



UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

Integrative and Conservation Biology PhD Program Handbook

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I. Introduction

What is a PhD? A Doctor of Philosophy is not only a learned individual driven by curiosity, but someone who has contributed original knowledge to their chosen field. This makes novel research a central tenet of any PhD program. It is through a doctoral student's capacity to conduct independent, novel research that they are assessed; it ultimately determines if a PhD is to be awarded. Independent learning is also a key component of graduate coursework, where emphasis is placed on the development of analytical skills and critical thinking. The emphasis on independence in a PhD is of the utmost importance. The central activities and missions of a university rest upon the fundamental assumption that all members of the university community conduct themselves in accordance with a strict adherence to academic and scholarly integrity. As a graduate student and member of the university community, you are expected to display the highest standards of academic and personal integrity.

This is the Handbook for the Biology Department's PhD program in *Integrative and Conservation Biology* (ICB). This program includes two tracks: *Conservation Biology* and *Integrative Biology*. This program handbook describes and interprets details about degree requirements and curriculum specific to the ICB PhD program. In particular, this handbook interprets formal university-level policies that can be found in the following three locations:

- (1) [General Graduate Policies](#) – apply to all graduate students at UCF
- (2) [Doctoral Program Policies](#) – apply to all doctoral students at UCF
- (3) [ICB PhD Graduate Catalog Entries](#) – apply to all doctoral students in the ICB program.
Requirements for students in specific tracks are also found here.

The [General Graduate Policies](#) and [Doctoral Program Policies](#) define how doctoral programs function at UCF and set rules for all doctoral students at the university. The [ICB PhD Graduate Catalog Entries](#) for our program define how the ICB PhD program operates, and sets rules for all doctoral students in the program. Every doctoral student is unique, but rules at these two levels cannot be easily changed or waived based on individual circumstances, other than through specific procedures laid out in the policies themselves. Given this, it is critical that you familiarize yourself with these three sources, and refer to these in conjunction with your faculty advisor and the graduate program director if in doubt about how a policy applies to a specific situation. This Handbook repeatedly references these documents.

The purpose of this Handbook is to serve as a more accessible interpretation of how these different policies function in practice within our program, including norms, average timelines, and typical ways requirements are met. While it serves as a useful guide to expectations, because this Handbook is interpretive it cannot cover every possible set of circumstances. Graduate students are diverse in their preparation, needs, and goals, and there may be times that deviation from the 'typical' cases described herein are warranted, with approval from a student's faculty advisor and the Graduate Program Director. While this Handbook attempts to describe a range of possibilities, others may be allowable if they best serve the needs of the student while complying with the [General Graduate Policies](#), [Doctoral Program Policies](#), and [ICB PhD Graduate Catalog Entries](#).

In addition, the university-wide [Graduate Student Handbook](#) includes university information, policies, requirements and guidance for all graduate students. While both handbooks are useful resources, know that you are always encouraged to speak with your faculty advisor, staff graduate specialist, Graduate Program Director, and staff of the College of Graduate Studies.

Overview and Milestones

The ICB PhD program has five major milestones: (1) assembling a doctoral advisory committee, (2) completing formal coursework, (3) a written Qualifying Exam, (4) a combination written and oral Candidacy Exam focused on a dissertation proposal, and (5) the final Dissertation Defense. The specific requirements for these five milestones are discussed in detail in subsequent sections.

The typical timeline for these milestones will differ based on student-specific factors, including whether the student has a Master's degree, the nature of the student's research, etc. Entering students should work with their faculty advisor to make a timeline for achieving each of these milestones.

Milestone 1 – Doctoral Advisory Committee

In the first year of the program, new students work with their faculty advisor to select a doctoral advisory committee. This committee is composed initially of the faculty advisor and at least two other faculty members in Biology. An 'outside' committee member from another department or outside the university is added after completion of the written Qualifying Exam. During the first year, the student should work with the advisor and committee to design a Program of Study, the list of coursework that will be used to satisfy degree coursework requirements. Students should have their first formal committee meeting during the first year.

Milestone 2 – Completing Formal Coursework

The timing of the completion of formal coursework can vary substantially among students. Students without a Master's degree should plan to complete formal coursework requirements by around the end of their second year. This may occur slightly earlier or slightly later depending on factors like the schedule availability of desired courses, the number of "informal coursework" credits a student has taken (e.g. Doctoral Research), whether a student has performed an internship, etc. Students should strive to complete all formal coursework by the first semester of their third year at the latest. Student with Master's degrees typically take far less coursework, and may complete formal coursework as early as the end of their first year.

Milestone 3 – Qualifying Exam

The written qualifying exam should be conducted as a student is approaching the end of their formal coursework, as the purpose is to assess the student's knowledge in the discipline and readiness to proceed in the program. This is typically conducted during a student's second year in the program, but can be done earlier so long as the Candidacy Exam can be completed within 12 months thereafter.

Milestone 4 – Candidacy Exam

The Candidacy Exam has a written component (the dissertation proposal) and an oral component (often referred to as the 'proposal defense'). The oral component consists of a public seminar presenting the proposed research and a private oral examination covering the proposal and related knowledge thereafter. The Candidacy Exam must be completed by no later than the end of the third year. It is most typically conducted between the end of the student's second year and the middle of their third year, but could be conducted earlier if formal coursework has been completed. Once a student has completed the Candidacy Exam and the preceding milestones, they will have achieved "candidacy" and are considered a "PhD candidate". Once students have achieved candidacy, they typically take only dissertation hours until defending.

Milestone 5 – Dissertation Defense

The amount of time between achieving candidacy and completing and defending the dissertation varies widely. Typically students complete and defend their dissertations between 4 and 6 years after entering the program (2-3 years after achieving candidacy). Under the General Graduate Policies, students have a maximum of seven years from matriculation to obtain a doctoral degree or they are dismissed from the program.

Table 1. Typical timelines for doctoral student completion of the five milestones. Bold colors indicate the most typical range of timing, while light colors indicate the range of possible/acceptable timing. Each year is divided into three semesters (Fall, Spring, and Summer).

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7
(1) Committee + Program of Study	Dark Red	Light Red					
(2) Complete Formal Coursework		Light Orange	Dark Orange	Light Orange			
(3) Qualifying Exam		Light Green	Dark Green				
(4) Candidacy Exam		Light Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue			
(5) Dissertation Defense					Light Purple	Dark Purple	Light Purple

Expectations of New Students

Incoming doctoral students are required to attend certain orientations as well as take specific trainings either during the first few weeks in the program, or during the first few semesters:

Orientations

- A department-level orientation is scheduled one week prior to the start of classes each fall, just after the start of GTA/GRA contracts. This orientation will cover expectations for Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) and Graduate Research Assistants (GRAs), as well as general program information.
- Students who will serve as GTAs are required to participate in the GTA orientation provided by the UCF Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning and the College of Sciences.
- An additional university orientation is held approximately one week prior to the fall semester, for which students are encouraged to attend.

Required Trainings

- Teaching Assistant/Associate Training. All students who will serve as GTAs are required to participate in Teaching Assistant or Teaching Associate training to ensure familiarity with UCF policies relating to instruction as well as FERPA and other legal requirements. All GTAs who are eligible for Teaching Associate status (those holding Master’s degrees or over 18 hours of graduate coursework) are required to apply for Teaching Associate status as soon as eligible. <https://graduate.ucf.edu/graduate-teaching/>
- Kognito At-Risk for Faculty and Staff. All student employees (including GTAs and GRAs) are required to be trained to identify and assist with students in crisis, including understanding mental health issues and the process for referring students to counseling resources. <https://caps.sdes.ucf.edu/kognito/>
- Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) training is required of all incoming students during their first semester and before working in a laboratory space. The specific trainings necessary will depend on the laboratory in which the student is working, and typically include online and in-person components. Students should check with their faculty advisor for more information. <https://ehs.ucf.edu/researchsafety>
- Academic Integrity Training is required of all incoming students to ensure clarity in expectations for research conduct, plagiarism, and related issues. This training is comprised of two parts:
 - Online Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) training in the appropriate category (life science/biology). This component must be completed in the first two semesters in the program. <https://graduate.ucf.edu/pathways-to-success/#CITI%20Training>
 - Four face-to-face Academic Integrity workshops coordinated through *Pathways to Success*. Students must take at least two CORE workshops and at least two other CORE or ELECTIVE workshops for a total of four workshops. This component must be completed before a student advances to candidacy. <https://graduate.ucf.edu/pathways-to-success/#Academic%20Integrity%20Workshops>

II. General Degree Requirements

Track Specialization

Upon applying to the program, doctoral students are required to identify a track of study. The two tracks have different course requirements and should be chosen according to the student's interests and research program. The track may be changed at any time during the student's time within the program. The tracks are as follows:

Integrative Biology Track – aims to understand the complexity of life by integrating research from across the continuum of biological disciplines, from molecules to ecosystems, as well as from other scientific fields. Integrative biologists are well suited to careers as managers and policy makers, and in particular scientific educators and researchers.

Conservation Biology Track – aims to understand the consequences of anthropogenic activities on biodiversity and ecosystem health, and to develop management tools directed at mitigating the impact of these activities. Conservation biologists are well suited to careers as scientific educators, researchers, and in particular managers and policy makers.

Credit Hour Requirement

- Both tracks require a minimum of 72 semester hours of graduate credit, including general and track-specific required courses, elective coursework, and dissertation research.
- All coursework in a doctoral program must be at 5000 level or higher, with a minimum of 36 credit hours at or above the 6000 level.
- Coursework must include a minimum of 27 hours of formal coursework excluding independent study, doctoral research, and dissertation hours. More detail is provided on these distinctions under the 'Curriculum' section, along with required courses and course type breakdowns.

Enrollment Requirements

Enrollment requirements depend on whether the student is pre-candidacy or post-candidacy, whether it is fall/spring or summer, and whether the student is supported as a GTA/GRA or has a different source of support.

