

MARINE BIOLOGY INTERDISCIPLINARY GRADUATE PROGRAM HANDBOOK

for

**Texas A&M University, Texas A&M University –Corpus Christi,
and hosted by Texas A&M University at Galveston**

Revised: August 2020

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE	3
STUDENT ADMISSIONS PROCESS TO THE MARB IDP	4
APPLICATION DEADLINES	5
INTERNAL TRANSFER APPLICATIONS	5
CONTINUATION TRANSFER APPLICATIONS	6
PH.D. APPLICANTS FROM A BACHELOR'S DEGREE	6
ADMISSIONS DECISIONS	6
MARB IDP DEADLINES FOR M.S. AND PH.D. STUDENTS	7
STUDENT ADVISORY COMMITTEES	8
COMMITTEE COMPOSITION	8
ADDITIONAL MEMBERS TO THE SAC	8
FACULTY MEMBERSHIP IN THE MARB IDP	8
DEGREE PLAN	9
CORE COURSES	9
REQUEST TO WAIVE CORE COURSES	9
THESIS/DISSERTATION RESEARCH PROPOSAL	10
DOCTORAL PRELIMINARY EXAMS	10
STUDENT FINAL DEFENSE	10
REGISTRATION AND BLOCK REMOVAL	11
ACADEMIC PROBATION AND DISMISSAL	11
ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORTS	12
ANNUAL FACULTY RETREAT AND SCIENCE SYMPOSIUM	12
GRADUATE STUDENT REPRESENTATION TO THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE	12
SUMMER HOUSTNG	12
DISTANCE EDUCATION COURSES	13
CROSS CAMPUS REGISTRATION	13
CROSS CAMPUS MARB IDP COURSES	13
FOR FACULTY MEMBERS OFFERING CROSS CAMPUS COURSES	13
GRADUATION	14

INTRODUCTION

This document has been developed for the guidance of faculty members and graduate students associated with the Marine Biology Interdisciplinary Graduate Program (MARB IDP) at all three locations where the program resides - Texas A&M University (TAMU, main campus, College Station), Texas A&M University – Corpus Christi (TAMU-CC), and Texas A&M University at Galveston (TAMUG). This handbook contains a brief outline of policies and procedures guiding this graduate program. For additional campus-specific policies, please visit the online versions of the TAMU-CC MARB IDP Handbook <https://sci.tamucc.edu/assets/documents/marb-handbook.pdf> or the TAMUG MARB IDP Handbook https://www.tamug.edu/marb/degrees/Marine_Biology_IDP.html. In addition to the policies and procedures outlined in this Handbook, MARB IDP students are required to follow campus-specific rules outlined in the graduate catalog at their respective campus.

The MARB IDP is unique in that it combines the strengths of three campuses and six departments within the Texas A&M University System. These departments include Biology, Oceanography, and Wildlife & Fisheries Sciences at TAMU, Life Sciences at TAMU-CC, and Marine Biology and Marine and Coastal Environmental Sciences at TAMUG. The home department for the program is Marine Biology at TAMUG. The goal of the graduate program is to attract high-quality students interested in one or a combination of the sub-disciplines of marine biology who wish to pursue careers in higher education, government, or private industry. The principal strengths of this marine biology program lie in the international recognition, scholarly productivity, and extramural funding of its diverse faculty, as well as the strategic location of two campuses on the Gulf of Mexico.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The MARB IDP administrative structure consists of a Council of Participating Deans (COPD), a Chair, Co-Chairs at the respective campuses, a Faculty Executive Committee (EC), Graduate Recruitment and Admissions Committee (GRAC), and a Staff Graduate Advisor (SGA). The chair of the COPD and the faculty chair are located at TAMUG.

Council of Participating Deans (COPD) – The COPD is made of up Deans/Leaders from the colleges and campuses that participate in the MARB IDP. This group provides administrative oversight to the MARB IDP. A subset of the COPD, the COPD Designees comprising representatives from the three campuses meets once a year to review the program.

