

# Welcome

This document was designed to answer many of the most common questions about the CRGP Program. If after reviewing these pages you find you still have questions, please feel free to contact the CRGP administrator or committee chair listed on the admissions and registration page.

# Admissions and Registration Questions

***Q. When can I start my graduate career?***

A. You can enroll as early as July 1, which is the first day of UNMC's academic year, or as late as mid-August when classes begin. New students begin research rotations at this time. It is often advantageous to begin rotations in the summer. This allows a student to rotate through labs without the additional coursework that occurs in the fall. Furthermore, the sooner a student chooses a lab, the sooner he/she begins dissertation research.

***Q. Can I apply for admission in the Spring Semester?***

A. Yes. Under this scenario the student would spend the spring semester completing the requisite three research rotations, then begin his/her dissertation research. For the summer, the student attends the Short Course. Due to the sequential nature of the first-year courses, a student starting in January would not be able to begin BRTP 821 and 822 until the following fall.

***Q. How do I get started?***

A. When students arrive on the first day, they should go to the Eppley Institute Administration office (EI 5003). There they will need to fill out and process the Personal Data Form and I-9 paperwork to put the student on the payroll. Students must bring two pieces of identification. Acceptable forms of identification include: driver's license, social security card, birth certificate, and passport. At this time, the student must also fill out a W-4 form. The administration office can also help schedule a physical examination which must be scheduled prior to beginning any work in the laboratory. Student should have a photocopy of their immunization record for this exam. The administration office will also provide the student with the UNMC Drug Policy, UNMC Safety manual, and instructions on how to obtain parking privileges and identification cards.

***Q. Who can help me when I arrive at UNMC?***

A. The CRGP program coordinators are Dr. Joyce Solheim (CRGP Graduate Committee Chair) and Ms. Diane Petersen (CRGP administrator). Dr. Solheim will help you set up your rotations and explain courses of study. Diane will assist you with filling out forms and will direct you through the enrollment process and registration. They can also help you with general questions about student health and insurance, fees, and housing. See the contact list below for more specific questions.

CRGP Graduate Committee Chair  
Dr. Joyce Solheim  
jsolheim@unmc.edu  
402-559-4539  
Office: Eppley Science Hall 8006

CRGP Administrator  
Diane Petersen  
dcpeters@unmc.edu  
402-559-4092  
Office: Eppley Institute 2006

Graduate Studies Administrator (Registration)

Amy Schlueter

402-559-6532

Office: Academic and Research Services 2030

Student Housing

402-559-5201

Student Health Program Assistant

Lorrie Skow

ljskow@unmc.edu

402-559-5158

***Q. How are the special needs of international students taken care of?***

A. Questions pertaining to visa status or INS paperwork should be addressed to Steven Daubendiek, International Advisor, of the UNMC Office of International Studies and Programs.

International Affairs and Programs

Steven Daubendiek

sdaubend@unmc.edu

402-559-6414

***Q. How many credit hours should I enroll for each semester?***

A. Full-time students must have at least 9 credits during the fall and spring semesters, 4 credits for the 8-week summer session, and 3 credits for the 5 week summer session. Except for special circumstances, a student must be enrolled continually throughout his/her graduate training. With approval of the Dean for Graduate Studies, students in the final semester of a Master's degree program or candidates for doctoral degrees registered for fewer than the minimum hours required for a full program may be granted full-time status provided they are not employed more than 20 hours per week (half-time).

# Comprehensive Exam Questions and Answers

## Q *What is the comprehensive exam?*

The completion of the comprehensive exam is required for a student to advance to Ph.D. candidacy. A research proposal written in the NIH style must be prepared, submitted, and orally defended. The topic of this proposal can be related to your dissertation research area and but should not be the same as your research or other projects in your mentor's laboratory. The topic must be approved by your supervisory committee. This proposal will be prepared on official NIH forms (Form PHS398,

A <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/funding/phs398/phs398.html>). The proposal should focus on a body of work appropriate for a three-year award. The body of the application, including 1) specific aims, 2) background and significance, 3) preliminary data and 4) research design and methods should not exceed 15 pages, not including references. Additionally, you will fill out the NIH cover page, abstract and personnel page (but not the performance site parts), table of contents, the budget form for the entire project period (not the detailed initial budget), and a biosketch for the PI (you).