Pre-Candidacy

- Pre-candidacy students employed as a GTA or GRA must enroll in 9 credit hours (full-time) in fall and spring semesters, and must enroll in 6 credit hours (full-time) if employed as a GTA or GRA during a summer semester.
- Summer enrollment is not required pre-candidacy if a student is not supported by GTA/GRA (e.g., supported as an OPS hourly employee).
- Students with other forms of support (e.g., fellowships, external scholarships, self-funding) may have different enrollment requirements specific to their source of funding, and should check with their faculty advisor and the Graduate Program Director about their specific situation to ensure compliance.
- Credits taken in excess of the credit hour requirements listed above are not covered by tuition remission (tuition waiver or payment from a grant).

Post-candidacy

- Once a student becomes a PhD Candidate, the student must be enrolled in 3 credit hours (full-time) each semester including summers no matter the source of support, with the caveats listed in the next bullet points.
- After a PhD candidate accumulates 15 credit hours of Doctoral Dissertation (PCB 7980), they may enroll in a minimum of one dissertation hour per semester, with approval of the faculty advisor and if not employed as a GTA/GRA (e.g., over the summer).
- If a PhD candidate does not wish to enroll in summer, they must file for a one semester Leave of Absence with the College of Graduate Studies. Any student may request up to 6 consecutive semesters of leave for qualifying

reasons; however, a maximum of 3 semesters of leave can be added to the student's seven year time limit for earning a doctoral degree. The [General Graduate Policies](#) and [Doctoral Program Policies](#) explain this process further.

GPA Requirement

The College of Sciences requires that students maintain a 3.00 GPA in their program of study in order to qualify for graduation. At UCF, "C" grades (C, C+, C-), as well as D, D+, D-, F, and U grades, are all considered unsatisfactory grades for a graduate student. A student may apply a maximum total of six credit hours of "C" grades, or the "C" grade credits associated with at most two classes, whichever is greater, to satisfy degree program requirements. Exceeding six semester credit hours of unsatisfactory grades is grounds for dismissal for all degree-seeking and non-degree students. A grade of "I" (incomplete) is assigned by the instructor when a student is unable to complete a course due to extenuating circumstances, and when all requirements can clearly be completed in a short period of time following the close of regular classes. Grades of "I" must be resolved within one calendar year or prior to graduation, whichever comes first, or they will revert to "F" or "U" grades.

Program of Study

A Program of Study outlines the courses the student will take to fulfill their coursework requirements. It is important to involve your committee in developing this program. The Program of Study form must be approved by a student's faculty advisor and filed with the Graduate Specialist by the end of a student's second semester in the program.

Annual Progress Report

The student is responsible for filing an Annual Progress Report with the department and with the College of Graduate Studies each year. The College of Graduate Studies report is currently due in May, and the departmental report is currently due November 1st, and will be aligned to a May date in the near future (first semester PhD students are not required to submit the departmental report at this time). To fulfill the report requirements, it is mandatory that the student meet with their advisory committee once per year (January 1st – November 1st), where the majority of the committee is simultaneously present (i.e. a group meeting, including telepresence). Any committee meeting where a majority is present satisfies the report requirements, including Candidacy Exams.

Publication Requirement

PhD candidates are required to have at least one peer-reviewed paper accepted for publication and a second paper submitted based on work done while in the ICB PhD program in advance of their defense. The student must be the first author on at least one paper. In the event that there is not a decision from a journal as of 6 months from submission or if the articles are rejected, the graduate program faculty will review the student's work and determine by vote if it fulfills this requirement.

III. Curriculum

Please note that the [ICB PhD Graduate Catalog Entries](#) for the year of matriculation govern a student's degree requirements, such that if the curriculum changes while a student is in progress, the student's degree is governed by the old requirements. This section discusses the current requirements, though there have been largely only program naming convention changes in recent years. Please refer to the [ICB PhD Graduate Catalog Entries](#) if in doubt.

Coursework - A minimum of 72 credit hours are required to graduate, including:

- a minimum of 27 formal coursework credits
- a maximum of 12 informal coursework credits (more can be taken but will not count toward the degree)
- a minimum of 15 Doctoral Dissertation credits (PCB 7980)
- all coursework must be at 5000 level or higher, with a minimum of 36 credit hours at or above the 6000 level.

IMPORTANT: Doctoral students who have already completed a Master's degree may request that enrollment in formal coursework be waived based on previous course work, as well as the transfer of up to 30 credit hours at the discretion of the Graduate Program Director. Requests should be made to the Graduate Program Director before matriculation or during the first semester in the program.

What are the different kinds of courses?

Formal Coursework - Existing courses that involve standard class instruction of a defined body of disciplinary knowledge. These courses involve interactions between a formal course instructor and the students that make up the class. These are most often traditional face-to-face courses, but can also include field courses and mixed mode courses, and can be either graduate-only or split-level (the latter are typically 5000-level). This category includes both required courses as well as elective courses, the professional development course, and the seminar course, but this category is distinguished from the four types of "informal courses" described below.

Independent Study (PCB 6908) – An individualized course of study created outside of the standard-format formal courses offered by the university. Independent study must have a defined core of knowledge to be learned by the student(s). The core of knowledge to be learned by the students(s) must be specified in written form and approved by the student(s), the instructor, and the Graduate Program Director prior to enrollment. Independent Study cannot be used to satisfy the "formal coursework" requirement.

Internship (PCB 6946) – An outside internship with a government agency, non-profit organization, for-profit company, or other institution where the student will conduct scientific research, perform conservation management, apply science to policy, or otherwise gain workplace experience in support of the student's career goals. Internships can be paid or unpaid, and the number of credits is variable depending on the time investment. The faculty advisor should serve as the instructor for Internship courses, and oversee that the goals of the internship are met. Internship credit cannot be used to satisfy the "formal coursework" requirement.

Doctoral Research (PCB 7919) – Doctoral-level research/scholarly work. Research hours taken **PRIOR** to passing candidacy. These can include laboratory rotations, preparation for candidacy exams, or standard research and scholarly endeavors directed toward completion of a project or a dissertation. Doctoral Research cannot be used to satisfy the "formal coursework" requirement.

Doctoral Dissertation (PCB 7980) – Dissertation hours are taken **AFTER** advancement to candidacy and directed toward completion of a dissertation through research, analysis, writing, and other scholarly activities. Doctoral Dissertation cannot be used to satisfy the "formal coursework" requirement.

How many courses and credits should I take in a given semester?

This differs depending on whether you are pre- or post-candidacy, your form of support, and whether it is the academic year or summer – see the "Enrollment Requirements" section on page 6. Typically, first year students take two formal courses (~3 credits each) along with Professional Development (1 credit), Seminar in Biology (1 credit), and Doctoral Research (~1 credit) to get to full-time status (9 credits) each semester in their first academic year. After that, a combination of formal and informal courses is used to get to full-time status, planned in consultation with the advisor. **CAUTION:** it is NOT a good idea to take more than two formal courses at once if a student is trying to balance coursework with GTA/GRA duties and starting dissertation research projects. Post-candidacy, students should only take dissertation hours – 3 per semester unless a student needs to take more in the final few semesters to get to 72 credits for a planned graduation date. See the "Example Timelines for Completion" section on page 10.

What are the course requirements for each track?

The table on the next page indicates the formal and informal coursework required for the **Integrative Biology Track** and the **Conservation Biology Track**. The only difference is that the Conservation Biology track has two additional required courses, and proportionally fewer formal elective hours. A student can examine how their courses will satisfy degree requirements by [processing a Graduate Plan of Study report or What If? Analysis in MyUCF](#).

		Course Requirements	IntBio Track	ConsBio Track
Formal Coursework (27 credits total)	Required Courses	<p>Both Tracks: PCB6095 Professional Development I PCB6096 Professional Development II PCB6935 Seminar in Biology (1 credit, repeated twice) PCB6466 Methods in Experimental Ecology I</p> <p>Conservation Biology Track only: PCB6042 Conservation Biology Theory PBC6053C Restoration Ecology</p>	Credits 1 1 2 3 - -	Credits 1 1 2 3 4 4
	Formal Elective Courses	Any 5000 level or greater course at UCF (chosen in consultation with advisor and committee). A second graduate level statistics course is strongly encouraged. At least 4 credits of the formal coursework electives must be offered through the Biology department.	20	12
Dissertation (15 credits)	Dissertation Hours	PCB7980 – Doctoral Dissertation	15	15
Additional Credits (30 credits)	Informal Courses, Additional Dissertation Hours, and Any Other Electives	<p>May include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Up to a maximum of 12 credits of informal courses including Doctoral Research (PCB7919), Independent Study (PCB6908) and/or Internships (PCB 6949) As many Doctoral Dissertation (PCB7980) credits as desired. Any additional formal coursework electives desired. <p>NOTE: the program highly recommends that students apply the full 12 credits of informal courses (pre-candidacy) and as many Doctoral Dissertation credits (post-candidacy) as possible toward this requirement. Doing otherwise will make it more difficult to meet program milestones on time.</p>	30	30
Total Credit Hours:			72	72

How do I sign up for courses?

For formal courses, continuing graduate students register through MyUCF after their assigned appointment day and time, which can be found in MyUCF. All continuing students should register early. **For graduate students with fellowships or assistantships, failure to register early may result in delays in receiving assistantship paychecks and sometimes result in the loss of tuition waivers.** Continuing graduate students registering for informal courses (including Independent Study, Internship, Doctoral Research, or Doctoral Dissertation) must fill out the [COS Restricted Registration Agreement Form](#).

What formal courses are available and when is the course I want to take offered?

Graduate course offerings change frequently, especially graduate elective offerings. The Biology department creates an annual plan to determine the graduate courses that will be offered in the coming two academic years. The table on the next page lists the graduate courses (other than Seminar and Professional Development) that will be offered over the coming two academic years, but is subject to change. Some courses may repeat thereafter. **IMPORTANT:** If a student would like to take advantage of special resources available on another campus but not available on the home campus (e.g., special course offerings, research opportunities, unique laboratories, library collections) they may file for **Traveling Scholar** status and take up to 6 credit hours elsewhere – see the [General Graduate Policies](#).