Chair of the MARB IDP – The Chair of the MARB IDP manages the program day to day and is responsible for annual reporting to the COPD. Typically, the Chair is a tenured faculty member in MARB, resides at TAMUG, and is elected for a three-year term by the entire Participating Faculty of the MARB IDP.

Co-Chairs of the MARB IDP – The Co-Chairs of the MARB IDP manage the program at their respective campus and work closely with the Chair. The Co-Chairs reside at TAMU and TAMU-CC and are elected by the Participating Faculty of the MARB IDP for three-year terms.

Executive Committee (EC) – The EC has nine voting members (two at-large members from each campus, the Chair and the two co-Chairs) and six non-voting members (the Past Chair, Staff Graduate Advisor, the GRAC Chair and one student representative from each campus). The Co-Chairs represent their campus and their respective departments. The EC meets twice a year (summer and during the winter Retreat). This group is responsible for developing or adjusting policies and procedures for the program, addressing issues, and verifying that the program is meeting expectations as outlined in the original approved proposal to the TAMU System and to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

Graduate Recruitment and Admissions Committee (GRAC) – The GRAC consists of six faculty members, with two members representing each campus. The GRAC is responsible for reviewing all admissions applications and issuing admissions decisions on these applications. The GRAC meets throughout the year following each application deadline. GRAC members are selected and voted to three-year terms by the Executive Committee.

Staff Graduate Advisor (SGA) – The SGA is responsible for student recruitment, record-keeping, advising, and registration under the supervision of the MARB IDP Chair. The SGA keeps minutes of the EC meetings and provides enrollment and tracking data at the EC meetings.

STUDENT ADMISSIONS PROCESS TO THE MARB IDP

A complete application consists of:

1. For M.S. thesis-option and doctoral students – Applicants must identify a faculty member who has agreed to be a Faculty Advisor and provide support for the student before going further in the application process. The location of the prospective Faculty Advisor determines which campus an applicant applies. The name of the prospective Faculty Advisor should be provided in the student's personal statement. Participating departments who accept non-thesis M.S. applicants will assign non-thesis M.S. students to a faculty member who has volunteered to serve as that applicant's Chair. Non-thesis M.S. applicants do not have to establish a faculty advisor prior to applying. At this time, only TAMUG accepts M.S. non-thesis applicants.
2. An application submitted to the prospective faculty advisor's campus.
3. A personal statement containing a narrative describing the student's objectives for graduate study and the reasons for applying to the MARB IDP, as well as the name of the prospective Faculty Advisor.
4. Three letters of recommendation from people familiar with the applicant's potential for graduate studies. Letters from the academic community are preferred.
5. Transcripts of all previous undergraduate/graduate work.
6. For international applicants whose native language is not English, the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) is required. The TOEFL must be taken within the last two years.

It is the applicant's responsibility to make sure that the application is complete by the deadline to

assure full consideration. In addition, each campus may have specific admissions requirements that can be found on their respective webpages. Acceptance into the MARB IDP is competitive and based on consideration of all application materials. Relevant life experiences may also provide a basis for consideration.

APPLICATION DEADLINES

Students are admitted into the MARB IDP for Fall or Spring semesters only. The Fall start date is strongly recommended. Complete applications must be submitted by the deadlines listed below. Late or incomplete applications will not be considered.

