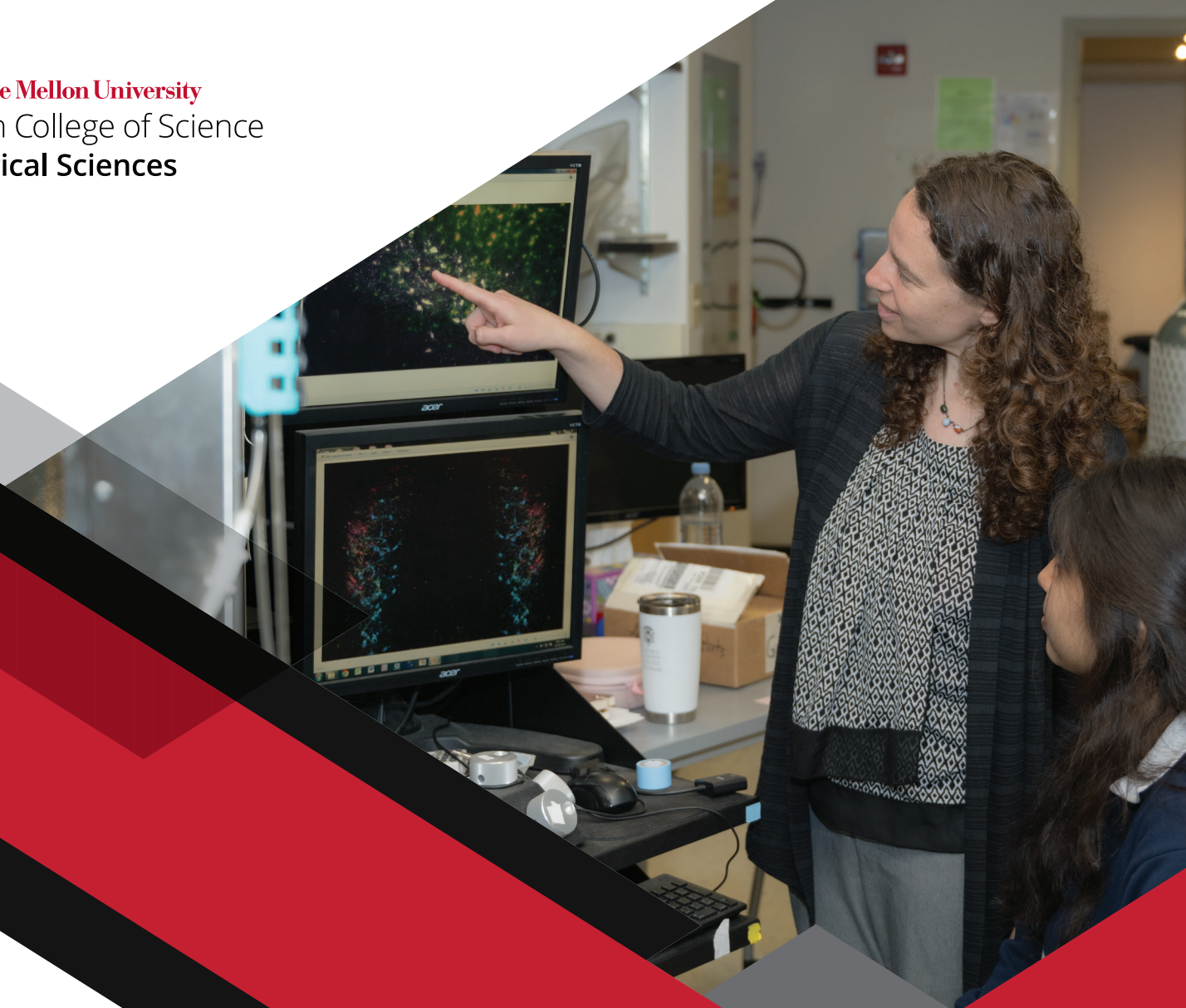


Carnegie Mellon University
Mellon College of Science
Biological Sciences



M.S. in Quantitative Biology and Bioinformatics

Student Handbook 2025–2026

Welcome.....	3
MSQBB MISSION STATEMENT.....	3
INTRODUCTION	3
Program Contacts	4
MSQBB STEERING COMMITTEE FACULTY	4
PROGRAM FACULTY	4
PRIMARY SUPPORT STAFF	4
OTHER SUPPORT STAFF	4
DEPARTMENTAL LEVEL CONTACTS	4
COLLEGE LEVEL CONTACTS	4
UNIVERSITY LEVEL CONTACTS	5
Section 1. Degree	6
COURSES AND GRADES.....	6
COURSEWORK	6
COURSE REGISTRATION.....	7
CHANGING PROGRAMS.....	8
GRADES & ACADEMIC STANDING	8
PROGRAM ACADEMIC PROBATION.....	8
ACADEMIC INTEGRITY FOR PROGRAM.....	8
Section 2. Academic Advising	9
ORIENTATION	9
ADVISING FOR COURSEWORK.....	9
MONITORING PROGRESS	9
NOTIFICATION AND CONSEQUENCES OF INADEQUATE PROGRESS TOWARD THE DEGREE.....	9
STUDENT RIGHTS IN ACADEMIC CONFLICTS	10
Section 3. Professional Development, Research & Internships.....	10
PROFESSIONAL SKILLS COURSE	10
SEMINARS, INVITED TALKS, AND JOURNAL CLUB	10
RESEARCH.....	11
INTERNSHIPS (MSQBB-AS ONLY).....	11
SUMMER COURSES	12
ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY	12
PASS/FAIL COURSES	12
TRANSFERRING COURSES.....	13
Section 4. Honors and Graduation.....	13
RESEARCH HONORS.....	13
GRADUATION	14
Section 5. Compliance Issues	14
ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH AND SAFETY TRAINING	14
ANIMAL TRAINING	14

Welcome

The Department of Biological Sciences directors would like to welcome you to the Master's in Quantitative Biology and Bioinformatics program (MSQBB) at Carnegie Mellon University! The MSQBB – Advanced Study degree option is also governed by this document.

While this handbook is specific to your academic experience in the MSQBB program, it is just one element of the [Graduate Student Handbook Suite](#). There are several other resources within the suite that you should consult when needed:

- [University-Wide Graduate Student Handbook \(Office of Graduate & Postdoctoral Affairs\)](#) (this is only for graduate students at CMU and covers academic and administrative policies at the university level)