Upcoming Graduate Course Offerings

	2021-2022	2022 - 2023
Fall	BSC5416 Sensory Ecology BSC5824 Biogeography BSC5937 Programming for Biologists BOT5503 Plant Physiology PCB5447 Disease Ecology PCB5469 GIS for Biologists and Ecologists PCB6466 Methods in Experimental Ecology I	BSC5416 Sensory Ecology BSC5937 Programming for Biologists BOT5530 Plant Genomics + Biochemistry BOT5937L Plant Microtechniques PCB5447 Disease Ecology PCB5469 GIS for Biologists and Ecologists PCB6046 Advanced Ecology PCB6466 Methods in Experimental Ecology I
Spring	BSC5467 Scientific Diving BSC6042 Conservation Biology ENY5006 Entomology PCB5362 Wetland Ecology + Biogeochemistry PCB6468 Methods in Experimental Ecology II PCB6677 Molecular Ecology + Phylogenetics	BSC5467 Scientific Diving BSC6042 Conservation Biology ENY5006 Entomology PCB6509 Global Change Biology PCB6053 Restoration Ecology PCB6468 Methods in Experimental Ecology II PCB6556 Conservation Genetics PCB6675 Evolutionary Biology ZOO5563 Herpetology

IV. Example Timelines for Completion

Below is an example of a timeline for a student entering without an MS degree, taking 5 years to complete the program (72 credits total). While this is a fairly typical timeline, many variations are possible within the program guidelines – a plan customized to the student’s needs should be developed at the same time as the program of study, and adjusted thereafter.

	Fall	Cr	Spring	Cr	Summer	Cr
Year 1	PCB6095 Prof. Development I PCB6935 Seminar in Biology PCB6466 Methods I Formal course PCB7919 Doctoral Research <i>9 credits total</i> SUBMIT PROGRAM OF STUDY	1 1 3 3 1	PCB6095 Prof. Development II PCB6935 Seminar in Biology Formal course Formal course PCB7919 Doctoral Research <i>9 credits total</i> FIRST COMMITTEE MEETING	1 1 3 3 1	Informal course <i>(if enrolled – e.g. GTA/GRA)</i>	6 ?
Year 2	Formal course Formal course Informal course <i>9 credits total</i>	3 3 3	Formal course Formal course Informal course <i>9 credits total</i> QUALIFYING EXAM	3 3 3	Informal course <i>(if enrolled – e.g. GTA/GRA)</i>	6 ?
Year 3	PCB7919 Doctoral Research <i>9 credits total</i> CANDIDACY EXAM	9	PCB7980 Doctoral Dissertation <i>3 credits total</i>	3	PCB7980 Doctoral Dissertation <i>3 credits total</i>	3
Year 4	PCB7980 Doctoral Dissertation <i>3 credits total</i>	3	PCB7980 Doctoral Dissertation <i>3 credits total</i>	3	PCB7980 Doctoral Dissertation <i>3 credits total</i>	3
Year 5	PCB7980 Doctoral Dissertation <i>3-9 credits total</i>	8	PCB7980 Doctoral Dissertation <i>3-9 credits total</i> DISSERTATION DEFENSE	9		

Below is an example of a rapid timeline for a student entering with an MS degree and strong statistical background, who has chosen to waive the formal coursework (transferring 30 credits from their Master’s degree) to finish in 4 years. Under this plan, the student takes only the 4 required credits of Professional Development and Seminar, takes nothing but Doctoral Research until candidacy (counting only 12 credits toward the degree), and completes the required 15 hours of Doctoral Dissertation credits plus an additional 11 credit hours of Doctoral Dissertation to reach 72 credit hours total. This is perhaps the fastest a student could complete the PhD program.

	Fall	Cr	Spring	Cr	Summer	Cr
Year 1	PCB6095 Prof. Development I PCB6935 Seminar in Biology PCB7919 Doctoral Research <i>9 credits total</i> SUBMIT PROGRAM OF STUDY FIRST COMMITTEE MEETING	1 1 7	PCB6095 Prof. Development II PCB6935 Seminar in Biology PCB7919 Doctoral Research <i>9 credits total</i> QUALIFYING EXAM	1 1 7	PCB7919 Doctoral Research <i>(if enrolled – e.g. GTA/GRA)</i>	6?
Year 2	PCB7919 Doctoral Research <i>9 credits total</i> CANDIDACY EXAM	9	PCB7980 Doctoral Dissertation <i>3 credits total</i>	3	PCB7980 Doctoral Dissertation <i>3 credits total</i>	3
Year 3	PCB7980 Doctoral Dissertation <i>3 credits total</i>	3	PCB7980 Doctoral Dissertation <i>3 credits total</i>	3	PCB7980 Doctoral Dissertation <i>3 credits total</i>	3
Year 4	PCB7980 Doctoral Dissertation <i>3 credits total</i>	3	PCB7980 Doctoral Dissertation <i>3-9 credits total</i> DISSERTATION DEFENSE	8		

V. Dissertation Advisor and Advisory Committee

Dissertation Advisor – The student’s dissertation advisor helps to shape their research and guide them through the PhD requirements. This includes helping to outline the scope of the research being undertaken, assisting with project design and implementation, as well as assisting with other degree requirements such as the selection of coursework. It is important to note that the advisor’s role is intended to be supportive, and faculty advisors should not be expected to take a lead role in the formulation or execution of the student’s research, or to formally impart the knowledge necessary to complete the degree. A supportive advisor-advisee relationship allows the student to develop as an independent scientist who can ultimately operate without supervision. In general, the advisor will be the student’s most frequent point of contact regarding the dissertation and degree requirements. Accordingly, an advisor should make themselves available throughout the year (including summers) to the student for regular meetings to assess student progress, and to assist the student with research needs. Advisors should also be available to read and comment on all formal documents associated with the degree (e.g., proposals or dissertation drafts) and return comments to the student within a reasonable timeframe.

Doctoral students and faculty advisors are recommended to adopt an individual development plan and an outline of expectations for both the student and the advisor. Conflicts between the advisor and student should be mediated by the student’s advisory committee and/or the graduate program director. Ethics violations should be directed to the graduate program director and/or appropriate university-level reporting mechanisms depending on the situation. If an advisor is unable to meet a student’s needs, a student may request to change their dissertation advisor at any time. The student’s advisor also reserves the right to step down in their role as advisor at any time. In both cases, it is the student’s responsibility to secure a replacement advisor within 12 months. If an approved faculty advisor replacement is not found, the student will be dismissed from the program.

Dissertation Advisory Committee – The role of the student’s Dissertation Advisory Committee is to advise the student in their dissertation research and program of study, mediate conflicts between the student and the advisor (generally in regards to the scope and nature of the proposed work), and ultimately to judge whether a PhD is to be awarded. This involves assessing and advising the student on study design, data analysis, the interpretation of results, and broader relevance of the research. The committee will serve as a resource for the student throughout the degree program and

process of completing the dissertation. In turn, the student must keep their advisor and committee regularly informed of their progress and any problems, especially during the required annual progress meeting.

To properly advise the student, the Dissertation Advisory Committee should be formed within the first year of the PhD program using the [Doctoral Committee / Candidacy Status Form](#). Rules governing the Dissertation Advisory Committee can be found in the university-level Doctoral Program Policies. In brief, these are:

- The student’s dissertation advisor “chairs” the Advisory Committee. A “co-chair” can be named when two faculty are advising the student.
- If the advisor has not served previously on a committee that has graduated a student, another committee member who has this experience must be designated as “vice chair” of the committee.
- All members of an Advisory Committee must hold either [Graduate Faculty](#) status or [Graduate Faculty Scholar](#) status. The Graduate Catalog contains formal lists updated annually. A Graduate Faculty Scholar cannot serve as “chair”, only a “co-chair” or “vice chair” (or regular member).
- Prior to the Qualifying Exam, the Dissertation Advisory Committee must consist of a minimum of three Graduate Faculty members in the Biology department, including the dissertation advisor and two other Biology graduate faculty.
- After successful completion of the Qualifying Exam, a member from outside the department (or university) who qualifies as Graduate Faculty or a Graduate Faculty Scholar must be added to the committee. It is recommended that this external member is added only after the student passes the Qualifying Exam.
- Emeritus faculty are considered outside members, but may also serve as committee vice chair.
- **To avoid conflicts of interest, current and potential employers of the student should be excluded from the dissertation committee.**
- The Curriculum Vitae of potential off-campus committee members are reviewed by the Graduate Program Director and the College of Graduate Studies for suitability, and such individuals can then be appointed to Graduate Faculty Scholar status.
- When more than four members are appointed to a committee, UCF Graduate Faculty members must form the majority.
- The Dissertation Advisory Committee must be approved by the Graduate Program Director and the College of Graduate Studies prior to any formal examinations – this occurs during committee formation using the Doctoral Committee / Candidacy Status Form.
- The student reserves the right to replace a dissertation committee member at any time. Committee members also reserve the right to step down from their committee role.
- The College of Graduate Studies reserves the right to review appointments to a Dissertation Advisory Committee, place a representative on the committee, or appoint a co-chair.

VI. Qualifying Exam, Candidacy Exam, and Advancing to Candidacy

Qualifying Exam

A written examination (format at the discretion of the committee), most commonly either:

- (1) **traditional Q+A exam**
- (2) **mock grant proposal**
- (3) **review paper**

Must occur by the end of Year 2. Must be passed before the candidacy exam.

Candidacy Exam

Two components:

- (1) **Written dissertation proposal**
- (2) Public **oral presentation** of the proposal and subsequent private **oral exam** with the committee.

Must occur by the end of Year 3. Last step before advancing to candidacy.

Qualifying Exam

The goal of the Qualifying Exam is to test a student's knowledge base and competency as a functioning scientist. The Qualifying Exam is a written exam, administered individually to each student within their first two years. The chair of the dissertation committee (the dissertation advisor) coordinates and implements the exam, serving as the intermediary between the committee and the student during the exam.

