

UNIVERSITY of **HOUSTON** | ENGINEERING

Department of Biomedical Engineering

Graduate Student Handbook

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Welcome

From the desk of the Department Chair, Dr. Kirill Larin, Ph.D., Fellow of AIMBE, SPIE, Optica



Welcome to the Department of Biomedical Engineering at the University of Houston, established in 2010. We are building one of the most respected and dynamic Biomedical Engineering programs in Texas, the United States, and around the world.

We are committed to fostering an environment of innovation and entrepreneurship, with a healthcare-focused academic curriculum designed to meet the demands of the ever-evolving global economy. This includes advancements in healthcare technology, management, and delivery.

Our primary goal is to develop leaders in academia, government, and industry nationally and globally. Our undergraduate and graduate programs emphasize the importance of global scientific, social, and cultural interactions and the dynamic demands of the global healthcare economy.

To achieve these goals, we are developing three emerging academic and research fields:

1. Neural and Rehabilitation Engineering

This field focuses on neural implants, neurogenesis, neurochips, cognitive engineering, neural signal and image processing and modeling, and brain-computer interfaces, from hardware to experimentation.

2. Biomedical Imaging

Our research emphasizes in vivo molecular and cellular imaging, with a strong focus on cancer biomarkers, therapy assessment, and developmental biology models. We also focus on clinical imaging, developing an advanced interdisciplinary research field based on human cardiovascular, brain, and ocular imaging.

3. Genomics, Proteomics, and Bionano Engineering and Science

This area covers gene regulatory networks, genetics of systems biology, computational biology, and infectious diseases. We also focus on innovative drug discovery and design, translational research, personalized medicine, and recent advances in bionano science and engineering.

Additionally, our faculty are actively working in Artificial Intelligence in biomedical engineering, including machine learning algorithms for medical image analysis, predictive modeling for disease progression, and AI-driven diagnostics and treatment planning. Wearable devices and personalized healthcare are other examples of our research interests, with a focus on the development of wearable technologies for health monitoring and disease management.

Our new undergraduate and graduate programs promote and expand close collaborations between medical centers and institutions. We believe that our unique program brings fresh ideas and additional dynamics to the biomedical industry in Texas and will promote growth in the biomedical and biotechnology industries in Houston, Texas, and the United States.

If you are interested in being a part of the Department of Biomedical Engineering as a faculty member, undergraduate student, graduate student, or postdoc, I would love to hear from you.

Warm Regards,

Kirill Larin, Ph.D., Fellow of AIMBE, SPIE, Optica
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Important University Websites

University of Houston	http://uh.edu/
Graduate School	http://www.uh.edu/graduate-school/
Cullen College of Engineering	http://www.egr.uh.edu/
Department of Biomedical Engineering	http://bme.uh.edu/
Office of International Student Services	https://uh.edu/oisss/

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Degree Plans and Timelines

Doctor of Philosophy in Biomedical Engineering

(from Bachelors)

The program requires completing at least 72 credit hours of approved coursework and program milestones.

Degree Plan

24 Coursework Credits

- 1 Math BIOE 6300
- 1 Statistics BIOE 6301
- 1 Biology-oriented course (ex. genomics, neuroscience, etc.)
- 4 Elective Courses

36 Research Credits

12 Dissertation Credits

Seminar (1 credit each semester enrolled)

Timeline (4- 6 Years)

- Coursework
- Qualifying Exam
- Form Dissertation Committee
- Prospectus
- Dissertation Defense
- Graduation

Doctor of Philosophy in Biomedical Engineering

(from Masters)

The program requires completing at least 54 credit hours of approved coursework and program milestones.

Degree Plan

12 Coursework Credits

- 1 Math BIOE 6300
- 1 Biology-oriented course (ex. genomics, neuroscience, etc.)
- 2 Elective Courses

30 Research Credits

12 Dissertation Credits

Seminar (1 credit each semester enrolled)

Timeline (3-5 Years)

- Coursework
- Qualifying Exam
- Form Dissertation Committee
- Prospectus
- Dissertation Defense
- Graduation

Masters of Science in Biomedical Engineering

(Non-Thesis)

The program requires completing a minimum of 30 credit hours of approved coursework.

Degree Plan

30 Coursework Credits

- 1 Math BIOE 6300
- 1 Statistics BIOE 6301
- 1 Biology-oriented course (ex. genomics, neuroscience, etc.)

7 Elective Courses

Timeline (2 years)

- Coursework
- Graduation

Masters of Science in Biomedical Engineering

(Thesis)

The program requires completing at least 30 credit hours of approved coursework and a successful Thesis defense.

Degree Plan

21 Coursework Credits

- 1 Math BIOE 6300
- 1 Statistics BIOE 6301
- 1 Biology-oriented course (ex. genomics, neuroscience, etc.)

4 Elective Courses

3 Research Credits

6 Thesis Credits

Timeline (2 Years)

- Coursework
- Form Committee
- Thesis Defense
- Graduation

Focus Areas

Below are the three Focus Areas offered by the University of Houston Department of Biomedical Engineering, with each track allowing for a specialized focus within a prominent area.

Neural, Cognitive, and Rehabilitation Engineering

We focus on neural implants, neurogenesis, neurochips, cognitive engineering, neural signal and image processing and modeling, and brain-computer interface from hardware to experimentation.

Course Options

- **BIOE 6305:** Brain-Machine Interfacing
- **BIOE 6306:** Advanced Artificial Neural Networks
- **BIOE 6309:** Neural Interfaces
- **BIOE 6342:** Biomedical Signal Processing

Biomedical Imaging

We focus on in vivo molecular and cellular imaging research with a strong emphasis on the imaging of cancer biomarkers, therapy assessment, cancer biology models, etc. We also focus on clinical cardiovascular and brain imaging and develop an advanced interdisciplinary research field based on human cardiovascular and brain imaging.

Course Options

- **BIOE 6346:** Advanced Medical Imaging
- **BIOE 6347:** Introduction to Optical Sensing and Biophotonics
- **BIOE 6348:** Advanced Bioelectromagnetic Imaging

Bionanoscience Science

We focus on gene regulatory networks, genetics of systems biology, computational biology, and infectious diseases. We also focus on innovative drug discovery and design, translational research, personalized medicine, recent bionanoscience and engineering advances.