## Q *Who is in charge of my comprehensive exam?*

After getting your topic approved, but before writing the full grant, you will write your specific aims and submit them to your Supervisory Committee. For this initial approval, your specific aims will likely require more background information than will be necessary in the aims section of your final grant. Often, getting approval of the aims can be completed, or at least initiated, via email. A formal meeting is not required for approval, but can be helpful because it allows all the members to discuss the aims with the student simultaneously and reach consensus. After approval of your aims, a modified version of your supervisory committee will serve as the Comprehensive Exam Committee. Your supervisory committee will select one of the members to serve as the Comprehensive Exam Committee chair, and will recruit an additional outside member with appropriate expertise to serve on the Comprehensive Exam Committee. Your mentor will not be involved in the examination questions or voting but may observe the exam. She/he will not assist you in formulating answers to the examiners' questions.

## Q *When should I do my comprehensive exam?*

A CRGP students are expected to complete successfully the written and oral portions of their comprehensive examination by the time they have been in the program for no more than 3 1/2 years. If necessary, you may request an extension of this deadline from your Supervisory Committee. If the Supervisory Committee grants the extension, your mentor will then send a letter to the CRGP Committee (addressed to the Chair) documenting the reason for the extension and the length of the extension.

## Q *How long will this take?*

The precise answer to this question will vary from student to student. However, there are suggestions for an example timeline:

- ➔ Gain approval of specific aims/formation of Comprehensive Exam Committee: **January**

- ⇒ Submit written grant: **March 15**
- ⇒ Receive permission to schedule the oral defense: Within 10 days, **March 16-25**
  - If a member of the committee decides that the grant proposal has major deficiencies, he/she will notify you, your mentor, and the other members of the examination committee, in writing, regarding what deficiencies need to be addressed. If you receive such a notification from one member, then you should consider rewriting the proposal and rescheduling the oral defense. If you receive such a notification from more than one member, then you are required to rewrite the proposal and reschedule the oral defense.
- A ⇒ Oral Exam: 14-28 days after grant submission, **March 29-April 12**
  - Committees are encouraged to allow the defense as close to 2 weeks after submission as possible. However, Exam Committee members have real-life deadlines that they cannot delay, and so may need up to 28 days after receiving the grant to sufficiently review it.
- ⇒ Receive written evaluation of written proposal and oral defense: **Within one week** of exam.
  - The committee usually informs you the day of your defense about the result of their vote. The written evaluation is an additional learning tool, and will be extremely useful if you need to retake the exam.

**Q** *What if it does not go well?*

A Relax, it is extremely rare for CRGP students to be denied candidacy after the first try. You were admitted to the CRGP from a competitive field because you are excellent. However, students are sometimes asked to re-try the comprehensive exam to address the specific deficiencies of their first attempt. Per the UNMC Graduate Studies guidelines, if more than one member of the committee recommends failure of the comprehensive exam, the student fails the exam. If the student does not pass on the first try, the student would be informed of the specific deficiencies by the examination committee and there would be one additional attempt. There is lots of help available to make sure your exam goes well.

**Q** *How do I prepare to write my grant?*

A There are several avenues of help for graduate students. Students often find it useful to examine grants written by other graduate students for their comprehensive exam, although there have been recent changes in the length requirements. This typically provides a nice template on which to base the structure of your grant.

A The following website has some helpful information about writing NIH style grants.  
[http://grants.nih.gov/grants/grant\\_tips.htm](http://grants.nih.gov/grants/grant_tips.htm)  
 Additionally, an informal lecture about grantsmanship is often very useful. Dr. Angie Rizzino has provided this service in the past. If there is enough student interest in such a lecture, this can easily be organized again.

