

CMB Student Handbook

2026-2027

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SECTION I

INTRODUCTION

The Cellular, Molecular and Biomedical Sciences Program began as a cross-college graduate program in Cell Biology over 50 years ago and achieved its current form in 2012. Today, CMB includes faculty from five colleges and reports to the Dean of the Graduate College. The objectives for students in the CMB Program are: (1) To become scholars in their field, (2) To attain a core set of knowledge within cellular, molecular, and biomedical sciences, (3) To understand, design and undertake a hypothesis-based approach to research in an ethically responsible manner, (4) To think independently, creatively, and critically, and (5) To be effective in both written and oral forms of communication as teachers, researchers, and scholars. This Program Handbook serves as a reference for graduate students within the CMB Program. The contents of this handbook will be reviewed and approved annually by the CMB Steering Committee. The University is rooted in The Our Common Ground Values: Respect | Integrity | Innovation | Openness | Justice | Responsibility.

SECTION II

Program Leadership, Governance & Operations

CORE LEADERSHIP BY DIRECTOR & PROGRAM ADMINISTRATOR

Key documents underpin the governance structure within CMB and its greater role at UVM. Links to these documents can be found in the governance appendix. At UVM, the Dean of the Graduate College selects the CMB Director and supports the program with a program administrator, who provides direct programmatic and student support for the success of the CMB graduate program.

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The program administrator is available for all issues related to student welfare, payment, matriculation, program coordination, equity concerns, communication of norms, and intermediating extenuating circumstances. The program director is responsible for oversight of all functions of the program relating to the educational, teaching, and logistical functions of the CMB program. Much of this operates through the function of committees defined by the CMB bylaws.

CMB COMMITTEES

CMB operations are conducted through a series of committees of volunteer faculty who oversee **Admissions, Recruitment, Faculty Membership, Student Progress, and Education**. Each of these committees is described in the appendix. Their goals are largely self-explanatory and summarized in the appendix. Each is run with a faculty chair, several faculty members, and in most cases 1-5 student members.

A CMB student committee also exists to provide a dedicated voice for the student body in program governance, help organize the annual retreat and recruitment events, and ensure student feedback shapes program policies.

SECTION III

Navigating Curriculum, Courses, and Enrollment

This section describes the expectations, logistics, and norms surrounding the courses you are expected to take.

CURRICULAR REQUIREMENTS

A CMB PhD involves years of research *and* courses reported to the graduate college as course credits. For CMB graduate students at UVM, a full-time load consists of 9 credits during fall and spring semesters and 5 credits during the summer,

where one credit hour is defined as approximately 45 total hours of academic work and student effort over the course of the term (defined [here](#)).

Completing the PhD requires accumulating 75 total credits: comprising 30 coursework credits, 20 lab research credits, and 25 course or research credits (detailed below). During your early years, you register for these as standard, tuition-bearing credit hours. Once you accumulate 75 credits, you have fulfilled all degree credit requirements and reach the tuition coverage limit. From that point on, you will enroll in Continuous Registration (GRAD 9010, 9020, 9030 for full-time work), a flat-fee enrollment status that maintains your active student standing, funding, and health insurance while you complete your dissertation defense.

30 coursework credits			20 research credits	25 flexible credits
Required Coursework (15 credits)	Elective Coursework (15 credits)			
• Core Curriculum (Y1 Fall+Spring, 12 credits) • Ethics (Y2 Fall, 1 credit) • Grant Writing (Y2 Spring, 2 credits)	• A list of approved electives is available here. Each is approved by the CMB Education committee. • If you see a course that you'd like to add as an approved elective, please email cmbed@uvm.edu with the syllabus	• CMB Seminar (1 credit, may be taken each semester) • Your division/department's journal club or seminar is listed as a class. • Independent study, such as attending a 2 week workshop on bioinformatics.	• Rotation research (6 credits) ○ 3 credits CLBI 7491 Y1 Fall ○ 3 credits CLBI 7491 Y1 Spring • After joining a lab (14+ credits) ○ max5/max9* credits for CLBI 7491 under your advisor ○ Once you've exceeded 75 credits, you switch to continuous registration. <i>*For full time research once you've joined a lab: 5 max for summer, 9 max for fall/spring. When you take an elective, you subtract from that maximum to make the total enrolled 5 or 9 respectively.</i>	(Draw from other columns)

Students should register for 9 credits per semester (fall & spring) between elective courses and dissertation research to be a full-time student. Students should take 5 research credits in the summer. Details on registering vary by year and are provided in Appendix 4.

A final grade point average of 3.00 is required by the University to graduate. Failure to maintain a 3.00 GPA in consecutive semesters may result in an academic dismissal from the CMB Program. Conversations between students and the Student Progress Committee will be initiated as soon as this GPA is below expectation.

Requests to alter required courses should be made to the Chair of the CMB Education Committee (cmbed@uvm.edu).

A sample 4-year plan is attached as appendix 3 and is provided online at <http://cmbed.w3.uvm.edu/plan>; program requirements for 2026 entering class listed below:

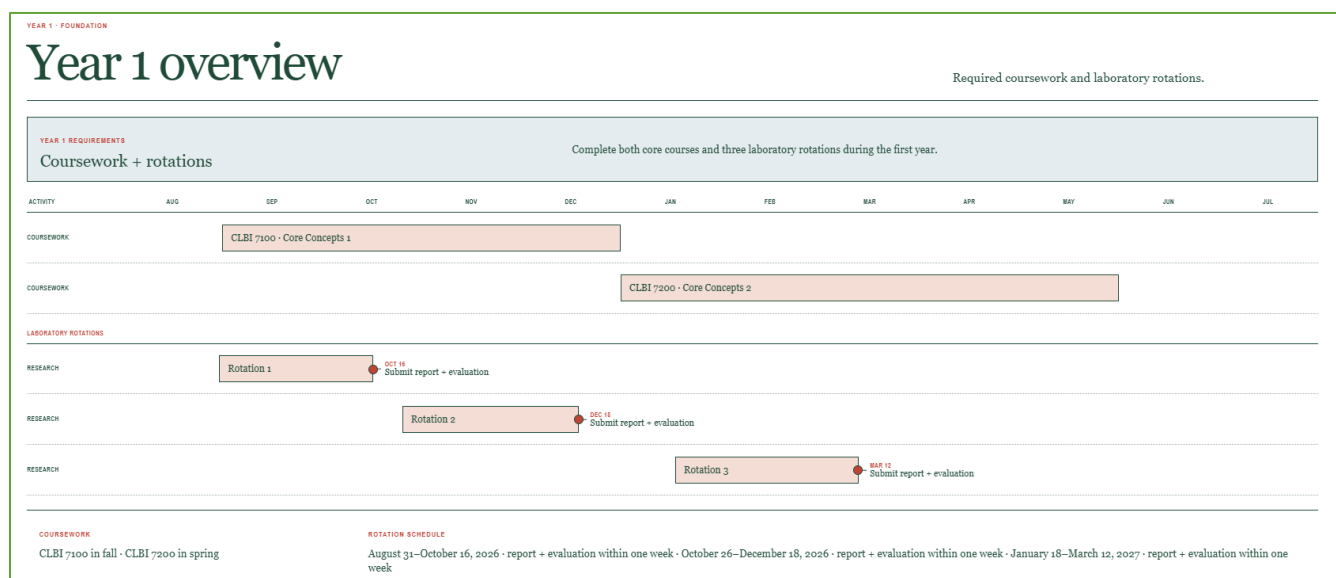
YOUR FIRST YEAR

Required core courses for all CMB students:

- (1) CLBI 7100 CMB Core Concepts 1 (6 credits; fall semester Y1),
- (2) CLBI 7200 CMB Core Concepts 2 (6 credits; spring semester Y1),

The program allows students to take elective courses their first year. As an example, one credit for each term of CMB seminar (CLBI 6080) can also be taken for both Fall and Spring semesters. For the first term, the education committee recommends core curriculum (6 credits), CMB seminar (1 credit), and 2 credits of rotation research under course CLBI 7491.

