



PennState

Huck Institutes of
the Life Sciences

Graduate Program in Neuroscience

University Park Campus

Student and Faculty Handbook

Fall 2024

Neuroscience Graduate Program: <http://www.huck.psu.edu/content/graduate-programs/neuroscience>

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NEUROSCIENCE

Mission

The primary mission of the Graduate Program in Neuroscience is to train students interested in obtaining a doctoral degree in the field of Neuroscience. Each student receiving a PhD in Neuroscience must submit an approved doctoral research proposal and successfully defend the findings and conclusions resulting from that research. Information on Neuroscience faculty members and their research projects can be found at <https://www.huck.psu.edu/graduate-programs/neuroscience/people/faculty>.

Academic Requirements

The Neuroscience Graduate curriculum consists of required courses and electives. Courses in the core areas of neuroscience include comparative neuroanatomy (NEURO 512), molecular and cellular neurobiology (NEURO 520), and systems neuroscience (NEURO 521). All neuroscience graduate students are also required to attend the program's neuroscience seminar series and associated course (NEURO 501), receive training in Ethics and the Responsible Conduct of Research (MCIBS 591 and CITI online RCR course), and conduct research supervised by a faculty member in the Neuroscience Graduate Program. For the PhD, students take no more than 12 graded credits (A-F) of Thesis Research (NEURO 600 or NEURO 610). In cases where a student has been approved to receive a master's degree in Neuroscience, the student takes no more than 6 graded credits for their thesis research. [Appendix 1](#) indicates a typical timeline of the required coursework in the neuroscience curriculum.

In addition to the required core courses in [Appendix 2](#), students must take at least two elective courses during the first two years. Electives include 400- or 500-level courses that are approved by the graduate student's advisor and the Neuroscience Program Chair. Although not required, students are strongly encouraged to take one or more statistics courses that are relevant to their research and a grant writing course. Elective courses that have been taken by neuroscience students in recent years are shown in [Appendix 3](#).

International students must demonstrate English proficiency as prescribed by the J. Jeffrey and Ann Marie Fox Graduate School. Information on the admission requirements for international students can be found at <https://gradschool.psu.edu/graduate-education-policies/gcac/gcac-300/gcac-305-admission-requirements-international-students/>

Full time student status requires a minimum of nine credits each fall and spring semester before the comprehensive exam. After passing the comprehensive exam, students may register for Dissertation Preparation (NEURO 601). Information about all Fox Graduate School policies can be found at <https://gradschool.psu.edu/academics/graduate-education-policies> and <http://gradschool.psu.edu/graduate-education-policies/>.

Laboratory Rotations

Students are required to complete 3 laboratory rotations in the first year. Students are responsible for identifying and organizing laboratory rotations with specific faculty members. Laboratory rotations last 7-8 weeks, with two rotations in the first Fall semester and one rotation in the Spring semester. Rotations provide the opportunity to participate in different projects, learn different methods, and engage in different laboratory environments; the overarching goal is to identify the laboratory and faculty mentor for PhD training and dissertation work. Rotation advisors should provide students with clear expectations of their responsibilities during the rotation, and the student should meet regularly with the advisor to discuss the progress of the rotation project.

Students may choose any member of the Neuroscience Graduate Faculty for a rotation. If research in a specific lab matches your interest, you should make an appointment to discuss the rotation plan with the

faculty member. The Neuroscience Program Chair will be available to provide guidance to narrow your choices or consult. Students who are conducting laboratory rotations enroll in NEURO 596, typically for 1.0 credit per semester.

Faculty Advisors

The Neuroscience Program Chair is the faculty advisor for students entering the program, and this person is available for specific questions about the program and for more general discussions of a student's progress. After a student has selected a faculty thesis/dissertation advisor, that faculty member assumes these responsibilities.

Dissertation Advisor

Students should choose a dissertation advisor and research laboratory before the end of the second semester of their first academic year. A student may choose any lab supervised by a member of the Neuroscience Graduate Faculty provided the faculty member agrees and has space and resources for the student's research. Students should have rotated with the faculty member and be familiar with the laboratory environment and its research mission.

Guidelines for interactions between the thesis/dissertation advisor and the graduate student appear in [Appendix 4](#).

Responsible Conduct of Research

All neuroscience students must complete an online Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) training course. First-year students are strongly encouraged to take this course before their summer orientation, which occurs prior to the beginning of the fall semester. The online course is offered through the CITI (Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative) Program. This on-line course supplements in-class, discussion-based RCR training that is provided in Ethics, Rigor, Reproducibility, and Conduct of Research in the Life Sciences (MCIBS 591), a required 2-credit course. Together, these two courses satisfy RCR training requirements mandated by Penn State's Scholarship and Research Integrity (SARI) Program, an RCR initiative organized through the Office for Research Protections within the Office of the Senior Vice President for Research.

To register for RCR training, go to the Penn State CITI website <http://citi.psu.edu/> where you will find instructions. After selecting Pennsylvania State University as the participating institution, register for either the CITI **Biomedical Science** course (for most students) or the CITI **Human Subject Research** course. The latter is suitable for students who anticipate doing dissertation research with human subject participants; it meets both general RCR requirements and specific RCR training required by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Human Participants Research at Penn State. Whichever course is chosen, students must work on their own to complete the course modules and pass the on-line quizzes. Students are required to complete all modules by August 31, 2024. A copy of the student's Completion Report must be submitted to Jean Pierce, jep32@psu.edu.

Safety Training

Within the first semester of residence, all students are required to take/pass the laboratory safety and chemical waste disposal training sessions. Typically, Laboratory Safety training will be completed before program orientation via the Learning Resource Network (LRN) <https://lrn.psu.edu/>. Information about additional training sessions can be found at the Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) website, <https://ehs.psu.edu/>, and should be administered through any lab in which the student is rotating or working.

