

Graduate Student Bill of Rights

This Bill of Rights was designed and reviewed by graduate students and faculty of the University of Miami's Biology Department to help students address their rights and freedoms within the department. In this document we have made an effort to encompass issues and concerns involving diversity, equity and inclusion and are committed to provide a safe environment for graduate students in the pursuit of their academic studies. The structure of this document was inspired by and adapted from the University of California Student Association Graduate Student Bill of Rights, Arizona State University, Louisiana State University Department of Communication Studies, Purdue University, University of Colorado, University of Michigan, and University of Texas College of Natural Sciences.

Article I. The right to be treated fairly and respectfully as members of the academic community.

Section A. According to Federal and State law, as well as University policy, graduate students have the right to work in an environment that is free of discrimination on the basis of race, national origin, ethnic origin, religion, biological sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, pregnancy, physical or mental disability, medical condition, marital status, age, sexual orientation, citizenship, or veteran status.

Section B. Graduate students have the right to study and work in an environment without discrimination for having dependents, not limited to children, partners, and/or parents.

Section C. Graduate students have the right, when possible under University policy, to confidentiality from their colleagues.

Section D. Graduate students have the right to professional treatment by their academic colleagues.

Section E. Graduate students have the right to academic free speech, in all their student and professional roles within the academic setting and they will not be penalized for their academic or personal ideas or beliefs, so long as these beliefs do not infringe upon the rights of others.

Article II. The right to have specific and concrete requirements for achieving a degree.

Section A. The requirements for achieving a degree will be communicated clearly in writing to students by the time of their admission to the graduate program.

- i. These requirements will be made publicly available and easily accessible to all graduate students. The Graduate Student Handbook can currently be found on the department website: (<https://biology.as.miami.edu/graduate/graduate-student-handbook/index.html>)
- ii. Graduate student handbook documents will be kept publicly available and accessible for a period of 7 years to ensure that students subject to older requirements continue to have access to those program requirements. Graduate students are responsible for program requirements at the time of matriculation.
- iii. Alterations to graduate degree requirements will be communicated and publicly accessible before enacting. Notification will be given to all graduate students in advance of the new requirements' effective date.

Section B. Upon fulfillment of the requirements for which they are responsible, graduate students will be guaranteed the right to graduate.

Section C. Graduate students will be given clearly communicated and feasible work expectations.

- i. Students will not be expected to work more hours than is consistent with fair labor practices or the labor standards of the department.
- ii. Students will not be asked to violate their religious beliefs while enrolled in the University. This includes the right to observe religious holidays.

Section D. Graduate students have the right to change their academic advisor if necessary.

- i. If a graduate student's academic advisor departs from the institution once the student's work is underway, the program will make a concerted effort to provide the student with alternative supervision, and if necessary, facilitate the transfer to another program.
- ii. If a graduate student's relationship with the advisor becomes unworkable due to harassment, discrimination, retaliation, or any other reasonable concern, the program will provide the student with alternative supervision.
- iii. This effort will be supervised and facilitated as a joint effort between the DEI committee, GAAC, and the graduate director.

Section E. Graduate students have the right to dissolve and reconstitute their committee at any time during the completion of their degree.

Article III. Graduate students will receive objective evaluation, regular feedback, and guidance concerning their academic performance and progress towards their degree.

Section A. Graduate students will be notified of deficiencies in their academic performance and will be given specific recommendations to correct academic deficiencies before action against the student is taken.

Section B. Evaluations are to be objective, specific, and, within a reasonable period of time, be shared with the graduate student.

- i. Graduate students will receive feedback on documents marking graduation milestones, including on dissertation proposal drafts and dissertation documents, provided that the documents are provided to faculty within the required window of time.

Section C. In the event of major examination failure or unsatisfactory performance, the reasoning for the negative assessment will be provided in written form to the graduate student.

Section D. Dismissal of a student from the graduate program for academic reasons must be preceded by specific, written performance evaluations with clear specific opportunities to remedy academic degree related deficiencies.

- i. There will be clear guidelines for dismissal of a graduate student from an academic program.
- ii. There will be an appeal process by which a graduate student can challenge their dismissal.

Section E. Termination of an academic advisor's relationship with a graduate student must be preceded with a written warning at least 6 weeks prior to dismissal.

Section F. Graduate students have the right to access their academic file, excluding only those materials for which access could compromise the confidentiality of colleagues (such as in the case of letters of recommendation).

Article IV. Graduate students have the right to receive appropriate credit and be recognized for intellectual and research development.