For 2026-2027 only, this course list does not align with the Catalog entry. Students will be retroactively moved to the new catalog that uses this updated curriculum near the end of spring semester of the first year.

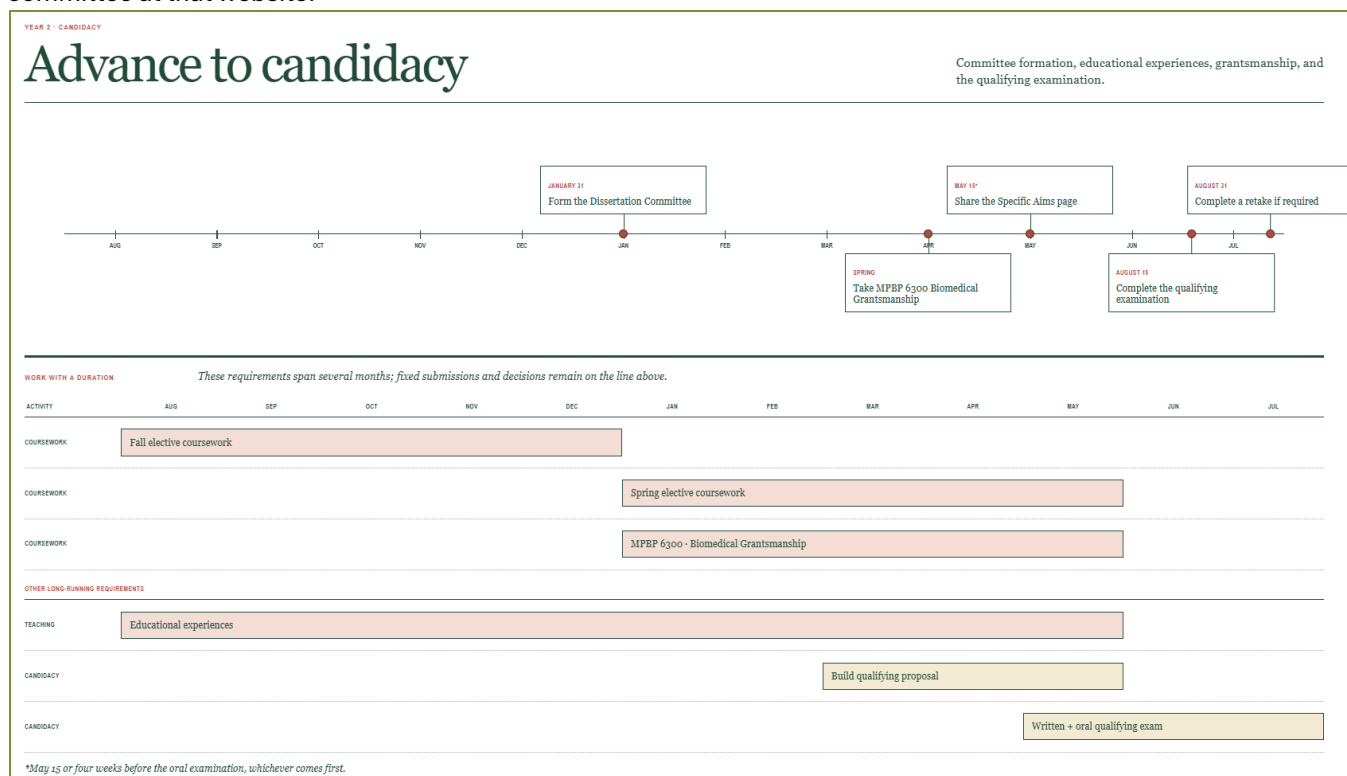


YOUR SECOND YEAR

Required core courses for all CMB students:

- (1) MPBP 6300 Biomedical Grantsmanship (2 credits; spring semester Y2),
- (2) MMG 6990/PBIO 6990 Ethics in Graduate Research (1 credit; fall semester Y1 or Y2) **or** NSCI 6270 Responsible Conduct in Biomedical Research (1 credit; spring semester Y1 or Y2)

Electives are commonly taken in both terms of your second year. A live list of approved electives is available [here: link](#). Electives not currently in the list of approved electives can be submitted for consideration to the CMB Education committee at that website.



YOUR THIRD TO FINAL YEARS

Students continue to take electives and can take CMB Seminar for up to three credits.

Once you hit 75 credits, you will convert to continuing education, whereupon your research class will be one of three numbers:

- CLBI 9010: The research course to take if you are taking other courses in addition to research
- CLBI 9020: The research course to take for summer credit
- CLBI 9030: The research course to take if you are taking the full 9 credits of just research
- In these later years, you can still take electives over and above the minimum.

POLICY FOR USE OF GENERATIVE AI IN ACADEMICS

The program is currently drafting policies on AI/LLM use specifically for unpublished data. Before fall semester, we will have an “official” CMB AI statement, but the following advice should be followed in the meantime.

- **Large language models can help you in some circumstances, but you cannot substitute their work and judgement for your own.** If you outsource reading the literature, critiquing published experiments (and providing such critical feedback to peers), and developing ideas to LLMs you deprive yourself of the ability to develop critical skills you have come to graduate school to learn. **CMB coursework continues to adjust to more in-person and ‘blue book’ style evaluation to minimize LLM.**
- Using large language models can help aid your research and improve your writing, but they also come with risks, particularly with unpublished data. **Uploading unpublished data in public chatbots or large language models poses serious risks to both confidentiality and scientific integrity.** Below are some key factors you should understand before making the decision to give your own unpublished data and ideas to a large language model. The decision to upload such data needs to be made by the people who hold the rights to that data (this likely means a discussion with your PI). **You should never upload someone else’s unpublished data and/or ideas without their permission.**
 - **Data Leakage and Loss of Intellectual Property:** Many AI platforms retain and reuse user inputs, sometimes as part of future model training. Submitting novel, unpublished results creates a real risk that those findings could be implicitly memorized and later echoed in responses to other users as you may have no control over where the data is stored, saved and distributed. This can have implications for scooping, intellectual property (patents) and other downstream consequences.
 - **Confidentiality and Compliance Violations:** Uploading raw experimental data to external servers can violate data use agreements as well as Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocols. If you upload someone else’s data in order to generate ‘peer’ reviews (ie, as an NIH reviewer) you can face serious consequences (including withdrawal of your own grants and a ban on reviewing, see <https://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-23-149.html>).

DEFENDING YOUR DISSERTATION

Much of the thesis defense process is clearly and effectively summarized by Graduate College resources:

- Required resources are available if you scroll down to the bottom of this address: <https://www.uvm.edu/graduate/academic-resources> and click on “Academic Support” – updated links will be under the header “Theses, Dissertations, and Graduation.”
- “[Requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy Degree](#)” defines requirements for your Defense Exam Committee.
- [Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Guidelines](#) (42 pages) defines timeline, formatting/fonts of your dissertation, and includes a FAQ section useful to many CMB students.
- The [Timetable for Thesis/Dissertation Students](#) defines four annual cycles and underlying administrative cycles, beginning with filing an ‘intent to graduate’ form and culminating with upload to the ProQuest database. Checkpoints in each cycle are non-negotiable and students are encouraged to schedule their oral defense early in their chosen cycle to permit sufficient time for dissertation edits.