- [The Word Student Handbook](#) (this is for all CMU students - undergraduates and graduates, and focuses on university-wide policies that affect student life (student rights and responsibilities, community standards, and the student code of conduct, etc.)

MSQBB MISSION STATEMENT

The MSQBB program seeks to provide students with a basic science background, but who haven't yet had quantitative training, with skills to enter careers in Bioinformatics and related fields, or to gain quantitative skills to help them in the next steps in their education and professional development. The curriculum provides both breadth and depth of training in Quantitative Biological Data Analysis and Bioinformatics skills. Interested students are also given opportunities to pursue research. Our graduates are prepared for rewarding jobs in industry or to pursue their further degrees at top universities.

INTRODUCTION

The Department of Biological Sciences has prepared this statement of policies and procedures to help answer questions that students may have as they enter the MSQBB program. This document specifies requirements that must be achieved to be a student in good standing; failure to meet any of these requirements may result in dismissal from the program.

The MSQBB Steering Committee and Graduate Programs Offices in the department provide ongoing guidance and assistance to students throughout their graduate career, and any questions or concerns may be discussed with either the faculty of the MSQBB Steering Committee or the Department Head at any time. The Word/Student Handbook, which details university-wide policies, is available upon request from the Graduate Programs Office.

Program Contacts

MSQBB STEERING COMMITTEE FACULTY

Whom to contact for what?

Yongxin (Leon) Zhao, Ph.D.

Director, MSQBB

MI 202A

412-268-8236

yongxinz@andrew.cmu.edu

Overall Program Management, Academic Integrity Issues, Leave of Absence Approval

D.J. Brasier, Ph.D.

