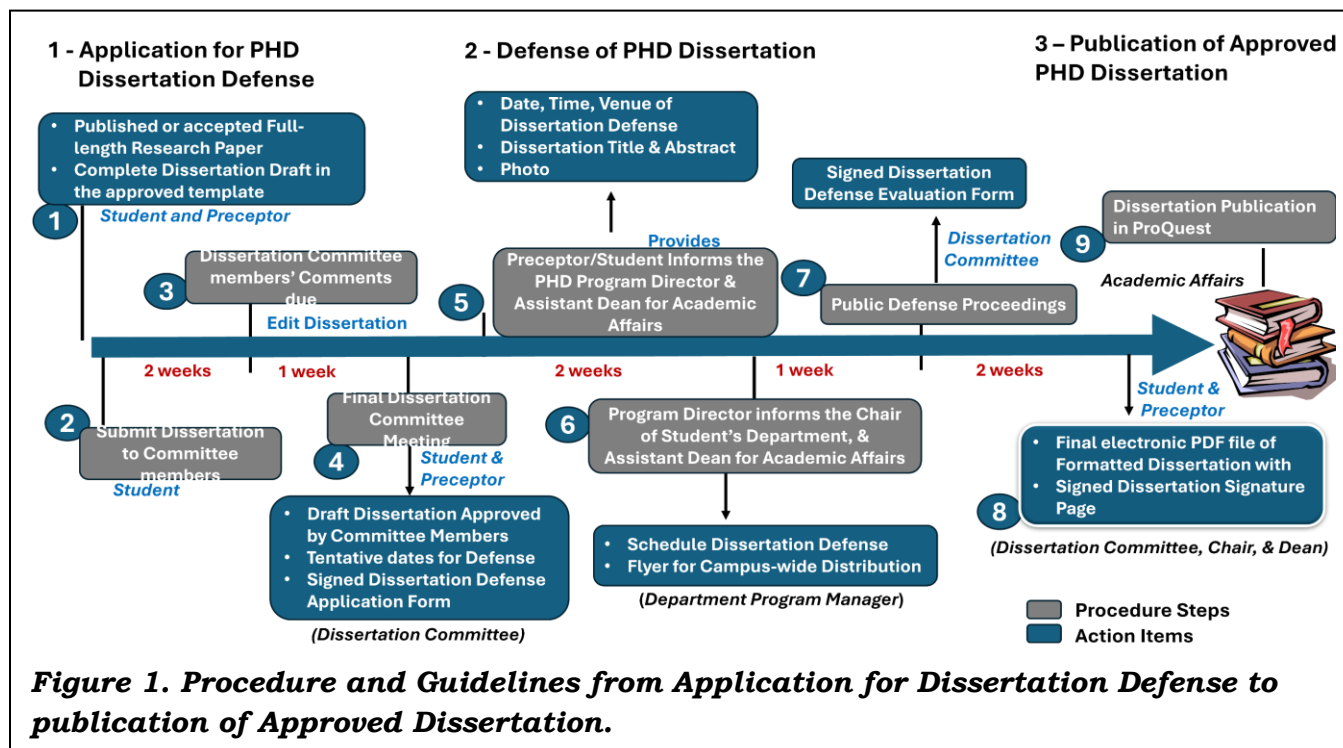
1. Dissertation Committee members are given at least two weeks to read the draft dissertation after the student and mentor have agreed that the draft is acceptable for review.
2. The mentor schedules a final meeting to approve the dissertation for defense by the student and to agree on the defense date and time. During this meeting or shortly thereafter, a *PhD Dissertation Defense Application Form* is completed with signatures from all Dissertation Committee members. [Dissertation Defense Application Form](#)
3. The mentor informs the PhD Program Director of the approval of the student's dissertation for defense and submits the completed and signed *PhD Dissertation Defense Application Form*, and the committee approved dissertation, the proposed defense date, time, the dissertation title, and abstract.
4. The PhD Program Director informs the Chair of the Department of Biomedical Sciences and the Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs of the proposed dissertation defense.
5. The PhD Program prepares the flyer for advertisement of the defense and coordinates the distribution of the flyers on campus. This should be done at least two weeks before the scheduled defense date.
6. The dissertation defense will consist of a 35–45-minute presentation by the student to their DC with a public audience, followed by questions from the audience, and then by a closed evaluation session with the Dissertation Committee.
7. Following the examination, the mentor shall submit the *Dissertation Defense Evaluation Form* signed by all members of the Dissertation Committee to the PhD Program Director.

