

Guide to the Dissertation Defense and Graduation

Graduate Program in Genetics

March 2025

Administrative matters and deadlines

Graduate School tasks and deadlines:

There are several important deadlines imposed by the Graduate School. **These must be observed, and it is your responsibility to make sure that they are.**

- **Apply for graduation:** Be sure to apply on the Graduate School web site, not SOLAR. The link for the application is https://www.stonybrook.edu/commcms/grad/academics/graduation_application.php. For information on the Doctoral Hooding Ceremony, see <https://www.stonybrook.edu/commcms/grad/academics/ceremonies.php>.

It is a matter of filing a single, simple form if you don't meet the deadline for graduation and want to 'roll it over' to the next semester. So it is better to err on the side of caution and apply if you think that there is any chance that you will be graduating in a given semester.

Do not worry about the exact title of your dissertation on the application form – you won't be held to it if you decide to change it later.

- **Dissertation Committee Approval:** The Graduate Program Director (GPD) must submit a form requesting approval of the examining committee to the Graduate School at least **four weeks before the defense**. But there is no need to wait, since this task does not require a known defense date. As soon as you are confident of the composition of your committee (generally the same as your research advisory committee), send the list to the GPD, indicating who is the chair and if anyone will be participating virtually (see below). The Graduate School now requires that at least one member of the committee have no personal, financial, or professional conflicts of interest with you, so designate a member who is not a collaborator or likely to co-author an article with you. You must keep in mind that the GPD may be unavailable around the time of the deadline, so allow ample leeway. The GPD can request a revision to the approved committee if unexpected circumstances occur, but the revised committee must still satisfy Program and Graduate School guidelines.

The approval form must indicate if any committee members plan to participate via Zoom or other streaming service. The guidelines of the Graduate School state, "At the program's discretion, committee members may participate in a dissertation defense virtually. However, the primary dissertation advisor (as listed on the Defense Committee Appointment form) or equal co-advisors, and the chairperson must be physically present at the defense. Additionally, the student must be physically present at their dissertation defense. A list of those members who will be attending virtually must be indicated on the Defense Committee Appointment form and sent to the Graduate School prior to the defense date. Any exceptions from this practice will require approval from the Dean of the Graduate School." Whether a member participates virtually or not can be changed after the committee has been approved, but the GPD must be notified so that he or she can request a revision from the Graduate School.

- **Doctoral Defense Announcement:** The GPD must submit a Doctoral Defense Announcement (DDA) at least **three weeks before the defense**. Because the GPD reviews these forms for accuracy (and, again, may not be available at the time of the deadline), the form should be submitted to her or him at least 4 weeks ahead of time. The form posted on the Graduate School web site (https://www.stonybrook.edu/commcms/grad/academics/student_resources.php under 'Forms for Graduating Students' at the bottom right) must be used, and the length restrictions must be observed.

The form requires an abstract of the dissertation. It does not have to match the abstract in the dissertation exactly, but it must be a complete scientific description of the research as one would find in a journal article. However, the title must be the same as in your final dissertation.

The form also requires that the time and place of the defense be known. The location must be spelled out in full – no abbreviations for the buildings. The Graduate School in general requires that defenses be held on the SBU campus. However, the Genetics Program has received permission to schedule defenses at CSHL, with the stipulation that the public talk be made available to anyone interested at SBU via a streaming service. For that reason, CSHL dissertation talks must be held in rooms that have the necessary AV resources.

In general, a large lecture room (such as Life Sciences Building Room 038) should be reserved for the public lecture. A smaller conference room should be booked for two hours for the subsequent private defense. For defenses at SBU, the Graduate Program Coordinator (GPC) can assist in reserving rooms.

- **Submission of the Dissertation:** Dissertations must be submitted to the Graduate School electronically; hard copies are neither required nor accepted. Detailed information about the submission process is at https://www.stonybrook.edu/commcms/grad/academics/dissertation_thesis_submission.php.

Degrees are conferred three times a year, in May, August, and December. For each graduation date, **there is a strict deadline for electronic submission of the dissertation**. No exceptions are made. **The deadline for the semester in which you intend to graduate is the earlier of the following:** 1) 3 months after the defense was held; or 2) by 4:00 PM on end-of-semester dates that can be found at <https://www.stonybrook.edu/commcms/grad/academics/calendar.php>. Defenses should be scheduled far enough in advance of the submission deadline to allow for any revisions required by the defense committee.

If you cannot revise your dissertation in time to graduate in the semester you intended, you may change your graduation date to the following semester. The Change of Graduation Date form is at https://www.stonybrook.edu/commcms/grad/academics/student_resources.php and requires that you upload an email from the GPD approving the new date. **And note that you must still submit the dissertation to the Graduate School within 3 months of when the defense was held.**

The Graduate School is now using Adobe Acrobat Sign as the only means to collect signatures of your committee members, and the signatures are also due by the above deadlines. The form is at https://www.stonybrook.edu/commcms/grad/academics/student_resources.php under 'Forms for Graduating Students'/'Adobe Signature Page – PhD'. A link to an instructional slide presentation is at <https://www.stonybrook.edu/commcms/grad/academics/graduation.php>. Follow the instructions carefully, being sure to list your advisor, chair, and committee members in the correct roles. Please

tell your committee members to expect an email from Adobe Acrobat Sign; apparently, it can be easy to overlook. You will also need to inform your committee members who was chosen as the member with no conflict of interest and who are 'additional members', since these roles need to be selected from a pull-down menu in AdobeSign. This information is in the email that the Graduate School sends confirming approval of your committee.

