

# Department of Bioengineering



## Master's Student Handbook

Graduate Group in Bioengineering  
University of Pennsylvania

<i>INTRODUCTION</i> .....	2
<i>UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA</i> .....	3
<i>BIOENGINEERING OVERVIEW</i> .....	3
<i>GOAL AND PHILOSOPHY</i> .....	4
<i>ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE</i> .....	4
<i>ADVISORS</i> .....	4
<i>THE GRADUATE ENVIRONMENT</i> .....	5
<i>GENERAL INFORMATION</i> .....	5
<i>DEGREE REQUIREMENTS</i> .....	7
<i>PEDAGOGICAL TRAINING</i> .....	11
<i>RECORDS</i> .....	11
<i>FINANCIAL SUPPORT</i> .....	11
<i>GRADUATION CHECKLIST</i> .....	12

## Introduction

Welcome to the Bioengineering Department! This handbook is designed to give new Bioengineering Master's students a brief history and overview of the Bioengineering department at Penn along with important guidelines for successfully completing the Bioengineering Master's program. In addition to this handbook there are helpful resources available on-line;



- The Bioengineering Graduate Program Web Pages:  
<http://www.be.seas.upenn.edu/current-students/masters/degree-requirements.php>
- SEAS Academic Resources:  
<http://www.seas.upenn.edu/graduate/advising/index.php>
- Campus Express – where your Penn journey begins:  
<http://www.campusexpress.upenn.edu/>
- “The PennBook - Resources, Policies & Procedures Handbook”:  
[www.vpul.upenn.edu/osl/pennbook.html](http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/osl/pennbook.html)
- Campus Resource Guide : [www.gsc.upenn.edu/resources/guide](http://www.gsc.upenn.edu/resources/guide)

## Important Contacts:

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It is the student's responsibility to be familiar with the rules, procedures, and requirements of the Department, SEAS, and the University of Pennsylvania.

## **University of Pennsylvania**

Founded by Benjamin Franklin in 1740 as a charity school for Philadelphia children, the University of Pennsylvania is one of America's first universities and one of its foremost institutions of higher education. Located in West Philadelphia, Penn offers its students one of the world's best research faculties and a major metropolis rich in history, tradition, culture and innovation.

Today, Penn is a national leader in interdisciplinary programs that combine academic theory with professional practice. Among the Penn programs that cross the traditional boundaries between academic and professional disciplines is the Institute for Medicine and Engineering and the Institute for Translational Medicine and Therapeutics.

Over 10,000 students are enrolled in Penn's 12 graduate and professional schools, many of which are leaders in their fields. Penn is also an integral part of the West Philadelphia community, participating in a number of programs designed to enhance the livability and economic health of the area.

## **Bioengineering Overview**

The first Biomedical Engineering Program in the nation began in the mid 1920's as a collaboration between engineers and health professionals at the University of Pennsylvania. The first Ph.D. in Bioengineering in the United States was awarded from Penn's Bioengineering Graduate Group in 1953. The Department of Bioengineering was formally approved by the University in 1973. Many of Penn's graduates hold academic positions in Biomedical Engineering or related departments at Universities throughout the world, and have played a leading role in defining the field. Other graduates have entered the biomedical industry and have become the primary driving force behind one of the faster growing sectors of the economy in providing advanced biomedical products, which has saved life and improved the quality of our healthcare system.

Today the Bioengineering department at Penn has 16 primary faculty, and more than 50 affiliated graduate group faculty who provide the core teaching and research environment for over 300 undergraduate and 120 graduate students. The department has consistently been ranked as one of the best Bioengineering programs in the country for preparing students for careers in industry, medicine, academia, and other fields related to biomedical technology. The success of the program is due to the dedication of the faculty in conducting both excellent teaching and outstanding research.

Penn's academic curriculum in Bioengineering provides a solid foundation in science and develops powerful methods for understanding basic physiological processes. Combining the resources of the University of Pennsylvania's School of Engineering, School of Medicine, School of Arts and Sciences, School of Veterinary Medicine, School of Dental Medicine, School of Nursing, and the University Hospitals, the department is pioneering in a broad range of research areas in Bioengineering.