Assistant Director (Academic Advising), MSQBB

MI 415A

412-268-1951

dbrasier@cmu.edu

Academic Advising and Course Selection, Periodic Academic Progress Checks, Change to P/F, Research for Credit, Graduation Certifications, Student Life Issues, International Student Issues, Oral Communication Skills, Alumni Networking, Bioprocessing Optimization, Entrepreneurship, and Regulatory Compliance and Social Events, Career Center and Industry Liaison, Diploma Ceremony, Overall Program Management, CPT authorization

PROGRAM FACULTY

<http://www.cbd.cmu.edu/directory/faculty/voting-faculty/>

<https://www.cmu.edu/bio/people/faculty/index.html>

PRIMARY SUPPORT STAFF

Ena Miceli

Director of Graduate Operations

MI 415

412-268-3012

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Graduate Student Database Management, Pre- and Post-Admission Procedures through Graduation, Biological Sciences Graduate Ombudsperson, Graduation Certifications, Diploma Ceremony, Orientation Coordination

OTHER SUPPORT STAFF

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Communications Manager

MI 409D

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Ryan Parrotte

IT Support Consultant

MI 411J

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DEPARTMENTAL LEVEL CONTACTS

Gordon Rule, Ph.D.

Interim Department Head

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David Casillas

Amy Kapp

MI 410

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COLLEGE LEVEL CONTACTS

Barb Shinn-Cunningham, Ph.D.

Interim Dean, Mellon College of Science

MI 432

412-268-1789

mcsdean@andrew.cmu.edu

Dejan Slepčev, Ph.D.

**Associate Dean for Faculty and Graduate
Affairs (BSC)**

WH 7123

412-268-2562

slepcev@math.cmu.edu

UNIVERSITY LEVEL CONTACTS

Graduate Student Ombudsperson

5000 Forbes Ave

412-268-1018

ombudsperson@andrew.cmu.edu

*Students may confer with the university graduate
student ombudsperson on issues of process or
other concerns as they navigate conflicts*

John Hannon, Ph.D.

Student Affairs Liaison

Warner Hall 300

412-268-2139

jfhannon@andrew.cmu.edu

*Supporting students to manage mental and
physical health and other personal issues including
finding appropriate resources and help managing
impact on coursework and life outside of classes.*

Section 1. Degree

COURSES AND GRADES

COURSEWORK

Before beginning courses, all students are required to satisfactorily complete an academic integrity instructional module, as proscribed by the Steering Committee.

The university's complete Schedule of Classes can be found at www.cmu.edu/hub.

To receive the M.S. degree, students must successfully complete these requirements:

- (A) At least 90 units of coursework (114 units for students in the MSQBB-AS program), which includes courses in specific categories as listed below
- (B) Average grade of B or above (GPA = 3.0) in those 108 or more units counted toward degree certification
- (C) Full-time course registration (at least 36 units) for each semester in the program

Coursework consists of:

- (A) Required Courses (37-39 units)

Minimum C grade in each course counted toward graduation

Should all be done in first semester

- 03-604: Professional Issues (3 units, Fall)
- 03-701-A1: Statistical Computing for Biological Sciences (6 units, Fall)
- 03-702-A2: Data Analysis for Biological Sciences (6 units, Fall)

- Programming (10-12 units, one of the following)
 - 02-601: Programming for Scientists (12 units, Fall)
 - 15-110: Principles of Computing (10 units, typically Fall but Spring option)
 - 15-112: Fundamentals of Programming and CS (12 units, typically Fall but Spring option)
- 03-708-A3: Practical Computing for Biologists (6 units, Spring)
- 03-713-A4: Bioinformatics Data Integration Practicum (6 units, Spring)

- (B) Core Elective Courses (12 units from the list below)

Minimum grade of C in each course

- 02-604: Fundamental Bioinformatics (12 units, Spring)
- 02-719: Genomics and Epigenetics of the Brain (12 units, Fall)
- 02-731: Modeling Evolution (12 units, Spring)
- 03-709: Applied Cell & Molecular Biology (Fall)
- 03-711: Computational Molecular Biology and Genomics (Fall)
- 09-615: Computational Modeling, Statistical Analysis and Machine Learning in Science (Fall)

Students in the MSQBB-AS program are also required to take a second class from the above list (12 additional units).