8. A student passes their dissertation defense, upon approval by at least two-thirds of the members of the Dissertation Committee. If the student fails the defense, they will be allowed one retake. The retake should occur within 60 days of the first evaluation. The vote of the DC is considered by the SOGS to be final.

After the defense, the PhD Program Director shall submit to the Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs the *Dissertation Defense Evaluation Form* documenting the defense result (satisfactory or unsatisfactory). [Dissertation Defense Evaluation Form](#)

**Graduation Dates on Diploma** - To be considered for graduation, the student must submit an electronic PDF of the approved final dissertation to the SOGS by 5:00 pm as follows: April 1, for May conferral and graduation (Commencement ceremony); May 31, for June conferral and graduation, July 31, for October conferral and graduation, and October 31, for December conferral and graduation. The Chair of the SEPC presents the candidate's name to the committee for approval. The SOGS Dean then presents the candidate's name to the Board of Trustees for their approval. The PhD is awarded after the Board of Trustees' approval of the student for graduation.

**Dissertation Submission and Publication** - Procedures for the dissertation formatting and style are described in the [Guide to the Preparation of Theses and Dissertations](#) available from the SOGS and must be strictly followed for final approval of the dissertation. The SOGS Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs examines and approves the dissertation/thesis for compliance with the *Guide to the Preparation of Theses and Dissertations*, quality of reproduction, and other matters of format and style. The dissertation/thesis will be returned to the student if it does not comply with all requirements. For publication, the SOGS Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs will require an electronic PDF of the approved dissertation and a signed [Dissertation Signature Page](#) bearing the original signatures of the mentor, Dissertation Committee members, the Department Chair and the Dean. The formatted and approved dissertation will be submitted to and published by ProQuest Dissertation Publishing, a repository of Electronic Theses and Dissertations. The process, requirements and timelines from application for dissertation defense to publication of dissertation in ProQuest are summarized as shown below.



## L. Application for Graduation

**Participation in Commencement** - Students in the PhD Program have the option of participating in the May Commencement if they defend their dissertation and submit a complete written and approved dissertation by April 1. Students who submit final documents after April 1 can participate in the May Commencement of the following year.

**Diploma Application** - All graduate students anticipating to graduate must complete a Diploma Application Card. Cards are available during fall registration and may be picked up from the Office of the Registrar. The deadline for receipt of the card is shown in the College's Admissions and Records Calendar.

**Graduation Clearance** - To receive a degree, prospective graduates must complete the following steps, prior to being issued a Clearance Form:

- Submit a letter from the PhD Program Director informing the Dean that all degree requirements have been completed and submit an electronic PDF of the dissertation (PhD) with all required signatures to the Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs, with cc to Assistant Director, Academic Affairs.
- Complete the Graduate Program Self-Assessment Student Questionnaire and return it to the Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs, with cc to Assistant Director, Academic Affairs.

- c) Complete and return to the SOGS the National Research Council Survey of Earned Doctorates (PhD graduates only) to the Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs, with cc to Assistant Director, Academic Affairs; and
- d) Complete the Exit Survey.

The **Graduation Clearance Form** is given to the student by the Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs after the above paperwork is completed. This form requires the signatures of the institutional personnel listed below who will certify that the student has cleared their area for graduation.

- Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs
- Student Services Director
- Supervisor of Postal Services
- Library Director
- Executive Director of Alumni Relations
- Director of Student Financial Aid
- Treasurer
- Safety and Security

All forms are to be completed before graduation. All products are to be completed before the actual degree is received.

