

Graduate Handbook

Neuroscience and Cognitive Science Program
University of Maryland, College Park
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SECTION ONE

Philosophy of Graduate Program

The Neuroscience and Cognitive Science (NACS) Program strives to educate exceptional scientists whose interdisciplinary training will form the basis for significant scientific contributions. This is a research doctoral program designed on an apprenticeship model: students train to become professional scientists by doing independent research and participating in all aspects of the profession under the guidance of faculty.

Much of the benefit for students of the NACS program is the opportunity for daily interaction with other NACS students, postdocs, and faculty over a broad range of interests and experience. We expect all students to be contributing—and benefiting—members of this intellectual community.

NACS graduate student research should be based at the University of Maryland, College Park (UMD) or at external institutions under the guidance of NACS adjunct faculty.

The NACS program is committed to maintaining a culture of diversity, inclusion, and fairness. It does not tolerate discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, physical or mental disability, protected veteran status, age, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, creed, marital status, political affiliation, personal appearance, or on the basis of rights secured by the First Amendment.

Advisors

Philosophy

The graduate advisor is a mentor for all aspects of the scientific and professional education of the student. This implies frequent, substantive interaction with the student. The student is expected, through his/her scholarship, to contribute to the mission of the mentor's laboratory, research group, and department. However, the philosophy of the NACS program is that the mentor serves the student, not vice versa.

Requirements

The advisor must be a Full Member of the Graduate Faculty at the University of Maryland, College Park and a NACS faculty member. If the advisor ceases to be a member of NACS but remains on the University of Maryland, College Park faculty after matriculation of the student, the student may remain in the NACS program as long as he/she continues to meet all the requirements of the program. If the advisor leaves the University of Maryland, College Park, and the student decides to remain in the NACS program, the student must choose a new advisor willing to accept all the duties listed below. The former advisor can serve as co-advisor or as a committee member, if appropriate.

Duties

The primary role of the advisor is as scientific mentor to the student. The advisor serves as chair of the student's committee and tracks the student's progress to insure that requirements of the program and of the student's committee are completed in a timely manner. Frequent informal evaluation is highly desirable to detect and correct problems before they become major. This is largely the responsibility of the advisor. However, periodic research presentations by the students during informal NACS events can be very valuable and should be strongly encouraged.

Procedure for Changing Advisors

Students who enter the NACS program must have an advisor and home department already established. Typically, students remain with their advisor and home department throughout their graduate career. However, a student may change advisors at any time. Our experience indicates that this is best done well before the student takes the qualifying examination.

The student may make the change by discussing his/her wishes with both the former and proposed new advisor and submitting a written statement briefly stating the reason for the change to the Graduate Director. For instances in which the student wishes to sever ties with his/her advisor before a new advisor has been identified, the student may prefer to discuss his/her plans with the Graduate Director, who can convey the change to the former advisor.

If the student has not made arrangements for a new advisor, the Graduate Director will appoint an interim advisor for a period of no more than two months. It is the student's responsibility to establish a working relationship with a formal advisor within this two-month period; failure to do so may result in the student's dismissal from the program.

Approval by the Graduate Director is required for a change in advisor. If the Graduate Director is either the student's old or new advisor, the Graduate Director should turn over the approval decision to the Graduate Committee. The Committee may require additional information from all parties involved. If the student wishes to challenge the decisions of the Graduate Director or the Graduate Committee about advisor assignment, he/she may address concerns to the NACS Program Director.

The new advisor must indicate to the Graduate Director in writing that he/she is willing to have the student in his/her laboratory and will assume all of the responsibilities of the advisor detailed above and provide funding for the student.

At the point when both student and new advisor want to go forward, the NACS office will notify the Graduate Director of the new home department. After the Graduate Director of the new home department has been notified, the student will form a transition committee. The following three or four faculty will be on the transition committee:

- New advisor
- NACS Graduate Director
- Another faculty member who most likely will be on the student's committee
- Possibly the old advisor or the NACS Program Director

Advisor Transition Period

Once an advisor transition has been formally initiated by either the student or the faculty advisor through written notice to the Graduate Director, an "Advisor Transition Period" begins. The length of this period depends on when the transition was initiated. If the transition is initiated during the fall or spring terms with more than two months remaining in that term, the Advisor Transition Period will conclude by the end of that term. If, however, the transition is initiated during the fall or spring term within two months of the end of that term, the Advisor Transition Period will be extended to last a minimum of two months. If the transition is initiated during the summer, the Advisor Transition Period will be at least two months but shall be extended into the first two months of the fall semester if there is limited availability of faculty during summer. During the Advisor Transition Period, the interim advisor and student must meet at least once to review the status of the search for a new advisor and ensure that the student is receiving adequate support. The Advisor Transition Period may be extended beyond these minimums at the discretion of the department or program.

When a new faculty research advisor is secured, a transition plan should be created for completing work with the former advisor and starting work with the new advisor. The transition plan must include any implications of the advisor change for coursework, exams, advancement to candidacy, and other program requirements. For students with funding, the transition plan must also address how students' funding will be maintained.

Procedure for Advisor to Drop Student

An advisor may decide he/she no longer wishes to supervise a student. This can be accomplished by a written request to the Graduate Director who will consult with the Program Director. If the request is approved, the advisor will notify the student in writing one month prior to termination. The Graduate Director will then appoint an interim advisor and the student will have two months from termination to find a new advisor.

Procedure for Lab Rotations

NACS offers lab rotations to selected first year students who have a serious interest in the research programs of several different faculty. NACS does not require mandatory lab rotations.

Faculty and students who choose to participate in a lab rotation their first year must take responsibility for making satisfactory arrangements (i.e., sequence, length of time, etc.). This requires a serious discussion among and agreement by the relevant faculty, followed by a letter documenting the arrangement and signed by the student and the relevant faculty. This letter is included in the student's file.

It is important to note that the home department and primary advisor remain the same throughout the rotation year.

Home Department

The NACS Program is made up of faculty from many departments. Since it is not itself a department, each NACS student **must** have a home department. This is the department in which the student's advisor has his/her appointment.

Advisory and Evaluative Committees

Philosophy

At each stage of graduate training and evaluation, a student will work closely with an advisor and a committee. Ideally, committee members will serve for the duration of the student's entire time in the Program.

Member Affiliations

Committee members must normally be full-time NACS faculty at the University of Maryland, College Park. However, if it is of special advantage to the student, up to two members of the committee can be full-time faculty members of another academic institution or permanent research staff members at a recognized scientific research institution, such as the National Institutes of Health.

Committee Meeting Schedule

First Year Research Project (FYRP)

The committee is comprised of the student's advisor, 2 additional faculty (one outside of research area), and a senior NACS student. The student and committee members sign a First Year Research Project Committee form and the student submits it to the NACS office. The committee helps the student plan curriculum, define research interests, and initiate a First Year Research Project. The committee meets twice in their first year. The first meeting must occur by October 15. The second meeting must occur by the end of February.

As the committee begins to evaluate the student's progress in the NACS Program, only the faculty members continue to serve. At a third meeting scheduled no later than October 15 of the student's second year, the student will make an oral presentation of the First Year Research Project to the committee. The oral presentation meeting must take place in person. A petition is required to have the meeting via Zoom.