## **Goal and Philosophy**

The Master's curriculum provides training in engineering with focuses on biological and medical sciences. The program provides education in scientific and engineering fundamentals and current updates in the field of Bioengineering. The fundamental goal of Penn Bioengineering is to provide students with a broad, flexible curriculum that gives them experience with a wide range of subject areas and intellectual approaches, to prepare them to function creatively and independently in a diverse range of settings.

The Master's degree program meets the need for rigorous and advanced training beyond the typical four-year engineering program. This is a terminal degree program. Students interested in continuing to pursue a Ph.D. must participate in the annual Ph.D. Graduate Admissions process.

## **Administrative Structure**

### **Main Department Office, and Packages**

The Bioengineering Main Department Office is located in 240 Skirkanich Hall. You will be asked to pick up confidential materials directly from the Graduate Program Coordinator in 240 Skirkanich Hall.

If you order packages for your lab, please have them delivered directly to your lab when possible. Personal packages are **not** accepted at the BE Department Office.

### **Graduate Group Structure**

The graduate program in Bioengineering is administered by the Bioengineering Graduate Group under the auspices of the SEAS Associate Dean for Academic Affairs. The Graduate Group is comprised of the Bioengineering primary faculty members as well as faculty from other departments and schools throughout the University. This unique composition gives students the opportunity to work in emerging and interdisciplinary areas that are relevant to Bioengineering. The current members of the BE graduate group and their research areas are listed on the Department's website: <http://www.be.seas.upenn.edu/about-research/grad-group.php>

## **Advisors**

Masters students will be assigned a Master's Program Academic Advisor. The advisor will assist each student to develop a program of study for the fall and spring semester of their first year. If a student chooses the thesis option, the student's thesis advisor may provide additional guidance on course selection, and will supervise the student's thesis research. The academic advisor will provide students assistance with finding a thesis mentor and must approve of every student's course selection each semester. Students will complete a Course Planning Guide Worksheet through Penn InTouch. All students must receive approval on their Worksheet from their advisor.

## **The Graduate Environment**

The spirit and size of the Department of Bioengineering fosters a close interaction between the graduate students and the entire faculty. This enriches the quality of student-faculty communications and the academic environment to benefit both learning and discovery. Every effort is made to create an environment of scholarship, creativity and learning, which is the very essence of graduate study.

Apart from offering advising, seminars, and informal meetings with the Department Chair and Graduate Group Chair to solicit student input and exchange information, the Department strongly supports the Graduate Association of Bioengineers (GABE). GABE ([www.seas.upenn.edu/be/gabe/index.html](http://www.seas.upenn.edu/be/gabe/index.html)) is a student-run association that represents the entire graduate student community in BE, and organizes both social and professional Bioengineering development events, sometimes in collaboration with the student chapter of BMES (Biomedical Engineering Society, [www.bmes.org](http://www.bmes.org)).

GAPSA is the University wide student government for all graduate and professional students at the University of Pennsylvania. There are many University wide affinity groups supported by GAPSA (e.g. LGBT, BGAPSA, LaGAPSA, Chinese Students and Scholars Association at Penn). For more information please visit [www.gapsa.upenn.edu](http://www.gapsa.upenn.edu)

## **General Information**

Penn Bioengineering Graduate Group offers students a broad education that enables them to work, develop, and lead in bioengineering practice and research: within either traditional engineering and research environments, or in non-traditional multidisciplinary environments at the interface between engineering and a diversity of fields, including medicine, the life sciences, business, and law.

## **Registration**

Master's students in Bioengineering have a wide variety of interests, and the BE graduate program is designed to encourage these interests. Some students prefer to take technical courses primarily within the Department; others desire to take a number of courses in other engineering or science departments. All graduate students must complete the Masters Academic Worksheet through Penn InTouch. A Master's program Academic Advisor must approve of course selection and sign the worksheet to give a student permission to register. Penn InTouch is found at [https://medley.isc-seo.upenn.edu/penn\\_portal/intouch/splash.html](https://medley.isc-seo.upenn.edu/penn_portal/intouch/splash.html)

The Academic Worksheet can be found must be submitted and approved prior to registering for courses. All students should register during Advance Registration. Dates for advance registration for the Spring and Fall semester can be found on the Academic Calendar.

