Chapter 3

ZOOOLOGY GRADUATE ADMISSIONS POLICIES

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 Director of the School of Life Sciences, 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 Director of the School of Life Sciences will work with graduate admission committees in programs affiliated with the School of Life Sciences, including the Botany, Microbiology, and 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 School of Life Sciences staff into an initial spreadsheet that includes key data (GPA, 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. Note that the program no longer requires GRE exams, and the minimum GPA requirement for acceptance by the Graduate Division is 3.0.

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, 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.

Approved by Zoology Graduate Faculty 24 October 2016, with revisions by GD on 14 July 2017 and subsequent clarifications.
C. **Ranking of Applicants:** In consultation with the Chair of the Zoology Graduate Program and the Director of the School of Life Sciences, 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 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 Chair of the Zoology Graduate Program and the Director of the School of Life Sciences 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 Director of the School of Life Sciences), 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 Director of the School of Life Sciences 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. **First round 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. **Second round 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 the Graduate Division 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 to the GD for admission, 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: English Proficiency

Documentation of proficiency in English is required of graduate students from nations where English is not the native language. The following are university policies and help with English:

- English Proficiency requirements: manoa.hawaii.edu/graduate/content/english-proficiency
- English Language Institute: manoa.hawaii.edu/graduate/content/english-language-institute
I. Commitment

The Zoology Graduate Program is committed to supporting graduate students, contingent on the availability of sufficient funds and, beyond the first year, satisfactory performance in both teaching and advancement in the degree program. Assuming sufficient departmental resources, MS students making satisfactory progress are guaranteed 2 years of support (regardless of source), and PhD students making satisfactory progress are guaranteed 5 years of support (regardless of source), with appointments made one year at a time. By petition to the Graduate Instruction Committee (GIC), MS students are possibly eligible for a maximum of 3 years of support, and PhD students are possibly eligible for a maximum of 7 years of support. Support can take the form of teaching assistantships (TA), research assistantships (RA), fellowships, or a combination thereof. Upon admission each student will receive a sponsorship plan from their major advisor outlining the plan for support. Regardless of support, current Graduate Division (GD) policy is that graduate students must complete their degrees within 7 years from their first semester in the program to avoid academic probation. Note that probation is automatic 7 years after entry to graduate school; full-time or part-time status during those 7 years does not matter. Probation also occurs if the GPA drops below 3.0.

II. Graduate Teaching Assistantships (TAs)

Teaching Assistantships (TA-ships) are professional positions that support the teaching mission of the university, as well as provide teaching experience for graduate students while pursuing their degrees.

A. Eligibility and Work Load: Zoology graduate students have priority access to teaching assistantships in the School of Life Sciences if they maintain a minimum 3.0 GPA. Teaching Assistants (TAs) are expected to work half time (i.e., not more than 20 hours per week) in their instructional duties, so that the remainder of the week is available for coursework, research, and other scholarly work toward degree completion. TAs must enroll for 6 to 9 graduate-level (or equivalent) credits toward the degree each semester. Audit hours do not count toward the minimum. TAs taking only one credit Thesis 700F (for MS students) or Dissertation 800 (for PhD students) are defined by the Graduate Division (GD) as carrying a full load. If receiving financial aid, the student should check with Financial Aid Services regarding TA funding and course requirements.

B. TA Application and Placement: The purpose of the TA application is to place qualified graduate students in an appropriate course matching their scientific expertise and level of teaching skill. The TA application is also used to rank applicants for any remaining positions once all support commitments are satisfied. Each semester, TA application announcements are by e-mail, and applications are due to the School of Life Sciences (SLS) for placement during the following semester (e.g., apply during Fall Semester for a position during Spring Semester). Once a student has accepted a TA position, they are expected to honor that commitment for the entire duty period. Recommendations for TA placement are made by the SLS instructional faculty and

---

3 Adopted by Biology Faculty prior to 2016, with subsequent clarifications.
staff, and approved by the SLS director. Other considerations include special priority for incoming graduate students and students of non-tenured SLS faculty, merit and need-based student petitions, and preferences based on past TA performance. See Chapter 2-IV-B for details.

C. **Caps on TA Positions per Faculty Member**: The number of TA positions available is determined by the needs of the School of Life Sciences. In order to equitably distribute TA positions across the school, faculty have a cap on the number of graduate students that they can support at the same time (i.e., per semester) as TAs. Regular Zoology graduate faculty may have a maximum of 2 students on TA-ships at any time, and Cooperating graduate faculty may have a maximum of 1 student on a TA-ship at any time. The difference in cap size is due to the fact that Regular Zoology graduate faculty contribute to the undergraduate program by teaching courses that generate TA positions. All faculty are expected to consider the cap when developing sponsorship plans for graduate student support. Exceptions to the cap will be considered by petition to the Director of the School of Life Sciences under special circumstances. See Chapter 2-IV-B for details.

D. **Levels of Support for Teaching Assistants**: Full academic year teaching assistantships carry a stipend that is paid over a 12-month period for 9 months of service. Importantly, students who TA only one semester during the academic year lose one month of salary and health insurance over the summer, so it is strongly recommended to TA for a full academic year. Current University of Hawai‘i System policy is that the minimum salary level for graduate students is Step 8 (pay scales: manoa.hawaii.edu/graduate/content/compensation-tax-withholding). In addition, all teaching assistantships include a tuition waiver, yet this waiver does not cover student fees. Teaching assistants may enroll in the State Health Fund medical insurance program if appointed at 0.50 FTE for a period of at least three months (i.e., a typical TA). While on TA-ship, a student may also work as an RA for additional hours of overload per week, subject to approval (use form “Graduate Assistant Petition to Work More Than 20 Hours” downloaded at manoa.hawaii.edu/graduate/content/forms). The Graduate Division lists other benefits for graduate students: manoa.hawaii.edu/graduate/content/benefits.

III. Graduate Research Assistantships (RAs)

Research Assistantships (RA-ships) are professional positions that support the research mission of the university, as well as provide research experience for graduate students while pursuing their degrees. RA-ships are typically supported by external grants to faculty. The exact nature of these positions will therefore vary by project and advisor. The School of Life Sciences does not provide research assistantships directly. Research Assistants (RAs) working at least 12 weeks of the 16-week semester are eligible for tuition waivers. While on TA-ship, a student may also work as an RA for additional hours of overload per week, subject to approval (use form “Graduate Assistant Petition to Work More Than 20 Hours” downloaded at manoa.hawaii.edu/graduate/content/forms). The Graduate Division lists other benefits for graduate students: manoa.hawaii.edu/graduate/content/benefits.
IV. Fellowships and Grants for Graduate Students

Note that many external fellowships granted directly to graduate students, such as national competitive fellowships (e.g., EPA STAR, etc.), are not eligible for tuition waivers. National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowships are an exception in that they are eligible for tuition waivers.

A. Zoology Graduate Program: The Zoology Graduate Program offers several research and travel awards for graduate students made possible through donations and endowments from alumni and former faculty. Requests for proposals are circulated in early Fall Semester. Awards are made once per year by a selection committee appointed by the Director of the School of Life Sciences. For details, see manoa.hawaii.edu/biology/node/674

B. UH Mānoa Campus:
   a. The Ecology, Evolution, and Conservation Biology graduate specialization offers several fellowships to its graduate students. Our 2020-2021 EECB graduate student representatives are Maria Costantini (mariacos@hawaii.edu) and Ryan Jones (rnjones@hawaii.edu). For details, see www.hawaii.edu/eecb/current.html
   b. The Graduate Student Organization offers grants in support of research and travel. Our 2020-2021 GSO graduate student representatives are Valentina Alvarez (val64@hawaii.edu), Maria Costantini (mariacos@hawaii.edu), and Randi Rollins (rrollins@hawaii.edu). For details, see gso.hawaii.edu/grants-awards
   c. The East-West Center offers a variety of scholarships and fellowships supporting cross-cultural exchange. For details, see www.eastwestcenter.org/scholarships-fellowships
   d. The STAR online system lists graduate funding opportunities, including an annually designated amount of Achievement Scholarship funds dedicated to the Zoology Graduate Program. For details regarding Achievement Scholarships, see manoa.hawaii.edu/graduate/content/achievement-scholarships

C. Extramural:
   a. Major National Competitive Fellowships:
      NSF Graduate Research Fellowship: www.nsfgrfp.org
      National Defense Science & Engineering Graduate Fellowship: ndseg.asee.org
   b. Web Lists of Fellowships and Grants:
      UH Mānoa Graduate Division: manoa.hawaii.edu/graduate/content/fellowships-scholarships
      Federal Government Grants: federalgovernmentgrants.net
      The Foundation Center: foundationcenter.org
      College Scholarships and Grants: www.collegescholarships.org/grants/graduate.htm
      Graduate Fellowships and Scholarships: www.gradschools.com/financial-aid/graduate-fellowships-scholarships/fellowships-for-graduate-students
      Prof. Marissa Baskett’s Links to Graduate Resources: www.des.ucdavis.edu/faculty/baskett/links.academia.html#Grad