Course Options

- **BIOE 6303:** Biomaterials
- **BIOE 6310:** Drug Design & Delivery
- **BIOE 6319:** Mass Transport for BioSystems
- **BIOE 6349:** Biomedical Microdevices
- **BIOE 6320:** Tissue Engineering

Admissions

Requirements

Course Requirement: those with a bachelor's outside of Biomedical Engineering must complete the following prerequisites.

- 2 years of Calculus and completion of Undergraduate Differential Equations.
- 1 year of Engineering/Calculus based Physics (University Physics I and II)
- 1 year of Biology (Any two 1000-level courses and higher)
- 1 year of Chemistry (Any two 1000-level courses and higher)

Admission Criteria

B.S. Degree: Biomedical Engineering-related STEM field.

M.S. GPA 3.00/4.00 on last 60 hours

Ph.D. GPA 3.30/4.00 on the last 60 **undergraduate** or Masters Graduate hours.

GRE Q-159, V-150

International Applicants

TOEFL: PBT580, CBT- 236, IBT- 92

IELTS: 7.0 overall with a minimum 6.5 writing score

Duolingo: 105 and higher

Graduate school requirements for more information:

<https://www.uh.edu/graduate-school/international-students/english-proficiency/>

Biomedical Engineering Department Graduate Admissions page for the most updated information: <http://www.bme.uh.edu/graduate/admissions>

Unconditional Admissions

The accepted incoming student meets all admissions requirements and can proceed with enrollment into the graduate program without additional prerequisites.

Conditional Admissions

The incoming student needs prerequisite or leveling courses to meet the admissions requirement and start graduate-level coursework.

Example: Students' bachelor's is outside biomedical engineering or related STEM fields.

- The student must complete the above-listed courses with a minimum of 3.0 GPA.

Example: Student's previous institution GPA needs to meet the minimum requirement.

- Must complete the first 12 SCH with a 3.0 GPA or B average for status change.

Students are evaluated at the end of the semester, and terms are met and required to complete a

Graduate and Professional Student Petition.

- Must be changed by the end of the first year of enrollment.
- Part-time students are required to complete the petition after completing 12 SCH.
- Students who fail to meet the conditions within the specified timeframe become ineligible for an advanced degree at the University of Houston.

Leveling Courses

Students are only eligible for enrollment in graduate-level coursework once prerequisites and leveling courses are complete. A grade of B and higher is required in all classes and does not count towards the graduate-level degree.

Academic Advising

Role of the Academic Advisor

The Graduate Academic Advisor is responsible for confirming course enrollment, assisting with academic plans, processing changes or adjustments to degree plans through signed petitions, managing student records, and facilitating dialogue between staff, students, and faculty.

- The Graduate Academic Advisor is available Monday through Friday between 8 AM and 5 PM and is subject to change based on availability.
- Advising appointments are preferred and recommended to prevent long waiting periods.

Role of Faculty Advisor (PI)

The Faculty Advisor or principal investigator (PI) is responsible for overall learning and serves as a mentor and role model throughout the graduate academic career.

Students are recommended to meet with the Faculty Advisor at the beginning of each semester to discuss academic engagement and learning.

Orientation

Incoming Biomedical Engineering students will have multiple orientations (mandatory & optional)

- Graduate School Orientation
- Cullen College of Engineering
- Biomedical Engineering Department (If available)
- International Student Orientation (Mandatory for all International Students)

Students are encouraged to attend each to learn about the policies, procedures, and the University of Houston Graduate School and College of Engineering.

Credit Load

- Doctoral students with an Assistantship and Graduate Tuition Fellowship (GTF) are required to enroll in 9 SCH each Fall & Spring semesters.
- Ph.D. students without an assistantship or GTF may enroll up to 12 SCH.
- M.S. students with an assistantship or scholarship are required to enroll in at least 12 SCH each Fall & Spring.
- Non-Thesis M.S. students may enroll in a maximum of 12 SCH per semester.
- International Students must enroll in full-time status to maintain Visa Status.

Enrolling in Courses

- The Graduate Academic Advisor is available for assistance if necessary. However, students are encouraged to enroll themselves each semester.
- Students seeking to take a MATH or ELECTIVE outside their BME program. Must receive approval from the PI and complete a general [graduate and professional petition](#) stating the reason for enrolling in the course.
- Please reference the Academic Calendar for enrollment, dropping, graduation, and payment deadlines.

Dropping a Course

Students may drop a course following the guidelines, restrictions, and consequences listed below.

- Funded Ph.D. students must remain in at least 9 SCH
- Funded M.S. must remain in at least 12 SCH.

Students who drop below the required credit hours per semester will lose their GTF and must repay all tuition and fees.

- Students dropping a course after the official day of record must complete a student-initiated drop form requiring the instructor's signature.
- Please reference the academic calendar for deadlines.

International students who drop below the required 9 SCH without a reduced course load form may have additional consequences.

- The reduced course load form is used during the international students' final semester with less than 9 SCH to complete graduation requirements.

Seminar

BIOL 6111 is a professional development opportunity for students to present their research and interact with field experts brought to the classroom.

- The one-semester credit hour seminar is required, along with research hours.
- The credit does not count toward graduate-level coursework.

Students may adjust the research hours if the seminar course exceeds the maximum credit hours allowed. The following page outlines the research hours numbering system.

Department Courses

Biomedical Engineering graduate courses include some upper-level undergraduates and all graduate students.

- Students may take electives outside the BME program after the course is approved and confirmed with the Faculty Advisor (PI) and Graduate Academic Advisor.
- Graduate students cannot enroll in courses in other departments for the first semester.
- Only twenty-five percent of your coursework may be completed outside the BIOE department.

M.S. and Ph.D. students must follow the degree plan outlined during the first enrolled semester.

- Reference the Graduate Catalog and Biomedical Engineering Website for courses: <https://www.bme.uh.edu/graduate/thrust-area>

Masters Research Hours

Masters Research Codes start with a “6” and end with “98,” with the second number representing the number of credit hours.

- 6198 = 1 credit
- 6298 = 2 credits
- 6398 = 3 credits
- 6498 = 4 credits
- 6598 = 5 credits

Students interested in enrolling in 6 credits must enroll in two options above.

