Student Handbook

Bioinformatics Program
Rochester Institute of Technology

Thomas H. Gosnell School of Life Sciences
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Disclaimer: this is only a guide. Official policies and procedures are in the undergraduate and graduate bulletins.
Bioinformatics@ RIT

Bioinformatics is a field that has been developing over the last 20 years. It is a discipline that represents a marriage between biotechnology and computer technologies and has evolved through the convergence of advances in each of these fields. Today bioinformatics is a field that encompasses all aspects of the application of computer technologies to biological data. Computers are used to organize, link, analyze and visualize complex sets of biological data.

In order to address the need for highly trained individuals in this exciting field, RIT has established degree programs in Bioinformatics at both the baccalaureate and masters levels. Already a national leader in biology education, we are offering curricula which lead to the BS and MS degrees in Bioinformatics. The latter is comprised of two tracks of core courses, a choice of electives, and a required research thesis. In addition, we offer a combined BS/MS program which can be completed in a total of five years.

An integral component of our program is the goal of familiarizing our students with the algorithms and techniques used in and appropriate for bioinformatics. The interdisciplinary nature of bioinformatics requires close work with departments outside of Life Sciences. In this light, our programs have been developed in collaboration with the faculty of the Thomas H. Gosnell School of Life Sciences, industry leaders who employ our students, as well as the departments Computer Science, Information Technology, Mathematics and Statistics and Chemistry.

Faculty within the Thomas H. Gosnell School of Life Sciences who teach in the Bioinformatics program include:

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Associate Professor of Life Sciences  
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**Feng Cui, Ph.D.**
Assistant Professor of Life Sciences  
M.D., Hunan Medical University, 1995  
M.S., Biology, Truman State University, 2000  
Ph.D., Bioinformatics, Iowa State University, 2005  
fxcsbi@rit.edu  
office: GOS-1336  
475-4115

**Michael V. Osier, Ph.D.**
Graduate Director of Bioinformatics and Associate Professor of Life Sciences  
B.S., Biochemical Science, University of Vermont, 1995  
Ph.D., Genetics, Yale University, 2002  
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**Gary R. Skuse, Ph.D.**
Professor of Life Sciences  
B.A. Biology, University of Rochester, 1979  
Ph.D. Biology (Developmental Genetics) Syracuse University, 1984  
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Undergraduate Studies - BS/MS in Bioinformatics

The existing BS program may be combined with the MS program in Bioinformatics, allowing undergraduate majors to acquire both degrees in as few as five years. Undergraduate students with an overall GPA of 3.2 and a GPA in their professional field of study of 3.4 may apply to the bioinformatics committee for entry before the completion of their third year of study. Students in the combined program will be required to take graduate level courses during their fourth year and complete an approved MS thesis during their final year of study. Those who select this program will complete the undergraduate degree requirements and 30 semester credit hours toward the Bioinformatics MS degree.

Course Information:

Detailed course listings can be found through the Registrar’s Web site, specifically on “https://sis.rit.edu/”. This site provides course descriptions, pre-requisites, days/times offered, which are open/closed for registration, and exam schedules. We strongly recommend checking the information offered from this site periodically.

Graduate Merit Scholarships:

Merit Scholarships are adjusted to encourage strong student performance in course work.

Full-time students with Merit Scholarships who perform well during their first year will see an increase in their Merit Scholarships for the subsequent years. Students with higher GPA’s will receive larger increases.

Full-time students with Merit Scholarships who receive multiple probations or otherwise perform poorly will receive a decrease in their Merit Scholarships. This is not punitive, but instead to encourage improvement. At the Program Director’s discretion, if a student performs sufficiently well in subsequent semesters, decreases may be removed, restoring the student to previous Merit Scholarship levels.

Note that the decreases are distinct from the Merit Scholarship increases, and additive. Additionally, decreases will happen in the semester immediately following the cause. For example, a student finishing their first year with a GPA of < 3.0 who receives two probations in the second year will see a total decrease of 10%.

