

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA  
CENTER FOR BIOETHICS

# GRADUATE PROGRAM STUDENT HANDBOOK



AcademicHealthCenter



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

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# GRADUATE PROGRAM STUDENT HANDBOOK

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## Welcome to the Bioethics MA program!

We are delighted that you are joining us in the Center for Bioethics! During your studies, you will be working with a broadly interdisciplinary, internationally recognized faculty, at an institution with a long-standing commitment to excellence in bioethics. We hope that your time with us is productively challenging and professionally rewarding.

This handbook aims to provide an overview of key information concerning the Master's program in Bioethics at the University of Minnesota. It serves as an important element in building a shared sense of expectations and responsibilities for your graduate education in the Center. For additional information, you can consult the following comprehensive documents available on the [Graduate School's website](#):

- [Graduate School Catalog](#), which provides detailed information about Graduate School policies and major program regulations
- [Graduate School's Graduate Student Handbook](#), which highlights the many resources available to graduate students at the University
- [University's Registration Page](#), which includes course schedules and deadlines for current semesters

In addition, there are expectations and responsibilities for students entering graduate programs. Some of these responsibilities are outlined in the following documents:

- [Mutual Responsibilities in Graduate Education at the University of Minnesota](#)
- [Student Conduct Code](#)
- [Code of Conduct](#)

Other relevant policies can be found at <http://www1.umn.edu/regents/polindex.html>.

Please note that the information provided in this handbook and other University catalogs, publications, or announcements is subject to change without notice. University offices can provide current information about possible changes.

Of course, your most important resource will be our faculty and staff; we look forward to working with you. You should meet with your advisor at least once per semester, although we encourage more frequent interaction between advisors and advisees. If you have questions, don't hesitate to ask.

We believe that graduate education extends beyond the classroom. Your education will be enriched by participation in this community, through informal discussions with faculty and students, active participation in the Center Seminar Series, and any number of other activities beyond those specified in this document. We have much to learn from one another and we are fortunate to be members of a community with such rich opportunities for learning and collaboration.

Again, welcome to the program. We are so glad that you decided to make the Center for Bioethics your community.

## 1. Program Overview

The mission of the Center for Bioethics is to advance and disseminate knowledge concerning ethical issues in health care and the life sciences. The Center carries out this mission by conducting original interdisciplinary research, offering educational programs and courses, fostering public discussion and debate through community outreach activities, and assisting in the formulation of public policy. The Center is open to all points of view regarding moral values and principles. Its research reflects a strong belief in combining the strengths of various disciplines and professions. When possible, research findings are integrated with policy analysis.

The Center's graduate program fits centrally with this mission. The Center offers a [graduate minor in bioethics](#), which is the appropriate option for those students interested in showing bioethics as an area of competence rather than an area of specialization. For students desiring a more comprehensive education in bioethics, a graduate major taken through the MA program is the appropriate course of study. The curriculum for this program includes a set of required core courses, the opportunity for study of electives in bioethics, as well as a requirement for coursework in other fields that are related to bioethics. Students will be required to write a master's thesis.

Given the fundamentally interdisciplinary nature of bioethics, professional opportunities in the field are greatly enhanced for trainees with a graduate degree in bioethics as well as a terminal graduate or professional degrees in another field - for example, degree combinations of an MA degree in Bioethics with another degree such as a JD, PhD, MD or others. Indeed, the current gold standard in bioethics graduate education is to understand Master's degrees in bioethics as value-added degrees while at the same time acknowledging the importance of a graduate major in bioethics for those who wish to specialize in the field. Specialization in the field requires the thoroughgoing, research-based education in bioethics provided by a graduate major. This model prompts students to acquire a firm disciplinary grounding as well as interdisciplinary bioethics expertise, a practice which best prepares students for bioethics related career placement. Students are advised against viewing the Bioethics MA as a stand alone degree that prepares them for career placement.

## 2. Degree Requirements

Students in this Plan A (i.e. thesis-based) Master's Degree program are required to take at least 20 credits of courses, distributed as follows:

### **REQUIRED BIOETHICS COURSES (9 credits)**

**BTHX 5010:** Bioethics Proseminar  
(to be taken Fall of 1st year - 2 credits)

The Proseminar will familiarize graduate students with a wide range of topics in bioethics and the work of a number of faculty affiliated with the program, to help

students select mentors and research programs. The Proseminar will be open only to bioethics graduate students (Master's students and Bioethics Graduate Minors), with an aim of fostering community among them.