- (C) At least 39-41 units of elective courses must be taken from Biological Sciences, 03-XXX listed courses (total units to graduate must be 90)

Minimum C grade in each course counted toward graduation.

Students in the MSQBB-AS program are also required to take 51-53 elective course units (to a total of 114 toward graduation).

Minimum C grade in each course counted toward graduation.

Up to 24 units of 02-6xx or 02-7xx courses can count toward electives (36 units for MSQBB-AS students). Additional courses from other departments may be taken with prior written approval from the Assistant Director.

Please note that all elective courses in Biological Sciences and other Departments have limited space, and some courses may not have space for all students who want them. Every effort will be made to help students get into appropriate and relevant elective courses.

Also, students should note that many courses (including some from host departments) have prerequisite knowledge. Students should check with the Academic Advisor for all courses.

Other notes

- Up to 12 units of research (03-700) with a faculty advisor may be counted toward the depth credits. Research should be approved by the Assistant Director (Academic Advising).
- Any course not listed above will need written approval from the Assistant Director (Academic Advising). Request will be evaluated based on relevance to program educational goals and absence of equivalent pre-approved courses.
- CMU undergraduate students enrolling for a continuing M.S. can use relevant courses from their undergraduate years to count toward the M.S. degree. The courses used toward the M.S. degree CANNOT be counted toward undergraduate degree certification. Undergraduate degree advisors need to verify and sign the Declaration of Carry-Over Credit form to confirm that no double-counting has occurred.

Important Rules for Coursework

- All student course selections are subject to the approval of the MSQBB Steering Committee.
- Students must maintain full-time enrollment in the program (minimum 36 units per semester - the only exception that is allowed is if CMU Student Affairs and/or a medical provider request that a student be allowed to take a reduced course load).
- Optional summer internships for course credit (with CPT authorization) may be counted toward elective credit for students in the MSQBB-AS program. CPT authorization depends on the regulations set by the Office of International Education. Any internship should be discussed with the Assistant Director of the MSQBB program prior to applying.

COURSE REGISTRATION

Registering For Classes

Incoming students will work with the Assistant Director over the summer to prepare for their fall courses. The 4 Easy Steps to Registration may be found at <https://www.cmu.edu/hub/registrar/registration/index.html>.

- To be in good standing, students must be full-time, meaning they must take at least 36 units per semester.
- Requests for part-time status are only granted in rare, extenuating circumstances.
- Students are advised to take no more than 48 units in any semester.
- Requests to take more than 48 units require approval from the Assistant Director. Students need to meet all the following criteria: (1) have a QPA above 3.50, (2) justify the value of the added coursework to their goals, (3) show how they will balance the added work in their weekly schedule, and (4) justify the need to take the extra courses in the requested semester and not delay the class to a later semester.

CHANGING PROGRAMS & MULTIPLE ENROLLMENTS

If an MSQBB student accepts another program's offer to begin before matriculation in the MSQBB program, the MSQBBB committee reserves the right to nullify the MSQBBB offer.

Additionally, our program is a full time program and we reserve the right to disallow students from simultaneous enrollment in a second MS program.

GRADES & ACADEMIC STANDING

To be in good academic standing, a student is expected to maintain a B average (GPA = 3.0) in the coursework that will be counted towards the degree. No grade lower than B- in foundation course(s) and no grade lower than C in other course categories shall be used for completion of degree requirements.

PROGRAM ACADEMIC PROBATION

Suppose the MSQBB Steering Committee determines that a student is making inadequate progress. In that case, it will notify the student in writing of the deficiencies and the consequences of failing to correct those deficiencies. Any student whose cumulative QPA is at or below 2.5 after one term or who is otherwise not making satisfactory progress toward their degree will receive a letter from the program placing them on academic probation. Under most circumstances, the student will be given one semester

to earn a B average in the courses to be counted towards the degree. Additionally, students who don't earn minimum required grades in any classes (B- or higher in foundation classes or C or higher in other classes counting toward the degree will also be placed on academic probation. Academic probation will end only when the student returns to a B average and fulfills the other requirements laid out in the terms of their probation. Failure to return to good academic standing after one semester dismissal from the program or other actions as decided upon by the administration of the program.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY FOR PROGRAM