The structure of the Qualifying Exam is ultimately at the discretion of the committee, but most commonly takes one of three forms depending on the preference of the student:

(1) A **Traditional Exam**. Each committee member contributes a set of formal questions focused on a particular range of general knowledge and discipline-specific topics within the student's research area. Through this exam format, the goal is for the student to demonstrate their content knowledge. The student should have a conversation with each committee member at least two months in advance of the exam, and each committee member must clearly articulate in writing to both the student and the dissertation advisor (a) the areas that will be included in the exam, (b) the expected time length of the exam, and (c) how the exam will be evaluated. Committee members will provide their exam questions to the dissertation advisor, who will distribute these to the student and collect the student's answers to provide to each committee member for grading. Typically this type of exam is completed over several days (one day per committee member) within a single week. The exam must be the sole work of the student, other than communication with the advisor or committee member to clarify exam questions or expectations.

(2) A **Mock Grant Proposal**. The goal of this type of exam is to generate a high-quality grant proposal that has the potential for funding (as deemed by the committee) at a specific funding agency. The topic can relate to the student's dissertation research, but the grant proposal should be wholly new work. Through this exam format, the goal is for the student to demonstrate skill in research design, communication, and grantsmanship. The student should identify a specific grant solicitation from a specific funding agency and adhere to the requirements of that funding source including scope, length, and formatting. Expectations of the committee should be discussed and formalized in writing before the exam period begins.

(3) A **Review Paper**. The goal of this type of exam is to generate a critical review paper offering a novel synthesis of the field, identifying knowledge gaps, providing new insights, and/or offering suggestions for future research. The paper should not simply be a summary of the literature in a given research area. Expectations of the committee should be discussed and formalized in writing before the exam period begins. It is recommended that the student provide the committee with several well-formulated potential topics. The committee will then discuss and arrive at a consensus decision on the exam topic. The student's goal should be to create a submit-able product. For the purpose of the exam, however, the product need not be fully publication-ready.

Rules for formats other than a traditional exam (e.g., mock grant proposal or review paper):

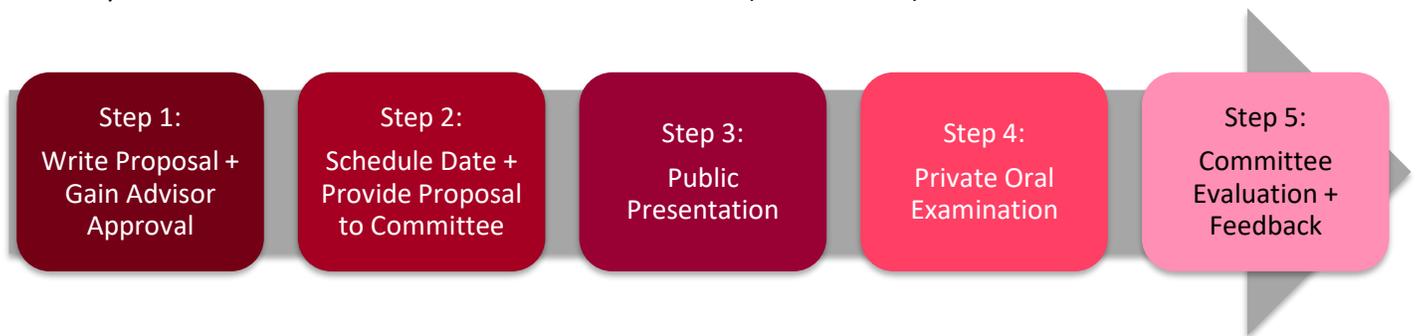
- (a) the product must be a novel document that is not part of the student's existing body of work.
- (b) the product must be the sole creation of the student; no communication between the student and others (including the student's advisor and committee) regarding the exam can occur unless to clarify exam expectations.
- (c) the product must be completed within a 6-week exam period. This is an examination, so deadlines must be observed. If the product is not completed within 6 weeks, the exam will default to the traditional exam format comprised of written questions.
- (d) or grading, the product will be assigned one of the following categories: accept, revise & resubmit, or reject. If the document is to be revised, the student has 3 weeks to resubmit, at which point the document will be either accepted or rejected (no resubmission). If the document is rejected, the second exam attempt will default to the traditional exam format.
- (e) a review paper exam format (if eventually published) cannot be used to satisfy the degree publication requirement, but it can act as a supplemental chapter in the dissertation if desired.
- (f) failure to adhere to exam goals should result in a failed grade, regardless of the other exam merits.

Evaluation and processes after the Qualifying Exam:

- Each committee member will assess the student’s performance on an official Examination Form obtained from the Graduate Specialist, as well as provide feedback to the student.
- In order to continue in the program, the majority of committee members must assign a passing grade.
- Any student scoring below this (lack of a majority of passing grades) must repeat the exam within six calendar months. A second failed attempt will result in dismissal from the program.
- Following the exam, the committee chair (dissertation advisor) will also submit a copy of the exam to the Graduate Specialist to be included in the student’s file.
- Upon successful completion of the Qualifying Exam, the external member should be added to the dissertation committee in advance of the Candidacy Exam.

Candidacy Exam

The purpose of the Candidacy Exam is for the student to formally propose their planned dissertation research and have that proposed research evaluated by the dissertation committee. The Candidacy Exam is a two-part exam, consisting of (1) the written dissertation proposal, and (2) the oral proposal presentation (often referred to as the ‘proposal defense’) composed of a public presentation and a private oral examination held by the committee immediately thereafter. The Candidacy Exam must occur within 36 months of matriculation (end of Year 3).



Step 1: The student writes a proposal outlining their planned dissertation research. Typically, the proposal will be in the format recommended below. However, in cases where this format is not appropriate, an alternative format may be used with the approval of the dissertation advisor. The proposal should be approximately 10 to 15 pages in length not including references, single-spaced and typed in 12-point font with one-inch margins on all sides. The use of figures and tables is encouraged. With rare exceptions it is expected that dissertation research will be hypothesis-driven.

Recommended format:

- Specific Aims: Describe concisely the question(s) to be addressed and the specific goals of the dissertation research as they relate to the question(s), including clear statements of hypotheses to be tested.
- Background and Significance: Review background literature relevant to the dissertation topic, indicating clearly where gaps in knowledge exist. Justify the need for the research by explaining its anticipated significance. Conclude by linking gaps in current knowledge to the proposed specific aims.
- Methodology: Outline carefully the study design for each specific aim. Methodologies should be explained in sufficient detail to allow committee members to assess the validity of their use in the study. Potential outcomes and alternative approaches should be discussed.
- Literature Cited: References should be indicated in the main body of the proposal wherever appropriate and should follow the format of a peer-reviewed journal in a field of study appropriate to your research. This section can be as long as necessary.

Step 2: Once approved by the dissertation advisor, the student will schedule the public presentation (the ‘proposal defense’) with the Graduate Specialist, reserving a room that can accommodate a minimum of 20 people. A virtual video conference format is permitted (e.g., Zoom) with approval of the advisor, committee, and Graduate Program Director. The student must submit the proposal to the dissertation committee for review at least four weeks prior to the public

presentation. An abstract describing the proposed research will be posted in the Biological Sciences Building and circulated by e-mail among faculty and graduate students at least two weeks prior to the event.

Step 3: The student will present their proposed research at the scheduled time in a forum open to all faculty, students, and visitors. The oral presentation should be approximately 30-45 minutes in length to be followed by a public question-and-answer period. Presentation of preliminary data is neither required nor expected, but should be provided if available and relevant. All attendees other than the dissertation committee and student will leave at the conclusion of the public question-and-answer period.

Step 4: The committee will continue the oral exam in closed session with further questioning. Questions can be directed to any matter relevant to the dissertation proposal and any areas of weakness previously identified in the Qualifying Exam. The student should be able to demonstrate knowledge of the theory, literature, and research methodologies relevant to the proposed area of research, and how their work relates to the field of Biology as a whole. Students are encouraged to ask committee members to clearly define the specific topics that they expect the student to be prepared to discuss. The faculty advisor and a quorum of the advisory committee (including an outside member) must be present at the oral component of the Candidacy Exam, although remote/virtual attendance is permitted.

Step 5: Performance in the Candidacy Exam is assessed using the following criteria: oral communication, written communication, content knowledge, and study design and analysis. At the end of the review, the committee will assess all four criteria and make one of the following recommendations to the student for the oral and written components of the Candidacy Exam, separately: (a) accept with minor revision, (b) revise and resubmit, or (c) reject. If the written communication component receives a “revise and resubmit” designation, the student must revise and resubmit the written proposal according to the committee’s recommendations. If the oral communication component receives a “revise and resubmit” designation, the student must schedule another public presentation. This process may be repeated until the committee either accepts or rejects the proposal. If the proposal is rejected, the student may be asked to leave the graduate program. A majority vote is required to pass the examination; however, no more than one negative vote is permitted. The majority must include the dissertation advisor. Any student who does not pass either portion of the Candidacy Exam must repeat it within six calendar months of the date of the first examination. A second failed attempt will result in dismissal from the program.

Advancing to Candidacy

After passing the Candidacy Exam, the student can advance to candidacy and can begin registering for dissertation hours. The following steps are required to be completed in order to be admitted to candidacy and enroll in dissertation hours (in suggested order of completion):

- (1) Program of Study submitted and approved.
- (2) Dissertation Advisory Committee formed.
- (3) Successful completion of Qualifying Exam.
- (4) Add external committee member to committee.
- (5) Completion of all formal coursework (27 credits)
- (6) Have no more than 6 hours of non-dissertation coursework remaining.
- (7) Successful completion of Candidacy Exam.

To advance to candidacy and enroll in dissertation hours, students must have all forms and documentation received and processed by the College of Graduate Studies prior to the first day of classes for that term. Candidates enrolled in three dissertation credit hours are considered full-time students. Most students require 2-3 years to conduct research and write their dissertation after advancing to candidacy. During this time, students should remain in close contact with the dissertation advisor and advisory committee. Annual progress reports must be filed with the Graduate Specialist.