Qualifying Exam (QE)

Committee composition may grow as the student gets to know more faculty in the program and/or additional expertise is needed. The student and committee members sign a Qualifying Exam Committee form and the student submits it to the NACS office. It is recommended that the committee meets during the spring semester of the student's second year. The QE oral presentation meeting must take place in person. A petition is required to have the meeting via Zoom.

Dissertation Proposal Defense

The committee must grow to a minimum of four faculty members for the dissertation proposal. The committee will advise the student on the planning of dissertation research and will provide feedback on research design and pilot data collection and analysis. The dissertation proposal defense typically occurs by the end of the student's fourth year. The dissertation proposal meeting must take place in person. A petition is required to have the meeting via Zoom.

Dissertation Defense

A representative of the Dean of the Graduate School is added to the committee before the PhD defense is scheduled.

The dissertation defense typically occurs by the end of the student's fifth year. The dissertation defense must take place in person. Requests to hold the defense remotely must be approved by the Graduate School.

Annual Committee Meeting Requirement

Students are required to meet with their committee once every 12 months until graduation but may schedule more frequent meetings as needed. Annual committee meetings can be held in person or via Zoom. The student brings two forms to the annual committee meeting: 1) a completed Graduate Outcomes Assessment (GOA) for the committee to review and sign, and 2) a Report of Committee Meeting form for the committee to complete and sign. After the meeting, the student submits both forms to the NACS office. The forms are available on the NACS website at <https://nacs.umd.edu/students/forms-and-resources>.

Procedure for Changing Committee Composition

The student may change committee composition at any time. Courtesy and common sense dictate that the student must thoroughly discuss the proposed change with both the former and new members before notifying the NACS Office. The student should briefly state the reasons for the request when notifying the NACS office.



SECTION TWO

PhD Degree

General Information

Philosophy

A major strength of the NACS program is the broad, integrative training it offers students. An important goal of the curriculum is to assure that all NACS students have a core body of knowledge covering the basic concepts across the full range of neuroscience and cognitive science. This must be balanced with a second goal: a doctorate in NACS is a research degree, and the best way to learn the skills and strategies of research is to be immersed in day-to-day laboratory or research group activities and an independent project. Thus, the program should impose the smallest number of required courses consistent with the sufficient breadth of training.

Participation

All NACS students are expected to participate regularly and actively in NACS activities including, but not limited to, NACS Retreat, NACS Research Day, NACS seminars, and other events. This expectation also applies to students who carry out their research at NIH or other off campus venues.

Expected Time to Degree

NACS students are expected to complete their PhD degree within 5 years.

Registration

Students must be registered in each semester until they graduate. Registration is the responsibility of the students until they advance to candidacy.

Course Load

The NACS office recommends that students take no more than 10 credits each semester, which is the number of credits of tuition remission that a student receives if the student has a full research or teaching assistantship appointment.

Teaching Experience

All NACS students are encouraged to teach for at least one semester during their graduate career. This will normally be as a Graduate Teaching Assistant.

External Funding Applications

Students are expected to submit predoctoral grant or fellowship applications. The NACS program has a Grants Development Specialist who can help students prepare these applications.

Completion of Forms

The student is responsible for completing required NACS annual committee meeting forms, report forms, Graduate Outcome Assessment forms, and Graduate School forms, by their specified deadlines. NACS forms are available on the NACS website at <https://nacs.umd.edu/students/forms-and-resources>, and Graduate School forms are available on the Graduate School website at <https://gradschool.umd.edu/forms>.

Annual Progress Report and Progress Update

At the end of each academic year, students complete an Annual Progress Report and submit it to the NACS Office. The NACS Director, Graduate Director, and Assistant Director review the progress reports and complete a Progress Update for each student. Any concerns of the NACS program or the student's advisor are noted on the Progress Update. Also noted on the Progress Update is whether the student is making satisfactory progress in the NACS program.

Commencement

NACS students typically participate in the commencement ceremony of their home department. Diplomas are mailed to the student after graduation. Degrees are awarded by the University in December, May, and August.

Course Requirements

Core Courses (must be completed by the end of the second year)

NACS 600 Ethics in Scientific Research

NACS 640 Foundational Readings (taken in the first semester)

Three of the following five courses (at least one course from each area):

Cognitive Area

NACS 642 Cognitive Neuroscience

NACS 645 Cognitive Science

Neuroscience Area

NACS 641 Introduction to Neurosciences

NACS 643 Computational Neuroscience

NACS 644 Cellular and Molecular Neuroscience

Students who have satisfactorily completed graduate courses with comparable content may be exempted from NACS 600, 641, 642, 643, 644, or 645 core course requirements with written permission of their committee and the Graduate Director. This includes students with prior training in neural, cognitive, and/or computational neuroscience and students entering the NACS Program with a Master's degree in a related field.

Supplemental Courses (must be completed by the end of the fourth year)

In addition to the core courses, NACS students must complete three 600-level or above courses (minimum of 9 credits) that are relevant to their program of research. These courses should be approved by the student's committee. Credits from core courses beyond the three mandated will count toward the total of 9 credits. The student's committee may require additional course work to remedy any areas of weakness in the student's previous training.

The NACS program will allow up to two 400-level courses to count towards the NACS supplemental course requirement provided the following criteria are met. The student must submit a completed "400-level Course Request Form" (available on the NACS website) for each 400-level course.

- The student provides a clear reason for the need to take the 400-level course
- A graduate course that meets the student's need is not available
- The 400-level course is at least 3 credits
- The committee approves the request

Dissertation Credits

The Graduate School requires 12 credits of 899 dissertation research credits before graduation. After a student has advanced to candidacy, the Registrar's Office automatically registers the student for 6 credits of NACS899 (no more, no less) each fall and spring semester until the student graduates. Please note: Students who intend to graduate in the summer (August) must be registered for 1 credit of NACS899 during that term.

NACS Course List

This is a list of NACS-related courses that are taught by NACS faculty. The list is emailed to NACS students and faculty each semester.

Research Requirements

First Year Research Project

Overview

NACS students will engage in a research project in their first year that culminates in a written report and oral presentation to their committee members. The project selected must be a new project (students cannot use projects they worked on before they entered the NACS program) and one that can be conceived and completed within the first year. The project will provide an early opportunity for students to receive feedback on written and oral presentations of their work. It will help launch students in their careers as independent scientists.

Lab Rotations

Upon entering the Program, students performing rotations should consult with their advisors as to where the project is to be performed and are encouraged to engage in a project that links their work. Students doing lab rotations will do the write-up of the written project during the summer. The written project can be based on research done in either lab. It is the student's responsibility to make sure that progress on the project is made within the timelines outlined below for the project.

Committee Meetings

- Students are required to meet with their committee three times in their first year.
- The first meeting must occur by October 15. One week prior to the meeting the student provides a one-page document (any format) on their background (e.g., degree, relevant coursework, research experiences), potential FYRP project, and proposed coursework. At the meeting the student presents these items for 10-15 minutes (slides recommended) and a general plan is discussed. Note that it should be understood by the committee that the student has just joined the lab and is not expected to have a perfectly drawn-out plan. This meeting is meant to be a discussion, but the student should be prepared to talk about *their* research interests intelligently. The student should ask their advisor to review the written document and slides beforehand. **It is expected that the student will then begin work towards the first year research project by the end of November.**
- The second meeting must occur by the end of February. The student submits a one page outline of the research project two weeks before the meeting. The outline should include hypotheses, methods, and specific aims. At the meeting, the student should present slides on these topics for 20-30 minutes. At this point the student should be able to intelligently describe *their* hypotheses, methods, and specific aims, and answer questions related to them. The committee reviews the progress that the student has made on the project and their ability to talk about it. The committee and student discuss the requirements for the written paper and review the timeline. The student should ask their advisor to review the written document and slides beforehand.
- The presentation of the research report will constitute a third meeting by October 15 of the student's second year. See full description below.