The academic calendar is on-line at: <http://www.upenn.edu/almanac/3yearcal.html>

## **Permits**

Some courses will require a “permit” to register. If so, you will receive a message when you try to register through Penn in Touch for your course selection. To obtain a permit, you will need to contact the Professor of the course directly and the Penn Department responsible for the course to ask for permission to enroll in the course. Once the department issues a permit for the course, return to “Penn InTouch” to complete your registration.

## **Changes in Registration**

Students may add or drop courses without penalty in any semester if it is done by the deadline posted on the Academic Calendar. The student should discuss all changes in registration with an Academic Advising or his/her advisor. All changes must be approved by one of the department’s Master’s Academic Advisors. Approval should be communicated via email to the Graduate Program Coordinator before any changes are made to the registration.

Continuous registration as a graduate student is required unless a formal leave of absence is granted. All students who desire a leave of absence must submit a petition to the Graduate Group Chair. The petition for leave of absence can be found at: <http://www.seas.upenn.edu/graduate/advising/forms-g.php>

## **Academic Forms**

**Important forms created specifically for the needs of students enrolled in the Masters program are found here:**

**<http://www.be.seas.upenn.edu/current-students/masters/forms.php>**

These forms include the BE Master’s Program Course Planning Guide (CPG), BE 599 – Independent Study Form, BE 597- Master’s Thesis Proposal Form and a link to All SEAS Academic Forms.

All SEAS Academic Forms including the Petition for Action, Petition for Leave of Absence, Transfer of Credit and Transfer of Graduate Group and the Application for Graduation can be found at <http://www.seas.upenn.edu/graduate/advising/forms-g.php>

## **Sub-matriculation**

Qualified students may be permitted to begin a graduate program towards the Master’s degree while still completing their undergraduate program. Sub-matriculation into the Master’s in Bioengineering is open to Bioengineering BSE students with a GPA of at least 3.2. This Master’s program is available only to current Bioengineering Undergraduate BSE students. Sub-matriculants may double count up to 3 courses towards both their BSE and Master’s degree. School regulations allow only candidates for the BSE degree to apply for sub-matriculation in the Master’s program. However, subject to

the same GPA criterion, BSE and BAS students may sub-matriculate into the M.B. program in Biotechnology and should refer to that program for details.

Interested students should inform and consult the Bioengineering Undergraduate and Graduate Chairs and fill out the online application. Application into any sub-matriculation program must be made between the end of the sophomore year and the end of the junior year.

### **Grades, Credits, and Academic Standing**

The grading system for graduate courses is A+ through F. If a student receives an F, the course must be taken again; however, the F remains on the student's record. Courses for which a passing grade was obtained cannot be taken again for credit.

Master's students in the School of Engineering and Applied Science are expected to maintain at least a B average (3.0) in their work. A student whose record falls below a minimum of a B average will be put on academic probation and may be required to withdraw; graduation requires a minimum of a B average (exclusive of dissertation credits). Requirements cannot be satisfied by auditing courses or receiving an incomplete (I) grade.

### **Degree Requirements**

To fulfill the requirements for the MSE degree, students must take 10 courses at the 500 level or above. You may choose to write a thesis or complete the non-thesis degree. The two options differ only in the distribution of courses. Many students, especially those interested in research or later pursuing a PhD or MD, choose to write a thesis. The program director helps you develop a program of study for the fall and spring semester of your first year.

The Course Planning Guide (CPG) helps you design an individualized curriculum that leads to your successfully completing the program. Use the CPG for both the thesis and non-thesis program options. The CPG is an on-line form found here: <http://www.be.seas.upenn.edu/about-be/forms/cpg/>

### **Required of All Master's Students**

A total of 10 cus is required of all Masters Students

- 1 Math course (1 CU)
- 1 Biomedical Science course (Students may select from BE 513, BIOM 600, or another Biology course (1 CU)
- 2 Bioengineering graduate electives (must be BE courses)
- 3 Engineering/Biomedical Science Electives
- 1 general elective course from any science or engineering discipline (1 CU)

## **Thesis Option Requirements**

If you choose to write a thesis, you are completing the thesis option and must also take:

\* 2 units of thesis research (BE 999) (2 CU)

Also be sure to read the Master's Thesis Guidelines.

In choosing the thesis option, your thesis advisor may provide additional guidance on course selection and will supervise your thesis research. The director of the bioengineering MSE program will help you find a mentor, traditionally selected from the Bioengineering Graduate Group.

