



**Institute of Plant Breeding,
Genetics and Genomics**

College of Agricultural & Environmental Sciences

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA



Graduate Student Handbook

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Program Overview

The [Institute of Plant Breeding, Genetics & Genomics](#) (PBGG) offers a Master's degree and a Doctorate of Philosophy in Plant Breeding, Genetics & Genomics. Interested students can apply for admission through the Graduate School.

An overall core curriculum for each degree ensures broad training, while providing the flexibility to emphasize topical areas of greatest interest to individual students. Each student will conduct their thesis or dissertation work under the supervision of his/her Major Professor and an Advisory Committee.

Most admitted students will receive competitive assistantships and a waiver of tuition.

General Information

Financial Assistance

The Institute does not have standing assistantships, but most graduate students receive financial aid in the form of assistantships. All students on assistantship receive out-of-state tuition waivers and in-state tuition fee reductions to \$25 per semester. All students will pay reduced in-state tuition and mandatory fees. Please see the [Bursar's page](#) for additional information on these fees. In addition, all graduate students on graduate assistantships are required to enroll in a mandatory health insurance program (or opt out) that is partially subsidized by the University. Additional information on health insurance can be found at the [Human Resources](#) web page.

The biggest obstacle for many applicants is to find a faculty member who has an assistantship available. We get many more applications than we have graduate assistantships, so many qualified applicants may not be admitted. Therefore, we recommend that you contact [faculty members](#) who could serve as potential advisors before applying to our graduate program.

Thesis/Dissertation Research

A student with an assistantship has responsibilities *in addition to* thesis/dissertation research responsibilities. Thesis research is a degree requirement, not a job responsibility. Research notes, data reports are owned by UGA and must be left with the Major Professor. A student may take copies, not originals.

Vacation Time

Graduate Research Assistants do not earn vacation time. Vacation/time off has to be coordinated with the Major Professor. Plan ahead of time (let your Major Professor know at least one month in advance).

Course Registration

The recommended number of hours is 16-18 during spring and fall, and 12 during summer. A full-time course load is 12 hours per semester during the academic year and 9 hours during the summer semester. The maximum semester course load for any student is 18 hours per semester and 6 hours during Maymester session. Students who do not have an assistantship must register for a minimum of 3 hours. Students on a graduate assistantship must register for a minimum of 12 hours during Fall and Spring semester, and a minimum of 9 hours during Summer session.

Students should enroll for classes at least 1 month prior to the start of each semester. All enrolled students pursuing graduate degrees at the University of Georgia must maintain continuous enrollment from matriculation until completion of all degree requirements. Continuous enrollment is defined as registering for a minimum of three (3) credits in at least two semesters per academic year (Fall, Spring, Summer) until the degree is attained or status as a degree-seeking graduate student is terminated.

Institute Seminar

All graduate students are expected to attend the regularly scheduled Institute seminar series. Exceptions are those students who have a conflict in class scheduling. Students who cannot attend seminar should notify the PBGG Administrative Manager.

Academic Honesty

Every student agrees to abide by [UGA's Academic Honesty Policy](#). It is the student's responsibility to become familiar with the policy. The policy is located on the Office of Instruction website. Violation of academic honesty may result in the following: Receipt of a failing/unsatisfactory assignment or course grade, placement of a dishonesty notation on transcript, suspension, dismissal, or expulsion.

Graduate Student Files

Graduate student files are maintained in the Institute main office in Athens. The Graduate Coordinator and Administrative Manager are responsible for their safekeeping.

Graduate Coordinator

The Graduate Coordinator is appointed by the Dean of the Graduate School upon the recommendation and approval by the Institute director and academic dean. The coordinator acts as a liaison between the Graduate School and the Institute. The Graduate Coordinator's duties are to sign documents regarding graduate student activities and maintain official Institute graduate student documents.

Major Professor

The Institute does not routinely sponsor lab rotations for incoming graduate students. Graduate students need to identify a Major Professor before they are accepted by the Institute. Although students may change Major Professors, many assistantships and other sources of funding may not be transferable among faculty.