**Q** *What kind of questions can be expected during the oral exam?*

A Typically, the questions that arise during the oral defense test comprehensive knowledge that is related to specific elements of the grant proposal. For example, if you propose to use a specific technique, you should be prepared to explain the principles and theory behind how that technique works. Committee members are instructed that questions in the oral examination should be related to the grant proposal and should not focus course work, unless it is related in some way to the grant proposal.

**Q** *An important section of a grant is Preliminary Data. What do I do about this?*

The Supervisory Committee will give students some leeway on what type of preliminary data is acceptable. For example, study sections generally require the investigator to have the transgenic mouse before they will fund a grant to study the effects of the transgene.

**A** (Reviewers are naturally concerned that there may be technical problems in generating the mouse.) For the comprehensive exam, it would be appropriate for you to state that the mouse would be made as part of the proposed project, and the committee will expect you to know the important details involved in generating the transgenic mouse.

Some programs encourage the invention of preliminary data supporting your grant. The CRGP DOES NOT want you to do this. Your preliminary data will primarily be a more specific review of the important background experiments supporting your hypotheses.

**Q** *What forms are required for the comprehensive exam?*

**A** The “Request for Scheduling the Comprehensive Examination” form is due in the Graduate Office two weeks before the exam. The “Report on the Comprehensive Examination” form is due in the Graduate Office within 7 days after the exam date. The “Application for Candidacy” form can be completed once the comprehensive exam is passed. This form must be submitted at least 7 months prior to the dissertation final oral examination. All the aforementioned forms can be found in the Graduate Office or the Graduate Studies web page.

# Dissertation and Graduation Questions

Q. *When can I begin writing my dissertation?*

A. Your committee will inform you when you are ready. The abstract and dissertation should be available for review by the Supervisory Committee four weeks before the final oral exam is scheduled. Before you begin preparing your dissertation, review the “Instructions for Preparation and Submission of Doctoral Dissertation”, which can be found at the following site.  
<http://webmedia.unmc.edu/gradstudies/forms/dissertationinstructions.pdf>

Q. *What happens if the Supervisory Committee does not approve my dissertation?*

A. It can be accepted once the basis for the disapproval has been corrected. If these criticisms involve extensive changes, the question of rejecting the dissertation entirely or postponing the final oral examination until the following semester should be considered by the Supervisory Committee.

Q. *What forms must be submitted?*

A. At least two weeks prior to the final oral exam, the chair of the Supervisory Committee must file the “Application for Final Oral Exam” in the Graduate Office. It is a wise idea for the student to assure that this form is filed on time. A report on the final examination is due in the Graduate Office within 7 days of the examination. Once the final oral exam is successfully completed, two copies of the dissertation (1 original and 1 copy) and three copies of the abstract must be presented to the Graduate Office. Two copies of the dissertation and one copy of the abstract will subsequently be returned for deposition in the library.

Q. *Is there anything else I need to do in order to graduate?*

A. Each student who expects to receive a diploma must file an application for the diploma in the Office of Academic Records and pay a \$25 non-transferable, non-refundable graduation fee. Announcements concerning deadlines for applications are posted throughout the campus and published in the internal communications of the Medical Center and on the [UNMC student website](#). Additionally, evidence of submission of dissertation material to a peer review journal must be given to the Graduate Studies Office.

## General Questions

***Q. What is the extent of student health insurance coverage?***

A. Medical insurance coverage for graduate students goes into effect as soon as they are enrolled in the graduate college. Only students are covered by this policy; however options for spouses and dependents are available. Dental insurance is not available. To qualify for insurance, students must be enrolled for a minimum of 1 credit hour per semester. For more information on student health insurance contact:

Patty George  
Student Life Center 3015  
559-7276

***Q. When do I get paid?***

A. Graduate students are paid monthly and will receive their paychecks on the last day of the month. Students beginning work after the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the month may not receive their first paycheck until the following month. Student stipends are taxable.

## Graduate Program Questions

Q. How long does the program take?

The average Ph. D. student completes his/her degree and dissertation requirements in about 5 years. M.