Section A. A graduate student will receive proper credit and/or proper recognition for intellectual products.

i. First authorship or co-authorship credit and recognition will be given according to the level of contribution by the student, for example as described by the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) Program.

Section B. A graduate student will receive credit and recognition for a curriculum developed by the student.

Section C. A graduate student will receive credit and recognition for innovation(s) and intellectual ideas developed by the student.

Article V. Graduate students have the right to refuse tasks that are not germane to their academic or professional development without penalty or prejudice.

Section A. Graduate students will not be overburdened with additional tasks unrelated to the student's thesis or professional development for the personal advantage of faculty members, university staff, administrators, or other academic colleagues.

i. Tasks necessary for laboratory function and maintenance in which the graduate student is participating must be discussed with the advisor and not interfere with thesis or professional development.

Section B. Graduate students will be granted reasonable time frames to complete tasks that are requested of them, given the student's level of expertise and available resources.

Article VI. The right to participate in an academic atmosphere that welcomes and encourages diversity.

Section A. Diversity includes but is not limited to, nationality, gender, race, religion, origin, sexual, orientation, medical condition, and disability.

Section B. International students will be treated equally and given equal opportunities within the scope of the University except where individual activities may conflict with local, state, or federal law.

Article VII. The right to a safe university environment.

Section A. A safe environment protects a student's well-being.

Section B. A safe environment is not limited to

- i. Safety from criminal activity.
- ii. Safety from discrimination on the basis of those characteristics defined above (Article I Section A).
- iii. Safety from harassment.
- iv. A workspace in accordance with University, local, state, and federal laws/regulations concerning safety standards.
- v. Access to necessary laboratory and field safety equipment and training provided by the University.

Article VIII. The right to be informed of financial and resource support.

Section A. Prospective graduate students will be provided with an accurate description of the availability and the likelihood of ongoing financial and resource support within their programs and at the university by the Department.

Section B. Graduate students who also hold positions as employees of the University will be protected by the same rights as other private sector employees within the University.

Section C. Graduate students will have access to graduate student retention data within the department of Biology.

Article IX. The right to have access to adequate resources and training for career objectives.

Section A. Graduate students will have access to career services targeted specifically to the postgraduate school job market.

i. These services can apply to academic as well as non-academic professions.

Section B. Teaching assistants and associates will have access to adequate pedagogical training. This includes:

i. Implementing structured training by graduate programs for their teaching assistants and teaching associates.

ii. Clear communication of the expectations of a graduate student teacher, and training which addresses how these expectations can be met.

If issues arise related to the topics discussed in the document, graduate students are strongly encouraged to contact the graduate student ombudsperson, Dr. Jennifer Rau, (jrau@miami.edu).

Responsibilities

A Graduate Student has the Responsibility to:

1. Adhere to all University policies and procedures.
2. Conduct themselves professionally in all University-related activities.
3. Devote an appropriate amount of time and effort toward the advanced degree within a time period consistent with departmental guidelines.
4. Uphold ethical standards in research and scholarship.
5. Provide accurate and honest reporting of research results, research methodology, and scholarship.
6. Proactively participate in the faculty mentor and graduate student relationship.
7. Be an engaged, contributing member of the laboratory and extended departmental community.
8. Uphold the University's mission statement.

"We are committed to freedom of inquiry-the freedom to think, to question, to criticize, and to dissent. We will pursue excellence in our research and educational missions with the single-mindedness that marks great commitments. We will prepare our students for rewarding lifelong careers and will instill in them a continued and permanent dedication to the search for knowledge and the search for truth. We will provide them with the foundations for ethical citizenship and service to others, a respect for differences among people, and a commitment to high standards of thought and communication. We will provide service to our community and beyond, including the delivery of high-quality, compassionate care through an academic health system. We will strive to transform the world in positive ways through innovative education, impactful research and scholarship, and the translation of knowledge into solutions."

The University of Miami has a code of conduct that must be adhered to within the "Student Rights and Responsibilities Handbook." This document was created in line with the standards of student equity and inclusion highlighted in the University of Miami Statement on Student Rights in that handbook.

Link: https://doso.studentaffairs.miami.edu/_assets/pdf/policies/student_rights_and_responsibilities_handbook.pdf

This document was inspired by and adapted from similar documents created at other reputable academic institutions, including University of California Student Association, Arizona State University, Louisiana State University Department of Communication Studies, Purdue University, University of Colorado, University of Michigan, and University of Texas College of Natural Sciences.