Annual Progress Evaluations

All graduate students are required to have an [annual evaluation of progress](#) towards accomplishing their degree objectives. This evaluation will be conducted in May; more frequent evaluations may be requested by the student or Major Professor. If requested by the student or the Major Professor, the Graduate Coordinator or Institute Director head will be present at the supplementary evaluation. After the evaluation, the Major Professor and student will sign the evaluation form and send a copy to the Graduate Coordinator to be included in the student's file.

If the Major Professor intends to rate the progress as unsatisfactory, the Major Professor must alert the Graduate Coordinator and Institute Director in advance and request the presence of one of them during the evaluation. In case of an 'unsatisfactory' evaluation, the Major Professor must enumerate clear guidelines the student needs to follow in order to make satisfactory progress and

specify a clear time frame in which the student must show adequate progress. Examples of guidelines may include specific research tasks to be completed, courses to be taken, grades to be achieved in particular courses, or others.

A student must report a grade of 'U' in any course to the Major Professor and Graduate Coordinator. A grade of 'U' will be followed by a progress evaluation in the first month of the following semester. Failure by the graduate student to report a 'U' to the Major Professor and Graduate Coordinator is grounds for immediate dismissal from the graduate program.

Dismissal from Graduate Program

A student failing to make adequate progress towards degree objectives may be dismissed from the graduate program by the Graduate Committee in consultation with the student's Major Professor. There are two types of dismissal; one is failure to make progress toward degree, which is the purview of the Institute, and includes dismissal for failing the written or oral comprehensive exams more than once each. The second is failure to maintain satisfactory grades. This is an automatic dismissal by the Grad School.

Request for Reconsideration by Graduate Coordinating Committee

A student dismissed from the graduate program may submit a letter to the Graduate Committee to ask for reconsideration if the letter provides new information regarding reasons for the failure to make adequate progress towards degree.

Dismissal Appeal to the Institute

A student dismissed from the graduate program may submit an appeal letter to the Institute Director. Upon receipt of the appeal letter, the Institute Director will appoint a committee of three faculty members not serving on the Graduate Committee to handle the appeal. The appointed committee will make a decision based on information obtained from the student, his/her Major Professor, and the Graduate Committee.

Dismissal Appeal to the Graduate School

Dismissal by the Institute may be appealed to the dean of the Graduate School after all avenues of appeal have been exhausted within the Institute. When students are terminated by the Institute, but not simultaneously by the Graduate School, they may apply for admission to another graduate program if they wish to do so.

The Master of Science (M.S.) Degree Program

A [checklist](#) for the following is provided on the PBGG website

Advisory Committee

An Advisory Committee of three or more faculty members shall be appointed by the end of the second semester of residence. This committee shall consist of the Major Professor, who must have Graduate Faculty status, and two other faculty members, at least one of whom must have Graduate Faculty status.

This committee will approve the student's program of study and thesis plan and administer the final oral examination. The Major Professor and/or student will keep the Advisory Committee informed of progress being made. [Forms for appointment](#) are available at the Graduate School website and can be submitted online by the end of the second semester.

Program of Study

M.S. students must have 30 credit hours to graduate, which must include 21 hours of course work, 12 hours of which must be graduate level courses only (i.e., not split undergraduate/graduate courses, e.g., 4100/6100). No more than six hours of Research (PBGG 7000) will be counted as hours on your program of study.

The following courses are required for graduation:

- one course of Research Seminar (PBGG/CRSS/HORT 8861)
- one course of Plant Breeding (PBGG/CRSS/HORT 6140)
- one course of Plant Breeding Practicum (PBGG/CRSS/HORT 6000)
- one Statistics course (STAT 6220 or STAT 6315 or FANR 6750 or higher)

M.S. students may transfer 6 graduate course credits from another institution.

All Graduate School requirements for a master's degree must be fulfilled within a six-year time frame, beginning with the first registration for graduate courses listed on the program of study and ending with the final semester of the sixth year.

By the end of the second week of classes of the semester of graduation: the submission of the online Program of Study is due. The Administrative Manager will forward it to committee members and the Graduate School for approval. The student will work with their Major Professor and Advisory Committee on the initial program of study the first semester.

Residency Requirement

Minimum residency requirement is one academic year (two consecutive semesters of full-time study).

Average Grade

A student must maintain a 3.0 (B) average on the graduate transcript and a 3.0 (B) average on the program of study.

Application for Graduation

A student must apply for graduation no later than Friday of the second full week (the first full week for summer) of classes in the semester of the anticipated graduation date to permit the Graduate School to review the student's file. These [deadlines](#) are published on the Graduate School Website for three semesters in advance. Students must enroll for a minimum of three credit hours during the semester in which degree requirements are completed. The application for graduation is submitted electronically in Athena and requires no signatures.

Late Filing for Graduation. A student who misses a graduation deadline by failing to file the Application for Graduation, Advisory Committee Form, and/or Program of Study Form will pay a single fee of \$50 (check or money order in U.S. dollars) for the late processing of all required forms. All required graduation forms, and the late fee payment must be submitted to the Graduate School Office of Enrolled Student Services within 45 calendar days of the original deadline. After the 45-day late period, no students will be added to the commencement roster for the current semester.

Change in Graduation Date. If a student cannot complete degree requirements in the semester for which a graduation application was submitted, the student should notify the Graduate School (<mailto:gradinfo@uga.edu>) to cancel the application. Once the application has been cancelled, the student should reapply the following semester.

Thesis

A thesis proposal approved by the Advisory Committee must be submitted to the Administrative Manager by the end of the second semester. These items become a permanent part of the student's Institute file and record. The thesis proposal is to ensure that a student starts early on a research project suitable for a thesis. A draft plan of the proposed research will be formulated together with the student's Major Professor by the end of the first semester. The full proposal must be finalized and approved by the student's Advisory Committee by the end of the second semester at a scheduled committee meeting, with committee members present, either physically or digitally. Committee members must receive a copy of the proposal at least 7 days prior to the scheduled meeting.

As a minimum, these research proposals should contain the research objectives and rationale, a proposed research approach, a research timeline, and a review of all the pertinent literature. The level of detail in the materials and methods section is at the discretion of the student and the committee members. Students are encouraged to prepare a slide presentation of their proposed research to present at their committee meeting.

Faculty are strongly encouraged to assign the research hours a grade of "U" for students who do not have their proposal approved by the deadline. At the committee's discretion, a student may receive an additional semester to finalize the proposal before the student is penalized with a "U."

Final Exam

A final examination on both the program of study and the thesis is required and will be administered by the Advisory Committee. Defense of the thesis will be by an oral examination. Please submit an electronic copy of the thesis to the Advisory Committee three weeks prior to oral defense. Students should follow formatting guidelines based on the University of Georgia Graduate School Style Manual. All members of the Advisory Committee must participate in the entire defense, and the committee must approve the defense with no more than one dissenting

vote. If a committee member cannot be physically present, the absentee member may participate via a teleconference in which all participants can hear each person's comments. The chair of the committee must register the vote and indicate that this member's participation was by teleconference.

The Graduate School must receive the [Electronic Thesis & Dissertation \(ETD\) Submission Approval](#) form no later than two weeks prior to graduation. The thesis will obtain final approval after suggested changes are completed.

A [Student Performance Evaluation Form](#), found online on the PBGG website, must be completed by all Advisory Committee members at the final exam. These forms should be submitted to the Administrative Manager immediately following the exam.

Exit Seminar

An oral defense of the student's thesis with their Major Professor and Advisory Committee must take place by the Graduate School deadline. The defense will be preceded by an exit seminar. The Graduate School's online Thesis Defense & Final Examination Approval Form must be completed by the Advisory Committee.

Exit Interview

An exit interview must be scheduled with the Institute Director prior to graduation. The [Exit Interview Form](#) is found on the PBGG website. If you wish to make anonymous comments, the form can be filled out and mailed to the Administrative Manager at 111 Riverbend Rd, Room 215, Athens, Ga 30602.

Graduate School Forms

All official Graduate School forms are accessible at their Forms [website](#). The Graduate School will not accept hand-written forms as official. Most forms can be submitted electronically to the Graduate School (directly from their Forms website). If this option is not available, you may key-in the form and print it for signatures (it can also be signed electronically).

M.S. to Ph.D. Transition

An M.S. student requesting to transfer to a Ph.D. program prior to completing all requirements for a M.S. degree must have finished 1 year of study during which they maintain a minimum GPA of 3.5 and demonstrate acceptable performance in research as determined by the student's Advisory Committee at a formal meeting.

The Doctorate of Philosophy (Ph.D.) Degree Program

A [checklist](#) for the following is provided on the PBGG website

Advisory Committee

A Ph.D. Advisory Committee must have five faculty members, consisting of the Major Professor and four other faculty members. The Major Professor and at least two other members must have Graduate Faculty status. Students with co-Major Professors must have five faculty members on their Advisory Committee, consisting of the two co-Major Professors and three other faculty members. At least one committee member must be from outside the Institute.

This committee will approve the plan of study and dissertation prospectus and conduct preliminary and final examinations. The student will keep the Advisory Committee informed of progress being made.

[Advisory Committee Forms](#) are available from the Graduate School website and must be submitted online by the end of the first year (after submission it will go to the Administrative Manager/Graduate Coordinator for approval).

Program of Study

Ph.D. students must have 30 hours beyond the M.S. degree to graduate, which must include a minimum of 16 hours of 8000 or 9000 level courses and 3 hours of dissertation writing (9300).

Ph.D. (M.S. earned previously): **30 credit hours** comprised of:

- **21 hours of coursework** (a minimum of 16 hours of 8000-9000 level credits) excluding 9000/9005/9300
- **3 hours of dissertation writing** (PBGG 9300)
- **6 hours of research (PBGG 9000) and the remainder in research or relevant lower-level courses**

The following courses are required for graduation:

- two credits of Graduate Seminar (PBGG/CRSS/HORT 8860 & PBGG/CRSS/HORT 8861)
- Advanced Plant Breeding (PBGG/CRSS/HORT 8140)
- Plant Breeding Practicum (PBGG/CRSS/HORT 6000)
- Plant Genetics (PBIO 8100 or PBGG 8890 or comparable)
- Statistics (PBGG 8010 or STAT 8200 or comparable)

Ph.D. students may transfer 9 graduate course credits from another institution after beginning at UGA.

Ph.D. (no M.S.): **36 credit hours** comprised of:

- **27 hours of coursework** (a minimum of 16 hours of 8000-9000 level credits), and including MS/PhD requirements
- **3 hours of dissertation writing** (PBGG 9300)
- **6 hours (minimum) of research (PBGG 9000) and the remainder in research or relevant lower-level courses**

The following courses are **required** for graduation:

- two credits of Graduate Seminar (PBGG/CRSS/HORT 8860 & PBGG/CRSS/HORT 8861)
- Plant Breeding (PBGG/CRSS/HORT 6140)
- Plant Breeding Practicum (PBGG/CRSS/HORT 6000)
- Advanced Plant Breeding (PBGG/CRSS/HORT 8140)
- Plant Genetics (PBIO 8100 or PBGG 8890 or comparable)
- Statistics (STAT 6220 or STAT 6315 or FANR 6750 or higher)
- Statistics (PBGG 8010 or STAT 8200 or comparable)

Ph.D. students may transfer up to nine graduate course credits from another institution after beginning at UGA.

The student shall submit a preliminary Program of Study by the end of the first year of residence. The Program of Study must be approved by the Advisory Committee and the Graduate Coordinator and then submitted to the Administrative Manager.

The final [Program of Study](#) must be approved by the Advisory Committee and the Graduate Coordinator. Any changes in courses or committee make-up must be approved and on file with the Graduate School by the time the notification of the preliminary oral comprehensive examination is given and prior to admission to candidacy. The Final Program of Study must be submitted online. All courses on the Program of Study must fall within a six-year time limit.

Research Prospectus

The dissertation must represent originality in research, independent thinking, scholarly ability, and technical mastery of a field of study. The Major Professor and Advisory Committee shall guide the student in dissertation planning. The student is required to prepare a dissertation prospectus which provides an introduction, rationale, and description of the proposed research to be conducted, along with a literature review of all the pertinent literature and a proposed research timeline. The level of detail in the materials and methods section is at the discretion of the student and the committee members. The prospectus must be presented to, and approved by, the Advisory Committee before significant research is undertaken, and no later than the end of the student's third semester. Committee members must receive a copy of the proposal at least 14 days prior to the scheduled meeting, and all committee members must be present, either physically or digitally. Students are encouraged to prepare a slide presentation of their proposed research and pertinent background information to present at their committee meeting.

Approval of the dissertation prospectus signifies that the members of the Advisory Committee believe that it proposes a satisfactory research study. A copy of the approved prospectus must be emailed to the Administrative Manager and becomes a permanent part of his/her record.

Faculty are strongly encouraged to assign the research hours a grade of "U" for students who do not have their proposal approved by the deadline. At the committee's discretion, a student may receive an additional semester to finalize the proposal before the student is penalized with a "U."

Residency Requirement

At least two consecutive semesters of full-time work must be spent in resident study on one of the three UGA campuses (i.e., enrollment for a minimum of 30 hours of *consecutive* work included on the program of study).

Comprehensive Examination

The Graduate School requires that all Doctoral students pass a Written and Oral Comprehensive Examination before they are admitted to candidacy for the Doctoral degree. A Program of Study Form must be submitted before taking the comprehensive exam. Students planning to take the Written Comprehensive Examination must meet with their Advisory Committee to discuss the examination. A student may not be allowed to take the examination without having attended such a meeting. The final step before Admission to Candidacy is the Oral Comprehensive Examination, administered by the Advisory Committee. The written comprehensive examination is given after a student has completed the bulk of his/her course work. This should be taken before the start of the third year in residence in the doctoral program. The oral comprehensive examination should follow soon thereafter. The Oral Comprehensive Examination may include, but is not limited to, the presentation, discussion, and defense of the dissertation prospectus. The Oral Comprehensive Examination should include an evaluation of the broad knowledge needed to complete the dissertation. The Exam may also include topics directly related to the dissertation prospectus. The student must notify the Administrative Manager four weeks prior to the oral exam, who will announce this to the Graduate School at least two weeks prior.

All members of the Advisory Committee must be physically present or have electronic means of meeting for the entire period of this Examination. Once the Oral Comprehensive Examination has been passed, the student will be admitted to candidacy for the Doctoral degree. Students who fail to pass either exam are allowed one additional chance to retake the exam, after which they will be dismissed from the program if they fail to pass the second attempt.

If the dissertation is not completed within 5 years of being admitted to candidacy, the student must pass another set of Written and Oral Comprehensive Examinations and be readmitted to candidacy. The student may request an extension of the 5-year time limit from the Dean of the Graduate School. Such a request requires the endorsement by the student's Major Professor and the Graduate Coordinator.

A [Student Performance Evaluation Form](#), found online on the [PBGG website](#), must be completed by all Advisory Committee members at the oral exam. These forms should be submitted to the Administrative Manager immediately following the exam.

Admission to Candidacy

Ph.D. students must have completed all prerequisites set as a condition for admission, filed a final Program of Study, met residence requirements, passed preliminary exams, and maintained a 3.0 average on courses listed on the plan of study.

A Ph.D. student must apply for admission to candidacy at least one full semester before the date of graduation. After admission to candidacy, a student must register for a combined minimum of 18 credit hours of dissertation or other appropriate graduate credit during the completion of the degree program. Students planning to graduate the same semester they enter candidacy must be admitted to candidacy by the published deadline for candidacy during that semester and register

for 18 hours. The student must also meet all other deadlines for graduation in that semester. A student must register for a minimum of three hours of credit in any semester when using UGA facilities, and/or faculty or staff time.

The student should submit the [Application for Admission to Candidacy form](#) immediately after passing the Oral Comprehensive exam.

Application for Graduation

A student must apply for graduation no later than Friday of the second full week (the first full week for summer) of classes in the semester of the anticipated graduation date to permit the Graduate School to review the student's file. These [deadlines](#) are published on the Graduate School Website for three semesters in advance. Students must enroll for a minimum of three credit hours during the semester in which degree requirements are completed. The application for graduation is submitted electronically in Athena and requires no signatures.

Late Filing for Graduation. A student who misses a graduation deadline by failing to file the Application for Graduation, Advisory Committee Form, and/or Program of Study Form will have the option of paying a single fee of \$50 (check or money order in U.S. dollars) for the late processing of all required forms. All required graduation forms, and the late fee payment must be submitted to the Graduate School Office of Enrolled Student Services within 45 calendar days of the original deadline. After the 45-day late period, no students will be added to the commencement roster for the current semester.

Change in Graduation Date. If a student cannot complete degree requirements in the semester for which a graduation application was submitted, the student should notify the Graduate School (<mailto:gradinfo@uga.edu>) to cancel the application. Once the application has been cancelled, the student should reapply the following semester.

Dissertation Completion

No later than three weeks before the final examination, a final draft of the thesis or dissertation must be submitted to the Advisory Committee. The draft is one which is approved by the Major Professor as being complete and editorially correct. Students should follow formatting guidelines based on the University of Georgia Graduate School Style Manual.

The thesis or dissertation will be revised as required by the examining committee.

By the deadline listed for the graduation semester, a complete formatted copy of the dissertation must be submitted to the Graduate School for a first format check.

Exit Seminar/Oral Defense

Final examination will consist of a seminar presentation of the student's research, followed by the defense/final exam. Questioning in the defense will emphasize the topic of the thesis or dissertation, but questions may be raised in any appropriate area.

All members of the Advisory Committee must be present during the final examination or have electronic means of meeting. Faculty holding the rank of Assistant Professor or above are invited and encouraged to be in attendance at the defense/final exam. The Administrative Manager should notify the Institute faculty of time and place of the final seminar and exam. An oral defense of the student's dissertation with the Major Professor and Advisory Committee must take place by the Graduate School deadline.

The Graduate School's online [Dissertation and Final Exam Approval Form](#) should be completed by the Advisory Committee.

A [Student Performance Evaluation Form](#), found online on the [PBGG website](#), must be completed by all Advisory Committee members subsequent to the final exam. These forms should be submitted to the Administrative Manager immediately following the exam.

**It is the student's responsibility to abide by Graduate School deadlines for graduation. Please check the [Graduate School](#) website under Current Students, Important Deadlines and Dates.

Exit Interview

An exit interview must be scheduled with the Institute director prior to graduation. The Exit Interview Form is found on the PBGG website. If you wish to make anonymous comments, the form can be filled out and mailed to the Administrative Manager at 111 Riverbend Rd, Room 215, Athens, Ga 30602.

Graduate School Forms

All official Graduate School forms are accessible at their Forms website. The Graduate School will not accept hand-written forms as official. Most forms can be submitted electronically to the Graduate School (directly from their Forms website). If this option is not available, you may key-in the form and print it for signatures (it can also be signed electronically). All names must be typed on the forms below or next to the actual signature. When turning in a form, access the most current version directly from the Graduate School [website](#).

PBGG Graduate Student Association

The PBGG Graduate Student Association (PBGG GSA) is an organization made up of all graduate students in the department. It exists to advocate for the students at the Institute and University level, as well as to provide professional, academic, and social networks. The GSA is led by a group of student officers who are elected every spring. PBGG GSA working committee is made up of president, vice-president, secretary/treasurer, journal club chair, social chair, webmaster, fundraising chair, and GSA delegate.