



Geoffrey T. Swanson, Ph.D.

Director, NU Interdepartmental Neuroscience Ph.D. program

NUIN_Dir@northwestern.edu ❖ Tel.: (312) 503-1052 ❖ Fax: (312) 503-1402

Dear NUIN preceptor,

Congratulations! It is our understanding that you plan to accept a NUIN student into your laboratory as a PhD Advisee.

Accompanying this communication is information about the funding structure and educational requirements associated with taking a NUIN student. We ask that the Student, Advisor, and Department Chairperson read these materials and acknowledge their understanding by signing the **NUIN Thesis Advisor Financial Agreement**, included as the last page of the document. We hope this information is helpful to you over the next several years.

For further details about the academic requirements, see the NUIN web site, and reference the NUIN student handbook: <http://www.nuin.northwestern.edu>. Questions should be directed to the NUIN Assistant Director, Jena Pitman-Leung (jpl@northwestern.edu) or to myself.

Congratulations once again. We hope and expect that the next several years will be a productive and rewarding time for both you and your new student.

Sincerely,



Geoffrey Swanson, PhD
NUIN Director

Information for NUIN Student Advisors

FUNDING OF NUIN STUDENTS

Financial Commitment to NUIN Students

NUIN students receive full support for their stipend, tuition, and health insurance during the entirety of their PhD studies as long as they continue to make satisfactory academic and research progress. The responsibility for this support is shared among The Graduate School (TGS), the Feinberg School of Medicine (FSM), NUIN, the Advisor, and the Advisor's department, as detailed below. Over the course of their PhD training, NUIN students are funded via a number of different mechanisms that include University Fellowships (UFs), Graduate Assistantships (GAs), Research Assistantships (RAs), Training Grants, or individual external awards to the student (NIH NRSA, for example).

The NUIN Thesis Advisor Financial Agreement

NUIN students are supported by institutional resources during their first six quarters of enrollment unless they have external or internal training fellowships. Beginning in the 7th quarter, **responsibility for ensuring full financial support resides with the Advisor**. In instances of co-advising, please submit to NUIN a written, signed document indicating how funding responsibilities will be split, and have EACH Advisor return a signed copy of the Advisor form. By signing the *NUIN Thesis Advisor Financial Agreement*, the Advisor(s) and Department Chair(s) acknowledge this responsibility and enter into this arrangement with the reasonable expectation that the Advisor will be able to fulfill this commitment. This agreement also outlines the process for handling situations where the Advisor has an unexpected lapse in funding and is not able to fully support a student. In such cases it is the Advisor's responsibility to notify NUIN and their Chair as soon as the issue is known. Funding shortfalls that affect NUIN students must be resolved by collective contributions from the Advisor and the Department; in rare cases NUIN, TGS, and FSM might also provide support. A copy of the *NUIN Thesis Advisor Financial Agreement* is included at the end of this document. **Please return the signed agreement to nuin@northwestern.edu.**

The Life Science Stipend

Northwestern's life science PhD students receive a monthly stipend that is determined yearly by TGS. Stipends will be \$34,176 in academic year 2021-22. All NUIN students receive their stipend while in good standing in the program.

Tuition

NUIN subsidizes tuition for students in their first 6 quarters through the UFs and GAs provided by TGS and FSM as part of the student aid budget. As detailed in the table below, faculty Advisors begin paying tuition for an advisee in the 7th quarter, which is typically Spring quarter of the second year in the program. Tuition charged to a faculty Advisor supporting a student as a Research Assistant is independent of the seniority of the student. Northwestern provides a tuition Research Assistant Scholarship (RAS) to cover the difference between "[full" tuition](#)" and the quarterly charge paid by Advisors shown in the table below.

Students who receive external fellowships that provide tuition subsidies, such as an NIH NRSA F31 Fellowship, will receive additional tuition supplements from the NUIN aid budget to offset the entire tuition (and stipend) charge to the faculty Advisor.

Institutional T32s

Many NUIN students are funded at some point by an institutional NIH T32 grant. NUIN administers several T32s that have neuroscience themes (<http://nuin.northwestern.edu/inside-nuin/training-grants/>). Any faculty member wishing to affiliate with a T32 should contact Cassandra VanDunk at NUIN_T32s@northwestern.edu.