LIBRARY, WRITING, TEACHING CENTERS

Helpful resources outside CMB are also available to you

- The **UVM Graduate Writing Center** supports writing at nearly every level (manuscripts, fellowships, grant proposals, posters, and dissertations). Consultants are experienced graduate writers drawn from programs across campus, and they often have a CMB student on retainer to help you receive domain-aware advice. Services are free to UVM graduate students. Individual appointments are offered in person at the Howe Library or online via Teams. For longer drafts (10-25pgs) you can book a paired “meet”/“review” appointment so the same consultant reads your draft and then later discusses edits with you. Weekly Wednesday writing retreats offer quiet space, refreshments, and optional consultant time with sign-ups on the appointment calendar. Website: <https://www.uvm.edu/writingcenters/graduatewriting> | Appointments: <https://www.uvm.edu/writingcenters/graduatewriting/appointments> | Contact: gradwriting@uvm.edu
- The **Center for Teaching and Learning** supports graduate student instructors and teaching assistants in pursuing impactful teaching, promoting evidence-based practices in course design, teaching, and instructional technology. Graduate teaching assistants can book one-on-one consultations about teaching or instructional technology, or email ctl@uvm.edu. Students planning an academic career should consider the Graduate Teaching Program — offered by the CTL with Writing in the Disciplines and the Graduate College. Website: <https://www.uvm.edu/ctl> | Graduate Teaching Program: <https://www.uvm.edu/ctl/graduate-teaching-program>
- The **Dana Health Sciences Library** is your primary library home as a CMB student, who can book a free 30-minute one-on-one research consultation with a health sciences librarian, in person or over Zoom/Teams. The Libraries also run workshops and events covering statistical analysis, data visualization, systematic review support, and software deep-dives including R workshops and infographic sessions at Howe Library. Dana: <https://libraries.uvm.edu/dana> | Find your health sciences librarian: <https://libraries.uvm.edu/services/find-health-sciences-librarian> | Research support: <https://libraries.uvm.edu/services/research-support> | Workshop calendar: <https://libraries.uvm.edu/research-support-services-cal>

TRANSFER CREDITS

Students who have taken required program courses at UVM, after completion of a bachelor’s degree but prior to admission to the program, may request that they be applied toward their doctoral degree. In addition, students may request that courses taken at other institutions after completion of a bachelor’s degree but prior to admission to the program be applied toward their doctoral degree. Students may transfer up to 24 credits. Credit cannot be awarded for courses with a grade lower than B (3.0). A minimum of 15 hours in courses used in compilation of the grade point average must be taken in residence at UVM. Students must get approval to transfer credits from the CMB Education Committee and the Dean of the Graduate College. Transfer credits for the required core courses in the CMB program would require a demonstrated graduate-level curriculum that matches what is presented in CMB courses. However, because successful completion of the qualifying examination requires proficiency in the first two years of the curriculum, transferring credits for these courses is discouraged. Transfer credits will not be allowed for the ethics course requirement. For more information, please visit the [Transfer Credit and Credit by Examination website of the Graduate College](#) website.

SECTION IV

Navigating Your Research & Lab Training

This section describes the expectations, logistics, organizational structures, evaluative strategies, and norms surrounding your research training throughout your years in the CMB program.

LABORATORY ROTATION SET-UP

Laboratory rotations provide hands-on research experience, training in experimental design, and support in selecting a dissertation lab. Students must complete three rotations during their first year, in at least two distinct laboratories. Each rotation lasts 8 weeks. They will not be extended unless in extenuating circumstances. Please contact the CMB administrator in those cases.

Rotation Schedule 2025-2026	Date	Length (weeks)
Start	Mon, Aug. 31, 2026	8
End	Fri, Oct. 16, 2026	
Start	Mon, Oct. 26, 2026	9
End	Fri, Dec. 18, 2026	
Start	Mon, Jan. 18, 2027	8
End	Fri, Mar. 12, 2027	
Start	Mon, Mar. 15, 2027	8
End	Fri, May 7, 2027	

The dates for the rotation 2026-2027 rotation schedule are provided to keep all students on the same timeline. A fourth rotation will be afforded only when necessary, with the approval and oversight of the Student Progress Committee. If you foresee the need for such a rotation, please alert your advisor from the Student Progress Committee as soon as possible. Students may start their rotation earlier if desired and amenable to the advisor, but they should not modify the end date for the rotation or the minimum duration of the rotation without explicit approval of the chair of the Student Progress Committee.

Setting up rotations:

- Students are responsible for contacting faculty directly to set up rotations.
- As early as the summer before matriculation, students are welcome to begin contacting faculty members to set up rotations in their laboratory.
- The annual orientation is designed to provide an overview of facultys' labs and projects. CMB encourages students to choose the lab of their first rotation labs during the early weeks of orientation, after having had a chance to see the environment and sample the culture and values of various labs.
- Faculty members do not view rotation choice (1st, 2nd or 3rd) differently from one another, and evaluate students on their merits, not on the timing or enthusiasm for rotation set-up. Nevertheless, because some labs in some years have limited slots for rotations, early communication in these cases is never discouraged.
- The Student Progress Committee is available to advise on navigating rotation selection. They recommend contacting second rotation faculty during August but, if helpful, leaving the conversation open-ended. For the third rotation, the student progress committee generally recommends keeping an open mind until at least the end of your first rotation, as you've presumably learned a lot more about the labs by weekly visits to CMB seminar.
- During the course of the year, students may need/desire to alter plans for a future rotation. In these cases, the students must notify the PIs involved as soon as possible. PIs will understand, but providing ample time for PIs to plan accordingly is helpful.

At the start of each rotation, students and rotation advisors must submit a Rotation Agreement within one week of the start of the rotation. Students are responsible for notifying their first-year advisor of any delays; failure to do so may result in an unsatisfactory grade.

Please note:

- A second rotation in the same lab requires approval from the Student Progress Committee. This process is begun with an email to your assigned advisor for 2026.
- A request for a fourth rotation requires approval from the Student Progress Committee.

ROTATION EVALUATION

Rotations can be evaluated by preparation of written report or delivery of short talk. This should be chosen by the rotation advisor in consultation with the student, as each rotation advisor likely has different preferences:

- The **Rotation Report** is written in consultation with the rotation advisor to ensure accuracy.
 - Deadline: 5PM Friday in the week following rotation completion.
 - While there is no required format, the report should be concise (approximately 1–2 single-spaced pages) and include: A brief summary/abstract / Background / Hypothesis and/or objectives / Results and discussion / Short bibliography. Experimental data may be incorporated, and there is no penalty for exceeding the suggested length if needed for completeness. Use of AI is highly discouraged.
- The **Rotation Presentation** will be set up 1 week after the close of each rotation session (jointly organized by Student Progress and Education committees).

- Presentation date: 3-5PM Friday in the week following rotation completion.
- 8 minute presentation with 2 minutes of questions; with content of a similar nature to the report.
- Audience will consist of students/faculty who will be encouraged to keep questions supportive, as the purpose is to facilitate an early speaking opportunity whereby students are able to exercise in the logical development of a presentation (background, findings, next steps).
- If students cannot be present for this timing, they should prepare the report. Ad hoc presentation at a group meeting will not suffice.

Rotation advisors must complete and review a Rotation Evaluation with the student and submit it within one week of the end of the rotation.

The CMB Director reviews Rotation Report and Evaluations and assigns a grade of SP (Satisfactory Progress) or UP (Unsatisfactory Progress) each semester. In cases where an unsatisfactory grade is assigned, the Director will provide feedback to the student, the advisor, and the Student Progress Committee. If a Rotation Report is deemed unsatisfactory, the student may be required to revise the report or may be placed on academic probation.

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE (2ND YEAR)

The purpose of a dissertation committee is to provide expert scientific mentorship, ensure the student stays on track toward degree milestones, offer constructive feedback on research direction, and advocate for the student's academic progress. At UVM, with your mentor's help, this group of faculty (details below on timing and requirements) administers your qualifying exam and continues on to meet annually and usually semi-annually at the close of your research.