Research and Teaching Assistantships

Support for first-year students is administered through the Huck Institutes. After the first year, students

receive stipends in the form of a teaching or research assistantship, which typically originates with the department of the faculty advisor. All students must be registered as full-time students to maintain stipend eligibility. If no faculty advisor has been identified, students should consult with the Neuroscience Program Chair.

Student Presentations

After their first year, students are required to give an annual presentation of their research to faculty and students in the neuroscience community. These presentations keep faculty and fellow students apprised of progress in research and provide students practice in giving research presentations. After the first year, students are encouraged to present their research progress at least once a year - at scientific conferences, for their committee, and/or to the Neuroscience community as a whole. Students are also expected to use these opportunities to inform the doctoral committee of their research progress.

Academic Integrity Policy

According to Penn State's Code of Conduct (Faculty Senate Policy 49-20, <https://senate.psu.edu/students/policies-and-rules-for-undergraduate-students/47-00-48-00-and-49-00-grades/>), "all students should act with personal integrity, respect other students' dignity, rights and property, and help create and maintain an environment in which all can succeed through the fruits of their efforts." Students should not "engage in or tolerate acts of falsification, misrepresentation or deception. Such acts of dishonesty violate the fundamental ethical principles of the University community and compromise the worth of work completed by others." Academic dishonesty, cheating, and plagiarism will not be tolerated in the Neuroscience Graduate Program and will result in disciplinary sanctions including dismissal from the program. University Policies for handling student misconduct are available at: <http://undergrad.psu.edu/aappm/G-9-academic-integrity.html>.

Scholarship Policy

Students are required to have a minimum grade-point average of 3.0 for the doctoral qualifying examination, admission to the comprehensive examination, thesis/dissertation defense, and graduation. One or more failing grades, a cumulative grade-point average below 3.0, or failing any of the required examinations are considered evidence of unsatisfactory scholarship and are grounds for dismissal from the University (see <https://gradschool.psu.edu/graduate-education-policies/gcac/gcac-800/gcac-803-procedures-termination-unsatisfactory-scholarship/>).

QUALIFYING EXAMINATION (summer of first year)

The Qualifying Exam is normally taken by each first-year student immediately following completion of 18.0 graduate-level credits (typically right after the first spring semester). Each student is expected to remain on campus during May, June, and July, or until testing is completed. A student must have a minimum grade-point average of 3.0 to be eligible for the Qualifying Examination. Passing the Qualifying Exam establishes that the student has sufficient proficiency to continue the pursuit of a doctoral degree in the Neuroscience Program. See additional Fox Graduate School policy for Qualifying Exam (GCAC-604: <https://gradschool.psu.edu/graduate-education-policies/gcac/gcac-600/gcac-604-qualifying-exam/>).

The exam includes a written and an oral portion that are administered and evaluated by the Neuroscience Qualifying Exam Committee. The exam assesses a student's ability to: (1) demonstrate working knowledge of key, fundamental neuroscience concepts, for example, information that was reviewed in first year of the neuroscience curriculum, (2) understand, interpret, and critically evaluate current neuroscience research, (3) develop a sound research plan to test a neuroscience hypothesis, and (4) communicate knowledge in both a written and oral format. English language competency will also be evaluated in this exam.

Students are evaluated on their combined performance on the written and oral portions of the exam. If a student fails the exam, the Neuroscience Qualifying Exam Committee determines whether the student is allowed to take another examination. If the second exam is failed, the student is dismissed from the doctoral program.

ANNUAL GRADUATE STUDENT ACTIVITY REPORT (GSAR) (every spring/summer)

Annual Evaluations are an integral part of the student's professional development. Students summarize their annual progress and achievements using the Annual Graduate Student Activity Report portal. Then the thesis/dissertation advisor (or the Neuroscience Program Chair for students not yet settled in a lab) evaluates student's progress and overall performance and provides guidance about future goals. While students and their advisors should meet regularly over the course of a year, the annual evaluations ensure that at least one meeting has been held to specifically look at the student's progress and performance. As stated in admission offer letters, continuation of student financial support is dependent on satisfactory progress.

The online Annual Graduate Student Activity Report (GSAR), <https://grad-activity.science.psu.edu/>, is sent to all Huck graduate students each spring from the Huck Institutes Graduate Programs Office (Huck Graduate Office). This online evaluation must be completed and approved by August 31 each year. Deadlines for student reporting and advisor evaluations occur before this final deadline.

Each student, in consultation with their advisor, will describe their research progress and plans according to the prompts that appear on the online GSAR form under the section "Progress and Future Plans":

- 1) Please provide a brief description of the current status of your research project.
- 2) Please describe your research accomplishments over the past year.
- 3) Please provide a description of your research plans for the upcoming year.

In addition to this information, each student should provide all of the requested information such as publications, meetings attended, funding received, etc. The online system is self-explanatory but the Huck Graduate Office can assist as necessary. Completed student reports will be reviewed by the Program Chair and, when appropriate, by Patrick Drew, Interim Director of the Huck Institutes.

FORMATION OF A DOCTORAL COMMITTEE (second year)

Within one year after passing the qualifying examination, the student will form a doctoral committee in consultation with their dissertation advisor. The committee is chaired by the student's dissertation advisor, except in rare circumstances. The doctoral committee provides general guidance for the student, and it administers both the Comprehensive Examination and the Dissertation Defense. Committee members should be knowledgeable and interested in the general area of the proposed research. It is suggested that the student form the doctoral committee as soon as possible but no later than one year after passing the Qualifying Exam. This allows for maximum feedback and guidance from the committee in the formation of the student's research projects.