Written Project

- Projects may involve empirical or theoretical research, and the discipline-specific details are developed by the student, his/her advisor and input from the committee.
- The project must be submitted as a brief journal-style research report in the following format unless a petition has been approved by the NACS Graduate Director prior to submitting the Written Project. Projects not submitted according to this format will be returned.

- Not to exceed 6 pages in length (not including references and figures)
- 12 point Arial font
- .75 inch margins
- Single spacing
- It is not intended that the project be exhaustive – a single repeatable experiment with controls would be sufficient. Solid negative results, control experiments or an original analysis of data collected by others may also be permissible, provided that the project elaborates on how those results lay the groundwork for future experiments by the student. **Also, the project doesn't need to be complete. Students can report on what they have accomplished so far.**
- The project should not be a literature review, but any references in the report may later become part of the student's qualifying exam.
- Students are encouraged to send their completed FYRP written proposal to the NACS Grants Development Specialist for advice on how they can convert it to a NSF GRFP grant proposal.

Oral Presentation

- An oral presentation to the student's committee must be scheduled by the student by June 1 of the student's first year. The actual oral presentation must take place by October 15 of the student's second year unless a petition has been approved by the NACS Graduate Director at least 2 weeks prior to October 15.
- The written project report must be submitted to the student's committee and to the NACS office two weeks before the date of the oral presentation.
- The student is expected to begin the oral presentation with a 20-30-minute overview that summarizes the first year research project.
- The entire oral presentation is expected to be one hour in length.
- The student brings two forms to the oral presentation: 1) a completed Graduate Outcomes Assessment (GOA) for the committee to review and sign, and 2) a First Year Research Project: Report form for the committee to complete and sign. After the meeting, the student submits both forms to the NACS office. The forms are available on the NACS website at <https://nacs.umd.edu/students/forms-and-resources>.
- The oral presentation must be held in person unless the student has submitted a Petition to Request an Exception to Procedure form that has been approved.

Evaluation and Grading

- The student's advisor and committee will evaluate the written report and the oral presentation.
- Grading of the entire research project (written report and oral presentation) will occur at the oral presentation and will be as High Pass, Pass, or Retake. The student's advisor and committee will complete a Report of First Year Research Project form at the oral presentation and submit the form to the NACS office. Each committee member will also complete a Feedback Form. The advisor will submit all Feedback Forms to the NACS office.
- Students who receive a Retake will have 6 weeks to complete any required work on the written report and give the oral presentation a second time. Grading of the retake will take place at the second oral presentation and will be as High Pass, Pass, or Fail.
- If the student fails the retake, the student will not be permitted to continue in the Ph.D. program. The program's director, the graduate director, and the student's advisor will discuss the possibility of the student completing a terminal master's degree. The student can appeal the outcome of a grade of Fail of the retake to the Graduate Director.

Travel Award

- Students who present the research from their First Year Research Project at a national conference within 18 months will receive a travel award to use toward travel expenses to the conference.

Qualifying Examination

Overview

- The purpose of the Qualifying Examination (QE) is to provide the student with an assignment that demonstrates the student's ability to integrate the existing literature in his/her area of study and propose logical next steps in

answering questions to which we currently lack sufficient answers. Rather than being an isolated exercise with no practical value to a doctoral student, the QE has been configured to resemble some aspects of the research grant application process. The academic intent is to provide practice experience in writing and observing submission guidelines, while at the same time allowing the student to demonstrate mastery of materials in his/her chosen discipline. Aspects of the QE product may or may not later be incorporated into the student's later Dissertation Proposal, at the student's discretion.

- Students can have three or four committee members for the QE. The student member from the FYRP is removed for the QE.
- The QE process includes two components: **A written proposal** and an **oral presentation** of the research proposal.
- A detailed guide to the **written** proposal follows in the next section.
- The **oral presentation** should place particular emphasis on the student's knowledge of background material, including relevant coursework, techniques and analytical methods, as well as the historical context and the broad significance of the proposed work. Questions during the oral presentation should probe the student's knowledge as to provide evidence that they are qualified to advance to candidacy.

Guidance for Students

Primary guidance for the development of the research proposal rests with the student's advisor and committee members, subject to the guidelines below. NACS encourages students to discuss their ideas with their advisors and committee throughout the QE process. The student will also have access to the NACS Grants Development Specialist for discussions concerning the general format and style of successful research proposals, keeping within the guidelines below. The student can also seek proof editing help as long as the editing is limited to typos and grammar only (major restructuring of the document or intellectual contributions to it are not allowed). The FAQs below provide additional information.

For the written proposal

- 1) Can advisors or other individuals edit the written proposal? No.
- 2) Can advisors or other individuals comment on the written proposal? Yes, but only on the first draft of each section.
- 3) Can advisors or other individuals answer questions about the written proposal? Yes.
- 4) Can students incorporate *ideas* (not text) from previous papers or grant submissions into their written proposal? Yes, if they were an author.

For the oral presentation

- 1) Can advisors or other individuals edit the PowerPoint presentation? No.
- 2) Can advisors or other individuals comment on the PowerPoint presentation? Yes, but only on the first draft.
- 3) Can advisors or other individuals answer questions about the PowerPoint presentation? Yes.
- 4) Can students use slides from previous presentations? Yes.
- 5) If they choose to do so, can students ask their advisors and lab members to sit in on a practice of their oral presentation and provide feedback? Yes.

Written Research Proposal

Guidelines

- The proposal should take a broad approach to addressing an important problem or a critical barrier to progress within the student's research area. It can be related to the research project the student is already independently working on or a submission for external funding. It can contain material that the student has used in a previous grant application to a funding agency, or material that has been developed as part of a grant writing workshop/course. Note that advisors are not permitted to edit the QE document, but they can read it and provide oral feedback for educational purposes.
- The student decides on the topic of the proposal. There must be consensus among the student, the advisor, and committee members as to the suitability and scope of the topic. The student should have general discussions with his/her advisor or other relevant colleagues, including the NACS Grants Development Specialist, during proposal preparation, but the final full-length version should be written independently. The QE is an examination and must represent the student's ideas for development of the research project. The student must follow university guidelines for academic integrity in the preparation of the proposal (see www.president.umd.edu/policies/iii100a.html).

- The Specific Aims within the proposal should describe a project that can be carried out within two years. No budget needs to be included in the proposal.
- In writing the proposal, the student should pay attention to Evaluation Criteria detailed below. Particular emphasis is placed on the Background and Significance section of the proposal. This section is expanded relative to that in an agency grant application.
- Experimental safety, and the use of biomaterials, animals or humans, should adhere to established ethical and safety guidelines, but details of their adherence to those guidelines are not required.
- The proposal may be eventually incorporated into the student's dissertation proposal, where the emphasis should be on the likely success of experiments and on the interpretation of preliminary data.
- Students are encouraged to send their completed QE written proposal to the NACS Grants Development Specialist for advice on how they can convert it to a NIH NRSA grant proposal.
- Preliminary data is not required.

Format

The written research proposal should include the following elements. Students should adhere strictly to the page limits indicated below.