VII. Dissertation Requirements and Dissertation Defense

The dissertation represents an original and significant contribution to the discipline and must be successfully defended to earn a PhD. To defend a dissertation, the candidate must:

- (1) submit the written dissertation to their committee,
- (2) make a formal oral presentation of their research findings in seminar format to the committee and public, and
- (3) defend their dissertation to the committee in a closed-door question-answer session.

The purpose of each component is to respectively assess the candidate's (1) written communication ability, (2) oral communication ability, and (3) capacity to demonstrate deep knowledge and understanding of the dissertation (and related areas) independent of outside assistance. The dissertation must meet all format specifications of the university. The most commonly preferred structure is to have chapters that are targeted for publication (individual articles as chapters), bookended with an overall introduction, conclusion, and appendices as needed for supplemental information. Each candidate must consult with their dissertation advisor and dissertation committee on the preferred structure. **Normally, any dissertation chapters that are submitted for publication before the defense should be submitted to the dissertation committee for feedback/approval before submission to a journal**, so that the advisory role of the committee is not being circumvented by the inclusion of already-published articles in the final dissertation.

Guidelines on Timeline Approaching the Dissertation Defense:

Students nearing graduation should familiarize themselves with the current dissertation completion procedures with the College of Graduate Studies, which offers several thesis and dissertation workshops each term as well as a Webcourses course designed to explain all of the requirements and timelines that are imposed above the level of the department: <https://graduate.ucf.edu/thesis-and-dissertation/>. Students are highly encouraged to attend these workshops early in the dissertation completion process to fully understand the policies and procedures. All university deadlines are listed in the [Academic Calendar](#). All dissertations at UCF are digital, referred to as Electronic Theses and Dissertations (ETD) and must be formatted under the UCF ETD formatting guidelines. Below is a general timeline that should be followed:

Final Committee Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Semester before the defense and graduation• Obtain committee approval to schedule defense date• Confirm with the Graduate Specialist that degree requirements are in order.
Check UCF Dates and Deadlines	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• College of Graduate Studies sets deadlines for key events• Students MUST meet Intent to Graduate, Format Review, Release Option, Defense, Approval Form, and Final Submission deadlines or graduation cannot occur. Check these deadlines three months PRIOR to the semester of graduation
Penultimate Dissertation Draft	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Get approval of dissertation draft from advisor• Submit dissertation draft to committee at least one month prior to defense
Schedule Defense Date	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Schedule defense date with the Graduate Specialist at least two weeks in advance, reserving a room that can seat at least 20 people• Submit a 250 word abstract to the Graduate Specialist to publicize the defense
Format Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Submit formatted dissertation draft to the College of Graduate Studies by the initial Format Review deadline.• Format review takes 5-7 business days.
Defense	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conduct defense on scheduled date• Complete and submit Defense Approval Form
Revise and Submit Final Dissertation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Revise Dissertation with committee and advisor feedback• Submit final version through ETD system.

Description of Steps:

- (1) A **final committee meeting** must occur in the semester prior to the defense to determine the candidate's readiness to defend. Only after approval by the dissertation committee can the student schedule their defense date. At this time the student should also meet with the Graduate Specialist to confirm that they are on track to meet any outstanding degree requirements.
- (2) Check and comply with **College of Graduate Studies Deadlines** for the dissertation completion and graduation process. Filing [Intent to Graduate](#) (via MyUCF) occurs at the end of the semester prior to the semester of graduation. The deadline for initial Format Review occurs in roughly the first third of the semester, and the deadline for Defense occurs in the second third of the semester. The deadline for Final Submission is in the last quarter of the semester.
- (3) **A penultimate draft of the dissertation** must be delivered to the advisory committee for assessment after the candidate and dissertation advisor have agreed upon all editorial changes; this should occur no later than one month before the public defense. The penultimate document represents the official dissertation that is to be defended, not the ultimate (final) document submitted to the university. Prior to submission of the penultimate dissertation to the committee, the candidate should seek committee feedback on the developing document when appropriate. The student should also recognize that the committee exists to offer guidance on project appropriateness, content knowledge, experimental design, data analysis, and data interpretation, but does not exist to help the student achieve editorial improvements. Once the PhD candidate submits the penultimate dissertation, the committee's role will switch from advisory to assessment. Committee members have the right to reject documents that fail to meet customary scientific standards. Furthermore, the committee is under no obligation to communicate errors or deficiencies in the penultimate document prior to the defense. It is recommended that when scheduling the defense, the student allows for several weeks after the defense to accommodate the committee's recommended edits to the ultimate (final) dissertation.
- (4) The **defense date** must be scheduled at least two weeks prior to the defense and on a date before the defense deadline for that semester. Submit a 250-word abstract (describing the research conducted and conclusions) reached to the Graduate Specialist to allow posting in the Biological Sciences Building, the department webpage, circulated by e-mail among faculty and graduate students, and posted on the College of Graduate Studies Events Calendar. A **Virtual Defense Format** occurring via video conference (e.g., Zoom) are permitted with approval of advisor, committee, and the Graduate Program Director.
- (5) Dissertation **format review** must be conducted by the College of Graduate Studies deadline. This is submission of the penultimate draft of the dissertation to ensure it complies with format requirements including margins, fonts, etc. ETD Student Services is the portal to be used: https://apps.graduate.ucf.edu/ETD_Student_Services/. Questions about formatting beyond those answered in the Webcourses training should be directed to editor@ucf.edu. If format approval is not granted upon initial review, resubmission is required.
- (6) The **dissertation defense** includes an oral presentation that should be approximately 45-50 minutes in length, followed by a question-and-answer period. In the presentation the candidate should focus on background information, describe the research performed, and draw attention to the significance of the conclusions reached. Department faculty have an opportunity for private comment to the advisory committee at the conclusion of the question-and-answer period, and then the committee and candidate will continue the defense in a closed session where the candidate will answer questions about the subject matter presented and defend the conclusions drawn. The committee will assess the candidate's level of competency with the research topic. A majority vote is required to pass the examination. Upon a successful defense the [Dissertation Approval Form](#) must be completed and submitted by the final submission deadline.
- (7) The **final dissertation** document must be uploaded to the ETD system before the final dissertation submission deadline.

Originality Check and Dissemination

Review for Originality - The University requires all students submitting a dissertation as part of their graduate degree requirements to first submit their electronic documents through iThenticate.com for advisement purposes and for review of originality. The dissertation chair is responsible for scheduling this submission to iThenticate.com and for reviewing the results from iThenticate.com with the student's advisory committee. The advisory committee uses the results appropriately to assist the student in the preparation of their thesis or dissertation. Before the student may be approved for final submission to the university, the dissertation chair must indicate completion of the iThenticate.com requirement by signing the Dissertation Approval Form.

Dissertation Dissemination – While UCF respects the wishes of students who would like to publish their work and/or apply for patents, it is essential for scholarly research conducted at a university to be available for dissemination. While several options are available for the release of an ETD, it is the goal of the university that all dissertations be available through the UCF Libraries catalog. Students with potential patent concerns are required to discuss the following options with their dissertation advisor and indicate the availability choice on the Thesis and Dissertation Release Option electronic form, which the student submits in the MyUCF Student Center.

For those with no patent or copyright concerns:

- Immediate worldwide dissemination with no restrictions.

For those who have patent issues, dissemination options must be discussed and agreed to with your advisor.

Choices are:

- Pending dissemination of the entire work for six months for patent or other proprietary issues, with an additional six months extension available. Once the patent and proprietary issues are resolved, then immediate worldwide dissemination with no restrictions.
- Pending dissemination of the entire work for six months for patent or other proprietary issues, with an additional six months extension available. Once the patent and proprietary issues are resolved, choosing this option allows the student to make the dissertation available to the university community for the period chosen below, and then for it to be distributed via the Web beyond that time.
 - one year
 - three years*
 - five years*

*Does not require dissertation advisor signature and approval.

For those who have copyright concerns, dissemination options are a student decision within the guidelines of individual departments that may have requirements for dissemination. If a department has no guidelines for dissemination, then students are free to choose one of the options below. In general, those in the sciences and engineering will choose one year while students in the arts and humanities may choose longer. Choosing this option allows the student to make the dissertation available to the university community for the period chosen below, and then for it to be distributed via the Web beyond that time.

- one year
- three years*
- five years*

*Does not require dissertation advisor signature and approval.

VIII. Academic Progress and Performance

Academic Progress Review

In the Integrative and Conservation Biology PhD program, student dissertation progress is assessed via two different mechanisms: (1) assessment by the dissertation committee, and (2) the Biology department Graduate Curriculum Committee. For this assessment to occur, each student beyond their first complete year in the program is **required to meet annually with their dissertation committee**. The student must then submit the Annual Progress Meeting form to the Graduate Curriculum Committee for review. Failure to achieve any of the below criteria can lead to the student's progress being deemed as unsatisfactory. After the first unsatisfactory designation, the student will be placed on probation (internal to the department). Once on internal probation, the dissertation committee is asked to devise an intervention plan and meet with the student within 6 months to reassess their progress. Failure of the student to convene a second meeting within 6 months will lead to an additional unsatisfactory assessment. A second unsatisfactory designation at any time during the student's tenure in the PhD program could lead to formal academic probation, a lack of future departmental financial support, and/or dismissal from the program.

Criteria for satisfactory progress:

1. Submit a Program of Study by the end of the second semester (9 months from matriculation)
2. Complete the Qualifying Exam by the end of Year 2 (24 months from matriculation)
3. Undergo the Candidacy Exam by the end of Year 3 (36 months from matriculation)
4. Enroll full-time during the academic year semester (Fall and Spring)
5. Enroll in consecutive Fall and Spring semesters, unless a formal leave of absence has been filed.
6. Maintain a GPA of ≥ 3.0 , with a limited number of "C" grades (see GPA requirement section)
7. Maintain satisfactory scientific progress as determined annually by the dissertation committee or by the departmental Graduate Curriculum Committee.
8. Convene an Annual Progress Meeting with the dissertation committee
9. Submit the Annual Progress Meeting form by the due date (currently November 1st)

Program Dismissal

As stated in the General Graduate Policies:

"The primary responsibility for monitoring academic performance standards rests with the [Integrative and Conservation Biology PhD program]. However, the academic college and the UCF College of Graduate Studies will monitor a student's progress and may dismiss any student if performance standards or academic progress as specified by the program, college or university are not maintained. Satisfactory academic performance in a program includes maintaining at least a 3.0 graduate status GPA in all graduate work taken since admission into the program. Satisfactory performance also involves maintaining the standards of academic progress and professional integrity expected in a particular discipline or program. Failure to maintain these standards may result in dismissal of the student from the program".