**BTHX 5300: Foundations of Bioethics**

(to be taken 1st year - 3 credits)

This course provides an overview of major theoretical frameworks and foundational issues in bioethics, including moral frameworks, sociology of knowledge, etc.

**BTHX 5610: Bioethics Research and Publication (1 credit)**

This seminar is tailored to students wishing to incorporate work in bioethics into their career plans. It provides an overview of research methods, and discusses career and publication strategies, authorship issues, ethics in publication, and peer review.

**Area Requirement:** At least one course allowing study of an area of specialization within bioethics, as specified, below (3 credits):

Clinical ethics core course

BTHX 5100: Intro to Clinical Bioethics -- 3 credits; or

Ethics of health policy core course

BTHX 5400: Introduction to Bioethics in Health Policy; or BTHX 5453: Law, Biomedicine, and Bioethics (cross listed with LAW 6853) -- 3 credits each

Ethics of human subjects research core course

BTHX 5210: Ethics of Human Subjects Research -- 3 credits

**Electives:**

**Bioethics courses** (at least 5 credits)

Complete listing of courses available at

[http://www.ahc.umn.edu/bioethics/prod/groups/ahc/@pub/@ahc/documents/asset/ahc\\_96015.pdf](http://www.ahc.umn.edu/bioethics/prod/groups/ahc/@pub/@ahc/documents/asset/ahc_96015.pdf).

**Related fields outside Bioethics:** (at least 6 credits)

Sample courses appropriate to this requirement can be found at

[http://www.ahc.umn.edu/bioethics/prod/groups/ahc/@pub/@ahc/documents/asset/ahc\\_96014.pdf](http://www.ahc.umn.edu/bioethics/prod/groups/ahc/@pub/@ahc/documents/asset/ahc_96014.pdf). Courses fulfilling this requirement must be chosen in consultation with the

student's advisor to ensure their appropriateness for the student's course of study.

Students may elect a graduate minor to fulfill this requirement. However, students may also elect to take courses from different programs, for example, a health policy course from the School of Public Health and a health law course from the Law School.

**NOTE:** Of the 20 total course credits required, at least 1 BTHX course and at least 2 courses total are to be taken at the 8xxx level. Thesis credits do not count toward this requirement.

## **Master's Thesis and Final Exam**

Students are also required to complete at least 10 thesis credits and write a thesis. Students work on their thesis under the supervision of a thesis committee; the committee chair will serve as the student's thesis advisor. The thesis committee must include two Bioethics graduate faculty members and one graduate faculty member outside of Bioethics. The "outside" member of the committee will be from the graduate faculty of the minor field, if the student has completed a graduate minor.

Before beginning to write a thesis, students should work with their thesis committee to develop a thesis proposal. The proposal should be a short (approximately 10 page) description of the thesis topic, including a cover form to be signed by the student and each member of the student's committee upon approval of the proposal, a narrative description of the proposed project and its contribution to the field of bioethics, a timetable for completion, and an annotated bibliography. Once a student's committee has approved the proposal, the student will be authorized to begin writing the thesis. Students may register for thesis credits while developing the thesis proposal.

No precise guidelines can be set for the time to be devoted to thesis writing or the page length of theses, as these depend on many factors. However, as a rough estimate, students can expect to spend 6 months to a year writing their theses, and theses may be approximately 50-100 pages in length. Please be advised that the Graduate School sets formatting guidelines for theses. They can be found at [http://www.grad.umn.edu/Current\\_Students/forms/g13.pdf](http://www.grad.umn.edu/Current_Students/forms/g13.pdf). A full copy of these guidelines will be included in students' orientation packets. It is a good idea to keep these guidelines in mind while writing the thesis, to avoid having to reformat it completely after it is written.

Students will be required to pass a final exam for their thesis. The final exam will be oral. The final oral for the master's degree is conducted as a closed examination, attended by only the student and the examining committee.

## **3. Joint Degree Options**

The Center for Bioethics is working on crafting agreements to allow students to pursue a degree in bioethics along with a range of other degrees as part of a Joint Degree Program. This would allow students to pursue joint degrees in bioethics and related fields in a streamlined program that offers greater academic support than if they sought the two degrees separately. Students interested in such options should contact the Director of Graduate Studies.

## **4. Academic Standards**

### **GPA**

Students must maintain a minimum GPA of 3.0 (B) to remain in good standing.

### **Limitations on use of S/N credits**

The Graduate School allows students to use up to 1/3 of the coursework on the Degree Program on an S/N grading basis. The remaining 2/3 must be completed on the A-F grading basis. All required courses must be taken on an A-F grading basis.