A. D./Ph. D. students typically require four years to complete their Ph. D. training, although completion in three years is possible.

Q. What are the CRGP requirements?

The following is a basic outline of a CRGP student's graduate career and requirements. Briefly, students must complete BRTP 821, BRTP 822, Principles and Methodologies of Cancer Research, two electives,

A. and an ethics course. Additionally, students must participate in the annual Journal Club, seminar series, and Short Course in Cancer Biology. Per graduate studies requirements, students must also maintain a minimum GPA of 3.0.

First year

Students become familiar with the work of CRGP faculty by rotating through several laboratories of their choice. Most students choose a faculty advisor by the end of their first semester and begin their dissertation research. Once an advisor is chosen, a Supervisory Committee should be established within about three months. The Supervisory Committee consists of four or five faculty members (including the mentor) who can provide advice and feedback to the student. CRGP faculty comprise most or all of this committee, however, other faculty with applicable expertise can be included. The makeup of the Supervisory Committee is subject to approval by the CRGP Graduate Committee and the Dean of Graduate Studies.

Course work:

Fall Semester—BRTP 821 and 822

Spring Semester—Journal Club, Electives

Summer—Annual Short Course in Cancer Biology

Second year

Students focus on course requirements and dissertation research.

Course work:

Fall Semester—Principles and Methodologies of Cancer Research, Electives

Spring Semester—Journal Club

Summer—Annual Short Course in Cancer Biology

### Third year

Students focus on dissertation research. Additionally, a comprehensive examination is required and usually is completed by the end of the third year. Satisfactory performance on this examination admits the student to candidacy.

#### Summer coursework—Annual Short Course in Cancer Biology

### Remaining years

During the final phase of graduate training, students work full time in the laboratory to finish their dissertation research. As in most doctoral programs, the dissertation constitutes original work that contributes to the field of study. At the end of the program, students write and defend their dissertation.

### Seminars

The Student/Postdoctoral Research Forum is held weekly and attendance is required. Graduate students must present a seminar annually, beginning in the fall of their second year.

Additionally, Eppley Institute seminars are held weekly (attendance required) and Eppley Cancer Center Grand Rounds are held once a month (attendance encouraged). Many other seminars are held on campus as well.

### Short Course

Every year, students are required to register for and attend the Short Course. The annual Eppley Institute Short Course in Cancer Biology is a three-day minisymposium on an important topic in cancer research. Four internationally-recognized experts are brought in from around the U. S. and Canada to educate students and faculty on the important issues and advances in the topic of interest. The Short Course consists of formal lectures and informal "chalk talk" discussions.

### Portfolio

Graduate Studies requires that students submit a portfolio annually. These are usually due around February and must be approved by the Supervisory Committee. Instructions and a sample for the portfolio can be found on the Graduate Studies Website under the "Ph. D. Student Information" heading.

### Ethics

Students will be expected to participate once during their graduate career in the UNMC "Responsible Conduct in Research" program. This program is usually offered in the spring. Typically, this requirement is completed within the first two years.

#### **Q. *What are the approved electives?***

A. BRTP 823/24 (considered one course), Nucleic Acids (BIOC 926), Proteins, Membranes and Cell Regulation (BIOC 925), Advanced Immunobiology (PAMM 955), Virology (PAMM 890), Medical

Chemistry (PHSC 830), Medical Pharmacology (PHAR 815), Physiology (PHYS 806), Chemical Carcinogenesis (TOX 875), Developmental Biology (CBA 918, 928). A different course can be substituted with permission of the CRGP Graduate Committee Chair and the student's Supervisory Committee. Two electives are required.

**Q. *What are the requirements for graduation?***

A. A graduate student must complete the required coursework (including Ethics training), complete the comprehensive exam, submit one first author paper, and prepare and defend a dissertation.