QUALIFYING EXAM COMMITTEE (BY JANUARY 31 OF THE SECOND YEAR)

In your second year, you write a fellowship-like grant on the subject of your research, wherein you also propose an entirely new research direction. This is delivered as a 9-12 page document and evaluated for effective written communication, experimental design, and understanding of core scientific concepts. It is also delivered as an oral presentation of your proposal leading to an oral defense of your ideas, evaluated in parallel with the written document for communication, design, and understanding.

This evaluation is conducted by a committee (the Qual Exam Committee). This committee will form a group that likely will become your dissertation committee. This committee consists of your advisor + two additional CMB faculty members with expertise close to your project area. The qualifying exam committee also consists of a representative of the Education Committee, present for consistency of rigor and fairness in the CMB program, and this member typically does not stay on as the committee becomes a Dissertation Committee unless their domain expertise is particularly valued.

Therefore, by January 31 of your second year, you will have identified 3/4 members of your dissertation committee. Some students identify all 4 members, this is fine. Some students choose 1 member who is not a CMB faculty member-- this is also fine.

THE FULL DISSERTATION COMMITTEE (AFTER SECOND YEAR)

In order to graduate, a full dissertation committee must be present for the student's thesis defense. This committee consists of:

- A minimum of four UVM Graduate Faculty members:
 - The student's advisor and
 - At least two other CMB faculty.
 - Additional faculty member (can be extradepartmental)
- One member of the committee will be designated as the committee chair. The chair of your committee is required to be primarily appointed in a department outside of your home department. They are expected to communicate and summarize the key opinions of the committee to the student and are typically available for offline conversations to help align student/committee expectations.
- In addition to the four UVM graduate faculty members, external faculty can be added upon approval from the graduate college with the 'Request for External Defense Committee Member' form (available [here](#), they will check

the CV and appropriateness). An example might be if the field of study is not well represented among faculty in CMB, or UVM at large.

Therefore, at least once annually, the program requires the student to meet with their dissertation committee. Content of committee meetings:

- At this meeting, students present their progress in their education (e.g., course completion, participation in a conference).
- This committee also functions as a check on the student's research progress. It provides specific troubleshooting, big picture course correction advice, timeline assessments, and expectations of the student to keep on timeline.
- Importantly, it also serves to help resolve student-mentor misunderstandings, and members and especially chairs of dissertation committees often make themselves available for regular 1:1 appointments for these and all other reasons.
- After the meeting, the chair of the committee writes and circulates a consensus assessment of the student's progress, inclusive of a numerical estimate of the student's percentage of cumulative progress towards degree. This information is annually conveyed to CMB as part of the annual progress report form.

Sometimes, a student will neglect to schedule regular meetings. CMB requires at least one such meeting annually, but as a student nears graduation, these meetings typically become more frequent. **It is the responsibility of the student to contact and invite faculty to be members of their dissertation committee and to pro-actively schedule meetings annually.**

The Student Progress Committee will review the submitted Annual Student Progress Form and report to the Steering Committee and Program Director any students who have concerning academics or are underperforming. This may be due to academic performance, research performance, teaching assignments, professionalism, etc. Based on this assessment, students who continue to fail to maintain satisfactory progress and meet program milestones are subject to dismissal from the Program and/or loss of funding.

Typically, the Dissertation Committee will also serve as the Dissertation Defense Committee. The composition of the Dissertation Defense Committee and the name of the advisor must be submitted to the Graduate College prior to the Dissertation Defense. For more guidelines on the Dissertation Defense and Committee responsibilities, please visit the Requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy Degree.

YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR MENTOR AND THE IDP

Relationships between students and mentors vary widely. Some mentors prefer monthly meetings, while the majority prefer at least weekly meetings. The rotations are designed to help first year students sample these variables.

The development of a student's individualized development plan (IDP) is an annual requirement of the Graduate College. The form of this questionnaire varies widely, but in many forms allows students and faculty to candidly express expectations and self-assess expected versus actual progress to the degree. Your PI might have a custom lab-specific IDP, but many have found the templates from Stanford (<https://oge.stanford.edu/academics/idp/forms/>) have been helpful for the biological sciences. The IDP process advocated by the graduate college (AAAS) sometimes focuses heavily on career navigation over expectation and expertise navigation.

SECTION V

Program & Training Milestones & Advancement

This section describes the strategies by which the program will assess your progress throughout your PhD, general and specific requirements at each stage, programmatic policies, and logistical considerations throughout your years in CMB.

CMB 'RESEARCH IN PROGRESS' SEMINAR

The CMB Program hosts weekly [“research-in-progress” seminars](#) that provide students with the opportunity to present their current work to the UVM community. All CMB students are required to attend and encouraged to actively participate in these seminars. Students in their second year and beyond are required to deliver an annual seminar. Completed projects are not required; presentations on new or ongoing projects, as well as methodological development, are encouraged to foster critical thinking and scientific dialogue within the CMB community.

Following each seminar, CMB faculty and students provide digital evaluations to the speaker to offer constructive feedback on both their research and presentation skills. These evaluations will be shared with each student speaker in an effort to provide meaningful feedback on their research and improve their presentation skills.

Students should work closely with their advisor to develop the content of their presentation. Students will be solicited for their seminar's title and abstract two weeks in advance. The abstract should be 100 words or fewer, and accessible to any member of the CMB community.

It is expected that dissertation committee members should be present at the seminar and provide relevant feedback either by completing the seminar evaluation form or by discussing directly with the student (e.g., one-on-one meeting or dissertation committee meeting).

TEACHING REQUIREMENTS

The University of Vermont recognizes the strong connection between graduate and undergraduate education and the importance of developing effective teaching skills. To support this goal, the University has identified teaching as a valuable component of graduate training. [Accordingly, the Graduate College requires all Ph.D. students to complete a teaching experience](#). This requirement is typically fulfilled during the student's second year and often involves teaching a laboratory course within the college of their advisor.

CMB students must complete two educational experiences, at least one of which must be a mentored, course-based teaching experience. If one of these experiences is a Graduate Teaching Assistantship (GTA), students are expected to commit approximately 20 hours per week to teaching or research responsibilities associated with the assistantship, in addition to their own academic studies and laboratory work. The CMB Education Committee will be developing guidelines of what would be acceptable teaching experiences. Students without fellowships will in most cases be completing two TA assignments over the course of their PhD. Recipients of fellowships, such as the NSF GRFP or the UVM presidential scholarship, will still need to complete two educational experiences; proposals for these experiences should run through the CMB Education Committee and will be voted on by the committee.

CHECK-INS WITH THE STUDENT PROGRESS COMMITTEE

The Student Progress Committee oversees each student's progress while they are in the Program. Committee members serve as faculty advisors during the first year until the student joins a laboratory, at which point the Principal Investigator assumes advising responsibilities.

During the first year, it serves as the student's Studies Committee until a Dissertation Committee is established. The Student Progress Committee meets with each first-year student at least twice:

- Meetings address coursework, laboratory rotation progress, and progress on program requirements. The Committee also identifies areas for improvement and works with students to develop strategies and access resources.
- You will be assigned an advisor from the committee based loosely on your interests.
- **First meeting during orientation/early fall** (meeting with all available members). At this meeting, students are provided with advice for any difficulties they might have and are introduced to their assigned advisor. General guidelines of the first year are also covered in this meeting, which typically lasts 15-30 minutes per student
- **Second meeting by the end of the spring term** (meeting with your assigned advisor)

The Committee ensures that Rotation Agreement Forms are submitted within one week of the start of each rotation and reviews Rotation Evaluations, discussing feedback with students during scheduled meetings. The Committee may also convene as needed to address concerns about individual student progress.

After students select a Dissertation Committee, the Student Progress Committee reviews the Annual Student Progress Form submitted by the student and approved by the advisor and Dissertation Committee.

Students who are having difficulties (as evidenced by the Annual Student Progress Form) will receive annual attention from the Student Progress Committee. Students

Students who fail to maintain satisfactory performance—including in academics, research, teaching, or professionalism—may be subject to probation, loss of funding, or dismissal from the Program.

