



# 2020-2021 Student and Faculty Handbook

## Graduate Program in Neuroscience

University of Mississippi Medical Center  
Jackson, MS 39216

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# I. INTRODUCTION

## Welcome to the Graduate Program in Neuroscience

The Program in Neuroscience is an interdepartmental PhD degree program with collaborating faculty from both basic and clinical departments at the University of Mississippi Medical Center. The objectives for the Program in Neuroscience are to educate and train individuals to become independent research investigators, teachers, and mentors with a broad understanding of the neurosciences and focused training within a subset of the areas of study that comprise neuroscience.

The purpose of this handbook is to clearly outline the requirements that must be completed during the course of PhD studies. In addition, this handbook outlines the expectations and responsibilities of students, mentors, and committee members, and describes the curriculum and the program governance structure.

This handbook was a result of the collective effort of the Executive Committee of the Graduate Program in Neuroscience, and we thank the past and present members of that committee who were involved.

As always, please feel free to contact us if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Douglas Vetter, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor  
Departments of Neurobiology & Anatomical Sciences, and  
Otolaryngology & Communicative Sciences  
Director, Graduate Program in Neuroscience

## II. DEGREE REQUIREMENTS

### A. SUMMARY

The Program in Neuroscience (PIN) is a course of study leading to a PhD degree. It is an interdepartmental degree program with collaborating faculty from both basic and clinical departments at the University of Mississippi Medical Center. The objectives for the Program in Neuroscience are to educate and train individuals to become independent research investigators, teachers, and mentors with a broad understanding of the neurosciences as well as focused training within a subset of the areas of study comprising neuroscience. These objectives apply whether the individual's ultimate career goal is to work in academic, government, industrial, or administrative settings. To receive the doctoral degree, the student must demonstrate evidence of proficiency and distinctive attainment in the neurosciences and a recognized ability for independent investigation as presented in a dissertation based upon original research. The following minimal requirements must be fulfilled to achieve the PhD degree in Neuroscience.

**Core Courses.** During the first year of study, students are required to take: Foundations in Neuroscience (NSCI 701), an intensive overview of neuroscience coupled with analysis of relevant primary literature; Fundamental Biochemistry (BIOC 704), a graduate-level general biochemistry course; Statistics (NSCI 710), a tutorial focusing on common statistical approaches used in neuroscience research, and Special Topics in Neuroscience course (NSCI 708) focusing on current issues of interest in neuroscience. Students also engage in a series of up to six 4-5 week surveys of different research laboratories affiliated with the Program (NSCI 790). During the second year of study, students engage in intensive Senior Laboratory Rotations (NSCI 791) which are typically conducted in the students' planned dissertation laboratories. Throughout their years of study, students also engage in professional skills development with courses in Neuroscience Journal Club (NSCI 720; years 1 – 4), Scientific Writing (NSCI 721; year 2), Responsible Conduct in Research (ID 709; year 1), and Professional Skills (ID 714; year 3).

**Requirements for Dissertation Candidacy.** In addition to the Core Courses described above, students must successfully pass a Qualifying Examination consisting of developing and defending a research proposal selected from 5-10 topics submitted by PIN faculty. This is completed in the summer between the second and third years. Successful completion is required for admission to candidacy status.

**Additional Graduation Requirements.** Students are required to have the results of their research accepted for publication prior to awarding of the degree. This manuscript must meet the publication requirements of the Graduate School; that is, the student

must be listed as the sole first author on at least one publication reporting research findings (not a review article) in a national or international peer-reviewed journal.

## **B. SCHOLASTIC REQUIREMENTS, PROBATION AND DISMISSAL**

**Scholastic Requirements.** In order to be in Good Academic Standing, a PhD student must maintain 1) a grade point average (GPA) of 3.0 or higher based on a four-point grading scale or 2) an 80% weighted numerical average. In addition, Program students must have attained a 90% or above at the end of the Foundations in Neuroscience (NSCI 701) course (i.e. Spring semester).

Under such a scale, a grade of “A” is assessed 4 points, a “B” 3 points, a “C” 2 points, and an “F” 0 points. Note the absence of the undergraduate “D” grade. A grade of “C” is (marginally) acceptable for graduate credit, but an overall GPA of  $\geq 3.0$  must be maintained. A grade of “F” is not acceptable for graduate credit but is included in the calculation of the student’s GPA. If a student receives an “F” in a course, the course must be re-taken. A course may be repeated only if recommended by the Program Director and Course Director. When a course is repeated, the second grade will be used in determining the student’s overall weighted average; however, the first grade will remain on the transcript. A course may be repeated only once.

Certain courses are Pass/Fail. A “P” indicates that a student has received graduate credit but has been assigned no point grade in the course. Courses that are graded in this way include special topics (NSCI 708), the statistics tutorial (NSCI 710), the journal club (NSCI 720), writing course (NSCI 721) and rotation survey course (NSCI 790). A grade of “F” requires retaking the course if the Program and Course Director so recommend.

**Probation.** If at any time during an academic year the progress of a student is considered unsatisfactory, the student may be placed on academic probation or dismissed from the program. A student whose GPA falls below 3.0 or an 80% weighted numerical average after the first year will be placed on academic probation and have 3 continuous semesters to raise their GPA to an acceptable level. Failure to do so will result in dismissal.

**Dismissal.** Students may be dismissed for unsatisfactory academic performance, failure to pass qualifying examinations, breaches of scientific integrity (e.g., plagiarism, falsification of data, etc.), or personnel issues (e.g., harassment). Dismissal of a student from the Program and the Graduate School is initiated by the Program Director and approved by the vote of the Program Executive Committee. A recommendation for dismissal is then submitted in writing to the Dean of the Graduate School (Dr. Joey Granger). Following his approval, Dr. Granger will notify the student in writing of the intention to dismiss. An appeals process is in place and available to the student.

### III. PROGRAM RESPONSIBILITIES

#### A. RESPONSIBILITIES OF STUDENTS AND MENTORS

Doctoral training is a significant investment of time and effort for both the student and the research mentor. A clear understanding of the respective responsibilities for the student and research mentor optimizes the working relationship over the course of the training period and helps provide structure for the training plan. The best training experience, for both the student and the research mentor, is one in which both parties understand and meet the key expectations for their roles.