- For example, 6198 and 6598 = 6 credits.

Master’s students must enroll in a 6X98 to begin working on their research.

Doctoral Research Hours

Doctoral Research Codes start with an “8” and end with “98,” with the second number representing the number of credit hours.

- 8198 = 1 credit
- 8298 = 2 credits
- 8398 = 3 credits
- 8498 = 4 credits
- 8598 = 5 credits

Students interested in enrolling in 6 credits must enroll in two options above.

- For example, 8198 and 8598 = 6 credits.

Doctoral students must enroll in an 8X98 to begin working on their research.

Masters Thesis Hours

Master’s Thesis Codes are 6399 and 7399; 6399 occurs first, then 7399.

Students traditionally complete their thesis hours during the last two semesters.

Master’s students are awarded a final thesis grade in 6399 and 7399 from their Thesis Advisor after successfully defending their thesis.

Doctoral Dissertation Hours

Doctoral Dissertation Codes are 8399, 8699, and 8999.

Students traditionally complete their dissertation hours during the last two to three semesters.

Doctoral students are awarded a final dissertation grade of 8399, 8699, and/or 8999, with a minimum of 12 hours of dissertation credits successfully defending their dissertation. If students have taken/are taking more than 12 credit hours, only the last 12 hours of the thesis will be graded.

Academic Policies

Graduate Catalog

Refer to the Graduate Catalog for annually updated policies and information related to graduate studies, including:

Information on overall policies, general admission policies, graduate program planning, college policies, programs and degrees, courses, and graduate student assistantships.

<https://publications.uh.edu/index.php?catoid=50>

Biomedical Engineering Policies

Academic Standing

- All graduate students must maintain at least a 3.0 GPA. Those that fall below are placed on academic probation the following semester.
- Students may be dismissed if their GPA does not increase to a 3.0 GPA.
- Students with a U or C+ or lower grade in 12 SCH of all undergraduate, leveling, and repeated courses at UH are ineligible for an advanced degree at the University of Houston and cannot re-enroll.

Qualifying Exam

- The following CORE courses are required before the Qualifying Exam
- BIOE 6300 Math Methods (Spring Only)
- BIOE 6301 Stats Methods (Fall Only and If Applicable)
- Biology-oriented course (ex. genomics, neuroscience, etc.)

The Qualifying Exam must be completed by the end of the 2nd or 3rd semester, excluding Summer semesters.

Enrollment

- Ph.D. and M.S. students must enroll in BIOE 6111 along with Research hours unless otherwise approved by their PI due to a confirmed interference with a confirmed graduation date.
- Once started, students must remain continuously enrolled in research, dissertation, or thesis.
- No more than 25% of courses are allowed outside the department. Students must confirm and receive permission and submit a petition stating how the course is relevant to research.
- Incoming students must take BIOE courses in their first semester.
- M.S. research codes are at 6000 levels and start at 6XXX.
- Ph.D. research codes are at the 8000 level and start at 8XXX.

Cullen College of Engineering Graduate Academic Policies

Refer to the Cullen College of Engineering Graduate Policies, including:

Admissions, enrollment, time limitations, transfer credit, credit level changes, resident requirements, earning credit, grade point average, four C-rule, qualifying examination, practical training, graduation, thesis/dissertation guide, committee formation, academic honesty, grievance policy, competitive scholarships and presidential fellowships and GTF.

<https://www.egr.uh.edu/academics/graduate-programs-policies>

Graduate School Forms & Procedures

Reference the Graduate School Forms and procedures for the following:

Forms and Procedures, including Graduate and Professional Student Petitions, Student-Initiated Drop Forms, Student Initiated Term Withdrawal, Medical/Administrative Term Withdrawal Requests, Letter of Financial Backing, CPT, and Reduced Course Load Form.

<https://www.uh.edu/graduate-school/forms/>

Safety Training

Incoming students must take laboratory safety training at the beginning of each semester.

Training is mandatory and by safety regulations from the Department of Environmental Health and Safety. <https://www.uh.edu/ehs/>

- Safety (EH12) is required for students working inside a lab in the SERC building.
<https://www.uh.edu/ehs/commons/safety-training/catalog/eh12/index>
- General Laboratory Safety and Hazardous Materials Orientation (EH06) is required for students working in labs outside the SERC building.
<https://www.uh.edu/ehs/commons/safety-training/catalog/eh12/index>

Additionally, following the posted laboratory safety expectations and policies within each lab.

Human Resources Training

Required for Ph.D. and M.S. Teaching and Research Assistants Only.

The following training must be completed within the first 30 days of enrollment.

- Conflict of Interest/Responsible Conduct Online Training
- Mandatory Online Hiring Training (Accessed through MyUH)
- Completion certificates can be emailed to the Department Business Administrator.

Program Milestones

Coursework

Outlined coursework within the agreed-upon degree plan must be completed by graduation with a 3.0 GPA or higher. Most students prefer to complete coursework (lectures) before focusing on research.

Qualifying Exam

Eligibility

- Doctoral students are eligible by the end of their second or third semester, excluding Summer semesters.
- Students must inform and confirm when the exam will take place in the semester.

Components

- Students must prepare and present an NIH-style abstract of research projects that the student has been performing or will perform (30 lines, 0.5-inch margins, Arial font, size 11). Additionally, the oral exam will assess knowledge gained from core courses and the student's proposed research. Students are permitted to modify the abstract topic for their dissertation.
- Notes, PowerPoint slides, or electronic displays are prohibited during the oral exam. Students are expected to explain their research or respond to questions from the Qualifying Exam Committee using the whiteboard provided by the department.

Committee

- The Graduate Academic Advisor will create the Qualifying Exam committee based on available faculty and the student's schedule.
- The committee includes the candidate's Research Advisor, Department Chair or Graduate Director, and two additional faculty selected by the chair and graduate program director. The additional faculty will represent the candidate's research focus area and be primarily responsible for the examination.
- The Research Advisor is expected to fulfill the candidate's advocate role as the student prepares for the exam. The Department Chair's primary function is to ensure consistency across all candidates' qualifying exams.

