Updated 9/29/2026

Summary of MCBB PhD Student Expectations by Year
Full details can be found in the Graduate Program Guide: http://www.bu.edu/mcbb/grad-guide

Annual reports are due in October and are required for students in their second year and up.

Year 1
- Complete three rotations.
- Enroll in graduate classes, as specified in the Graduate Program.
- Serve as a teaching fellow during spring semester and enroll the accompanying pedagogy course.
- Begin Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) training: https://www.bu.edu/research/ethics-compliance/responsible-conduct-of-research/training-programs/rcr-for-doctoral-or-postdoctoral-researchers/
- Attend the Friday CM/MCBB seminar series.

Year 2
- Begin forming your faculty committee to take your qualifying exam. Your exam may take place in your 2nd or 3rd year.
- Enroll in graduate classes. Ensure you are on track to complete all required courses, as specified in the Graduate Program Guide.
- Serve as a teaching fellow for at least one semester.
- Complete RCR training by the end of year 2.
- Attend and present an appropriate seminar series (CM/MCBB, Neuro, ChemBio, EBE, etc.)
- Attend professional development events to enhance skill and career training.

Year 3
- If you haven't already, complete your qualifying exam by the end of your third year.
- Complete any remaining required courses.
- Serve as a teaching fellow if you haven't completed the 2-semester teaching requirement or funding requires it.
- Attend and present an appropriate seminar series.
- Attend professional development events to enhance skill and career training.
- Present your research at conferences.

Year 4 and beyond
- Have at least one committee meeting each year; see next page for scheduling guidelines.
- Complete any remaining required courses.
- Serve as a teaching fellow if you haven't completed the 2-semester teaching requirement or funding requires it.
- Attend and present an appropriate seminar series.
- Attend professional development events to enhance skill and career training.
- Present your research at conferences.
- Plan a timeline to graduation. Review the dissertation guidelines and timetable in the Graduate Program Guide. A prospectus is required ~9 months prior to the proposed graduation date and may be discussed at a committee meeting.

In general, the PhD is expected to be completed within seven years.

How to Schedule a Committee Meeting

1. Meet with your advisor to discuss a timeframe for a committee meeting.

2. After agreeing on a timeframe with your advisor, ask your committee members about their *general availability** and any blackout dates during this range. Let them know a poll will follow so they are aware more detailed planning is forthcoming.

3. Once your committee members have responded, figure out a few options that generally seem to work for everyone and propose a few variations of that time.
    a. Example: If everyone replied that Wednesday mornings tend to work, include several morning times for a few different Wednesdays within your timeframe.
    b. Doodle or When2Meet are good tools to use at this stage of scheduling.

Tips

- Begin the process early! Faculty schedules fill up quickly, often months in advance.

- Avoid sending scheduling polls with more than 10 options. This will give you a faster response rate.

- After receiving poll responses, confirm a date as soon as possible. Faculty schedules change quickly, and they may no longer be available if you wait too long to confirm.

*It is best to start with general availability instead of specific dates and times to help speed things up. Here is a great example from Claus Wilke about why this works:

> You may wonder what the difference is between asking people about their general availability and asking them specifically when they can or cannot meet. The difference is efficiency. If you send me an email such as this one:
>
> Dear Claus,
>
> I'd like to schedule a committee meeting for late May or early June. Are there any days that you are out of town during that time? Also, are there days/times that generally do or do not work for you?
>
> I can respond:
>
> I'm around. MWF is usually bad, but I'm free most times TTH.
> Claus
>
> Writing this kind of a response will take me all of 2 minutes, and I'll likely do it the moment I get your message. As a result, this exchange has saved you from proposing numerous times I would have declined, and it has saved me the time and effort it would have taken me to enter my entire calendar into Doodle.

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	Y1 Fall	*Y1 Spring*	*Y2 Fall*	*Y2 Spring*	*Y3*	*Y4*	*Y5+*
Research	Rotations 1-2	Rotations 2-3	Thesis Work Qual Exam *completed by the end of Y3*		Thesis Work Qual Exam or Committee Meeting	Thesis Work Yearly Committee Meeting	Thesis Work Yearly Committee Meeting Defend *Prospectus due ~9 mo. before defense*
Classes	BI 753: Advanced Molecular Biology MB 721: Graduate Biochemistry MB 581: Grant Writing Seminar	BI 735: Advanced Cell Biology 1 elective class	1 elective class MB 581: Grant Writing Seminar *If not taken in the Y1 Fall*	1 elective class			
Teaching		TF MB 697: Pedagogy Class	1 additional TF required				
Professional Development	MB 696: First Year Graduate Seminar in Biology (Fall) Start RCR training (online + 1 credit class) PhD Progresssion		Complete RCR training PhD Progresssion Badges		PhD Progresssion Badges	BI 714: Professional Development for Biology PhDs (optional) PhD Progresssion Badges	
Seminars	MB 583 (Friday CM/MCBB seminar)	MB 584 (Friday CM/MCBB seminar)	Attend and present at appropriate seminar series (CM/MCBB, Neuro, ChemBio, etc.)		Attend and present at a seminar series	Attend and present at a seminar series	Attend and present at a seminar series

Career Development; Communication Skills; Discipline-Specific Knowledge; Research Skills; Teaching Skills; Management and Leadership