

## Advancement to Candidacy Guidelines

Advancement to candidacy is a university (campus-wide) requirement and must be completed prior to the prescribed pre-candidacy time limit, usually by the end of the fourth year. It is required that non-resident students and students entering the PhD Program FA24 or after advance to candidacy by the end of the third year. Advisors and students should discuss and establish an appropriate timeline for advancement to candidacy, with an understanding that the student should advance to candidacy prior to the stated pre-candidacy time limit. In general, the doctoral thesis committee members (see below for details on thesis committee membership) will evaluate the student's written and oral presentation based on the following questions.

- Does the student have a deep working knowledge of the relevant background literature that forms the basis for the dissertation research project? Does the student know and clearly communicate the key previous results or studies that inform the proposed research question?
- Has the student appropriately provided sufficient justification and rationale for the chosen research approach? Has the student considered potential problems and provided alternative approaches to offset these risks?
- Is the student making sufficient overall research progress toward the goal of making an original contribution to the chosen research field (e.g. publishing a first author research paper) before the end of their 5<sup>th</sup> year in the graduate program?

### Advancement thesis committee composition

After the student and advisor have agreed upon a projected date to advance to candidacy, the student and advisor will then formulate the advancement doctoral committee. This committee will oversee the student's progress from the time of advancement to candidacy until the student's successful PhD thesis defense and graduation. Minimally, the advancement to candidacy committee will consist of four members (five if jointly advised). Refer to the [graduate handbook](#) on committee composition requirements.

The chair of the committee is the Thesis Advisor (or co-chairs if jointly advised by two faculty members). Further, the student and advisor should select an Evaluation Head of the committee who will serve as the moderator for all committee meetings and complete the attached evaluation form. It is the student's responsibility to communicate the choice of Evaluation Head prior to the advancement committee meeting.

Once formulated, the student is required to communicate the committee composition to the Graduate Program Coordinator to ensure that the composition meets all requirements. The Graduate Program Coordinator should be contacted with any questions regarding committee composition. The committee composition is then routed to the Chair of the Graduate Committee and the Graduate Division for approval. **The approval process must take place at least two weeks prior to the scheduled advancement committee meeting.**

### Written advancement meeting report guidelines.

The student must submit a written advancement meeting report to all committee members (electronically) **one week prior to the advancement committee meeting.** Failure to submit this report by the stated deadline may result in a failure to advance to candidacy. It is highly recommended that the student sends early drafts of the written advancement meeting report to the Thesis Advisor to obtain constructive feedback prior to sending the advancement meeting report to thesis committee members.

The written advancement meeting report should not exceed 10 pages (references excluded from this limit) and be comprised of the following sections.

Specific Aims Page – 1 page

Background and Significance – 1-2 pages

Progress report for each aim following these guidelines. 2-3 pages for each aim.

Aim X:

Rationale.

Briefly restate the significance of the research question for this aim. Why is the research question interesting? What key previous results in the lab or in the literature form the basis for the hypothesis or research approach?

Research approach.

Justify chosen research approaches. Why is this the best method/approach to answer this research question?

Research progress toward aim completion.

What has been done and what is the contribution of new knowledge to the chosen research field? Include figures as needed. If the aim has not been started, state the expected results.

Potential pitfalls that may limit, or are currently limiting, research progress.

What if the approach doesn't work or yield interpretable data? Have there been unexpected problems with the chosen research approach?

Alternative Approaches.

This section should contain a discussion of alternative approaches to overcome potential or ongoing research barriers.

Please also include a timeline for achieving research goals, including a timeline for graduation. Further, a slide that discusses future career plans should be included at the end of the presentation.

### **Oral advancement to candidacy presentation**

The student should present the research background, significance, and progress using a similar structure as the written report. The student should prepare meeting materials that, when presented uninterrupted, do not exceed 45 minutes in length. Slides that lay out the research and graduation timelines should be included at the end of the presentation. Keep in mind the stated evaluation criteria listed above when constructing the written report and oral presentation. It is highly recommended that the student reviews the presentation with the Thesis Advisor prior to the advancement thesis committee meeting. It is also advisable that the student give a practice presentation to the entire research group if possible.

The student will be asked to leave the room prior to the commencement of the oral presentation. During this time the committee will have a discussion with the Thesis Advisor to evaluate overall student progress, research strengths and weaknesses, and any potential concerns.