Overview

- The Graduate Academic Advisor notifies the candidate (student) of the date and time once confirmed with the committee.
- The oral exam will evaluate the student's ability to summarize and effectively communicate knowledge in BME.
- The student must submit abstracts to the Graduate Academic Advisor at least one week prior to scheduled Qualifying Exam. Abstracts will be distributed to the committee by the Graduate Academic Advisor.

The Exam Committee will ask questions and discuss with the student for the remainder of the session. The following are the goals and scope of the oral exam:

- Determine the students' depth of understanding of the Biomedical Engineering Core.
- Assess critical thinking and application of engineering tools to solve problems.
- Ability to integrate skills in biology or biomedical engineering research.
- Successful student completion will demonstrate critical thinking and application, incorporating the learned coursework to topics pertinent to the research area.

Immediately Following

- The student is dismissed, allowing the committee to discuss performance and determine exam results. The following are possible outcomes.

Contingent Pass

- The candidate continues in the Ph.D. program only if they successfully fulfill a plan recommended by the Exam Committee.

Fail

- The candidate is removed from the Ph.D. program. However, a contingent plan may be developed to enter the thesis or non-thesis M.S. program.
- Petition to retake the exam, during which the student may be retained in the Ph.D. program until resolved.
- If denied, the student is removed. If approved, the student remains in the program contingent upon passing the repeat.

The graduate advisor adds the completed [Qualifying Exam Score Sheet](#) by the committee to the student's academic record.

Formation of MS Thesis and PhD Dissertation Committee

The student and Faculty Advisor determine the M.S. Thesis/Ph.D. Dissertation Committee.

The Ph.D. Dissertation Committee requires a minimum of five members and includes at least four tenure-track faculty within the University of Houston and a fifth member outside the UH Systems.

- The student's faculty advisor acts as the chair.
- Two Biomedical Engineering Department faculty.
- One tenure-track faculty outside the BME department.
- The remaining member is a tenure-track faculty outside the University of Houston.

The M.S. Thesis Committee includes three tenure-track faculty members.

- The student's Faculty Advisor acts as the chair.
- One tenure-track faculty in the BME department.
- Remaining is outside of the BME department.

The Committee members complete the [Committee Appointment Form](#) acknowledging participation. The completed and signed form submission is required well before allowing time for approval by the Department and Dean's Office to schedule the proposal defense.

- The Graduate Academic Advisor collects the CV's of faculty members outside of the University of Houston.
- A student is not required to enroll while requesting to form a committee but must be enrolled when the defense occurs.

Committee Formation Deadlines

- Ph.D. Formed by the end of the fourth semester, excluding Summer semesters.
- M.S. Formed by end of the second full-length semester, excluding Summer semesters.

The first draft of the Thesis or Dissertation must be submitted to the Engineering Dean's Office for review/ format check two weeks prior to defense date.

Prospectus (Ph.D. Only)

Eligibility

- Doctoral students must complete by the end of the fourth semester (excluding Summer semesters), unless an exception has been approved by the Department Chair and Graduate Director.

Components

- Written NIH R21-styled grant proposal, which includes the Abstract, Summary, Specific Aims, Research Plan, etc. of an NIH R21. It is not necessarily to be “high risk and high gain” type research proposal (<https://www.grantcentral.com/>: John Robertson et al., The Grant Application Writer’s Workbook, Grant Writer’s Seminars and Workshops, LLC).
- A 25–30-minute oral presentation addressing Significance, Innovation and Approach criteria.
- A period of oral questions from the committee to test the student’s general scientific knowledge and discipline-specific knowledge.

Overview

A: Introduction

1. Choice of topic for Abstracts and Proposals

Students will submit an NIH R21 abstract of their intended proposal by email to the Graduate Advisor (limit length to 30 lines or less of text; include the project's broad, long-term goals and specific aims). The members of the Prospectus Examination Committee will review the abstract and provide comments. Choice of topic is the responsibility of the student in coordination with their PI. However, it is suggested the abstract topic be related to the PI’s research. The abstract may describe a prospective dissertation project formulated by the student. There is no obligation for the student to carry out the project; the actual dissertation project may differ from the one formulated by the student. Questions about the topic suitability should be submitted to the Committee Chairperson. Topics should have a compelling and well-justified rationale. The proposed research should address biomedical questions and/or develop innovative methodologies (e.g. data analysis methods, algorithms, or software). The proposal design must be based on existing knowledge and should address a knowledge gap of biomedical relevance related to the PI’s lab.

2. Prospectus Exam Goals

The Prospectus Exam should prepare the student to submit their own grant application but does not require that they do so. Passing the Prospectus Exam is a requirement for Admission to Candidacy for the Ph.D.

3. Criteria for evaluating Abstracts and Proposals

The Abstract and Proposal will be evaluated along the following major NIH criteria:

Significance

The project should address an important problem or a critical barrier to progress in the field. If the aims of the project are achieved, how will scientific knowledge, technical capability, and/or clinical practice improve? How will successful completion of the aims change the concepts, methods, technologies, treatments, services, or preventative interventions that drive this field? Is there a

compelling rationale for the work? Have you convinced the thesis committee reviewers that this project merits “financial support”?

Innovation

Does the application use novel approaches, concepts and/or methodologies? Is the novelty of the concept, approach or method confined to one field or is it more encompassing?

Approach (Research Strategy)

The overall strategy, methodology, and analyses must be well-reasoned and appropriate to accomplish the specific aims of the project. Are potential problems, alternative strategies, and benchmarks for success presented? Will the strategy establish feasibility and how will the particularly risky aspects of the work be managed? For novel technologies, what are the key proof-of-concepts experiments and/or simulations to demonstrate its feasibility?

In addition, please note any R21 requirements for the project that involve clinical research or animal subjects and be ready to address them during the oral exam.

B: Timeline of the Prospectus Exam

The Prospectus Exam must be completed by the end of the 4th semester, unless an exception has been approved by the Department Chair and Graduate Director.

C: Format of the Prospectus Exam

1. The first component of the Prospectus Exam is a written NIH R21-styled grant proposal. Which includes the Abstract, Summary, Specific Aims, Research Plan, etc. of an NIH R21. Please see NIH R21 guidelines from 2024. The proposal should follow the NIH requirements for formatting: single spaced, Arial font, size 11, 1/2-inch margins minimum, max 1". Figure legends may be smaller at 10-point.