FUNDING

All CMB graduate students are guaranteed financial support while pursuing their Ph.D., contingent upon maintaining satisfactory progress in the program (see “Requirements for Remaining in Good Standing”). During the first year, students are typically funded through a Graduate Teaching/Research Assistantship, which could include a teaching (TA) obligation during one semester of the second year.

After the first year, funding responsibility follows this order: Primary advisor (PI) → Department → College. Signatures on the Mentor Commitment Form indicate agreement with this funding hierarchy. If advisor funding is not available, students in good standing may be supported by a Graduate Teaching Assistantship beyond the second year and must fulfill all associated responsibilities. In accordance with Graduate College policy, students must maintain at least part-time enrollment to receive funding. Full-time status in the CMB Program requires enrollment in 9 credits per semester and 5 credits during the summer. Students supported by GTA or GRA appointments are eligible for this enrollment level. Students who have completed all required coursework but not their research and dissertation must enroll in Continuous Registration. Students working full-time (9 or more credit equivalency) should register for GRAD 9030, while those working at least half-time (5–8 credits) should register for GRAD 9020.

For FY 2026–2027, CMB students receive a minimum annual stipend of \$34,375, a tuition scholarship covering up to 23 credits per year, and full health insurance. Students are required to pay the Graduate Student Senate fee (\$25/semester at writing). Advisors and departments must maintain this level of support beyond the first year. Additional funding information is available on the Graduate College website [Funding Your Graduate Education](#).

QUALIFYING EXAM

You spend your second year preparing a ~10 page document that resembles a grant application for a fellowship. At the conclusion of writing and submitting this document, you then present an oral defense to faculty members that will likely comprise your dissertation committee. This fulfills a requirement by the [Graduate College](#) to assess students through a qualifying examination that contains a written component. The CMB Qualifying Examination is a tool to comprehensively assess each student and ensure that they are prepared to proceed toward the doctoral degree. The goal is that this examination will be evaluated to avoid bias and ensure uniformity of assessment. In making the assessment, the examination will determine whether the candidate:

- Has acquired an adequate academic background through required coursework and electives in CMB
- Can analyze and interpret data and scientific ideas
- Can apply logical thought to make connections between diverse facts and concepts
- Understands and meets the intellectual demands of the degree program
- Can clearly communicate scientific knowledge and reasoning

Please see Appendix 2, for detailed information about the Qualifying Examination.

SATISFACTORY PROGRESS

The pursuit of science occurs due to the efforts of individuals on many levels. The Ph.D. is not simply a linear progression of effort from a B.S. or M.S. degree, but rather a distinct branch of training and expectations. The roots of the Ph.D. in philosophy should not be lost; hence the Doctorate of Philosophy requires its trainees to learn and employ rigorous logic along with

knowledge in their chosen field to produce new knowledge. In the case of the CMB program, acquisition of the Ph.D. comes with the expectation that students have been trained to critically, systematically, and independently address scientific questions relating to cellular, molecular, and/or biomedical sciences (hereafter these areas of study will be called CMB).

REQUIREMENTS FOR REMAINING IN GOOD STANDING

Grades or research productivity alone are not enough to remain in good standing with the CMB Program or Graduate College. The [Graduate College outlines minimum standards](#), including grades and cumulative GPA, milestone

Unsatisfactory	Satisfactory	Beyond Expectations
Become a scholar in your field		
Cursory to conversant coverage of the literature in specific field; sparse understanding of literature in general field	Thorough understanding of literature in specific field; conversant with literature in general field	Deep understanding of literature in specific field; conversant with literature in general field
Attain a set of core knowledge within cellular, molecular, and biomedical sciences		
Conversant to thorough knowledge in specific field; conversant in general field; sparse in domain	Deep knowledge within specific field; thorough in general field; conversant in domain	Encyclopedic knowledge within specific field; deep knowledge in general field; thorough knowledge in domain
Understand, design, and undertake hypothesis-based approaches to research in an ethically responsible manner		
Successfully interpret only some experimental data; issues with faulty interpretation & lack of knowing that interpretation is incorrect	Readily provide reasonable interpretation of most experimental data - raw or in papers	Easily and insightfully interpret most experimental data
Experimental design only solid very close to specific field; issues identifying good experimental design; often fails to spot weak experimental design	Experimental design solid if not exceptional for standard CMB questions; can identify good experimental design; can identify weak experimental design	Experimental design exceptional for standard CMB questions and can readily design solid experiments well-outside of standard questions
Requires substantial hands-on training to conduct standard cell & molecular protocols; frequent technical failures; cannot master high-skill protocols or takes inordinately long	Can find, interpret, and conduct standard cell & molecular protocols with only infrequent technical failures; less adept with high-skill protocols, but trainable and shows improvement over time	Zero inertia in finding, interpreting, and conducting most standard wet-lab approaches; rapidly trainable in specialist techniques
Does not understand the importance of scientific ethics; stands by their own data even when presented stronger counter-data; "knows" they're right despite evidence	Understands the ethical framework overlying modern science and importance of being the harshest critic of one's own data	Is careful, self-critical, and actively assesses their science within an ethical framework
Think independently, creatively, and critically		
Can articulate no conceptual model of the specialty field or the model is overly simplistic; all data interpretation and hypothesis generation only occur with full re-immersion in already-read literature	Has developed a conceptual model that suits the specialty field and uses that model to generate novel hypotheses	Conceptual model expands beyond the specialty field and hypotheses are both novel and creative
Cannot link ideas from disparate fields even with substantial guidance	With some guidance, can link ideas from disparate fields to integrate data	Can integrate ideas from disparate fields with little or no guidance
Can draw only single conclusions from data; lacks critical evaluation of data; has trouble predicting data from a given scenario	Can draw reasonable, realistic, and critical conclusions from real data and predict data for provided scenarios	Readily uses induction and deduction to span the realm of reasonable outcomes
Be effective in both written and oral forms of communication as teachers, researchers, and scholars		
Has trouble conveying at least one scale of their story to one or more audiences	Capable of conveying the big, medium, and narrow story of their project to a variety of scientists	Is asked "what year of postdoc are you?" after a scientific conversation, or even better, "when did you start your lab?"
Often uses imprecise or incorrect language (ex. systemic vs systematic); often falls into jargon or unclear casual parlance	Uses language precision and specificity to accurately convey their work; jargon is sometimes inappropriately used, but is understandable	Language precision and specificity are ubiquitous in their work; when jargon is used, it is in the context of specialists and conveys the message
Written work has more than one of the following issues: dense, poorly cited, lacks flow, poor grammar, hard to follow, etc	Written work is considered readily readable within the norms of the field	Written work is considered readable for any domain and is very clear

What is Satisfactory Progress?

The answer to this question is hard to pin down specifically, but by the end of the degree, Students should achieve performance in the "Satisfactory" column for most to all of the subsections of the Table below. We also recognize that, in some circumstances, demonstrating capabilities in the "Beyond Expectations" column might cancel out capabilities that are in the "Unsatisfactory" column. Because not all scientists are the same or value the same skillsets, not all of these aspects of the degree are weighted the same and each Dissertation Committee will weight these components differently.

deadlines, annual Ph.D. reviews, and program length. In addition, CMB students must:

- Meet with their studies/dissertation committee at least annually and submit documentation to their advisor and the CMB Office;
- Fulfill all teaching obligations satisfactorily;
- Meet seminar participation requirements.

Each year, students must work with their advisor to complete an Annual Student Progress Form summarizing academic and research progress, committee recommendations, and the advisor's evaluation. This documentation must be submitted to the CMB Office by June 30. An online survey is distributed to advisors for this purpose. During the first year, the CMB Director assigns research credit grades based on rotations.

