



**SYSTEMS, SYNTHETIC, AND PHYSICAL
BIOLOGY GRADUATE PROGRAM**

GRADUATE STUDENT HANDBOOK

2021-2022

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I. PROGRAM OVERVIEW

A. Overview of the program

Systems, Synthetic, and Physical Biology (SSPB) is a new discipline that combines the approaches of Systems and Synthetic Biology with biophysical research to build a complete and quantitative approach to the study of highly complex biological problems and the engineering of biological systems. There is a great deal of methodological and intellectual overlap between these research areas, a research interface that is rapidly becoming one of the most important areas of life sciences of this century. Within the next 50 years, we will likely see a dramatic shift in manufacturing and medicine towards much more biologically based technologies and discoveries. While the recent period has been called the Information Age, the next period will be a biological one in which cells are engineered to produce new medicines, biofuels, and materials. Before we can reliably re-engineer cells to make new tissues or produce high value molecules, we must understand how to speak the language of life. While DNA is part of the language of all life, as scientists we struggle to read and write stories of any real sophistication. SSPB research is at the heart of reading, understanding, and using this elegant language to construct and deconstruct genetic circuits that will allow us to determine how cells operate, interact with each other, and adapt to their environment. If we truly understand this language we will be able to reprogram cells to make new tissues, biofuels, chemicals, materials, and medicines.

1) **Systems Biology** is the study of the emergence of functional properties that are present in a biological system but not in its individual components. Systems Biology attempts to understand how a process, a cell, a group of cells, or a tissue works at a global level and how different components of the process interact. The topics include the studies of signaling, multicellular organization, and gene regulatory/biochemical networks . The field combines both science and engineering approaches and uses mathematical, computational, and statistical tools for data analysis and modeling.

2) **Synthetic Biology** is the purposeful construction of new cells to elicit engineered behaviors. By engineering genetic and metabolic networks, synthetic biologists are able to simplify the complexity of biochemical networks and thus elucidate the quantitative and qualitative behavior of network components. This knowledge is applied toward engineering goals such as the production of high-value chemicals or therapeutic agents. As with Systems Biology, Synthetic Biology is a highly interdisciplinary field, combining aspects of Molecular Biology, Biochemistry, Computational Biology, and Theoretical Physics.

3) **Physical Biology** is an integration of Biology with Chemistry, Physics, Mathematics, and Computer Science to provide a quantitative approach to problems in biology, biomedicine, and biotechnology. Like Systems and Synthetic Biology, Physical Biology unifies two approaches in science: the study of diseases and organisms *in toto* (a holistic or "top down" approach) and the study of specific molecular mechanisms (a "bottom up" approach) to develop models that anticipate the physicochemical properties of molecules, cellular and organismal behaviors and fitness, and the effects of changing environments on these properties.

The SSPB graduate program represents a cooperative effort by faculty in the schools of Natural Sciences and Engineering to provide training in these rapidly growing research areas. The interdisciplinary nature of the SSPB program allows students to achieve their graduate degree

requirements by taking select classes from the different participating departments and performing their dissertation research under supervision of faculty associated with the program who reside within seven different science and engineering departments.

B. Goals of the program

The SSPB graduate program provides advanced specialized training beyond baccalaureate programs. The following three goals of the graduate training provided by this program aim to guide students as they develop into doctoral recipients:

1. Understand research achievements in the disciplines of Systems, Synthetic, and Physical Biology.
 - Build foundational knowledge (research findings and techniques) in the disciplines that underlie Systems, Synthetic, and Physical Biology,
 - Integrate knowledge from diverse fields to develop a solution plan for defined biological problems that currently exist (critical thinking),
 - Apply knowledge from Biology, Mathematics, and Physics to open ended biological challenges (integrate biological and quantitative techniques), and
 - Develop deep knowledge within the sub-area where students pursue their dissertation research (*i.e.*, find the edge of the wave so that they can ride it!).
2. Perform independent research in Systems, Synthetic, and/or Physical Biology.
 - Identify and pose a research problem and place that problem in context within the field's established literature,
 - Develop a solution to an open-ended research question that has not yet been answered,
 - Thoughtfully relate research achievements to others in the SSPB fields through peer-reviewed publications, and
 - Assume responsibility for continued professional growth by striving to acquire new knowledge and skills (and display high professional standards).
3. Develop professional skills in oral and written communication.
 - Write well-organized, coherent technical prose that is at a level observed within peer-reviewed manuscripts and disseminate original results through peer-reviewed publications,
 - Deliver oral presentations that are of the caliber that is expected at national conferences and disseminate original results and findings to the community, and
 - Demonstrate critical thinking skills when confronted with unanticipated questions.

C. Becoming a leading researcher

To maximize training in SSPB, graduate students must be committed to:

- Assuming full responsibility in their research and scholarly activities
- Initiating and completing innovative and productive research activities,
- Engaging in active learning, such as participating in weekly seminars and attending relevant seminars outside of the program,
- Developing advanced oral and written communication skills,
- Accepting and providing constructive scientific criticism, and
- Exercising high professional standards in all aspects of work.

The SSPB graduate program faculty members are committed to training and mentoring graduate students to reach their full potential as scientists. We seek to facilitate students' progression towards fulfilling and exciting careers in academia, industry, or government, and to develop their skills as future leaders in science and society.

D. Participating departments and faculty

Bioengineering (<http://bioe.rice.edu>): Gang Bao, Caleb Bashor, Michael Diehl, Isaac Hilton, Oleg Igoshin, George Lu, Jianpeng Ma (*adjunct*), Robert Raphael, Ka-Yiu San, Laura Segatori, Junghae Suh, Jerzy Szablowski, Jeffrey Tabor, Omid Veisheh, David Zhang

Biosciences (<http://biosciences.rice.edu>): Caroline Ajo-Franklin, Matthew Bennett, James Chappell, Yang Gao, Natasha Kirienko, Michael Kohn, Marcos de Moraes, Edward Nikonowicz, George Phillips, Susan Rosenberg (*adjunct*), Yousif Shamoo, Jonathan (Joff) Silberg, Yizhi (Jane) Tao, Aryeh Warmflash

Chemical & Biomolecular Engineering (<http://chbe.rice.edu>): Xue (Sherry) Gao, Fred Mackintosh, Ross Thyer

Chemistry (<http://chemistry.rice.edu>): Cecilia Clementi, Anna-Karin Gustavsson, Anatoly Kolomeisky, Christy Landes, Peter Wolynes, Han Xiao

Civil and Environmental Engineering (<http://ceve.rice.edu>): Pedro Alvarez, Lauren Stadler

Computer Science (<http://compsci.rice.edu>): Lydia Kavradi, Luay Nakhleh, Todd Treangen, Vicky Yao

Earth, Environmental, and Planetary Sciences (<https://earthscience.rice.edu>): Caroline Masiello

Electrical and Computer Engineering (<http://www.ece.rice.edu>): Lan Luan, Xaq Pitkow, Jacob Robinson, Francois St-Pierre (*adjunct*), Chong Xie

Physics (<http://physics.rice.edu>): Ching-Hwa Kiang, Jose Onuchic

Statistics (<http://statistics.rice.edu>): Marek Kimmel

E. Useful websites

The following are a few links that SSPB students frequently use:

Canvas (<http://www.rice.edu/canvas/>): Learning management system used by instructors to disseminate course information

Center for Teaching Excellence (<https://cte.rice.edu>): Provides resources for graduate students who wish to build academic careers in which teaching will play a significant role

Center for Academic and Professional Communication (<https://pwc.rice.edu>): Provides feedback on written texts and oral/visual presentations

Doerr Institute for New Leaders (<https://doerr.rice.edu>): Offers a variety of programs for student leadership development needs

Employee and Student Tools, Help, and Electronic Resources (Esther) (<https://esther.rice.edu>): Used regularly for registration, grades, and information

Environmental Health and Safety (<http://safety.rice.edu>): Provides safety training

General Announcements (<http://ga.rice.edu>): Contains information on academic policies and procedures, student services and organizations, and rights and responsibilities

Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (<http://graduate.rice.edu>): Great resource for finding forms related to enrollment, candidacy, and thesis

Office of the Registrar (<http://registrar.rice.edu>): Contains information on course schedules, academic calendars, registering, and more

Student Health (<http://health.rice.edu>): Contains information about on campus preventive and outpatient clinical care

Systems, Synthetic, and Physical Biology Program (<http://sspb.rice.edu>): Contains information specific to this graduate program

II. ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

A. Using this handbook

Students should use this handbook as a guide to the processes that will occur at the different stages of their studies in the SSPB program. In addition to complying to the regulations stated herein, students must also follow processes in the General Announcements (<http://ga.rice.edu>) and Code of Conduct (<https://sjp.rice.edu/code-of-student-conduct>). In cases where there is conflicting information, university-wide regulations take precedence over SSPB regulations, which take precedence over research group regulations. When in doubt, students should seek help first at the SSPB program level and then at the central administration level (Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies). Please contact the Program Director if you have suggestions for additions or clarifications to this handbook. These suggestions will be considered in the annual revision of this handbook.