The student is required to meet with the doctoral committee at least once each year. It is the student's responsibility to organize these meetings. Committee meetings typically occur immediately after students present their research progress in a formal seminar. Students are expected to document in writing their progress on dissertation research and future plans for the doctoral committee.

Formal approval of the Doctoral Committee by the Fox Graduate School is required. Students should contact the Huck Graduate Office to complete the necessary paperwork when formalizing or revising their committee.

Composition of the Doctoral Dissertation Committee

Consistent with Fox Graduate School policy (<http://gradschool.psu.edu/graduate-education-policies/gcac/gcac-600/gcac-602-phd-committee-formation/>), a Doctoral Dissertation Committee in the Neuroscience Program should have:

- At least 4 members from the PSU Graduate Faculty.
- At least 2 members in the Neuroscience Program, both of which are in the PSU Graduate Faculty.
- At least one outside member in the PSU Graduate Faculty who is in a different department from that of the dissertation advisor. The outside member should represent a field outside the candidate's major field to provide a broader disciplinary perspective and expertise.

A person not affiliated with PSU may be a special member beyond the 4 members of the PSU Graduate Faculty with approval of the Neuroscience Program Chair and the Fox Graduate School Dean. This request must be submitted to the Fox Graduate School by the Huck Graduate Office and will include a copy of the special member's CV and a memo signed by the Neuroscience Program Chair addressed to the Graduate Enrollment Services Manager.

COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION (end of second/third year)

The Comprehensive Exam is designed to test the student's ability to construct a detailed experimental plan that addresses a specific issue in neuroscience. This exam must be taken after the end of the second year and before the end of the sixth semester. The Comprehensive Examination is administered by the student's doctoral committee, and it consists of a written research proposal followed by an oral examination. To be eligible to take the exam, the student must have a minimum grade-point average of 3.0 for work completed at Penn State and have no deferred or missing grades. In addition, the student must satisfy the English competence requirement and have completed all required coursework. The oral examination must be formally arranged via the Huck Graduate Office, which requires three weeks' notice. Comprehensive examinations are scheduled and announced officially by the Office of Graduate Enrollment Services upon recommendation of the program chair and must not be held without official notification from the Fox Graduate School.

Written Proposal

The proposal may be on any neuroscience topic, including the student's prospective dissertation research. The proposal should follow the format of a NIH Predoctoral (F31) Fellowship application. The Specific Aims must be agreed upon by the student and dissertation advisor. After agreeing on the goals and the wording of the Specific Aims, the advisor should have as little to do with the proposal as possible; the research proposal is to reflect a student's independent work. The student is free to use published (or in press) papers that are available, but the logic, experimental design, and writing must reflect the student's original work. The written proposal must be completed and delivered to members of the doctoral committee at least two weeks before the oral examination. The proposal does not need to correspond to the student's intended dissertation research, although it usually does. The purpose of the exam is to test the student's ability to develop a coherent research plan and support that plan with logical, literature-based arguments.

Oral Examination

The student must provide a formal presentation of the scientific background, rationale, and general approach of the research plan for each Specific Aim in the written proposal (approx. 30 – 45 minutes). During this presentation, the doctoral committee may interrogate the student on all aspects of the

proposed experiments, predicted results, interpretation of data, and knowledge of background material. The student and at least three persons on the doctoral committee, including the Committee Chair and Dissertation Advisor, must be physically present for the examination. If the student, advisor, and/or committee chair/co-chair is not able to participate in-person due to extenuating circumstances, the Neuroscience Program Chair may approve at their discretion the remote participation of one or more individuals or approve a fully remote examination. A request for remote participation should be submitted at the same time that the examination request is submitted. If the Neuroscience Program Chair does not approve the request for remote participation, either the student or advisor may appeal to the Associate Dean for Graduate Education in the Eberly College of Science.

Evaluation

Students are evaluated on their combined performance in the written and oral portions of the exam. A favorable vote of at least two-thirds of the committee is required for passing. In the event of failure, the examining committee will determine whether the student may take another examination. When a period of more than six years has elapsed between the passing of the comprehensive examination and the completion of the program, the student is required to pass a second comprehensive examination before the final defense will be scheduled.

The Fox Graduate School requirements for Comprehensive Exams can be found at <https://gradschool.psu.edu/graduate-education-policies/gcac/gcac-600/gcac-606-comp-exam-temp>.

DISSERTATION & FINAL ORAL EXAMINATION

Completion of the requirements for a PhD degree in the Neuroscience Intercollege Graduate Degree Program entails the preparation of a dissertation (written dissertation), a final oral examination (dissertation defense), and formal acceptance of the dissertation by the student's doctoral committee. The dissertation defense is administered by the student's doctoral committee. The student must have a minimum grade-point average of 3.0 to be eligible to defend. To schedule the defense, the student needs to notify the Huck Graduate Office 3-4 weeks prior to scheduled defense.

Applying for Graduation

At the beginning of the semester in which the student wishes to graduate, they must apply for graduation. This is done through LionPATH (<http://www.lionpath.psu.edu/>). Contact the Huck Graduate Office for details and assistance with applying.

