

General Information on the Combined MSc/BScH Program in Biology

In 2015, The Graduate Studies Committee (GSC) in Biology successfully presented a proposal to the School of Graduate Studies (SGS) for a major modification to allow a combined MSc/BScH degree in Biology. We are joining a trend among science departments to offer such combined programs. This program will serve to expedite the progress of Biology 537 Honour's students who carry first-class standing through an MSc degree, typically shortening the MSc program by two academic terms.

As many Biol 537 students remain here as MSc students (avg 10 per yr), and indeed pursue projects that are extensions of their Biol 537 research, this strategy makes a lot of sense for both supervisors and students and is being encouraged by SGS.

Honour's Thesis Students (Biol 537) entering this fall (2016) will be allowed to take steps towards participation in an combined MSc program if they wish. Note, only 4th year students doing a research 537 thesis can partake in the combined MSc. Below, I provide some FAQs/responses but if you have additional questions, feel free to contact me. The process as laid out may sound complicated, but in practice it shouldn't be.

What is the basic structure of the combined MSc Program be as of Sept, 2016?

Biol 537 students who are interested in the combined BScH/MSc program would typically complete up to two graduate courses (3.0 credits each) as **electives** during their fourth year in addition to any courses required for their UG degree. These grad courses will count towards **BOTH** their UG degree and their MSc (a strategy known as "laddering"). Only one of these may be a 400/500-level undergrad course (workload to be scaled as grad course). In order to enroll in a grad course as an undergrad you need: (i) approval from each of the following: course instructor, Chair of Undergraduate Studies in Biology, and the School of Graduate Studies, (ii) to hold first-class standing (e.g. B+ average in your previous two years of undergrad). Once enrolled, you need to achieve the academic standing required of grad courses (i.e., min equivalent of B- in each) in order for them to count toward an MSc but simply passing the courses will suffice for them to count toward a BScH. You still need to complete all aspects of your BScH in the normal timeframe. Once you have completed your BScH and have been accepted into our MSc program, all standard requirements of the MSc degree apply.

How do I enter the combined MSc program in fall 2016?

In addition to taking Biol537, you would take one or two graduate courses in Biology (or another department but approved by our Grad Studies Committee) as electives. In order to enroll in graduate courses, you need permission of the instructor, Undergrad Chair, and SGS. Either an Academic Change Form-SGS (http://www.queensu.ca/skhs/sites/default/files/SGS_Academic_Change_Form.pdf) or a regular undergrad add/drop form can be used to add grad courses as an undergrad. In future, Biology reserves the right to limit the number of students using this combined strategy and may develop a formal application process (competition) for 3rd year students considering the combined BScH/MSc option program. For now (as of Sept, 2016), no limits have been placed on the number of participants.

What is the advantage of doing a combined BScH/MSc?

The program will **typically** reduce the time to MSc completion by up to 2 academic terms. An MSc degree in Biology is expected to take 6 terms (2 calendar years) and requires 12 course credits at the graduate level and a research thesis. Honour's Thesis students who enter the combined program take graduate courses as well as conduct research and thus enter the MSc program (**if accepted**) with advanced standing. Moreover, 4th year students benefit from the educational experience of graduate courses that focus on the most recent developments in a given field as well as the higher level of

discussion and debate that is expected in these courses. In addition, students enrolled in the program will likely be more competitive for external scholarships and awards. **Enrolling in the combined BScH/MSc program does not guarantee that you will be completed early:** the standard requirements of an MSc program must still be adhered to such as a thesis that is at an acceptable standard as judged by your examination committee.

Are there disadvantages to doing a combined BScH/MSc?

The workload during your Honour's year may be heavier than normal if you are taking one or two graduate courses. You may also decide that a standard MSc experience is more suited to your career or research goals (e.g. your research project requires the full two years).

What if I decide not to enter the MSc program, can I still finish just my BScH?

Yes, of course, but you should make this decision in the winter term of your Honour's Thesis program before officially entering the MSc program (i.e. don't register in March for a May/Sept MSc start).

Can I do a both a BScH and an "accelerated" MSc in Biology but not do any graduate courses as a 4th year student?

Yes, but such an approach is really no different than simply completing your undergrad degree, subsequently enrolling in an MSc, and aiming to complete it in a shorter-than-usual timeframe. It doesn't require any special permissions and your MSc work can still elaborate upon your Biol537 project but it would mean taking 4 grad courses and completing all your research in a shortened timeframe, a formidable though not impossible task.

Could I change labs or projects after I finish my Biol537 and enter the combined MSc?

Yes, in principle, and any grad courses you have taken as electives and approved as described above would count toward your MSc. However, if your MSc research is unrelated to your Biol537 project then it is unlikely your supervisory committee will permit parts of the 537 thesis to contribute to your MSc thesis. Thus, the likelihood of completing your MSc in less than two years will be reduced.

What if I have already finished my Biol537 in April 2016 and am pursuing an MSc in the same lab here in Biology starting Sept, 2016, can I use that data in my MSc thesis?

Yes, to a certain extent, as has always been the case in Biology. You will still have the 12-credit obligation associated with our MSc degree. If your MSc project however is an extension of your Biol537 work, the Biol537 data can be included as part of your MSc research project. Of course your MSc project will be expected to build upon it and your supervisory committee will evaluate it according to departmental and university criteria for an MSc degree. You cannot simply plunk your 537 thesis into your MSc thesis as a series of chapters. Your supervisory committee can help guide you on what is permissible and what is not.