Campus	Deadline to be considered for University fellowships Thesis MS, PhD	Deadline to be considered for other funding Thesis MS, PhD	Final IDP-wide Application Deadline All degrees
Fall Admission			
TAMU	Dec 1	February 15	May 1
TAMUG	February 15	February 15	May 1
TAMU-CC	Feb 1		May 1
Spring Admission			
All campuses			October 1

INTERNAL TRANSFER APPLICATIONS

An internal transfer applicant is defined as 1) a student currently enrolled in the MARB IDP who wants to change degree programs (i.e. M.S. to Ph.D.), 2) a student currently enrolled in the MARB IDP who wants to move his or her home department to a different campus, OR 3) a student enrolled in another graduate program at TAMU/TAMUG and TAMU-CC who wants to transfer into the MARB IDP. Internal transfers must be approved by the GRAC, and provide the following to the GRAC for consideration of approval of the transfer:

- A letter from the Faculty Advisor supporting the transfer and assuring that support is available for the student.
- A progress report from the student.
- A copy of the student's original complete application.
- If transferring from TAMU-CC to TAMU/TAMUG or TAMU/TAMUG to TAMU-CC, the applicant will need to submit another ApplyTexas application and pay the appropriate application fee.

The items above must be submitted to the staff graduate advisor (SGA) by the appropriate deadline for consideration.

CONTINUATION TRANSFER APPLICATIONS

A continuation transfer is 1) a MARB IDP M.S. thesis-option student who is planning to graduate or has graduated and 2) wants to continue on with the Ph.D. degree with the same faculty advisor.

Continuation transfers must go through the GRAC by providing the following:

- A letter from the Faculty Advisor that includes a funding plan
- A progress report from the student
- A copy of their original complete application.

There is not a deadline to submit items. However, students and faculty advisors should be aware of university policies administered by the Office of Graduate and Professional Studies at TAMU and TAMU-CC. For TAMU/TAMUG students, students are required to submit a letter of intent to OGS after a GRAC review. The letter of intent should be received by OGAPS less than a year from the M.S. graduation date to avoid submitting another application and fees. The GRAC will receive these requests via email, with adequate time to review the transfer.

PH.D. APPLICANTS FROM A BACHELOR'S DEGREE

Applicants without an MS may apply directly to the doctoral program provided it is supported by the GRAC and the applicant's prospective Faculty Advisor. Student should check with their prospective advisor for policies on studies directly pursuing the Ph.D. from the B.S. level

ADMISSIONS DECISIONS

Decisions to admit students to the MARB IDP are made by the GRAC. The Chair of the GRAC communicates the decision on each application to the Chair of the MARB IDP, the MARB IDP Co-Chairs, and the applicant's prospective Faculty Advisor. A prospective Faculty Advisor can challenge a denial with a formal written appeal to the Chair of the MARB IDP. The Chair, along with the two Co-Chairs, will review the appeal and vote to either reverse or uphold the decision the recommendation of the GRAC. Only the prospective Faculty Advisor can appeal an admissions decision.

MARB IDP PROGRAM DEADLINES FOR M.S. AND PH.D. STUDENTS

Ph.D. students must complete the following to graduate from the MARB IDP program:

1. Establish a Faculty Advisor before application review
2. Form a Student Advisory Committee
3. Submit a Degree Plan
4. Submit a Research Proposal
5. Pass an oral (required) and written (option of the advisory committee) Preliminary Examination
6. Conduct research based on the proposal
7. Write a Dissertation on the research results
8. Defend the Dissertation
9. Submit a Committee-approved final version of the Dissertation

M.S. Thesis students must complete the following to graduate from the MARB IDP program:

1. Establish a Faculty Advisor before application review
2. Form a Student Advisory Committee
3. Submit a Degree Plan
4. Submit a Research Proposal
5. Conduct research based on the Proposal
6. Write a Thesis on the research results
7. Defend the Thesis
8. Submit a Committee-approved final version of the Thesis

M.S. Non-Thesis students must complete the following to graduate from the MARB IDP program:

1. Accepted applicants are assigned to a Faculty Advisor who has volunteered to serve as a student Chair/Advisor
2. Form a Student Advisory Committee
3. Submit a Degree Plan
4. Write and present a professional paper on a relevant topic approved by the Student Advisory Committee, typically within the last semester of enrollment. This paper is formulated in consultation with the Student Advisory Committee and may be based on literature reviews, course materials, and other sources.

