

Neuroscience PhD Program

Thesis Committee Rules & Guidelines – October 2020

Purpose

After forming a thesis committee, each student should meet with the committee once each year. Scheduling of the thesis committee meetings will be done by the Neuroscience PhD program. Thesis committee meetings are usually focused on the students' research progress and future plans, but they can also include discussions on topics such as experimental design, data analysis strategies, selection of journals for publishing the student's research findings, career development, and postgraduate options.

Submitting the annual progress report

At least ten days before each thesis committee meeting, the student should write a brief (no more than one page) progress report that addresses the following topics:

1. What progress have you made towards your degree in the past year? Include specific scientific achievements and discussion of any major obstacles or changes in direction. The emphasis should be on the past year and not prior years. Explain any deviations from last year's goals.
2. Current plans for the thesis, including specific goals for the next year and a timetable for completion.
3. If animal and/or human subjects are used, the relevant protocol number(s) should be listed.

The student should obtain the signatures on the Annual Student Progress Report for all committee members. After the meeting, the student should send the signed form to Candace Groskreutz (candaceg@berkeley.edu).

Thesis committee meeting

The student and committee members should plan on a meeting that mainly consists of discussion involving the student and committee members, not a presentation by the student to the committee. Moreover, discussion of research progress should focus on the past year, with minimal time spent on research activities from prior years. In general, students should not have more than 20-30 minutes of prepared material for the meeting, and they should focus on areas for which feedback from the committee would be most helpful. Meetings should typically not be longer than 1-1.5 hours, and each one should include time for the student to meet with the committee while the thesis advisor is not present. Students are not expected to provide food and drink for their thesis committee meetings.

Results of the committee meeting

After each thesis committee meeting, a designated committee member who is not the student's thesis advisor writes a brief (1-2 paragraphs) report summarizing i) the committee's evaluation of student progress, ii) professional development (conference presentations, publications, etc.) over the past year, and iii) recommendations regarding next year's objectives. This report should be emailed to candaceg@berkeley.edu. This report is shared with the student, who has the right to reply in writing to any comments. The thesis committee report and the student's reply (if any) become part of the student's permanent academic record.

Thesis committee composition

The committee should have four faculty members. The Chair is almost always the thesis advisor. Either the Chair or co-Chair must be a faculty member in the UC Berkeley Academic Senate (not Adjunct) and a member of the Neuroscience PhD Program. Otherwise, there are no restrictions regarding the number of committee members that are HWNI or non-HWNI faculty. Each committee has one member who is designated to be the Academic Senate Representative, and this person must be a member of the Academic Senate. One committee member can, in rare cases, be from a university besides UC Berkeley, but this requires special approval from the Graduate Division.