

# ACADEMIC STANDARDS, POLICIES, AND PROCEDURES

Following is a summary of general GSBS regulations. Complete and specific regulations and requirements are included in the GSBS Policies and Procedures (<https://gsbs.uth.edu/academics/policies-and-procedures/>) pages available on the GSBS website, developed under the auspices of the Academic Standards Committee. The provisions that apply to a particular student are those in the GSBS Catalog and the UTHealth Houston General Information Catalog in effect at the time the student is admitted to a GSBS degree program.

## Degree Requirements

The general requirements for the PhD and MS degrees are described in the Programs of Study (<https://catalog.uth.edu/biomedical-sciences/programs/>) section of this catalog. The specific requirements for the degrees and the time limits for meeting the requirements are presented on the individual degree and degree program pages.

Unless there is an embargo in effect, all research papers, theses, and dissertations authored by degree candidates are available to interested members of the general public upon request.

## Registration

Full-time students must be registered for each term (Fall, Spring, Summer) of the academic year unless approved for an official leave of absence. Students who are not registered for a term or on an approved leave of absence are considered to have withdrawn from school. Once having withdrawn, a student who wishes to continue formal studies must apply and be readmitted to the GSBS. A student must be enrolled through the semester in which he or she completes all requirements for graduation.

## Transfer Credit

No record of courses taken at other institutions prior to admission to the GSBS will appear on a student's GSBS transcript. However, with approval from the Academic Standards Committee and the GSBS Office of Academic Affairs, students who entered the GSBS may transfer credit from previous graduate work taken at another accredited institution provided the credit was not earned toward a completed degree or certificate program. Transfer credits cannot exceed in number those earned in GSBS coursework toward any degree. For the program of work that a student submits in the petition for admission to candidacy for the MS degree, a maximum of two courses taken elsewhere may be included and counted toward the credit hour minimum for the degree. Particular courses taken at the graduate level at another institution, if approved by the GSBS Office of Academic Affairs, may be considered as meeting individual degree requirements.

## Grading System

Graduate students must be assigned letter grades (*A, B, C, F*) for completion of formal courses listed in the GSBS Catalog. For computation of the GPA: *A = 4, B = 3, C = 2, and F = 0*.

A grade received in an approved course taken at another institution will be recorded as submitted by the institution but will not be calculated in the GSBS GPA unless the course is cross-listed as a GSBS course.

*Literature Surveys, Special Project: Research, Seminars, The Ethical Dimensions of the Biomedical Sciences, Tutorials*, and other research courses listed in the GSBS Catalog are assigned grades of *Pass (P)* or *Fail (F)*. In addition, other courses may be graded as pass/fail with permission from the GSBS curriculum committee. A grade of *P* will not be included in the computation of a student's GPA.

For *Special Project: Course*, the instructor may assign either a letter grade (*A, B, C, F*) or a *Pass/Fail* grade. However, the grading system must be the same for all students in the course. A letter grade will be included in the computation of a student's GPA; a grade of *P* will not.

*Thesis for Master of Science and Dissertation for Doctor of Philosophy* will be listed as *Pass* (indicating sufficient progress) or *Fail*.

A grade of *Incomplete (I)* may be issued by the Course Director whenever a student is unable to complete all course requirements by the end of the semester due to unavoidable circumstances. The grade of *Incomplete* cannot be given for poor performance or for the purpose of avoiding the issuance of a regular grade to a student who has performed poorly. Before the end of the following semester, the student must turn in the required work for a regular grade or else the *Incomplete* will be replaced with a grade of *F*. In instances where unavoidable circumstances prevent the student from completing the work in the following semester, the student may apply for an extension of the *Incomplete* until the next time the course is offered. Such extensions must be approved by both the Course Director and the GSBS Office of Academic Affairs.

The symbol *WP* is given when a student with satisfactory course performance withdraws from a course within the first nine weeks of class with the consent of the instructor. A *WP*, by itself, will not prevent the student from withdrawing from GSBS in good standing. The symbol *WF* is given if the student has displayed unsatisfactory course performance up to the date of withdrawal. A *WF* grade is equivalent to an *F* in the calculation of the GPA. There will be no withdrawal after the last day of the ninth week of class.

A failing grade in any GSBS course is grounds for dismissal from the GSBS. The student may request that the Dean allow him or her to retake the course the next time it is offered (usually within one year) rather than being subject to dismissal. If the request is granted, the student must earn a grade of *A* or *B* in that course; a grade of *C* when the course is retaken will result automatically in dismissal. During the interim, the student will be on academic probation. If the student passes the course, the *F* will remain on the transcript, but only the new grade will be calculated in the student's GPA.

Students may retake a GSBS course, in which case both the new and previous grades will appear on the transcript, but only the second grade will be calculated in the GPA. Students whose GPA is less than 3.0 can only retake courses in which they received a *C* or below in an effort to raise their GPA to 3.0 or above.

