



Boston University Chobanian & Avedisian School of Medicine
Graduate Medical Sciences

PhD GMS Handbook

2025-2026

* Approved by PhD Steering Committee

Commented [TD1]: Greg - where is this link? Is it on the web? If its on one drive we can't link to it.

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
Welcome	4
Academic Policies.....	4
• Satisfactory Academic Progress.....	5
• Time to degree	5
• Advisors.....	5
• Faculty Advisor	5
• Research Advisor / Lab	5
• Fair Expectations	6
Academic Requirements	6
• Program Milestones.....	6
• Qualifying Examinations	6
• Dissertation Advisor / Committee Assignment.....	7
• Registrar Requirements for Program Completion.....	7
Misconduct and Grievance Procedures	7
• Appropriate Treatment in Graduate Education	7
• Boston University Equal Opportunity Office	7
• Title IX – Sexual Misconduct	8
• Ethics Point.....	8
Professional Comportment	8
Other Resources	8
• GMS Handbook	8
• PhD program’s data profile	8
• PhD Handbooks	9
• Graduate Program in Neuroscience	9
• Program in Biomedical Science	9
• Virology, Immunology & Microbiology.....	9
• Biochemistry & Cell Biology	9
• Genetics & Genomics.....	9
• Molecular & Translational Medicine (coming soon)	9
• Nutrition & Metabolism (coming soon)	9
• Orofacial & Skeletal Biology (coming soon)	9

• Pathology (coming soon)	9
• Program in Pharmacology.....	9
• Biophysics and Physiology.....	9
Essential Financial Information for all GMS PhD students	9
• Non-service stipends:.....	9
• Service stipends:	9
• Paycheck implications:.....	9
• Income tax implications:	10
• Build and keep an Emergency Fund:	10
• Money Management Help:	10
• Summary of stipend sources and their implications.	11
• Vacation Policy	11

Welcome

Welcome to the Graduate Medical Sciences, the graduate arm of Boston University Chobanian & Avedisian School of Medicine. We have five (5) entry portals to our PhD programs. Three (3) are direct entry programs - Anatomy and Neurobiology, Behavioral Neuroscience and Pharmacology, one (1) is the University-wide Graduate Program for Neuroscience and the last is the Program in Biomedical Sciences (PiBS), our umbrella program. PiBS provides entry into nine (9) participating departments/programs including Biochemistry & Cell Biology, Biophysics, Genetics & Genomics, Virology, Immunology & Microbiology (VIM), Molecular & Translational Medicine, Nutrition & Metabolism, Orofacial & Skeletal Biology, Pathology and Physiology. In addition, students can participate in the Immunology Training Program, earning degrees in the VIM or Pathology programs.

Each PhD program has its own policies and requirements therefore this GMS PhD handbook serves to provide general GMS policies not superseded by departmental guidelines. Students are required to complete both GMS as well as the department/program-specific requirements. As program policies and requirements may change, students are advised to continually consult with their research advisors and the Directors of Graduate Studies of the departments/programs they join to be certain that they follow all policies and requirements. Additionally, students must also adhere to the guidelines of GMS, as well as Boston University at large.

It is each student's responsibility to be certain that all program requirements are fulfilled. Students are encouraged to consult regularly with their advisors to be certain they are progressing as expected and that all requirements will be completed in time for the planned graduation.

GMS provides oversight for the length of study, program integrity, stipend levels, benefits (including health insurance), grievance procedures, and other matters relevant to the education of its graduate students.

Academic Policies

The academic policies and procedures concern all graduate students in Graduate Medical Sciences at Boston University Chobanian & Avedisian School of Medicine. GMS policies are Boston University policies are posted on our website.

- [GMS Academic Policies](#)
- [BU Academic Policies](#)

Satisfactory Academic Progress

Students in GMS must make satisfactory academic program (SAP) according to GMS policy and guidelines. GMS policy is available [here](#) requiring a minimum GPA of 2.7; many PhD programs have a higher minimum GPA and additional requirements.