### **M. Student Transfer from PhD to Dual Degree Program**

A student in the PhD Program may apply to Medical or Dental School Programs or the Physician Assistant Program at Meharry after being Admitted to Candidacy and remain in the SOGS while the application is being processed. If a graduate student has not been Admitted to Candidacy, the Office of Admissions and Records will not accept their application to those programs unless the student withdraws from the SOGS and waits one calendar year before applying. The following steps should be taken:

- a) PhD students interested in transferring to one of the dual degree programs should apply to the program of choice through the appropriate admissions portal (AMCAS/ AADSAS/ CASPA) and submit all appropriate application materials for admissions evaluation.
- b) If accepted into the new program, the PhD student may apply to SOGS to be enrolled into the SOGS MD/PhD, DDS/PhD, or PA/PhD dual degree program by submission of a completed Transfer Request Form that will be reviewed by the PhD Program Council.
- c) PhD students who are accepted to transfer into the dual degree program must complete all requirements of the PhD Program before starting the new program. A final copy of the approved PhD dissertation must be received by the SOGS before the student can start the new program.
- d) PhD Students accepted into the dual degree program will be eligible to receive full tuition, fees, and stipend support for an additional period of up to four years maximum. These students are required to fulfill all duties and responsibilities associated with the dual degree.
- e) Dual Degree: The dual degree will be awarded once the student completes the second-degree Program.

- f) Students have the right to appeal the acceptance decisions of the PhD Program Council to the Dean of the SOGS.
- g) If a student is not accepted into the Dual Degree Program, they may still be admitted to the new program on their own.

## **N. Financial Assistance**

- a) The SOGS provides funding for students during the first two academic years of their PhD program. This includes tuition and fees, and the annual stipend. The student's mentor shall be responsible for financial support for the remainder of the student's time in the program.
- b) The SOGS offers financial assistance in the form of fellowships, traineeships, service appointments such as teaching assistantships, graduate assistantships, and research assistantships for students enrolled in the PhD Program. All inquiries concerning the availability of such assistance should be addressed to the PhD Program Director.
- c) PhD training is a full-time activity. Therefore, students receiving a stipend or fellowship are not permitted to hold outside employment. Violation of this regulation could lead to loss of the fellowship.

**Emergency Loan Program** - Graduate students may receive emergency loan assistance from the college's loan funds and the Graduate School's emergency funds. Please contact the Office of Financial Aid at 615/327-6826 or the Graduate School Assistant Dean for Student Affairs at 615 327-6533 for additional information.

## **ONLINE RESOURCES:** [SOGS-PhD Program Student Resources](#)

PhD Program Milestone Timetable for Completion of Degree in 4 Years

Self-Tracking Summary Progress Checklist for the Overall Program

Self-Tracking Dissertation Committee/Qualifying Exam Checklist

Written Preliminary Exam Grading Form

Oral Preliminary Exam Grading Form

Dissertation Committee Meeting Report Form

Individual Development Plan (IDP) Form

Guidelines for Writing Dissertations

Self-Tracking Dissertation Defense Checklist

## **Applicable Institutional Policies**

All institutional policies for MMC and SOGS, including those relevant to the PhD Program, can be found within the PolicyTech system (<https://home.mmc.edu/about/policy/>).

**Student Alcohol & Drug Policy** - Meharry Medical College ("College and/or MMC") strives to maintain a safe and healthy environment for all. Therefore, the College prohibits being under the influence of, or the unlawful use, manufacture, possession, sale, distribution or dispensing of drugs or drug paraphernalia ("controlled substances" as defined in the Controlled Substances Act, 21, U.S.C 812) and alcohol on the College property or during



College sponsored or sanctioned activities. This includes off-campus clinical training and rotation sites. Individuals who engage in illegal activity or the improper use of alcohol and drugs are harmful to themselves, the wellbeing of others, the College's mission, and patient safety during clinical training. A sustained finding of violation of this Policy as determined by the Student Code of Professional Conduct policy ("Student Code of Conduct") will result in dismissal. All decisions are subject to appeal procedures as outlined in the Student Code of Conduct policy. The full policy can be found at [Alcohol-and-Drug-Policy.pdf \(mmc.edu\)](#)