B. Graduate program organization

Program Director (Dr. Joff Silberg, joff@rice.edu). The Program Director is responsible for program leadership, curriculum oversight, planning, and evaluation. This individual considers student petitions, coordinates teaching assignments, and approves rotation/advisor assignments. Students and faculty can contact the Program Director with any SSPB questions or suggestions. The Director is the instructor for SSPB 599: Teaching in SSPB.

Program Manager (Dr. Lesa Tran Lu, lesa@rice.edu). This is the first person you should contact when questions arise. This role works side-by-side with the Program Director to oversee program administration. The SSPB Program Manager is the instructor for SSPB 550: Graduate Seminar.

Program Manager (Dr. Jing Jin, jj29@rice.edu). This individual shares program information with students and faculty, such as deadlines, student progress, program events, and opportunities. This role maintains the website, manages the mailing list, and serves as a liaison with the GSA.

Financial Administrator (Felipe Romero, fromero@rice.edu). This individual processes stipends, reimbursement for SSPB-sponsored events, and travel awards. This role also serves as a financial liaison with the departments where students perform their thesis research.

Graduate Advising Committee (Drs. Chappell, (*chair*), Bennett, and Silberg). This committee: (i) identifies remedial course work, (ii) advises students in the coursework that complies with SSPB requirements, and (iii) coordinates rotation and thesis advisor assignments. The Chair is the instructor for SSPB 575, Intro to Research. Any correspondence should be directed to the chair.

Graduate Curriculum Committee (Drs. Segatori, (*chair*), Phillips, Igoshin, Warmflash, and Silberg). This committee: (i) oversees curriculum changes, (ii) makes adjustments to course and entry requirements, and (iii) reviews and responds to student petitions for course substitutions or waivers. Any correspondence should be directed to the chair of the committee.

Steering Committee (Drs. Silberg, (*chair*), Igoshin, Kimmel, Bennett, Wolynes, and Ball (*ad hoc*)). This committee: (i) oversees the academic policies of the program, (ii) appoints training faculty, and (iii) monitors student progress. The current members include the Program Director, two Natural Sciences faculty, two Engineering faculty, and the IBB Director.

C. Graduate stipends and health insurance

Stipend. Students receive a constant amount of pay twice each month. Paychecks are issued on the 15th day of the month and the last day of the month, or the previous business day if the pay date falls on a holiday or weekend. If students have any questions regarding their stipend, they should contact the Financial Administrator. The current annual stipend is \$33,000.

Health insurance. Rice University requires all degree-seeking students to have health insurance. Students electing to enroll in the Rice Student Health Plan may opt to be billed annually or semi-annually. Contact the Cashier's Office for payment options (713-348-4946). Students must complete an Insurance Waiver Form to waive enrollment in this health plan.

D. Graduate student mail

The SSPB Mail Stop (MS) is MS-180, which corresponds to the mailboxes in BRC Suite 170A. Students should see the Program Administrator if they do not have a mailbox. FedEx and UPS packages are received in BRC Suite 170.

E. Employee and Student Tools, Help, and Electronic Resources (Esther)

Esther is used by students to register for classes and retrieve data such as grades and account information. The Rice Registrar's website contains instructions for using Esther. Esther is used to: (i) update contact information, (ii) register for classes, add/drop courses, and view enrollment verification, (iii) view course schedule, (iv) access final grades, (v) view past course and instructor evaluation comments, (vi) view unofficial transcript, (vii) print degree application, (viii) identify holds on accounts and pay account balances online, (ix) view financial aid information, (x) view employment information, such as past pay stubs, (xi) review charges and payments, and (xii) review changes to various forms (tax form and direct deposit information).

F. Graduate studies forms

All forms related to candidacy, thesis defense, thesis submission, and degree conferral can be found at the Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (GPS) website. Their website (<http://graduate.rice.edu>) contains a link for these forms.

G. SSPB Graduate Student Association Board

President ([Matthew Carpenter](#)). Directs and oversees the execution of council goals while collaborating with officers.

Vice-President ([Caleigh Roleck](#)). Assists in the president's roles, maintains archives and meeting agendas, and serves in the president's absence.

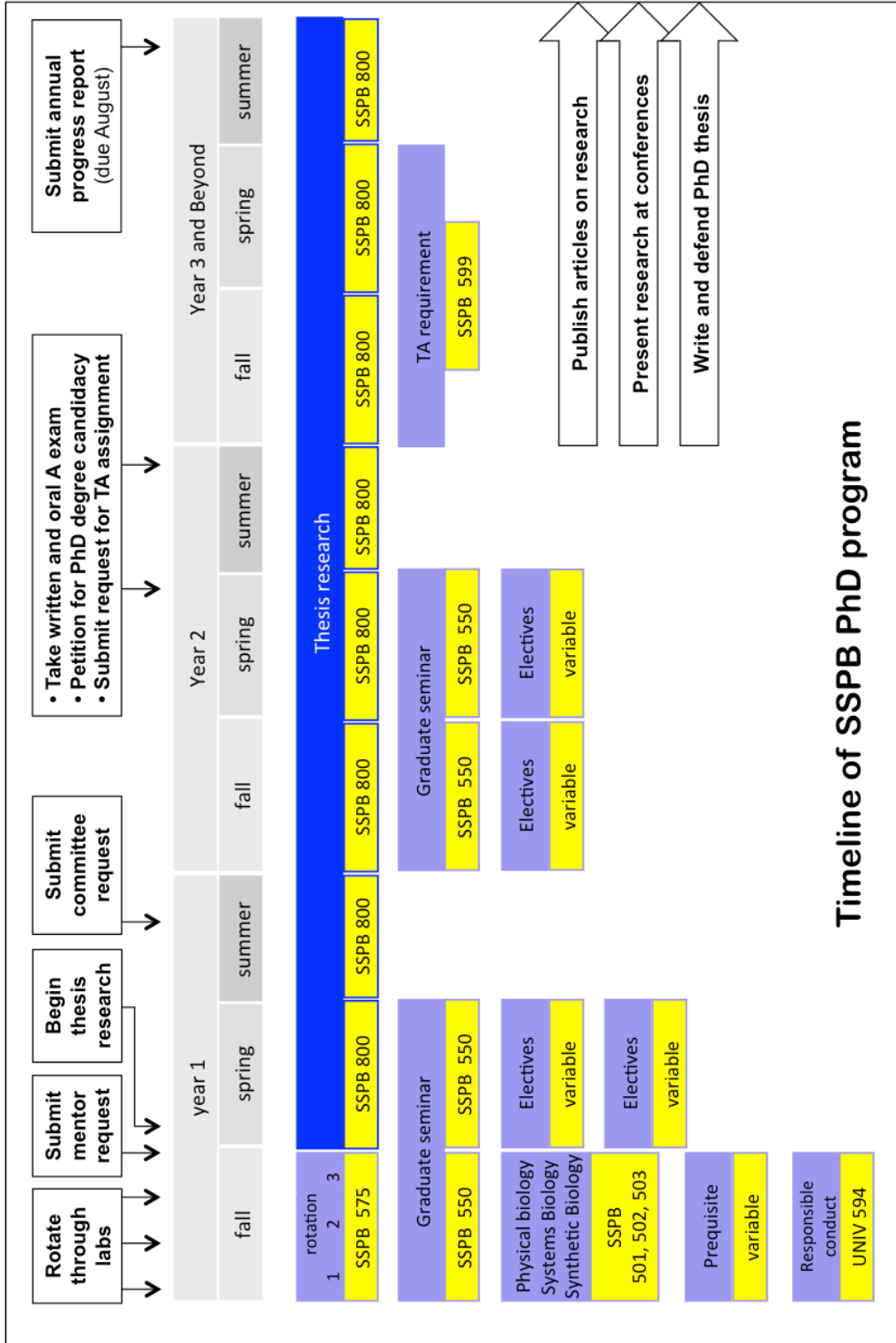
Treasurer ([Rosa Guerra Resendez](#)). Manages and accounts for budgets, and works with other officers to plan budgets.

GSA Representative ([Rosa Guerra Resendez](#)). Represents the SSPB Program in the GSA.

Recruitment Chairs ([Maxwell Hunt](#) & [Zachary Jansen](#)). Assist SSPB administration with prospective student recruitment and new student orientation activities.

Social Chairs ([Samantha Coffler](#) & [Robert \(Bobby\) Tesoriero](#)). Organize budgeted social events.

III. TYPICAL TIMELINE FOR A SSPB STUDENT



Timeline of SSPB PhD program

IV. REQUIREMENTS AND COURSE REGISTRATION

A. Prerequisite courses

Because of the interdisciplinary nature of SSPB training, students are required to have undergraduate training in the following 5 foundational areas:

1. Molecular Biology (Introductory Biology and at least one upper-level biology class, such as Cell Biology, Genetics or Biophysics),
2. Biochemical Reaction Kinetics (Biochemistry, Bioreaction Engineering, or equivalent),
3. Physical Chemistry or Thermodynamics or Statistical Mechanics,
4. Ordinary Differential Equations, and
5. Statistics.