As already mentioned in previous sections, a student may be dismissed from the program if they are without a dissertation advisor for 12 months, or earn two or more unsatisfactory progress reports. A student may also be dismissed at any time for a significant breach of UCF's student rules of conduct (see UCF's Golden Rule Student Handbook for details). In each of these cases, the student will be informed by the Graduate Program Director of their dismissal. A student may appeal their dismissal with the College of Graduate Studies.

IX. Graduate Research Regulations

Laboratory and Field Safety

Laboratory Safety – Students conducting research in laboratory spaces are required to complete Environmental Health and Safety trainings appropriate to the specific research and the laboratory in which they are working. The specific trainings necessary will depend on the laboratory in which the student is working, and typically include online and in-person components. Students should check with their faculty advisor for more information.

<https://ehs.ucf.edu/researchsafety>

Field Safety – Students conducting field research are required to file a field safety plan on file with the department. Students should check with their faculty advisor for more information.

Human and Animal Subjects

Human Subjects - If the student chooses to conduct research that involves human subjects (surveys, interviews, etc.), he or she must gain Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval prior to beginning the study. For access to the IRB submission form and sample consent forms, please visit the Office of Research website:

<https://www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb/investigators/index.html> The UCF Principal Investigator Manual describes all policies and procedures. An approved copy of your protocol must be on file with the Graduate Program Director.

Non-human vertebrates - If the student chooses to conduct research that involves vertebrate subjects, he or she must gain Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) approval prior to beginning the study. For access to the IACUC submission forms, please visit the Office or Research website:

<https://www.research.ucf.edu/Research/Presubmission.html>. Prerequisite training is required before filing an Animal Use Approval Form. An approved copy of the research protocol must be on file with the Graduate Program Director. In addition, the student must comply with any applicable state and federal regulations, particularly concerning protected species.

Ethics in Research

Researchers in every discipline have a responsibility to be aware of and conform to ethical norms within the scientific profession. All aspects of the collection and use of information must promote the principles of knowledge, truth, and the avoidance of error, while being free of fabrication, falsification, or misrepresentation. Researchers must adhere to all research regulations and work responsibly to ensure accuracy, honesty, transparency, and awareness of conflicts of interest in conducting research and generating research products. Students guilty of academic dishonesty or improper ethical behavior will be dismissed from the program.

Patent and Invention Policy

UCF has three fundamental responsibilities with regard to graduate student research. They are to (1) support an academic environment that stimulates the spirit of inquiry, (2) develop the intellectual property stemming from research, and to (3) disseminate the intellectual property to the general public. UCF owns the intellectual property developed using university resources. The graduate student, as inventor, will, according to this policy, share in the proceeds of the invention. The full [Patent and Invention Policy](#) is available in the General Graduate Policies.

Travel Authorization

Students must obtain university travel authorization for travel on university business (field work, conference travel, etc) by completing a Travel Authorization Request before incurring any expenses (e.g., booking reservations). Students should check with their faculty advisor for more information and the best strategies to avoid having to pay expenses up front and be reimbursed. In most cases, faculty/staff can book flights and lodging with university purchase cards. Travel advances are also available for certain kinds of travel.

Sponsored Research

Students participating in sponsored research (research funded by external grants or contracts) must work with the Principal Investigator to ensure compliance with funder policies and regulations.

- Many funders require participants to be up to date on [Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative \(CITI\) Responsible Conduct of Research \(RCR\)](#) training in the appropriate category (life science/biology).
- **In situations where a graduate student is the Principal Investigator or Co-Principal Investigator (including graduate student research grants), grant submissions MUST go through the [Office of Research Proposal Submission process](#)** in the same manner as if a faculty member were the Principal Investigator. All sponsored research at UCF is required to go through this process to ensure compliance with legal and financial requirements. This applies to virtually all grants, as well as many kinds of funding opportunities named ‘scholarships’ or ‘fellowships’ that contain a research component. Essentially, this process must be followed in any situation where the funder will be providing funds to UCF even if the funder’s rules state that the student should submit directly to the funder, with few exceptions. UCF will not accept research funds (e.g., to place into an account to pay for research) unless the Office of Research proposal submission process has been followed, and the student may be forced to accept the grant as an individual (with tax liability) or decline the grant entirely. Graduate students should work closely with their faculty advisor as well as the College of Sciences pre-award staff well in advance of any grant submission (at least a month) to determine the proper procedure for the funding type and to ensure compliance.

X. Financial Support

Graduate Assistantships

UCF has several different types of graduate assistantships, including Graduate Teaching Assistantship (GTA) and Graduate Research Assistantship (GRA) positions. Detailed information is provided in the [Graduate Assistant Guide](#). The following guidelines apply within the Biology department:

- If a doctoral student is offered a GTA in their letter of admission, the student is guaranteed twelve semesters of academic year (Fall/Spring) GTA support with satisfactory performance as a GTA and toward the degree.
- An annual survey is conducted to solicit GTA preferences on course placement, with final appointments made by the Associate Chair of the department as Head of Curriculum with input from program coordinators.
- The department is not able to provide summer GTA positions to all students. A limited number of summer GTAs are available (typically 5-10), and are prioritized to (1) international students without other summer financial support, and (2) domestic students without other summer financial support. The prioritization of international students reflects that most visa types severely restrict outside employment opportunities.
- GTA support is not guaranteed for doctoral students beyond six years in the program, but support may be extended for up to one more year with satisfactory performance as assessed by the dissertation committee and Graduate Program Director.
- If a student with guaranteed GTA support becomes supported by a GRA or fellowship, they retain the ability to return to GTA support in subsequent years with adequate notice – all faculty advisors provide funding information in December for the following academic year.
- GRAs are funded by grant accounts. A student incoming on GRA funding alone does not have a guarantee of continued support. Such students can apply for GTA funding in subsequent years through the annual GTA funding allocation process that occurs at the same time as graduate admissions.
- To be employed and to maintain employment in a graduate assistantship position, the student must be in good academic standing and enrolled full time.
- The Graduate Specialist will inform students via email of deadline dates by which Assistantship Agreements need to be signed to ensure correct processing. If the student does not sign and turn in their Assistantship Agreement by the specified deadline, payment will likely be delayed. Agreements must be approved at three levels before the student will be granted payment.

GTA Training Requirements – A GTA position is meant to provide support to the student while helping students develop their training, experience and skills in preparation for future employment. UCF requires students to complete GTA training requirements before their Assistantship Agreement can be approved. These GTA requirements, registration instructions, and schedule of training can be found here: <https://graduate.ucf.edu/graduate-teaching/>

Students who are non-native speakers of English and do not have a degree from a U.S. institution must pass an English Speaking Test (currently the Versant exam) before they will be permitted to serve as either Graduate Teaching Assistants (position code 9184) or Graduate Teaching Associates (position code 9183). Students who do not pass the English Speaking Test upon matriculation can be placed into GTA Grader position (position code 9187) for the short term while taking UCF's English training courses to improve their scores. If a student is unable to pass the English Speaking Test within a year, continued financial support should not be expected from the department, which cannot guarantee GTA positions to those who are not eligible for most GTA roles. Faculty advisors may be able to make alternative GRA arrangements, but this is not guaranteed.

GTA/GRA Performance Assessment - At the completion of each semester in which a student is employed as a GTA or GRA, the student's performance will be evaluated by the faculty member teaching the course or supervising the work. These assessments will be used to provide feedback on strengths and weaknesses in the student's performance in preparation for future employment beyond the degree. Unsatisfactory performance assessments should be taken seriously, and students counseled on how to improve their performance. Multiple unsatisfactory GTA performance assessments may be grounds for loss of continued GTA support.

Tuition waiver/remission – Students supported by GTA are provided with a tuition waiver, while those supported by GRA have tuition remission paid by the supporting grant. A tuition waiver/remission covers tuition (and the out-of-state differential fee if applicable) for full-time enrollment (9, 6, or 3 credits depending – see the Enrollment Requirements section under General Degree Requirements). **Tuition remission does NOT cover other local fees** (health fee, athletic fee, building fee, etc.), which are billed to the student each semester. Students must enroll in courses as soon as possible for a given semester to assure that assistantships and tuition remission are processed in a timely manner. **Failure to register full-time will result in the tuition waiver/remission being revoked by the College of Graduate Studies!**

Health Insurance - For university fellows and graduate assistantships with appointments totaling 20 hours per week, the College of Graduate Studies provides health insurance coverage (<https://graduate.ucf.edu/health-insurance/>). Full annual coverage will be provided in two separate time periods. Students with qualifying assistantships and fellowships in the fall term will receive fall coverage, running from August 15 through December 31. Students with qualifying assistantships and fellowships in the spring term will receive coverage for the remainder of the year, running from January 1 through August 14. Communication on insurance coverage and deadlines will be provided by the College of Graduate Studies. Please note that students wanting to enroll in the insurance plan must accept the coverage before the end of the insurance company's open enrollment period for the semester. Once the open enrollment period closes, the College of Graduate Studies is no longer able to add students to the coverage for that coverage period. A voluntary dental and vision insurance are available as supplements to the health insurance plan.

Payroll – UCF uses a biweekly payroll schedule (every two weeks). The current payroll schedule for a given year can be found on the UCF Human Resources website. Students supported via GTA/GRA/fellowships do not submit timesheets.