Program tasks:

- Your committee must grant you formal permission to write the dissertation. Confirmation of permission to write must be provided to the GPD. Committee chairs should be consulted about the best way to obtain this permission (e.g., through a face-to-face committee meeting, via an electronic 'conference'). This permission is an important safeguard for you, since it confirms that the committee deems that you have performed an adequate amount of research for a dissertation. The chair of the committee should use this form to confirm that you have been given permission to write: <https://forms.gle/eQ7thoES4T28ekHu9>.
- As soon as the Doctoral Defense Announcement has been prepared, you must send a scientific image from (or related to) your dissertation to the GPC for use in a program flyer announcing the defense.

Task for international students:

- It is essential that international students meet with the Visa & Immigration Services office early to begin the application for Optional Practical Training (OPT), if you want to stay in the US. You cannot work (or be paid) in the US after graduation unless you have OPT in place. It can take a couple of months to get this squared away.

Preparing and submitting the dissertation

- **Submitting the dissertation to your committee:** The written document must be distributed to committee members **at least two weeks before the defense**. Any shorter time period must be approved in advance by your committee chair, but recognize that it takes a long time to carefully read and evaluate such an extensive document. And it will take longer (probably much longer) to write and assemble the dissertation than you think. Don't schedule an unrealistic defense date and expect your committee to read the dissertation at the last minute. Additionally, the dissertation should be as polished as a manuscript that you submit to a journal. Allow ample time for your mentor to review it and for careful proof-reading.

Committee members generally appreciate a bound hard copy (with figures in color if relevant). Staples charges only a few dollars to prepare a spiral-bound copy. If you're not sure if members want a hard copy, you should ask. For members off-campus, offer to mail a hard copy.

Lastly, make a copy for yourself so that you can refer to it if committee members have specific questions at the private defense.

- **Writing the dissertation:** The Graduate School has strict formatting and submission requirements. Instructions are at https://www.stonybrook.edu/commcms/grad/academics/dissertation_thesis_submission.php; follow them carefully. Additionally, use the 'Dissertation Template – PHD' for the face pages

(https://www.stonybrook.edu/commcms/grad/academics/student_resources.php under 'Forms for Graduating Students'). Dissertations have been rejected by the Graduate School for mistakes as small as incorrect numbering of the face pages. (Of course, they do allow you to revise, but it slows down the graduation process.)

Beyond the face pages and general formatting guidelines, there are no hard and fast rules about how dissertations should be prepared. Some students use multiple published papers or manuscripts in a 'chapter' format. If you go this route, be sure that you aren't unnecessarily repeating information (e.g., in Materials and Methods). Typically, dissertations are expected to include a substantial introduction (a very rough rule-of-thumb is 25 double-spaced pages and at least 100 references). And committees generally like to see a 'Future Directions'-type section after the Discussion. This section highlights the significance of the dissertation work, points out questions in the field that remain to be answered, and often contains material that would be considered too speculative to include in a journal article.

However, the ultimate content and organization of the dissertation (excluding the face pages) is up to you, your advisor, and your committee.

- **The day of the defense:** Again, it is up to you, your advisor, and your committee chair, but in general your oral presentation should be about 45 minutes long to allow time for questions from the audience. There is no need to cover all the information that is in the written document. Acknowledgements should be included, but don't go overboard – short and sweet is generally most appreciated.

Commencement

Going forward, the University will hold only one doctoral hooding (commencement) ceremony, in May. If you graduate in August or December, you may participate in the May ceremony immediately before or immediately after your actual degree conferral. More information about this new policy is available at <https://www.stonybrook.edu/commcms/commencement/december-commencement-message.php>.

If you have applied for graduation, you should receive information about Commencement, including how to register for the ceremony and where to rent academic regalia. Be on the lookout for this email, which typically arrives in early March, since there are deadlines for both registration and rental. The deadlines are also available here: <https://www.stonybrook.edu/commcms/commencement/faq.php>. If you have any questions or concerns, contact doctoralhooding@stonybrook.edu.

Defense and Graduation Checklist

- _____ Apply for graduation (as soon as possible)
- _____ Obtain formal permission to write from your research committee and have confirmation sent to the GPD (as soon as possible)
- _____ Consult with VIS about applying for OPT (international students only; as soon as possible)
- _____ Send confirmed list of dissertation committee members to the GPD (as soon as possible and no later than 5 weeks before the defense)
- _____ Submit Dissertation Defense Announcement to GPD (as soon as time and place are set and no later than 4 weeks before the defense)
- _____ Send image for flyer to GPC (as soon as DDA has been submitted)
- _____ Distribute written dissertation to committee (no later than two weeks before the defense)
- _____ Upload the electronic dissertation to the Graduate School by the deadline
- _____ Obtain signatures of dissertation committee members using Adobe Acrobat Sign by the deadline
- _____ If you wish to participate in Commencement, consult <https://www.stonybrook.edu/commcms/commencement/faq.php> for relevant deadlines