All MARB IDP students must show evidence of good progress toward their degree by meeting the following deadlines:

	Ph.D.	M.S. Thesis	M.S. Non-thesis
Selection of advisor	Before applying	Before applying	Assigned upon acceptance
Degree plan filed	End of first semester	End of first semester	End of first semester
Proposal submitted	End of fourth semester	End of second semester	
Passed Preliminary Exam	End of fifth semester		

STUDENT ADVISORY COMMITTEES

Each graduate student must assemble a student advisory committee (SAC) by the end of their first long semester in the MARB IDP. If a SAC is not formed by the end of the first long semester, the student will be placed on warning and must meet with their respective campus contact to discuss their progress toward meeting this deadline. If the SAC is not formed by the end of the second long semester, the student will be blocked from registering for courses until the SAC is formed.

Committee Composition

The chair of an SAC must be a faculty member of the MARB IDP and have full membership in the Participating Graduate Faculty at their respective campus. The majority of the committee must be faculty members of the MARB IDP and members of the Participating Graduate Faculty at the respective campus where the student resides. For required number of committee members, please refer to your campus catalog. Students are strongly encouraged to include committee members from MARB IDP campuses/departments other than the student's home department.

Additional Members of the SAC

A recognized scholar who is not a member of the Participating Graduate Faculty may serve as a Special Appointment or Adjunct Member of the Graduate Faculty following nomination and approval by the Chair of the MARB IDP. A student can have only one external or special appointment member who may serve in addition to, but must not replace, the required members described above. This member should have Adjunct membership or a Special Appointment approved by the graduate offices in College Station or Corpus Christi.

Faculty Membership in the MARB IDP

To obtain faculty status in the MARB IDP, faculty members of other department or programs must present their CV to the Chair of the MARB IDP, who will circulate it to the EC for

consideration. For non-tenure track faculty positions, participation on a student committee as a co-chair will be determined on a case by case basis by the EC. Non tenure-track faculty may not serve as sole chair but may serve as either as a committee member or co-chair.

DEGREE PLAN

The student, in consultation with the SAC, will develop the proposed degree plan no later than the end of the first long semester (fall/spring). Similar to the SAC, if the degree plan is not formed by the end of the first long semester, then the student will be placed on warning and must meet with their respective campus contact to discuss their progress toward meeting this deadline. If the degree plan is not formed by the end of the second long semester, the student will be blocked from registering for courses until the degree plan is submitted.

Credit Hours Required for Master of Science Degree

	Thesis	Non-thesis
Courses*	22	34
Seminar	2	2
Research hours	<u>8</u>	<u>0</u>
Total	32	36

**A minimum of one graduate level statistics course must be included.*

Credit Hours Suggested for Doctor of Philosophy Degree

	With M.S.	Without M.S.
Courses*	17-23	39-55
Seminar	2	2
Research hours	<u>39-45</u>	<u>39-55</u>
Total	64	96

**A minimum of two graduate level statistics courses must be included unless waived by the SAC.*

Core Courses

Students will gain proficiency in a broad range of discipline-appropriate topics in marine biology by completing appropriate graduate-level courses, participating in a seminar course or workshop, conducting relevant research activities, and/or through classroom teaching experience. Proficiency in discipline-appropriate topics will be evaluated and approved by the student's committee Chair. Required courses include MARB 6340 Marine Ecosystems Ecology (Alternate: MARB 640), MARB 668 Marine Evolutionary Biology (Alternate: MARB 6341), and MATH 6315 (Statistical Methods in Research I). Additional or alternative coursework may be assigned by the student's committee or committee Chair.

Request to Waive Core Courses

In cases where students may have already demonstrated proficiency in core course areas (e.g., a similar graduate-level course was taken at another institution), the student may request to waive the core course requirement. To request this waiver, the student must contact the instructor(s) teaching the course with an explanation and a demonstration of proficiency (e.g., a syllabus of the equivalent course, a statement of

justification, transcript, and information about the course materials (e.g., assigned readings, textbook). If the instructor approves the waiver request, the student will submit their request to the appropriate campus MARB IDP lead (Chair or Co-Chairs at the respective campuses), who will present the request to the Executive Committee for review and an e-vote for final approval.