- Abstract / Lay Summary (up to 1 page)
 - Provide a brief summary of the research proposal (background, specific aims, approaches used, and future goal) that is targeted to a general audience.
- At Least Two Specific Aims (1 page)
 - State broad objectives. Do not subdivide specific aims (e.g. Aim 1b etc.). Describe concisely the specific hypothesis to be tested and what the research is intended to accomplish.
 - In addition to following the guidelines above, students should consider the following questions concerning their Specific Aims:
 - What is the fundamental problem that will be addressed?
 - Why is testing the hypothesis, solving the problem, or making these observations important for your field of research?
 - Does the proposed research challenge an existing concept or seek to establish a new idea?
 - What is original about the approach?
- Background and Significance, and Research Design and Methods (Not more than 15 pages combined. You can divide these 15 pages between the two subheadings according to your preference, but you should be mindful that all evaluation criteria must be addressed for each subheading)
 - Background and Significance
 - Summarize the background to the research proposal. Critically evaluate the history of relevant work in the research field and the state of existing knowledge. Critically evaluate the history and utility of techniques to be used in the project. Identify gaps in knowledge or techniques that the proposal is intended to fill. Justify the importance of the research described by relating the specific aims to broad, long-term scientific objectives.
 - In addition to following the guidelines above, students should consider the following questions concerning the background and significance of their proposal:
 - How does previous work in your research field inform your proposal?
 - How does work done in fields of research or on societal issues outside of your discipline inform your proposal?
 - What impact does your proposal have beyond your laboratory group?
 - Does your proposal have clinical significance or an impact on society?
 - Are there gaps in current knowledge that the proposal is designed to address?

- Do your proposed techniques have limitations or distinct advantages compared to others?
 - Research Design and Methods
 - Describe the research design and procedures to be used to accomplish the specific aims of the project. Include how the data will be collected, analyzed, and interpreted. Describe any new methodology and its advantages over existing ones. Discuss potential difficulties and limitations of the proposed procedures and alternative approaches to achieve the aims.
 - In addition to following the guidelines above, students should consider the following questions concerning their Research Design and Methods:
 - How do your design and its methods achieve your specific aims? Will your anticipated results be clearly and unambiguously interpretable?
 - Does the approach overcome existing challenges or barriers in the research field?
 - If your methodology is new, what is innovative about your approach?
- One Future Goal (1 page)
 - Must include broad concepts and technologies outside the student's own field.
 - Must adopt an interdisciplinary approach (for example a systems-level or computational approach to a cellular neuroscience project or a cognitive neuroscience approach to a cognitive science project). If both specific aims are interdisciplinary, it is not necessary for the future goal to adopt an interdisciplinary approach.
- Literature Cited [unlimited pages]
 - Provide a complete bibliography of literature cited including authors' names, title of publication, year, journal or book title, volume, and page numbers. Citations must be listed alphabetically in the reference list and as author(s) and year(s) in the text.
- The document should be formatted as indicated below unless a petition has been approved by the NACS Graduate Director prior to submitting the written research proposal. This is one of many training exercises to help students become independent researchers.
 - Up to 18 pages, excluding figures and references.
 - 12 point Arial font
 - .75" margins all around
 - Single line spacing

Evaluation

Process

- The student, advisor, and committee must reach consensus on a tentative title for the research proposal before the end of April in the student's second year. It is the student's responsibility to email the title to the NACS Office.
- Each committee member will read the written research proposal and complete a Rubric Form. On the form the committee member will provide a rating score of 1-5 (Poor to Excellent) for 14 criteria and an overall score for the entire proposal. The overall score is not necessarily an average of the rating scores, and it should roughly reflect the rating scores. In addition, each committee member will complete a Comments Form. On the form the committee member will provide a ½ - 1-page review of the proposal, which should include specific feedback to the student in preparation for the Oral Presentation (if the proposal is acceptable) or a rewrite of the proposal (if the proposal is rejected).
- It is recommended that the committee discuss the rating scores on the Rubric Forms as a group (either in person, via Zoom, or through email), especially if the student will not receive at least a 3.0 total score. The student's advisor will transfer the committee members' rating scores from the Rubric Forms into a Scoring Form. The student's advisor will also transfer each committee member's overall score for the entire proposal to the Scoring

Form and then calculate an average of the overall scores, which will serve as the student's Total Score on the written grant proposal.

- The student must receive a Total Score of 3.0 or above for the written research proposal to be accepted.
- The student's advisor will forward the Scoring Form and all Comments Forms to the NACS Office. The NACS office will then complete a Decision Form and email it, along with the Comments forms, to the student.
- Proposal Accepted
 - If the Committee accepts the written research proposal, the student proceeds to the Oral Presentation.
- Proposal Rejected
 - If the Committee rejects the written research proposal, the student will have one month to rewrite the proposal. The student must immediately schedule a meeting with his/her advisor to discuss the Overall Score, the comments, and the work needed to re-write the proposal, subject to the Guidelines above. The student can rewrite the proposal one time only.
 - If the proposal is rejected a second time, the student will not be permitted to continue in the Ph.D. program. The student may submit a petition to NACS to complete a terminal Master's Degree.

Criteria

The Committee will evaluate the written research proposal on the criteria shown below using a rating scale of Excellent = 5 points, Very Good = 4 points, Good = 3 points, Fair = 2 points, Poor = 1 point for each item. The committee member will also provide an overall score for the entire proposal. The overall score is not necessarily an average of the rating scores, and it should roughly reflect the rating scores. The student must receive an Overall Score of 3.0 in order for the written proposal to be found Acceptable.

Background and Significance	
1	The student displays an adequate knowledge of the history of the research field, including knowledge that goes beyond their specific research question, discipline, and laboratory group.
2	The student identifies gaps in current knowledge that the proposal is designed to address.
3	The student displays an adequate and critical knowledge of the techniques to be deployed and their history.
4	The project addresses an important problem or a critical barrier to progress in the research field.
5	The project has impact beyond its research field.
Specific Aims, Future Goal, and Research Design and Methods	
6	The strategy, methodology, and analyses are well-reasoned and appropriate to accomplish the specific aims of the project.
7	The anticipated results of the project sufficiently fulfill the aims.
8	The research proposal successfully integrates interdisciplinary concepts or technologies.
9	Potential problems, alternative strategies, and benchmarks for success are presented.
10	Risky aspects are managed well.
11	The future goal includes broad concepts and technologies outside the student's own field.
Writing	
12	The writing is clear.

13	The writing is free from grammatical errors.
14	The writing appropriately uses terminology.
Citations	
15	Citations are appropriately used.

Oral Presentation

Preparation

- Students should pay careful attention to issues raised on the Comments Forms. In addition, students should be familiar with background publications that provide the foundation for their research proposal, and with current literature that pertains to their specific aims and their future goal. Students should also be familiar with the rationale for any experimental or analytical techniques that they propose. Students may be asked to defend their choice of methodologies, discuss the rationale for and creativity of the proposed research, and discuss strengths and limitations.

Format

- The student is expected to begin the oral presentation with a 30-minute overview that summarizes the written research proposal.
- The entire oral presentation is expected to be between 1 ½ to 2 hours in length. This includes the student's overview and questions from the Committee during and after the overview.
- At the conclusion of the oral presentation, the student is excused from the room so that the Committee can discuss the student's performance.
- The oral presentation must be held in person unless the student has submitted a Petition.

