Thesis Committee Purpose: Have in place a mechanism for reporting progress in thesis research and core competencies in order to facilitate timely completion of graduate training.

A. Detailed Program Policy:

1. Beginning in the spring of the Second Year of training, each graduate student must form a thesis committee and have a Thesis Committee meeting. This first committee meeting should be completed prior to the third year of study.

2. In the event that a student does not pass the DBO in their first attempt, the first thesis meeting should be held no later than 6 months after passing the DBO. In the event that a student changes thesis labs, the first thesis meeting should be held no later than 9 months after joining the new lab. The student, new thesis advisor, and Program Director will formulate a revised timeline for completion of degree based on circumstances.

3. Each student must have at least one committee meeting per year, but may have more if desired. At each meeting the student and committee will fill out the Thesis Advisory Committee Report and submit it with any other documentation to the Immunology Program Office.

4. The Committee should include the student’s advisor and 3-4 other Hopkins faculty. Members can be outside, i.e. not a member, of the GPI but the most important issue to that relevant expertise be present to help advise you. As appropriate, faculty experts outside of Hopkins can be invited to be members of a thesis committee. A student’s first Thesis Committee meeting must occur prior to the Third Year of training.

5. Before the first meeting, the student should ask a senior faculty member (not the mentor) to be the committee chair, this chair is responsible for running the thesis committee meeting and developing the progress report.

6. In advance of this first meeting, students must prepare a written research proposal in the general form of a research grant. Guidelines for this proposal are below. It is a good idea to update this research proposal for your subsequent meetings and redistribute it to your committee members, but this is not mandatory.

7. Student, advisor and committee members must complete and sign the Program thesis meeting form that contains written feedback on the student’s progress. This report is returned to the program office and the original becomes part of the student’s file. The form is attached.

8. After completion of Year 6 (72 months post-matriculation), meetings should be held every 6 months at which a Program Policy Committee member, Program Director, or Program Director’s designee (other than the student’s mentor) must be present.

9. A terminal masters will be recommended if PhD is not complete by end of year 8, unless the Program Director grants permission for continued study. [NOTE: Official leaves of absence are not included].

10. If a student fails to have an annual meeting then his/her lab of origin will not be allowed to accept Immunology rotation students or new Immunology graduate students for the pursuit of Ph.D. thesis study until the requirements of this policy have been met.
11. At each thesis committee meeting, a formal report is filled out and signed by each committee member. This report and any documents (proposal, reports, etc) are submitted to the program office by the student and kept on file.

12. At each Thesis Committee Meeting, the student should present her/his research work, roughly following the format of the written proposal. The discussion can be and is often open-ended in nature. The student should prepare a summary report for the committee prior to each meeting.

The Thesis Committee meeting is not a second Oral Exam. Many students feel inhibited to schedule Thesis Committee meetings because they are concerned that they have “no data” to present or may not have a well-planned course of research and will be judged harshly. This concern may be particularly felt for the first meeting. Please be reassured that Thesis Committee members are not there to judge the student, they are simply there to help guide a student’s research efforts as part of a team that includes the student and the student’s advisor. The common goal of those present is to enhance the research experience and guide experiments toward thesis completion and graduation. A student does not need to have a body of data to present at the Thesis Committee meeting. Especially for the first meeting, even a collection of ideas is enough to facilitate the discussion and propagate advice. The meeting is a fantastic opportunity to pick the brains of smart, experienced, and expert faculty. Many thesis projects have been enhanced by Committee meetings --- the associated exchange of ideas has often led to important discoveries and earlier graduation.

The Committee is empowered to collegially reach a consensus as to when the thesis research is complete and when the thesis should be written and publicly presented.

B. Preparing the Research Proposal

The first meeting will focus on the thesis proposal. The thesis proposal should be single-spaced and no more than 10 pages long, including figures. References are not included in the page limit. Please distribute your proposal to committee members at least one week in advance of the meeting.

Your proposal should include the sections listed below. The language used is borrowed heavily from the NIH guidelines so you can gain insight into how one prepares a full-fledged research proposal (like your dear mentor does!). Descriptions of each section are meant just as a guide to give you an idea of what can be covered in each section. Remember, the proposal and the Thesis Committee Meeting are meant to help you with your research, the proposal will not be graded, and there are no absolute requirements for the written document. Try to describe your experimental goals, rationale and approach as best as you can, but do not be concerned about following every aspect of the suggested section guidelines. Feel free to ask your advisor or other faculty members for help if you have questions.

a. Specific Aims (What are my discrete goals? 1 page at most)

List the broad, long-term objectives and goals of the specific research proposed, e.g., to test a stated hypothesis, create a novel design, solve a specific problem, challenge an existing paradigm, address a critical barrier to progress in the field, or develop new technology. Most proposals will have two or three specific aims. For example, in one student’s proposal, each aim could be a separate step in a series of steps that define the whole project. In another student’s proposal, each aim could pertain to an individual project if several projects are being proposed at a preliminary stage. Again, feel free to ask your advisor or other faculty for guidance. The length of this section is typically several paragraphs to one page.
b. **Significance** (Why should anyone care? 1 page at most)
   - Explain the importance of the problem or critical barrier to progress in the field that the proposed project addresses.
   - Explain how the proposed project will improve scientific knowledge, technical capability, and/or clinical practice in one or more broad fields.
   - Describe how the concepts, methods, technologies, treatments, services, or preventative interventions that drive this field will be changed if the proposed aims are achieved.