For part-time students, evaluations will be made after completing the equivalent of a full-time year of courses (minimum of 18 credits).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance Metric</th>
<th>Merit Scholarship Change</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First year GPA of &gt; 3.7</td>
<td>+5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First year GPA of 4.0</td>
<td>Additional +5% (total of +10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two Probations or a First year GPA of &lt; 3.0</td>
<td>-5% each</td>
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Bioinformatics MS Thesis

To graduate with a Master of Science degree from the Bioinformatics Program, all students must complete a series of milestones. Below is a sample signature sheet to record your progress. An official signature sheet will be kept in the Thomas H. Gosnell School of Life Sciences.

Milestones:

- If you have acceptance contingencies, they must be completed.
  
  Date __________________  Program Director signature: ____________________________

- Complete required coursework and credit hours.
  
  Date __________________ Official signature: ____________________________
  (must be the Bioinformatics Program Director or Administrative Assistant)

- Identify a thesis advisor and thesis committee.
  
  Date __________________ Thesis Advisor signature: ____________________________

- With your advisor, prepare a thesis proposal (policies below).
  
  Date __________________ Thesis Advisor signature: ____________________________

- With your advisor, write a thesis (formatting guidelines below)
  
  - Defend the thesis proposal
  
  Date __________________ Thesis Advisor signature: ____________________________

- With your advisor, write a thesis (formatting guidelines below)
  
  - Defend your thesis in an advertised public presentation. Advertising must be at least two weeks in advance. Signature sheet available from Thomas H. Gosnell School of Life Sciences staff.
  - Bind your thesis at the Wallace Center (guidelines below)
  
  Date __________________ Official signature: ____________________________
  (must be the Bioinformatics Program Director or Administrative Assistant)

All requirements of graduation have been met:

Date __________________ Program Director signature: ____________________________

Date __________________ School Head signature: ____________________________
Identification of a Thesis Advisor and the Thesis Proposal

1. The Director of Bioinformatics will initially assume primary advising responsibility for each MS. He will assist each student in identifying a suitable research project and research advisor. The student will select a research advisor on the basis of common interests shared between the advisor and the student. Full time faculty, adjunct faculty and professionals outside of RIT may serve as research advisors. In every case, the Director of Bioinformatics must approve the selection of a research advisor.

2. The student will prepare a research proposal, working in consultation with his or her research advisor. The proposal should be no longer than 15 pages and include the following sections.

   A. Introduction This section should describe, in detail, the background and rationale for the proposed project. This section must conclude with a succinct statement of the problem to be addressed by the proposed project.

   B. Materials and Methods This section should describe the project to be undertaken. Sufficient detail should be provided so that the student’s thesis advisory committee can determine whether the proposed work represents a satisfactory thesis project in terms of scope and value.

   C. Literature Cited This should reflect a thorough search of relevant literature needed to support the proposed project. A comprehensive list of relevant literature will assist the student in assessing the relevance and potential impact of the proposed project.

3. The student will select a Thesis Advisory Committee composed of his or her advisor and 2-3 additional members. Members should be selected based on their potential to provide guidance for the proposed thesis project.

4. Two weeks prior to an initial Thesis Advisory Committee meeting, the student will distribute printed copies of his or her research proposal. At the initial committee meeting the student will present the proposal orally to her or her committee and be prepared to discuss and defend the proposal. By the end of that meeting, the committee will either approve the proposal as written or recommend changes. Any such changes will be incorporated by the student and the revised proposal distributed for committee approval. There is no need for a second committee meeting unless the committee deems it necessary.

5. Identification of a thesis advisor and approval of a thesis project must occur before the end of the first year of graduate study. Once the committee approves the project as suitable for a MS thesis in Bioinformatics the student may commence work on the proposed project.
The Written Thesis and Public Defense

1. Upon completion of the approved thesis project, a written report of the work performed will be submitted to the student’s thesis advisory committee. The final report will contain all of the sections described above for the research proposal with the addition of a results and discussion section detailing the findings of the student’s thesis research and include a scholarly review of the implications of the student’s work.