Supplemental Assignments

Some lab groups provide supplemental assignments during the academic year (Fall/Spring). Standard half-time GTA/GRA appointments are for 20 hours per week, and supplemental GRA assignments are a way for faculty advisors to provide additional student funding up to 30 total hours. Supplemental assignments must enhance the student's progress and must not interfere with the continued progress of the student. Faculty advisors must complete the [Supplemental Assignment Form](#) and gain approval of the Graduate Program Director.

OPS Summer Support

Many lab groups support pre-candidacy PhD students over the summer via temporary OPS contracts funded by grants. These OPS positions function as “research assistant” or “technician” appointments for a limited duration, with the hourly wage and number of hours set by the supervising faculty. These are often a more economical solution for supporting pre-candidacy students, as students do not need to be enrolled in courses over the summer pre-candidacy and therefore faculty advisors do not need to find a funding source to pay tuition. OPS positions cannot be held simultaneously with a GTA or GRA contract. Students with OPS contracts will need to submit timesheets for each biweekly pay period, due to the departmental Human Resources specialist by the biweekly deadline. The current payroll schedule for a given year can be found on the UCF Human Resources website. Failure to turn timesheets in by the deadline for the pay period will delay payment to the student.

UCF Internal Graduate Fellowships

See <https://graduate.ucf.edu/fellowships/> for more information on each fellowship. Those providing full-time support typically require or expect that fellowship funding replaces GTA/GRA support. Those providing partial support generally expect that fellowship funding supplements GTA/GRA support.

UCF Fellowships for Incoming PhD Students:

The following fellowships are program-nominated at the time of admission based on application materials:

Trustees Doctoral Fellowship - \$25,000 per year for 4 years.

Presidential Doctoral Fellowship - \$20,000 per year for 4 years.

Boyd Lyon Fellowship - \$19,000 per year for two years.

Graduate Deans Fellowship - \$5000 supplement to a qualifying assistantship or fellowship for one year.

The following fellowships require the student to apply by a given deadline (subject to change!):

UCF Graduate McNair Fellowship - \$25,000 per year for 5 years. New graduate students who completed a McNair Scholars program as an undergraduate are eligible. Deadline January 15.

McKnight Doctoral Fellowship - \$15,000 per year for 5 years. New African-American or Hispanic doctoral students are eligible. Deadline January 15.

UCF Graduate RAMP Fellowship - \$12,000 per year for 4 years. New graduate students who completed the UCF undergraduate RAMP program are eligible. Deadline January 15.

UCF Graduate FAMU Feeder Fellowship - \$12,000 per year for 4 years. New graduate students who completed the FAMU Feeder program as an undergraduate at FAMU are eligible. Deadline March 1.

Summer Mentoring Fellowship - \$4500 stipend in the summer before a normal August start date. All new incoming domestic graduate students (citizens/permanent residents) from underrepresented groups (self-identified) are eligible. Deadline March 15.

Delores A. Auzenne Fellowship - \$2500 each semester for 2 semesters. New and continuing students from underrepresented minority groups (not specifically defined). Deadline March 1.

UCF Fellowships for Continuing PhD Students:

Multidisciplinary Doctoral Fellowship - \$20,000 per year for 3 years. All active PhD students in good standing can apply (must complete 18 credit hours before the start of the fellowship). Deadline is April 1.

Dean’s Dissertation Completion Fellowship - \$10,000 for the spring semester before an expected spring graduation date. Deadline November 16.

Delores A. Auzenne Fellowship - \$2500 each semester for 2 semesters. New and continuing students from underrepresented minority groups (not specifically defined). Deadline March 1.

UCF Internal Scholarships

UCF uses the Access to Opportunity (A2O) system for most scholarships: <https://ucf.academicworks.com/>. Graduate students are eligible for some of these scholarships, either merit-based or need-based.

External Graduate Fellowships

A wide range of external fellowships exist from diverse funding sources, from government agencies to private foundations, such that it is not possible to provide a comprehensive list. A small number of major fellowships of general applicability to PhD students in our program are listed below. The College of Graduate Studies also maintains a list of some interesting [Other Funding Opportunities](#).

[National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship Program](#) - \$34,000 stipend per year for 3 years within a 5 year period. Provides cost-of-education funds to UCF, a portion of which covers tuition/fees with the remainder available for research supplies, research travel, and other qualifying expenses. Current PhD students must apply in Year 1 or Year 2 and cannot hold a previous Master's degree, with some exceptions.

[Ford Foundation Predoctoral Fellowship](#) - \$27,000 stipend for 3 years to incoming or continuing PhD students who provide evidence that they can fully utilize a three-year fellowship award.

[Ford Foundation Dissertation Fellowship](#) – \$28,000 stipend for 1 year to PhD Candidates writing and defending their PhD within the subsequent 12 months.

[USDA NIFA Predoctoral Fellowship](#) - \$35,000 stipend per year for 3 years, plus up to \$22,000 per year in tuition/fees/benefits/supplies/travel/workshops/publications, and \$3000 per year institutional allowance in lieu of indirect costs. Applicants must be PhD Candidates and propose projects addressing AFRI areas.

[Smithsonian Office of Fellowships and Internships](#) – lists over a dozen fellowships to travel and conduct research at a wide range of Smithsonian institutions, including the marine station in Fort Pierce, FL.

[Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute Fellowship](#) – a variety of both short-term and multi-year fellowships funding a range of research types.

[NOAA Coastal Management and Digital Coast Fellowships](#) – a variety of both short-term and multi-year fellowships funding a range of research types.

[NOAA Sea Grant Scholarships](#) – a variety of funding opportunities for graduate students working on ocean or coastal research topics.

[NOAA Student Funding Opportunities](#) – a wide variety of fellowship and scholarship opportunities for graduate students in a range of NOAA mission research areas, including the Nancy Foster Scholarship Program.

[NASA Fellowships](#) – wide range of funding opportunities including fellowships, graduate research opportunities, and internships.

[Cientifico Latino Fellowship Database](#) – lists over 180 graduate fellowships!

UCF Internal Research Grants and Travel Awards

These funding sources provide funds for research and travel, rather than student stipend support.

UCF Research Grants and Travel Awards:

[UCF Doctoral Research Support Award](#) – Up to \$5,000 awarded by the College of Graduate Studies in support of research-related expenses including travel, research participant costs, attendance at trainings/workshops, specialized equipment, or consumables/supplies. The award is available to doctoral students who have passed their Qualifying Exam and are in the proposal stage of their dissertation, pre-candidacy. Students in Doctoral Candidacy status and who have enrolled in more than one semester of dissertation hours (including the application term) are not eligible to apply.

[UCF Presentation Fellowship](#) – The College of Graduate Studies will provide support once per academic year for a graduate student to present their research at a professional meeting/conference. Deadlines vary by semester. Support is \$300 for in-state travel, \$500 for domestic out-of-state travel, \$800 for international travel, and \$150 for virtual conferences.

[UCF Open Access Publishing Fund](#) - The College of Graduate Studies will provide annual support up to \$1,500/year for article processing charges (APCs) for current and recent (within one year of graduation or employment) graduate students and postdoctoral scholars.

[Student Government Conference and Registration Funding](#) – a mechanism to receive individual funding for registration, lodging, and flights. Typical amounts are a few hundred dollars, approved in advance.

Department of Biology Travel Awards:

[Boyd Lyon Travel Award](#) - \$300 awarded by the Biology Graduate Student Association. Deadlines are announced by the department.

[Department of Biology Travel Award](#) – Up to \$1000 awarded for travel related expenses associated with research or professional conferences. Deadlines are announced by the department.

External Grants

Grantsmanship is a critical part of doctoral training. PhD students are encouraged to work closely with their faculty advisor to identify grant opportunities for which they are eligible, including graduate student grants available through scientific societies, foundations, and government agencies. All graduate students are encouraged to explore the [Pivot Funding Opportunity Database](#) available from the Office of Research. As described in the Graduate Research Regulations section, students MUST follow the Office of Research proposal submission process for all external grants.

XI. Professional Development Resources

The [UCF Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning](#) provides classes and programs designed to assist graduate students with the educational issues they face in the classroom as teaching assistants or instructors. These resources include workshops and assistance in course design and syllabi development, pedagogy research and the science of learning, the use of different technologies in the classroom or online, and a future faculty program. Further information on these resources is available at <http://www.fctl.ucf.edu/>

The [UCF Biology Graduate Student Association](#) (BGSA) was established in 1997 to provide opportunities for UCF Biology students to participate in extracurricular activities in Biology. These activities include grad student presentation seminars, journal club paper discussions of articles in department research areas, service activities including outreach to schools and the public, and social events (canoeing, nature walks, volunteer activities, social gatherings). The BGSA also serves as an advocacy organization to bring concerns and suggestions to department leadership. The best method to get involved is to join the BGSA Facebook page (“UCF BGSA”), to contact the BGSA secretary: ucf.bgsa.secretary@gmail.com

[UCF Graduate Student Association](#) (GSA) is UCF's umbrella graduate organization committed to enriching graduate students' personal, educational and professional experience. <https://ucfgsa.com/>

[UCF Graduate Research Forum](#) - The Research Forum is a series of annual events that provide an opportunity for graduate students to showcase their research and creative projects and to receive valuable feedback from faculty judges. Awards for best presentations in each category are given and all participants receive recognition. The College of Graduate Studies and the Graduate Student Association invite all UCF students, community, and employers to attend the Graduate Research Forum. For more information see: www.graduate.ucf.edu/ResearchForum.

[UCF Graduate Excellence Awards](#) - Each year, the College of Graduate Studies offers graduate students who strive for academic and professional excellence the opportunity to be recognized for their work. For the nomination process and eligibility criteria, see www.graduate.ucf.edu/gradawards. The award categories include the [Award for Excellence by a Graduate Teaching Assistant](#), the [Award for Excellence in Graduate Student Teaching](#), and the [Award for Outstanding Dissertation](#).

XII. Forms

Below is a list of key forms. All forms need to be processed through the Graduate Specialist. Any forms mentioned in this Handbook that are not listed below should be obtained from the Graduate Specialist.