If students are missing formal training in one or more of these subjects, they are required to take the equivalent background courses during their first year at Rice. The corresponding courses at Rice include the following:

1. Cell Biology (BIOS 341),
2. Biochemistry (BIOS 301) or Bioreaction Kinetics (BIOE 330),
3. Physical Chemistry or Thermodynamics (BIOE 332, BIOS 352, CHEM 311 or PHYS 425),
4. Ordinary Differential Equations (MATH 211 or CAAM 336), and
5. Applied Statistics for Bioengineering and Biotechnology (BIOE 439/539), Probability and Statistics (STAT 310), or Introduction to Statistics for the Biosciences (STAT 305).

These classes should be taken for a “pass/fail” grade. Students taking these courses as pass/fail will receive a grade of “pass” if they make a grade of A, B, C, or D. If a student earns a grade of “F”, it will appear on their transcript.

These courses do not count toward the required semester hours for the degree program.

B. Lecture courses

Students are required to accumulate 24 semester hours of coursework by taking the following courses for a letter grade:

1. Physical Biology (SSPB 501)
2. Introduction to Systems Biology Modeling (SSPB 502)
3. Synthetic Biology (SSPB 503)
4. Advanced Topics in SSPB (at least 3 courses from approved list in Appendix*, ≥500-level)
5. Open elective courses (at least 6 credit hours that are 300-level or above)

It is recommended that at least one of the courses in Advanced Topics apply quantitative concepts from Computer Science, Physics, and Mathematics or Statistics to biological problems, and at least one of the courses focus on biology within the sub-area where each student is pursuing their dissertation research. Students must take at least 15 semester hours of lecture courses during their first year, including their prerequisite courses, the core requirements

(SSPB 501/502/503) for which they have sufficient prerequisites, and additional approved lecture courses. Additionally, all of the core course requirements (SSPB 501/502/503) should be taken during the first year in residence and must be taken before the end of the second year.

*Students may petition to the Program Director for a course not found on the approved list in the Appendix to count towards the Advanced Coursework requirement.

C. Responsible Conduct of Research

All students are required to take “Responsible Conduct of Research” (UNIV 594) during their first semester. Responsible conduct of research is defined as the practice of scientific investigation with integrity. It involves the awareness and application of established professional norms and ethical principles in the performance of all activities related to scientific research. UNIV 594 does not count towards the 24 hours of coursework.

D. Seminars

Seminar attendance is an integral part of our education as scientists during our formal studies and beyond. For this reason, students are required to enroll in the graduate seminar course (SSPB 550) each semester of their first two years to accumulate a total of four semesters of course credit.

Students that have a class or TA-assignment conflict with the seminar timing during one of their first 4 semesters at Rice can petition the Graduate Advising Committee to postpone their fulfillment of the seminar requirement to a subsequent semester. SSPB 550 is graded on a “Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory” basis based on attendance. The attendance policy for SSPB 550 is set by the course instructor and announced in the course syllabus each semester. Students who have fulfilled their seminar requirement are encouraged to continue attending the SSPB seminar series and other proximal seminars of relevance to their research and education.

E. Research

First semester. During their first semester in residence, all students must register for “Introduction to Research” (SSPB 575) and participate in research rotations. The student performance in the research rotations (SSPB 575) will be graded as Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory.

Subsequent semesters. To be a full-time student and receive a stipend during the fall and spring semesters, students must register for a minimum of 9 credit hours. The university minimum requirement for the doctorate degree is 90 semester hours beyond the bachelor’s degree (60 hours beyond the master’s degree).

After joining a research group, students should register for “Graduate Research” (SSPB 800). Students should consider course load when deciding on the number of credit hours to take for SSPB 800. In cases where students only take SSPB 800, they should register for 9 credit hours per semester during the terms they are engaged in research. In semesters where students are taking courses, they should enroll in SSPB 800 for a minimum of 9 credit hours. Students are expected to fulfill the research requirements as defined by their advisor to earn a “satisfactory” grade in SSPB 800.

Summer semesters. To be a full-time student and receive a stipend during the summer session, students must be registered for a minimum of 9 credit hours. Students are expected to enroll in

SSPB 800 for nine credits during each summer.

F. Teaching

Each graduate student must satisfactorily complete SSPB 599 during one semester (before the end of their third year in residence) to fulfill their teaching requirement. Students must submit a request for their teaching assignment to the Program Director before the end of the fourth semester.

Student requests for teaching assignments should include at least one of the core courses (SSPB 501/502/503) and a second course outside of the core. Multiple core courses can be requested and will be considered. Assignments will be determined by the Program Director in coordination with the research advisor.

Students interested in additional teaching experience for future academic careers are encouraged to participate in teaching another course to develop their pedagogical skills (e.g., subject mastery required for teaching, presentation skills including effective public speaking, setting clear expectations, and judging performance). This additional teaching must be approved by the research advisor.

G. Requirements for the MS in SSPB

Although students are not normally admitted to a Master of Science (MS) degree program, students who do not wish to continue their studies toward the PhD degree may choose to graduate with the MS degree by satisfying the following requirements:

- Satisfying all university graduation requirement for thesis master's degrees (please see General Announcements)
- Completing all core courses: SSPB 501, SSPB 502, SSPB 503
- Completing three additional one-semester lecture courses (3 credit hours/course) that qualify as an Advanced Elective or Open Elective
- Completing the following Program-specific courses: UNIV 594, SSPB 575, SSPB 599, and two (2) semesters of SSPB 550
- Completing at least six (6) credit hours of SSPB 800
- Producing a Master's thesis that presents the results of original research approved by the graduate program
- Passing a final oral Master's thesis defense and submitting the thesis to the Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies

Students must maintain a minimum overall GPA of 3.00 or higher in all Rice coursework to be a candidate for the MS degree. No other preliminary examination will be held prior to the final oral defense of the written Master's thesis.

Master's degrees must be completed by the fifth year of residency and will not be awarded until all coursework requirements are completed. To attend commencement at the end of the academic year, the student must submit a petition for candidacy prior to deadlines listed each year in Rice's academic calendar.

As in the case of the PhD students, students seeking a Master's degree should complete and submit the Petition for Approval of MS Candidacy Form with the assistance of the Program Manager and the approval of the Program Director by no later than the end of the 4th semester of program enrollment. In the petition sent to the dean, the Program Director identifies the student's thesis director, recommends a thesis committee, certifies that the applicant has fulfilled

the departmental requirements, and provides a course transcript as evidence that work completed within the department is of high quality.

V. FIRST YEAR IN THE PROGRAM

A. Early matriculation

Some students will come to Houston early (between May 16 and August 1) to work in a lab over the summer. This is a way to get a head start on picking an advisor during a time when students do not have all of the distractions of course work and teaching assignments. During this time, students are paid at the existing stipend rate. In order to do this, students need an agreement that the particular faculty member is willing and able to support them during this time. It is important to realize that working for a faculty member during the summer does not constitute a commitment on the part of either the student or the professor to a long-term working relationship.

B. Orientation week, advising, and course registration

Orientation Week. Students will typically be required to arrive on campus one week before the start of their first semester to participate in Orientation Week (or O-week), during which students learn the basics about Rice and have a chance to socialize with more senior students. During this week, there are mandatory university-wide orientations conducted by the Office of the Dean of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies as well as the Office of International Students and Scholars. The SSPB Program will also host a program-specific orientation, during which students are provided an overview of the program, meet with the Graduate Advising Committee, and attend presentations by SSPB faculty interested in recruiting students. Students will also participate in activities that help them understand the foundational knowledge and quantitative skills that they will need to develop during their first year of study. These activities will be organized by current SSPB graduate students.

Advising. The Chair of the Graduate Advising Committee helps students plan their coursework during their first semester in residence. Students meet with the Chair of this committee before the start of the Fall semester to identify prerequisite courses that are required and to develop a plan for coursework during their first year in the program. Once a student joins a lab, the student's faculty mentor is responsible for providing guidance on advanced elective coursework. Although the student's advisor will take over the advising role once the student officially joins a lab, the Graduate Advising Committee is always available to answer questions.

Registering for courses. Students should register via Esther. Log onto Esther using your Student ID and follow the instructions under the registration tab. To be a full-time student and receive a stipend, students must be enrolled in a minimum of 9 credit hours during the spring and fall semesters, as well as during the summer session. Depending on the semester, the number of credit hours for Graduate Research (SSPB 800) will be adjusted based on course load so that the total credit hours equal at least 9 credit hours. For more details about course requirements and registration, please see Section IV (page 12).

C. Peer advising

An outstanding resource that all entering students should use is the knowledge base of the current graduate students. To help connect entering and existing graduate students in the

program, one or more social activities will occur prior to the beginning of the first semester. Beyond these activities, entering students are encouraged to proactively engage more senior graduate students in the program for advice about various topics of interest, such as the transition to graduate school and graduate life. Entering students often benefit from discussing information about navigating the city, the university, rotations, courses, writing fellowships, and choosing an advisor.