### **Incomplete Grades**

The symbol "I" may be assigned by an instructor to indicate "incomplete," in accordance with provisions announced in class at the beginning of the semester, when in the instructor's opinion there is a reasonable expectation that the student can successfully complete the work of the course. An "I" remains on the transcript until the instructor replaces it with a final A-F or S-N grade. The time limit for removal of incomplete grades is one semester after the grade is assigned. Thus, for example, an "I" grade assigned in fall semester must be removed by completion of outstanding work by the end of spring semester. An "I" grade assigned in spring semester must be removed by completion of outstanding work by the end of the following fall semester. Course instructors may, at their discretion, establish a shorter time limit for the removal of incomplete grades. The maximum number of credits of incompletes allowable at any given time is six (6) credits. Students may petition to the Director of Graduate Studies for exceptions to this requirement; exceptions will be granted only in exceptional circumstances.

### **Annual Reviews**

Members of the Bioethics graduate faculty are required to provide students with information about their standing in the MA program. Each spring semester, members of the Bioethics graduate faculty will meet to assess the performance of students who have been active in the MA program. The work of each student is considered separately and the faculty reaches one of three decisions:

1. to encourage the student to continue in the program;
2. to allow the student to continue in the program, but inform him or her of specific concerns the faculty has concerning performance or progress;
3. to terminate the student from the program.

Decisions of the faculty are communicated to the student by letter following the meeting.

## **5. Progress Toward Degree**

### **Maintaining active student status**

The Graduate School requires students to register every fall and spring semester throughout the program to remain active. If students become "inactive" they will automatically be withdrawn from the Graduate School and must reapply for admission to the department and the Graduate School.

### **Part Time vs. Full Time Status**

Students may elect to pursue the MA degree on either a part time or full time basis. By Graduate School standards, students must be registered for a minimum of 6 credits to be considered full time. As with all decisions concerning registration and progress

toward degree, students should discuss the issue of part time vs full time status with their advisor and/or the Director of Graduate Studies.

### **Time Limit for Earning the Master's Degree**

All requirements for the master's degree must be completed and the degree awarded within seven years. The seven-year period begins with the earliest coursework included on the official degree program form, including any transfer work.

Students who are unable to complete the degree within the seven-year limit may petition the Graduate School for an extension of up to one additional year. Extensions beyond one year are considered only in the most extraordinary circumstances. To ensure timely consideration, petitions should be filed early in the term in which the time limit expires.

If a petition is approved, the student is notified of the expectations for progress and completion of the degree. If the petition is denied, the student is terminated from the graduate program.

Students who have been terminated under such circumstances may apply for readmission to the Graduate School; however, readmission under these circumstances is not assured. The faculty in the major field and the Graduate School set any readmission conditions on the student's resumption of work toward the degree, such as registering for additional coursework, retaking written examinations, completing the degree within a specified time period, or other appropriate terms.

For more information about the master's degree time limit and petitioning procedure, visit [http://www.grad.umn.edu/current\\_students/forms/g14.pdf](http://www.grad.umn.edu/current_students/forms/g14.pdf)

### **Limits on the Use of Transfer Credits**

Master's degree students are required by the Graduate School to complete at least 60 percent of the coursework for their official degree programs (*excluding thesis credits*) as registered University of Minnesota Graduate School students. Since the MA in Bioethics requires a minimum of 20 credits of coursework (excluding thesis credits), students may be allowed to transfer 8 credits of coursework. To do so, students must gain approval of the advisor, director of graduate studies in the major (and director of graduate studies in the minor, if the courses are for a designated minor), and the Graduate School. Transfer of coursework from any combination of the following is permitted:

1. Other recognized graduate schools;
2. Registration for graduate credit by non-degree students—students may be able to register for graduate credit when not admitted to the Graduate School. Non-degree students interested in taking graduate-level courses must work with the respective departments (generally the director of graduate studies or his/her designee) to gain admission to non-degree status. For information about registering for graduate credit as a non-degree student, refer to <http://onestop.umn.edu/non-degree/registration/graduate/index.html>.

3. Registrations through other University of Minnesota units (e.g., College of Education and Human Development, Law School) in pursuit of graduate-level degrees;
4. Adult special, summer session, and College of Continuing Education registrations at the University of Minnesota taken *before spring semester 2001*. Any registrations in these categories taken spring semester 2001 or later will not be accepted towards any Graduate School degree requirement.

In all cases, official transcripts of the work must be attached to the degree program form, unless they have already been included in the student's Graduate School file. Individual graduate programs have the option of specifying a lower percentage of coursework for transfer.

