

MCB Policy on Time to Degree and Annual Thesis Committee Meetings

After students advance to candidacy, they meet annually with their Thesis Committee. Please adhere to the following guidelines and timeline.

<u>Year in Program</u>	<u>Meeting Dates</u>	<u>Notes regarding the Meeting</u>
6th Year +	Fall Semester	The student updates the committee on their plans and timeline for filing their dissertation and submitting a first-author paper.
5 th Year	Fall Semester	The student provides an update to the committee on the status of their dissertation and first-author paper, and the student and committee discuss a likely filing semester. Post-graduation career goals and plans for professional development activities should also be discussed.
4 th Year	Fall Semester	The student updates the committee on plans for their dissertation project; the committee provides input and advice. Post-graduation career goals and plans for professional development activities should also be discussed.
3 rd Year	Fall Semester	The student discusses their dissertation research plans and the committee provides input. Planned professional development and fellowship applications can also be discussed.

Suggested Topics for Discussion:

In general, students may want to discuss any or all of the following with their committees

- Progress they have made
- Setbacks they have encountered
- Places where they need advice or have questions
- Dissertation outlines
- Figures for publication
- Graduation timelines
- Career goals and advice for achieving their desired post-graduation position

Purpose of Thesis Committee Meetings

The purpose of committee meetings is for students to receive regular guidance from the committee on selecting and implementing research strategies, publishing research papers, and moving towards their career goals. Thesis committees will also play a central role in implementing and ensuring the success of the MCB publication policy, which states:

The goal of Ph.D. is to prepare students to become independent researchers and to master the scientific process. An important step in this training is the publication of scientific findings, which marks a milestone in completing a project and teaches valuable skills in communicating these results to other scientists and the public. The process of preparing manuscripts also serves as an important step in ensuring that scientific

conclusions are placed into a broader context and are based on rigorous and reproducible experiments. Moreover, the process of submitting manuscripts introduces students to the system of peer review and teaches them how to respond to reviewer requests and questions.

Students are expected to publish at least one 1st-author (or co-1st-author) peer-reviewed research paper prior to graduation. Submission of a manuscript to an online archive (such as bioRxiv) or submission to a peer-reviewed journal prior to graduation, will satisfy this requirement. In the case of extenuating circumstances (serious illness, change of mentor, non-renewal of a visa) that may preclude publication prior to graduation, a written waiver from the thesis advisor and signed by the thesis committee will be necessary for the student to graduate.

Meeting scheduling and attendance:

It is the responsibility of the student to work with the GAO to organize their Committee meetings within the time windows indicated in the table below. The mentor and two of the three other members will constitute a quorum. If a committee member cannot be present, a one-on-one meeting is acceptable, provided that the faculty member fills out a report that is countersigned by the student.

Prior to the meeting:

Prior to the meeting, the student will write an Annual Progress Report in consultation with the Thesis Committee Chair and email report to the committee. The student will also submit the Annual Progress Report Information to the webform:

<https://mcb.berkeley.edu/internal/grad/progress-reports/student.php>

The report sent to the committee should have the following elements:

1. What progress did you make towards your degree in the past year? Compare this with your previous goals (if applicable). If you were unable to attain them, what were your obstacles?
2. Please describe your current plans for the dissertation, providing a timetable for completion.
3. In which year and term do you plan to file for your degree?

Conducting the meeting:

The GAC recommends the following guidelines for conducting thesis committee meetings:

1. Once all committee members are present, the student will briefly leave the room so that the dissertation chair can provide other members of the committee with a verbal evaluation of the student's progress to date, identifying both the student's strengths and any areas in which the student can improve. This information will help the committee members more effectively provide advice to the student.
2. The student will then provide a focused summary of research progress. They should also discuss technical difficulties that have been encountered. The committee will evaluate the student's progress, provide advice, set goals/expectations for publication, and set goals for the coming year as well as for the timely completion of the dissertation

within the normal 5.5 year period.

3. Toward the end of the meeting, the dissertation chair will leave the room and any remaining issues will be discussed with the student in the absence of the mentor. This phase of the Thesis Committee meeting is intended to facilitate interactions with the other committee members by allowing the student to establish a closer relationship with the other committee members. It is intended to provide the student with an opportunity to identify any issues that might have been difficult to discuss in front of the mentor, which can include lab culture, mentorship needs, and other sensitive topics.

Record of the Meeting:

At the conclusion of the meeting, all faculty will sign the MCB Annual Academic Progress Form attesting to their attendance at the meeting, confirming that plans for a first-author publication were discussed, providing the semester of anticipated completion, and indicating the level of progress achieved (very good, satisfactory, or inadequate). Third and fifth-year students are also required to discuss their IDP with their PI and use the form to provide confirmation that the discussion took place. This form will be returned to the GAO **within one day of the meeting date**. For students who matriculated in 2021 or later, records of the thesis committee meetings will be added to their Academic Progress Report in Cal Central. Students must have at least three meetings in order to graduate, including one meeting at least six months prior to filing (for students filing sooner than in 5.5 years exceptions can be made).

Following the meeting - the Annual Progress Evaluation:

The Committee Chair/Dissertation Advisor will write a report to be circulated to the entire committee for comments and approval. This report should be submitted to the webform **within one week of the meeting date**. *Filing such reports is required for demonstrating compliance with departmental policy.* Webform:

<https://mcb.berkeley.edu/internal/grad/progress-reports/faculty.php>

If a problem arises that cannot be resolved by the committee, they may recommend that the student should not continue in the program. The recommendation is then forwarded to the GAC and the Graduate Division for a final decision.

Sixth Year Extensions

For students who matriculated in 2019 or before, there is a two-year extension to normative time due to interruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. These students should add two years to the timings listed below (i.e. 7.5 years instead of 5.5).

If a student is unable to complete their degree by the end of 5.5 years the financial support provided by the mentor may be extended five months to the University's dissertation filing date in May of their sixth year. The decision to grant extensions is the responsibility of the student's Thesis Committee and requires appropriate and documented special circumstances.

Examples would include illnesses, change of mentor, a fourth rotation, and scientific problems unforeseen at the annual fourth or fifth-year Thesis Committee meetings. In order for such extensions to be granted, reports of all previous Thesis Committee meetings must have been filed with the GAO, and the Thesis Committee and the student must unanimously agree with the extension. If there is disagreement on the extension within the Thesis Committee or if the student disagrees with the Thesis Committee decision, the case will be referred to the GAC. Funding and continuation in the Graduate Program beyond the May filing deadline in Spring of the 6th year will be considered on a case by case basis by the GAC upon petition by the

Thesis Committee *and the student*. If such a petition is not filed by the end of January in the Spring semester of the 6th year, a recommendation will be made to the Graduate Division to terminate graduate standing. Anyone seeking an extension to file in the summer after their sixth year must submit a statement signed by both the student and the PI that they are aware SHIP insurance coverage ends on July 31st.

Any food at meetings of students with faculty mentors, including qualifying exams and thesis committee meetings, shall be provided by faculty, not students.