Written Dissertation Preparation

The Fox Graduate School has strict guidelines for preparing and formatting the written dissertation; see Fox Graduate School Policies (<http://gradschool.psu.edu/graduate-education-policies/gcac/gcac-600/gcac-607-dissertation-research-doctorate/>) and the Fox Graduate School's thesis and dissertation information webpage (<https://gradschool.psu.edu/academics/theses-and-dissertations>) for details. Extensive consultation with the doctoral committee is strongly encouraged; during the years prior to dissertation preparation, students should have consulted with their dissertation committee members (e.g., through yearly, or more often, group or individual meetings) to discuss and agree upon dissertation content and format. Prior to submitting the dissertation to the committee, students should allow ample time for their dissertation advisor to provide feedback on dissertation drafts. (The draft submission, feedback, and revision process takes weeks to months.) The finalized dissertation should be submitted to the dissertation committee no less than 2 weeks before the dissertation defense date.

Students must present their dissertation in accordance with the Penn State University guidelines as described in the **Thesis and Dissertation Handbook** available at <https://gradschool.psu.edu/assets/uploads/documents/Thesis-and-Dissertation-Handbook.pdf>

or from the Office of Theses and Dissertations in 115 Kern Building (814-865-1795). The dissertation must meet the editorial standards of the Fox Graduate School, so that it constitutes a suitable archival document for inclusion in the University Libraries.

Oral Dissertation Defense

The final oral examination consists of a public presentation of the dissertation research, followed by a closed meeting with the student's doctoral committee. The examination should be scheduled after the student has fulfilled all other Fox Graduate School requirements for the degree; three weeks' notice is required by the Fox Graduate School for scheduling this examination. The oral examination is scheduled by the Office of Graduate Enrollment Services, on the recommendation of the head of the graduate program, and may not be scheduled until at least three months have elapsed since the comprehensive examination was passed. The final version of the dissertation should be delivered to the members of the doctoral committee a minimum of two weeks before the defense. A favorable vote of at least two-thirds of the doctoral committee is required for passing the final oral examination.

The doctoral candidate and a minimum of three committee members, including the Committee Chair and Dissertation Advisor, must be physically present for the dissertation defense. If the student, advisor, and/or committee chair/co-chair is not able to participate in-person due to extenuating circumstances, the Neuroscience Program Chair may approve, at their discretion, the remote participation of one or more individuals, or approve a fully remote examination. A request for remote participation should be submitted at the same time that the examination request is submitted. If the Neuroscience Program Chair does not approve the request for remote participation, either the student or advisor may appeal to the Associate Dean for Graduate Education in the Eberly College of Science. In preparation for the dissertation defense, the student's advisor is required to set up and disseminate any links or connections for video conferencing, if utilized.

Fox Graduate School policies regarding the oral defense can be found here:

<https://gradschool.psu.edu/graduate-education-policies/gcac/gcac-600/gcac-608-final-oral-examination-research-doctorate/>.

Dissertation Submission and Acceptance

This is the final step of the process. When the student has completed any final revisions requested by the committee, the final dissertation is uploaded to the eTD site. Then, the dissertation must be accepted, as indicated by the electronic signatures of two-thirds of the doctoral committee and the Neuroscience Program Chair.

Degree completion and Exit Interview

Upon completion of the degree, students should check with their advisor to determine if they should provide a bound or electronic copy of their dissertation to the advisor. The Huck Graduate Office sends an Exit Survey to each graduating student. Students will also meet with the Neuroscience Program Chair or an appropriate representative to discuss their doctoral training at Penn State and provide suggestions for improving the program.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Internships (optional)

The internship experience is optional. All graduate students who are members of the Huck Institutes of the Life Sciences may participate in an external work internship that may be available in academia, industry, or government. Students can receive one credit on their transcript by enrolling in MCIBS 595. A quality letter grade (A-F) or a research grade (R) may be assigned. Non-traditional settings are also

available. Students interested in this opportunity should initiate discussion early on with their advisor and Neuroscience Program Chair to identify suitable internships and the best time for this experience (typically in summer). For assistance finding an internship, contact Dustin Zettle (dmz5150@psu.edu), Science Career Coordinator, Eberly College of Science -Office of Science Engagement (814-865-9922).

Teaching Opportunities

Teaching opportunities are available, and students interested in teaching should initiate discussions with their advisor and the Neuroscience Program Chair to determine the best timing for this experience. The student will need to register for teaching assistant training (e.g. a departmental course such as BIOL 893 (Experiential Teaching in Biology) or the New Instructor Orientation Course offered by the Schreyer Institute for Teaching Excellence: <http://www.schreyerinstitutione.psu.edu/Events/NIO/>).

During the semester in which they teach and develop their teaching skills in a classroom setting, students register for MCIBS 602 and receive one credit on their transcript. A teaching certificate, which documents the student's teaching commitment and experience, can be obtained from the Fox Graduate School. For more information on how to obtain a teaching certificate, please visit the Fox Graduate School website: <https://gradschool.psu.edu/student-support/professional-development/penn-state-cirtl-teaching-certificate>.

Vacation and Sick Days, Leaves of Absence

In general, vacation time should not exceed a total of 10 days (2 weeks) per year, exclusive of the 11 designated University holidays. Days at scientific meetings or training conferences are not vacation time (extra days before or after the meeting would count as vacation). Students may take more than the regularly allocated vacation time in any given calendar year for special travel or activities if they have the **consent of their research advisor** and they take correspondingly fewer vacation days in the preceding and/or following years.

Students must inform their research advisor (or the Graduate Program Chair if a research advisor has not yet been assigned) of their vacation plans at least 15 days before the first day of their vacation. The student should submit their vacation request in writing and obtain written approval from their advisor (an email will suffice). While advisor/Program Chair will usually approve most reasonable requests, requests can be denied if there are circumstances that warrant such a denial. Such denials should not, however, impede a student from using all of their annual vacation time in a reasonable fashion.