A Prospectus Exam Certification must accompany the submission (see Section D below).

The written proposal should also be submitted to the BME Graduate Advisor via email. The Prospectus Exam date will be determined from when the proposal is submitted. Please refer to Prospectus timeline for deadlines and important dates.

1. The second component of the Prospectus Exam will be a 25–30-minute oral presentation by the student. Although a projector will be available for the presentation, bring your own laptop computer. Prepare an oral presentation of 25-30 minutes in length (NO LONGER) addressing Significance, Innovation and Approach criteria. During this period the examining committee will ask questions primarily for clarification after which the floor will be open for wider questioning by the Committee.
2. The third component of the Prospectus Exam will be approximately 30-minute period of oral questions from the committee to test the student’s general scientific knowledge and discipline-specific knowledge (not necessarily pertaining to their proposal). While a student may not be able to answer all of these questions, s/he is expected to demonstrate knowledge beyond the specifics of the proposal. Reviewing course material from first- and second- year courses may help you prepare for this second part.

You may prepare additional slides with more detailed descriptions of the experimental procedures for use in answering questions. Good preparation for this portion of the exam includes a thorough awareness of the relevant literature, attention to experiment details, and the rationale for the experiments.

Students should be prepared to answer questions dealing with the following:

- Details and principles of the techniques used; if a particular technique is cited, you should be able to explain it in detail and draw a diagram of the expected results.
- The biological significance of the project.
- The existing body of knowledge, including work done in other experimental systems relevant to the project.
- Relevant details of literature cited.
- Difficulties and limitations of proposed procedures.
- Reasonable alternative approaches to achieve the specific aims.
- Expected outcomes of the proposed experiments and the next steps to be taken.
- Specific details of the biochemical or biological process or system being studied.
- Future directions of the proposed research beyond the specific aims.
- Other topics related to the proposal.

D: Preparation for the Prospectus Exam

A student's mentor is expected to assist the student in preparing for their Prospectus Exam, respecting the rules below. Each proposal submission must be accompanied by a Prospectus Exam Certification (Appendix B, part I) attesting that the student and mentor abided by the following guidelines.

1. The Specific Aims of a Prospectus Exam proposal must be initially formulated by the student. The mentor and other faculty, students and postdocs may discuss the proposal's aims and experimental design with the student. However, the student must be the sole author of the proposal. The student may discuss the written document and receive feedback, but the editing, correction and/or revision of the proposal must be done by the student alone.

Students should follow the [R21 proposal format](#) and below is the description of the kinds of content that appears in the proposal.

Specific Aims

What do you want to do? This section should be fitted to the background that follows. If a structure, mechanistic model, new device or methodology is needed, tell us what it is and why it is needed and provide specific aims that address the needs. If a new mechanistic model is to be tested, you should have a hypothesis that is supported by the preponderance of the literature. (One page is recommended in the full Proposal, an abbreviated version in the Abstract.)

Significance and Innovation

This section should briefly summarize the relevant literature in a way that reveals knowledge or methodology deficits that your proposal will satisfy. This section should critically evaluate the current state of knowledge in the field. If mechanistically oriented, this section should move from the broad, e.g., epidemiology, to the specific, i.e., molecules. If it is to develop a device or method,

the current state of the devices/methods should be discussed and the value of your improvement should be put into concrete terms, e.g., faster, better resolution, higher throughput etc.

Approach (Research Strategy)

List each specific aim and describe in detail the research design and procedures to accomplish specific aims. When possible, refer to published protocols for standard methods. Include the means by which the data will be collected, analyzed and interpreted.

Reference List

This section is not included in the word limit. You should be prepared to answer questions about all papers listed in your references.

Figures

This section is counted in the word limit. Diagrams are strongly encouraged to clarify the proposed experiments. Figures should be grouped in this section or incorporated into the text.

1. The student may not submit a Prospectus Exam proposal that has already been submitted as an external fellowship or grant application by someone else.
2. Students are encouraged, but not required, to include preliminary data in their proposal. They may include preliminary data from other members of their lab, but this must be acknowledged in both the written proposal (via the Contributions Statement; Appendix A) and the oral presentation.
3. The members of the Examination Committee play no part in the preparation or practicing of the student's oral presentation. The student must be the sole author of their presentation slides. They may practice their planned presentation and receive feedback from other students, postdocs, the mentor or other faculty. However, the editing, correction and/or revision of the slides must be done by the student alone.

E: The Prospectus Exam Committee Rules

1. The Examination Committee shall consist of a Major Advisor and the dissertation committee members. All members of the dissertation Committee are voting members.
2. The Prospectus Examination Chairs shall recommend the examination date. Once an exam date and Examination Committee has been determined, the student must submit a Prospectus Examination Date form to Graduate Program Advisor.
3. The Major advisors shall meet with program leadership or a designated exam coordinator each year, prior to the first exam. The purpose of the meeting is to remind all advisors of the exam format and guidelines, to discuss the criteria that will be used to assess student performance on the examination, and to review the criteria for grading the exam (Pass/Incomplete/Fail) to ensure consistency across all Prospectus Exams.

F: Conduct of the Prospectus Exam

1. The Prospectus Exam proposal must be submitted to the Prospectus Examination Chair two weeks before the scheduled exam.

Proposals submitted on or before the due date will be reviewed by the Chair, and those that are complete and meet format requirements will be certified by the Chair (see Appendix B, part II) to proceed to the oral exam.

Failure to submit the proposal by the due date will result in a grade of Fail for the Prospectus Exam, unless the Chair grants an extension of the due date based on a justified request submitted by the student prior to the deadline. Proposal submissions that are grossly incomplete also will result in a grade of Fail for the Prospectus Exam. Proposals with minor omissions or formatting deficiencies will have a one-time only period of 48 hours to make corrections before resubmitting the proposal to the Chair. At that time, the Chair will determine whether the proposal can be certified to proceed to the oral examination.

2. Prior to the exam, each member of the dissertation Committee, including the major advisor will write a critique of the written proposal using the evaluation categories for the written proposal:
 - a. Ability to critically evaluate research literature
 - b. Rationale and Research Question
 - c. Imagination and Originality of Thought
 - d. Research Design and Methods
 - e. Rigor & Reproducibility
 - f. Writing Skills

Each member will score each category from 1 - 9 (1 = exceptional; 9 = poor). The written critiques and scores must be sent to the Prospectus Examination Chair no later than 3 days before the exam. Prior to being shared outside of the Committee, the Critiques may be edited by the member within 48 hours after the Exam date to reflect final opinion of the member upon discussions within the Committee during the Exam.