Work to be transferred must be graduate level (postbaccalaureate) and have been taught by faculty authorized to teach graduate courses. It is the student's responsibility to provide appropriate course documentation (e.g., course syllabi, faculty status information) supporting proposed transfer credits to the program.

In the case of a transfer from a non-U.S. institution, the credits must have been earned in a program judged by the Graduate School to be comparable to a graduate degree program in a graduate school of a regionally accredited institution in the United States.

Regarding the transfer of coursework from either a U.S. or non-U.S. institution, if conditions are placed on a student's admission to exclude certain coursework from transfer to a Graduate School degree program, that coursework may not be transferred regardless of the level of the coursework or the status of the school or college in which it was earned.

Credits are transferred by including the courses in the proposed degree program. Credits not accepted as part of a student's degree program cannot be transferred to the graduate transcript.

Courses taken before the awarding of a baccalaureate degree cannot be transferred.

### **Filing of milestone forms**

Degree Program Forms identify the courses that you will complete to fulfill a student's requirements for the MA degree. Consistent with the guidance provided by the Graduate School

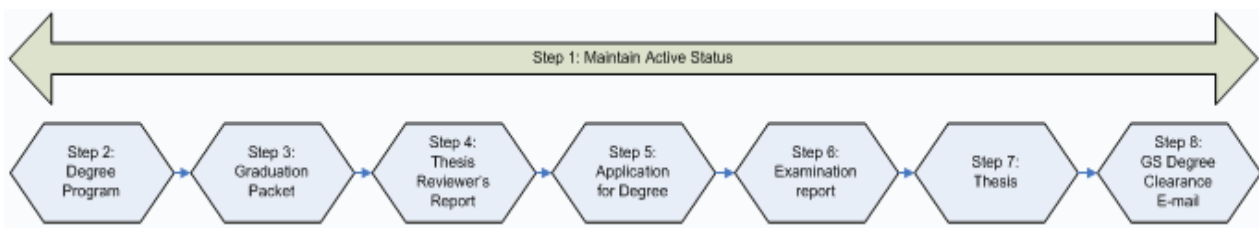
([http://www.grad.umn.edu/Current\\_Students/degree\\_completion/explain/degree\\_program.html](http://www.grad.umn.edu/Current_Students/degree_completion/explain/degree_program.html)), students must file their Degree Program forms at least one term before they take their final examination, and are encouraged to do so earlier if feasible. The faculty of the Center for Bioethics recognizes the value of using unofficial drafts of the form for advising purposes, and so will encourage that the form be used in this way as early as possible during a student's MA program, as early as the student's second term. Our faculty also recognizes the importance of officially filing the form earlier than one semester prior to the student's final exam, if possible, to relieve the administrative burden re: processing forms, and delays for the student if forms need to be revised and refiled. Thus, as per the language from the Graduate School's website (above), students

will be encouraged to file their forms earlier than the deadline if possible. It is our understanding, however, that changes made to a student's degree program after the form is officially filed with the Graduate School require a formal petition to the Graduate School. Thus, a balance must be struck between the advantages of filing Degree Program forms early, and the administrative burden created by premature filing of forms.

The Graduate School provides a helpful checklist to track degree completion requirements. For sake of convenience, it is reproduced here from [http://www.grad.umn.edu/current\\_students/masters/planchecklist.pdf](http://www.grad.umn.edu/current_students/masters/planchecklist.pdf).

### **Degree Completion Check List Master's Plan A (with thesis)**

The following Graduate School requirements are to be completed in the following order. To help you keep track of your degree completion requirements, check off each step when completed, and retain this check list for your reference. For additional information about Graduate School requirements, refer to the current [Graduate School Catalog](#). Be sure to contact your graduate program office concerning program-specific requirements.



- Step 1: Maintain active student status** by registering in the Graduate School every fall and spring term (including the term in which you complete all requirements and clear for your degree.)
- Step 2: File your Degree Program form** with the Graduate School (316 Johnston)
  - The *Degree Program* form is available in 316 Johnston, and [online](#).
  - Check with your graduate office regarding program-specific deadlines for submission of the *Degree Program* form.
  - The Graduate School must receive your *Degree Program* form at least one term prior to your anticipated term of degree clearance.
  - Your *Degree Program* must be approved by the Graduate School before you can obtain your Graduation Packet and defend.

- **Step 3: Obtain your Graduation Packet** from the Graduate School (316 Johnston)
  - About one semester before your final oral examination, obtain the Graduation Packet in 316 Johnston, or request [online](#).
  