**Anti-Harassment Policy** - Unlawful harassment, including sexual harassment, is contrary to basic standards of conduct between individuals and is prohibited by state and federal law. It is the policy of Meharry to expressly forbid any form of unlawful harassment of, by or between employees, guests, volunteers and/or vendors. Any staff employee who engages in any of the acts or behavior defined below violates Meharry policy, and such misconduct will subject an employee to corrective action up to and including termination. The full policy can be found at [Anti-Harassment-Policy.pdf \(mmc.edu\)](#)

**Non-Retaliation for Reporting** - The College prohibits any retaliation, retribution, or harassment to be directed against any employee who reports a Compliance concern. Anyone who is involved in any act of retaliation against an employee who has reported suspected misconduct in good faith should be subject to disciplinary action. The full policy can be found at [Non-retaliation-for-reporting.pdf \(mmc.edu\)](#)

**Policy for Managing Informal and Formal Student Complaints** - In keeping with the Meharry Medical College ("College") mission, the College seeks to maintain a safe and amicable environment for students, faculty, and staff. The college understands that occasionally students will face a challenge or concern that requires assistance or intervention. To promote appropriate communication between students and departments on campus with whom they interact, this policy provides venues where students can share feedback, and outlines procedures that are established to manage informal and formal concerns and complaints presented by students. The full policy can be found at [Policy-for-Managing-Informal-and-Formal-Student-Complaints.pdf \(mmc.edu\)](#)

**Sexual Misconduct and Grievance Procedures** - Meharry Medical College (MMC) defines sexual misconduct as any wrongdoing of a sexual nature. This encompasses sexual exploitation, harassment, violence, nonconsensual sexual contact, and non-consensual sexual intercourse. MMC considers sex discrimination in all its forms to be a serious offense. Sexual Misconduct violates MMC's sexual discrimination policy and Federal Civil Rights laws. MMC is committed to creating a safe and responsible environment by fostering a community that promotes prompt reporting of all types of Sexual Misconduct and fair and timely resolutions. As a recipient of Federal funds, MMC is required to comply with Title IX of the Higher Education Amendments of 1972, which prohibits discrimination based on sex in education programs or activities. To ensure compliance with Title IX and other federal and state civil rights laws, MMC has developed policies and procedures that prohibit sex discrimination in all its forms. This policy extends to employment with and admission to the

College. Consistent with due process, all accused are presumed innocent until proven otherwise under this Policy. The full policy can be found at [Sexual-Misconduct-and-Grievance-Procedures.pdf \(mmc.edu\)](#)

**Social Media Policy** - Meharry Medical College recognizes the value social media plays in networking and in education; however, improper use can potentially create legal and ethical dilemmas, especially when the online behavior is deemed unprofessional or unlawful. This policy is intended to inform Meharry Medical College workforce, students and business affiliates of the expected social media etiquette and consequences of breaches to protect their personal and professional integrity and MMC's institutional image and reputation. The full policy can be found at [Social-Media-Policy.pdf \(mmc.edu\)](#)

**Student Professional Conduct** - The Code of Conduct is designed to promote the professional development of students at MMC. However, it cannot include, nor foresee each potential infraction. Therefore, unprofessional behavior that falls outside of those within this code is still subject to discipline. These specific incidents will be considered in the context in which they occur. This code is designed to serve as a guideline for our students and includes activities and conduct during their time at MMC. While this code of conduct is not meant to govern behavior of a student's private life disconnected from their academics, it should be noted that health professionals are held to high standards of conduct within society. Therefore, this behavior has the potential to come before the Student Disciplinary Committee for investigation. The full policy can be found at [Student-Professional-Conduct-Policy.pdf \(mmc.edu\)](#)