## Grade Grievance Procedure

In attempting to resolve any student grievance regarding grades or evaluations, it is the obligation of the student first to make a good faith effort to resolve the matter with the faculty member involved. Individual faculty members retain primary responsibility for assigning grades and evaluations. The faculty member's judgment is final unless compelling evidence suggests discrimination, differential treatment, or a mistake. If the evidence warrants an appeal, the student must submit a request in

writing with supporting evidence to the Dean. The determination of the Dean is final.

## Probation

*Causes* – Any student that does not meet the academic standards of GSBS may be placed on academic probation by the Dean. Any of the following actions or conditions can cause the student to be placed on academic probation, including but not limited to:

- Failure of any course; A failing grade in any GSBS course taken while a student is enrolled at GSBS is grounds for dismissal from the GSBS. The student may request that the Dean allow him or her to retake the course the next time it is offered (usually within one year) rather than being subject to dismissal. If the request is granted, the student must earn a grade of A or B in that course; a grade of C when the course is retaken will result automatically in dismissal. During the interim, the student will be on academic probation. If the student passes the course, the F will remain on the transcript, but only the new grade will be calculated in the student's GPA.
- Failure to maintain a GSBS cumulative grade point average of 3.0 or better; The GPA must be raised to a 3.0 or better within one year. A student who receives a grade of C in a course may choose to retake the course to raise his/her GPA. In this case, only the second grade would be used in the GPA calculation, but the original (C) grade will remain on the student's transcript.
- Failure of the student to meet with their Advisory Committee within a six-month period
- Failure to meet the particular requirements for the MS or PhD degree in the time periods specified by the GSBS
- Failure to make satisfactory progress toward the degree or perform academically in a satisfactory manner, as determined by the student's Advisory Committee
- Release of the student by the Research Advisor due to the student's unsatisfactory progress toward the degree

*Procedures* – The Dean may place a student on academic probation for any of the reasons given above or other academic-related deficiencies on a case-by-case basis. Written notification will be provided to the student, his or her Advisor or Advisory Committee, and Program Director (if applicable). Within one month of notification, the student, in consultation with the Advisor or Advisory Committee and Program Committee (if appropriate), will submit to the Academic Standards Committee a proposed course of action to resolve the student's academic difficulties. The Academic Standards Committee will review the proposal, approve it, or suggest modifications and forward its recommendations to the Dean. The Dean will make the final decision on the student's proposal and inform the student of the conditions to be met. The student will remain on probation until otherwise notified by the GSBS Office of Academic Affairs.

Students who are released by their Research Advisor for unsatisfactory progress toward the degree may be placed on probation after review by the Academic Standards Committee of the specific reasons for the release. In conducting this review, the committee has the option to receive input from the student, advisor, and/or other GSBS faculty members. The student must consult with the GSBS Office of Academic Affairs to identify a new advisor and begin a six-week trial period within one month of the release. For students on probation, the plan for degree completion and selection of a new Research Advisor must be approved by the GSBS Academic Standards Committee prior to the student's formal affiliation with the Advisor.

*Consequences* – Any student on probation will not be allowed to stand for the MS final oral thesis examination, petition for the PhD candidacy examination (except when probation is due to failure to submit a petition), or stand for the defense of the PhD dissertation. Students on probation are not eligible to receive GSBS Scholarships, Fellowships or Travel Awards. Also, students will not be able to serve as officers in GSBS student organizations or members of GSBS standing committees, or participate in internships.

More severe actions, up to and including dismissal, may be considered by the Academic Standards Committee for a student's failure to make satisfactory progress toward the degree.

## Dismissal

*Causes* – The following list describes the most common conditions or circumstances in which the Dean may dismiss a student from the GSBS, which includes but is not limited to:

- If the student fails any course
- If the student fails to identify a research advisor within the allotted period for the degree program
- If the student's academic deficiencies are not resolved within the time period specified in policy or by the Dean
- A student displays substantial deficiencies in his or her ability to perform effectively in a laboratory, or other research or training environment (as determined by one or more GSBS faculty members)
- After release by the research advisor, a student is unable to identify a new research advisor and provide a satisfactory plan for degree completion
- After voluntarily seeking new mentorship, a student is unable to identify a new research advisor and provide a satisfactory plan for degree completion
- If the student fails the PhD candidacy examination

*Procedures* – The GSBS Academic Standards Committee will consider any questions concerning a student's academic progress in which dismissal is a possible outcome and will make the decision concerning the dismissal of the student. If the student wishes to appeal the decision of the Academic Standards Committee, he or she may appeal to the Dean, who will consider the evidence and the decision of the GSBS Academic Standards Committee and render a decision on the appeal. The Dean's decision is final.

## Policy for Readmission of Students Dismissed for Unsatisfactory Progress

Any student who withdraws from GSBS or is dismissed because of unsatisfactory progress must wait one year before applying for readmission. Upon re-application, students are evaluated by the GSBS Admissions Committee on a case-by-case basis. Those who appear to have the potential to complete the degree program successfully are recommended for admission to the Dean. The Dean makes the final decision concerning readmission.

## Student Conduct and Discipline

Students are responsible for knowledge of and compliance with University policies concerning student conduct and discipline as set forth in UTHHealth Houston Handbook of Operating Procedures (HOOP) Policy 186, Student Conduct and Discipline (<https://www.uth.edu/hoop/186-appendix-a.htm>).

