

FAQ and Guidelines

MSc in Biology/Neurosciences BIO506

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Below you will find a number of frequently asked questions and guidelines how to enroll in the Master program in Neurosciences and how to find a project for your Master thesis. For additional questions about the admission or enrollment process please contact the Academic Support Office Biology (studienkoordination@biol.uzh.ch). General information can be found here:

<http://www.biologie.uzh.ch/Studium/Masterstudium.html>

The MSc Biology/Neurosciences curriculum consists of a research project as the central part and a number of mandatory and optional lectures and lab courses. See the main page <http://www.biologie.uzh.ch/Studium/Masterstudium/MasterStudies/Neurosciences.html> for a list of lectures and courses.

Master of Science in Biology, Neurosciences

The Master degree is awarded after the successful completion of the research project (52 weeks of duration), the acceptance of the thesis, the successful completion of the compulsory Module BIO 520, and the successful completion of the mandatory and optional courses and lectures listed in the Learning Agreement. See main page for course list. For more information about the Master thesis BIO 506 and about BIO 520 see below.

When does the Master program start?

The Master thesis is not bound to semesters or any fixed starting dates. Lab courses and lectures are, of course, but they can also be taken during the research project. Lab courses (aka block courses) are full time. Therefore, you will need to interrupt your research project (talk to your supervisor!). Lectures can be taken in parallel to your research project or to block courses, as they are all scheduled on Mondays or Tuesday mornings.

How do I apply?

It depends!

With a BSc in Biology, Biomedicine, or Biochemistry of the UZH: No specific requirements to fulfill, find a research group for your thesis (see below), fill in the Learning Agreement, have it signed by (in that order) your supervisor, the Master coordinator Prof. Dr. Esther Stoeckli, and the head of the academic support office PD Dr. Karin Isler (studienkoordination@biol.uzh.ch), and enroll in the

courses of your choice in addition to the mandatory ones. Before you can start the Master's project, you must be enrolled as a Master student.

With a BSc in Biology, Biomedicine, or Biochemistry from a different University: Apply online at UZH for admission (http://www.uzh.ch/studies/application/master_en.html), as your degree needs to be evaluated for equivalence before you can enroll. Depending on your country of origin, the evaluation process can take several months.

With a BSc in a different discipline: Contact the Admissions Office of UZH. Only BSc degrees containing a large proportion of Natural Sciences and Biology of a university recognized by UZH are eligible. Most likely you will need to fulfill some additional requirements and take courses and/or lectures to qualify.

How do I find a Master project?

Master projects are not announced on any website or black board, as most labs have frequently changing opportunities. Therefore, check the websites of labs you are interested in to find out more about their research and contact group leaders directly about available Master projects. A good starting point is also the website of the Neuroscience Center Zurich (www.neuroscience.uzh.ch). However, not all groups listed on the website can accept Master students. According to the rules of the Faculty of Science, only group leaders actively involved in teaching at the Faculty of Science (at the Master's or Bachelor's level) can supervise Master students. For a list see the main page <http://www.biologie.uzh.ch/Studium/Masterstudium/MasterStudies/Neurosciences.html>. If you are not sure, contact the Master coordinator, as this list is changing constantly.

A good opportunity to find out more about neuroscience labs is the block course in neurobiology (BIO328). In this course you will learn more about neuroscience research done at the UZH and at the University Hospitals.

What is the Learning Agreement?

The learning agreement (LA) is in essence a contract between the Faculty of Science and you, stating that you will get your Master degree if you successfully complete all the courses and requirements, as detailed in the LA. Therefore, it is IMPORTANT that you hand in the LA before you actually start with your Master thesis project. This is the only way to make sure that your project and your course work will be accepted for the Master degree.

What if I want to change a course listed in the Learning Agreement?

Don't worry, the LA can be changed when all parties agree. So if you need to change the LA, contact your supervisor, the Master coordinator and afterwards ask the Academic Support Office Biology (studienkoordination@biol.uzh.ch).

Mid-term report/Progress report

Between 5 and 6 months after the start of your Master project you have to hand in a progress report (to the Master coordinator). In this report you should provide a short summary of the background of your project (Introduction) followed by a statement of the aim of the project. Summarize your results and describe whether and how you are going to reach the expected goals in the remaining time. Did you change the project? Were there any unforeseen delays or problems?

There is no given format or length of the report. In general, reports are between 3 and 5 pages of text (without counting illustrations).

BIO520 Integrated knowledge in biology/neuroscience

This module, in essence the Master exam, is designed as a self-study period in the context of your Master degree and comprises 300 hours of study. It allows students to demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of their Master concentration and of general fundamental concepts of biology. The exam consists of two parts: a written three-hour exam and an oral exam of 45 minutes duration. In general, BIO520 is completed after handing in the thesis. The date is arranged on an individual basis between the MSc coordinator, the thesis supervisor and the student. The final grade is the mean (rounded to half grades) of the two parts. However, both parts have to be completed successfully (with at least grade 4.0).

Part 1: Written examination

The written examination of 3 hours usually takes place in the morning of the exam day. It consists of an essay written by the candidate on one of the two suggested topics. Unless otherwise agreed, the exam takes place at the Institute of Molecular Life Sciences. Details about room and time will have to be organized in agreement with the coordinator.

Part 2: Oral examination

The oral examination lasts 45 minutes. It is usually scheduled for the afternoon of the same day as the written exam. In some cases, the oral exam can follow the presentation of the Master thesis. This has to be organized in agreement with the coordinator and the supervisor. They will be the examiners. In some cases, a third group leader may be invited for the oral exam.

BIO 506 Master thesis

The thesis has to comply formally with the standards applied to scientific publications. Plagiarism in any form will not be accepted and means automatic disqualification! The student has to hand in one hard copy and a pdf of the final version to the Academic Support Office Biology (Studienkoordination Biologie, Y13-J-01) on the date fixed in the Learning Agreement. Additional copies have to be handed in to the Master coordinator and the supervisor of the thesis for evaluation. Grades are given by the

supervisor in agreement with the Master coordinator. The Master coordinator has the right to ask for revisions of the Master thesis if it does not fulfill standards of the Master specialization. The final decision on grades of the Master thesis is taken by the Master coordinator. For grading the following criteria are most important:

a) lab work:

Amount and quality of the experimental work, analysis of results, motivation.

b) writing:

Overview of the research field relevant to the Master project in the Introduction (note: the Introduction of the Master thesis has to be considerably longer than the Introduction part of a paper, on average between 15 – 20 pages), clear description of research question addressed in the Master project, clear description of the results with appropriate quantitative assessment, description of the logic of the selected approach, clear and detailed description of the methods used, interpretation of the experimental results in the context of the tested hypothesis and the research field, outlook.

c) Presentation of the Master project:

Clear and concise presentation of the research goal, the logic for the choice of experimental approaches taken, the results obtained and their importance for the field.

In most cases, the presentation of the thesis project will be in the context of an institute's progress report/seminar. If there is no such opportunity in the institute, where the master thesis is carried out, the presentation will be in the Neuroscience seminar of the IMLS (BIO619). Exceptions can be granted by the Master coordinator.

Esther Stoeckli

November 2018