**Students with Disabilities** – Meharry Medical College recognizes and supports the standards set forth in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, these laws are designed to eliminate discrimination against qualified individuals with disabilities. Disabilities may include physical or mental impairments which substantially limit one or more of a person's major life activities, and which necessitate modifications. Meharry Medical College is committed to making reasonable accommodations for qualifying students with disabilities as required by applicable laws. All accommodations are tailored to meet the needs of each student with a documented disability. Specific concerns pertaining to services for students with disabilities or any disability issue should be directed to the ADA Coordinator, Jacqueline "Dee" Gardner via email at [jgardner@mmc.edu](mailto:jgardner@mmc.edu), phone (615) 327-6760 or in person, Lyttle Hall, Room 306. The full policy can be found at [Students-with-disabilities.pdf \(mmc.edu\)](#)

**Whistleblower and Retaliation** - MMC encourages all members of the MMC community to report acts they in good faith perceive as being a violation of law and/or College policy, rules or requirements. This policy is intended to encourage the disclosure to the appropriate officials so that prompt and appropriate action can be taken. MMC is committed to protecting individuals from interference in making a good faith report of violation under this policy and from retaliation because of such good faith reporting. Individuals may not retaliate against any other individual based on that person's good faith report of a violation. Individuals may



not use or attempt to use authority or influence related to their College position or association to interfere with another individual's right to make a report of violation as provided for in this policy. The full policy can be found at [Whistleblower-and-Retaliation-Policy.pdf \(mmc.edu\)](#)

## **Applicable School of Graduate Studies Policies**

**Final Course Grade Policy** - For graduate students to be evaluated in a timely manner, and for grades to be sent to the Registrar's Office, course coordinators must submit final course grades two weeks after a course has officially ended. The full policy can be found at [SOGS-Final-Course-Grade-Policy](#)

**Grade Appeal Policy** - Meharry Medical College School of Graduate Studies is committed to training graduate students in a fair and unbiased environment. If for any reason a student feels he/she has received an exam grade or a final grade in a course unfairly, he/she will be able to appeal the grade. The full policy can be found at [SOGS-Grade Appeal Policy](#)

**Grade Exclusion Policy** - Under the Grade Exclusion Policy, students in their first year of didactic courses are given the opportunity to repeat the course within 12 months and exclude the original grade from their cumulative GPA. Grade exclusion is applicable for a maximum of two courses. Other restrictions may apply. This policy only applies to students who entered Meharry in 2022 and later and will not retroactively alter academic or financial aid status. Excluded courses will continue to be counted in calculation of satisfactory progress for financial aid eligibility. The full policy can be found at [Grade Exclusion Policy](#)

**Academic Honesty** - All students are subject to the regulations of the college's Honor Code. Instances of suspected plagiarism, cheating on examinations, or other violations of the Student Honor Code, should be reported either to the office of the General Counsel or the Office of the Dean, SOGS. Plagiarism consists of presenting the writing, data, or ideas of another, as one's own without acknowledgment by citation or other appropriate and accepted means. Plagiarism constitutes a grave and fundamental violation of personal integrity and professional ethics. The Student Disciplinary Committee reviews allegations of plagiarism. The full policy can be found at [SOGS-Academic-Honesty-Policy \(mmc.edu\)](#)

**Academic Dishonesty Policy** - Academic dishonesty is deemed unacceptable behavior by the School of Graduate Studies. This type of behavior includes cheating on examinations, homework assignments, assigned papers and other course activities. Examples of dishonesty include but are not limited to:

- a. Communication with another person other than faculty in any manner during an examination;
- b. Copying material from another student's examination;
- c. Permitting a student to copy from your examination;
- d. Use of unauthorized books or notes, all electronic devices, phone, google glasses, laptops, iPads, media, etc. during an exam;

- e. Falsification/misrepresentation of academic performance;
- f. Impersonation of another student at any examination or other form of academic work;
- g. Interference with an instructor's administration of an examination;
- h. Plagiarism, copying another's work, including the work of other students and submitting it as yours; cut and paste and sharing of written work that is not your own etc.