2. The student is required to summarize his or her work in a public seminar wherein he or she will present the thesis research and present it in its contemporary context. The seminar defense must be advertised at least two weeks in advance, and must be in a different academic term than the proposal defense. Any defense that was not advertised at least two weeks in advance must be rescheduled to meet the requirement unless there were unavoidable reasons it could not happen and the Program Director approves. A thesis defense is a public defense, and must be appropriately advertised. Therefore, students must make arrangements for the room reservation through the department more than two weeks in advance. The staff in the GSOLS office can assist with making room reservations. The seminar may be immediately followed by a private defense attended only by the student and his or her thesis advisory committee. In some instances, particularly when additional expertise is needed, a fourth committee member may be invited to the student’s thesis defense. If this is necessary, the student will be so informed at least one week prior to the thesis defense.

At least two weeks prior to the defense, the student will distribute printed copies of his or her written thesis to the thesis advisory committee. At the defense, which will last no less than 50 minutes, the student will present the research work and be prepared to discuss and defend that work. By the end of that meeting, the thesis advisory committee will either approve the thesis as written or recommend changes. Any changes will be completed in a timely fashion, as specified by the thesis advisory committee, and approved before the student’s research is considered complete.

3. Three corrected and committee approved copies of the final written thesis must be prepared. The student’s research advisor keeps one copy, and the Bioinformatics Program retains the second copy. The third copy is sent to the RIT library for holding and future reference. While only three copies are required, it is highly recommended that the student make several extra copies for himself or herself.

4. When final approval has been received from the Thesis Advisory Committee, and all other requirements have been met, the Director of Bioinformatics will certify the student for graduation.
Format of the Written Thesis

Formal requirements for the format of the written thesis are outlined by the RIT Library. As of January, 2014, this information is located at "http://infoguides.rit.edu/thesis-services". In the future, this information may move, but should be easily found from the Wallace Center’s Home Page.

The below are recommendations, and can be superseded by the RIT thesis requirements as noted above.

The key to good thesis writing is organization and planning. Students are encouraged to read the following guidelines carefully.

Contents: In keeping with the convention in the scientific literature, as appropriate, the thesis should contain the following sections. Sections indicated as optional are not required.

1 Title Page
2 Copyright Release Form
3 Abstract
4 List of Figures (optional)
5 List of Tables (optional)
6 Acknowledgments (optional)
7 Table of Contents
8 Introduction
9 Experimental or Methods
10 Results
11 Discussion
12 Conclusions
13 References
14 Appendices (optional)

Title page should include the following statement. “Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Science degree in Bioinformatics at the Rochester Institute of Technology.”

Following the title page should be a list of the thesis committee members with their departmental and institutional affiliations.

Copyright Release Form: Occasionally RIT receives requests for copies of a thesis. You may or may not wish to grant Wallace Memorial Library the right to make a copy of your thesis when a request is received. Your choice is implemented by signing the appropriate permission or deny-permission Copyright Release Form.

Abstract: The abstract is a brief summary of your thesis. See any abstract in the scientific literature as an example. The length should be approximately 100 to 200 words.

References: References are a list of scientific literature cited in the thesis. These should follow one of two formats: listing by number or listing by author’s name and date. For example:

Both algorithms set equal to zero any data point with a value less than an arbitrary noise figure as defined previously.\(^{13}\)

Both algorithms set equal to zero any data point with a value less than an arbitrary noise figure as defined previously (13).

Both algorithms set equal to zero any data point with a value less than an arbitrary noise figure as defined previously Ludlow and Skuse 1995).
Collate all references at the end of the manuscript in numerical order of citation if listed by number and in alphabetical order if cited by author.

The exact format of the reference may vary slightly between the subdisciplines of biology. You should use the format acceptable in your subdiscipline. References to journal articles should contain authors, title of article, journal name in italics, volume (bold), pages, and year as presented in the following examples. Refer to The ACS Style Guide or CASSI for abbreviations of journals.


An alternative format for some professional journals:


References to books should contain the author(s), title in italics, publisher, city, and year. You may also wish to include the ISBN number.


References to book chapters in an edited book should contain authors, title of chapter, title of book in italics, editor, publisher, city, year, page or chapter.


Additional formats may be used as long as the format of all references is consistent within the thesis.

Appendices: Appendices should, if necessary, have their own table of contents. The individual pages of an appendix should be numbered with the letter of the appendix and ascending page numbers (i.e., A1, A2, A3....).