Time to degree

Students in good standing are guaranteed 5 years of stipend support although it can be extended. Students have a maximum of 7 years to complete their degree. Students may petition for additional time to the Associate Provost and Dean of Graduate Medical Sciences in cases of extenuating circumstances. See policy [here](#).

Advisors

- *Faculty Advisor*

Upon entering GMS, each student is assigned a faculty member who will serve as the faculty/academic advisor. The academic/faculty advisor functions as the student's formal administrative advisor until a research/dissertation advisor is assigned usually at the end of the first academic year (per Program/Department guidelines). The role of the faculty advisor is to advise on academic issues. See policy [here](#).

- *Research Advisor / Lab*

All students are required to complete laboratory rotations, the number of which is set by the Program/Department, prior to choosing a laboratory (and Program/Department) in which to perform the dissertation research work. Students must be accepted into a dissertation laboratory, select their research advisor and a Department/Program by September 1st of the second year in the program.

It is recognized that there are situations when a student will need to change advisors due to funding issues or if the current advisor leaves BU or failure of the current dyadic mentoring relationship.

If the student is switching advisors within their current Department/Program, they must consult with, and get approval from, the Program Director and Chair of their current Department/Program as well as the Associate Provost/Dean of GMS.

If the student wishes to join a different Department/Program, the current Chair/Director and the new Chair/Director, as well as the Associate Provost/Dean of GMS must approve the change and the [Transfer Between Departments](#) policy followed.

The Chair/Director of the student's Department/Program will confirm that the new advisor has sufficient funds to support the student's stipend and their research for at least 2 years.

In all cases, students must identify a new advisor within 30 days. During the time they are without an advisor, their stipend will be funded by GMS. If they fail to identify an advisor within this time, they will be dismissed from GMS.

In situations when the PhD student "believes that their relationship with their mentors or academic advisor is disrespectful, abusive, discriminatory, or characterized by other inappropriate behavior" GMS will follow the procedures outlined in Appendix C -Side Letter: Transitional Assistance of the Boston University Graduate Workers Union (BUGWU) [Collective Bargaining Agreement](#).

- *Fair Expectations*

Graduate Medical Sciences encourages and supports a positive mentoring relationship between a doctoral student and their research advisor. As such, GMS encourages the use of the AAMC compact – [Fair Expectations](#)- between a doctoral student and their primary mentor to facilitate a positive mentoring relationship and successful scientific and professional growth. Students should meet with their prospective research advisor and together they should review and discuss this document, before committing to the research mentor – PhD mentee relationship

Academic Requirements

The PhD program requires [64 units](#). In some cases, Master's units can be [transferred](#). These units (credits) are taken as formal didactic courses and by performing research, attending seminars, etc. These requirements are dictated by Program/Department.

All students are required to be registered every semester at Boston University unless on an approved leave of absence as per GMS and University guidelines. See policy [here](#).

Program Milestones

In addition to completing coursework (64 units) and other requirements dictated by Program/Department, the following general GMS milestones must be completed for graduation.

- *Qualifying Examinations*

All PhD students must demonstrate expertise in their field by completion of qualifying examinations set by their department, or Program. All students must complete their qualifying exams by September 1st of the third year in the program (unless otherwise dictated by their program). The qualifying examinations are designed and administered by

the participating Department/Program which dictate the expectations in keeping with GMS guidelines. See policy [here](#).

- [Dissertation Advisor / Committee Assignment](#)

An advisory committee of GMS faculty will be assembled as per the guidelines of each Department/Program. The role of the dissertation advisory committees is to both advise the student and assess their academic progress throughout the dissertation research. Students are expected to meet with their dissertation advisory committee at least annually, but more frequent meetings are encouraged. Expectations for the dissertation are dictated by each Department/Program in keeping with GMS guidelines.