These recommended guidelines are advisory and reflect those suggested by government agencies such as National Science Foundation and National Institutes of Health for training grant fellows. Students should consult with their advisor regarding any absences that affect other group members in the advisor's lab. Common sense policies and procedures should apply. Note that vacation time should be planned to avoid interference with specific duties including teaching.

Huck Institutes Resources

The Huck Institutes Travel Award

The Huck Institutes of the Life Sciences provide Travel Awards to PhD students enrolled in all Huck graduate programs who will give poster and/or oral presentations at domestic or international conferences. To apply for this travel award, submit a request form at <https://www.huck.psu.edu/graduate-programs/ecology/student-resources/research-travel-awards/huck-institutes-of-the-life-sciences-graduate-travel-award>. The application will be sent to the Graduate Program Chair for review and approval. The maximum award for domestic travel is \$750, and the maximum award for international travel is \$1,500. These funds may be used for transportation, lodging, and meeting registration fees; meals and per diem

charges are not allowed. Students are eligible to receive this award twice during their study at Penn State (for 2 domestic or 1 domestic and 1 international meeting).

Graduate Student Professional Development System

A successful career in Neuroscience requires more than scientific knowledge and technical ability. To help you obtain the professional skills needed to be successful in securing a satisfying and rewarding career, the Huck Institutes has created a Professional Development System that includes seminars, workshops, and other resources aimed at developing your skills so that you can take advantage of a broad range of professional opportunities. See the following website for more details:

<https://www.huck.psu.edu/resources/students/graduate-students/professional-development/professional-development-overview>

Writing Skills

The ability to communicate succinctly in the scientific enterprise is paramount for success. Effective writing is an essential skill for the submission of abstracts, manuscripts, and grant applications, all of which are used to summarize and report one's scientific findings. It is also important to develop your ability to explain your scientific endeavors to audiences outside your field or to the lay public. To improve the quality, clarity, and effectiveness of your written communication, please consult the [Writing Skills](#) website offered by the Huck Institute or any of the following resources offered on this campus:

- [The Penn State Graduate Writing Center](#)
- [Writing as an Engineer or Scientist](#) by Dr. Michael Alley
- [The Fox Graduate School Grant Writing Workshops](#)
- [Apply to take part in the Graduate and Professional Student Association's Dissertation and Thesis Boot Camp - a week-long event held in a quiet section of the library that includes informational workshops on issues related to writing as well as dedicated writing time. For more information on when the bootcamp is each semester, visit the GPSA website.](#)
- International graduate students and visiting scholars can attend workshops on English Academic Writing, Speaking, and Interaction through English for Professional Purposes Intercultural Center ([EPPIC](#)).

Individual Development Plan

To help set career goals, students are encouraged to register at myIDP (<http://myidp.sciencecareers.org/>) and use the resources there to gain strategies for charting a successful career. This website provides:

- Exercises to examine your skills, interests, and values
- A list of 20 scientific career paths with a prediction of which ones best fit your skills and interests
- A tool for setting strategic goals for the coming year, with optional reminders to keep you on track

In addition, each spring semester the Huck Institutes offers interactive sessions to help students interpret their myIDP results, set career goals, and review and revise these goals over time.

Huck Graduate Student Advisory Committee

This Graduate Student Advisory Committee represents all graduate students in the Huck Institutes of the Life Sciences. Its mission is to promote graduate student interests, facilitate communication among students and faculty, and help guide students in their career plans. More information is available at: <https://www.huck.psu.edu/resources/students/graduate-students/graduate-student-involvement/huck-graduate-student-advisory-committee>.

Huck Institutes Graduate Network on LinkedIn

Students are encouraged to join the Penn State Huck Institutes Graduate Network on LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/groups/8278299/>. This LinkedIn group is a great resource for students interested in careers in both industry and academia to network and connect with program alumni.

Competence in Written and Spoken English

The Fox Graduate School requires that all PhD candidates demonstrate high-level competence in the English language, including reading, writing, and speaking. Competence in written and spoken English is assessed as part of the qualifying exam.

All international students and other students for whom English is not their native language are required to take the American English Oral Communicative Proficiency Test (AEOCPT) which is administered by the University's Department of Applied Linguistics. Given at the beginning of fall and spring semesters, international students are required to pre-register for the AEOCPT. Typically, students who are required to take this test will be scheduled for testing prior to the first semester by the Huck Graduate Program Coordinator, currently Dana Coval-Dinant; if you believe you should be scheduled for this test and do not receive notification of a test date, please contact Dana (dmc6@psu.edu). The test scores from the AEOCPT are provided to the Huck Graduate Office via a secure website and also in LionPATH. A score above 250 on the AEOCPT satisfies the Department's requirement; students scoring under 250 must take courses to improve their spoken language and retake the test before being allowed to teach, as prescribed by the Fox Graduate School. <https://aplng.la.psu.edu/programs/about-the-aeocpt>

Students who are required to enroll in English as a Second Language (ESL) must complete the ESL requirement by the end of the second semester. Students who fail this requirement may be terminated from the respective graduate program at the discretion of the Neuroscience Program Chair.

Below is the course of action for the AEOCPT score ranges:

AEOCPT SCORE	REQUIRED COURSE	PROGNOSIS
250 - 300	None	Student may teach with no restrictions.
200 - 249	ESL 118G	Must pass the Interactive Performance Test (IPT) before teaching.
150 - 199	ESL 117G followed by ESL 118G	Two semesters of ESL, then IPT before teaching.
<150	ESL 115G, then ESL 117G, then ESL 118G	Three semesters of ESL, then IPT before teaching.