QBB course instructors set specific policies for every assignment in their course. Instructors typically state in their syllabus what types of collaboration are allowed or not allowed on different assignments. However, **students are responsible** for making sure they understand what kind of collaboration is allowed or not. **If you are not 100% certain about what is permitted on an assignment, do not start working on it until you have contacted the instructor to clarify.** Unintentional violations of course policy ***are treated as violations of academic integrity*** and can result in course-level and program-level penalties.

In addition to any course-level actions taken by instructors (e.g., giving the student a failing grade on the assignment or failing the entire course without the option to withdraw), the program co-directors will impose penalties for academic integrity violations. Program level consequences may include any or all of the following: probation (see "Grades" below); suspension for one or more semesters; dismissal from the program; required additional training on academic integrity; or other action as decided upon by the administration of the program.

The program administration will determine the consequences for violations of academic integrity or other program policies on a case-by-case basis, considering a variety of different factors, including:

- The severity of the violation, including factors such as the number of assignments in question, the weight of those assignments in the course, the type of violation, fraction of the assignment in question that violated course policy, overall impact of the violation on the academic environment in the course, impact of the violation

on the academic environment in the program and university in general, and other factors determined by the two program co-directors.

- Whether a student has had an academic integrity violation in the past
- Lying about the facts of the violation or fabricating evidence to cover up a violation

In most cases, two violations (and in some cases, a single violation that is severe or when the student lies about the facts of the case) are grounds for dismissal from the MSQBB program.

Students may appeal whether a violation occurred and course and/or program level outcomes following University procedures: <http://www.cmu.edu/academic-integrity>.

Note that university policies about academic integrity are subject to change, and students should review current procedures each semester.

Section 2. Academic Advising

ORIENTATION

For incoming graduate students, there are two orientations. Both events occur in the weeks preceding the start of the fall semester.

The University-wide orientation, organized by the Office of Graduate Education and Postdoctoral Affairs, introduces students to university resources and services, including information on activities to do before and after arrival on campus, resources for living in Pittsburgh, and key dates and deadlines.

The Departmental Orientation introduces them to departmental faculty, research, administration, policies, and services.

ADVISING FOR COURSEWORK

Before each semester, each student must share their plan for the coming semester with the MSQBB Steering Committee. All changes must be approved by the Assistant Director (Academics).

MONITORING PROGRESS

Students who have specific concerns about their progress are urged to speak with the Assistant Director (Academic Advising) as early as possible. The Assistant Director (Academic Advising), along with members of the MSQBB Steering Committee, meets with the student at least twice a year, providing guidance and monitoring the student's overall progress. In addition, the Assistant Director (Academic Advising) meets with the student as and when needed to discuss progress and resolve issues.

NOTIFICATION AND CONSEQUENCES OF INADEQUATE PROGRESS TOWARD THE DEGREE

Suppose the MSQBB Steering Committee determines that the student is making inadequate progress. In that case, it will notify the student in writing of the deficiencies and the

consequences of failing to correct those deficiencies. Any student whose QPA is at or below 2.5 after one term is placed on academic probation. The terms of the probation, including conditions to be taken off from the probationary status and consequences for not meeting the terms of probation, depend on the individual cases and will be stated and spelled out in the letter placing the student on probation. The committee and the student will then formulate a plan to address those deficiencies, including milestones. Consequences of continued failure to make satisfactory progress or not being in good academic standing will be determined by the Steering Committee.

STUDENT RIGHTS IN ACADEMIC CONFLICTS

A student wishing to appeal a departmental disciplinary decision should first speak with the faculty member directly involved in the decision. A student who is uncomfortable approaching the faculty member may discuss the matter with the Director of Graduate Operations (Biological Sciences Graduate Programs Office), who serves as the Graduate Ombudsperson for Biological Sciences. Suppose the conflict cannot be resolved on this level. In that case, the student is referred to the Program Co-Directors or the relevant Department Head(s) who may, with the student's permission, meet with both the student and the faculty member involved.