Concerns about a student's progress may be reported by faculty or students to the Student Progress Committee, Steering Committee, or Director. The Director communicates cases of poor performance or academic probation to the relevant committees. Based on these evaluations—covering academics, research, teaching, and professionalism—students who fail to maintain satisfactory progress may be placed on probation, lose funding, or be dismissed from the Program.

ACADEMIC AND PROGRAMMATIC PROBATION

If students fail to maintain a 3.0 GPA, they are put on Academic Probation as described by the Graduate College ([link](#)). Failure to bring the GPA to 3.0 or above in the next semester will trigger a discussion and vote on dismissal from the program by the Steering Committee.

Grades are not the only aspect that can trigger a probation period. Receiving an Unsatisfactory (U or UP) in research credits results in Program Probation. Similar to Academic Probation, students must return to Satisfactory (S or SP) in the following semester or this will trigger a discussion and vote on dismissal from the program by the Steering Committee. The requirements to improve from a U to an S should be discussed and written by the student's Studies Committee who can also reach out to the Director or Student Progress for assistance and guidance.

TERMINAL MASTER OF SCIENCE (M.S.) DEGREE & LEAVE OF ABSENCE POLICY

- The Graduate College only awards M.S. degrees to CMB students who matriculated into the Ph.D. program and have either made insufficient research progress to complete the Ph.D. or who have voluntarily chosen to leave the Ph.D. program in favor of the M.S. degree. The student must be in good standing with the program and will have successfully completed their Qualifying Exam or must complete a Qualifying Exam prior to defending their M.S. thesis. The student must complete the minimum course and research requirements for the M.S. as defined by the Graduate College and must defend a research-based master's thesis. For further information, please refer to the [Graduate College Requirements for the Master's Degree](#).
- CMB students may request a leave of absence from the Program for up to one year and should follow the Graduate College guidelines and procedures on this site [Leave of Absence](#).

PARENTAL ACCOMODATIONS

CMB students may request parental accommodation from the Dean of the Graduate College (or designee) 90 days prior to expected birth/adoption (with contingencies for unexpected change). Both parents are eligible if they are both UVM students. For more information, please read [Graduate Student Parental Accommodation Policy](#).

Frequently Asked Questions

ACADEMICS

- Q: What are the most common reasons for a 'U'?*

Not turning in the paperwork for rotation report has historically led to the most 'U' grades. While CMB will issue reminders, it should be assumed this is the responsibility of the student to adhere to timelines.
- Q: How do I reserve a room?*

As you enter your second year, you may need to reserve rooms for dissertation committee meetings or thesis defense. For these rooms, you should reach out to the CMB office (Erin) for assistance. To book rooms for other lab-specific purposes, reach out to your departmental administration team.
- Q: How do I figure out deadlines for registration?*

Refer to the Office of the Registrar's website: <https://www.uvm.edu/registrar/registration-schedule>
- Q: Whom do I reach out to if I am worried about my grades?*

As a first year, talk to your student progress committee point person/advisor, the CMB administrator, the head of the student progress committee, and if needed, the CMB Director, in that order. In addition, your rotation advisors know how to help with these issues as well and should be seen as a resource.
- Q: How do I choose which electives I need to take? / Where can I find a list of accepted electives?*

Once you have a likely advisor, communicate with your advisor to determine which electives will best support your thesis research and interests. The list of approved electives can be found here: <https://cmbed.w3.uvm.edu/plan/electives>

The CMB Education committee is working to provide a curated list of classes that will be offered in the 2026-2027 year, as some of those classes on the list are not currently registerable.
- Q: Can I earn a master's degree concurrently with my PhD, like at <other institution>?*

CMB currently does not offer this option.

RESEARCH

- Q: What do I do if a faculty member does not respond to my request for a rotation? How long do I wait?*

Allow a reasonable amount of time (1 week is a good rule of thumb), then send one polite follow-up email. It is also acceptable to politely approach the faculty member once in person in an appropriate situation (seminar, etc). Consider asking the advisor's existing students for insight—they might be traveling, on sabbatical, dealing with an emergency, etc., in which case it may be considerate to allow extra time for them to respond. If you still do not hear back, consider alternative rotation labs.
- Q: How do I know if I have a spot secured in a faculty member's lab?*

Communicate with the individual faculty member. They should be clear about your status and you are allowed to ask for explicit confirmation. When you have both signed the Mentorship Agreement, you are considered part of their lab. If you are having trouble getting a straight answer, contact Erin Montgomery or Matt Wargo.
- Q: Whom do I reach out to if I am worried about not finding a lab?*

Talk to the Student Progress Committee Representative, Erin Montgomery, or Matt Wargo. Your fellow students may also be good resources for identifying labs that may be a good match.
- Q: What happens if my advisor leaves UVM, loses their funding, or dies before I finish my PhD?*

This situation is extremely rare and handled on a case-by-case basis. A new home is always found for the student, but if you are worried, please reach out to the CMB Director directly and it will be handled confidentially. You are guaranteed funding while you are making satisfactory progress towards your degree, regardless of your

advisor's status. If you find yourself in this situation, you will not be expected to figure it out alone; CMB leadership will help you.

- *Q: Is co-mentoring with multiple advisors allowed?*

Co-mentoring arrangements are allowed. They come with unique advantages and challenges, and typically require more self-advocacy and self-direction on the student's part. Have a thorough conversation with both advisors about each individual's responsibilities and expectations within the arrangement in advance. It is also strongly suggested that you communicate with the student progress chair if considering this option.

- *Q: My advisor has been unavailable/unresponsive/unsupportive for an extended period, and it is directly impeding my research progress. What do I do?*

Contact Student Progress Chair, Erin Montgomery, or Matt Wargo for support. Nearly all mentors meet with their students weekly or bi-weekly, though many take hiatuses from meetings for extended periods and this is normal. Mentors are expected to maintain a reasonable level of availability and provide reasonable guidance to their students as part of their membership in the CMB program. This particular topic should be brought up during annual IDP conversations if it's an area where expectations between mentor and mentee diverge. The student progress committee membership is also open to your issues.

- *Q: I would like to work on a particular subject area and am having trouble finding a suitable advisor?*

Talk to the Student Progress Committee. You may want to consider a co-mentoring arrangement, or you may need to consider being flexible about your research area. In general, if you have to choose one or the other, a good mentorship match is almost always preferable to a perfect research topic match. Also remember that being exposed to new areas of research will benefit your development as a scientist! Erin Montgomery may also be a helpful resource to figure out the best plan in your unique situation.

FINANCES

- *Q: How frequently are we paid? How do we arrange for that process?*

You are paid biweekly. Payroll enrollment should be handled during your orientation. You should be able to view your status on UVM's PeopleSoft webpage (link is on Payroll website: <https://www.uvm.edu/finance/ufs/payroll>).

- See the Payroll Schedule for specific pay schedule: <https://www.uvm.edu/finance/ufs/payroll-schedule>. If you have further questions, contact Erin Montgomery and/or Payroll (802-656-6600 or payroll@uvm.edu).

- *Q: How much should we budget for various fees?*

Refer to your GTA/GRA/fellowship acceptance form, as some appointments and fellowships do or do not cover different fees. Students are typically responsible for the Graduate Student Senate fee (\$25 per semester). If you have further questions, contact Erin Montgomery.

- *Q: What do I do if I do not get a paycheck?*

Contact Erin Montgomery and Payroll (802-656-6600 or payroll@uvm.edu) immediately.

- *Q: I was awarded a fellowship with a stipend! Do I get two stipends now?*

No; your fellowship stipend replaces any preexisting stipend. You may only receive one stipend at a time. If you have specific questions, contact Erin Montgomery.