OTHER GRADUATE NEUROSCIENCE PROGRAMS

MD-PhD Program

Students in the MD/PhD program who select the Neuroscience option at the University Park campus for their doctoral dissertation research must satisfy requirements similar to traditional doctoral students in the Neuroscience Graduate Program. During their first two years in the Neuroscience Program, MD/PhD students are required to take the following core courses: Seminars in Neuroscience (NEURO 501- 8 credits), Cellular and Molecular Neuroscience (NEURO 520), Systems Neuroscience (NEURO 521), and Ethics, Rigor, Reproducibility and Conduct of Research in the Life Sciences (MCIBS 591). Students in the MD/PhD program are expected to register for 9-12 credits each semester until the Comprehensive Exam has been passed. Beyond the core courses listed above, MD/PhD students may take additional courses recommended by their advisor. Students can also register for Thesis Research (NEURO 600 or NEURO 610) to obtain a total of 9-12 credits per semester.

Master's (M.S.) Degree in Neuroscience

Master's students must have a minimum of 30 credits and a 3.0 overall GPA (see Fox Graduate School Policies, <http://gradschool.psu.edu/graduate-education-policies/gcac/gcac-600/gcac-631-degree->

[requirements-research-masters/](#)). Of these 30 credits, at least 18 must be core courses in the Neuroscience Graduate Program. To qualify for the master's degree, the following core courses are required: Seminars in Neuroscience (NEURO 501 - 4 credits), Comparative Neuroanatomy (NEURO 512 – 4 credits), Cellular and Molecular Neuroscience (NEURO 520 - 3 credits), Systems Neuroscience (NEURO 521 – 3 credits), Ethics, Rigor, Reproducibility and Conduct of Research in the Life Sciences (MCIBS 591 - 2 credits), and Research Credits (NEURO 600 – at least 6 credits). Credits from Internships (NEURO 595) count toward the 30 credits but Teaching credits (MCIBS 602) do not. If all course credits and requirements are met, master's students do not have to be registered for classes while writing and/or defending their research work (unless they are still funded as a graduate assistant or teaching assistant or if their visa status requires them to enroll).

A written thesis is required to obtain a master's degree in the Neuroscience Graduate Program. The student must select a thesis committee (consult with the faculty advisor), present a thesis proposal, complete the work outlined in the proposal, write a thesis, and defend it. The master's thesis committee must contain at least three Penn State Graduate Faculty members, and at least two within the student's major field.

Integrated Undergraduate Graduate (IUG) Program

Scholars in the Schreyer Honors College who participate in the IUG program and wish to obtain their master's degree in the Neuroscience Graduate Program must fulfill all Fox Graduate School requirements noted in the master's degree section above in addition to the following program-specific requirements. IUG students must demonstrate satisfactory performance on a neuroscience-related thesis project approved by the Neuroscience Program Chair, and a minimum grade point average of 3.0 must be earned in the following core courses: Seminars in Neuroscience (NEURO 501- 4 credits), Comparative Neuroanatomy (NEURO 512 – 4 credits), Cellular and Molecular Neuroscience (NEURO 520 – 3 credits), Systems Neuroscience (NEURO 521 – 3 credits), and Ethics, Rigor, Reproducibility and Conduct of Research in the Life Sciences (MCIBS 591 - 2 credits). IUG students must also complete Research Credits (NEURO 600 – at least 6 credits). The Schreyer IUG Plan of Study and Semester Reports should be reviewed with the Huck Graduate Office to ensure all requirements will be fulfilled.

GOVERNANCE OF THE GRADUATE PROGRAM IN NEUROSCIENCE

The Neuroscience Graduate Program is governed by the Neuroscience Advisory Committee (2024-25):

Paul Bartell, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Avian Biology

Sonia Cavigelli, Ph.D., Chair; Associate Professor of Biobehavioral Health

Nikki Crowley, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Biology, Biomedical Engineering, Pharmacology; Director of Penn State Neuroscience Institute – University Park

Bruce Gluckman, Ph.D., Professor of Engineering Science and Mechanics, Neurosurgery, and Biomedical Engineering; Associate Director, Penn State Center for Neural Engineering

Xiaogang Hu, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Mechanical Engineering, Kinesiology, and Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation; Dorothy Foehr Huck and J. Lloyd Huck Chair in Neurorehabilitation

Janine Kwapis, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Biology

Nina Lauharatanahirun, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Biobehavioral Health, and Biomedical Engineering

Elizabeth Losin, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Biobehavioral Health

Yingwei Mao, Ph.D., Professor of Biology

Ruobo Zhou, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Chemistry

APPENDIX 1: Typical Course Timeline for Doctoral Students in the Neuroscience Curriculum for 2024-2025

University Park Campus
<i>Year 1 Fall</i>
NEURO 520 Cellular & Molecular Neuroscience (3)
NEURO 512 Comparative Neuroanatomy (4)
NEURO 501 Seminars in Neuroscience (2)
Register for CITI on-line RCR course
Submit CITI RCR Course Completion Report
NEURO 596 Laboratory Rotations (1-3)
Electives (2-4 credits)
<i>Year 1 Spring</i>
NEURO 521 Systems Neuroscience (3)
NEURO 501 Seminars in Neuroscience (2)
MCIBS 591 Ethics, Rigor, Reproducibility and Conduct of Research in the Life Sciences (2)
Electives (2-4 credits)
NEURO 596 Laboratory Rotations (1-3)
<i>Qualifying Examination: Summer</i>

<i>Year 2 Fall</i>
NEURO 501 Seminars in Neuroscience (2)
Electives (2-4 credits)
NEURO 600 Thesis Research (3-5)
<i>Year 2 Spring</i>
NEURO 501 Seminars in Neuroscience (2)
NEURO 600 Thesis Research (6)
Electives (2-4 credits)
<i>Comprehensive Examination: Summer Yr2 – Spring Yr3</i>

<i>Years 3-5</i>
NEURO 601 Dissertation Preparation
MCIBS 595 Internship (1) (optional)
<i>Dissertation Defense</i>

APPENDIX 2: Core Courses in the Neuroscience Graduate Program

NEURO 501 Seminars in Neuroscience (2 credits)

This course examines the research presented by invited speakers in the Neuroscience Seminar series. It has two components: (1) student presentations of the general research questions, techniques, and conclusions in contemporary research articles from the speaker's laboratory, and (2) attendance of the research seminar by the invited speaker and participation in the question-and-answer periods.