Cost of Standard NUIN Student Supported by the PI – AY 2021-2022

Year 2	FALL	WINTER	SPRING	SUMMER	Annual Cost to PI
FSM labs:					
Stipend			\$8544	\$8544	\$17,088
Tuition			\$3742	\$3742	\$7,484
Fringe (2.6%)			\$222	\$222	\$444
Total Cost Per Student			\$12,508	\$12,508	\$25,016
Non-FSM labs:					
Stipend			\$8,544	\$8544	\$17,088
Tuition			\$3,867	\$3867	\$7734
Fringe (2.6%)			\$222	\$222	\$444
Total Cost per Student			\$12,633	\$12,633	\$25,266
Year 3+	FALL	WINTER	SPRING	SUMMER	Annual Cost to PI
FSM labs:					
Stipend	\$8544	\$8544	\$8544	\$8544	\$34,176
Tuition	\$3742	\$3742	\$3742	\$3742	\$14,968
Fringe (2.6%)	\$222	\$222	\$222	\$222	\$888
Total Cost Per Student	\$12508	\$12508	\$12508	\$12508	\$50,032
Non-FSM labs:					
Stipend	\$8,544	\$8,544	\$8,544	\$8,544	\$34,176
Tuition	\$3,867	\$3,867	\$3,867	\$3,867	\$15,468
Fringe (2.6%)	\$222	\$222	\$222	\$222	\$888
Total Cost per Student	\$12,633	\$12,633	\$12,633	\$12,633	\$50,532

* NOTE: FSM PIs pay a lower tuition rate due to a supplement provided by FSM Administration.

Details of the standard NUIN funding model

Most students are funded according to the following standard model:

YEAR #1: NUIN students are fully supported by a University Fellowship (UF) during their first year, including the summer quarter. NUIN students typically join a laboratory in the latter portion of their first year, but the Advisor bears no financial responsibility during the first year.

YEAR #2: Each NUIN student receives support from a Graduate Assistantship (GA) during fall and winter quarters of their second year. Although students are required to fulfill two quarters of service as a Teaching Assistant (TA), the TA service is not directly tied to the GA support; students often TA in quarters other than the ones during which they receive a GA. **Students become the full financial responsibility of their Advisor after 7 quarters, typically beginning the Spring quarter of the second year.** “Full financial support” includes tuition, and full life science stipend, and an automatically calculated fringe rate (for students paid off of grants). Note that currently Northwestern pays the health insurance premium for all PhD students. See the accompanying table for the costs incurred by an Advisor to support a standard NUIN PhD student.

YEARS #3 – completion: The Advisor assumes full responsibility for ensuring that NUIN PhD advisees are fully supported until the completion of all PhD requirements. Funding during this phase is typically via Research Assistantships, Training Grants, or individual external awards to the student.

ACADEMIC MILESTONES AND REQUIREMENTS

The following information is meant as a summary and timeline. Please see the [NUIN website](#) and the NUIN Student Handbook for details and the most updated information.

Coursework

NUIN students must complete 9 Units of graded coursework and maintain a B (3.0) average. Students typically complete 3-5 courses during their first year, including 4 units of the NUIN Fundamentals series, leaving 4-6 to be completed after joining a lab. All students take a *Great Experiments* course elective and choose a concentration area in their second year. TGS requires students to complete 9 graded units of coursework by graduation, but most students complete this requirement by the end of their second year. Beyond the required courses, students may take additional courses with their Advisor's permission, without any tuition penalty. Alternatively, advanced students may wish to audit a class they are interested in.

Using the [Graduate Student Tracking System \(GSTS\)](#) to track Milestones

NUIN has adopted use of the online GSTS program to track student milestones. Students must use GSTS to form a thesis committee, create the PhD Prospectus, PhD Final Exam, and Application to Graduate forms, and upload all milestone related documentation. See below for more detail.

Teaching Assistant (TA) Requirement

NUIN students are required to serve as a TA for the equivalent of two courses. Most students satisfy this requirement during their second year, though some students TA during their third year. The two quarters of GA funding that NUIN students receive during their second year is only indirectly tied to the TA requirement. NUIN has specific TA obligations it needs to meet and often this requires students to travel from one campus to another – more typically from Chicago to Evanston. It is recommended that Advisors and students plan ahead to maintain adequate research productivity during the TA quarter, e.g., to schedule analysis, writing, or other work that can be done in discontinuous research time as a major component of the student's lab work that quarter. Note that TAing as a mechanism for financial support of students beyond their two-quarter requirement is prohibited.

The Qualifying Exam

The Qualifying Exams are oral and consist of a Research Chalk Talk (i.e., drawing on the board but using no slides or other prepared visual aids) in which each student presents and answers questions about the research they have conducted or will conduct in their thesis laboratory, including the Rationale, Approach, Results, Interpretation, and Significance, regardless of the outcome(s) of the experiments. Students also are expected to be conversant with general principles related to the topic of their Research Chalk Talk. The purpose of the Qualifying Exam is to demonstrate the progress of the student's scientific and experimental reasoning to the Committee. Preliminary data are not required. In many cases, the project presented will develop into a thesis project, but this is not a requirement.

Timing and Scheduling

The Qualifying Exam can be scheduled as early as Spring quarter and no later than the end of the Summer quarter of the second year. It is expected to last between 1-2hrs. It is the responsibility of the student to schedule the precise time, date, and location. Students may ask NUIN staff for help reserving a room if required. Students are discouraged from providing food for committee meetings.