- *Q: I was awarded a fellowship with a stipend! Now I have to self-pay taxes. I have questions about that, and when I ask for help, all I'm told is that UVM can't give me tax advice. Where can I get my questions answered?*

As frustrating as it can be to receive this answer, the law prohibits employers from giving individual tax advice for your protection. Please see information from the IRS for individuals receiving large awards and making estimated tax payments: [IRS Estimated Taxes](#). For more information about potential tax consequences of fellowship or traineeships, please see this guidance from the IRS:

- If you are a U. S. citizen or resident for tax purposes, who received a fellowship or traineeship stipend time spent in the U. S., should consult IRS Publication 970, which is available at <http://www.irs.gov/publications/p970/index.html>
- International students on certain visas who receive fellowship or traineeship stipends for time spent in the U.S., should consult IRS Publication 519, which is available at <http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p519.pdf>

- *Q: Am I allowed to have another job outside UVM while I finish my PhD?*
Although it is strongly discouraged, UVM cannot prohibit students from external employment. If you are funded on a federal fellowship, those have specific pre-approval requirements for additional work.

OTHER

- *Q: Where is the international student office and what is its role in helping students?*
Please refer to the International Student Services website: <https://www.uvm.edu/oie/welcome-international-student-services>

The Office of International Education (OIE) is located at 633 Main Street, B-101.

Their work includes immigration advising, student support as they get to know Burlington and UVM, orientation, social and educational programs, and being a resource for students when they don't know where to find the information elsewhere on campus.

- *Q: I keep being asked to sign a Graduate Student Union membership card/petition/etc. Will UVM, CMB, or my advisor penalize me if I do?*
The law prohibits retaliation against any student employee, regardless of citizenship status, for exercising their right to participate legally in their labor union. If you have specific concerns, please contact CMB leadership.
- *Q: I am finding graduate school lonely and isolating. Does CMB sponsor any community-building events?*
Several events are started every year with the intention of long-term continuity, but these initiatives sometimes disappear as the students themselves graduate. The program always encourages these events. You can also consider joining the CMB Recruitment Committee, which has grown to actively promote such events. Maintaining a strong support network to lean on when things get tough is one of the best ways to help yourself succeed during your PhD studies.
- *Q: I'm worried about my labmate/CMB friend/advisor/student's mental health. How do I help?*
The official path would be to refer to the UVM CARE webpage: <https://www.uvm.edu/deanofstudents/uvm-care-team>
CMB encourages candid conversations with leadership, all of whom have a great deal of experience with these particular issues, as they are not uncommon in the sciences.

Appendix 1: Governance

The Director will be appointed by the Dean of the Graduate College. Please see supporting information in the Bylaws and MOU for more details on the appointment and responsibilities of the CMB Director, description of subcommittee structure, and responsibilities within the Program. The CMB Program is supported by a full-time administrator who provides direct programmatic and student support for the success of the CMB graduate program.

Key Document Links:

[Requirements for the Doctorate in Philosophy Degree](#)

[Rotation Agreement Form](#)

[CMB ROTATION EVALUATION \(DOC\)](#)

[CMB PROGRESS REPORT \(DOC\)](#)

[ABOUT UVM](#)

[CMB PROGRESS REPORT \(DOC\)](#)

[CAMPUS MAP](#)

[CMB HANDBOOK \(PDF\)](#)

[CMB BYLAWS \(PDF\)](#)

[CENTER FOR HEALTH AND WELLBEING](#)

[GRADUATE COLLEGE](#)

[GRADUATE STUDENT LIFE \(INCLUDING HOUSING INFORMATION\)](#)

[GRADUATE STUDENT SENATE](#)

[LIBRARIES - DANA HEALTH SCIENCES](#)

[LIFE IN BURLINGTON](#)

[MENTOR COMMITMENT FORM \(DOC\)](#)

[MyUVM](#)

[CMB ROTATION AGREEMENT \(DOC\)](#)

[CMB ROTATION EVALUATION \(DOC\)](#)

[Graduate College Academic and Enrollment Policies](#)

[Rights and Responsibilities of Graduate Students](#)

[Funding Your Graduate Education](#)

[Leaves of Absence](#)

[CMB Staff and Committees](#)

[CMB Faculty Link](#)

[CMB Student Link](#)

Appendix 2: Qualifying Exam Draft Specifications

QUALIFYING EXAMINATION

The entering class of 2026 will experience a qualifying exam wherein students will write and defend the same proposal in their second year. This proposal is intended to be based on the student's thesis work and evaluated for (1) logic of presentation and framing and experimental design, (2) communication and understanding of scientific ideas pertaining to the student's proposal.

The proposal is a 9-12 page document, consisting of:

- Aims 1 and 2 are based on the student's PhD research plan.
- Aim 3 is an aim rooted in the same hypothesis as the rest of the grant but involves a technology or model system not currently used by the mentor. The advisor may not guide the student's logic, planning, or understanding of concepts or pertaining to this aim.
- The oral defense of this aim should predominate the ~2 hour examination period.
- The structure of the grant is an NIH grant, akin to an F31 with the scholarship length limits of an R01.

The oral examination will be expansive and challenge the student's integration of curricular concepts with their research directions, particularly in the context of their novel proposal. Final specifications will be made available ~1 year before exam. We provide a draft proposal until the CMB Education Committee is able to provide clearer guidance on this exam:

The Qualifying Examination (also called Qual or Comprehensive Exam) must be completed by August 15 of the 2nd year (The 'August' indicated is the one 24 months from entry into the program, for clarity). The two components, written and oral, of the qualifying exam must be successfully completed to advance in candidacy. Failure will lead to dismissal from the CMB program. Alternative ending, including the defense of a master's thesis, will require the approval of the dissertation committee and the CMB program director. The evaluation committee will be composed of the dissertation committee members and be chaired by a member of the education committee.

Roles: Members of the Evaluation Committee will consist of the student's Dissertation Committee, the research advisor, and a member of the CMB Education Committee. **By May 15 or four weeks before the oral component** of the CMB Qualifying Examination (whichever comes first), the student will share the Aims Page. Members of the evaluation committee will provide general comments within 48 hours.

1. CMB Education Committee Member: Selected by the student. Present to normalize rigor of the Exam portion, to provide an outside view towards the topic of the proposal and defense, and to assure that (i) the examination does not become an evaluation of the Advisor's research, nor that (ii) the Advisor provides excessive assistance to, or critique of, the student. If the Education Committee member is also a member of the Dissertation Committee, they may serve both roles simultaneously. However, the Education Committee member cannot concurrently be the advisor.

2. Dissertation Committee Members: To provide basic knowledge of the dissertation topic.

3. Research Advisor: To provide an evaluation of the student's independent thinking and integration with the work previously conducted by the laboratory.

4. Others: The student may seek advice from other students, postdocs, and technicians as they see fit. CMB faculty should refrain from specific assistance, particularly with hypothesis formulation and testing within the stretch aim, although general questions about the faculty's area of specialty are acceptable.

For Student: The student should regularly discuss with the dissertation advisor about the dissertation research and choose two avenues/aims that will be pursued for completion of the Ph.D. The student can also reach members of the dissertation committee to build the rationale, ask for general comments and address specific questions (e.g., scientific and technical). In contrast, the third aim should be the product of the innovation and the creativity of the student. Through conversation with peers and the CMB community, the student should identify an extension of the dissertation work that has not yet been explored and is not considered by the mentor at the time of preparation for the qualifying exam. The third aim will lead to the articulation of an overarching hypothesis for the whole proposal, with an appropriate design of the method to test it.

For faculty: The mentor is invited to regularly check the student's progress on the written component of the Qualifying Exam. Providing feedback (e.g., through genuine conversation or by reviewing and editing the proposal) is encouraged. While this feedback could be extensive and detailed for the first two aims, the mentor will not provide specifics for the generation of the hypothesis or construction of the third aim. The mentor can assure that the stretch aim is sufficiently distinct from work that has or is being conducted by the lab, has been or is being conducted by collaborators, or is not part of a grant proposal that has been written but on which work has not yet commenced.