- [Registrar Requirements for Program Completion](#)

- Completion of Coursework
- Completion of Qualifying Exam
- Dissertation Research
 - Dissertation Prospectus Outline
 - Dissertation Abstract
 - Completion of Dissertation (including check for Plagiarism) using the [Turnitin Plagiarism Tool](#)
 - Approval by first and second readers, as well as committee members
 - Oral Exam
- Dissertation Submission

See policy [here](#)

Misconduct and Grievance Procedures

GMS places a high priority on the appropriate treatment of its community and affiliated members and provides a mechanism for both open and confidential resolution of complaints from students. Information on how to report misconduct including harassment, discrimination, academic issues, faculty complaints, disability discrimination, employment issues, etc. can be found on our [webpage here](#) . More information can be [found here](#) and through the resources below.

Appropriate Treatment in Graduate Education

To ensure a supportive learning environment for its masters, PhD and post-doctoral trainees, Graduate Medical Sciences established the [Appropriate Treatment in Graduate Education Policy](#). GMS students may view the form, learn how complaints are reviewed and processed and submit the ATGE online form here. Complaints of mistreatment can be submitted named or be made anonymously.

Boston University Equal Opportunity Office

The [Equal Opportunity Office](#) (EOO) is dedicated to advancing Boston University's commitment to fostering an environment where faculty, staff and students can engage in

work and study free from unlawful harassment, discrimination, or access barriers. You can contact EOO to speak to a confidential resource; to report harassment, discrimination, or sexual misconduct or to report a barrier to gaining access on campus.

Title IX – Sexual Misconduct

BU is committed to providing a safe environment free from sexual misconduct and discrimination. Title IX, is now under the umbrella of the [Equal Opportunity Office](#). Please reach out to the

GMS Deputy Title IX Coordinator:

Gwynneth Offner, PhD, Director, M.S. Medical Sciences Program (GMS)

o goffner@bu.edu / (617) 358-9541

Karen Symes, PhD, Assistant Dean of Student Affairs (MED)

o symes@bu.edu / (617) 358-4578

Ethics Point

[Ethics Point](#) is a confidential BU-wide (third-party) Ethics and Compliance Hotline to report improper academic conduct or violations of BU policies for all students, staff, and faculty

Professional Comportment

“Boston University School of Medicine is committed to a work environment that is professional, collegial, supportive of all personnel, and conducive to providing the best possible patient care, teaching, and research. The school places a very high priority on maintaining a work environment for staff, trainees, and faculty characterized by generosity, integrity, constructive interactions, mentoring, and respect for diversity and differences among members of our community. All faculty, staff and students are also expected to model the behavioral attributes of responsibility, empathy, service excellence, problem solving and continuous improvement, efficiency, cultural competency, and teamwork.”
[GMS Academic Conduct Code and Disciplinary Procedures](#)

Other Resources

[GMS Handbook](#)

[PhD program’s data profile](#)

Shown are PhD profiles including a brief description of the program, and five-year (or more) trend data on applications and offers, selectivity, entering cohort size, sex and ethnicity demographics, attrition rate, cumulative completion rate, median time to degree, and five- and ten-year out graduate employment

PhD Handbooks

- [Graduate Program in Neuroscience](#)
- [Program in Biomedical Science](#)
- [Virology, Immunology & Microbiology](#)
- [Biochemistry & Cell Biology](#)
- [Genetics & Genomics](#)
- [Molecular & Translational Medicine \(coming soon\)](#)
- [Nutrition & Metabolism \(coming soon\)](#)
- [Orofacial & Skeletal Biology \(coming soon\)](#)
- [Pathology \(coming soon\)](#)
- [Program in Pharmacology](#)
- [Biophysics and Physiology](#)

Essential Financial Information for all GMS PhD students

This document is meant to help PhD students and faculty understand the various sources and types of PhD stipends. This is especially of interest with the ratification of the Boston University Graduate Workers Union (BUGWU) contract as the source of stipend funds directly determines which students are in the union and which are not.