The student may also continue to meet with the Director of Graduate Operations (Biological Sciences Graduate Programs Office), who serves as the Graduate Ombudsperson for Biological Sciences.

The student may also meet with the MCS Ombudsperson. The Mellon College of Science Grievance Procedures are available at <http://www.cmu.edu/mcs/policies/grievance.html>.

A student not satisfied with the achieved resolution may file a formal written appeal to both the Associate Dean for Graduate Affairs and the Dean of the Mellon College of Science. The policies and procedures governing this process are explained in The Word/Student Handbook section entitled "Academic Standards and Actions."

Section 3. Professional Development, Research & Internships

PROFESSIONAL SKILLS COURSE

Professional Skills (06-604) meets weekly. This course offers students the opportunity to learn about available resources on campus and outside, share knowledge, and hone their professional skills. The primary goal is to position students for an on-time graduation and to empower students with the important tools necessary to find an internship, secure a job, or pursue a Ph.D.

All students will need to register for 06-604, a 3-unit course, and complete it with a passing grade during their first semester. This course contributes towards the units for graduation certification and the 36 units required for full-time status. As a pass/fail course, it is not factored into a student's QPA. NOTE: This is the only course that a student may count toward graduation with a "pass" grade aside from 3 more units of seminar (next section), which may count toward depth.

SEMINARS, INVITED TALKS, AND JOURNAL CLUB

Each semester, all students may register for and attend the weekly seminars  Graduate

Research Seminar 03-655, 3 units). Graduate students are strongly urged to meet the speakers to broaden their knowledge of cutting-edge science and to make useful contacts; the faculty host can arrange individual or small group meetings for interested students.

Note: The above seminar courses are pass/fail; however, students may apply up to three units of seminars toward the graduation units. These courses are very beneficial for staying current with research and for networking, so we encourage students to enroll in these courses, particularly if they are interested in pursuing a Ph.D. or other advanced degree.

Invited talks from outside speakers and alumni are arranged throughout the year. They will be announced via e-mail.

RESEARCH

Students who are interested in conducting research for academic credit take M.S. Thesis Research 03-700 for research with a Biological Sciences faculty mentor.

- Up to 12 units of 03-700 may be counted toward the degree.

Typically, students contact faculty directly to learn about available research opportunities. To register for this class, please contact the Assistant Directors (Academic Advising & Internship), who will assist with registration.

Some faculty members may be willing to pay for research assistantships. You can receive either research credit or pay for research in a given semester, but not both.

Summer research in a lab requires you to either be paid (as a CMU employee) or to register for a course. Most students prefer to be employed, but if you want to get course credit for summer research, please ask the program advisors.

INTERNSHIPS (MSQBB-AS ONLY)

Students often secure internships in industry or academia during the summer between the first and second years, and less frequently during the academic year. The internship must be relevant to Quantitative Biology and Bioinformatics. Students must contact the Assistant Director during the late fall about planning for an internship.

REGISTRATION FOR INTERNSHIPS

- **Summer off-campus internships:** Register for **03- 600R** (3 units, no tuition).
- **Fall or spring internships:** Register for **03-600A** (3 units, tuition charged).
- **Paid on-campus summer research:** Also register for **03-600R** after discussing with the Assistant Director.

Important: Written approval is required from the Assistant Director before registering for 03-600R or 03-600A.

International students

If doing a **paid summer internship off-campus**, you must apply for:

- **CPT** (Curricular Practical Training) or
- **Pre-Completion OPT** (Optional Practical Training)
— through the **Office of International Education (OIE)**.
- You are **not eligible for CPT** until the summer after your **first full academic year**.
The internship must be relevant to your program.

For **CPT**, you'll need:

- An **offer letter** with dates, hours, and pay
- **Approval from the Assistant Director**
- **CPT is faster** to process. **OPT can take up to 90 days to process.**
- Do **not accept or sign an offer** until you have checked with **OIE** and the **Assistant Director**.