3. Prior to the exam, the Committee will determine whether the proposal is acceptable for examination. If the proposal is acceptable, the Examination Chair will instruct the committee on the conduct of the examination and the possible outcomes to consider.

If the proposal is deemed unacceptable, the dissertation Committee must determine whether the student will be awarded a grade of Incomplete or Fail, based on the severity and extent of deficiencies of the written proposal. The Committee will provide the student with written feedback, outlining strengths and weaknesses of the proposal, and in the case of a Fail grade make a recommendation on whether the student should be allowed a second opportunity to take the Prospectus exam. If permitted, the Committee will set a deadline for the submission of a revised proposal.

4. The exam cannot begin until all members of the dissertation Committee and the student's mentor are present. Failure to have all members present will result in a postponement of the exam.
5. The first part of the exam is the student's a 25-30 minute presentation of their proposal. During this time, the committee should limit their questions to those that are necessary for clarification.
6. After the oral presentation, the committee members will ask questions for 30-35 minutes about the proposal, the discipline relevant to the student's research and also examine the student's basic scientific knowledge. The Examination Committee Chair will coordinate the process to allow all committee members to examine the student.

7. The student's mentor/mentors will be a silent observer/s during the exam. The mentor/s may provide clarification during the exam only if invited to do so by the Chair of the Examination Committee.

G. Results of the Prospectus Exam

1. After the oral exam has ended, the committee will ask the student to step out of the room to discuss the student's performance.
2. The possible outcomes of the exam are **Pass, Incomplete, or Fail**. This will be decided by a simple majority of the Examination Committee, determining first if the exam resulted in a grade of Fail, and if not, a second determination of whether the grade should be a Pass or Incomplete. In the case of a **Pass**, the Prospectus Examination Result form must be submitted to Graduate Advisor within 24 hours of the exam. The written critiques of the proposal will be emailed to the student and mentor by the Exam Chair within 48 hours of the conclusion of the exam.
3. An **Incomplete** is used when the dissertation Committee determines that the student's proposal, background knowledge or oral exam performance is inadequate in defined areas and that additional requirements must be completed to remedy the deficiency. Within 48 hours of the exam, the Chair will provide to the student, mentor and departmental graduate committee chair with the written critiques of the dissertation Committee members as well as a summary of the oral exam. Requirements for satisfying the Incomplete must be specified in writing and attached to the Prospectus Examination Result form, including a date by which the additional requirements must be completed. Such additional requirements may include, but are not limited to, re-writing parts of the proposal, writing an essay on a specified subject, taking a course, and/or additional oral examination. After the requirements stipulated by the dissertation Committee have been satisfied, the student will receive a Pass. If the requirements to remediate an incomplete are not completed satisfactorily, the student will either be scheduled for a re-examination (repeating the entire process) or be removed from the doctoral program, as determined by the dissertation committee chair and approved by the departmental graduate committee chair and the department chair. There is no option for a second grade of Incomplete.
4. A **Fail** is awarded if the student's performance on the Prospectus Exam is unsatisfactory, either at the initial examination or when an incomplete is resolved with a grade of Fail. Within 48 hours of receiving the grade of Fail, the Examination Chair will provide to the student, mentor and departmental graduate committee chair the written critiques of the Committee members as well as a summary of the oral exam. The rationale for the Fail grade, suggestions for improvements and a recommendation for whether a second Prospectus exam will be permitted must be specified in writing and attached to the Prospectus Examination Result form. Based on this recommendation, the departmental graduate committee chair and the department chair will determine one of two outcomes: either schedule a re-examination (repeating the entire process) or remove the student from the doctoral program. The departmental graduate committee chair will inform the student of the final decision.

Failure of the Prospectus Exam is reported to the Graduate School and the student will be placed on Academic Probation. A student who fails their initial Prospectus Exam may be recommended for dismissal to the BME graduate program director. A second Prospectus Exam may be taken only if recommended by the student's Examination Committee. Any student who fails two Prospectus exams will be recommended for dismissal to the CCOE Graduate Dean.

Dissertation & Thesis Defense

The student will coordinate their defense date with the committee and Faculty Advisor and contact the Graduate Academic Advisor if a room is to be reserved.

- The student must distribute the written thesis/dissertation to the committee at least two weeks before the defense date.
- The student must email an approved (by your major professor) draft of their thesis/dissertation to their committee members and the Graduate Office for format checking at least two weeks before the defense date.
<https://www.egr.uh.edu/academics/graduate-programs-policies/guide-preparationthesisdissertations>
- Results should be reported to the Graduate Advisor using the [final score sheet](#).

Dissertation/ Thesis Defense Deadline

- All students must defend before the deadline set by The Graduate School and Cullen College of Engineering, or they will be ineligible to graduate that semester.
- Refer to the academic calendar for the semester's deadlines and refer to the preparation guide for engineering deadlines:
<https://www.egr.uh.edu/academics/graduateprograms-policies/guide-preparation-thesisdissertations>

Academic Calendar: <https://publications.uh.edu/content.php?catoid=48&navoid=18100>

Dissertation Submission

For more information, please refer to the Graduate Programs Guide to Preparing Thesis and Dissertations. If there are questions or clarification regarding this two-step process, contact the College Graduate Coordinator in E421 in the Dean's Office of Engineering Bldg. 2 (D3)

Miranda Vernon Harrison by phone at 713-743-4219 or email mavernon-harrison@uh.edu
<https://www.egr.uh.edu/academics/graduate-programs-policies/guide-preparation-thesisdissertations>

Graduation

Steps for Graduation

- Apply for Graduation via MyUH and pay the fee (\$25 or \$50 if past the deadline)
- Receive a blank degree plan to be completed from the Graduate Advisor
- Complete Dissertation/Thesis
- Submit the Electronic Dissertation/Thesis to the Vireo website
- Submit an approved hard copy of the Dissertation/Thesis to Miranda Vernon-Harrison (E-421)
- Pay for binding (\$40)
- Attend Commencement
- Make sure your address is updated and accurate in your MyUH account

Check the Academic Calendar for Graduation application deadlines below for more information.
<https://www.egr.uh.edu/academics/graduate-programs-policies/graduation>

Financial Support

Research Assistantships (RA)

Faculty submit annual proposals for research grants and contracts to fund current and future research. Each faculty member accepts applicants and awards research assistantships directly to research assistantships from those funds. Often, students from a previous course are chosen.