##### **Responsibilities of the Student:**

- The student is expected to devote a minimum of 40 hours per week to work towards the attainment of the degree for the duration of the training period.
- The student will be responsible for learning and adhering to the program requirements for the degree as outlined in this Handbook and to the requirements set by the School of Graduate Studies in Health Sciences (SGSHS) as outlined in the Annual Bulletin.
- The student will work closely with the research mentor and their Advisory Committee to develop a dissertation project.
- All third year students and above will present abstracts at SGSHS Research Day.
- The student will exhibit scholarly initiative in the gathering and exhaustive review of scientific literature pertinent to dissertation research.
- The student will adhere to the expectations communicated by the mentor for laboratory work, including experimental protocols, data management, daily schedules, and time frames for the completion of work.
- The student will be prompt for all meetings and will respond to communications (email and other) in a timely manner.
- The student will alert the mentor and Education Coordinator of vacation requests well in advance and adhere to the Graduate School's regulations for extended leave-time requests.
- The student will adhere to the professional and ethical research guidelines set by the University and National and International agencies and as outlined in course ID 709.
- The student will acknowledge the contributions of co-workers when presenting research findings.
- The student will respect co-workers in the laboratory and make every effort to resolve conflicts while maintaining professional working relationships.
- The student will take responsibility for promptly communicating concerns and needs to the mentor throughout the training period.
- The student will discuss his/her Individual Development Plan (IDP) with their mentor throughout the training period.
- The student will present abstracts at one or more national conferences in each post-candidacy year and will optimize the value of the time spent at the

conference by attending talks, viewing posters, and pursuing networking opportunities.

- The student will write first-author papers in a timely manner upon the completion of studies.
- All formal presentations, manuscripts, and documents related to their training and dissertation are expected to be made using the English language. If the primary language of the student is not English, or the student is not fully bilingual, the student, with the advice of the mentor and PIN as necessary, will ensure that they are proficient enough to produce clear, acceptable documents and presentations in English.
- **The COVID-19 pandemic may require the student to be vigilant in keeping abreast of the fluid state of health requirements. Students are required to adhere to all policies enacted by UMMC, SGSHS, and PIN. Further, COVID-19 restrictions related to travel and group gatherings may limit one's ability to adhere to some of the above routine expectations. Where questions arise, one may contact Faculty and/or the Program Director for more guidance.**

### **Responsibilities of the Mentor to the Student:**

- The mentor will ensure that the student receives ample training for all laboratory tasks before allowing the student to work independently on those tasks.
- The mentor will clearly communicate expectations for laboratory work, including experimental protocols, data management, daily schedules, and time frames for the completion of work.
- The mentor will provide the scientific guidance and the resources needed to complete the student's dissertation research.
- The mentor will help the student form an advisory committee in a timely manner.
- The mentor will allot time for structured, regular meetings with the student to evaluate the student's progress and discuss topics related to the student's research and professional development.
- The mentor will discuss the student's IDP at any time the student requests, but at least once per year.
- The mentor will be responsible for stipend and research support for the student consistent with the policy described below (Stipend Support)
- The mentor will cover the costs of abstract submission, registration, and travel/housing accommodations for *at least* one national scientific conference for each year in the post-candidacy period. Institutional sources can be used to defray these costs.
- The mentor will create networking opportunities for the student (e.g., by facilitating interactions with research colleagues at scientific conferences).
- The mentor will train the student to write grants and scientific manuscripts.
- The mentor will provide opportunities for the student to submit multiple first-author manuscripts.
- At the outset of each project, the mentor will lead a discussion with the student and other participants in the study to explicitly outline the scientific roles of each participant and the order of authorship for the resulting publication(s). Changes

in the arrangement over the course of the study period will be made through group discussion.

- The mentor will provide guidance in identifying and applying for post-graduate positions.
- The mentor will support the student's career advancement by serving as a professional reference after the completion of the doctoral degree.

### **Responsibilities of Mentors to the Program in Neuroscience:**

Once a faculty member accepts a student in the laboratory, they commit to the following responsibilities:

- Provide for student's stipend starting summer of G3 and throughout the entire remaining period of dissertation research (even if it extends into G6).
- Be willing to teach at least 6 hours per year in courses of the Program in Neuroscience.
- Serve on committees of the Program in Neuroscience when requested.
- Serve as a role model for the Program in Neuroscience students. This includes attending the research seminars of external speakers and all Program in Neuroscience student seminars in the Seminar series of the department of Neurobiology & Anatomical Sciences.

## **B. THE STUDENT ACADEMIC PROGRESS REPORT**

Twice yearly at the end of semester, the student is expected to meet with the Program Director. Prior to that meeting, the student will fill out an Academic Progress Report and send it to the Educational Coordinator. This form is designed in such a way that allows the student to simply continue adding relevant information as is necessary. Forms can be obtained from the Educational Coordinator. As new entries are made, please highlight these so that the Director can quickly ascertain what is new. A meeting with the Program Director will be made with the help of the Educational Coordinator. First year students, who will not yet have a research mentor, will meet with the Program Director. Once a research lab is identified (typically by the Fall of the second year), the student will first gain their mentor's signature on the form before submitting it. The mentor is also encouraged, although not required, to attend the meeting with the Program Director. This process is time sensitive, so timely responses to initial requests for submission of reports and scheduling of meetings is expected.

## **C. STIPEND SUPPORT**

The Program is committed to providing stipend support for all full-time graduate students during the five years of their training. The Graduate School provides stipend support for 2 years and 10 months for students, usually during the first three years of their training; whereas for the remaining period, students are supported by funds provided by research grants, training grants, or departmental funds. When a faculty

member agrees to serve as advisor for a student, they are doing so with the explicit expectation and commitment of providing all stipend support for that student beyond the time of support offered by the Graduate School. If there is a gap or shortfall in the advisor's funding, the first line of backup is support from the department of the faculty member's primary appointment. If the department cannot provide that support, then the Program and Graduate School will attempt to do so, but there is no guarantee of that funding. Thus, it is imperative that students choose advisors with sufficient funds available to ensure that they will be able to maintain stipend support, as well as have access to research resources, for the entire time of their training.