Examination questions written by Meharry faculty are not to be copied, photographed, etc. and/or memorized with the intent to distribute or post on any website. If dishonesty is detected, the student will receive an automatic zero on that examination, quiz or work assignment. Repeated (second or other instances of dishonesty) behavior will be referred to the School Disciplinary Committee and may result in expulsion from the program and Meharry Medical College. The full policy can be found at [SOGS-Academic Dishonesty Policy](#)

**Procedures for Review and Appeal of Academic Actions** - A student's academic status is determined by the SOGS Student Evaluation and Promotion Committee. The full policy can be found at [Procedure-for-Review-and-Appeal-of-Academic-Actions.pdf \(mmc.edu\)](#)

**Procedure for Review and Appeal of Disciplinary Actions** – Full policy can be found at [Procedure-for-Review-and-Appeal-of-Disciplinary-Action.pdf \(mmc.edu\)](#)

**Student Mistreatment Policy** - Meharry Medical College is an institution rooted in the care of the whole person. Our motto promises the "Worship of God through service to mankind"; interaction between teachers, students and administrative staff should emulate this founding principle. As such, Meharry is committed to creating and sustaining an educational environment that fosters the values and virtues of:

- Mutual respect
- Trust
- Honesty
- Collegiality
- Compassion
- Accountability

Such values are especially critical to effective relationships between faculty, students, and administrative staff. The graduate learning environment is expected to facilitate students' acquisition of professional and collegial attitudes necessary to be effective biomedical researchers, clinical investigators, and public health workers. The development and nurturing of these attitudes are enhanced and, indeed, based on the presence of mutual respect between teacher, learner and staff. Characteristics of this respect are the expectation that all participants in the educational program assume their responsibilities in a manner that enriches the quality of the learning process. The full policy can be found at [SOGS-Mistreatment-Policy \(mmc.edu\)](#)

**Student Complaint Policy** - Students are encouraged to address their concerns with the individual involved, at the earliest possible time and on an informal basis. If no satisfaction is gained from the informal meeting, then a formal complaint should be filed. If it is an issue that falls under Honor Code Violations, Student Mistreatment, Sexual Misconduct, or Grade

Appeal, the policies for these specific issues will take precedence. The full policy can be found at [SOGS-Student-Complaint-Policy \(mmc.edu\)](http://mmc.edu/SOGS-Student-Complaint-Policy)

## **Applicable PhD Program Policies**

**External Review of Graduate Programs in Biomedical Sciences** – The School of Graduate Studies strives to provide unique educational opportunities in basic biomedical research and clinical investigation training and public health service to promising African Americans and other under-represented ethnic minority students through outstanding basic, clinical and public health oriented research with special emphasis on serving the underserved communities and in diseases and health conditions that disproportionately affect minority populations. The Biomedical Sciences PhD program will engage in a periodic external review to assure its excellence and competitiveness at the national level. The full policy can be found at [External Program Review Policy](#)

**Faculty Eligibility to Train PhD Students** - Meharry Medical College, School of Graduate Studies was founded to provide excellent research training to underrepresented students in the areas of biomedical sciences and public health. Meharry is committed to excellence in research training. In order to achieve this goal, the research mentors of Ph.D. students must have demonstrated competency in mentoring students, with facilities to support the research efforts of the students, and to make the students competitive for a research career. The full policy can be found at [Faculty Eligibility to Mentor Graduate Students Policy](#)

**SOGS Student Transfer from the PhD Program into a Dual Degree Program Policy** - There is a need for clinician scientists who are well trained in medicine or dentistry and research. The Meharry Medical College School of Medicine (SOM), School of Dentistry (SOD), and relevant professional programs in School of Graduate Studies (SOGS) are committed to supporting dual degree programs. The traditional way to be admitted into one of these programs is to submit a dual degree application at the time of consideration for both medical or dental school and graduate school. This policy provides guidance on admission of students in the PhD Program to the MD/PhD, or the DDS/PhD Program. Students in the PhD Program who are interested in pursuing a dual degree must be in good academic standing and in the Dissertation Phase of their training. They should have applied and be accepted to the SOM, SOD or other relevant professional program in the SOGS. The full policy can be found in the [SOGS-PhD Program Student Resources](#) folder.