D. Research rotations and joining a lab

Research rotations. To facilitate learning about the various thesis opportunities, students participate in three laboratory rotations during their first semester. The purpose of lab rotation is to assist the first-year students in choosing a faculty advisor and a lab for conducting thesis research. Rotation selection involves many steps, including:

1. Students attend faculty research presentations. These presentations occur before rotations and provide students an opportunity to hear about the diversity of research opportunities in the program.
2. Students coordinate one-on-one discussions with faculty. Students are responsible for setting up meetings with faculty to discuss possible rotations based on their interests after the presentations. These can be scheduled in advance of the faculty presentations.
3. Students submit a rank ordered list of rotation preferences. This list is submitted to the Chair of the Graduate Advising Committee near the end of August. Students have an opportunity to update this list before the second and third rotations begin.
4. Students enroll in SSPB 575 to receive course credit for rotations in the semesters where they rotate through labs. One semester of SSPB 575 is required of all students.
5. Rotations are assigned. The Graduate Advising Committee will work to match students with labs that match their research interests.
6. Students discuss rotation expectations with mentors. To ensure a good rotation experience for both the student and the faculty, students should set up meetings with their advisors well in advance of the rotation to discuss expectations, goals, requirements and lab guidelines.
7. Students rotate through three different labs. These laboratory rotations occur during the first semester and are typically ~4 weeks in duration. Students are expected to spend approximately six hours in the lab per week for each rotation.

Submitting advisor preferences. Upon completing the lab rotations, students submit a ranked list of their preferred thesis advisors to the Chair of the Graduate Advising Committee near the end of their first fall semester. Students must list a minimum of three different possible advisors. Students may include laboratories that were not among the three approved rotation labs. However, they should not include an advisor on their ranked list unless they have discussed research opportunities in that lab. Students are responsible for developing a list of at least three different faculty members within the SSPB program who could serve as their thesis advisors.

Advisor assignments. The Graduate Advising Committee works to match student interests to those of the SSPB faculty and available funded research projects. This matching occurs after all students have submitted their thesis advisor preferences and after consultation with the requested advisors. Several factors are considered during the matching process, including

funding, available space, academic standing, rotation performances, and the relationship between the student and the potential advisor.

In most cases, students will be granted their primary choice for a thesis research advisor. When a match with the top choice is not possible, the student will likely be matched with one of his or her alternative choices. In special circumstances where a student cannot be placed with an advisor by the beginning of the spring semester, the student will be notified of the delay and efforts to assign an advisor will be handled on a case-by-case basis.

In extraordinary cases, students may submit a petition to request that a faculty member outside of the program be considered as their research advisor. To do this, the student must submit a formal written petition to the Program Director that indicates:

- (i) the name of faculty member they would like considered as their thesis advisor,
- (ii) the reasons that they would like that faculty member considered as a thesis mentor,
- (iii) how the research that they will pursue in that group is aligned with the SSPB program, and
- (iv) additional factors that are relevant to their request.

Students should only make this request if they have had previous discussions with the faculty member who they are proposing as a thesis advisor, and if that faculty member is amenable to serving as their thesis advisor.

In the very rare case when no match satisfactory to both the student and a faculty member is made, the Program Director will recommend that the student transfer to another graduate program at Rice or to another institution that is more in line with the student's interests.

E. Evaluation of progress

At the end of each of the first two semesters of residence, the program will review each student's course work, performance in laboratory rotations, and motivation. Students must maintain at least a B average (GPA = 3.0), obtain satisfactory marks in research rotations, participate in the graduate seminar, complete the required coursework, and demonstrate potential for research to continue in the PhD program. Additionally, students must take courses that have been approved by the chair of the Graduate Advising Committee.

Students who do not meet the above requirements will be placed on probation. The Program Director, after consultation with the Graduate Advising Committee, will determine what the student must do to address deficiencies to be removed from probation. Clear expectations for resolving deficiencies will be communicated in writing.

Failure to adequately address deficiencies in the indicated period of time will result in dismissal from the program.

VI. SECOND YEAR IN THE PROGRAM

A. Research and coursework

Students are expected to devote a majority of their time to research activities during their second year in the program, although some students may take additional coursework during this time. In each semester including the summer, students should register for “Graduate Research” (SSPB 800). Students are expected to fulfill the research requirements as defined by their advisor to earn a “satisfactory” grade in SSPB 800, and they are expected to continue maintaining a B average (GPA = 3.0) in their coursework.

B. Research Progress Committee

The Research Progress Committee should be formed before the end of the second semester in residence, and the student is responsible for assembling their committee. A list of the assembled committee must be emailed to the Program Administrator.

Committee role. The purpose of the committee is to evaluate the student’s research progress by administering the Admission to Candidacy Exam before their fifth semester in residence. This committee will also read, critique, and provide feedback on the student’s annual progress reports, and the committee administers the student’s final oral defense and evaluates the formal written proposal.

Committee structure. The student in consultation with their thesis advisor should develop a plan for a Research Progress Committee, which must include a minimum of three Rice tenured or tenure-track faculty members who are SSPB faculty with primary appointments within at least two different Rice University departments. Additional members are allowed.

Thesis Director. The student should choose a Thesis Director and Committee Chair. The Committee Chair and Thesis Director need not be the same person. However, the Chair must be either a tenured or tenure-track member of the SSPB Program whose primary faculty appointment is at Rice University.

Committee formation. Once the student has organized a willing Research Progress Committee, they must communicate the names of these individuals to the Program Administrator and their thesis advisor by email. This must happen before the end of the second semester in residence. Any deviation from these rules and this timeline must be approved by the Program Director and must follow university-wide rules.

Getting the most out of the Research Progress Committee. It is important that the student and committee maintain an effective working relationship. Committee members can supply scientific and technical advice, assist the student in achieving career goals, and might ultimately provide references for a student when they search for professional positions after the PhD is awarded. The committee also can help resolve disputes (if any) between student and thesis advisor.

C. Admission to candidacy examination

Timing. The admission to candidacy examination (A-exam) **must occur before the beginning of the fifth semester in residence.** The student is responsible for scheduling the A-exam and

informing participants of the date well in advance of the deadline. The Program Administrator must be made aware of the exam date and location at least two weeks in advance of the exam.

Students who are unable to schedule their thesis proposal before the beginning of their fifth semester (excluding summers) must request an extension by submitting a petition to the Program Administrator in writing before August 15, who will forward the petition to the Program Manager and Program Director for approval. The petition should include the following:

- (i) the current time boundary,
- (ii) requested time boundary, which cannot be more than 12 months,
- (iii) reasons that resulted in the need for an extension,
- (iv) list of milestones to be completed that will result in meeting the requested time boundary,
- (v) additional factors that are relevant, and
- (vi) approval (signature) of the thesis advisor.

Failure to submit a petition or rejection of a petition will lead to program dismissal.

Overview. The A-exam includes a formal written proposal and an oral examination conducted by the student's Research Progress Committee. This committee will determine the suitability of the student's candidacy for further pursuit of the doctoral degree based on his or her performance on the written and oral portions of the A-exam. The student's overall academic record and research progress also are considered in determining the student's "pass" or "fail."

Written Exam. The written proposal contains a summary of research progress up to that point and future research plans. This document must be submitted to the Research Progress Committee and the Program Administrator at least 2 weeks before the scheduled Oral Exam. The Program Administrator requires only a digital copy of the exam.

The format of the proposal should be of a quality that could be submitted to a federal funding agency (e.g., NIH NRSA). Students are encouraged to request feedback from their advisor, other lab members, and the writing center (i.e., CWOVC) to ensure that the written document is clear and cogent. This document should contain (as a minimum) the following sections:

1. Abstract (not to exceed 250 words).
2. Background with extensive literature survey. Provide a historical background of the proposed research including major relevant findings by others.
3. Problem statement. Concisely and clearly describe the point of departure for the proposed research project.
4. Research plan. Describe in detail the rationale, hypotheses, methodology, controls, expected outcomes, interpretations, and possible alternative approaches.
5. Preliminary results. Present data from initial experiments that support the research plan. This section can be integrated into the research plan.
6. References.
7. Proposed time-line for completion of thesis research

The advisor may, within reason, require additional information be included. Portions of manuscripts or reports to sponsors (if available) can be incorporated in the written proposal.

Note that preliminary data should be presented in publication-quality figures and diagrams, and there should be no typographical or spelling errors. The length of the proposal may vary.

However, it should not exceed 10 pages (single spaced, font Times 12 or Arial 11), including specific aims, figures and tables, but excluding references and the title page.

Oral Exam. The goal of the oral exam is to test both the student's understanding of the proposed thesis project and his or her understanding of fundamental principles in SSPB. The oral exam involves a formal presentation of the student's proposed research plan, which if uninterrupted would last about 30 to 45 minutes. The student should be prepared for substantial questioning by their committee, whose charge is to assess the depth of the student's general knowledge and to determine the student's familiarity and overall understanding of his/her research topic. The oral exam is generally scheduled for 2 hours in length. The student should refer to the Thesis Proposal Defense (A-exam) - Student Checklist in this handbook Appendix for instructions on the oral exam.