The GSBS Code of Conduct pledge must be signed by all students in GSBS degree programs when they first enroll and when they petition for MS or PhD candidacy.

## Leaves of Absence, Time Away from Duties, and Withdrawals

The GSBS allows students to request an official Leave of Absence (LOA), which is subject to approval by the GSBS Office of Academic Affairs. During an official LOA, the student cannot be paid by the advisor or the GSBS but may engage in outside employment. Students funded by the GSBS are funded for the specified term for continuous enrollment. If a student takes an LOA during the time funded by the GSBS, no guarantee can be made that the GSBS-funded time lost during the LOA can be "re-captured" once the student returns to their studies.

To request an official LOA, the student must complete a petition form which must be provided by and returned to the Office of Academic Affairs. During an approved LOA, the student is not enrolled and is not eligible to receive stipend support from the GSBS or their advisor.

The student may request an initial leave period of up to one year. When requesting leave, students must indicate their intended return date, which must coincide with the beginning of a semester. If the LOA begins in the middle of a semester, the student will be considered withdrawn from the entire semester. In such cases, the student must return by the start of the same semester in the following academic year. For example, if the student leaves in the middle of a fall semester, they must return in the beginning of next fall semester. If the student requests an LOA for a future semester in which they are not yet enrolled, the LOA will begin on the first day of that semester.

Students who are approved for an LOA may return at the beginning of the semester indicated on their petition, or at the beginning of an earlier semester, as long as it falls within the approved one-year leave period. Students in good standing must notify the Office of Academic Affairs at least 30 days prior to the start of the semester in which they intend to re-enroll. Reapplication for admission is not required for re-entry. Students who do not re-enroll by their approved return date and who have not been granted an extension of the LOA will be considered withdrawn from the GSBS.

Students may request a one-time extension of the official LOA period for a maximum duration of one additional year. Extensions require the approval of the Dean and must be submitted at least 30 days before the end of the initial leave period.

In cases where a student on leave of absence has separated from the thesis/dissertation advisor, the student must identify a faculty member who is willing to serve as the new thesis/dissertation advisor prior to the student's re-enrollment in the GSBS. The new advisor and a plan for completing the thesis/dissertation must be submitted to the Office of Academic Affairs at least 60 days prior to the student's re-enrollment. This plan must also be approved by the GSBS Academic Standards Committee.

In cases where a student is returning from a leave of absence that was initiated after, or coincident with, being placed on academic probation, the student must submit a plan for remedying the academic issue and completing the degree program at least 60 days prior to returning to the GSBS. This plan must be approved by the Academic Standards Committee before the student may enroll again.

The GSBS requires that all students register every semester until they complete their degree requirements and graduate. Any student who fails to register for a semester and who has not been approved for an official leave of absence will be considered withdrawn from the GSBS. To resume studies after withdrawal, the student must reapply and be formally readmitted to the school.

## Time Away from the Lab

Students receive their stipends as employees from one of the GSBS parent institutions, each of which has its own employment policies and procedures with which the student must comply. UTHealth Houston and MD Anderson Cancer Center each has its own policies on several issues, such as the amount of time graduate students are permitted to be away from their lab or workplace for purposes such as sick leave, vacation, family-related leave, etc. The GSBS policy on time away from the lab is deferred to the policy of the institution at which the student is employed. When a student joins the lab/group of a faculty member, the student should apprise him/herself of these policies. In all cases, however, the student should remember that they are employed by the advisor, and the advisor sets the standards for work ethic and policies of the lab, including attendance standards and expectations. The student and advisor should always explicitly discuss the advisor's expectations before they make a mutual commitment. In all cases, it is the student's responsibility to request time away from the lab (or expected lab activities; in advance, when possible) and to keep the advisor, or the advisor's designee, informed in a timely manner of any unanticipated absences, e.g., for illness, family emergencies, etc.

## Reasonable Accommodation

Individuals seeking reasonable accommodations related to disability, pregnancy and parenting, or religion must initiate the accommodation process by contacting their school's designated Section 504 Coordinator (<https://www.uth.edu/hoop/section-504-coordinators.htm>) and completing a request form found on the University Relations & Equal Opportunity (UREO) webpage (<https://www.uth.edu/hr/service-areas/university-relations-equal-opportunity/>).

Accommodations are not retroactive, and require advance notice to implement. To allow adequate time to evaluate the request, engage in the interactive process, and make arrangements for any accommodation to be provided, requestors are strongly urged to contact UREO as soon as possible.

For more information, visit HOOP Policy 101, Disability and Pregnancy Accommodations (<https://www.uth.edu/hoop/policy.htm?id=1448050>), HOOP Policy 232, Pregnant and Parenting Students (<https://www.uth.edu/hoop/policy.htm?id=32d838cb-8f11-40f7-b8e5-f42719d41202>), and HOOP Policy 112, Religious Accommodations (<https://www.uth.edu/hoop/policy.htm?id=1448072>).