

Instructions for Dissertation Advisory Committee (DAC) meetings and reports

DAC meetings serve as an opportunity for the student and advisor to assess progress and plans and receive feedback for the near (next DAC) and longer term (Defense). Integral to these meetings is the preparation of a DAC report that summarizes progress, challenges, and future directions. The substance and format of the report will evolve as you progress through the program and general G-year specific guidance is provided below. Your report is likely to incorporate portions that the bridge G-year guidelines. Your mentor should be involved in the planning, drafting, and finalizing stages of your DAC report.

To encourage **'forward looking'** DAC meeting discussions the **first page of the report** should serve as a succinct primer to refresh your DAC members about your project and progress.

Page 1 DAC report format

Your Name, Your Lab(s), Project Title

Expanded abstract with subsections (*Background, Approach, Results, Conclusion, Significance*). This expanded abstract is a concise description of your project. It should summarize progress, challenges, and proposed plans so that your committee can provide useful near- and long-term advice.

Following the expanded abstract present a set of bullet points (the details can be saved for the meeting). For example

- achieved milestone description (Fig. 1)
- achieved milestone description (Fig. 2A)
- achieved milestone description (Table 1)
- anticipated milestone description (Fig. 3, Table 2; 3-4 months)
- anticipated milestone description (Fig. 4, 5; 4-6 months)

Proposed next DAC February/March.

G2 & G3 DAC instructions

G2 students will ordinarily complete their first post-qualifying-exam DAC meeting by June 30 of their G2 year (~ 6 months post exam). Because the qualifying exam does not require supporting experimental results, this first DAC is critical for you to get off on the right foot as you formulate your thesis projects. Failure to schedule this first DAC by June 1 will delay your Advancement to Candidacy. A successful G2 DAC completes your advancement to Candidacy. Students that have not advanced to candidacy are not eligible to teach or to receive travel awards.

G3 students will ordinarily schedule their DAC for the fall semester (~6 months after the G2 DAC).

G2 and G3 DAC Page 2+ report instructions

The G2 and G3 DAC report should emphasize Questions and Approaches with limited expectations for completed data figures. The format should include the following sections:

Project Summary (A 300-500-word narrative that expands on the page 1 abstract)

Specific Aims

Specific Aim 1:

Questions and background

Rationale

Approach and Progress,

Data (if any)

Future Directions and time lines (if not complete)

Specific Aim 2 (etc):

G4+ page 2+ DAC report instructions

If you have multiple projects, prepare a “page 2+” for each, listing each title on page 1.

To emphasize timely publication, we strongly encourage G4+ students to model their post-page 1 DAC report as a draft manuscript(s) that outlines an anticipated scientific story. The degree that the report will resemble a complete manuscript draft will depend on the extent of progress. That is, adjust the proportion of experimental design and data analysis vs experimental plans to reflect your progress.

For each project (anticipated or completed manuscript) present a skeletal narrative that anticipates a future publication. The purpose of the narrative is to create an accessible context for each cited figure/table, illustrating the conceived narrative arc. This narrative should explicitly cite completed, partial, or conceived figures/tables. All figures should include full legends. Incomplete figures should illustrate the goal and parameters, **but should not contain simulated or hoped-for data**. For example, graphs with axis names but no data, an empty western blot with lanes and anticipated conditions clearly labeled, a written description of microscopic images (or just an empty/grey box with a full legend). The anticipated data figures should also include an approximate timeline for the data collection.

Again, the report is a **sketch** of a paper(s) that you are developing. The presentation of preliminary figures is an exercise to help the committee see how you are thinking about the collection, analysis, and presentation of your data. This way, the committee can discuss whether the direction presented is the best way to answer the scientific question, as well as be specific with its advice/feedback.

Published papers can be cited (provide links or PDFs), but do not need to be incorporated into the forward-looking DAC report.

G6+ DAC report instructions

The format of your G6+ DAC report should be similar to your G5 DAC report, but should emphasize time lines and completion strategies, with explicit goals to submit manuscript(s) and prepare a detailed thesis outline that will precede “checking the box” (ready to write thesis). G6+ students will meet with their DAC at least every six months and a member of the MCO leadership team will attend each DAC meeting until “the box” is checked.