

## FAQ

Last Updated Monday, October 26 2009

### Frequently Asked Questions

What are the minimum requirements to apply to the Ph.D. Program in Molecular and Cell Biology?

- You must hold (or expect to hold prior to the beginning of classes) a bachelor's degree or recognized equivalent from an accredited institution.
- You must have a minimum grade point average of 3.0 (B grade) on a 4.0 scale.
- You must take the General Graduate Record Exam (GRE). The average percentile for those being admitted to our program is ~80%. The GRE Subject Test is not required but it is strongly recommended.
- You should have research laboratory experience.
- We require three letters of recommendation preferably from individuals who know your research ability and goals.
- The Test of English as Foreign Language (TOEFL) with a minimum score of at least 570 for the paper-and-pencil test, at least 230 for the computer-based test and 68 for the internet based test is also required from applicants whose native language is not English, and who have not received a degree from an English language institution.

For more information of Minimum Degree Requirements is available at [http://www.grad.berkeley.edu/admissions/admis\\_require.shtml#4\\_2](http://www.grad.berkeley.edu/admissions/admis_require.shtml#4_2).  
How long will it take me to get my Ph.D.?

The Ph.D. program is designed to allow students to complete their degree in about five and a half to six years. A few students finish after four and a half years; however, most students take five and a half. Full funding is guaranteed for up to five and a half years and if necessary can be petitioned to extend to six years.  
What kind of financial support can I expect?

Financial support includes an annual stipend, full payment of tuition, fees, health and dental insurance for 5 and a half years. The annual stipend rate for a full 12-month appointment in 2008/2009 is \$27,000. Entering students' stipend is based on an eleven month appointment. Any extramural fellowships with awards below the departmental stipend are supplemented by the department to equal the department's stipend level. In addition, there is an incentive award for garnering fellowships. See our policy on Extramural fellowships.  
Given the size of the department, isn't MCB somewhat impersonal?

The MCB Department may seem large overall yet it allows for many research options. The department is broken up into five divisions that share research interests--small villages that add up to a diverse city. There are many departmental events that enhance graduate education, such as joint lab meetings, journal clubs, divisional retreats, seminar series that cut across divisions to focus on common interests such as yeast, nucleic acids or genomics, and a student-run "MCB Follies."

How much course work is required?

Required course work includes: a) specific classes in which all entering MCB graduate students must enroll; b) three graduate courses which must be completed during the first three semesters chosen from a list compiled by the department; and c) additional seminar coursework following Advancement to Candidacy. Most courses are taken for a letter grade and must be passed with a grade of B or better in accordance with University policy governing graduate students. Courses taken as satisfactory/unsatisfactory must be passed with a satisfactory grade in order to fulfill the requirement.

Will I be expected to do a lot of teaching?

No more than two semesters of teaching service (one in a lecture course with discussion sections and one in a lab course) are required. Students usually teach in the Fall semester of their second year and the Spring semester of their third year. Training is provided by the department for all new Graduate Student Instructors and is required by the University.

Will I be able to get into the lab of my choice?

Before selecting a thesis advisor, students rotate through three laboratories. The laboratory assignments are based on student preference and are arranged so that each student gets his/her first choice for at least one rotation.

The final thesis lab assignments are based both on student and professor input. Again, most students get the lab of their first choice.

What about the qualifying examination?

Students take their qualifying examination toward the end of their second year. The exam committee is selected with student input. The exam itself is based on two proposals - an "inside proposal" describing potential thesis research and an "outside proposal" on an unrelated topic, plus any relevant general-knowledge questions, all of which the student prepares in advance. Many students discuss previous results obtained in the lab if it is relevant to their inside proposal. However, this is not required. The student must defend the proposals, not previous research results. In the unlikely event that a student does not pass, the exam is rescheduled for the following semester.

How can I survive the bureaucracy of a large university?

The answer to this question is contained in three words: "Graduate Affairs Office." The GAO staff -- Eileen Bell, Christina Dominici, Berta Parra, and Eric Buhlis -- are knowledgeable, friendly, and dedicated to doing their utmost to help you cut through any red tape.

Berkeley is well known for taking the best care of its students among the major graduate programs.

Are there any graduate student groups?

Yes. The Molecular and Cell Biology Graduate Student Organization (MCBGSO) is a student-run organization that acts as a forum to address graduate student issues and concerns, and it functions as a liaison between graduate students and faculty and staff. Graduate student representatives serve on important divisional and departmental committees such as the Graduate Affairs Committee (GAC), divisional faculty meetings, faculty search committees and the Graduate Admissions Committee. They also conduct a student thesis seminar series and the spring semester Marian E. Koshland Lecture series, for which all speakers are both invited and hosted by graduate students. The group also has two seats on the campus-wide Graduate Assembly.

There is also an active chapter of graduate students in SACNAS (Society for the Advancement of Chicanos and Native Americans in Science.)

What is the Berkeley community like?

Berkeley combines an attractive campus environment with an interesting and diverse city. Exciting popular and classical music performances, dance, theater, and sports events are found in both the campus and community. There are many nearby outdoor opportunities for skiers, hikers, windsurfers and boaters. There is an abundance of restaurants representing a large variety of ethnic traditions. The problem is usually choosing, not finding, things to do.

Housing in the Bay Area

With new campus graduate housing and apartment projects near the campus, housing is easier to find now than it was three years ago. Rents tend to be somewhat high in the Bay Area; however, Berkeley is significantly cheaper than the majority of Bay Area locations and students find their housing costs fit easily into their stipend budget. Additionally, both the university and the department offer services to help locate housing.