Molecular, Cellular and Developmental Biology - Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

Areas of Study
Opportunities for graduate study and original research leading to the PhD degree are available in a variety of areas. The department does not offer a terminal, stand-alone master's degree program. Students enrolled in the doctoral program may earn their master's degree if they decide to leave the program after completing 30 hours of graduate course work and the PhD oral and written comprehensive examination.

Molecular Biology
Includes gene regulation, virology, nucleic acid-protein interactions, chromosome structure and function, chromosome replication, microbial diversity, human genome structure, RNA structure and catalysis.

Cell Biology
Includes cytoskeleton, biophysical cytology, vacuole assembly, analysis of yeast spindle pole bodies and vertebrate centrosomes, synthesis and secretion of glycoproteins and polysaccharides, defense responses in plants and 3-D high resolution reconstruction, biogenesis of mitochondria and chloroplasts, energy metabolism, assembly of membrane protein complexes, cell cycle regulation and checkpoints and signal transduction.

Developmental Biology
Covers mechanisms and regulation of morphogenesis and cell growth, genetic control of development, molecular genetics of embryogenesis, sex determination, ras proteins and vulval development and programmed cell death in nematodes, molecular genetics of Drosophila neurobiology, developmental genetics of Drosophila and Caenorhabditis, neural development in mice, transgenic mice and muscle development and function.

Genetics
Includes genetics of human disease, complex traits, mouse development and invertebrate development.

Requirements
Admission Requirements
The graduate program of the Department of Molecular, Cellular and Developmental Biology is sufficiently flexible to accommodate students with a wide range of training. Students with bachelor’s degrees in any of the biological, biochemical or physical sciences are encouraged to apply. Background necessary for the program includes the equivalent of undergraduate courses in cell biology, developmental biology, genetics, organic chemistry, biochemistry, chemical thermodynamics, differential and integral calculus and general physics.

Prerequisites
Students accepted with deficiencies may demonstrate mastery of the required areas by taking appropriate undergraduate courses, by passing advanced-standing examinations or by successfully completing graduate-level courses that require the undergraduate courses as prerequisites. Students admitted generally have independent research experience.

Degree Requirements
A minimum of 30 credit hours of courses numbered 5000 and above, plus 30 credit hours of doctoral thesis, are required. Specific courses depend on the student background and field of specialization.

The faculty of the department offers a variety of courses to help graduate students acquire knowledge in the various areas of study. Further, students are required to work in at least three different laboratories to broaden their education and to help them identify the field of greatest interest for their thesis work.

Advisory Committee
An advisory committee, appointed upon entrance, develops an appropriate curriculum based in part on the student’s background. A written preliminary exam consists of a series of courses and exams administered during the first year.

Qualifying Exam
A comprehensive qualifying exam administered at the beginning of the spring semester of the second year includes a written research proposal and an oral defense of the proposal that emphasizes breadth and depth of knowledge as well as an ability to communicate and synthesize facts into a coherent scientific argument.

Thesis
The principal elements in graduate training are defining a thesis problem, investigating this problem with a coherent piece of research that constitutes a substantial contribution to knowledge, and writing a report on this work in the form of peer-reviewed journal articles and a thesis submitted to a departmental committee for approval. After completion of the thesis, each candidate for the PhD degree is required to take a final oral examination on the thesis and related topics, and to present a public seminar.

Teaching
Generally, each candidate for the PhD degree does two semesters of apprentice teaching. This obligation is usually met during the student’s first year of graduate study.