1. [College of Graduate Studies Forms](#) - A listing of general forms and files for graduate students including student services and records and graduation forms.
2. [Restricted Registration Agreement Form](#) – this form is used to register for informal courses like Doctoral Research, Independent Study, Internship, or Doctoral Dissertation.
3. [Official Transcript Request](#) – UCF does not provide “unofficial transcripts” but an equivalent can be obtained from the [Office of Prestigious Awards](#) if applying for a grant/fellowship.
4. [Traveling Scholar Form](#) – Use this form to apply for Traveling Scholar status to take advantage of special resources available on another campus but not available on the home campus like special course offerings, research opportunities, unique laboratories and library collections.
5. [Doctoral Committee/Candidacy Status Form](#) – This form is used to form the dissertation committee, revise the committee if needed, as well as to advance to candidacy once all requirements have been met.
6. [Special Leave of Absence Form](#) – This form is used to apply for a special leave of absence if continuous enrollment will not be possible for any reason.
7. [Graduate Petition Form](#) - When unusual situations arise, petitions for exceptions to policy may be requested by the student. Depending on the type of appeal, the student should contact their faculty advisor and/or the Graduate Program Director to begin the petition process.

XIII. Key Staff and Roles

The following faculty and staff play a major role in administering specific aspects of the graduate program. A full list of all staff scope of duties is circulated annually, students should check with their faculty advisor if in doubt.

Graduate Program Director – Dr. Kate Mansfield, Associate Professor, Bio 402B, kate.mansfield@ucf.edu

- Oversees graduate program, chairs Graduate Curriculum Committee
- Emphasis on curriculum, funding, program evaluation/improvement, interface with College of Graduate Studies

Assistant Graduate Program Director – Dr. Chase Mason, Assistant Professor, Bio 401E, chase.mason@ucf.edu

- Backup when Director unavailable, leads main-cycle graduate admissions process
- Emphasis on admissions/recruitment, handbooks and policies, and student advising

Graduate Specialist – Juana Pasco, Bio 301, juana.pasco@ucf.edu

- Processes graduate admissions/matriculation, GTA and GRA contracts
- Registration for informal graduate courses, processes all forms relating to the graduate program
- Student advising, scheduling rooms for candidacy exams, thesis proposals, and thesis/dissertation defenses

Human Resources Specialist – Jessica Banos, Bio 302, jessica.banos@ucf.edu

- OPS contracts, payroll certification and timesheets

Accounting Specialist – Karen Reinemund, Bio 302, karen.reinemund@ucf.edu

- Travel authorizations and reimbursement, purchasing card approver, purchase order creator

Budget Analyst – Sheri Pearson, Bio 302, sheri.pearson@ucf.edu

- Grant administration (post-award), Responsible Fiscal Officer for all Biology accounts, GTA contract approval

Facilities Specialist – Gabriel Perez-Mercado, Bio 302, gabriel.perez-mercado@ucf.edu

- Building manager and liaison with EHS/IT/Facilities, contact for building safety issues
- Keys/electronic door access, Bio305 computer/printer issues, SAFE forms for events
- Bio-vehicles administrator, contact for research/teaching use of departmental vehicles

XIV. Key Campus Resources

Biology Graduate Student Lounge – Room BIO 311 in the Biological Sciences Building is a general breakroom and space for informal meetings, with a small kitchen and a number of tables.

Graduate Student Teaching Office – Room BIO 201 in the Biological Sciences Building is a space where GTAs may request to hold their office hours to avoid disruptions in their laboratories. Desks are assigned on a space-available basis. During some terms, GTAs may need to share desks.

Biology Computer Lab – Room BIO 305 is used for courses, but is also available for use by graduate students at other times. A student's faculty advisor must request that a student's ID card be activated to gain swipe access to this lab.

UCF Libraries – The UCF Libraries contain substantial physical and digital collections, as well as access to expansive Interlibrary Loan services to access nearly any scholarly work. <https://library.ucf.edu/> The main campus John C. Hitt Library contains reservable single-person study rooms (or 'carrels') that are useful for students needing quiet space as well as group study/presentation rooms.

UCF Graduate Student Center – Located on the second floor in suite 213 of Trevor Colbourn Hall, The [Graduate Student Center](#) provides a space for graduate students to gather for professional development, workshops, rehearsal of presentations, defenses of their thesis or dissertation research, guest lectures and colloquia series, and group study and collaboration. The Graduate Student Center contains four main areas: multipurpose study and collaboration area, presentation room, conference room, and study and data analysis rooms. Room reservations are available.

UCF Student Health Services – The [UCF Student Health Center and Pharmacy](#) is located next to the Biology building. Students' primary care consultation and evaluation by health providers are covered by the student Health Fee, included in tuition and fees. Additional services/materials are either billed to insurance, or can be paid directly using a low-cost self-pay scale. The Health Center also has a referrals department to direct students to additional in-network providers.

UCF Counseling and Psychological Services – [CAPS](#) is a free-of-charge campus agency designated to provide culturally- and trauma-informed services to university-enrolled students. CAPS seeks to strengthen student success by minimizing the interruption of learning caused by mental health concerns. During normal operations, CAPS offers initial assessments, brief individual counseling, group therapy, workshops and educational presentations on a variety of topics, crisis intervention and daily walk-in services, and professional consultations to staff, faculty, and students.

UCF Recreation and Wellness Center – the [RWC](#) is comprised of a wide range of indoor and outdoor recreation and fitness facilities, as well as a wide range of programs including Intramural Sports, Sport Clubs, Outdoor Adventure, Fitness, and Aquatics programs, as well as the Office of Wellness and Health Promotion which provides outreach and educational workshops on safe sex, nutrition, stress management, sleep, healthy relationships, and body image as well as HIV testing and counseling. In addition to the primary RWC building, this unit includes various facilities such as the Climbing Tower, Tennis Courts, Sand Volleyball Courts, RWC Park, Lake Claire, Challenge Course, and a Disc Golf Course. The RWC also has two satellite fitness centers. RWC @ Knight's Plaza (West Plaza Drive by Addition Financial Arena), and

at RWC @ Downtown (Second Floor of the Union West Building at the downtown campus). The RWC is open to all currently enrolled students, and paid memberships are available for non-students.

Knights' Pantry – The [Knights Helping Knights Pantry](#) serves UCF students by providing basic needs including food, clothing, and personal hygiene items to foster continued academic success and increase retention for students in need.

UCF Student Accessibility Services – [SAS](#) is the office that handles educational and campus accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act and related issues. SAS is absolutely available to graduate students, and is mandated to work collaboratively with students, faculty, and staff to create an inclusive educational environment for students.

UCF Global – this office functions as the primary international hub for students, faculty, and staff. It is a one-stop clearinghouse for all issues relating to international students or international travel. [UCF Global](#) includes immigration and visa assistance, support services, English language programs, and health and safety assistance for international travel, including remote fieldwork.

UCF Office of Diversity and Inclusion – [ODI](#) coordinates multiple workshops and initiatives to improve equity and inclusion on campus, and coordinates/partners with [multiple programs](#) on campus, including the [Just Knights](#) reporting mechanism for hate or bias incidents on campus.

UCF Social Justice and Advocacy – this office contains the [Multicultural Student Center](#), a resource office mission to create a more inclusive and equitable campus environment that enriches the university experience through actively supporting diverse and intentional programming, and [UCF LGBTQ+ Services](#), a resource office for LGBTQ+ students and allies. We are an entry point for anyone looking for resources relating to sexual orientation or gender identity.

UCF Veteran's Academic Resource Center – [VARC](#) is a one-stop solution to the needs of student veterans. VARC provides offices, study space and lounge space, as well as access to a number of university offices, in one central location. The goals of VARC are to: Help veterans understand and ensure access to all of the campus resources available; Help veterans succeed by providing study space and special tutoring at their convenience; Help UCF faculty and staff understand the unique needs of student veterans; Provide student veterans with the tools needed to stay on track and finish their degree.

UCF Victim Services – [UCF Victim Services](#) provides free, comprehensive victim advocacy services to students, faculty, staff, and visitors to campus who have been impacted by crime, violence, or abuse. Advocates offer CONFIDENTIAL support, crisis intervention, reporting and disclosure options, safety planning, information and referrals, practical assistance, and educational programs. Our clients are informed of all their reporting and disclosure options and we empower them to make the best decision for themselves.

UCF Student Care Services – [SCS](#) offers guidance, resources, and referrals to UCF students who are experiencing a distressing situation which significantly impacts academic or personal success. The SCS team coordinates referrals to campus and community resources, develops action plans for student success, oversees the Student of Concern process, and provides education and outreach to university and community members. The goal of SCS is to intervene before a student reaches crisis level and ensure the safety of both the student and the UCF community.

UCF Ombuds Office – The [Ombuds Office](#) is an informal, confidential, neutral, and independent resource to solve problems on campus, working to identify avenues on campus to achieve fair resolutions to problems. The Ombuds Office confidentially receives complaints, concerns, or questions. In response, the Ombuds Office staff listens, clarifies policies, identifies appropriate university channels, makes referrals, and assists by developing a range of options for the concerned party. When appropriate and if requested by visitors, the Ombuds Office staff may participate as a third party to informally facilitate difficult communications in an impartial and independent manner. The Ombuds Office advocates for positive systems change when appropriate without disclosing confidential communications.

UCF IntegrityLine – a [completely anonymous secure ethics reporting mechanism](#) line administered by a third party. The University of Central Florida is committed to a culture of integrity, compliance, and accountability that encourages the highest standards of ethical behavior. Members of the university community are expected to conduct all university activities and business in an honest, ethical, and lawful manner. When members of the university community become aware of or have reason to suspect university activities and business are not conducted according to these expectations, UCF expects and encourages members of the university community to speak up and make good faith reports of suspected misconduct.

UCF VPN – The [UCF Virtual Private Network](#) allows users to access restricted on-campus resources while off-campus, including network file sharing and the ability to use Remote Desktop access to certain laboratory computers.

UCF Card Services – The [UCF Card Services](#) office handles UCF ID cards, including lost or stolen identification cards.