Non-service stipends:

Students on non-service stipends are not members of the collective bargaining unit of BUGWU and do not pay union dues. Funds for these stipends come from GMS. First year students, students on training grants (T32) and on predoctoral grants are on non-service appointments (see also the table at the end of this document).

Service stipends:

Students on service stipends are members of BUGWU and are supported by grant funds from principal investigators (PI's), by teaching commitments or on bridging funds (see table below).

Many students will switch between non-service and service stipends during the course of their time in our PhD programs. It is important for you to understand the changes in your payments that will occur as you move between funding sources. While your total annual stipend amount will not change in moving between non-service and service appointments, the amount that you see in your paycheck and how often you receive your paycheck will.

Paycheck implications:

It is important for you to understand the changes in your paycheck and to plan for them. Non-service stipends are paid monthly, the fourth Friday of the month. Service stipends are paid weekly on Fridays. The net amount you receive in your paycheck will change due to

differences in tax withholding. Federal and state tax withholding occurs automatically when you are on a service stipend. Taxes for US citizens and permanent are not withheld on non-service stipends, even though you may need to pay taxes on those earnings. Taxes may be withheld from international students.

GMS strongly urges you to check the gross pay on each paycheck to insure you are receiving the correct amount. Please notify your administrator immediately if you note a discrepancy where you are being paid incorrectly, either too little or too much. Please be aware that if you are overpaid on a given paycheck or for a period of time, you will be expected to return the funds in excess of your stipend, or those funds will be withheld in your future paychecks.

Income tax implications:

GMS cannot give tax advice. Furthermore, each student's tax liability will differ depending on their situation (e.g., single vs. married; filing singly or jointly; first year student with income from previous employment; dependents; etc.). We suggest you consult a certified tax consultant. However, GMS wants you to be aware that you are likely to owe federal and state taxes on your stipend, so please budget to have sufficient funds to pay any taxes you owe on April 15 each year. Note that when you are on a non-service stipend you may need to consider making estimated tax payments to the federal government to avoid any underpayment of tax penalties.

While we are discussing taxes, please be aware that W2 tax forms are issued for your stipend while you are on a service stipend but W2 forms are not issued for your non-service stipend earnings. You will need to report your non-service stipend earnings on your tax form.

Build and keep an Emergency Fund:

GMS also urges you to keep sufficient funds on hand in case of emergencies or in case of payment difficulties such as a missed stipend payment. GMS has a very limited capacity to offer short-term, non-interest loans to students who need them in emergencies. These can be requested by reaching out to the office of the Associate Dean of GMS.

Money Management Help:

Boston University also provides budget and money management tools including the Kindros™ money management learning platform designed for college students. This financial planning service is available to you at no cost.

(<https://www.bumc.bu.edu/osfs/flp/kindros/>)

Summary of stipend sources and their implications.

Source	Payment Frequency	Tax withholding?	Service/ non- service
1st year PhD stipend (Sept-June)	Weekly paid on Fridays	No, and no W2 form Int'l students check with nrapay@bu.edu	non-service
Research Grant support (GRF or GRA)	Weekly paid on Fridays	Yes, and W2 form	service
T32 Training Grant	Weekly paid on Fridays	No, and no W2 form Int'l students check with nrapay@bu.edu	non-service
Predoctoral Fellowship (F30, F31)	Weekly paid on Fridays	No, and no W2 form Int'l students check with nrapay@bu.edu	non-service
Private foundation (AHA, ACS, HHMI)	Weekly paid on Fridays	Yes, and W2 form	service
Bridge funding	Weekly paid on Fridays	Yes, and W2 form	service

Vacation Policy

A new [Vacation Time Policy for Salaried Graduate Workers](#) is now in effect to provide clarity and consistency on vacation time for salaried graduate workers including PhD students. The complete policy is available on the [BU Policies site](#).