NEURO 512 Comparative Neuroanatomy (4 credits)

This course provides instruction on the functional and structural organization of the vertebrate central nervous system. In addition to lectures, students attend laboratory sessions devoted to human brain dissections, histologic sections of various vertebrate brains, and non-invasive magnetic resonance images.

NEURO 520 Cellular and Molecular Neuroscience (3 credits)

This course provides fundamental instruction on the structural and functional organization of neurons and glia, how neurons and synapses develop and are modified by activity, and how neurons communicate electrically and chemically with each other. NEURO 520 is a pre-requisite for NEURO 521.

NEURO 521 Systems Neuroscience (3 credits)

This pro-seminar course covers the mechanisms of specific neural systems and their relationship to behavior and cognition. The course is subdivided into blocks (2-3 weeks) that are devoted to a variety of topics such as motor control, cortical processing, and depression and anxiety, among others. Discussion of each topic is led by a faculty member who has expertise on that topic. NEURO 520 must be taken before taking NEURO 521.

MCIBS 591 Ethics, Rigor, Reproducibility and Conduct of Research in the Life Sciences (2 credits)

Students examine integrity and misconduct in life sciences research, including issues of data collection, publication, authorship, and peer review.

NEURO 596 Independent Study: Laboratory Rotations (1-3 credits)

For students exploring potential PhD projects and faculty advisors. Students receive an R (satisfactory/passing) or F (unsatisfactory/failing). Only R credits are counted for credit totals.

NEURO 600 or NEURO 610 THESIS RESEARCH (up to 12 credits)

For students who are matched with a faculty advisor but have not passed their comprehensive exams. Work in this course is graded (A-F).

NEURO 601 DISSERTATION PREPARATION (0 credits)

For students who have passed their comprehensive exams. This course appears on the transcript but does not have any grade or credit associated with it. It is full-time by definition.

APPENDIX 3: Sample of Elective Courses for the Neuroscience Graduate Program*

BBH 468 – Neuroanatomical Bases for Disorders of Behavior and Health (3)
BBH/PSY 502 – Health: Biobehavioral Perspectives (3)
BBH 597 – Biology of Aging (3)
BGEN/BMMB/MCIBS 551 – Genomics (3)
BIOET 504 – Research Integrity in Science and Engineering
BIOET/ESC 531 – Neuroethics: Science, Technology, and Society
BIOET 590 – Bioethics Colloquium
BIOL 404 – Cellular Mechanisms of Vertebrate Physiology (3)
BIOL 426 – Developmental Neurobiology (3)
BIOL 467 – Molecular Basis of Neurological Diseases (3)
BIOL/PHYS 465 – Network Analysis of Biological Systems (3)
BIOL/MCIBS/VBSC 503 – Critical Elements of Genetic and Molecular and Cellular Biology (4)
BMB 400 – Molecular Biology of the Gene (2)
BMB 401 or 402 – General Biochemistry (3)
BMB/VBSC 433 – Molecular and Cellular Toxicology (3)
BME 597 – Grant Writing for the Biomedical Sciences (3)
BMMB 541 – Molecular Biology of Animal Development (3)
BMMB 543 – Current Topics in Gene Regulation (3)
BMMB/MCIBS 554 – Foundations in Data Driven Life Sciences (3)
BMMB 852 – Applied Bioinformatics (2)
ESC 525 – Neural Engineering: Fundamentals of Interfacing with Brain (3) [requires calculus & programming background]
ESC 527 – Brain Computer Interfaces (3)
ESC 555 – Neuroscience Data Analysis (3) [Matlab-based]
HDFS 597 – Grant Writing Intensive Seminar (3) [post qualifying exam, advisor must send email to instructor]
KINES 565 – Neurophysiological Basis of Movement (3)
KINES 465 – Neurobiology of Sensorimotor Stroke Rehabilitation (3)
MCIBS 593 – Molecular Biology Laboratory (3) [by permission only; contact 814-863-3650]
NEURO 602 – Supervised Teaching Experience (1)
PHSIO 571 – Integrative and Cellular Mammalian Physiology I (3)
PHSIO 572 – Integrative and Cellular Mammalian Physiology II Endocrine Physiology (3)
PSY 511 – Foundations of Social, Cognitive, and Affective Neuroscience
PSY 512 – Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience of Adolescence (3)
SBN 505 – Seminar in Social and Behavioral Neuroscience (3)
SBN 508 – Methods in Social and Behavioral Neuroscience (3)
STAT 462 – Applied Regression Analysis (3)
STAT 500 – Applied Statistics (3)
STAT 501 – Regression Methods (3)
STAT 502 – Analysis of Variance and Design of Experiments (3)
STAT 505 – Applied Multivariate Statistical Methods (3)
STAT 507 – Epidemiologic Research Methods (3)
STAT 509 – Design and Analysis of Clinical Trials (3)
STAT 513 – Theory of Statistics I (3)
STAT 514 – Theory of Statistics II (3)
STAT 540 – Statistical Computing (3)
STAT 555 – Statistical Analysis of Genomics Data (3)

(*) These courses are examples of courses that previous students have taken as electives and are not meant to be exclusive. Elective courses may include 400 and 500 level courses if approved by the Advisor AND the Neuroscience Program Chair. #### indicates courses that are cross-listed in more than one department.