c. **Innovation** (What is kool about this! 1 page at most)
   - Explain how the application challenges and seeks to shift current research or clinical practice paradigms.
   - Describe any novel theoretical concepts, approaches or methodologies, instrumentation or interventions to be developed or used, and any advantage over existing methodologies, instrumentation, or interventions.
   - Explain any refinements, improvements, or new applications of theoretical concepts, approaches or methodologies, instrumentation, or interventions.

d. **Approach** (What experiments do I plan to do, how will I do them, and how will I interpret the possible results? variable #s of pages but for you 5 at most)
   - Describe the overall strategy, methodology, and analyses to be used to accomplish the specific aims of the project. Include how the data will be collected, analyzed, and interpreted as well as any resource sharing plans as appropriate.
   - Discuss the potential difficulties and limitations of the proposed procedures and alternative approaches to achieve the aims. As part of this section, provide a tentative sequence or timetable for the project.
   - If the project is in the early stages of development, describe any strategy to establish feasibility, and address the management of any high-risk aspects of the proposed work.

e. **Preliminary Data** (What experiments have I done so far?)

   If you happen to have preliminary data (note data may be minimal for the first meeting), use this section to present it in the context of the goals stated in the Specific Aims. It is just as valuable to describe the experiments that did not work as to describe the ones that did work, as long as they pertain to your Specific Aims. The length of this section is variable.

**Recommended Goals for Thesis Meetings**

**Meeting #1 (Year 2-3):** Evaluate thesis proposal and work accomplished to date. Set goals and expectations. Give advice on the most efficient and promising routes to achieve objectives.

**Meeting #2 (Year 3-4):** Evaluate progress and achievements during the previous year and provide advice on the most efficient and promising routes to achieve goals and overcome obstacles. To facilitate this, student will distribute a brief written report of findings and any new proposed studies and/or investigative directions.

**Meeting #3 (Year 4-5):** Student should include a brief written report of findings to date and any new proposed studies and/or investigative directions. The committee will evaluate progress/achievements during the previous year and provide advice on the most efficient and promising routes to achieve goals and overcome obstacles. Similar to meeting #2, the student
will distribute a written report. At this stage, the student should prepare a written thesis completion plan and discuss future career goals in presentation. The committee should provide guidance to the student on how best to complete thesis research and advice with achieving the stated career goals.

**Meeting #4 and beyond (Year 5-6+).** Subsequent annual meetings should follow format of meeting #3 above and increase in frequency to 6-month intervals.
RECORD OF ANNUAL THESIS COMMITTEE MEETING

NOTE: Thesis committee meetings have the option of beginning without the student present for the mentor to review the student’s progress with committee members. At the end of the meeting, the student may opt for the mentor to leave the room and talk alone with committee members.

Name of student: ______________________________________________________

Matriculation year: ________

Name of advisor: __________________________________________________________

Date of meeting: __________

Number of previous thesis committee meetings: ______________________________

Thesis Committee Chair: ________________________________________________
(The most senior member of the committee serves as the “chair”, and should fill out the required information after discussion with the committee. The office will not accept incomplete forms.)

Information on Milestones (filled out by student)

Year of Study: ___2 ___3 ___4 ___5 ___6 ___7 ___?

Courses/workshops/meetings attended:

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

Papers/Abstracts:

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

Core competencies
(Filled out by Committee and chair and communicated to the student)

On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = very strong, 5 = needs significant improvement) evaluate the level of at which the student as developed:

A basic knowledge of the field ________

The ability to recognize a problem that can be addressed experimentally ________

The skill to devise a suitable experimental approach ________

The ability to recognize if the selected experiments yield interpretable results ________

The ability to revisit and revise experimental approaches ________

The skill to communicate and summarize findings so as to convince a peer group that his/her conclusions are justified? ________
Committee Evaluation of Thesis Research Progress

There has been sufficient experimental progress from the last meeting  ____ Yes,  ____ No

The student is on trajectory for completion of PhD in ___ 1 year, ___ 2 years, or ___ > 2 years

There is concern regarding trajectory or thesis project  ____ Yes,  ____ No
(student and advisor must meet with program director if concern is noted)

The above named student is in the final phase (final 6 months of training) and will be allowed to write a dissertation and graduate when the items listed below are complete (complete section below)  ____Yes ,  ____No

We have discussed career objectives with the student and have given advice on how to achieve that objective.  ____Yes ,  ____No

Summary of committee recommendations (for students not in final phase):
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

The committee agrees that the student is in the final phase and that completion of the following allows the student to write their dissertation and graduate:
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

Note: Students in the final phase are expected to complete requirements within six months of the final thesis meeting. If the student is unable to do so, another meeting will be scheduled [by the Academic Program Manager] after six months.

Advisor's signature                  Date                  Student's signature

Names and signatures of other Committee Members present:

1) _____________________________  ____________________________
   Name                                 (Chair) Signature

2) _____________________________  ____________________________
   Name                                 Signature

3) _____________________________  ____________________________
   Name                                 Signature

4) _____________________________  ____________________________
   Name                                 Signature