The Thesis Advisor will similarly be asked to leave the room to allow time for the student to discuss any issues regarding the Thesis Advisor with committee members. If the student articulates substantial concerns regarding the Thesis Advisor that cannot be adequately addressed in the context of the committee meeting, the Evaluation Head should contact the Director or Associate Director of the PhD Program to discuss the issues and establish an action plan.

Following the student's presentation, the student may again be asked to leave the room while the committee discusses the quality of the student's oral and written presentation and the overall research progress. Once the student rejoins the meeting, the Evaluation Head will summarize the discussion and provide feedback to the student. Other committee members are encouraged to provide feedback as well. **The committee chair and evaluation head should budget at least 10 minutes of discussion time at the end of the meeting, without the student present, to carefully complete the online Biological Sciences Advancement to Candidacy evaluation form** The completed form will provide useful written feedback to the student and the PhD program. The PhD program expects faculty who serve on PhD thesis committees to provide substantive and thoughtful feedback as part of their instructional obligations.

The Evaluation Head will then inform the student if they have succeeded or failed to advance to candidacy. The student should be afforded the opportunity to ask questions regarding committee feedback. If the committee decides that the student has not met the criteria to advance to candidacy, the student will be placed on program probation. Program probation would require the committee to collaborate with the student to establish a detailed progress improvement plan with well-defined milestones and timelines for the student to repeat the advancement meeting to successfully advance to candidacy. The duration of the program probation will be at least 10 weeks and can be extended up to one year. The committee will establish an appropriate timeline. The probationary process requires scheduling a future committee meeting no more than 12 months from the date of the current committee meeting. Careful consideration of pre-candidacy time limits is needed. If the student has reached or is nearing the pre-candidacy time limit, sufficient time to repeat the advancement meeting may not be available. In this case, a failure to advance to candidacy may result in termination from the PhD program. Probationary status would be communicated with the Director of the PhD Program who will help facilitate development and implementation of the progress improvement plan.

## Advancement to Candidacy Evaluation Form

Student:

Year of student matriculation in doctoral program:

Thesis Advisor:

Evaluation Head:

Other Committee Members:

Date of Committee Meeting:

Evaluation Scale:

1 - Outstanding: Exceeds expectations with some minor issues or flaws

2 - Satisfactory: Met or above expectations with some notable but not concerning issues or flaws

3 - Requires Attention: Did not meet expectations with major issues or flaws.

1) Did the student submit their written advancement meeting report at least one week prior to the committee meeting?

Yes No

2) The quality of the written annual committee meeting report

was: Outstanding (1), Satisfactory (2), Requires Attention

(3)

3) The quality of the oral presentation was:

Outstanding (1), Satisfactory (2), Requires Attention (3)

4) Overall student progress since the previous committee

meeting is: Outstanding (1), Satisfactory (2), Requires

Attention (3)

5) The student's knowledge of the scientific literature relevant to the research

project is: Outstanding (1), Satisfactory (2), Requires Attention (3)

6) The student's ability to critically evaluate and interpret their

results is: Outstanding (1), Satisfactory (2), Requires Attention

(3)

7) The student's initiative and independence toward study design and project

directions is: Outstanding (1), Satisfactory (2), Requires Attention (3)

8) Is the Committee in agreement with the student's research priorities and research timelines for the next 12 months as stated in the student's written report and oral presentation?

Yes No

If not, please explain briefly below:

9) Provide a summary on the committee's overall evaluation of student academic progress. What are the major research goals for the next year?

10) Please provide an action plan to address specific areas of training that need attention. If the committee feels that certain minimal goals must be achieved in order for the student to remain in good standing in the graduate program, please specify these here. The committee should revisit this action plan the following year to see if progress has been made.

11) Should the student advance to candidacy?

Yes No

If the committee decides that the student has not met the criteria to advance to candidacy, the student will be placed on program probation. Program probation would require the committee to collaborate with the student to establish a detailed progress improvement plan with well-defined milestones and timelines for the student to repeat the advancement meeting to successfully advance to candidacy. The duration of the program probation will be at least 10 weeks and can be extended up to one year. The committee will establish an appropriate timeline. The probationary process requires scheduling a future committee meeting no more than 12 months from the date of the current committee meeting. Careful consideration of pre-candidacy time limits is needed. If the student has reached or is nearing the pre-candidacy time limit, sufficient time to repeat the advancement meeting may not be available. In this case, a failure to advance to candidacy may result in termination from the PhD program. Probationary status would be communicated with the Director of the PhD Program who will help facilitate development and implementation of the progress improvement plan.

Signed by Evaluation Head  
Signed by Thesis Advisor  
Signed by Student