

## Chapter 3 ZOOLOGY GRADUATE ADMISSIONS POLICIES<sup>2</sup>

### I. Graduate Admissions Committee (GAC)

The Graduate Admissions Committee (GAC) will consist of 4 faculty members (2 regular and 2 cooperating) of the Zoology Graduate Program who commit to a 2-year term. Each year, 2 individuals (1 regular and 1 cooperating) will be replaced such that there is continuity across years in the admissions process. At the start of each academic year, the Zoology Graduate Chair, in consultation with the Chair of the Department of Biology, will solicit volunteers and nominations from the Zoology Graduate Faculty, and select among them to represent the breadth of expertise of the Zoology Graduate Program. GAC membership should cover the major fields of study in the Zoology Graduate Program as well as possible, and will represent the program in evaluating all graduate applications. The first responsibility of the GAC each year is to elect a chair to convene upcoming meetings and be a point of contact for GAC communications. The GAC and Chair of Biology will work with graduate admission committees in programs affiliated with the Department of Biology, including the Marine Biology Graduate Program, to ensure cooperative processing of graduate applicants across programs.

### II. Evaluation of Graduate Applicants

- A. **Initial Screening:** Application files are due **15 December** each year, at which time they will be collated by Biology staff into an initial spreadsheet that includes key data (GPA, GRE scores, potential advisor(s), etc.). The GAC will then evaluate all applications and members will add their own rankings to the initial spreadsheet, as outlined in Section II.B. below.
- B. **Evaluation Criteria:** Each application file will be reviewed by a minimum of 2 GAC members, including at least one member from the applicant's field of study, yet excluding any identified sponsors of the applicant. Applicants will be evaluated in terms 5 criteria, all of which are considered important:
  - (1) academic background (courses, grades, GRE scores, etc.);
  - (2) letters of recommendation;
  - (3) vision and writing (personal statement, etc.);
  - (4) previous research experience; and
  - (5) overall potential for success in the program.

The GAC will then meet to discuss and categorize the applications into 4 tiers: *Outstanding, Acceptable, Marginal, or Unacceptable*. **IMPORTANT: All Level 2 and 3 Zoology Graduate Faculty will be notified that the applications are in the process of being tiered, and are responsible to confirm that files are complete for any applicants with whom they have specific interest.**

- C. **Ranking of Applicants:** In consultation with the chairs of the Zoology Graduate Program and the Department of Biology, the GAC will consider the number of students graduating the previous year, expected availability of TA resources for the coming year, and other resources (grants, office space, etc.) to estimate the maximum number of students likely to be accepted. GAC will

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<sup>2</sup> Approved by Zoology Graduate Faculty 24 October 2016, with revisions by GD on 14 July 2017 and subsequent clarifications.

then rank the top applicant files down to roughly triple the maximum number of incoming students that could be accepted in the coming year, unless that number exceeds the applications in the *Outstanding* and *Acceptable* categories, in which case only applicants in those upper two categories will be considered.

- D. **Notification of the Graduate Faculty:** By **15 January**, the GAC will circulate the categorically tiered *Outstanding* and *Acceptable* applicants on a summary spreadsheet to all Level 2 and 3 Zoology Graduate Faculty in good standing. Faculty who wish to accept a student from the circulated list will have until **1 February** to submit a non-binding *internal* “sponsorship” plan to the chairs of the Zoology Graduate Program and the Department of Biology outlining a plan for both stipend and research support of new and continuing students for their graduate training (including current or pending grants) for 5 years for a PhD applicant or 2 years for an MS applicant. No applicant without a faculty sponsorship letter will be acceptable for admission.
- E. **Ranking and Selection of Sponsored Applicants:** The GAC will reconvene to rank the pool of sponsored applicants, incorporating the sponsorship plan, guaranteed non-TA support, the minimum number of TA slots available (determined by the Chair of the Department of Biology), and other factors (e.g., preference for new assistant professors, see Chapters 3 IV B and 4 II C). The GAC will then determine which applicants will be offered priority admission and provide a recommendation to the Chair of the Department of Biology for allocation of available TA and other resources (within the guideline set forth in Chapter 3 IV B and 4 II C) to recruit outstanding candidates.
- a. Early offers of acceptance: The GAC will decide which students will be made early offers of acceptance based on applicant rankings. Faculty will be notified of decisions regarding early offers by the **end of February** to notify excellent candidates as early as possible in this process (see Section III below).
  - b. Later offers of acceptance: As students decline early offers or additional resources become available (e.g., additional TA slots, awarded grants), the GAC will proceed down the ranking list to make offers up to the maximum number of students who can be guaranteed support within the program for any given year.
  - c. Competitive fellowships: Students who are awarded a substantial competitive fellowship that provides a stipend (e.g., NSF GRF, NOAA Nancy Foster, EPA STAR) will be evaluated by the GAC at any time during the admissions process. The GAC will evaluate any fellowship on a case-by-case, with the standard of comparison being the National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship (NSF GRF).