- **Step 4: Submit the forms in the Graduation Packet** per instructions
  - **Step 4a:** The *Reviewers Report* form must be signed and submitted to the Graduate School (316 Johnston) in order for you to obtain the *Examination Report* form.
  - **Step 4b:** The *Graduate Application for Degree* form must be submitted to the Office of the Registrar by the first business day of the month you intend to graduate.
  
- **Step 5: Submit the Examination Report form**, signed by your committee to the Graduate School (316 Johnston)
  - The signed *Examination Report* form must be submitted by the last business day of the month you intend to graduate.
  
- **Step 6: Submit two unbound copies of your thesis** along with the \$10 thesis binding fee, to the Graduate School (316 Johnston), including the following:
  - **Step 6a:** A signature page with your adviser(s) signatures.
  - **Step 6b:** One additional copy of the title page must be submitted.
  - All thesis materials must be submitted to the Graduate School by the last business day of the month you intend to graduate.
  
- **Step 7: Follow instructions provided to you by the Graduate School** regarding your degree clearance During the 2nd or 3rd week of the month you apply to graduate, as indicated on the *Graduate Application for Degree* form (see Step 4b), you will receive an email communication from the Graduate School to your U of M email address. The email will either alert you to remaining degree requirements that must be completed in order for your degree to be awarded; or will confirm that you have completed all degree requirements, and inform you of the date upon which your degree will be awarded.

**IMPORTANT NOTICE REGARDING COMMENCEMENT ATTENDANCE:**

Commencement attendance does not imply that you have completed all degree requirements and officially graduated. For information specifically related to eligibility requirements and deadlines for attending the Graduate School commencement ceremony, please refer to the Graduate School's Commencement Attendance Approval form, available in your graduation packet and [online](#).

If you have questions regarding your master's degree progress and/or degree clearance, please contact:

**Graduate Student Services and Progress** - [http://www.grad.umn.edu/current\\_students/](http://www.grad.umn.edu/current_students/)  
**Degree Program Forms**, Renae Faunce - [gscmte@umn.edu](mailto:gscmte@umn.edu) - 612-625-5833  
**Master's Degree Progress**, Amber Knapp - [gsmast@umn.edu](mailto:gsmast@umn.edu) - 612-625-4019

## 6. Advising

Students will be assigned a faculty advisor upon entry into the MA program. Assignments will be based on areas of interest expressed by students in their application materials and on the current faculty advising load. The initial faculty advisor provides information and guidance to the student in course selection and general progress with graduate coursework. This faculty advisor should:

- Clarify program requirements, policies and procedures;
- Assist in developing and approve the student's program of study; and
- Facilitate relationships between the student and other individuals on campus who may provide assistance.

It is important to note that the initial faculty advisor appointment is not intended to continue for the duration of the graduate student's program. Students are encouraged to meet and become acquainted with program faculty, and if a more appropriate advisor match is found, to ask that faculty member to serve as her/his thesis advisor/chair of the thesis committee. The thesis advisor should be working with the student by the time that the student's degree program form is filed, if not earlier. Specific guidelines for individual thesis work are determined by the student, the thesis advisor, and review committee members chosen and approached by the advisee upon consultation with and approval of the advisor.

The thesis advisor should:


- take reasonable measures to ensure that the advisee initiates thesis research in a timely fashion;
- meet regularly with the advisee to discuss thesis development;
- return comments on written work in a timely fashion; and
- uphold the academic standards of the University of Minnesota.

Advising during graduate school will evolve from a somewhat directive to a more comprehensive approach. The advisor/advisee relationship should be implemented through a mentoring process that features interactive communication, socialization into the academic community, and sponsorship into the profession. Central to graduate student success is the tenet that graduate students are responsible decision makers and self-directed learners. In order to plan and realize their academic and career goals, advisees should:

- seek advising from appropriate advisors at appropriate times;
- use available resources, including those that are web-based, to monitor their academic progress; and
- be responsible for actions and decisions that affect their academic progress.

It may happen that either the faculty advisor or the advisee believes that the advising process is not successful. Such difficulties should be reported to the Director of Graduate Studies, who will assist in mediating and in developing meaningful alternatives to existing problems to arrive at a mutually acceptable resolution of the problem. It may happen that a change of advisor occurs as a result. Such a change should be handled so that the academic experience of the graduate student is supported. Students who wish to speak to someone outside the Center about such problems can go to [Student Conflict Resolution Center](#) or [Graduate Student Services and Progress Office](#) for additional help.

<p>The University of Minnesota is committed to the policy that all persons shall have equal access to its programs, facilities, and employment without regard to race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, age marital status, disability, public assistance status, veteran status, or sexual orientation.</p>
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