**Q. *Is a Masters Degree offered if a student does not wish to complete the program?***

A. The CRGP program is intended to be for training of Ph.D. students. The faculty recognizes, however, that circumstances may warrant a student's leaving the program prior to completion of the requirements for the Ph.D. One reason for premature termination might be a change in the student's educational plans. The student may qualify for a Masters degree provided that the following conditions have been met: (1) Completion of all didactic coursework, including the number of courses required by UNMC Graduate Studies. (2) Completion of a research project consistent with a Masters level of achievement. (3) Completion of a comprehensive examination, in accordance with UNMC Graduate Studies guidelines. (4) Completion of a Masters thesis. (5) Concurrence of the mentor and the student's advisory committee. (6) Concurrence of the CRGP Graduate Committee. Other requirements of the UNMC Graduate Studies program, such as Responsible Conduct in Research, must also be met.

# Rotations and Advisor Choice Questions

**Q. *What is the purpose of doing research rotations?***

A. Research rotations help students explore various approaches to ~~doing~~ cancer research and to choose an advisor for their dissertation work. Choosing an advisor is one of the most important decisions a graduate student will make. An advisor is responsible for overseeing a student's research and providing guidance and recommendations that are critical for his/her scientific career. Thus an amiable student/advisor relationship is crucial for a successful graduate career. With that in mind, both research interests and personal interaction must be considered when choosing a lab.

**Q. *How do I decide in which laboratories to do research rotations?***

A. The best way to choose research rotations is to peruse the research interests of CRGP faculty members, meet with potential mentors, and then choose a lab that is doing research that interests you. The following website contains a list of CRGP faculty and links to their research descriptions:  
<http://www.unmc.edu/Eppley/crgpfaculty.htm>

A new student does not have to choose all three rotations prior to beginning the program. In fact, it is often advantageous to delay choosing rotations 2 and 3 until you become more familiar with the CRGP and its faculty. In most years, the CRGP Graduate Advisor organizes a presentation to the new students by faculty interested in hosting rotation students. Each faculty member presents the basic focus of his/her lab, then outlines potential research projects.

**Q. *How many research rotations are required?***

A. Three, 5-8 week research rotations are recommended. Two rotations are the minimum, and only by permission of the CRGP Graduate Advisor. If needed to produce a good match between student and advisor, a fourth rotation can be arranged.

# Supervisory Committee Questions and Answers

**Q. *What is a supervisory committee?***

A. The student's mentor plus three or four additional faculty comprise the committee. One non-CRGP faculty with appropriate expertise may be included on the committee. The supervisory committee oversees the student's course of study, the comprehensive exam, the research project, and the dissertation defense. This committee is an important resource for the student's education and training.

**Q. *When and how do I set up my supervisory committee?***

A. After choosing an advisor, each graduate student should consult with his/her advisor to choose the faculty members to serve on your committee. You are expected to establish your Supervisory Committees by the time you have been in the UNMC graduate program for one full year. Once a committee is chosen, the "Recommendation for Appointment of a Supervisory Committee" form must be filled out and submitted to the Graduate Studies Office for final approval by the Dean of Graduate Studies. CRGp students are expected to establish their supervisory committee by the time they have been in the graduate program for one full year.

Your first committee meeting should be held ideally as soon as the Supervisory Committee is formed. Graduate students and committee members often find it useful to hold committee meetings following or near your annual research seminar.

**Q. *If one of my supervisory committee members leaves UNMC, can he/she continue to serve on my committee?***

A. Yes, if you and the other committee members agree. They may serve on your committee via phone and correspondence. The individual must be physically present at your defense to sign your dissertation. Additionally, they must retain some sort of faculty appointment at UNMC. The Graduate Studies office can advise on this process.

**Q. *What happens if one of my committee members must resign from my committee?***

A. A minimum of four committee members must be on your committee. If this criterion is met with the remaining committee then you must only notify the Dean of Graduate Studies, in writing, of the resignation. The addition of another committee member is necessary if the aforementioned criterion is no longer met. The CRGP graduate committee and the Dean of Graduate Studies must approve the new committee member.