THESIS/DISSERTATION RESEARCH PROPOSAL

The format of the Research Proposal is determined by the student's Advisor and SAC. The student with a required thesis or dissertation will develop a detailed proposal before research begins. The student should report regularly on research progress to the SAC to prevent last minute surprises or misunderstandings and to gain approval of any redirection.

A M.S. thesis-option student must submit his or her proposal by the end of the second long semester. A Ph.D. student must submit his or her proposal by the end of the fourth long semester. If the proposal is not submitted by the deadline above, then the student will be placed on warning and must meet with their respective campus contact to discuss progress toward meeting this deadline. If the proposal is not submitted by the end of the following long semester, the student will be blocked from registering for courses until the proposal is submitted and approved by their SAC.

DOCTORAL PRELIMINARY EXAMS

All committee members must participate in the preliminary examination. The preliminary examination should be completed by the end of the fifth long semester or the final semester of coursework, whichever comes first. If the preliminary examination is not completed by the end of the fifth long semester, the student will be placed on warning and must meet with their respective campus contact to discuss progress toward meeting this deadline. If the preliminary examination is not taken by the end of the sixth long semester, the student will be blocked from registering for courses until it is taken.

Preliminary exams will cover all areas within the scope of the student's doctoral program and will involve written exams from each advisory committee member, followed by an oral exam administered by the committee as a whole. The format and context of the preliminary examination is determined by the SAC following the graduate guidelines of the student's home campus.

STUDENT FINAL DEFENSE

All committee members must complete and submit a MARB IDP defense rubric for a MARB IDP student when he or she defends. Defense rubrics should be submitted to the campus Academic Advisor who will submit them to the Staff Graduate Advisor.

REGISTRATION AND BLOCK REMOVAL

Students who fail to meet MARB IDP deadlines (degree plan, proposal, preliminary examinations, etc.) will be given a warning. The warning status remains for the next long semester. Students then are required to meet with the campus contact to discuss progress toward the deadline. Students who are on warning must meet the deadline by the end of the next long semester to avoid a block from continued registration. The block will be removed once the student submits the required documents.

ACADEMIC PROBATION AND DISMISSAL

A graduate student will be placed on scholastic probation if:

1. At the end of any semester or term, the student's cumulative graduate GPA falls below 3.0, or
2. The graduate student receives a non-passing grade (C, D, F, U, NC) in any course in two sequential semesters.

Removal from Scholastic Probation: A student must achieve a cumulative 3.0 GPA within completion of the next 9 semester credit hours to be removed from scholastic probation if scholastic probation was due to unsatisfactory GPA. The courses included in the 9 semester hours must be approved by the program faculty for degree-seeking students.

A student who received two or more non-passing grades in two sequential semesters may be removed from scholastic probation after one (1) year if the student achieves a cumulative 3.0 GPA and passing grades in all courses.

A student will not be placed on scholastic probation in a graduating semester if the cumulative GPA is 3.00 or higher and there are no more than two Cs for courses on the degree plan.

Program Dismissal: A student who is or has been on scholastic probation will be dismissed from the program if

- The student's grade point average for any subsequent term or semester falls below 3.0, or
- The student receives a third grade non-passing grade, or
- The student does not achieve the required cumulative GPA of 3.0 within completion of 9 semester hours.
- The student is not mathematically able to achieve the required cumulative GPA 3.0 within completion of 9 semester hours.

ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORTS

All MARB IDP students and faculty must submit an annual report each year by June 1 using the MARB IDP Annual Report Form. Information from this annual report is required for assessing the progress of the MARB IDP for state and accreditation agencies. Student Annual reports must be endorsed by the student's Committee Chair. This information is provided to the EC and COPD annually in late summer.