SUMMER COURSES

Students registering for summer courses must pay summer tuition (including the *Quantitative Biology Internship 03-690*). Before registering for these summer courses, students should check with the Assistant Directors about tuition.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

Graduate students are required to have a certain level of fluency in English before they can instruct in Pennsylvania, as required by the English Fluency in Higher Education Act of 1990. Through this Act, all higher education institutions in the state are required to evaluate and certify the English fluency of all instructional personnel, including teaching assistants and interns. The full university policy can be reviewed at: <https://www.cmu.edu/policies/faculty/evaluation-certification-english-fluency-instructors.html>.

Language Support in the Student Academic Success Center will rate the fluency of all instructional personnel to determine at what level of responsibility the student can T.A. Language Support in the Student Academic Success Center helps T. A.s who are non-native English speakers develop fluency and cultural understanding to teach successfully at Carnegie Mellon. Visit the Student Academic Success Center website for additional information: <https://www.cmu.edu/student-success/>.

Because the Department of Biological Sciences believes that excellent English skills are essential, we strongly recommend that students whose native language is not English achieve a PASS by the end of their second year.

PASS/FAIL COURSES

Students may elect to take a course Pass/Fail, with a petition and **approval** from the Assistant Director (Academic Advising). Pass/Fail courses are strongly discouraged and are not counted toward the degree in the student's program of study. Such a petition must provide a compelling reason for taking a course Pass/Fail and defend why that will not impact the student's program of study (i.e., a medical hardship in completing a course).

Taking a course for credit indicates an intellectual commitment to the material and may be viewed more positively by other professors and potential employers than a Pass. Potential employers gain more information about a student's ability from seeing a letter grade on a transcript than from a P. Except for 06-602 Bioprocessing Optimization, Entrepreneurship, and Regulatory Compliance in Biotechnology and Pharmaceutical Engineering, Pass/Fail courses cannot be used to satisfy any MSQBB program requirements or to satisfy any prerequisites.

The student must complete the [Pass/Fail Approval Form](#)** during the registration ADD period (the first two weeks of each semester) and receive permission from the Assistant Director (Academic Advising) and the Department Head (Biological Sciences). Switching a course to Pass/Fail mid-semester will generally only be approved under special circumstances.

- Prerequisites may not be taken Pass/Fail.
- Classes taken Pass/Fail may not be used to fulfill graduation requirements, except for seminar courses and 06-604.
- Pass/Fail status is irrevocable.

TRANSFERRING COURSES

The MSQBB program does not accept transfer credits.

CMU undergraduate degree holders, please refer to carry-over course credit details.

Section 4. Honors and Graduation

RESEARCH HONORS

The directors of the MSQBB program confer awards for academic achievement, research honors, professional honors, and outstanding leadership at graduation. Students maintaining a GPA of 4.0 or higher will receive an award for academic achievement. Students with substantial research accomplishments, such as a publication or honors thesis, will receive an award for research achievement. Students who make substantial contributions to the MSQBB community, such as serving as a GSA representative or organizing social events, will receive an award for leadership.

Suppose you are interested in completing a research-based thesis. In that case, you are required to: (1) complete 12 or more units of independent research study with a faculty advisor (with QBB Advising committee approval), and (2) write and defend a master's thesis. If you satisfy the above requirements, you qualify for Research Honors.

Full research honors requirements are available from the Assistant Director (Academics). The final thesis should have the following sections:

- Title page & Dedication/Acknowledgements
- Abstract (1 page)
- Introduction chapter (4 or more pages):
 - Separate from the introduction sections in other chapters
 - This is a place for the student to put the entire thesis in context
- 1 or more additional chapters (20 or more pages each).
 - Chapter format should be consistent and may match the format of any journal article in the field of study.
- Bibliography (pages are enumerated but do not count toward page total). This may be a standalone bibliography for the whole thesis, or each chapter may have its own bibliography.

GRADUATION

MSQBB students are certified for graduation by the Department of Biological Sciences in the Mellon College of Science.

Carnegie Mellon University holds graduation ceremonies in May only. Because there are no August or December commencement ceremonies, we encourage students to participate in the May events. Students who graduate in December should contact the Biological Sciences Graduate Programs Office for details.

