

**Department of Microbiology & Immunology
Guidelines for First Thesis Committee Meeting**

(see also <https://www.med.unc.edu/microimm/phd-thesis-committee-policies/>)

Purposes of First Meeting

- Introduce the student and committee members to each other, to lower the barrier to consultation and advice. Students are strongly encouraged to interact with committee members outside of formal committee meetings, both to obtain a broader perspective on their research project and to develop relationships that lead to positive letters of recommendation as well as scientific and career networking opportunities.
- Discuss any concerns about the nascent student/advisor relationship to facilitate a constructive doctoral training relationship.
- Simply experience a committee meeting so as to reduce stress at the next meeting, which likely will include the oral preliminary exam and dissertation project approval.
- Because the student has not yet been in their dissertation lab very long, the project may not yet be fully developed and may not yet have generated much data. A lack of data at this stage is not considered to be a problem, as long as the student is making progress learning experimental approaches and there is a reasonable premise for the work being pursued. The first meeting is an opportunity for the committee to provide input on the scale and direction of the project, to maximize the chance of approval at the next meeting.

Timing of First Meeting

- To allow sufficient time to act on committee feedback prior to the dissertation project approval meeting, students must hold their first dissertation committee meeting before the end of spring semester of their first year in the department (second-year BBSP students, first-year M.D./Ph.D. students).
- The optimal time for the first committee meeting is likely in December, January, or February (after MCRO795 and before the written preliminary exam). In some cases limited availability of committee members may require scheduling the meeting later in the spring semester.
- The first meeting should be scheduled for one hour, but is not required or expected to fill the available time because there may not be much data to discuss. Future committee meetings are likely to be longer.
- Students must schedule their meeting and inform the Student Services Specialist by December 1. Students who are unable to schedule their meeting by December 1 must contact the Director of Graduate Studies and discuss the reason for the delay.

Progress Report (applies to all committee meetings, not just first)

- Students must provide committee members with a progress report at least one week before the meeting. The report should be developed in conjunction with, or at least approved by, the research advisor(s) prior to distribution.
- Approximately two pages in length. Write a Specific Aims page about the dissertation project, expanded to describe experimental progress. List any publications from UNC graduate school and outline how the project is expected to lead to at least two first-author research publications. Describe career plans and planned or completed career exploration and professional development activities.

Meeting Mechanics (applies to all committee meetings, not just first)

- Students are not permitted to supply food for any of their committee meetings, including the oral preliminary examination and the final private defense.
- Obtain your MCRO Thesis Committee Meeting Progress Report form from the Student Services Specialist.
- To start the meeting, the student will leave the room so the research advisor(s) can convey to the committee how the student is progressing in their research and training, and note any issues in the training environment.
- The student will return to the room. The advisor(s) will then leave the room so the student can convey to the committee how their research and training are progressing, and note any issues in the training environment.
- The student will return to the room and begin their presentation, describing their research plans and progress.
- The student will describe how they envision their research will lead to at least two first-author research publications. Publication plans may be tentative at early-stage committee meetings but will be a key benchmark at later-stage committee meetings. Plans for any middle-author research publications or reviews should also be described.
- The student will describe their career interests and activities in which they plan to engage for career exploration and professional development. Career interests and plans may not yet be well-formed at early-stage committee meetings, but should become more developed at later-stage committee meetings.
- In all phases of the meeting, the committee will provide advice and feedback, as opposed to the student giving an uninterrupted presentation.
- The committee will decide when they should next meet with the student. Committee meetings should be no more than one year apart, but often may be more frequent. Even after all formal requirements are completed, the committee decides when the student has earned their degree. Therefore, regular interactions with the committee is a key determinant of student success.
- The committee Chair will summarize the meeting on the Progress Report form. Both the student and Chair will sign the form, to avoid misunderstandings about what transpired or what is expected.