## **Non-Thesis Option Requirements**

Students who choose to not write a thesis must also take 2 science and engineering electives

## **Upon Completion**

When you complete the requirements and are ready to graduate, you must complete the Application for Graduation and submit the form to the Academic Programs Office in 111 Towne Building.

## **Policy on Transfer Credits Earned in Other Institutions**

Two graduate-level course units (out of the 10 required) taken at another university may be accepted provided that the grade received in each course was at least a B and did not count toward an undergraduate degree. All transfer credits are subject to approval by the Graduate Group Chair and the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs. The student who wishes such credit transfer must complete and submit a "Transfer of Credit Petition" found on-line at: <http://www.seas.upenn.edu/graduate/advising/forms-g.php> In order to obtain credit for courses taken at other institutions the following procedure must be followed:

- For each transfer course, obtain the course description and the title of the textbook prescribed for the course.
- Identify a professor who teaches a similar course at Penn. If a similar course is not offered at Penn, identify a professor whose areas of expertise are in the general area of the course to be transferred. The professor should certify that the course is of similar level to a graduate course offered at Penn or, if a similar course is not offered at Penn, that the course qualifies for Penn students to take if it were offered here.
- Submit a petition on a standard form to the Graduate Group Chair. Attach a copy of the complete transcript to the transfer of credit petition.
- \*Please note that a student may not receive credit for a course taken at the undergraduate level if that course counted toward an undergraduate degree.

## **Independent Study – BE 599**

Independent study allows the student to create a customized curriculum to study material beyond or outside the scope of our standard BE offerings. The student should identify the independent study topic, faculty mentor and scope of the independent study. Prior to the beginning of the semester in which the student contemplates taking the independent study, the student and his/her independent study faculty must complete the BE 599 Independent Study Form that can be found on-line in the Forms Page website. The document must be signed by both the student and his/her independent study faculty mentor, and it should be submitted to the Graduate Program Coordinator in room 240 Skirkanich Hall. The Graduate Group Chair will review the proposal and either approve of the plan or request revisions.

Independent studies are less structured than regular courses but are no less rigorous. They must adhere to the following guidelines:

- An independent study course should require an effort comparable to that of a regular course, about 9 hours a week or a total of 126 hours per semester.
- The student should meet the faculty member administering the independent study (the advisor) on a regular basis, at least once a week. It is the student's responsibility to schedule these weekly meetings. Past experience indicates that failure to maintain regular contact with the student's advisor often has led to a less than satisfactory performance in the independent-study course. In the absence of regular contact, the student stands the risk of not being focused leading to an impression of dereliction. The key to a successful independent study is a steady effort throughout the semester. The student should not expect to be able to cram a semester's work into a few days of intensive work at the end of the semester.
- At the conclusion of the independent study, the student should prepare a brief report specifying what material was covered during the independent study, those objectives that were met and those that were not. In the event that objectives were not met, a clear explanation should be provided as to why such objectives were not met. This document should also be signed by the student and his/her independent study faculty mentor, and it will form a part of the student's file.
- It is the student's responsibility to make sure that these guidelines are followed. Failure to follow these guidelines may result in the student not receiving credit for the independent study.

## **Bioengineering Seminar**

All students are invited to attend the Bioengineering Seminars. The seminars are usually held weekly on Thursdays at 12pm. All Seminars are listed on the Bioengineering Current Events web page found here:

<http://www.be.seas.upenn.edu/about-be/events/index.php>

The seminars are also announced via email. All students are encouraged to attend but Master's students are not required to enroll in BE 699 - Bioengineering Seminar. BE 699 cannot be used to fulfill a requirement toward your Master's degree.

## **BE 597 – Master’s Thesis Research**

BE 597 is the course number assigned to Master’s Thesis Research. Section numbers for BE 597 are assigned according to each advisor’s name. The section numbers for BE 597 will be distributed by the Graduate Program Coordinator during advance registration time period. The student’s thesis advisor assigns grades for BE 597. Only grades of “S” (satisfactory), “U” (unsatisfactory) or “I” (incomplete) can be earned in this course.