There are two May graduation ceremonies for M.S. students in Quantitative Biology and Bioinformatics. The Department of Biological Sciences Diploma Ceremony and Reception are usually held on Friday before the university-wide Sunday Commencement. Students who graduated the previous December and those receiving their degrees in May or August are eligible and strongly encouraged to participate.

Section 5. Compliance Issues

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH AND SAFETY TRAINING

Department of Biological Sciences graduate student may be required to complete Laboratory Safety, Hazardous Waste Management, and Biological Safety training presented by Environmental Health & Safety during the Departmental Graduate Student Orientation. Graduate students must receive training before beginning regular coursework. Radiological Safety Training, Compressed Gas Cylinder Training, and Bloodborne Pathogen Training may be required.

ANIMAL TRAINING

Animal training is required for any individual listed on an animal protocol. Currently, training is offered through the University of Pittsburgh Animal Research Protection Office. All necessary approvals must be completed before research studies involving laboratory animals can begin.

For more information on training, please get in touch with the IACUC at 412-383-2008

Below are the contents of the [University-Wide Graduate Student Handbook \(Office of Graduate & Postdoctoral Affairs\)](#) (this is only for graduate students at CMU and covers academic and administrative policies at the university level).

Contents

SECTION 1: Welcome & Introduction.....	4
1.1: Mission, Vision, & Values: Carnegie Mellon.....	4
1.2: Mission, Vision, & Values: Office of Graduate & Postdoctoral Affairs.....	5
1.3: Departmental Personnel.....	6
1.4: Office Resources.....	7
1.5: Academic Calendar.....	7
SECTION 2: University Policies & Expectations.....	8
2.1: Carnegie Mellon University Statement of Assurance.....	8
2.2: The Carnegie Mellon Code.....	8
2.3: Statute of Limitations - Doctoral Students.....	9
2.4: Statute of Limitations - Master's Students.....	9
2.5: Verification of Enrollment.....	10
2.6: Change of Address.....	10
2.7: Computing Resources.....	10
2.8: Employment Eligibility Verification.....	11
SECTION 3: Degree Completion, Grading, & Evaluation Policies.....	11
3.1: Academic Integrity.....	11
3.2: University Policy on Grades.....	11
3.3: Transfer Courses and Policy on Grades for Transfer Courses.....	11
3.4: Standard Degree Requirements & Degree Certification.....	12
<i>Program of Study.....</i>	<i>12</i>
3.5: Drop/Add/Withdraw Procedures.....	13
3.6: Policy for Examinations.....	13
3.7: Withdrawal of a Degree.....	13
3.8: Leave of Absence.....	13
SECTION 4: Graduate Student Appeal and Grievance Policies and Procedures.....	14
4.1: Introduction.....	14
4.2: Appealing Final Grades.....	14
4.3: Appeal of Academic Actions.....	15
4.4: Appeal from Academic Disciplinary Actions.....	16
4.5: Community Standards Violations.....	16
4.6: Discriminatory and Sexual Misconduct.....	17
4.7: Intellectual Property Disputes.....	17
4.8: Research Misconduct.....	18
4.9: Suspension/Required Withdrawal.....	18
4.10: General Grievances.....	19
4.11 Consumer Information.....	20
SECTION 5: Funding & Financial Support.....	20
5.1: On-Campus Employment.....	20
5.2: Conference Funding.....	20
5.3: Scholarly Project Funding.....	20
5.4: Professional Engagement Funding.....	20
5.5: Health Insurance Requirement.....	21
5.6: University Fees.....	21
5.7: Taxation of Graduate Student Awards.....	21
5.8: Lost Funding.....	21
5.9: University Financial Aid.....	22
SECTION 6: Safeguarding Educational Equity.....	22
6.1: Assistance for Individuals with Disabilities.....	22
6.2: Gestational and Parental Accommodations.....	22
6.3: Consensual Intimate Relationship Policy Regarding Undergraduate Students.....	23
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS.....	23
Key Resources for Graduate Student Support.....	23
Key Offices for Academic & Research Support.....	24
Key Offices for Health, Wellness, & Safety.....	24