At the conclusion of the oral exam, the committee will decide among one of the following three possible outcomes:

1. Pass. The written proposal was judged to be well-written and logical, and the thesis project was viewed as feasible. In addition, the student demonstrated exemplary knowledge in all areas covered during the exam.
2. Conditional pass. The student effectively communicated exemplary knowledge in most areas covered during the exam, but displayed incomplete knowledge or communication of some aspect of the project or the underlying science. In this case, the committee may assign the student additional reading, writing, or coursework on specific topics to improve the student's basic science foundation and to facilitate thesis completion. The committee will communicate a deadline for this additional material and then determine if that work addresses the deficiencies; if so, then the student will formally "pass" the oral examination.
3. Fail. If the committee decides that the student has failed the written or oral exam, the student may be dismissed from the program. Alternatively, at the discretion of the committee and in consultation with the Program Director, a make-up exam may be scheduled within six months. If the student fails the second exam, the student will be dismissed from the program. Students who fail the candidacy exam can request permission to complete a Master's degree within one year from the date of the candidacy exam. The thesis advisor, the progress review committee, and the Program Director must approve this request. A primary consideration in granting this request will be whether the preliminary research already conducted supports the likelihood of successful completion of a novel research project within the one-year time frame. Once approved to complete a Master's degree, students must submit an original research thesis and defend the thesis in a public oral examination.

D. Petition for PhD degree candidacy

Immediately following successful completion of the Admission to Candidacy examination, the student must coordinate with the Program Manager to submit a Petition for Approval of Candidacy for a Doctoral Degree Form for official approval of his/her candidacy for the PhD degree. **Prior to submitting this form, students must identify an "outside" member of their thesis committee**, since the university requires the student to name the "outside" member of his or her thesis committee. This outside member must be a faculty member who is outside the SSPB program and outside of the department where their thesis advisor has a primary appointment.

SSPB Program policy is that the petition should be filed within one week of passing the candidacy exam, or the Program Director will be notified that the student has not filed in a timely fashion. On the form, the thesis advisor should be listed as the Director of the Thesis Committee, the outside committee member should be a Rice faculty member from outside the program and thesis advisor's department, the chair of the progress review committee should be listed as the member from within the program, and everyone else on the progress review committee should be listed as additional members.

Once a student has passed their A exam and completed their required coursework, the program will submit the form to the Office of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies for approval. If you have questions about the petition, you should contact the Program Manager.

VII. ADVANCEMENT TO CANDIDACY TO GRADUATION

A. Research and teaching responsibilities

Research. Students are expected to immerse themselves in full time research after completing their advancement to candidacy exam. They are also expected to publish their research findings in peer-reviewed journals. To advance as a scientist, it is essential that students publish most or all of their dissertation research in peer-reviewed journals. A strong publication record is the most important metric by which research accomplishment is evaluated, and is necessary for a student to establish a scientific career following the receipt of their PhD. Students should not plan to defend their dissertation until the bulk of their research has been accepted for publication.

Teaching. Students must fulfill their teaching (SSPB 599) requirements to graduate. Students must submit a written request for their teaching assignment to the Program Director before the end of the fourth semester. This request should include: (i) at least one of the core courses SSPB 501/502/503, and (ii) a second course outside of the core. Additional core and non-core courses can be requested. Students must fulfill this requirement before the end of their third year in residence.

Students may submit a petition to request to delay their teaching requirement. To do so, the student must submit a formal petition to the Program Director indicating: (i) the rationale for the request, and (ii) the course and semester where they wish to fulfill their teaching requirement.

Scientific Conferences. The program encourages students to participate in local, national and international scientific conferences. This participation enables students to present their work to a wide audience, listen to research presentations from a range of speakers, and meet with individuals sharing common research interests. Students should also use these meetings to network with future collaborators and employers. The Financial Administrator can help students with travel guidelines related to scientific conferences, and they can make sure that students understand costs that are reimbursable versus costs that are considered personal.

If students are planning to present at a meeting, they can request a small subsidy for travel from the SSPB program (e.g., \$300). To do so, students should email information about the conference (title, date, relationship to thesis) and their Abstract to the Financial Administrator who will share it with the Program Manager and Program Director for consideration.

B. Annual evaluation of progress

Student Progress Review Reports. Following the A exam, students are required to complete annual reports that will be reviewed by their Research Progress Committee, Advisor, Program Director, Program Manager, and Program Administrator by August 1 each year. Typically, these reports should contain:

- (i) a list of articles published, submitted, or in preparation,
- (ii) a list of oral and poster presentations,
- (iii) a short summary of the research progress, and
- (iv) the research plans for the upcoming year.

(v) A full curriculum vitae (CV) should be provided as an attachment.

The research progress and plans (i-iv) should not exceed 1,000 words. There is no word limit on the CV. Students can additionally request a meeting with their committee if they have faced any challenges that they would like to discuss. The Program Administrator will schedule any meetings that are requested. If the student plans to defend within 1 semester of the annual report due date, then they should submit an outline of their thesis for approval with their report.

Review of Research Progress. Following the A exam, the research advisor must submit a letter by August 1 each year, which contains a written evaluation of the student's progress, to the Program Administrator. The Program Administrator will send this letter and the student's report to the Program Director. If the research advisor raises any concerns about progress, then this information will be provided to the Research Progress Committee for evaluation. The committee will then convey to the student in writing whether the student's progress is satisfactory and if there are any recommended activities that might be beneficial to the student in their efforts.

If the Research Progress Committee finds that the student is not making satisfactory progress, then the Program Administrator will schedule a meeting for the student with their Research Progress Committee to discuss their progress in greater depth. Following this meeting, the committee can recommend to the Program Director that the student be placed on research probation or dismissed from the program.

C. PhD thesis defense

The Committee. The University committee for the final oral examination (defense of thesis exam) must be approved by the Office of Graduate Studies at the same time as the candidacy is approved. At the minimum, the committee must be comprised of the following three members who must all be tenured or tenure-track faculty members of Rice University: (1) the chair of the thesis committee can either be the research advisor or a faculty member affiliated with the SSPB Program; (2) a second committee member who is affiliated with the SSPB Program; and (3) a third committee member who must not be affiliated with either the SSPB Program or the department where the student's advisor has their primary appointment. Oftentimes, this committee includes additional faculty members, e.g., additional members of the student's Research Progress Committee, faculty outside of Rice whose expertise is aligned with the thesis research, and other Rice faculty members.

A student may elect to have an "external examiner" from another university also serve on the committee. In such cases, the Program Director must secure the approval of the Office of Graduate Studies for the addition of an "external examiner" to the committee. The formal structure of thesis committees is described in the General Announcements and regularly reviewed by the Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies.

Scheduling the Defense. After a student's candidacy has been approved and upon completion of his or her research project, the student must schedule, in coordination with his or her research advisor, a public oral examination of the defense of his or her thesis. The student is responsible for reserving a room for the thesis defense. Generally, a 2-hour block of time is sufficient for the lecture and subsequent examination.

The final thesis defense seminar is public, and the student must arrange to have it announced in the Rice weekly Calendar of Events at least two weeks before the scheduled date, and the student must notify the Program Administrator to post the defense on the SSPB website. Oral

examination announcements are to be submitted to the Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies by entering the information into the online Graduate Students Thesis Defense Announcement form. This form can be found online (<http://events.rice.edu/rgs>). Students should refer to the Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies website (<http://graduate.rice.edu/thesis>) for specific information regarding scheduling requirements. Exceptions to this policy are granted only in very rare circumstances and must be approved by Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies.

Written Thesis Requirements. Graduate students must conclude an original investigation that is formalized in an approved written thesis. The requirements and format of the written dissertation are set forth by the Office of Graduate Studies. It is to the student's advantage to be fully aware of these requirements before undertaking the writing process. The title page should list the thesis advisor first, then the remaining committee members should be listed in alphabetical order. The thesis advisor should read preliminary drafts of the thesis and must approve the final copy before its distribution to the other committee members.

For the examination, the final copy shall consist of a printed document, which, if accepted, could be bound and submitted without editing to the Office of Graduate Studies. The final copies must be submitted to the thesis committee members, along with a copy to the Program Administrator, at least two weeks before the final oral examination. In the course of the examination, the thesis committee members may recommend revisions or additions, which must be incorporated in the final thesis, which is then signed by all committee members.

The student should note that, in order to participate in the commencement ceremonies at the end of the academic year, the committee members must approve the final copy of the thesis before the deadlines imposed by the Office of Graduate Studies.

Thesis Examination. The final thesis examination consists of two parts. (1) Initially, the student presents an hour-long public lecture that is handled like a departmental seminar. (2) The official examination by the thesis committee follows the seminar. The student is expected to defend in detail his/her research work and the text of the written thesis. The committee members will consider both the student's research work and the final copy of the thesis. Detailed instructions for the thesis defense process can be found online at <https://graduate.rice.edu/current-students/defense>.

