

Systems Biology Program Dissertation Advisory Committee Policy

Dissertation Advisory Committee (DAC)

After passing the PQE, a DAC of at least three faculty members and the student's Dissertation Advisor(s) must be appointed 4 months after their PQE exam and a meeting scheduled for 6 months after their PQE exam. This will allow students to take maximal advantage of their committee's expertise. At least one committee member should be from the Program in Systems Biology. Other members may be from outside the Program and, if they choose, one member may be from outside Harvard. Once students have decided on their committee they should fill out the Proposed Dissertation Advisors Form and submit it to the Systems Biology Coordinator for Program approval.

The Committee must meet with the student at least once a year through G5 and every six months thereafter, until Ph.D. dissertation writing is underway. However, students are encouraged to consider more frequent meetings (every 6 months is ideal). The Chair of the DAC is responsible for the preparation of the DAC Report, which should be signed by all committee members at the conclusion of each meeting and submitted to the Systems Biology Coordinator. Students will be allowed to register for the upcoming year only if their Dissertation Advisory Committees have met and filed a formal report (see the attached form) within the past twelve months. The Coordinator will of course help with scheduling these meetings.

Role of the DAC

The role of the DAC is to assist the student in defining the dissertation project, review scientific progress, offer critical evaluation, suggesting extension or modification of objectives, arbitrate differences of opinion between the student and the advisor if they arise, and decide when the work accomplished constitutes a dissertation. Our hope is that the committee will help students in the early stages to get their research off to a good start, and that they will be a resource for students at any point during their graduate career.

At the start of the meeting, the student will be asked to leave the room for a few minutes. This gives the committee an opportunity to speak with the Dissertation Advisor but this should not be considered evaluative. Similarly, the Dissertation Advisor will also be asked to leave the room so that the student can voice any issues that they might feel more comfortable discussing only with the committee

Procedures for Setting up DAC meetings

Students should contact the Systems Biology Coordinator, who will assist them in scheduling all meetings and who should receive a copy of all information that is given by the student to his or her DAC committee prior to the meeting.

Dissertation Proposal and DAC Report Policy

Students are to submit a brief summary of progress (five or fewer pages not including images and references) to their Dissertation Advisory Committee and Systems Biology

Coordinator at least one week before the meeting and be prepared to give a twenty minute presentation. The student is also responsible for bringing a copy of the DAC report to each meeting. This report is to be filled out by the Chair of the committee and returned to the Systems Biology Coordinator immediately following the completion of the meeting.

The presentation can include the student's overall goals, progress that has been made (show data) and plans going forward. The student should also discuss any other plans for the coming year such as teaching, meeting, courses, etc with the committee so all can get some sense of how time will be spent during the coming year.

Dissertation Preparation and Defense

The Dissertation Advisory Committee, in consultation with the Dissertation Advisor, determines when it is time for a student to stop laboratory work and begin to write a dissertation. Once a student has been given permission to write a dissertation, the Systems Biology Coordinator should be contacted to schedule an appointment to discuss requirements, dates, etc.