Topic: The qualifying exam should be based on the student's actual dissertation topic or a potential dissertation topic. The students will have been in the dissertation lab for approximately one year when defending this proposal and obviously may not have discovered the topic upon which their final dissertation will be based.

The written component of the CMB Qualifying Examination:

This component is organized to assess a student's ability to present their research project in a grant proposal format using the NIH F31/R01 guidelines. The first two aims of the proposal will describe the dissertation work the student is expected to complete to graduate, while the third aim will present an extension of the work (stretch aim) which is not developed, funded or considered by the mentor at the time of the writing process.

During the second year, the student will work on building the grant proposal. **By May 15 or four weeks before the oral component of the CMB Qualifying Examination (whichever comes first), the student will share the Aims Page.** Members of the evaluation committee will provide general comments within 48 hours. This feedback should indicate the logic or absence of logic of the proposal, especially for the scope of the stretch aim. The Evaluation Committee will be provided 2 weeks to review the proposal before the oral component.

1. Philosophy and Expectations:

Writing is often the best way to learn to formulate testable hypothesis(es) and plan a reasoned set of experiments designed to explicitly test the hypothesis(es). This part of the Qualifying Exam is designed to evaluate the student's written scientific communication ability as a measure of appropriate progress toward a doctoral degree as a second-year student. This should not be viewed from the aspect of 'fundability' but rather from scientific quality and student potential. The Committee should focus their evaluation on the breadth and depth with which the topic/problem is communicated, clarity of approach, and the logical underpinnings of the science.

The student should follow the F31/R01 general guidelines (~9-12 page with 'Specific Aims, Significance, Innovation, Approach' format, although all 12 pages may not be required). However, the student should focus their language (significance & innovation particularly) to the Federal agency that best suits the science (i.e., NSF, NIH, USDA, DOD). While a desired side-product of this written work is to turn them into pre-doctoral Fellowship applications, the in-depth, high-level grantsmanship should be withheld until after the completion of the Qualifying Exam, when it becomes the purview of the student's advisor and Dissertation Committee.

2. Evaluation:

The written component of the qualifying exam will be evaluated on the following criteria:

The oral component of the CMB Qualifying Examination:

This component is organized to assess a student's ability to present their research project in a 30-minute seminar/chalk talk. In the first 15-minutes of the presentation, the student will present the background, biological question/hypothesis of the proposal, and finally the three aims, with their specific hypothesis and overall methodology approach. Then, the student will focus on Aim 3 (Stretch Aim) by sharing how this stretch aim will expand the dissertation work, how the new hypothesis will be tested, and what the outcomes of this new avenue could be. After the 30-minute presentation, the evaluation committee will ask questions to assess students' knowledge and ability to integrate new information, including alternative approaches and concepts, into their proposal. The scope of these questions can be based on any topic from the first-year curriculum. The student should be prepared to answer questions on their proposal and speculate if concepts not considered are UVM highlighted.

1. Philosophy and Expectations:

The qualifying exam is organized to assess the ability of students to think as a scientist in terms of hypothesis generation and logic, and to link these skills to a general understanding of how we gather the information and how these pursuits are linked in the big picture.

The goal in this assessment is to establish that the student is sufficiently equipped with fundamental knowledge and the capacity to integrate and apply that knowledge in a scientific manner to merit continuation in the Ph.D. program. This goal is to both protect unprepared students from spending unproductive time in graduate school and to protect the program and its faculty from expending effort on students unlikely to graduate.

Rubrics for Oral and Written will be uploaded to the education site upon approval of Education Committee.

Qualifying Exam Decision:

Following completion of the written and oral components of the Qualifying Exam, the evaluation committee will fill out the evaluation form that provides evidence of the student's qualifications for admittance to doctoral candidacy. The Education Committee member will collect a consensus with the other members of the evaluation committee, but in the absence of the student. This form will provide meaningful feedback on students' strengths and weaknesses, recommendations for elective courses, and the exam decision. A copy will be given to the student, the mentor, the Student Progress Committee, and the CMB administration.

Students can contact the Education Committee member of their Qualifying Exam Evaluation Committee for one-on-one feedback. If the student does not pass on the first attempt, the Evaluation Committee will provide written recommendations for improving the written document and oral presentation to the student and the CMB Program office. The student will be provided a timeline and format for a single retake before the August 31st deadline.

Appendix 3: Sample Student Schedule

Year 1 (12 core, 9 research, 2 elective = 23 total)		
Fall	Spring	Summer
Core Curriculum CLBI 7100 (6 cr)	Core Curriculum CLBI 7200 (6 cr)	Research CLBI 7491 (5 cr)
Research CLBI 7491 (2 cr)	Research CLBI 7491 (2 cr)	Choose Advisor
CMB Seminar CLBI 6080 (1 cr) [or other elective]	CMB Seminar CLBI 6080 (1 cr) [or other elective]	
Year 2 (3 core, 14 research, 6 elective = 23 total [46 cumulative])		
Fall	Spring	Summer
CLBI 7020 (2 cr)**	Grant Writing MPBP 6300 (2 cr)	CLBI 7491 (5 cr)
Ethics (1 cr) MMG/PBIO 6990: Ethics in Graduate Research (1 cr) or NSCI 6270: Responsible Conduct in Biomedical Research (1 cr). The first course is cross-listed by 2 departments.		Qualifying Exam by August 31
Elective (3 cr)	Elective (3 cr)	
CLBI 7491 (5 cr)	CLBI 7491 (4 cr)	
Teaching Assignment*		
Year 3 (16 research, 7 elective = 23 total [69 cumulative])		
Fall	Spring	Summer
Elective (3 cr) Seminar Elective (1 cr)	Elective (3 cr)	CLBI 7491 (5 cr)
CLBI 7491 (5 cr)	CLBI 7491 (6 cr)	
Year 4 (6 standard research [75 cumulative] + 17 continuing research credits)		
Fall	Spring	Summer
CLBI 7491 (6 cr) Note that 6 credits it all that was needed to hit the 75 credit mark for standard enrollment. Hereafter, student enrolls in continuing enrollment.	GRAD 9030 (9 cr)	GRAD 9020 (5 cr)
GRAD 9010 (3 cr)		
Year 5 & Beyond (23 continuing research credits annually)		
Fall	Spring	Summer
GRAD 9030 (9 cr)	GRAD 9030 (9 cr)	GRAD 9020 (5 cr)

* Students may be assigned to teach in their second year by the College of their chosen mentor. Funding sources of student may also require additional teaching assignments.

***Note that grad 9010/9020/9030 serve different functions. 9010 is for continuing registration wherein students are enrolled for other classes as well (<9 credits), 9020 is for summer, and 9030 is for those students taking the full 9 credits during fall/spring of just research.

**CLBI 7020 (Data Science) is not being offered in the 2026 year.

Appendix 4: How to register for classes?

Registering for classes:

1. Log in to myUVM <https://experience.elluciancloud.com/uvm/>
2. Under the “My Courses” card, click on “Manage My Courses”
3. Select the term you are registering for (ex. Fall 2026) and click submit
4. Scroll to the bottom of the page and click on “Class Search”
5. Select the subject of the class you want to register for (Biochemistry, Cell Biology, MMG, etc.) and click on “Section Search”
6. Check the box of the class you want to register for, scroll down to the bottom of the page and click “Register”
7. Ensure that your total credits for Fall/Spring semesters is 9 credits and for the Summer semester is 5 credits
 - a. This can be achieved through changing the number of credits of CLBI 7491 by clicking on the number of credits once registered, changing the number of credits and clicking “Submit Changes”

Running a degree audit:

1. Log in to myUVM <https://experience.elluciancloud.com/uvm/>
2. Click “View All Cards”
3. In the search bar, type “Degree audit”
4. Under the “Degree Audit” card, click on “Run a Degree Audit”
5. Ensure that all courses that you’ve taken are recorded in the Degree Audit