If the committee members approve the student's performance and the text of the thesis, they sign the required forms, which must be brought to the examination by the student. The student should obtain this form from the Program Administrator prior to the defense. If alterations in the written text of the thesis are requested, the student must submit a revised copy of the thesis to the dissenting members for their approval and signatures on the title page. In the case of an unsatisfactory performance, a second examination can be scheduled. A second unsatisfactory performance will result in dismissal from the program.

Acceptance of Thesis. No later than six months from the date of the examination, candidates who successfully passed the oral examination in defense of their thesis must submit their thesis to the Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies. A student's thesis must be submitted electronically. The Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies website (<http://graduate.rice.edu/thesis>) contains specific instructions regarding how to submit the thesis. If the thesis is not ready for final signatures by the end of the six-month period, the "pass" may be revoked and an additional oral defense must be scheduled.

Degree Conferral. Students who wish to have their degree conferred in the same semester in which they defend, must file their applications for degree conferral before November 1 for the fall semester and March 1 for the spring semester. These dates are subject to change, therefore, students should consult the Registrar's webpage academic calendar (<http://registrar.rice.edu/calendars>) to confirm these deadlines.

Deadlines. Rice University requires the thesis to be defended before the end of the 16th semester of residency at Rice. However, the normal limit of financial support for graduate students is ten semesters (excluding summers). Students, who anticipate taking longer than 10 semesters for completion of their PhD degree must consult with their advisor as outlined in Section VIII-C.

D. MS thesis defense

Overview. Masters of Science degree candidates are required to submit a formal written thesis and complete an oral examination that is consistent with the format and requirements set by the Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies. The thesis document and oral defense are to be evaluated by the student's Masters Thesis Committee.

The Committee. The Masters Thesis Committee administers the oral examination for the student's thesis defense and has final approval/disapproval authority and responsibility for the written thesis. The committee includes the thesis advisor and all members of the student's Research Progress Committee. Any adjustments to the committee composition must be approved by the Program Director and the Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies at the same time as the candidacy is approved. More detailed guidelines regarding committee composition can be found in the General Announcements.

Scheduling the Defense. After a student's candidacy has been approved, the student must schedule, in coordination with his or her research advisor, a public oral examination of the defense of his or her thesis. The student is responsible for reserving a room for the thesis defense, in consultation with the Program Administrator. Generally, a 2-hour block of time is sufficient for the lecture and subsequent examination. The final thesis defense seminar is public, and the student must arrange to have it formally announced with the Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies and on the SSPB website at least one week before the scheduled date. After this announcement is submitted, the Program Administrator automatically obtains the Approval of Master's Candidacy Form from the Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies. The student must bring this form to the defense.

Written Thesis. Graduate students must conclude an original investigation that is formalized in an approved written thesis. The requirements and format of the written dissertation are set forth by the Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies. It is to the student's advantage to be fully aware of these requirements before undertaking the writing process. The title page should list the thesis advisor first, then the remaining committee members should be listed in alphabetical order. The thesis advisor should read preliminary drafts of the thesis and must approve the final copy before its distribution to the other committee members.

For the examination, the final copy shall consist of a printed document, which, if accepted, could be bound and submitted without editing to the Office of Graduate Studies. The final copies must be submitted to the thesis committee members, along with a copy to the Program Administrator, at least one week before the final oral defense.

Oral Defense. The final thesis examination consists of two parts: (1) Initially, the student presents an hour-long public lecture that is handled like a departmental seminar. (2) Following the public lecture, the official examination by the thesis committee follows. The student is expected to defend in detail his/her research work and the text of the written thesis. The committee members will consider both the student's research work and the final copy of the thesis. Detailed instructions for the thesis defense process can be found online at <https://graduate.rice.edu/current-students/defense>.

If the committee members approve the student's performance and the text of the thesis, they sign the required forms, which must be brought to the examination by the student. In the course of the examination, the thesis committee members may recommend revisions or additions, which must be incorporated in the submission of a revised final thesis, which must then be approved and signed by all committee members. The student should note that, in order to participate in the commencement ceremonies at the end of the academic year, the committee members must approve the final copy of the thesis before the deadlines set by the Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies.

In the case of an unsatisfactory performance, a second examination can be scheduled. A second unsatisfactory performance will result in dismissal from the program.

Following their defense, students must submit a copy of their approval of candidacy form, signed by the thesis committee signifying successful defense of the thesis, to the Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies within one week after the oral examination. Instructions to submit this form are located online at <https://graduate.rice.edu/thesis>. The original approval of candidacy form must be turned in when the thesis is submitted.

Acceptance of Thesis. No later than six months from the date of the examination, candidates who successfully passed the oral examination in defense of their thesis must submit their thesis to the Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies. A student's thesis must be submitted electronically. The Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies website (<http://graduate.rice.edu/thesis>) contains specific instructions regarding how to submit the thesis. If the thesis is not ready for final signatures by the end of the six-month period, the "pass" may be revoked and an additional oral defense must be scheduled.

Degree Conferral. Students who wish to have their degree conferred in the same semester in which they defend, must meet the submission deadline for that degree conferral per the Academic Calendar.

Deadlines. All master's students are required to complete their program within five years of initial enrollment. This time boundary includes any period in which the student was not enrolled or enrolled part-time, for whatever reason. Failure to meet any university time to degree deadline may result in the student not being able to continue in their degree program.

VIII. ADDITIONAL PROGRAM PROTOCOLS

A. Vacation

Arrangements for holidays and other time off must be made in advance in consultation with the advisor and must be in compliance with university rules and any guidelines from funding agencies. During the first semester of study, graduate students observe the same holiday schedule as other students engaged in course work. Beginning in the second semester, PhD students are engaged in research full time and must have any vacation time approved by their advisor. During this time, students follow the designated staff holidays. For example, winter break is a staff holiday where students receive time off, since the university is officially closed. However, students do not receive spring break as time off because the university is not officially closed during this time. Note that vacation time must not conflict with requirements of the granting agency that provides student support.

Medical leaves and other types of interruptions of study should be handled according to the guidelines in the General Announcements (<http://ga.rice.edu>).

B. Conflict Resolution

Any student who has a conflict with a faculty member or a student colleague is first encouraged to settle the conflict directly. Should this not be possible or should the conflict remain unresolved, the student may file a formal grievance with the Chair of the Graduate Advising Committee. Graduate Student grievances and problem resolution will be handled by the Chair of the Graduate Advising Committee in consultation with the Program Director. If the student's advisor, members of his or her thesis committee, or other faculty involved in the conflict are members of this Committee, then the pre-doctoral student will have recourse directly to the Program Director who will act as an Ombudsman. Additional faculty members may be consulted by the Graduate Advising Committee and/or Program Director to assure the student's grievance is heard by an appropriate audience.

C. Financial support

Students who receive a stipend in support of their graduate work are expected to devote full-time to their studies and are not allowed to take outside employment. Full-time for first-year students during their first semester of study will typically consist of six courses (SSPB 501, SSPB 502, SSPB 503, SSPB 550, SSPB 575, and UNIV 594). Financial support is dependent upon satisfactory performance in coursework and research, reasonable progress toward degree requirements, the availability of funds, and placement in a lab by the end of the second semester in residence. Student stipends are subject to all of the usual federal taxes.

The program will fund students during the first semester of study. In most cases this covers the first semester in residence. Advisors become responsible for financially supporting students beginning on the first day of February. Advisors are expected to pay 100% of the student's stipend unless that stipend is funded by an external fellowship, scholarship, training grant, or other source of external funding which covers all or a portion of the student's stipend. If alternative sources of funding only cover a portion of the student's stipend, then the advisor is

responsible for the remaining portion.

The normal limit of financial support for graduate students is ten semesters (excluding summers). Students, who anticipate taking longer than 10 semesters for completion of their PhD degree must consult with their advisor. The advisor, in consultation with the thesis committee, shall consider the student's progress, circumstances that justify continued funding, and the availability of funding when making a decision regarding whether the student's funding should be continued for a specific period. Continued support will be reevaluated annually or more often as appropriate. Students whose funding has been terminated may continue to register and work on research projects as long as they continue to make acceptable progress toward the degree requirements.

D. Changing laboratories

Because switching advisors will likely affect progress toward the degree and/or any financial support arranged by the previous advisor, students should not consider switching advisors except in exceptional circumstances. However, the program recognizes that in rare circumstances a student may feel their interests could be better served by working with a different advisor. Requests to voluntarily switch advisors will be handled on a case-by-case basis. In such cases the program will make every effort to assist the student, however, the student bears the ultimate responsibility of finding a new advisor.

Procedure. Students should first discuss issues with their current advisor in an attempt to resolve any concerns or problems. If the student feels issues are insurmountable, he/she is encouraged to request the guidance of the Chair of the Graduate Advising Committee and/or Program Director. If the student still wishes to switch advisors, the student should speak with a potential advisor whose research interests are in line with their interests, who is willing to serve as the student's advisor, and who has funding to support the student. If the student finds another faculty member willing to serve as his or her advisor, the student should submit a written petition to the Program Director for approval of the switch in advisors. This petition *must* have the endorsement of the new advisor. If the Program Director approves the switch, the Program Administrator will process the paperwork required to switch advisors in coordination with the Program Manager.