### III. Offers to Acceptable Candidates

University policy states:

*The Graduate Division officially admits students based on support and confirmation from graduate programs if requirements for admission have been met. Programs should not provide any form of official notice to applicants of their admission until the official letter from Graduate Education has already been sent. A copy of the admission or denial letter is sent to the department for each applicant.*

However, faculty sponsors of applicants recommended for admissions shall be contacted as soon as possible so that they can communicate the decision immediately with the applicant. A letter from the Zoology Graduate Program will provide informal communication to students that they have been recommended for acceptance to the GD, including the Zoology Graduate Program intention to offer support, and the nature of that support.

#### **IV. Funding Limits for Graduate Students**

The Zoology Graduate Program policy is to accept only students who will be supported financially throughout their graduate training. As such, selected applicants will be guaranteed 2 years of support (regardless of source) if entering as an MS student, and 5 years of support (regardless of source) if entering as a PhD student, based loosely on the sponsorship plan at the time of acceptance. Limits and guaranteed support are also intended to set target normative time to graduation; to ensure timely completion of degrees, MS students are eligible for a maximum of 3 years of support (regardless of source) whereas PhD students are eligible for a maximum of 7 years of support from any sources. Exceptions may be considered by petition to the Graduate Instruction Committee (GIC).

#### **V. Graduate Applicant Proficiency**

Incoming graduate students are expected to have demonstrated proficiency in the biological sciences, typically by having completed a bachelor's degree in biology or other life sciences field similar to a Bachelor's of Science degree in Biology at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. Typical *minimum* preparatory undergraduate coursework includes:

- 18 semester hours or 27 quarter hours of biology [note that 2 semesters = 3 quarters]
- 3 semesters or 5 quarters of chemistry (general and organic)
- 2 semesters or 3 quarters of physics
- 1 semester or 2 quarters of biochemistry or molecular biology
- 1 semester or 2 quarters of calculus (note that calculus is a required prerequisite for the graduate course in Biometry ZOOL 631)

Prior research experience is especially desirable. The Graduate Admissions Committee will examine each applicant's transcripts carefully for evidence of sufficient proficiency for graduate studies. Applicants should also discuss with their potential advisors any possible deficiencies that would require remedial coursework. Any additional deficiencies and remediation will be determined during the first-semester interim committee meeting, culminating in the completion of Form I.

#### **APPENDIX: GRE Scores & English Proficiency**

While there is no official minimum GRE score required for admission and the GRE is only one measure of potential success in graduate school, very low scores are typically regarded as an applicant not being adequately prepared for graduate school. In any case, Teaching Assistantships will **not** be offered to students with GRE Verbal scores below 460/151. For university policies and help with English:

- English Proficiency requirements: [manoa.hawaii.edu/graduate/content/english-proficiency](http://manoa.hawaii.edu/graduate/content/english-proficiency)
- English Language Institute: [manoa.hawaii.edu/graduate/content/english-language-institute](http://manoa.hawaii.edu/graduate/content/english-language-institute)