Examining Committee

The Qualifying Exam committee will be composed of three or more faculty as well as the student's thesis advisor (as an observer). One member of the committee (not the thesis advisor) will act as Chair of the Qualifying Exam and will be asked to provide a Chair's Summary following the exam.

[Assembling the Thesis Committee](#)

A Thesis Committee should be assembled as soon as possible after the Qualifying Exam, and no later than the end of winter quarter of the third year (G2 year for MSTPs). Thesis committee members should be entered into GSTS and sent a formal “invitation” to join. Thereafter the student should meet with members of their committee, either individually or as a group. This should be done before presentation of the Thesis Proposal. Information on how to select a thesis committee can be found on the NUIN website.

[The Thesis Proposal \(Prospectus\)](#)

Each student must complete a Thesis Proposal no later than October 31st of their fourth year (G3 year for MSTPs). This milestone consists of a written research proposal in grant format and an oral defense of the proposal before the Thesis Committee. A Thesis Proposal form must be completed by the members of the committee and uploaded to the student’s profile in GSTS. The student should also create a PhD Prospectus form in the TGS section of GSTS in order to receive formal recognition that this milestone was completed from TGS.

[Annual Meetings of the Thesis Committee](#)

NUIN students are required to meet with their Thesis Committee at least once every twelve months. These meetings are followed by submission of the signed *Thesis Committee Meeting Status Report* to [GSTS](#). This document serves as an important means to track student progress.

[Fourth Year Seminar](#)

Each NUIN student is required to give a formal, public research presentation during the fourth year. The Advisor is expected to help the student prepare and to provide constructive feedback. Notice of completion of the seminar requirement should be uploaded to GSTS as a document containing the location, date, and title of the seminar.

[First Author Publication Requirement](#)

Each NUIN student must publish at least one peer-reviewed, first author research journal article.

[PhD Defense](#)

NUIN students must prepare a PhD dissertation and defend the thesis research in a private meeting with the Thesis Committee. Students should create a PhD Final Exam form in the TGS Forms section of their [GSTS](#) profile in advance of the defense. Students are also required to present their thesis in a seminar open to the Northwestern community and the public. The public talk should be advertised only after a successful private defense.

Individual Development Plan (IDP)

IDPs are designed to provide 1) a planning process to allow trainees to outline research goals and career development needs, and 2) a forum for trainees and mentors to discuss progress, effort and support towards these goals. Of note, NIH has made the IDP a requirement for any trainee supported by a NIH award. Furthermore, the IDP will inform NUIN’s required annual assessment of good standing sent to students, Advisors and TGS. If a student is not making satisfactory academic or research progress, it should be indicated on the IDP, and the student and Advisor should meet with NUIN Directorate to outline a plan for remediation. Yearly IDPs should be uploaded to GSTS.

NUIN THESIS ADVISOR FINANCIAL AGREEMENT

Dear NUIN preceptor,

Thank you for agreeing to be a NUIN student thesis Advisor. We appreciate your commitment to graduate education and hope this relationship will be productive for both of you. To ensure that the Student, Advisor, and Department Chairperson are aware of both the funding structure and educational requirements associated with taking a NUIN student, we are providing you with information on these topics, and ask that all three of you read and sign the Advisor Agreement, to acknowledge your understanding. We hope this information is helpful to you over the next several years. Details about the NUIN funding model as well as the academic requirements of NUIN and the Graduate School are attached. Additional important funding considerations are discussed below.

Students are admitted to NUIN by the Graduate School with a guarantee of funding (including stipend, tuition, and health insurance) as long as they continue to make satisfactory academic and research progress toward completion of the PhD. NUIN students are supported predominantly by institutional resources during their first six quarters of enrollment. After that time, **primary responsibility for ensuring full financial support resides with the Advisor**, although funding may come from a variety of sources (i.e., Research Assistantships, Training Grants, individual fellowships). By signing this agreement, the Advisor and Department Chair acknowledge this responsibility and enter into this arrangement with the reasonable expectation that the Advisor will be able to fulfill this commitment.

In the event of an anticipated gap in the Advisor's ability to support a student, the Advisor should notify NUIN and the Department Chair as soon as this likelihood is recognized. Funding shortfalls that affect NUIN students should be resolved by the Advisor and the Department. In rare cases, NUIN, The Graduate School, or the Feinberg School of Medicine might provide supplemental support. Please note that the role of the Chair may be to provide some portion of support from department funds and/or to advocate for support to the appropriate Dean. By signing this agreement, the Advisor and Department Chair acknowledge this process and enter into a good faith commitment to help cover any interruptions of funding.

Sincerely,



Geoffrey Swanson, PhD
Director, NUIN

Faculty Advisor (signature)

Faculty Advisor (print)

Date

Department Chair (signature)

Department Chair (print)

Date

NUIN Student (signature)

NUIN Student (print)

Date

For students in Basis Science Administration (BSA) managed departments only:

BSA Administrator (signature)

BSA Administrator (signature)

Date

Please return the signed form as a pdf electronically to nuin@northwestern.edu