ANNUAL FACULTY RETREAT AND SCIENCE SYMPOSIUM

The annual MARB IDP Faculty Retreat and Marine Biology Science Symposium give the MARB IDP community an opportunity to foster campus collaborations. It is held each winter for students and faculty of the MARB IDP, with the location rotating among the three campuses. The EC conducts its winter meeting during the annual retreat. Students are given the opportunity to display a poster or give an oral presentation on their research during the retreat. Students are expected to present their work at the retreat once every two years at a minimum.

GRADUATE STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES ON THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

At the Annual MARB Retreat, students will choose one graduate student from each of the three campuses to serve as graduate student representatives to the Executive Committee. Campus graduate student representatives attend the semiannual Executive Committee meetings as non-voting Executive Committee members. The role of the graduate student representatives is to communicate concerns, present new ideas, and provide a student perspective on current and proposed program policies. The graduate student representatives also convene the annual graduate student meeting at the Retreat, during which the succeeding year's representative is selected and issues to be brought to the Executive Committee are discussed.

SUMMER HOUSING

For MARB IDP students from College Station and Corpus Christi needing to utilize labs, facilities, and resources of the Galveston campus and surrounding area may reside in the Residence Halls on the TAMUG campus. These students are strongly encouraged to speak with their Co-Chair early in the spring semester to determine costs of housing, parking, and food. The Co-Chair and/or student should notify the SGA as soon as possible. Responses less than a month's notice are not guaranteed accommodations.

DISTANCE EDUCATION COURSES

Each campus is encouraged to offer two distance education courses per semester that are available to all MARB IDP students. Prior to registration each semester, MARB IDP faculty members must provide the SGA with a listing of distance courses they will offer in the upcoming semester. The SGA will then distribute this list to all MARB IDP faculty and students.

CROSS CAMPUS REGISTRATION

Cross campus registration is defined as taking a MARB IDP course at a partner campus instead of the home campus. All cross campus registrations are coordinated by the SGA. Cross campus registrations are coordinated by the SGA to ensure that the student only receives one tuition and fee bill from their home campus. The student should not receive a bill from the partner campus where the course originates.

Cross Campus MARB IDP Courses

The following courses are defined as acceptable MARB IDP Cross Campus courses when taught by distance education and may therefore be included on a student's degree plan:

TAMU

- Any 300, 400, or graduate level courses in BIOL, OCNG, or WFSC
- Any 400 or graduate level courses in ESSM
- STAT 651, 652, 653

TAMU-CC

- MATH 6315, 6316, 6317, 6318
- MARB 6340, 6341
- MARB 6590

TAMUG

- All 300, 400, and graduate level courses in MARB, MARS

For Faculty Members Offering Cross Campus Courses

Course advertising – It is suggested that faculty provide either an electronic advertisement and/or syllabus to the SGA to assist with advertising the course to partner campuses.

Course section creation –When a student requests a cross campus course, a course section will be created at the student's home campus.

Instructional needs – Sometimes obtaining adequate resources for the student registered cross campus can be challenging. If an instructor needs assistance with student access to course materials or general IT access, the instructor should contact the SGA.

Entering Grades – HOWDY is the System that TAMU and TAMUG uses for registration; SAIL is the System that TAMU-CC uses for registration. Each institution has specific requirements for entering grades for cross-campus students:

GRADUATION

The Office of Graduate and Professional Studies (OGAPS) at TAMU and TAMU-CC confer graduate degrees at the close of each regular semester or 10-week summer session. Students expecting to graduate in a given semester must contact the SGA, who will provide a final list to the OGAPS at TAMU and TAMU-CC. Students graduating are required to conduct an exit interview with the SGA. An additional survey will be sent to alumni following their first, second, and fifth year after graduation. The diploma for the program has the name of both institutions and the three campus seals.