## **IV. PROGRAM EXPECTATIONS**

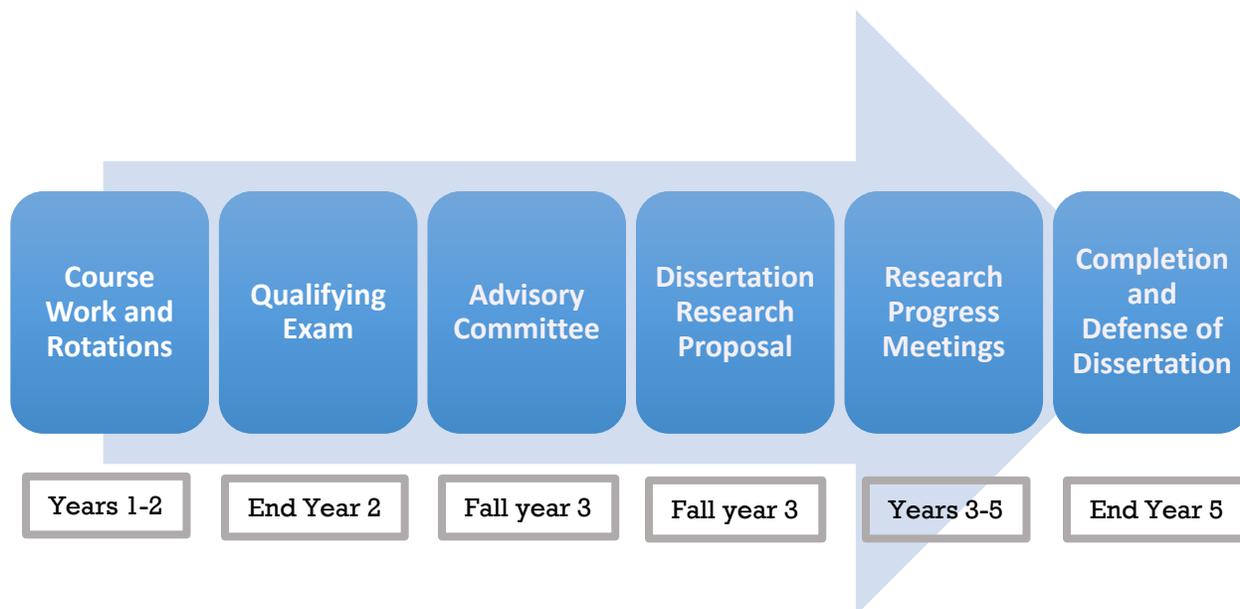
### **A. ADDITIONAL PROGRAM EXPECTATIONS**

- Attend Seminar Series
  - Guest speakers and Student seminars
  - Read enough about the topic to follow the talk & formulate questions
  - Explain any absences to the seminar organizer.
- Attend Research Days
  - SGSHS (Fall)
  - Neuroscience (Spring)
- Be an active participant in PIN:
  - Luncheons with seminar speakers and faculty applicants (mandatory for G1 through G3; strongly encouraged for G4 and G5)
  - Volunteer during recruitment events
  - Volunteer for Brain Awareness and SGSHS outreach events
  - Be ready to serve as the student representative on the PIN Executive Committee
- Support your fellow students
  - Attend all student presentations in NSCI 791 (each semester)
  - Take an active interest in others' work
- Professional behavior

- Respond timely to emails and other pertinent official communications
- Meet deadlines

*Mentors should strongly encourage these expectations*

## B. COURSE OF STUDY OVERVIEW



## V. COURSEWORK AND ROTATIONS

### A. COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

**NSCI 701. Foundations in Neuroscience.** This course provides a thorough overview of fundamental neuroscience over two semesters spanning ~90 two-hour lectures. It systematically covers neuroscience in an integrated fashion covering the following main topics: 1) Neuroanatomy and Cellular Neurobiology; 2) Molecular/Structural Biology of Ion Channels, Electrophysiology, and Neural Potentials; 3) The Synapse; 4) Motor Systems; 5) Sensory Systems; 6) Developmental Neurobiology; 7) Regulatory Systems; 8) Neural Networks and Connectomics; 9) Neuropharmacology; and 10) Neurobiology of Brain Disorders. The course also presents ~10 “technical lectures” that cover techniques and procedures commonly used in neuroscience research, when and why they are used, the assumptions made in implementing the techniques, and final analyses made possible by the techniques. Finally, lab meetings include the dissection of the human brain. The course includes both didactic and primary literature-based content that is actively discussed during the lectures. It is the first required course in the Program in Neuroscience. (spanning both the Fall and Spring semesters).

**NSCI 708. Special Topics in Neuroscience.** A small group, faculty-led discussion course on selected topics in neuroscience offered by groups of faculty. Students discuss primary literature with the faculty (Summer semester).

**NSCI 710. Tutorials in Neuroscience.** Tutorials cover specialized topics in neuroscience in depth, in a small group setting. Courses consist of intensive, directed reading and discussion and is intended to provide students with the opportunity to study specialized topics in neuroscience with faculty experts in that area. The objective for this course in this academic year is to study experimental design, scientific rigor, and use of biostatistical methods in neuroscience (Spring semester).

**NSCI 720. Neuroscience Journal Club.** A review of significant issues in neuroscience including literature review and discussion of recent data and news. Individual students prepare, orally present, and lead discussions on chosen papers. (Fall and Spring semesters)

**NSCI 721. Scientific Writing in Neuroscience.** An introduction to scientific writing that includes preparation of abstracts for scientific meetings, presentations at meetings, preparation of a scientific manuscript for publication and, finally, preparing a grant proposal for extramural funding in the NIH style. (Fall and Spring semesters)

## **B. LABORATORY ROTATIONS**

Students in the Program in Neuroscience are required to take two laboratory rotation courses. In their first year, students enroll in NSCI 790 – Neuroscience Laboratory Survey; while in their second year, they enroll in NSCI 791 – Senior Laboratory Rotations. Each course has specific objectives.

**NSCI 790. Neuroscience Laboratory Survey.** This course is comprised of 4-5 week rotations in up to six active research laboratories in the Program in Neuroscience. A minimum of 15 hours/week is expected to be spent in the chosen laboratory. The goal of these rotations is to expose the student to the breadth of research occurring in the Program in Neuroscience. Additionally, exposure to the approaches and culture of multiple laboratories should allow for the student to make an informed choice when selecting a dissertation mentor and advisory committee members. (Fall and Spring semesters)

**NSCI 791. Senior Laboratory Rotations.** These are intensive laboratory rotations intended for students to begin research in their planned dissertation laboratories. Thus, all three rotations can be within the same laboratory. However, rotations may also be conducted in up to three different laboratories depending on the student's training needs and interests. 20-40 hours/week are expected to be spent in the chosen laboratory depending on the semester. (Summer, Fall and Spring semesters)

## C. DISSERTATION RESEARCH

Following successful passing of the Qualifying exam (see below), students will spend up to 3 years on their dissertation research:

**NSCI 798. Dissertation Research in Neuroscience.** (Summer, Fall and Spring semesters)

## D. CURRICULUM OVERVIEW

YEAR 1					
		FALL		SPRING	
		Course	Credits	Course	Credits
		NSCI 701 Foundations in Neuroscience	7	NSCI 701 Foundations in Neuroscience	6
		CMB 704 Fundamental Biochemistry	7	ID 709 Responsible Conduct of Research	1
				NSCI 710 Statistics	1
		NSCI 720 Journal Club	1	NSCI 720 Journal Club	1
		NSCI 790 Laboratory Rotation Surveys	3	NSCI 790 Laboratory Rotation Surveys	3
		TOTAL	17	TOTAL	12

YEAR 2					
SUMMER		FALL		SPRING	
Course	Credits	Course	Credits	Course	Credits
NSCI 708 Special Topics in Neuroscience	3	NSCI 721A Scientific Writing in Neuroscience	3	NSCI 721B Scientific Writing in Neuroscience	3
		NSCI 720 Journal Club	1	NSCI 720 Journal Club	1

NSCI 791 Senior Laboratory Rotation	9	NSCI 791 Senior Laboratory Rotation	6	NSCI 791 Senior Laboratory Rotation	6
<b>TOTAL</b>	12	<b>TOTAL</b>	10	<b>TOTAL</b>	10

<b>YEAR 3</b>					
<b>SUMMER</b>		<b>FALL</b>		<b>SPRING</b>	
<b>Course</b>	Credits	<b>Course</b>	Credits	<b>Course</b>	Credits
<b>Qualifying Exam</b>	N/A			ID 714 Professional Skills	3
		NSCI 720 Journal Club	1	NSCI 720 Journal Club	1
NSCI 791 Senior Laboratory Rotation	9	NSCI 798 Dissertation Research	1	NSCI 798 Dissertation Research	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	9	<b>TOTAL</b>	2	<b>TOTAL</b>	5

<b>YEAR 4</b>					
<b>SUMMER</b>		<b>FALL</b>		<b>SPRING</b>	
<b>Course</b>	Credits	<b>Course</b>	Credits	<b>Course</b>	Credits
<i><b>Elective:</b> NSCI 708 Special Topics in Neuroscience</i>	3	<i><b>Elective: ID</b> 715 Teaching Skills (Recommended for Year 4; also possible Year 3)</i>	3	<i><b>Elective: ID</b> 716 Teaching Skills (Recommended for Year 4; also possible Year 3)</i>	3
		NSCI 720 Journal Club	1	NSCI 720 Journal Club	1
NSCI 798 Dissertation Research	1	NSCI 798 Dissertation Research	1	NSCI 798 Dissertation Research	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	1	<b>TOTAL</b>	2	<b>TOTAL</b>	2

<b>YEAR 5</b>					
<b>SUMMER</b>		<b>FALL</b>		<b>SPRING</b>	
<b>Course</b>	Credits	<b>Course</b>	Credits	<b>Course</b>	Credits

NSCI 798 Dissertation Research	1	NSCI 798 Dissertation Research	1	NSCI 798 Dissertation Research	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	1	<b>TOTAL</b>	1	<b>TOTAL</b>	1

## VI. QUALIFYING EXAM

### A. GENERAL SUMMARY

**Goal of the Qualifying Examination:** To determine whether the student is ready to be admitted to doctoral candidacy and undertake PhD dissertation research. Specific skills tested include the ability to:

- Identify and incorporate pertinent primary research literature into a plan for novel neuroscience research.
- Identify key questions/gaps in knowledge in the context of the chosen topic.
- Formulate hypotheses and develop experiments to test/support them.
- Design and describe positive and negative controls in a research plan, and the statistical evaluations necessary to interpret results from the proposed experiments.
- Describe the entire range of potential results, indicate how each type of result would be interpreted, identify key follow-up steps, and design alternative approaches should the first line of research falter.

**General Procedure:** The Qualifying Examination is intended to be an independent, individual examination of a student's readiness to begin the next phase of graduate study as a doctoral candidate developing, conducting and writing dissertation research. The sum of each student's experiences in classes, laboratories and independent reading will have contributed to the preparedness for the examination.

Given the importance of the Qualifying Examination to a student's progression, **students absolutely may not engage in any laboratory work during the time between when the question is selected and the time the oral examination is fully concluded (including any time required for remediation)**. Student advisors will be notified by the PIN of this expectation. If a student has an ongoing experiment that will require attention during that time, the advisor and the student are expected to work together to find another way of tending the experiment without the student.

#### Qualifying Examination Committee:

**PhD candidates:** QE committees consist of three members **plus** one or both Qualifying Exam Committee co-chairs. One member is the faculty whose question is picked by the student, one member is faculty appointed by the co-chairs who brings expertise to numerous aspects of the topic covered by the

question and/or relevant research design, and one member may be requested by the student. The student's mentor is ineligible as an examiner. The QE Chair does not participate by asking questions of the student. The QE Chair runs the discussion/assessment period of exam following the end of the student's presentation and oral exam and conveys to the student the final decision of the QE committee and announces the method of remediation if any is required.

**MD/PhD candidates:** The composition of the Examination Committee in this case follows that of the PhD candidates except that all three of the members are chosen by the Qualifying Exam Chairs (i.e., the MD/PhD student is submitting their F30/research proposal for review and not choosing a faculty-submitted question). The student's mentor or any other faculty collaborator on the grant application are ineligible as examiners.

### **Timeline for the Qualifying Exam:**

**PhD candidates:** Beginning in mid-May (generally 1-2 weeks following the end of the Spring semester of year 2), students will receive a list of exam questions (with faculty writing the question identified). Students will have one week to decide on which question to answer. Students have four weeks to produce their response to the exam question. Final oral exam is anticipated during late June.

**MD/PhD candidates:** Beginning in the summer prior to G1 and continuing in the Fall semester of G1, the candidate and research mentor will develop an F30 application to be submitted to NIH. This document also will serve as the candidate's dissertation proposal as well as the written portion of the Qualifying Exam. The normal timeline for MD/PhD candidates is accelerated and the F30 application is usually submitted for the December or April deadlines, making the QE in the spring of G1.

## **B. Written Qualifying Examination**

A student may not choose a Qualifying Examination question that is submitted by their dissertation mentor or a question that is closely related to the student's dissertation research. The QE Chair will make this determination in consultation with the PIN Executive Committee if necessary. Once a Qualifying Examination question is chosen and the choice is submitted to the PIN Office and/or QE co-chairs, it is to be worked on by each student with no help from others, including other students, faculty, post-docs or outside contacts.

### **Format for the Written Qualifying Exam:**

**PhD candidates:** The Qualifying Examination response is written following a typical NIH small grant proposal style. It should be no more than 7 pages long (1

page Specific Aims + 6 pages Research Strategy). It should be single spaced, 11 point Arial, 0.5 inch margins. It should also include a Bibliography (any standard format is acceptable) that does not count towards the 7 page limit. The Research Strategy section should include sections on 1) Significance, 2) Innovation, and 3) Approach.

**MD/PhD candidates:** The candidate will submit select sections of their F30 application [Specific Aims (1 page), Research Strategy (6 pages), Literature Cited], prepared according to NIH guidelines.

### C. Oral Qualifying Examination

During the oral portion of the exam, the student briefly presents their written proposal and then fields questions from the QE Committee. Allowing another colleague (student, faculty, etc.) to read the written proposal or to rehearse the student for the oral exam is NOT PERMITTED. The QE committee will be considering whether a student can reason through problems, is cognizant of potential problems that may arise, is well informed as to the methods employed in the research proposal and has a reasonable level of understanding of the neuroscience underlying the research.

**Format for the Oral Qualifying Exam:** Students deliver a 10-15 minute concise overview presentation of the research proposal presented as their Written QE. At the conclusion of the presentation, QE committee members ask questions about the experiments proposed and the fundamental neuroscience. Students should anticipate that such questions can include basic neuroscience tenets upon which the proposal is based, statistical analysis, etc. It is expected that a typical oral exam will last 60-90 minutes.

### D. Outcomes of the Qualifying Examination

Three outcomes are possible for the Qualifying Examination.

- a. **Pass:** No further steps are needed. Within a week of the oral exam, students will receive a short synopsis of strengths and weaknesses that the exam committee noted for your own information and for your official file.
- b. **Remediate:** Students may be asked to rewrite part or the entire proposal, or to take a second oral exam, or both. All additional steps needed to "pass" must be completed within 7 days of the initial oral exam. Students will receive a written summary of the requested changes from the QE chair on the same day as your oral exam.
- c. **Fail:** If the exam committee does not believe that the student can remedy the problems identified during the oral exam within 7 days, the student will fail the Qualifying Examination. **It is important to note that students who are otherwise in good academic standing, will NOT be terminated from the Program for not passing the Qualifying Examination on the first try.** If a

student does not pass the Qualifying Examination, the Program Director, in consultation with the Examination Committee and the Executive Committee, will determine what steps must be taken before the student will be permitted to take the Qualifying Examination again and will set the date of a second exam. Retaking the Qualifying Examination, however, must occur before the end of the third year in the Program.

## **VII. ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

All students must form an advisory committee within six weeks of passing the Qualifying Exam, i.e. the start of Candidacy. Members of the advisory committee will have the appropriate expertise to help students successfully navigate their dissertation research projects, provide professional development advice, and should be viewed as a valuable resource. Members can be consulted both informally, as well as during the formal advisory committee meetings.

### **A. COMPOSITION OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

The committee consists of the research mentor (Chair of the Advisory Committee), 2 (or more) faculty members of the Graduate Program in Neuroscience, and 1 (or more) graduate faculty from outside the Graduate Program in Neuroscience. The outside member can be graduate faculty at UMMC (in another graduate program) or at a different university.

Committee members are selected by the student and the mentor, subject to approval by the Program Director and Associate Director. Students and research mentors will submit the names and short descriptions of the expertise of the proposed advisory committee member relevant to the dissertation research to the Education Coordinator of the Program in Neuroscience for approval by the Program. Upon program approval, the student will submit the form to the Education Coordinator for final approval by the Graduate School. If a proposed member is from outside of UMMC, a CV must be submitted with the proposal and the form.

Executive Committee Representative: In addition to the above-mentioned members, a member of the Executive Committee of the Graduate Program in Neuroscience will be assigned by the Program Director to serve on the Advisory Committee. In addition to providing research and professional development advice, this member will report to the Executive Committee on the student's progress and oversee the overall quality of the dissertation in relation to the Program's standards and requirements. In the case of a mentor also sitting on the Executive Committee, the mentor may not serve as the Executive Committee representative on their student's advisory committee. The Executive Committee member also will chair the Dissertation Defense.

## **B. ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETINGS**

Advisory Committee meetings take place at least once every 6 months for PhD students and at least once every 3 months for MD/PhD students. The first meeting takes place before the end of the fall term of the third year for PhD students and before the end of the fall term for the first year for MD/PhD students. Each meeting must be scheduled with the aid of the PIN Education Coordinator and dates of the meetings must be recorded in the Student Progress form. Research Proposal or Progress Reports must be provided to the Advisory Committee 3 business days prior to the scheduled meeting.

## **C. RESPONSIBILITIES OF ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

Research Mentor's Responsibility: The mentor is responsible for making initial contact with potential advisory committee members to ask if they are willing to serve on the student's committee. Normally this will be done shortly after the student has passed the Qualifying Exam, but changes in the advisory committee composition may occur at different times during the degree. Research mentors also are responsible for helping to ensure that advisory meetings occur on time.

Student's Responsibility: The student is responsible for scheduling the advisory committee meetings and ensuring they are completed on time as per Program and SGSHS guidelines. The student will work closely with the PIN Education Coordinator to schedule the meetings. Students also are responsible for distributing the Research Proposal and Progress Reports to the committee members and the Education Coordinator in time for the meetings.

Graduate Program in Neuroscience Executive Committee (EC) Representative Responsibility: An EC representative is assigned to each advisory committee and can act both as Program representative and scientific advisor if expertise is appropriate. At their discretion, an EC member can call for additional committee meetings should they believe more frequent and additional meetings are warranted. The EC member reports student progress during the monthly EC meetings. Finally, the EC member can answer any questions regarding the research proposal or progress report format, program or SGSHS guidelines, and serves as the student's advocate.

## **VIII. RESEARCH PROPOSALS AND RESEARCH PROGRESS REPORTS**

### **A. GENERAL SUMMARY**

A Research Proposal (i.e., dissertation proposal) must be prepared by the student for the first advisory committee meeting which is to be scheduled before the end of the fall semester of the third year (or first year in the case of a MD/PhD student). When

scheduling this first advisory committee meeting, please note that it is expected that the research/dissertation proposal will be approved by the committee before the start of the subsequent spring semester (i.e., committee-required revisions must be made and the Dissertation Approval form signed by start of the spring semester). Thereafter, the student will prepare a Research Progress Report for each advisory committee meeting, to be held at least once every six months (or three months for MD/PhD students). Thus, the goal is to prepare the initial document (i.e. research proposal) for the first advisory committee meeting and then revise and update the document with changes and new information for subsequent advisory committee meetings (i.e. progress report). The progress report will therefore develop and grow as the student progresses through the program.

The Research Progress Report provides an update of the research and academic progress of the student and forms a starting point for discussion during the meeting. It also helps the student focus his/her thoughts and present the projects clearly and concisely. Progress Reports should be prepared by the student with feedback from the research mentor. The report must be provided to the members of the advisory committee and PIN Education Coordinator by email at least 3 business days prior to the meeting.

*What is included in the Research Proposal and Research Progress Report?*

A typical dissertation consists of multiple aims/objectives that are related to a central theme, hypothesis, or overall goal. These aims typically result in multiple dissertation chapters or publications (see dissertation format). Therefore, the aims may either be closely related and test a single hypothesis, or may only be loosely related, but center on an overall theme that can be very broad. Students will therefore include **all** of their research plans and progress during the PhD years in the research proposal and progress reports. It is acceptable for a student to have “side-projects” in collaboration with other trainees or staff in the mentor’s laboratory, and such projects may lead to co-authorships. Such side-projects are summarized during meetings with the advisory committee. All research progress and plans are included in the progress reports; however, the majority of the student’s time should be spent on the dissertation research.

*Format:*

The Research Proposal is similar in its content and outline to a F31 proposal. Thus, it will include a brief background, define the aims/objectives and hypotheses, and a brief description of the planned experiments with a summary of the methods (no details are required). This proposal is presented during the first Advisory Committee meeting for approval by the Committee.

The Research Progress Report is similar in its content and outline as the Research Proposal, but with updated results and plans.

There is no restriction to the length of the reports, but they typically consist of 4-6 concisely written pages. Figures are not required, but may be included. If included, figures should be in near publication quality and have legends. Drafts of manuscripts

can be attached to the progress reports to provide detailed information of completed projects and solicit feedback on the manuscript. These manuscripts will form chapters in the dissertation (see Dissertation Format).

*Overview of Student's Academic Activities:*

In addition to the research progress, the student will also inform the advisory committee about academic activities, including courses, conference attendance, publications, and professional development activities. This information will allow the advisory committee members to provide career advice as well as monitor academic progress. An updated Student Progress Form will be used for this; this is the same form used for the twice-annual meetings with the Program Director. The student will clearly highlight the new entries since last advisory committee. Students are encouraged to discuss their IDP with the advisory committee, but this is not required.

*Examples:*

Contact the PIN Education Coordinator to view examples of Research Proposals and Progress Reports.

***Timeline:***

**Meeting #1: Research Proposal** [approved before the end of the fall semester of third year (PhD) or first year (MD/PhD)]

*Background of Project* - Provides a description of key findings leading to the creation of the hypothesis to be tested. Includes relevant references if applicable.

*Specific Aims/Objectives* - Define the objectives to be pursued, the rationale for the objectives selected.

*Experimental Designs* – For each Aim/objective briefly describe the experimental designs and methods that will be employed for each objective.

*Dissertation Approval Form:* Make sure the Dissertation approval form is signed by all committee members.

**Meeting #2: Progress Report** (*within 3-6 months after Meeting #1*)

The student will update the Research Proposal and add Progress for each of the Aims/Objectives, by providing results, and/or status of the analysis (in progress, planned etc.). It is expected that research plans will change over the course of the dissertation research. Therefore, the student will clearly indicate which research plans are new and provide the rationale for these new plans, as well as reasons as to why a plan or objective is jettisoned.

*Results* - Indicate progress on each of the objectives outlined in the research proposal with a brief description of the results obtained. Figures with figure legends for data generated may be included.

*Discussion* - State the conclusions that can be made from the work accomplished to date and briefly explain how the results contribute to the overall problem to be studied ('Big Picture').

*Manuscripts in preparation or submitted and abstracts* may be appended as separate documents for consideration by the committee.

**All subsequent meetings:**

Update the Progress Report and clearly explain all planned experiments. Add the general outline of the chapters to be included in the dissertation, indicating the structure of each of the research chapters.

## **IX. DISSERTATION FORMAT**

### **A. OVERVIEW**

The dissertation format will follow the guidelines set by the SGSHS [([https://www.umc.edu/graduateschool/GraduateSchool\\_Home.html](https://www.umc.edu/graduateschool/GraduateSchool_Home.html)); click on "Current Students", and then "Forms" under "Documents, Forms and Policies"] which allows for two formats.

1. Article-style thesis/dissertation format, which is intended for doctoral students whose final, completed dissertation will consist of a number of manuscripts or published articles. This may include articles already published in, submitted to, or to be submitted to peer-reviewed journals. In addition, it may include data from studies conducted during the candidacy that are part of the dissertation but not yet included in manuscripts either submitted or in preparation.
2. Traditional style dissertation, which is intended for students whose dissertation consists of a single set of studies, or a single monograph.

The Program in Neuroscience expects that students will have multiple studies and publications deriving from their PhD dissertation. Accordingly, the Article-style dissertation format is recommended. Previously published articles to be included in the dissertation should be formatted according to the standard outlined by the Graduate School (see below)

## B. DISSERTATION OUTLINE

### *Dissertation Outline (Article-style format):*

- I. Title Page (see link above for examples)
- II. Signature Page
- III. Abstract
- IV. Dedication (optional)
- V. Acknowledgements (optional)
- VI. Table of Contents
- VII. List of Tables (see Note 1)
- VIII. List of Figures (see Note 1)
- IX. Introduction and Review of Literature (see Note 2)
  - a. Literature cited in Introduction and Literature Review (see Note 3)
- X. Research Chapters: Each chapter containing:
  - a. Title page including authors contribution statement (see Note 4)
  - b. Introduction (see Note 5)
  - c. Materials and Methods (see Note 6)
  - d. Results: (see Note 7)
  - e. Discussion (see Note 8)
  - f. Literature cited (see Note 3)
  - g. Figure captions
  - h. Tables and Figures
- XI. Overall Summary and Discussion (see Note 9)
  - a. Literature cited in Discussion (see Note 3)

### **Notes:**

1. Lists should be according to Chapter, using a 1.1,1.2...to n.1,n.2 format
2. This section will describe the overall hypothesis or question, the studies and sub-hypotheses or questions, and explain their significance. It will contain an extensive review of relevant background literature to describe the broader context and introduce main concepts and hypotheses or research questions.
3. All citations will be formatted identically throughout the dissertation, including Introduction and Literature Review, all chapters, and Summary and Discussion. Set your citations manager to use Journal of Neuroscience style for this section and throughout the dissertation.
4. Since manuscripts may contain multiple authors and include data not collected by the student, the contributions of each individual author will be stated on the title page of each research chapter.
5. The typical journal Introduction; usually a word limit set by the journal and not including a very broad literature review background.
6. Material and Methods: only for that particular chapter
7. Results: only for that particular chapter
8. Discussion: only for that particular chapter
9. In the overall Summary and Discussion, the student will describe how the studies fit together and test the overall hypothesis or address the overall question.

Future directions may be identified.

All formatting including fonts, margins, etc., must be consistent throughout the dissertation and adhere to SGSHS guidelines. Complete guidelines and formatting tips can be found on the SGSHS website (see link above).

It is the student's and research mentor's responsibility to strictly adhere to the formatting guidelines.

## **X. DISSERTATION DEFENSE/EXAM FORMAT**

### **A. PROCEDURE FOR DISSERTATION DEFENSE**

The student will present their dissertation research in a public, seminar-style setting. After a short period of questions from the public audience, the public portion of the defense is concluded. The student will be asked by the examiners to leave the room for a brief period of time. During this time, the examiners, comprised of the members of the advisory committee (VII.A, above), will share their impressions and determine the order of questioning.

The student is then invited back into the room and the exam begins. The exam will typically last for 1.5-2 hours, and consist of one or two rounds of questions from the examiners.

The Executive Committee member who serves as the Chair of the Dissertation Defense will take notes throughout the exam and keep track of the time.

After completion of the questioning, the student is again asked to leave the room, while the examiners reach their decision and compile recommendations.

Finally, the student is invited back into the room and the Chair will convey the exam committee's decision to the student in the presence of all examiners.

The research mentor will oversee any revisions required by the examiners.

## **XI. PROGRAM GOVERNANCE AND COMMITTEES**

### **A. OVERVIEW**

The Graduate Program in Neuroscience is an interdepartmental research training program whose activities are dependent on the voluntary participation of faculty from participating departments in model of shared governance. The following is a list of

current committees and administrative roles in Program:

## **B. PROGRAM STRUCTURE**

*UMMC Neuro Institute* – Along with the SGSHS, the Operating Board of the Neuro Institute is the oversight body for the Program and is comprised of the Chairs of the Departments of Neurobiology & Anatomical Sciences, Psychiatry & Human Behavior, Neurology, and Neurosurgery, as well as members of UMMC administration. The charge of this group includes budgetary approval and oversight, selection and review of the Program Director, and long-range programmatic planning, the latter in the context of the larger scale development of neuroscience research, education, and clinical services at UMMC.

*Director* – The Director is responsible for providing oversight for all aspects of the operation of the Graduate Program, the progress of students and all program activities. The Program Director reports to the Operating Board of the Neuro Institute and the Graduate School, chairs the Executive Committee, and works with the Associate Director and Executive Committee to develop the curriculum, oversee recruitment and admission of students, support the credentialing of faculty, and oversee other program events. The Director will serve as the primary program representative on the SGSHS Graduate Council and other committees as needed. The Director is appointed by the Operating Board of the Neuro Institute for a fixed term of 3 years.

*Associate Director* – The Associate Director has responsibility for all aspects of student recruitment and the annual admissions process, including the preparation of recruitment materials, organization of on-site and off-site recruitment events, the interview and selection process, and communications with applicants and faculty related to admissions. As noted above, the Associate Director serves as a member of the Executive Committee, and as Chair of a Recruitment and Admissions Subcommittee comprised of EC members and other PIN faculty. In addition, the Associate Director serves as an alternate representative for the Program on the SGSHS Graduate Council and other committees as needed. The Associate Director is appointed by the Operating Board of the Neuro Institute for a 3-year term.

*Executive Committee* – The Executive Committee (EC), chaired by the Director, will be responsible for operations of the program, including its curriculum, recruitment and admissions, student guidance, and mentoring and career development support. The EC is comprised of 5 elected faculty members and includes the Director and Associate Director. EC members are elected by majority vote of the faculty from a slate of candidates drawn from all current PIN faculty, which is reviewed and approved by the Operating Board of the Neuro Institute prior to the election. Subcommittees may be developed to assist the EC in its duties. The 5 faculty members are voting members of the EC. The EC also includes one non-voting student member, who is elected by majority vote of the Neuroscience graduate student body. The EC meets at least monthly; motions require a simple majority to carry, but changes in Program policies or

training goals must also be approved by the Operating Board of the Neuro Institute. Faculty members serve a 3-year term; the student member serves a 1-year term.

*Recruitment/Admissions Committee* – The Recruitment/Admissions Committee is chaired by the Associate Director and is responsible for reviewing application materials from prospective students, interviewing prospective students, participating in recruitment events, and providing recommendations for admission offers to the Executive committee. Members are invited to join by the Director and Associate Director and serve a 2-year term.

*Curriculum Committee* – The Curriculum Committee is chaired by the Director and provides oversight of the program curriculum. The Committee is responsible for evaluation and modification of existing courses, and developing new course offering/program activities to augment training in scientific knowledge, research skills, communication skills, professionalism and other core competencies. Members of the Curriculum Committee are invited to join by the Director, and typically consist of current course directors.

*Program Education Coordinator* – The Program Education Coordinator provides administrative support to students, Course Directors, Program Director, Associate Director, and Executive Committee, and assists in the preparation of periodic reports to the Operating Board of the Neuro Institute, SGSHS and other bodies.

## **XII. TEACHING**

### **A. TRAINING IN TEACHING**

Teaching skills are an essential core competency to be acquired by all graduate students. Therefore, it is recommended that student's elect to participate in the opportunities listed below. In addition, it is recommended that a student partake in teaching courses and opportunities in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> years in consultation with the research mentor and advisory committee.

#### *ID 715 and ID 716: Teachers in Training*

SGSHS has established a program for students to participate in a teaching practicum, in collaboration with the School of Health Related Professions as well as area community colleges and universities. The PhD student is mentored to provide lectures in the areas of self-identified expertise (i.e. neuroscience). The Teachers-in-Training Program allows participants to experience mentorship, observation, and teaching in an undergraduate classroom at neighboring institutions or universities. This opportunity offers selected participants the ability to gain an enhanced level of teaching experience, mentoring, and observation designed to increase professional development and preparation for a career in higher education. This is a chance for graduate students who are interested in teaching as a career to experience university teaching with a mentor-teacher.

The student will first register for ID 715, Teaching in Higher Education (3 hours credit) and meet once per week with a mentor to refine teaching technique and presentation materials. Participants receive instruction on the basics of learning styles, teaching philosophies, course development, and assessment in addition to teaching and learning techniques.

Students then register for ID 716, Teaching Practicum (1 hour credit). After the student receives his/her teaching assignment and teacher-mentor, the mentor will observe the student for one class period; provide feedback and guidance then do a formal evaluation culminating in a course grade.

### **XIII. LEAVE POLICIES**

All vacation/sick time requests should be approved by the mentor and reported to the Education Coordinator prior to the student taking leave time. Extended leave time requests also must be approved by the Program Director and SGSHS. Stipend payments and insurance coverage will continue while the Graduate Assistant-Stipend student is on approved sick, vacation, or parental leave. Sick, vacation, and parental leave days do not accrue from year to year.

#### **A. SICK LEAVE**

A Graduate Assistant-Stipend student may be granted up to 15 days of sick leave per calendar year or prorated based on the stipend start date as listed below:

- January – March--15 days of sick leave.
- April – June--12 days of sick leave.
- July – September--8 days of sick leave.
- October – December--4 days of sick leave.

#### **B. VACATION LEAVE AND HOLIDAYS**

A Graduate Assistant-Stipend student will receive stipend payment for all UMMC approved holidays. In addition, they may be granted up to 15 days\* of vacation per calendar year or prorated based on the stipend start date as listed below (\*note “days” refers to business days):

- January – March--15 days of vacation leave.
- April – June--12 days of vacation leave.
- July – September--8 days of vacation leave.
- October – December--4 days of vacation leave.

Vacation days do not accumulate and amount of vacation days re-sets January 1. Missing more than 15 business days/year for vacation will result in loss of pay.

### **C. PARENTAL LEAVE**

A Graduate Assistant-Stipend student may be granted up to 30 calendar days of parental leave per year for the adoption or birth of a child. Either parent is eligible for parental leave. They may request to use any residual sick or vacation time to extend the period of paid leave.

### **D. LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

A leave of absence is generally granted to students in good academic standing with the university and approved by the Program Director and Dean of the Graduate School. For students in good academic standing, a leave of absence is generally approved for no more than one academic semester for personal, financial or medical reasons. For students not in good academic standing, i.e., those whose GPA is less than 3.0 or whose research efforts/results are not satisfactory, leaves of absence will be given at the discretion of the Program Director and Dean of the Graduate School. Such students will be permitted the option of withdrawal. Stipend payment is suspended during a leave of absence.

A Graduate Assistant-Stipend student is required to be actively enrolled and covered by the student health insurance plan for a minimum of three months prior to the beginning of a leave of absence. If the Graduate Assistant-Stipend student is allowed to take a leave of absence, the school will continue to pay for health insurance for up to two months. If additional leave of absence is required after the two month period, health insurance will be terminated unless the student applies for the continuation of coverage through the Office of Student Accounting. This continuation of coverage will be at the student's expense.

## **XIV. HEALTH AND WELLNESS**

### **A. STUDENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

Stress is a fact of life and there may be times that a student needs additional support and guidance to come up with answers and practical solutions. In recognition, UMMC has an outstanding Student and Employee Assistance Program; called LifeSynch. This service is available at any time on any day, and maintains strict confidentiality.

Further information can be found on this website:

<https://www.umc.edu/Office%20of%20Academic%20Affairs/For-Students/Student%20Affairs/Student%20Assistance.html>

Phone number: (866) 219-1232

Brochures can be found in the SGSHS entrance office.

## **B. STUDENT COUNSELING AND WELLNESS CENTER**

UMMC has developed a Student Counseling and Wellness Center to help students manage the stress and difficulties of life. Licensed psychiatrists and psychologists are available to confidentially address issues including stress and anxiety, depression, and adjustment issues. Appointments are available during standard business hours.

Further information can be found on this website:

<https://www.umc.edu/Office%20of%20Academic%20Affairs/For-Students/Student%20Affairs/Student%20Counseling%20and%20Wellness%20Center.html>

Phone number: (601) 984-6936

## **C. STUDENT FITNESS**

The Fitness Center is a facility dedicated to the promotion of healthy attitudes and lifestyles among future health care professionals. It offers students and residents a wide variety of fitness resources, including controlled weight machines, free weights, treadmills, bikes, steppers, aerobic studio, basketball/volleyball court and jogging track.

In addition, the Fitness Center offers towel and locker service, showers, equipment checkout and supports the UMMC recreational sports programs.

UMMC also operates Wellness Centers in Brandon and Flowood. These are medically-based fitness centers with state-of-the-art equipment offering individual and organized group fitness opportunities. All UMMC students and employees are offered membership at a discounted price.

For more information visit: <https://www.umc.edu/wellness/Home.html>

## **D. STUDENT RECREATION**

The Recreation Center is located on the first floor of the Norman C. Nelson Student Union. It features a ping pong table, foosball table, video games, 2 pocket billiard tables, 2 large screen TVs, kitchenette, locker service, and most importantly, a relaxed

atmosphere. The Recreation Center is open to all UMMC students and residents seven days a week.

## XV. PROGRAM-RELEVANT CONTACT INFORMATION

### Graduate Program in Neuroscience:

**Director:** Dr. Douglas Vetter  
Office: R730  
Office phone: 601-984-1689  
Email: [dvetter@umc.edu](mailto:dvetter@umc.edu)

**Education Coordinator:** Ms. Joslyn S. Downey  
Office: TR402  
Office: 601-984-5512  
Email: [jdowney@umc.edu](mailto:jdowney@umc.edu)

### School of Graduate Studies in Health Sciences:

**Main:** Office: 601-984-1195

**Associate Dean for Student Affairs:** Dr. Mike Ryan  
Office: 601-984-1842  
Email: [mjryan@umc.edu](mailto:mjryan@umc.edu)

**Associate Dean for Academic Affairs:** Dr. Sydney Murphy  
Office: 601-984-1206  
Email: [smurphy@umc.edu](mailto:smurphy@umc.edu)

### University of Mississippi Medical Center:

**Office of Student Affairs:** <https://www.umc.edu/Office%20of%20Academic%20Affairs/For-Students/Student%20Affairs/Student-Affairs-Home.html>

**Associated Student Body:** <https://www.umc.edu/Office%20of%20Academic%20Affairs/For-Students/Student%20Affairs/Associated-Student-Body/Overview.html>

**Chief Diversity & Inclusion Officer:** Dr. Juanyce Taylor  
Office: 601-984-1010  
Email: [jdtaylor@umc.edu](mailto:jdtaylor@umc.edu)