CHEMISTRY - DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (PHD)

The Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry is internationally recognized for its research and education. As part of a commitment to continuing this tradition of excellence, the department provides a graduate program that integrates opportunities for cutting-edge creative research and study across a wide range of areas, including analytical, atmospheric, biochemistry, biophysical, chemical physics, environmental, organic, materials and nanoscience, and physical chemistry.

Graduate students enjoy extensive scientific collaboration with chemistry and biochemistry faculty, with other departments, such as Physics and Molecular, Cellular and Developmental Biology; and with research institutes and agencies, such as the Cooperative Institute for Research in Environmental Sciences (CIRES), Joint Institutes of Laboratory Astrophysics (JILA) and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

The course work for this program is tailored to the individual student's research interests and needs. Although course offerings vary each year, approximately 40 graduate-level courses are offered annually, covering topics of important and contemporary interest in all areas of chemistry and biochemistry. Students are also given the chance to familiarize themselves with faculty research by attending seminars by faculty on their research and research group meetings, and by individual meetings with faculty members.

PhD program students complete a number of other requirements, including a comprehensive examination, which consists of written cumulative examinations, and an oral examination. At some point later in the program, students complete an original research proposal and give a seminar to the department on a topic outside their own research. Most students graduate with their PhD in about five years.

Requirements

Examination Requirements

Each PhD student is required to satisfy divisional preliminary examinations and pass a series of comprehensive examinations to be advanced to candidacy. The candidate must then pass a final thesis defense examination to be awarded the PhD degree. Interdisciplinary students should adhere to specific program requirements.

Preliminary Examinations

The Graduate School requires that the department administer preliminary examinations in order to "satisfy itself (by examination or other means) that students who signify intent to undertake the PhD degree are qualified to do so." The format of the departmental preliminary examination for each student will be a responsibility of the division that admits them. The preliminary examination will be completed before the end of the second semester of study. Students will be required to follow the format of the preliminary examination of the division that admits them. Students who are uncertain of their division or who are considering an interdivisional major should consult the graduate advisor for advice on the preliminary examination requirement.

Language Requirements

The Graduate School rules state that "a student who is noticeably deficient in the written and/or oral use of the English language cannot obtain an advanced degree from CU Boulder." The department assesses the English language proficiency of each PhD student in the oral comprehensive examination.

The department does not require proficiency in a foreign language for the PhD degree.

Comprehensive Examinations

The comprehensive examinations are made up of three parts: a series of cumulative examinations, an oral examination and evaluation of an original research proposal. The oral examination and the research proposition evaluation shall be conducted by a five-member examining board, according to the rules of the Graduate School. One member of this board shall be the student's research advisor, and one member shall be from outside the primary field of study of the student. The membership of this board shall be selected by the Graduate Advisor, in consultation with other faculty members as necessary. The comprehensive examinations are considered passed when the requirements of all parts have been met.

Cumulative Examinations

The cumulative examinations are given in each division eight times a year from September through May on the first Saturday morning of each month except January. Students must take each examination from the beginning of their third semester and pass six before failing eleven. Students will usually take only the examinations offered in their division, but may elect to take up to three in other divisions; in these cases, students must inform the graduate program manager of their intentions prior to the examination date. Students in the atmospheric program will be advised on the selection of the appropriate examinations. An examination that is not taken counts as a failure unless the student has been excused in writing from the examination by the graduate advisor. During the first year, the student may elect to take one or more examinations with the advantage that only half of the failed exams are counted; half-failures are rounded to the lower number. Students should note that they are not allowed to read the exam(s) and then leave without taking the exam without penalty of a failure.

A student completing a master's degree in this department, either voluntarily or on the recommendation of the PhD oral examination committee, may wish to be considered for admission to the PhD program. Such students must take the cumulative examinations from the beginning of their third semester (voluntary MS) or continue with examinations (recommended MS), to assist the Graduate Scholastic Committee in deciding upon admission.

Oral Comprehensive Examination

Students must take the oral comprehensive examination no later than the end of the fourth semester. Master's degree students in this department who wish to continue for a PhD degree must take the oral examination no later than the end of the fifth semester even if they have not completed the master's degree.

This examination will include questioning on two topics: the student’s research, and general topics. Students are expected to demonstrate a clear understanding of their thesis research and fundamental knowledge in chemistry, and show the ability to think creatively. Students are strongly advised to spend time reviewing material from chemistry and biochemistry courses they have taken as undergraduates and graduates, since this material is often the subject of questioning during the examination.

The oral examination committee consists of three of the five faculty members appointed to the examining board selected by the graduate advisor. The student's research advisor, while a member of the examining board, may not be a member of this committee. The decision of this
committee shall be determined by a simple majority of the members. The committee shall determine whether the student is capable of PhD degree work, master's degree work or no advanced degree work. The committee may require that the student repeat the examination, and/or may require the student to take additional courses. The committee may require that the student complete a thesis master's degree before continuing on to the PhD; in this case, the committee will decide if it is necessary for the student to repeat the oral comprehensive examination at some time during the completion of the master's degree research. The committee may also require that a student complete a master's degree (thesis or course work MS), and then leave the graduate program. As described in the Graduate School rules, students who fail the examination have the right to request a second attempt; in this case, the student should contact the Graduate Scholastic Committee.

Students are responsible for arranging the examination date with their committee and should notify the graduate secretary two weeks prior to the scheduled date. At least one week before the exam date, students will present a short written overview (approximately 5 pages) of their thesis research plan to each committee member. This overview will outline clearly the direction of the student's thesis, provide the committee with advance notice of the thesis research area, and will describe promising research results (if any). Students might be asked at the time of the exam to describe and defend alternate experimental approaches to their research goals.

Research Proposal
Upon completion of the oral comprehensive examination, each student shall submit an original research proposal on a topic not related to the student's thesis research to the two members of the examination board who were not members of the oral examination committee. The proposal may be written as a part of any graduate course in the department where written proposals are required, or may be written as a part of an individual's group meeting activity. It is the thesis advisor's primary responsibility to assure that the proposal is original. The proposal must obtain the approval of both the members of the research proposition committee. In the event of a dispute between the two members, the proposal will be referred to the full examination board for a decision.

Upon satisfactory completion of all three examination requirements, the five members of the examination board shall recommend the student for advancement to candidacy for the PhD degree.

Final Examination
This examination is primarily a defense of the candidate's thesis. The examining committee consists of the student's thesis advisor as chair and four other faculty members, at least one of whom is rostered outside of the department. These committee members are selected by the graduate advisor upon request and after consultation with the student. The student must arrange for one of these other committee members to be the "second reader" of the thesis. The second reader will carefully review the thesis with the candidate. The student is responsible for arranging the date of the examination and notifying the graduate program manager at least two weeks prior to the date, and is responsible for distributing copies of the dissertation to the committee members — after it has been approved by the thesis advisor — at least two weeks before the examination. Failure to meet this latter deadline is a legitimate reason for any thesis committee member to postpone the examination.

Course Requirements
General Requirements
Sixty credit hours of courses are required, consisting of 30 hours of research in CHEM 8991, at least 15 hours in formal courses (see next section), and the remainder in other courses, such as summer courses, seminar courses, group meeting courses and research in CHEM 6901. A minimum grade of B- is required in all courses counting for the PhD degree; students should also be aware that they must maintain a cumulative grade point average of 3.0 in all formal courses and an overall grade point average of 3.0 or they will be placed on academic probation. Students may also be placed on probation if they are not making satisfactory progress in their research. Probationary status must be removed within two semesters or a student will become ineligible to receive a PhD degree from the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry. Students on probation will not have a high priority for financial support.

A degree plan of courses taken and yet to be taken must be filed with the Graduate School by the end of the student's third semester.

Selection of Formal Courses
All students will be required to take a minimum of 15 credit hours of formal courses. Formal courses are regularly scheduled, examined and graded; courses such as summer courses, seminar courses, group meeting courses and research in CHEM 6901 are not considered formal courses. Each student's program plan for course work must be approved by the student's research advisor and the departmental graduate advisor. These formal courses must be approved prior to the end of the second semester, and students are encouraged to complete formal course requirements within their first three semesters.

Transfer of Credit
Up to 10 credit hours of graduate-level, formal course work may be transferred from another school subject to demonstrated proficiency in the subject(s) and written approval by the graduate advisor. Forms for this purpose can be obtained from the graduate secretary.

Formal Application of Admission for Candidacy for the PhD Degree
All students must make formal application for admission to candidacy for the PhD degree by the end of the third semester on forms that can be obtained from the graduate secretary. This Graduate School requirement should be fulfilled even though students have not completed all their formal course work. After filling in the form indicating graduate courses taken and to be taken, it should be approved and signed by the student's research advisor and then the graduate advisor.

PhD students shall have passed their cumulative exams and the oral comprehensive examination before they may be admitted to candidacy for the PhD degree. Students should note that the approved research proposal must be filed in order for a student to be advanced to candidacy.

Research Requirements
The results of a completed research program are submitted as a thesis for the final examination described above. Some students may pursue their PhD research in a laboratory outside of the department (e.g., JILA, NOAA, etc.) with the approval of the graduate advisor. In this case, the student must find a surrogate advisor in the department who agrees to monitor the activity of the student. It is recommended that meetings between the surrogate advisor, student and day-to-day advisor be frequent, perhaps in the form of a group meeting.

Time Limit
Students should note the time limit specified in the Graduate School rules: "All doctoral students are expected to complete all degree
requirements within six years from the date of the start of course work in the program.” Information on extensions is available in the Doctoral Degree Requirements (catalog.colorado.edu/graduate/degree-requirements/doctoral-degree-requirements/#timelimittext) section.