Evaluation

Process

- After the student has left the meeting room, the committee will decide on a rating score of 1-5 (Poor to Excellent) that represents the consensus of the committee for the 7 criteria. The committee will also decide on a Total Score of 1-5 that represents the consensus of the committee for the entire oral presentation. The Total Score is not necessarily an average of the rating scores, and it should roughly reflect the rating scores. The student's advisor will enter the rating scores for the 7 criteria and the Total Score for the entire oral presentation into the Scoring Form. The Total Score will serve as the student's score on the entire Qualifying Exam. In addition, the committee as a group will complete a Feedback Rubric. If a retake is the outcome, each committee member will complete a Comments Form. On the Comments Form the committee member will provide a ½ - 1-page review of the oral presentation. The outcome of the entire QE is explained to the student when the student returns to the room.
- The oral presentation is evaluated as "Pass" or "Fail" by the Committee. The student must receive a Total Score of at least 3.0 to receive a "Pass" on the oral presentation. A "Pass" indicates that the student achieved a high standard of scholarship, and that the student has passed the entire Qualifying Examination.
- Fail: If the Committee assigns a "fail" outcome, the student can repeat the oral presentation once. If the Committee assigns a "fail" outcome a second time, the Committee must recommend to the Graduate Director that 1) the student be withdrawn from the program immediately or 2) the student be allowed to complete a terminal Master's Degree.
- The student's advisor will forward the Scoring Form and the Feedback Rubric to the NACS Office. If a retake is the outcome, the advisor will also forward all Comments Forms to the NACS office. The NACS office will then complete a Decision form and email it, along with the other forms, to the student.
- The student and advisor also need to complete a Graduate Outcomes Assessment (GOA). The student submits the GOA to the NACS office.

Criteria

The oral presentation will evaluate the student's knowledge and depth of understanding of the written research proposal. The Committee will evaluate the oral presentation using a rating score of 1-5 (Poor to Excellent) that

represents the consensus of the committee for the 7 criteria. The committee will also decide on a Total Score of 1-5 that represents the consensus of the committee for the entire oral presentation. The Total Score is not necessarily an average of the rating scores, and it should roughly reflect the rating scores. The student must receive a Total Score of at least 3.0 to receive a "Pass" on the Oral Presentation. A "Pass" indicates that the student achieved a high standard of scholarship, and that the student has passed the entire Qualifying Exam.

1	The student presented a coherent and understandable overview of the proposal.
2	The visual material presented by the student was well designed.
3	The student adequately addressed issues raised in the reviewers' comments.
4	The student adequately answered questions that arose during the oral presentation that were not raised in the reviewers' comments.
5	The student's arguments displayed a knowledge of the history of their research field and its associated techniques, as well as those outside their research discipline.
6	The student's arguments displayed an understanding of the future of the research field.
7	The student's arguments displayed an interdisciplinary appreciation of the research field.

Timetable

All NACS core course requirements must be completed before the date of the oral presentation. The qualifying examination process begins in the Spring Semester of the student's second year in the program and, without re-taking parts of the examination, will be completed before the end of November of the fall semester of the student's third year in the program.

- The NACS Office distributes a copy of the qualifying exam guidelines and timeline to the students and Committee by the end of February.
- Students must submit a tentative title for their written research proposal, approved by their advisor and committee, to the NACS office before the end of April
- Students submit the written research proposal to their Committee by the end of August. They also submit a copy of the written research proposal (as a Word document) to the NACS Office.
- The Committee evaluates the written proposal and indicates the outcome by the end of September. If the Committee rejects the written proposal, the student must rewrite and submit the proposal to the Committee by the end of November. The Committee evaluates the re-written proposal and indicates the outcome by the end of December. If the proposal is accepted, the oral presentation takes place by the end of January. If the student fails the oral presentation, the repeat of the oral presentation must occur by the end of February.
- The Oral Presentation takes place by the end of November. If the committee rejects the oral presentation, the repeat of the oral presentation must occur by the end of January.

Advancement to Candidacy

Students are eligible to submit the paperwork to advance to candidacy after passing their qualifying examination if they have completed their First Year Research Project and all core course requirements.

Please note that when a student advances to candidacy, the Registrar's Office automatically enrolls the student in 6 credits of NACS899 each fall and spring semester until the student graduates. This means that the student might not have enough tuition remission leftover if the student is still interested in taking courses. We will allow students to delay submitting their candidacy paperwork until a later date if they are still interested in taking courses.

If the student does not advance to candidacy by the end of the tenth semester, the student must request a one-year time extension from the Graduate School by filling out a "Request for Time Extension" form on the Graduate School's website.

Dissertation Proposal

Before the end of the student's eighth semester, the student will present his/her dissertation proposal at an evaluation meeting of his/her dissertation committee. The purpose of this meeting is to assure the following:

- the proposed research can lead to a dissertation that meets the requirements and standards for attaining a doctorate
- the project is feasible
- the student has designed experiments that answer the questions posed
- the student has sufficiently worked out the details of the proposed research
- the student has anticipated possible pitfalls
- the student is thoroughly ready to proceed with the project
- the student has sufficient knowledge in the field to competently interpret and discuss his/her research findings in a broader context

The student must have an approved protocol for the IACUC for animal research, or the student must have the IRB protocol for human research.

While this is an official and required meeting, it is more significantly part of a continuing dialog between the student and the committee that should result in dissertation research of the highest possible quality.

The proposal meeting must be held in person unless the student has submitted a Petition.

Guidelines for the Written Proposal

NACS recommends that the written research proposal include the elements described below. The document should be double spaced with 1 inch margins. The student should submit the proposal to the committee two weeks prior to the scheduled proposal meeting. Text and figures from the sections listed below can be reused in the dissertation.

- Title page
 - Title of the proposal
 - Student's, advisor's and committee members' names
 - Date of submission
- Abstract / Lay Summary (up to 1 page)
 - Provide a brief summary of the research proposal (background, specific aims, approaches used, and future goal) that is targeted to a general audience.
- At Least Two Specific Aims (1-2 pages)
 - State broad objectives. Describe concisely the specific hypothesis to be tested and what the research is intended to accomplish.
 - In addition to following the guidelines above, students should consider the following questions concerning their Specific Aims:
 - What is the fundamental problem that will be addressed?
 - Why is testing the hypothesis, solving the problem, or making these observations important for your field of research?
 - Does the proposed research challenge an existing concept or seek to establish a new idea?
 - What is original about the approach?
 - What do you expect to find and how would you interpret those results?
- Background and Significance/Introduction (10-20 pages)
 - Summarize the background to the research proposal. Critically evaluate the history of relevant work in the research field and the state of existing knowledge. Critically evaluate the history and utility of

techniques to be used in the project. Identify gaps in knowledge or techniques that the proposal is intended to fill. Justify the importance of the research described by relating the specific aims to broad, long-term scientific objectives.

- In addition to following the guidelines above, students should consider the following questions concerning the background and significance of their proposal:
 - How does previous work in your research field inform your proposal?
 - How does work done in fields of research or on societal issues outside of your discipline inform your proposal?
 - What impact does your proposal have beyond your laboratory group? What impact does your proposal have on the literature?
 - Does your proposal have clinical significance or an impact on society?
 - Are there gaps in current knowledge that the proposal is designed to address?
 - Do your proposed techniques have limitations or distinct advantages compared to others?
- Proposed or completed studies: At least 2 Chapters dedicated to your proposed or completed experiments described in your specific aims (i.e., 1 chapter for each aim). Note, it is fine if the work has already been published so long as you are lead author. The published work can be directly inserted into the proposal; however, NACS recommends that it be edited to be cohesive with the rest of the proposal. NACS also recommends that each chapter includes the following:
 - Rationale of proposed studies (1 paragraph)
 - Research Design and Methods: Describe the research design and procedures to be used to accomplish the specific aims of the project. Include the means by which the data will be collected, analyzed, and interpreted. Describe any new methodology and its advantages over existing ones.
 - Preliminary or published data: Describe your preliminary or published data that support your hypotheses.
 - Predicted or published results: What do you expect to find and how would you interpret those results. If the work is published, then describe your results and interpretations.
 - Potential Pitfalls: Discuss potential difficulties, pitfalls and/or limitations of the proposed procedures and alternative approaches to achieve the aims if any difficulties or pitfalls arise. Note, if the work is published, then there would be no pitfalls.
- Timeline to completion
 - Break down how long it will take to complete and write up each of the experiments in your specific aims and how long it will take to complete your written thesis. Provide specific dates. A table or calendar of events is often helpful. Be mindful of the time it takes to write a thesis and prepare for your talk and that potential difficulties/ pitfalls may arise.
- Literature Cited [unlimited pages]
 - Provide a complete bibliography of literature cited including authors' names, title of publication, year, journal or book title, volume, and page numbers.

The Proposal Evaluation Meeting

- The format and detail of the proposal evaluation meeting is at the discretion of the student's advisor and committee. At the meeting the student normally presents an oral summary of the research project and answers any questions from the committee. The proposal evaluation meeting will typically last about two hours.
- The student brings two forms to the meeting: 1) a completed Graduate Outcomes Assessment (GOA) for the committee to review and sign, and 2) a Report of Dissertation Proposal form for the committee to complete and sign. After the meeting, the student submits the forms to the NACS office. Forms are available at <https://nacs.umd.edu/students/forms-and-resources>.

- After the student has passed the dissertation proposal, the student must submit a pdf of the proposal to the NACS office.

Dissertation

The PhD must be the result of original, independent research; the dissertation is the report of that research. Students are encouraged to use their published papers in their dissertation. **Students should adhere to the Graduate School guidelines when writing and formatting the dissertation.**

Dissertation Defense

Graduate School regulations stipulate that the doctoral degree, including the dissertation defense, must be completed within four years after admission to candidacy or within nine years after matriculation, whichever is greater. Specific procedures for scheduling and administering the dissertation defense are given in the Graduate School Catalog.

Students must meet the graduation deadlines set by the Graduate School for the semester they plan to graduate. The graduation deadlines for each semester are available on the Graduate School website.

- Application for Graduation: Students must submit an electronic application for graduation by the deadline in order to graduate that semester.
- Nomination of Dissertation Committee Form: Students must complete a Nomination of Dissertation Committee form and submit it to the NACS office, who will submit it to the Registrar’s Office by the deadline. **The committee form must be submitted to the Registrar’s Office at least 6 weeks before the scheduled defense.**
- Dissertation Forms: Students must submit the dissertation electronically via the ETD System. All members of the Dissertation Committee must sign the electronic Report of Examining Committee form (REC). Both items must be submitted by the deadline.

Students must submit their dissertation to the examining committee 10 business days before the date of the defense.

The NACS office will send out the announcement of the dissertation defense at least five working days in advance to all members of the faculty and students within the NACS program.

The dissertation defense will consist of two parts:

- Part 1 will be a public presentation by the candidate on the main aspects of the research reported in the dissertation. During part 1, questions from the audience to the candidate will be permitted.
- Part 2 will be a formal examination of the candidate by the Dissertation Examination Committee. This part will be open only to the Dissertation Examination Committee and members of the Graduate Faculty. During Part 2, only members of the Dissertation Examination Committee will be permitted to ask questions.

The outcome of the dissertation defense will be determined by the student’s doctoral examination committee. The results will be reported to the NACS Office. The NACS program requires one electronic copy of the dissertation.



SECTION THREE

MS Degree

The NACS program offers an optional non-thesis MS degree and an optional thesis MS degree. Students who wish to earn one of the two MS degrees (non-thesis or thesis) in route to the PhD can apply for the MS degree. Students who, for one reason or another, need to exit the program before completing the doctorate can also apply for the non-thesis MS degree or the thesis MS degree.

Non-Thesis MS Degree

Requirements

The requirements for the non-thesis MS degree include a total of 31 credits (16 credits in core courses; 12 credits in elective courses; and 3 research credits), and the successful completion of a written First Year Research Project and an oral presentation of the First Year Research Project.

Coursework

Students will take 3 credits of NACS 798 non-thesis research credits. The 28 credits in coursework must be in NACS or NACS-related areas, and of these, at least 20 must be at the 600 level and above, and no courses may be below the 400 level. Students must maintain a cumulative grade point average of 3.0.

All MS students must take the following two courses (4 credits):

- NACS640: Foundational Readings in Neuroscience and Cognitive Science (2 credits)
- NACS600: Ethics in Scientific Research (2 credits)

They must also take three of the following 4-credit NACS courses (12 credits). At least one course must be taken from each area.

- Cognitive Area
 - NACS642: Cognitive Neuroscience
 - NACS645: Cognitive Science
- Neuroscience Area
 - NACS641: Introduction to Neuroscience
 - NACS643: Computational Neuroscience
 - NACS644: Cellular and Molecular Neuroscience

In addition, students must take 12 credits in elective courses approved by NACS and the student's committee.

Written First Year Research Project and Oral Presentation

Students will use their completed written paper and oral presentation from the First Year Research Project as the written and oral components of their non-thesis MS degree if they passed their First Year Research Project.

Thesis MS Degree

Requirements

The requirements for the thesis MS degree include a total of 31 credits (16 credits in core courses; 12 credits in elective courses; and 3 research credits), and the passing of an oral defense of an original thesis.

Coursework

Students will take 3 credits of NACS 799 thesis research credits. The 28 credits in coursework must be in NACS or NACS-related areas, and of these, at least 20 must be at the 600 level and above, and no courses may be below the 400 level. Students must maintain a cumulative grade point average of 3.0.

All MS students must take the following two courses (4 credits):

- NACS640: Foundational Readings in Neuroscience and Cognitive Science (2 credits)
- NACS600: Ethics in Scientific Research (2 credits)

They must also take three of the following 4-credit NACS courses (12 credits). At least one course must be taken from each area.

- Cognitive Area
 - NACS642: Cognitive Neuroscience
 - NACS645: Cognitive Science
- Neuroscience Area
 - NACS641: Introduction to Neuroscience
 - NACS643: Computational Neuroscience
 - NACS644: Cellular and Molecular Neuroscience

In addition, they must take 12 credits in elective courses approved by NACS and the student's committee.

Thesis

Students must conduct an independent research study on a topic selected by the student and his/her committee, and write a formal research paper (thesis) describing this research study. At minimum, the thesis should be a manuscript organized in a style that is typical for a peer-reviewed journal within the student's research area and should be of a quality and significance suitable for publication in such a journal. The thesis should be based on completed experiments, including a complete description of the methodology used and results obtained, which may be more in-depth than typical journal publications. The thesis should also contain an expanded literature review and theoretical framework, as well as an expanded discussion relating these findings to the existing literature.

An electronic copy of the thesis must be submitted to the NACS office.

The thesis can be an extension of the first year project, with additional experimentation and write-up.

The dissertation can include the thesis project as part of the background research and be built upon it, but the dissertation would need to substantially expand this topic with multiple additional experiments.

Oral Defense

Students must pass an oral examination defending the thesis and covering all course material. Approval of the thesis and the defense is the responsibility of the student's Examining Committee.



SECTION FOUR

Administrative Procedures

Philosophy

The goal of the program administration is to facilitate all activities of the graduate program while insuring that all rules and regulations are followed. A certain amount of bureaucracy is necessary, but it should never interfere with the intellectual activities of the students and faculty. The administration should also continually work to improve the graduate program.

Administrative System

College

NACS is a program within the College of Behavioral and Social Sciences (BSOS). The Dean of BSOS is the Dean for the NACS program.

Program Director

The Program Director works with the Executive Committee to generate and evaluate proposals for changes and improvements in NACS Program policy.

Graduate Director

The Graduate Director advises in any problems concerning NACS students and works with the NACS leadership to improve the Graduate Program.

Admissions Director

The Admissions Director works with the Admissions Committee to evaluate applications and make recommendations for acceptance to the program.

Graduate Committee

The Graduate Committee rules on requests for leaves of absence, special exceptions to policies, issues of probation and termination of students not meeting program requirements, and other student issues.

Assistant Director

The administrative activities of the program are managed by the Assistant Director, who works with the Program Director, the Graduate Director, and the Admissions Director.

Academic Problems

Probation

Probation is a formal warning to the student that there are serious deficiencies in his/her performance. Failure to correct those deficiencies can lead to termination from the program.

A student may be put on probation when one or more of the following events occur:

- The student fails to maintain a cumulative grade point average of 3.0 (required by Graduate School).
- The student fails to meet the deadline for completing the qualifying examination or dissertation proposal defense.
- The student's committee recommends probation because of a pattern of performance below the accepted standard for the NACS program. In this case, the committee must submit a written report detailing and documenting the problems to the Graduate Committee, and the Graduate Committee will determine if probation is warranted.

When placed on probation, the student will be informed in writing of the requirements for being removed from probation and the deadline by which those requirements must be met.

A student will be removed from probation when performance in courses improves to meet Graduate School requirements, or the Graduate Committee determines, based on reports from the student's committee and advisor, that the student has satisfactorily corrected the deficiencies that resulted in probation.

Termination

Procedure

- The Graduate School will terminate the admission status of any student whose cumulative grade point average falls below 3.0 for three consecutive semesters of enrollment.
- The decision to terminate a student from the program for any other reason must be made by the Graduate Committee after careful consideration of the circumstances and all pertinent information.

Grounds for Termination

- A student who has been placed on probation and fails to meet the requirements for removal from probation by the stated deadline will be terminated from the NACS program.
- A student who fails the qualifying examination and is not granted a reexamination will be terminated from the PhD program.
- A student who fails the qualifying examination and also fails a re-examination will be terminated from the PhD program.
- A student who does not have an advisor (other than an interim advisor) for more than four consecutive months will receive a warning that he/she will be terminated from the program if he/she does not have an advisor in the following two months. Thus, a student who goes without an advisor for a period of six consecutive months will be terminated from the NACS program.
- A student who has not completed the dissertation defense by the deadline established by the Graduate School will be terminated from the NACS program.
- A student who has violated accepted scientific ethical standards will be terminated from the NACS program.

Leave of Absence

Graduate School

Requests for an official Leave of Absence from the Graduate School should include an explanation, the date of anticipated return to registration, and a letter of support from the advisor. Decisions on granting leaves are made by the Graduate School.

A leave of absence may not be for longer than one year. The student may, however, submit a second request that will be considered by the Graduate Director. The Graduate Director may then petition the Graduate School for an extension for a student who has had a leave of absence.

A leave of absence 'stops the clock' with respect to NACS graduate program deadlines. When the student returns to enrollment, the clock resumes where it stopped. The clock for some Graduate School deadlines does not stop with a leave of absence. Failure to comply with such deadlines may necessitate reapplication for admission to the Graduate School.

NACS

When circumstances prevent a student from requesting an official Leave of Absence from the Graduate School, the student can contact the NACS office to discuss options for an unofficial leave of absence from the NACS program.

Exceptions

Unusual circumstances may arise that are not explicitly covered by the rules and regulations or that warrant exceptions to the rules. We intend the system to be flexible enough to accommodate any situation as long as the spirit of the regulations, the well-being of the student, and the standards of NACS are not compromised.

To request an exception to procedures for a First Year Research Project, Qualifying Exam, or Dissertation Proposal, the student's **committee** must complete a Petition for Exception to Procedure form (available on the NACS website) and submit it to the NACS Assistant Director, who will forward it to the NACS Graduate Director for approval.

A request for an exception for any other reason should be made in writing to the Graduate Director by the advisor, who must include an explanation and justification for the request. The Graduate Director will review the request and decide if an exception will be granted. An exception applies to a single student in a single situation and does not imply that other students will automatically be granted the same exception. The fact that an exception has been granted does not change rules or regulations.

Multiple requests for exceptions by an individual student (for instance, more than one request to extend the deadline for the qualifying examination) are likely to indicate serious academic problems that need to be addressed by the student and his/her advisor.

Grievance Process

The NACS Program is a scholarly community whose aim is to create an environment conducive to learning. This is accomplished through the promotion of responsibility and encouragement of honesty, integrity, and respect among students, faculty, and staff ensuring that all act in accordance with our behavioral standards while supporting individual rights. We are committed to the principles of truth, objectivity, fairness, honesty, and free inquiry, which includes the freedom to express careful and reasoned criticism of data and opinion. As a citizen of the academic community, each member of the NACS Program community is expected to assume the obligations of responsible citizenship.

It is the policy of the NACS Program to administer conduct standards in a fair, respectful, and equitable manner. We are also committed to serving as an advocate for, and resource to, student victims of crimes, harassment and other traumatic experiences.

Existing Policies

It is the policy of the University and the NACS Program to maintain the campus as a place of work for faculty, staff, and students, free from all forms of harassment. Harassment in the workplace or the educational environment is unacceptable conduct and will not be tolerated. The University has established policies and reporting processes that address Title IX, sexual misconduct and discrimination. These policies can be found:

Sexual Misconduct Policy

<https://president.umd.edu/communications/statements/sexual-misconduct-policy>

Non-Discrimination Policy

<https://president.umd.edu/administration/policies/section-vi-general-administration/vi-100b>

The University has established policies and grievance processes for students who believe that their academic performance has been unfairly evaluated. For graduate students, the policy/process can be found:

Arbitrary and Capricious Grading Policies

<https://academiccatalog.umd.edu/graduate/policies/school-policies/>

In addition, the Graduate Council has established grievance policies and procedures for Graduate Assistants who believe that they have been unfairly treated in respect to their employment and/or duties as a Research, Teaching or Administrative Graduate Assistant. The policy/procedure can be found:

Graduate Assistants Grievance Procedures

<https://academiccatalog.umd.edu/graduate/policies/policies-graduate-assistantships/>

Informal Process

We believe that it is best to facilitate, with dignity, the resolution of disputes and concerns at the lowest level possible; it is best to attempt a resolution with the parties involved. To assist in such mediation, you may wish to contact the Graduate Student Ombuds Officer (see <http://www.gradschool.umd.edu/Ombuds/>).

Formal Process

If a graduate student believes that they have experienced treatment that is unethical, grossly unjust, uncivil, or otherwise creates a hostile learning or working environment from a faculty member, a staff member, or another student, the student should attempt to resolve the matters locally, collegially, and informally. If the issue has not been resolved to the graduate student's satisfaction or the treatment cannot be stopped through informal means, the graduate student may elect to file a formal grievance.

The Graduate Council has also established a grievance policy/process for graduate students who have a legitimate dispute or concern not covered by University policies which can be found:

Graduate Student Grievance Policy

<https://academiccatalog.umd.edu/graduate/policies/school-policies/>

It is the policy of the NACS Program to administer conduct standards in a fair, respectful, and equitable manner. We are also committed to serving as an advocate for, and resource to, student victims of crimes, harassment and other traumatic experiences.

If you are unable to achieve a mutually satisfactory resolution informally, then the next step is to initiate the formal grievance process. This process, conducted in strict confidentiality, within the NACS Program is as follows:

Phase 1. The process begins with the filing of a formal grievance with the Director of Graduate Studies:

1. The student shall provide in writing a request to initiate a formal grievance process. This request must contain a clear description of the facts giving rise to the grievance including the following elements: names of the parties involved; date(s), time(s) and location(s) of the actions/incidents; names of witnesses; and the desired resolution of the grievance. The request must be signed.
2. The written grievance must be filed by an enrolled student before the first day of the next semester in which the incident occurred or within 30 calendar days of the student's withdrawal or dismissal.
3. The Director of Graduate Studies will conduct an investigation and provide a determination within 30 business days of the filing of the grievance. This investigation can include interviewing the parties involved and consulting with appropriate campus administrators (such as University Counsel). The decision shall be provided in writing to the parties involved.

4. If the decision is accepted by the parties, the matter is deemed settled. If not, then the decision of the Director of Graduate Studies can be appealed in Phase 2 of the process.

Phase 2. If the resolution proffered by the Director of Graduate Studies is deemed unacceptable, the grieving party can file an appeal with the Program Director as follows:

1. Either party may initiate the appeal process by sending a written appeal to the Director of the program within 30 calendar days of the announcement of the decision by the Director of Graduate Studies.
2. The written appeal must be signed and include the original description of the facts, a clear explanation of why the party filing the appeal found the outcome(s) of the Director of Graduate Studies proceedings and decision(s) unsatisfactory, and a statement of the desired resolution/remedy.
3. The Director will acknowledge receipt of the appeal within five business days of receipt of the written appeal.
4. The Director will proceed with one of two options: (*Panel is optional for the unit*)
 - a. The Director will meet with the parties involved, either individually or together, before reaching a decision. The Director can confidentially consult with the appropriate persons who may be knowledgeable about the policies, practices and issues involved. The Director shall endeavor to convey a written decision and, where appropriate, the remedy, to the parties involved within 30 calendar days of receipt of the letter of appeal. The written decision of the Director will contain a statement of the issues, the Director's findings of fact, the controlling policy provisions, the Director's assessment regarding the merits of the grievance, and a disposition of the grievance, including the remedy and/or disciplinary actions. or
 - b. The Director will convene a panel of two graduate faculty members and one graduate student (or staff person if one of the parties is a member of the staff) to confidentially review the matter and make a recommendation to the Director. The panel will conduct its review in an impartial and unbiased manner. The Director will provide a copy of the letter of appeal and other documentation as appropriate. The panel will offer to meet with the parties involved, either individually or together, before reaching a decision. The panel can confidentially consult with the appropriate persons who may be knowledgeable about the policies, practices and issues involved. The panel shall endeavor to convey a written decision and, where appropriate, the remedy, to the parties involved within 30 calendar days of receipt of the letter of appeal. The written report of the panel will contain a statement of the issues, the panel's findings of fact, the controlling policy provisions, the panel's assessment regarding the merits of the grievance, and a recommended disposition of the grievance, including a suggested remedy and/or disciplinary actions. The Director shall endeavor to convey a written decision and, where appropriate, the remedy, to the parties involved within 15 calendar days of receipt of the panel's report.
5. If the decision is accepted by the parties, the matter is deemed settled. If not, then the decision of the Director can be appealed in Phase 3 of the process.

Phase 3. If the resolution proffered by the Director of the program is deemed unacceptable, the grieving party can file an appeal with the Dean of the College of Behavioral and Social Sciences as follows:

1. Either party may initiate the appeal process by sending a written appeal to the Dean of the College within 30 calendar days of the announcement of the decision by the Director of the Program.
2. The written appeal must be signed and include the original description of the facts, a clear explanation of why the party filing the appeal found the outcome(s) of both the Director of Graduate Studies and the Program Director proceedings and decision(s) unsatisfactory, and a statement of the desired resolution/remedy.
3. The Dean of the College will acknowledge receipt of the appeal within five business days of receipt of the written appeal.
4. The Dean of the College (or designee) will proceed with one of two options:

- c. The Dean or his/her designee will meet with the parties involved, either individually or together, before reaching a decision. The Dean or his/her designee can confidentially consult with the appropriate persons who may be knowledgeable about the policies, practices and issues involved. The Dean or his/her designee shall endeavor to convey a written decision and, where appropriate, the remedy, to the parties involved within 30 calendar days of receipt of the letter of appeal. The written decision of the Dean or his/her designee will contain a statement of the issues, the Dean's or his/her designee's findings of fact, the controlling policy provisions, the Director's assessment regarding the merits of the grievance, and a disposition of the grievance, including the remedy and/or disciplinary actions. or
 - d. The Dean or his/her designee will convene a panel of two graduate faculty members and one graduate student (or staff person if one of the parties is a member of the staff) to confidentially review the matter and make a recommendation to the Dean or his/her designee. The panel will conduct its review in an impartial and unbiased manner. The Dean or his/her designee will provide a copy of the letter of appeal and other documentation as appropriate. The panel will offer to meet with the parties involved, either individually or together, before reaching a decision. The panel can confidentially consult with the appropriate persons who may be knowledgeable about the policies, practices and issues involved. The panel shall endeavor to convey a written decision and, where appropriate, the remedy, to the parties involved within 30 calendar days of receipt of the letter of appeal. The written report of the panel will contain a statement of the issues, the panel's findings of fact, the controlling policy provisions, the panel's assessment regarding the merits of the grievance, and a recommended disposition of the grievance, including a suggested remedy and/or disciplinary actions. The Dean or his/her designee shall endeavor to convey a written decision and, where appropriate, the remedy, to the parties involved within 15 calendar days of receipt of the panel's report.
5. If the decision is accepted by the parties, the matter is deemed settled. If not, then the decision of the Dean can be appealed to the Dean of the Graduate School as set forth in graduate policy (discussed above).

In the instance that one of the parties involved in the grievance is either the Director of Graduate Studies or the Director of the Program, the student may file the grievance with the Dean of the College. If the Dean is a party to the grievance, the student may file the grievance directly with the Dean of the Graduate School.

Remedies suggested by the filing party must be reasonable and within actions that can be taken in accordance with university policy and appropriate statutes. The NACS Program will endeavor to reach a just and equitable resolution in each case.

Within limitations that govern an ordered intellectual community, the NACS Program accords its members freedom of inquiry, expression and action. Along with this freedom, is the obligation to do so responsibly. When that bond is broken, we are committed to addressing the issues and concerns as outlined above.