APPENDIX 4: Guidelines for Advisor-Student Interactions

Effective mentoring, open communication, and ethical professional conduct are essential for a high quality graduate education and research environment. Effective mentoring must be based on a commitment to provide every student access to supportive guidance on a range of professional, ethical and collegial issues. A productive mentorship requires that students are treated respectfully and fairly, and that the mentor serves as a role model - upholding the highest ethical standards. These guidelines embody many of the best practices used by the majority of our faculty here and elsewhere. They are intended to provide a heightened awareness of the need to consciously establish an effectual mentorship based on trust, courtesy, and shared expectations.

Faculty Advisors/Mentors will:

- provide an environment that is intellectually stimulating, emotionally supportive, safe, and free of harassment;
- be supportive, equitable, accessible, encouraging, and respectful;
- recognize and respect the cultural back-grounds of students;
- be sensitive to the power imbalance in the student-advisor relationship;
- avoid assigning duties or activities that are outside students' academic responsibilities or are detrimental to the timely completion of their degrees;
- respect students needs to allocate their time among competing demands, while maintaining timely progress towards their degree;
- advise graduate students on the selection of a thesis topic with realistic prospects for successful completion within an appropriate time frame;
- assist students on selecting and forming a thesis committee;
- set clear expectations and goals for students regarding their research and thesis;
- discuss policies and expectations for work hours, vacation time and health contingencies;
- meet regularly and individually with students to provide feedback on research progress and expectations (weekly meetings are recommended);
- provide students with training and oversight in the design of research projects, development of necessary skills, use of rigorous research techniques, and all other aspects of research;
- arrange for the on-campus supervision and advisement of graduate students during extended absences as well as regular contact (e.g. by phone) when possible;
- provide and discuss clear criteria for authorship at the beginning of all collaborative projects;
- encourage participation in professional meetings and try to secure funding for such activities;
- provide career advice, help with interview and application preparation, and write letters of recommendation in a timely manner;
- ensure students receive training in the skills needed for a successful career in their discipline, including oral and written communication and grant preparation;
- schedule at least one meeting each semester to discuss topics other than research, like professional development, career objectives and opportunities, climate, laboratory personnel relations, etc;
- be a role model by acting in an ethical, professional, and courteous manner toward students, staff, and faculty.

Graduate Students will:

- acknowledge that they bear the primary responsibility for the successful completion of their degree;
- exercise the highest ethical standards in all aspects of their research, including collection, storage, analysis, and communication of research data;
- complete to the best of their abilities all tasks assigned by the program, including teaching duties;
- be informed about regulations and policies governing graduate studies at the program and graduate school levels and take responsibility for meeting program and graduate school deadlines;
- set up meetings with their mentor and communicate regularly with their thesis committees;
- prepare progress reports and request feedback from their full committee annually;
- be considerate of time constraints and other demands imposed on faculty and staff;
- take an active role in identifying and pursuing professional development opportunities;
- be proactive about improving their research skills, including written and oral presentation skills;
- inform faculty mentors of potential and or existing conflicts and work toward their resolution;
- seek mentoring and support resources beyond their faculty advisor, including other faculty mentors, peers, and organizations;
- consult outside help from graduate program chairs, ombudsmen, or other faculty if conflicts arise with your advisor;

- be aware that if they feel compelled to change advisors or research direction, they may have options and should consult with their program chair;
- always act in an ethical, professional, and courteous manner toward other students, staff, and faculty.

Programs will:

- provide students with information that includes policies, degree requirements, and resources;
- guide students through lab rotations (when applicable), assist students with selection of their advisor and resolution of student-advisor conflicts
- provide students with contacts and resources for potential conflict resolution in addition to the Program Chair (e.g. ombudsperson, director of graduate studies);
- provide pedagogical training and regular assessment of the teaching activities;
- monitor graduate student progress towards their degrees and professional development, including mentoring meetings, committee meetings, exam completions and other benchmarks appropriate to their discipline;
- provide and monitor training in the ethical conduct of research;
- provide appropriate infrastructure to allow students to complete their education and research in a timely and productive manner;
- establish and communicate policies for emergencies and unplanned situations that may disrupt the work of students and/or faculty;
- encourage and monitor student and faculty adherence to these guidelines.

These Guidelines are endorsed by the **Huck Institutes of the Life Sciences Graduate Education Office** and were adapted from guidelines recommended by the **Eberly College of Science Climate and Diversity Committee**.

APPENDIX 5: Neuroscience Program Contact Information

Dr. Sonia Cavigelli
Neuroscience Program Chair
219 Biobehavioral Health Building
814-863-0210
sac34@psu.edu

Administrative Support in the Huck Graduate Office:
Contact regarding stipends, fellowships, semester bills, etc.:

Dana Coval-Dinant,
Graduate Program Manager
101 Huck Life Sciences Building
814-865-3155
dmc6@psu.edu

Contact regarding Program paperwork, scheduling exams, etc.:

Jean Pierce,
Academic Program Coordinator
101 Huck Life Sciences Building
814-867-0371
jep32@psu.edu

Huck Institutes Academic Advisor (for assistance regarding conflicts/problems which cannot be resolved through normal channels within the Graduate Program)

Dr. Patrick Drew
Interim Director, Huck Institutes of the Life Sciences
W-317 Millennium Science Complex
814-863-1473
pjd17@psu.edu