Research Assistantships (RA) are awarded directly to applicants by the department faculty and are highly competitive. The faculty sponsor often arranges to research with a student pursuing a Ph.D. or M.S. degree similar to their research.

Applicants are responsible for finding a faculty member to collaborate on research projects.

Teaching Assistantships (TA)

The Department of Biomedical Engineering Chair awards Teaching Assistantships (TA).

- Awards are based on the candidate's potential to contribute to the BME graduate program.
- Most TAs are expected to transition into being supported as an RA after their first year.
- TA positions are highly competitive and are only awarded to Ph.D. students.
- Not all students recommended for a TA will receive one due to the limited available positions.

BME Departmental Scholarships

The scholarship is awarded through the Department of Biomedical Engineering, and applicants are eligible upon acceptance into the Graduate Program. The department's scholarship committee determines scholars' elections.

The criteria for awarding this competitive scholarship are as follows:

- | | |
|--|--|
| ▪ Academic record in an undergraduate program | ▪ Job experience |
| ▪ The quality of the undergraduate program | ▪ Publications |
| ▪ The reputation of the educational institution and any previous academic experience | ▪ Research Interests and research statements |
| ▪ Graduate record examination results | ▪ Research Experience |
| ▪ Letters of recommendation | ▪ Journal Publications |
| | ▪ Poster and oral presentation record/evidence |

Graduate Tuition Fellowship (GTF)

The Graduate Tuition Fellowship (GTF) is awarded each semester to RA/TAs and covers tuition and some fees. The department, on behalf of the student, submits the GTF award.

In-State Waiver

RAs and TAs outside Texas are awarded waivers to change feeds from out-of-state to in-state tuition and submitted by the department on behalf of the student.

University of Houston Scholarships

Review the following link for potential scholarships for M.S. and Ph.D. students.

<https://www.uh.edu/financial/undergraduate/types-aid/scholarships/index.php>

Tuition & Fee Payment Options

Installment Pay Plan

This plan is available to any student unable to pay the total amount due by the university due date.

- Does not cover prior unpaid balances.
- Requires four separate installments and a \$25.00 non-refundable origination fee.
- 25% of the current semester's tuition and fees are required by the initial due date.
- Late fee of \$25.00 for each installment past the due date.
- All funding sources must satisfy the outstanding balance before issuing a refund.
- If courses or fees are added, the new balance is included in the installment plan.
- Installment plan is not an option for summer or the winter mini stand-alone.
- Unavailable to students with financial aid covering 100% of the total balance.

Emergency Deferment Plan

- Only available to students living off-campus.
- Does not cover prior and unpaid balances.
- Late fee of \$25.00 if unpaid in full by the due date.
- Requires scholarship and financial aid funds to be applied first.
- A 5% annual percentage rate is assessed on the Official Reporting Date of the semester.
- Requires the balance to be paid in full, during which the deferment plan was applied.
- Defers payment until the 90th day for Spring & Fall or the 45th of the summer.

Short-Term Tuition Deferment Plan

Defers the payment of all current semester's tuition, fees, and housing.

- Only available to those living in university housing.
- Does not cover prior or unpaid balances.
- 12% interest accrues annually on the official reporting day of each semester.
- \$5.00 origination fee and \$25.00 late fee if the balance is not paid by the due date.
- The deferment is due and payable no later than the 30th calendar day of sessions other than the regular term or the last day of the session or whichever date occurs first.

Payment Deadlines

Students are responsible for meeting deadlines and paying tuition and fees. Students may be dropped for non-payment.

Payment Due Dates: <https://www.uh.edu/financial/payment/billing-due-dates/>

Tuition & Fees Calculator: <https://uh.edu/financial/undergraduate/tuition-fees/>

Health Insurance

Domestic Students

The University does not require domestic students to obtain health insurance. However, it is highly recommended that all students have some form of health insurance.

Available options:

Option 1: Direct Pay by mailing enrollment card to Macori Administration – see enrollment card and benefit book for requirements and deadlines.

Option 2: Direct Pay by enrolling online for requirements and deadlines

www.studentinsurance.com/Schools/TX/UH/

Option 3: Sign up through MyUH(PeopleSoft) to have your premium charged to the student account(Fall and Spring Semesters only – Use Option 1 or 2 to enroll for Summer-only coverage). See the benefit book or online enrollment information for requirements.

- **Enrollment Deadline:** Official Reporting Day as posted in the Academic Calendar.
- **Error in Enrollment:** Visit the Health Center to request a credit to the student account during the posted insurance waiver period - requests will not be accepted after the Official Reporting Day as posted in the Academic Calendar.

NOTE: A copy of the University of Houston endorsed Health InsurancePlan brochure and identification card for the current Academic year can be obtained at the link below or the University Health Center.

Students are responsible for reading and understanding the policy coverage, limitations, claim processing, and responsibilities. The brochure includes medical emergencies, vision care discounts, 24/7 nurse lines, optional dental insurance, and evacuation/repatriation. Please carry the identification card with you at all times. The card contains your policy number and contact information for the current academic year's insurance company and provider network.

International Students

Non-immigrant International students carrying hours will be automatically enrolled and charged for health insurance each semester to satisfy the University policy regarding maintaining acceptable health insurance coverage. The amount during the Fall of 2016 was approximately \$750.

A health insurance fee waiver may be requested online with proof of acceptable alternate insurance. The insurance plan and the University's criteria are reviewed periodically and may be subject to change.

Insurance Resources

UH Health Center, Student Health Insurance

<http://www.uh.edu/healthcenter/insurance/>

UH@studentinsurance.com

713-743-5151

International Students

Arriving On-Campus

All international students attending the University of Houston must contact the International Student and Scholars Services Office (ISSSO) upon campus arrival and attend the required orientation. For more information, please get in touch with ISSSO:

Student Center North Room 203
4465 University Dr. Houston, TX 77204
Phone: 713.743.5065
Fax: (713) 743-5079
isssohelp@central.uh.edu
<https://uh.edu/oisss/>

Maintaining F1 Status

- Students must be enrolled full-time (9 hours for graduate students).
- Students are not allowed to work unless permission is currently granted from an International Student Counselor or the Department of Homeland Security (Pg. 3 on the I-20 or an Employment Authorization Card)
- Students must carry current documentation (i.e., passport, I-20)
- Keep the ISSSO updated on address, contact information, and significant life changes.

Optical Practical Training (OPT)

Optional Practical Training is not permitted for students with a GPA below 3.0 during their first semester.

Post-Completion OPT is allowed for students who have completed their M.S. or Ph.D., including their thesis/dissertation submission for binding.

Pre-completion Part-time OPT is allowed for unsupported F-1 students during any semester and is limited to 20 hours per week. Time used is deducted from the one-year eligibility at half the rate. Students must meet all applicable INS regulations regarding their status as students.

Pre-Completion Full-time Summer OPT is allowed, but students can only work full-time during the summer. Time used is deducted from one year of eligibility. Students cannot hold a full-time OPT and be supported students simultaneously.

Pre-completion full-time OPT with only thesis or dissertation remaining is allowed for non-supported students, with the approval of the thesis/dissertation advisor. All coursework and department requirements, like screening exams, qualifying exams, and thesis/dissertation proposals, must be completed for students to be eligible.

Students interested in OPT will need the following:

- Submit a copy of their EAD card to ISSSO.
- Actively search for employment (Visit USCIS for resources and information).

<https://www.uscis.gov/working-in-the-united-states/students-and-exchange-visitors/students-and-employment>

According to the federal regulations [8 CFR 214.(f)], F-1 students are responsible for reporting the address, employer's name and address, and any periods of employment and unemployment while on OPT. ISSSO is accountable for updating the student's SEVIS record to reflect these changes. This reporting responsibility is an ongoing requirement.

Curricular Practical Training

Curricular Practical Training (CPT), such as Dissertation or Thesis Research, is allowed with an employer letter verifying involvement in the research, and the offer of employment is predicated on the need for access to their facility for data collection.

- The student's advisor must countersign the letter to show approval of the CPT.
- CPT as a practicum, internship, or CO-OP is not allowed.

Miscellaneous Items

Student Travel

Domestic The following must be submitted to the Program Coordinator AT LEAST TWO weeks before the travel date.

- Travel Request Checklist
- Travel Request
- Supporting Documents

International The following must be submitted to the Program Coordinator AT LEAST ONE month before the travel date:

- Travel Request Checklist
- Travel Request
- Supporting Documents
- Export Controls and Embargo Forms

Travel may only be approved by the deadlines and the inclusion of all documents. Reference the University's travel policies.

<http://www.uh.edu/af/universityservices/policies/mapp/04/040204.pdf>

Travel Reimbursements

The TRAVEL REIMBURSEMENT CHECKLIST and supporting documents are provided to the Program Coordinator for reimbursement. Please allow up to one month for processing.

Purchase Reimbursements

The REIMBURSEMENT FORM and all receipts for lab-related purchases are provided to the Program Coordinator for reimbursement. Please allow up to one month for processing.

Mileage Reimbursements

The MILEAGE REPORT FORM is requesting reimbursement for using a personal vehicle. The form and all receipts are provided to the Program Coordinator for reimbursement. Please allow up to one month for processing.

Room Reservations

Students can reserve space within the 2nd floor SERC for presentations and academic milestones. Please speak with the graduate advisor to check the availability of space.

Resources

D. Bruce Religion Center

adbrc@central.uh.edu

743-5050

Athletics

<https://uhcougars.com/>

Bookstore

Bookstore Help Center

713-741-7095

Student Accessibility Center

DCenter@central.uh.edu

713-743-5400

Counseling & Psychological Services

Health 2 Building, 2nd Floor

Room 2005

713-743-5454

CoogsCare

713-743-5454

Engineering Career Center

ecareers@central.uh.edu

(713) 743-4230

Get Involved

Student Organizations

(713) 743-2255

Health Center & Pharmacy

713-743-5151

International Student Services Office

isssohlp@central.uh.edu

(713) 743-5065

Parking and Transportation

(713) 743-1050

parking@uh.edu

832-842-1097

UH Police

police@uh.edu

(713) 743-3333

UH Main

(713) 743-2255

UH Veteran Services

vets@uh.edu

(713) 743-2255

UH Wellness

wellness@central.uh.edu

(713) 743-5430

Graduate & Professional

Student Resources

Workshops & Events

Appendix A

Contributions Statement

The student should document their contributions to the design and preliminary data of the QE proposal. In addition, the names and contributions of individuals assisting the student with the preparation of the proposal. See examples in the table below.

Contributor	Nature of Contribution
Student name	Conceived and wrote Aim 1
Charlie Brown (graduate student)	Provided Figure 2 as preliminary data. Read draft proposal and provided critique.
Fred Flintstone (mentor)	Discussed Aim 1 after student wrote the aim; Discussed Aims 2 & 3 with student before the research plan was written.

Appendix B

Prospectus Exam Certification

Part I

Student and Mentor certify that:

- The student formulated the initial Specific Aims for this proposal.
- This proposal has not been submitted as a fellowship or grant application, by anyone else.
- The student is the sole author of this proposal
- The proposal is formatted according to NIH rules
- The proposal contains Specific Aims (1 page), a Research Plan (6 pages), References (pages as needed) and an NIH-style Biosketch (up to 5 pages).
- The student has attached a Contributions Statement indicating their contributions to the design and preliminary data of the proposal. They have included the names and contribution of individuals assisting them with the preparation of the proposal
- The student has acknowledged the source of any preliminary data in the proposal that was not generated by them.

Exam Date: _____

Date Proposal Submitted: _____

Student Name (Print and sign)_____
(Date)_____
Mentor Name (Print and sign)_____
(Date)

Part II

QE Proposal Receipt & Approval to Proceed with Oral Examination

Exam Committee Chair certifies that:

Exam Chair Name (Print and sign)

(Date)

**Return Completed Form to
Graduate Program Advisor**