Students may not initiate the process to change advisors more than twice nor have a total of more than three advisors, including their initial advisor, during their tenure as a student.

E. Probation and dismissal

Grades. Students must maintain a GPA of 3.0 or higher. If a student's GPA falls below 3.0, then the student will be placed on probation. The Program Director, after consultation with the Steering Committee, will determine what the student must do to address deficiencies and be removed from probation. Clear expectations for resolving any academic deficiency will be communicated in writing to the student. Failure to address deficiencies will result in dismissal from the program. If the student's GPA falls below 2.67 for two consecutive semesters (including the summer semester), the student will be immediately dismissed without further warning in accordance with University policy. Students will be notified of their dismissal once final grades have been received and posted to their records.

Research Progress. Students must make adequate progress on research. Progress includes

receiving satisfactory grades for SSPB 575 and SSPB 800 (the research-related courses), passing the advancement to candidacy exam, and submitting annual progress review reports that demonstrate progress. A lack of progress will lead to placement of a student on probation. The Program Director, after consultation with the Steering Committee, will determine what the student must do to address deficiencies and be removed from probation. Clear expectations for resolving any research progress deficiency will be communicated in writing to the student. A failure to rectify the problems would be grounds for dismissal under the terms of the “satisfactory progress” rule in the graduate requirements.

F. Guidelines for petitions and appeals

As outlined in the General Announcements, graduate students may petition for exceptions to academic requirements, regulations, and judgments. A course requirement is an example of an academic requirement. Allowed time to degree is an example of an academic regulation. Course grades and dismissals from programs are examples of academic judgments. If a petition is denied, one level of appeal is allowed.

Detailed information on the university policies related to these protocols can be found within the General Announcements (<http://ga.rice.edu>).

G. Assault, Harassment, and Discrimination

Rice encourages any student who has experienced an incident of sexual, relationship, or other interpersonal violence, harassment, or gender discrimination to seek support. There are many options available both on and off campus for all graduate students, regardless of whether the perpetrator was a fellow student, a staff or faculty member, or someone not affiliated with the university.

Students should be aware when seeking support on campus that most employees are required by Title IX to disclose all incidents of non-consensual interpersonal behaviors to Title IX professionals on campus who can act to support that student and meet their needs. The therapists at the Rice Counseling Center and the doctors at Student Health Services are confidential, meaning that Rice will not be informed about the incident if a student discloses to one of these Rice staff members. Rice prioritizes student privacy and safety, and only shares disclosed information on a need-to-know basis.

If you are in need of assistance or simply would like to talk to someone, please call Rice Wellbeing and Counseling Center (<https://wellbeing.rice.edu>), which includes Title IX Support: x3311 and 713-348-3311

Policies, including Sexual Misconduct Policy and Student Code of Conduct, and more information regarding Title IX can be found online (<https://safe.rice.edu>).

IX. APPENDIX

A. Approved advanced elective courses

BIOE 505: Macromolecular Assemblies BIOE 518: Introduction to Computation Biology BIOE 521: Microcontroller applications BIOE 522: Gene Therapy BIOE 523: Control Theory/Synthetic Biology BIOE 525: Nanobiology and Nanomedicine BIOE 526: Precision Gene Editing BIOE 535: Cell Based Therapeutic BIOE 537: Genetic And Epigenetic Control BIOE 539: Applied Statistics for Bioengineering and Biotechnology BIOE 542: Macromolecular Systems Bioengineering BIOE 543: DNA Biotech, Biophysics, Modeling BIOE 561: Principles of Bioengineering I BIOE 562: Principles of Bioengineering II BIOE 577: Foundations of Biotechnology BIOE 580: Protein Engineering BIOE 587: Optic Imaging/Nanobiophotonics BIOE 589: Computational Molecular Bioengineering BIOE 610: Methods of Molecular Simulation
BIOS 524: Microbiology & Biotechnology BIOS 551: Molecular Biophysics BIOS 552: Structural Biology BIOS 555: Computational Synthetic Biology BIOS 561: Topics in Evolution BIOS 569: Core Course in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology BIOS 570: Computation with Biological Data BIOS 572: Immunology
CEVE 544: Environmental Microbiology
CHBE 540: Statistical Physics for Nanoscience and Nanoengineering CHBE 545: Principles of Biomolecular Engineering, Design and Selection CHBE 557: Discovery and Engineering of Bioactive Natural Products CHBE 580: Protein Engineering CHBE 588: Advances in Genome Engineering CHBE 640: Metabolic Engineering
CHEM 515: Chemical Kinetics and Reactions Mechanisms CHEM 523: Advanced Analysis for Molecular Dynamics CHEM 537: Biophysical Chemistry CHEM 551: Biomolecular Concepts CHEM 552: Chemical Biology CHEM 554: Drug Discovery CHEM 559: Spectroscopy at the Single Molecule/Particle Limit CHEM 650: Chemical Physics of Biological Matter
COMP 504: Graduate Object-Oriented Programming and Design COMP 540: Statistical Machine Learning COMP 543: Graduate Tools and Models - Data Science COMP 547: Computational Genomics For Microbial Forensics COMP 570: Bioinformatics: Sequence to Structure

COMP 571: Bioinformatics: Sequence Analysis COMP 572: Bioinformatics: Network Analysis (<i>also crosslisted as BIOC 572 and BIOE 564</i>) COMP 576: Introduction to Deep Learning COMP 650: Physical Computing Seminar COMP 670: Computational Biology Seminar
ELEC 588: Theoretical Neuroscience ELEC 589: Neural Computation ELEC 680: Nano-Neurotechnology (<i>also crosslisted as BIOE 680</i>)
PHYS 526: Statistical Physics PHYS 551: Biological Physics PHYS 622: Quantum Field Theory
STAT 581: Mathematical Probability STAT 623: Probability in Bioinformatics/Genetics STAT 650: Stochastic Differential Equations STAT 673: High-Dimensional Data STAT 699: Statistical Learning

B. List of important deadlines

FIRST YEAR IN PROGRAM

August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • meet with Graduate Advising to make coursework plan for first year • first rotation requests submitted to the Chair of Graduate Advising Committee
September	• second rotation requests submitted to the Chair of Graduate Advising Committee
October	• third rotation requests submitted to the Chair of Graduate Advising Committee
November	• register for Spring semester using Esther (a minimum of 9j credits)
December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • thesis mentor requests submitted to the Chair of Graduate Advising Committee • see payroll to process I-9 forms (contact SSPB Financial Administrator with questions)
January	• begin thesis research in mentor's laboratory
February	
March	• register for Summer semester using Esther (a minimum of six credits)
April	• register for Fall semester using Esther (a minimum of 9 credits)
May	• submit Research Progress Review committee request to Administrator
June	• make coursework plan for upcoming year (consult advisor and Chair of Advising)
July	

SECOND YEAR IN PROGRAM

August	
September	
October	
November	• register for Spring semester using Esther (a minimum of 9 credits)
December	
January	
February	
March	• register for Summer semester using Esther (a minimum of 9 credits)
April	• register for Fall semester using Esther (a minimum of 9 credits)
May	• teaching assignment requests submitted
June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • make coursework plan for upcoming year (consult advisor and Chair of Advising) • make sure Advancement to Candidacy Exam is scheduled
July	

THIRD YEAR IN PROGRAM

August	• deadline for completing Advancement to Candidacy Exam
September	• submit petition for PhD degree candidacy (must find outside committee member first)
October	• coordinate teaching assignment for spring if not enrolled in SSPB 599
November	• register for Spring semester using Esther (a minimum of 9 credits)
December	
January	
February	
March	• register for Summer semester using Esther (a minimum of 9 credits)
April	• register for Fall semester using Esther (a minimum of 9 credits)
May	• make plan to complete any required coursework during the fourth year
June	
July	• submit annual student progress report (<i>advisor submits progress letter</i>)

FOURTH YEAR AND BEYOND

November	• register for Spring semester using Esther (a minimum of 9 credits)
March	• register for Summer semester using Esther (a minimum of 9 credits)
April	• register for Fall semester using Esther (a minimum of 9 credits)
July	• submit annual student progress report (<i>advisor submits progress letter</i>)

C. Student tracking and checklist to candidacy

Student: _____
Last, First, Middle Initial

Student ID: _____ Start Semester: _____

Advisor: _____

Other _____ (...Committee Chair within department)
 Committee _____ (...Member within department)
 Members: _____ (...Member outside department)
 _____ (...Additional members within department)

Notes:

Requirement	Course Name	Course Number	Sem / Year	Total Credit	Grade	Transfer Credit	Course Waived	Notes
Prerequisite (300 or 400 level)	Cell / Molecular Biology							Option = BIOS 341.
	Biochemistry							Options = BIOE 330, BIOS 301.
	Phy Chem / Thermo							Options = BIOE 332; BIOS 352; CHEM 311; PHYS 425.
	ODEs							Options = MATH 211; CAAM 336.
	Statistics							Options = STAT 305, 310; BIOE 439.
Program Specific	Responsib Conduct Res	UNIV 594						Must take first semester.
	Intro to Research	SSPB 575						
	Graduate Seminar	SSPB 550						Must take four semester before end of second year.
	Graduate Seminar	SSPB 550						
	Graduate Seminar	SSPB 550						
	Graduate Seminar	SSPB 550						
	Graduate Teaching	SSPB 599						Must complete before end of third year.
Core Courses	Physical Biology	SSPB 501						Must take during first two years.
	Intro Systems Biology	SSPB 502						
	Synthetic Biology	SSPB 503						
Advanced Electives								Select at least 9 credit hours from: BIOE 521, 522, 523, 525, 526, 535, 537, 539, 542, 543, 561, 562, 577, 580, 587, 589, 610, BIOS 524, 551, 552, 555, 570; CEVE 544; CHBE 540, 557, 580, 588; CHEM 515, 523, 537, 551, 552, 554, 559, 650; COMP 540, 543, 547, 570, 571, 572, 650, 670; ELEC 588, 589, 680; EBIO 541, 561; PHYS 526, 551, 622; STAT 581, 623, 650, 673, 699.
Open Electives								Must be 300-level or above; taken for a letter grade
Additional Courses								Includes BIOS 611 or any course with S/U or P/F grade designation

SSPB 800 Total Research Credit Hours: _____ 0.00

Sem/Yr	Credit Hr	Grade	Sem/Yr	Credit Hr	Grade

Prerequisite Total:	0.00
Program Specific Total:	0.00
Core Courses Total (9 credits required):	0.00
Advanced Electives Total (9 credits required):	0.00
Open Electives Total (6 credits required):	0.00
Additional Courses Total:	0.00
Research Credit Total (SSPB 800):	0.00
Course Credit Hours:	0.00
TOTAL CREDIT HOURS:	0.00
PROGRAM GPA:	

This form is intended to be a checklist to Candidacy only. It is the responsibility of the student to read and fulfill all of the requirements detailed in General Announcements, the SSPB Graduate Program Student Handbook, and on the GPS website.

D. Thesis Proposal Defense (A-exam) - Student Checklist

1. **Schedule your Oral Exam.** You must: (i) identify a time that your committee can attend, and (ii) reserve a room for a two hour block of time. You are welcome to ask the Program Administrator for assistance with scheduling.
2. **Communicate the location and time.** Email the Program Administrator the time and location of your Thesis Proposal Defense and the members of your Research Progress Committee.
3. **Submit the written proposal.** Submit the written proposal to: (i) your Progress Review Committee, and (ii) the Program Administrator at least two weeks before the Oral Exam. You must submit both an electronic and printed copy of this proposal.
4. **Print out 3 copies of the Evaluation Form.** Print out a copy of the “Evaluation Form” and “Guidelines for Evaluation” for each committee member, fill out the student section, and bring forms to your Oral Exam along with pens for each of your committee members. Each committee member fills out a separate form.
5. **Print out 1 copy of the Approval Form and Faculty Instructions.** Print out the “Approval Form,” fill out the student sections of this form, and bring this form to your Proposal Defense meeting. You should give this form to the Chair of your Research Progress Committee. You should also give them a printed copy of the “Faculty Instructions” page.
6. **Present your proposed plan.** Give an oral presentation describing the proposed research plan and answer committee questions. The committee will assess the depth of your general knowledge and determine your familiarity and overall understanding of their thesis topic.

Note: At the end of the exam you will be asked to step out of the room so that the committee can discuss their evaluation. At this time, each committee member completes the “Evaluation Form” with their final recommendation, and the Chair must fill out the “Approval Form” which summarizes the committee’s evaluation.
7. **Submit the completed forms.** Following the exam, students collect all forms from the committee members. Immediately following the exam (same day), the student must submit all of the forms (Evaluation and Approval Forms) electronically to the Program Manager and copy all committee members on the email.
8. **Filing a petition for PhD degree candidacy.** Upon passing the exam, students must coordinate with the Program Manager to complete a Petition to Candidacy Form. This form requires students to identify an “outside member.” For SSPB, the outside member must be a Rice tenure-track faculty member not affiliated with the SSPB program. This individual cannot be a member of their mentor’s department.

Note: The Evaluation Form, the Guidelines for Evaluation, and Approval Forms form are all at the end of this handbook.

Contact the SSPB Program Administrator if you have any questions.

E. Thesis Proposal Defense (A-exam) - Faculty Instructions

PRIOR TO THE EXAM.

1. The student provides each committee member a “Thesis Proposal Evaluation Form” which includes both an evaluation form and the guidelines for evaluation. The student should also provide the Chair a “Thesis Approval Form.” These forms are found at the end of the Graduate Handbook.
2. The committee Chair asks the student to step out of the room and reviews the transcript and checklist provided by the Program Administrator showing the student’s progress in their coursework. Is this satisfactory? Is the student on a good pace to completing their coursework? If not, then the Chair should make a note within the Thesis Approval Form.
3. At this time, each faculty member should comment on the student’s success achieving the Program Learning Outcome (PLO) #3 in the Thesis Evaluation Form, which assesses the student’s written communication skills. Note that the students are required to provide a separate Evaluation Form for each committee member.

FOLLOWING THE EXAM.

4. Each faculty member should complete the remaining sections of the Evaluation Form (PLO #1, 2, and 4), sign the form, and provide this to the student. In cases where students receive an “unsatisfactory”, faculty must provide written comments.
5. The chair of the committee is responsible for filling out the Approval Form. This form details the different possible outcomes (pass, pass with reservations, and fail) as well as required activities for each outcome.

QUESTIONS?

Contact the Program Administrator.

F. Thesis Proposal Evaluation Form

Student: _____ Date of Exam: _____

Please review guidelines for evaluation and provide comments as needed (comments are required for "unsatisfactory" components).

	<i>Excellent</i>	<i>Satisfactory</i>	<i>Unsatisfactory</i>
PLO 1. Depth of knowledge in area of thesis proposal	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Comments</i>			
PLO 2. Ability to integrate knowledge and critical thinking	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Comments</i>			
PLO 3. Written communication skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Comments</i>			
PLO 4. Visual and oral communication skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Comments</i>			

Summary evaluation

- I have read this exam and recommend: pass A-exam
 conditional pass of A-exam (comments below)
 fail A-exam

Committee member: _____

Signature: _____

Student collects and returns all committee member forms to SSPB Program Administrator.

G. Thesis Proposal Guidelines for Evaluation

PLO 1. Depth of knowledge in chosen area of thesis proposal

- Excellent:* Identifies all relevant results/techniques from literature, and synthesizes them in a thoughtful discussion.
- Satisfactory:* Discusses major previous works and places them in context for the present project.
- Unsatisfactory:* Fails to cite or assimilate previous work of relevance to topic.

PLO 2. Ability to integrate knowledge and critical thinking

- Excellent:* Original research that demonstrates distinct creativity in the question or experimental design. Complete answers that show a deep understanding of the discipline that extends beyond the contents of the document.
- Satisfactory:* Describes a novel problem appropriate for a doctoral thesis. Competent answers that illustrate a facility with the issues and techniques immediately relevant to the thesis project.
- Unsatisfactory:* Incremental approach unlikely to yield publishable findings. Answers reveal a limited familiarity with the thesis project or its context.

PLO 3. Written communication skills

- Excellent:* Good organization, fluent prose, and few grammatical errors. Full compliance with formatting guidelines.
- Satisfactory:* Decent organization, coherent prose, and limited grammatical errors. Full compliance with formatting guidelines.
- Unsatisfactory:* Poor organization, incoherent prose, and/or numerous grammatical errors. Not in compliance with formatting guidelines.

PLO 4. Visual and oral communication skills

- Excellent:* Engaging, highly polished presentation with well crafted slides that illustrate key results in the project and clearly describe future directions.
- Satisfactory:* Professional presentation on par with a solid conference talk, includes a coherent project narrative and future plans.
- Unsatisfactory:* Too much or too little detail, unclear about project goals and direction, incoherent or illegible slides, read from slides.

H. Thesis Proposal Approval Form

Student: Fill out the box and submit the form to your Committee Chair prior to your defense.

A preliminary oral examination for the approval of the student's thesis proposal in the major field of Systems, Synthetic, and Physical Biology:			
Student's Name: _____			
	Last Name	First Name	Middle Initial
Date: _____			
	Month	Day	Year
Title of Thesis Proposal: _____			

Committee Chair: Indicate the outcome of the exam below.

Committee Decision:

- Passed the thesis proposal defense without reservations**
- Passed the thesis proposal defense with reservations**
Committee members must, within one week, provide the student an explanation of deficiencies. Student should be given opportunity to rectify identified deficiencies.
- Failed the thesis proposal defense**
If student fails the thesis proposal, the committee may, by unanimous vote, allow the student to re-defend the thesis proposal. Students are allowed to re-defend only once.

Approval to retake: **YES** **NO**

Thesis Committee Chair

Date

Committee Comments: