

Guidelines for Dissertation Advisory Committee Meetings

Harvard Biophysics Graduate Program

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THE GOAL

The goal of the Dissertation Advisory Committee (DAC) meetings is for the student to receive additional guidance from faculty members beyond the dissertation advisor on the student's dissertation research, advisor-advisee relationship, and career planning.

DISSERTATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE SELECTION

The DAC comprises three faculty members. **The DAC chair is responsible for keeping the meeting running on course and on time, completing the DAC report form in full including all questions on the form, and returning the completed, signed form to the Biophysics office.** Students will discuss their selection of committee members with Biophysics Program Co-Chairs Rachele and/or Martha, prior to finalizing the committee membership. **The DAC chair must be a Biophysics Program faculty member** (listed below). At least one of the remaining two DAC members must be a Harvard tenured-track faculty member but need not be a Biophysics Program faculty member; up to one DAC member is permitted to be a tenured-track faculty member from another academic institution (e.g., MIT).

Jonathan Abraham
Mark L. Andermann
Haribabu Arthanari
Stephen C. Blacklow
Martha L. Bulyk
Stephen Buratowski
Luke H. Chao
George M. Church
Adam E. Cohen
Michael M. Desai
Michael T.H. Do
Florian Engert
Conor L. Evans
Rachele Gaudet
Stephen C. Harrison
Doeke Romke Hekstra
Sun Hur
Gabriel Kreiman
Andrew C. Kruse
Maria K. Lehtinen
Maofu Liao
Joseph J. Loparo
Debora S. Marks
Venkatesh N. Murthy
Cengiz Pehlevan
Mara G. Prentiss
Maxim Prigozhin
Sharad Ramanathan

Tom A. Rapoport
Bruce R. Rosen
Aravinthan Samuel
Eugene I Shakhnovich
Sichen Susan Shao
Radhika Subramanian
Shamil R. Sunyaev
Gerhard Wagner
Johannes C. Walter
Wesley P. Wong
Hao Wu
Xiaowei Zhuang
Karen Adelman
John A. Assad
Brian J. Bacsikai
Michael Baym
Alan Brown
Ciprian Catana
James J. Chou
Benjamin de Bivort
Vladimir Denic
Abigail Sloan Devlin
Min Dong
Jan Drugowitsch
Michael J. Eck
Georges El Fakhri
Ethan C. Garner
Hopi Hoekstra

Sahand Hormoz
Naama Kanarek
Tomas Kirchhausen
Nancy Kleckner
Galit Lahav
Wei-Chung Allen Lee
Tami D. Lieberman
David R. Liu
Ying Lu
Leonid A. Mirny
Danesh Moazed
Andrew W. Murray
Daniel J. Needleman
Bence Olveczky
David Pellman
Gary Ruvkun
Bernardo L. Sabatini
Chris Sander
Alex K. Shalek
William M. Shih
Pamela A. Silver
Timothy A. Springer
Lawrence L. Wald
Tobias Christian Walther
Amanda Whipple
Peng Yin

Try to pick faculty whose expertise fits closely with your dissertation topic. Some committees might include faculty with expertise in the broad area of the student's project but not exactly the same system or topic, in order to provide expertise on multiple different topics related to the student's research and/or for broader perspective. Students should contact the potential committee members directly to inquire about their willingness to serve on the committee. If you are having difficulty finding committee members or a chair, please contact the program office for recommendations. The student's dissertation advisor(s) participates in DAC meetings, but is not one of the three DAC members.

STUDENT DAC REPORT

Students are required to submit a written DAC report to the DAC members at least 1 week prior to the DAC meeting. The report for the 1st DAC meeting is typically a proposal for the planned dissertation research, while reports for subsequent DAC meetings are updates of the progress made since the prior DAC meeting, including a description of results, any challenges or stumbling blocks, progress towards manuscripts, and plans for the next ~6-12 months of research. Students are encouraged to clearly articulate points on which discussion and advice from DAC members is sought.

Format

- The student's written DAC report should be ~2-10 pages, including figures and/or tables. The initial DAC report is typically ~5-10 pages, while subsequent reports are typically ~2-4 pages.
- Use at least 11 point font.
- Figures with legends are highly encouraged because they generally add clarity.
- The DAC report for the anticipated final DAC meeting should include an outline for the dissertation.

The Biophysics Program Co-Chairs Rachele and Martha are available to answer questions, clarify expectations, and provide guidance at any point during the DAC report preparation process. Examples of student DAC reports are available from Michele in the Biophysics office.

DAC MEETING

DAC meetings last 1.5 to 2 hours. Plan to schedule a 2-hr meeting, but at the outset of the meeting the DAC chair and the student should check if any DAC members need to leave after 1.5 hrs. Students should prepare a presentation of the student DAC report. We recommend that you prepare for just a ~30-min presentation, as you will be interrupted with questions throughout the presentation. Although it is appropriate to give a brief introduction, it is assumed that the DAC members will have read the student's written DAC report.

At the beginning of the DAC meeting, the student will be asked to leave the room. At this time, the DAC chair will ask the dissertation advisor to inform the DAC on her/his impression of the student's research progress, skills development, issues that may have come up in the student's written DAC report, impression about the mentor-mentee relationship and student's overall wellbeing, and in later stages, plans for timing of the dissertation defense.

After the student re-joins the meeting, the dissertation advisor is then asked to leave the room. At this time, the DAC chair will ask the student to inform the DAC on all the same points as mentioned above, and also whether there are any points that the student would like to discuss confidentially with the DAC while the dissertation advisor is out of the room.

After the dissertation advisor re-joins the meeting, the DAC chair will ask the student and advisor a number of questions from the DAC report form that address whether the student has completed

various graduation program requirements (e.g., completion of an Individualized Development Plan (IDP) within the past 12 months) and that ask about potential conflicts of interest.

The student will then give the prepared presentation on research progress and plans, with discussion with the committee.

SCHEDULING THE DAC MEETING

The student should assemble a Dissertation Advisory Committee (DAC) and schedule the first DAC meeting to occur within 6 months after passing the PQE. It is in the student's best interests not to delay scheduling the first DAC meeting, and to hold DAC meetings every ~6-12 months, as you will gain valuable feedback from the DAC. Please note that selecting your committee members and scheduling the meeting may take much longer than expected, and so you should plan well in advance (2-4 months). Students may schedule their DAC meetings on their own, or may instead ask Michele for assistance in scheduling the meetings. The web tools Doodle and when2meet are excellent aids in polling people's availability for meetings.

For meetings held virtually via Zoom, be sure at the outset of the meeting that the DAC chair is made the Host or Co-Host of the Zoom meeting. For meetings held in person, Michele can assist with room scheduling for meetings at the Longwood or Cambridge campuses, or with parking for meetings held in person at the Longwood or Cambridge campuses. You can book a room for the meeting through the eCommons portal under "Services" and fill out the "Room Request Form." You may also book a conference room in your department if preferred. Once you've confirmed your DAC meeting, please email Michele the names of the DAC chair & remaining DAC members, and the meeting date, time, and location.

THE OUTCOMES

The DAC chair will submit written feedback in the form of the completed DAC report form to Michele, who will send a copy to the student, the Biophysics Program Co-Chairs Rachele and Martha, and the student's dissertation advisor. In addition to giving feedback and recommendations on the dissertation research, the committee is also available to provide guidance on career plans for after the dissertation defense (e.g., applying for a postdoctoral position).

- The student will be informed by the end of the DAC meeting whether the student is permitted to begin writing the dissertation. Permission is given only when the student has completed essentially all or nearly all the work required for the dissertation. This approval is referred to informally as "getting your box checked". No more DAC meetings will be held and instead the student can proceed to selecting a dissertation defense committee and scheduling the dissertation defense within the next 6 months.
- If the student is not yet permitted to begin writing the dissertation, then the committee will discuss with the student when the next DAC meeting should be held. **DAC meetings should be held at least once every 12 months.**

NEXT STEPS

Students will discuss their selection of three dissertation defense committee (DDC) members with Biophysics Program Co-Chairs Rachele and/or Martha prior to finalizing the committee membership. The Biophysics Program Co-Chairs Rachele and Martha are available to answer questions, clarify expectations, and provide guidance at any point during the preparation process for the dissertation defense. Examples of student dissertations are available from Michele in the Biophysics office. The student's dissertation advisor(s) is present at the dissertation defense, but is not one of the three DDC members. **The DDC chair must be a Biophysics Program faculty member.** At least one of the remaining two defense committee members must be a Harvard faculty member but need not be a

Biophysics Program faculty member; up to one defense committee member is permitted to be a faculty member from another academic institution (e.g., MIT). Up to 2 members of the DDC may have also served as members of the DAC.