A Bioengineering Master’s student who wishes to write a thesis must choose an advisor and a suitable thesis topic before the end of his/her first semester of graduate studies. The advisor must be a faculty member in the Bioengineering Graduate Group.

At the time of registration for Thesis Research (BE 597), the graduate student must complete and submit the required Master’s Thesis Research Proposal form found on-line on the Forms Page website.

Usually the student will conduct thesis research during the summer sessions but may also do so in the Spring semester.

## **Submitting the Master’s Thesis**

The thesis must be prepared and submitted following the University of Pennsylvania Master’s Thesis Style Guide found on-line at: <http://www.upenn.edu/VPGE/masters.html>

The written thesis must be approved by the student’s thesis advisor and Bioengineering Graduate Group Chair, indicated by original signatures on the thesis cover page.

Two unbound hardcopies of the approved thesis must be submitted to the Bioengineering Graduate Program Coordinator, 240 Skirkanich Hall. They will be bound (at the BE Graduate Group’s expense) for the advisor and the Graduate Group Thesis Library.

Two unbound hard copies of the approved thesis must also be submitted to the Office of Academic Programs at the School of Engineering, located in 111 Towne Building.

### **BE 990 Registration**

To be eligible to register for BE 990, a Master's degree student must have completed 10 courses and only need to complete the writing of his/her Master's thesis. Students may also register for BE 990 to allow the completion of any incompletes. A student is allowed to take 990, which carries full-time status with 0 credit units, only once. If a student wishes to register for BE 990, the student must contact the Graduate Program Coordinator.

### **Pedagogical Training**

Participation of graduate students in the teaching mission of the department develops their teaching, presentation, leadership, and interpersonal skills while assisting the department in discharging its teaching responsibilities. Typically students lead tutorials, supervise undergraduate laboratory experiments, develop instructional laboratories, develop instructional materials, and/or grade homework, laboratory reports, and exams. All interested graduate students are encouraged to participate under faculty guidance in the teaching mission of the department, but a teaching experience is not mandatory. Students interested in participating in teaching should contact the Graduate Program Coordinator at least one month prior to the start of the semester. In addition, BE 895 (Methods in Bioengineering Education) offers graduate students a formal course in the practical and philosophical aspects of university teaching. Finally, Penn's Center for Teaching and Learning ([wwwctl.sas.upenn.edu](http://wwwctl.sas.upenn.edu)) offers teaching workshops.

### **Records**

Transcripts can be viewed on Penn In Touch at [https://medley.isc-seo.upenn.edu/penn\\_portal/intouch/splash.html](https://medley.isc-seo.upenn.edu/penn_portal/intouch/splash.html). Graduate students are encouraged to periodically check transcripts. Look for unreported grades or other discrepancies. Please bring any questions or concerns about your transcripts to the attention of the Bioengineering Graduate Program Coordinator in 240 Skirkanich Hall.

### **Financial Support**

It is well known that the cost of a graduate or professional education today is a major investment for most students and their families. The University of Pennsylvania understands this, and is committed to making a Penn education accessible for all talented and qualified students. Extremely limited internal funding opportunities are available for Master's degree candidates. Master's candidates are typically NOT provided fellowship or research support. You should not count on getting financial assistance, beyond loans, if you join our department as a BE Master's student.

For up to date information on financing your graduate education please visit the Student Financial Services web page at: <http://www.sfs.upenn.edu/paying/paying-grad.htm> Here

you will find information on financial aid including loans, scholarships, grants and fellowships.

### **Graduation Checklist**

- 1) If you have chosen the Master's Thesis option, please obtain Master's thesis instructions from 111 Towne Building early in the writing stage.
- 2) Confer with your adviser and inform him or her of the need for a timely reading and signature before graduation.
- 3) Fill out the application form well in advance of the deadline.
- 4) Make sure that your financial obligations are cleared before the end of the final semester.
- 5) Check that your academic record is complete, and that appropriate courses have been taken for the degree. Students who have completed all requirements for the degree before their final semester should obtain an exemption from registration form in 111 Towne Building.
- 6) Order cap and gown from the Bookstore in early March if you wish to participate in the May graduation ceremony. May is the only formal graduation ceremony. (Students who graduate in August or December of the preceding year are invited to attend the May ceremony. Students anticipating graduation in the same year may request, by approval, to participate in the May ceremony.)