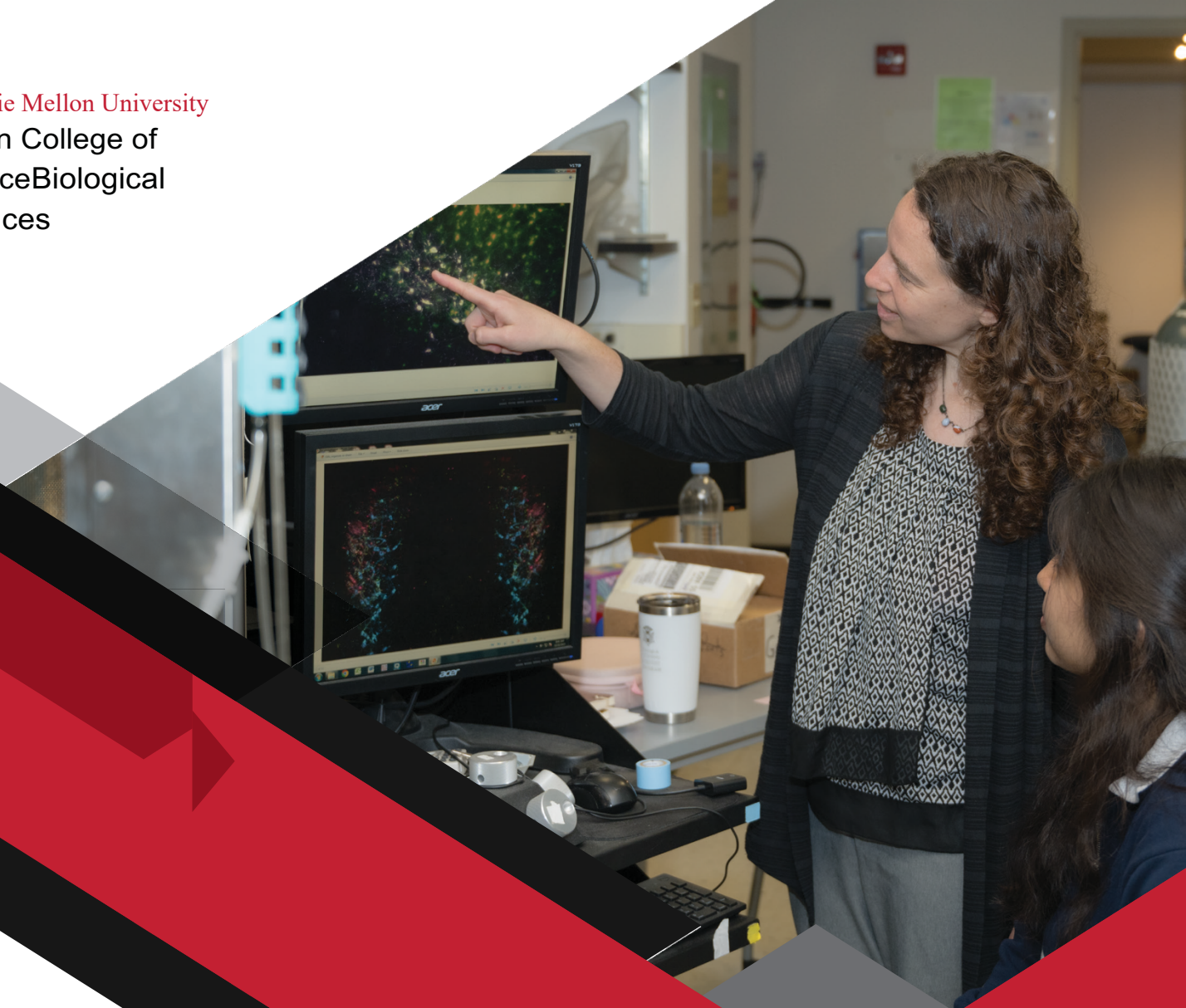


Carnegie Mellon University
Mellon College of
Science Biological
Sciences



M.S. in Quantitative Biology and Bioinformatics

Student Handbook 2025-2026

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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/director
y/faculty/voting-faculty/](http://www.cbd.cmu.edu/director/y/faculty/voting-faculty/)

[https://www.cmu.edu/bio/
people/faculty/index.html](https://www.cmu.edu/bio/people/faculty/index.html)

PRIMARY SUPPORT STAFF

Ena Miceli

Director of Graduate Operations

MI 415

412-268-3012

emiceli@andrew.cmu.edu

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

OTHER SUPPORT STAFF

Matthew Salyers

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

MI 634A

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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 (MSQBB)

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:

1. At least 90 units of coursework, which includes courses in specific categories as listed below
2. Average grade of B or above (GPA = 3.0) in those 90 units counted toward degree certification
3. Full-time course registration (at least 36 units) for each semester in the program

Coursework consists of:

(A) Required Courses (31-33 units)

Minimum C grade in each course counted toward graduation

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

- 03-713-A4: Bioinformatics Data Integration Practicum (6 units, Spring – second half)

(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)
- 03-757: Synthetic Biology (Fall)
- 09-615: Computational Modeling, Statistical Analysis and Machine Learning in Science (Fall)

(C) General Biology Electives (45-47 units)

Minimum C grade in each course counted toward graduation.

At least 45-47 units of elective courses must be taken. Up to 24 units of graduate courses from Computational Biology (02-6xx or higher) may count toward this requirement, along with Graduate Biological Sciences courses (03-6xx or higher) to reach the total required 90 units to graduate.

COURSEWORK (MSQBB-AS)

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:

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

Coursework consists of:

(A) Required Courses (31-33 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 – first half)
- 03-702-A2: Data Analysis for Biological Sciences (6 units, Fall – second half)
- 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)
- 03-713-A4: Bioinformatics Data Integration Practicum (6 units, Spring)

(B) Core Elective Courses (24 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)
- 03-757: Synthetic Biology (Fall)
- 09-615: Computational Modeling, Statistical Analysis and Machine Learning in Science (Fall)

(D) General Biology Electives (59-61 units)

Minimum C grade in each course counted toward graduation.

At least 59-61 units of elective courses must be taken. Up to 36 units of graduate courses from Computational Biology (02-6xx or higher) may count toward this requirement, along with Graduate Biological Sciences courses (03-6xx or higher) to reach the total required 90 units to graduate.

NOTES ON COURSES

- Up to 12 units of research (03-699) 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.
- 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.

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 MSQBB committee reserves the right to nullify the MSQBB 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 directors or university may impose additional outcomes. More information can be found here: <https://www.cmu.edu/student-affairs/ocr/students/index.html>

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

If 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.

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. Research 03-699 for research with a Biological Sciences faculty mentor.

- Up to 12 units of 03-699 may be counted toward the degree.
- If students do a thesis (see “

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.

International students

If doing a **paid summer internship off-campus**, you must contact the **Office of International Education (OIE)** for:

- **CPT** (Curricular Practical Training, <https://www.cmu.edu/oie/employment/f1-students/curricular-practical-training.html>) or
- **Pre-Completion OPT** (Optional Practical Training, <https://www.cmu.edu/oie/employment/f1-students/opt-stem-opt-extension/pre-completion-opt.html>)
- You are **not eligible for CPT or OPT** until the summer after your **first full academic year**. The internship must be relevant to your program.

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.

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.

Students who complete a thesis may register for 03-700 during their final semester.

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).

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