**Q. *How often must my supervisory committee meet?***

A. Graduate Student Bulletin indicates that meetings are to be held twice per year. Additional meetings may be scheduled on an "as needed" basis.

**Q. *How should I prepare for my supervisory committee meeting?***

- A.
- ⇒ Arrange the meeting time and location: This should be accomplished several weeks in advance since it can be difficult to find a convenient time for everyone. Your administrative assistant should be able to help you schedule a room for the meeting.
  - ⇒ Documents: Provide an updated research description. Brief research proposals from fellowship applications or your portfolios are often ideal for this. Send this information and any accessory documents (i.e. current C.V., meeting agenda, etc.) to your committee members several days before the meeting.
  - ⇒ You may wish to prepare a presentation of your new work (and sufficient background information) for your committee members so they are clear as to where your research stands. In the case where the meeting occurs soon after the student's research seminar, it may be useful

to provide a printout of the slides used for the seminar.

- ⇒ Paperwork: Prior to your first committee meeting you will need to fill out the “Report of the Supervisory Committee on Program of Studies for the Ph. D. Degree” form. You can get this form in the Graduate Studies Office. This form will need to be approved by your committee and submitted to the Graduate Office. Any subsequent changes in the Program of Studies must be submitted in writing by the committee chair to the Graduate Office.

**Q.** *After my committee meeting, is there an official report that must be filed?*

**A.** The results of each meeting will be summarized in written form and copies provided to the student, the committee members, the CRGP administrator (for the student’s file), and to the Graduate Studies office. This task is often accomplished by the Chair of the Supervisory Committee.

# CRGP Policy on Student Training Activities (Work Policy)

Research training is considered full-time, year-round employment for full-time students in the Cancer Research Graduate Program and in its predecessor, the Cancer Research Training Program. The student's research and academic training take priority, and outside activities are not to interfere or reduce effort significantly.

In some cases, activities outside the laboratory or classroom may benefit the student's training. For example, to gain teaching experience, a student might provide a few lectures in a course or tutor a few hours per week. The major goal of these activities must be for training purposes, not for extra remuneration. It is essential that any such activities be performed only with the prior knowledge and consent of the student's research mentor. The student must also make arrangements to make up any time lost from the laboratory or classroom.

It is not permissible for a full-time student to spend significant time outside the laboratory or classroom primarily for monetary compensation. Thus, teaching an entire course primarily for pay, especially a course which meets during regular business hours, is not allowed.

Students should also be aware of the UNMC Graduate Studies policies, as specified in the Graduate Studies Bulletin:

“Graduate students holding major fellowships or traineeships are expected to be enrolled in a full program of studies and are not to engage in other remunerative employment without permission of the Dean for Graduate Studies.”

Note that the Graduate Studies policy includes students holding extramural fellowships, UNMC Graduate Studies fellowships or traineeships, and students supported by training grant funds. Since many CRGP/CRTF students are included in one or more of these categories at some point, it is vital that the students and faculty be aware of these policies.

# Useful Websites

Ph. D. Forms: [http://app1.unmc.edu/gradstudies/index.cfm?webtype=graphics&L2\\_ID=65&L1\\_ID=62&CONREF=38](http://app1.unmc.edu/gradstudies/index.cfm?webtype=graphics&L2_ID=65&L1_ID=62&CONREF=38)

UNMC student website: [UNMC student website](#)

NIH Grant tips: [http://grants.nih.gov/grants/grant\\_tips.htm](http://grants.nih.gov/grants/grant_tips.htm)

Graduate Studies Home Page: [http://app1.unmc.edu/gradstudies/index.cfm?webtype=graphics&L1\\_ID=1&CONREF=9](http://app1.unmc.edu/gradstudies/index.cfm?webtype=graphics&L1_ID=1&CONREF=9)

Extramural Fellowships:

Howard Hughes <http://www.hhmi.org/grants/individuals/>

National Science Foundation <http://www.ehr.nsf.gov/dge/programs/grf/>

Department of Defense <http://www.asee.org/resources/fellowships/ndseg/index.cfm>