

Boston University - Department of Biology
Resources to Help Maintain a Positive Working Environment
and to Resolve Conflicts for Graduate Students

The Department of Biology strives to create a positive working environment for all students, staff, and faculty. We take academic compliance, mental health, personnel conflicts, and other sensitive issues seriously. Accordingly, we devised a step-by-step process by which to communicate concerns with the Department and University when such situations arise. Given the diversity and complexity of such matters, not every issue falls neatly into one plan of action. Nevertheless, there are specific steps that enable the Department of Biology to resolve these matters in a fair, equitable, effective, and efficient manner. In general, the Department of Biology follows the best-practice guidelines of first trying to self-resolve issues between the primary parties in potential conflict and then, if unsuccessful, one or more parties may elevate the issue and attempt resolution with the next level up. We strongly encourage this approach because it generally has the highest success rate of fully resolving conflict without lingering challenges.

Resources to Help with Academic Concerns

For assistance with academic matters, including questions pertaining to the graduate curriculum, graduate students should first communicate with their advisers. If the student needs further assistance, they should communicate with our Graduate Program Specialists. Academic matters not readily resolved by the Graduate Program Specialists may require resolution through discussions involving the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) or Director of Master's Studies (DMS). In these instances, one of the Graduate Program Specialists will reach out to the DGS or DMS to attempt to resolve the matter. More complex academic matters may require additional communications with one of the Associate Chairs and/or Department Chair depending on the specific academic problem. Under nearly all circumstances, the problems can be resolved within our department. However, if the matter remains unresolved after discussions within the Department, the Chair will make a final determination whether to communicate the problem to the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences (GRS). Students may go directly to the staff at GRS if they feel they cannot communicate directly with personnel in the Department of Biology such as the Graduate Program Specialists, DGS, Associate Chairs, and/or Chair.

- Primary Contact: Academic Adviser
- Secondary Contact: Graduate Program Specialist
- Further Contacts: Director of Graduate Studies, Director of Master's Studies, Associate Chairs, Department Chair
- Support Contact: Upon request, any of the above individuals may serve as a support person during meetings

Student-Student or Student-Faculty Conflict

For assistance with conflicts that cannot be self-resolved between a student and another student or a faculty member in the program (who is not their research mentor or academic adviser), students should communicate the matter initially with their research mentor (or academic adviser) if the problem cannot be self-resolved between parties. If the problem is not resolved, then the student (possibly with their mentor) should bring this matter to the attention of the Associate Chair for their group, i.e. CM, EBE, or Neuro. Depending on the outcome of these discussions with the Associate Chair, this matter may require additional involvement of the DGS, DMS, and/or Chair of the Department.

- Primary Contact: Academic Adviser
- Secondary Contact: Associate Chair
- Further Contacts: Director of Graduate Studies, Director of Master's Studies, Department Chair
- Support Contact: Upon request, any of the above individuals or a Graduate Program Specialist may serve as a support person during meetings

Graduate Student – Research Mentor Conflict

For assistance with conflicts that cannot be self-resolved between a student and their research mentor, either individual should reach out to the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) or Director of Master's Studies (DMS) first. Depending on the nature of the situation and outcome of this discussion, additional steps may be taken. If the matter is not resolved after discussions with the DGS or DMS, the DGS or DMS will recommend discussing the matter with their Associate Chair, their thesis committee Chair, and/or the Department Chair. If any of these individuals are unable to address the concerns, they will direct the student to the next appropriate personnel in the Biology Department.

- Primary Contacts: Director of Graduate Studies, Director of Master's Studies
- Secondary Contact: Associate Chair
- Further Contact: Department Chair
- Support Contact: Upon request, any of the above individuals or a Graduate Program Specialist may serve as a support person during meetings

Title IX Concerns and Other External Mitigation

While many sensitive issues can be resolved within the Department, and we encourage initial discussions with the DGS, DMS, or Chair, some individuals may be hesitant to discuss such matters with departmental personnel because of privacy concerns, particularly those pertaining to faculty-student interactions. In these instances, the student can reach out to the [Office of the](#)

Ombuds, which offers total confidentiality. More complex matters may require involvement of the Associate Dean of Graduate School or University level administration. Regardless of preference, all conversations will be held in confidence, unless they pertain to a possible Title IX violation, which under law is required to be shared with the Title IX office at Boston University.

Information about Boston University's Title IX policies can be found here:
<https://www.bu.edu/eoo/sexual-misconduct-title-ix/policy-and-procedures/>.

A list of confidential Title IX resources can be found here:
<https://www.bu.edu/eoo/get-help-now/confidential-resource-providers/>.

Mental Health Resources

In recent years there has been an increase in the number of students seeking mental health support. While we are not mental health experts, students should not hesitate to reach out to their research mentor (or academic adviser), other faculty members, a Graduate Program Specialist, the DGS, the DMS, their Associate Chair, or the Chair for guidance. One of the best resources for such matters is the Department of Behavioral Medicine at Boston University. This office can provide students with strategies to help students cope with challenging situations, and many students have found them to be quite helpful. Students conducting work outside of Massachusetts for more than one month at a time have access to mental health services from GeoBlue by filling out this online form.

General Resources for Graduate Students

- Graduate Student Association: <https://www.bu.edu/gso/>
- List of Graduate Student Groups:
<https://www.bu.edu/grad/grad-student-life/student-groups-associations/>
- Graduate Women in Science and Engineering (GWISE): <https://www.bu.edu/gwise/>
- Professional Development & Postdoctoral Affairs: <https://www.bu.edu/pdpa/>

Resources for BIPOC and First-Generation Students

- Diversity & Inclusion:
<https://www.bu.edu/cas/about/diversity-inclusion-cas/grs-diversity-and-inclusion/>
- Underrepresented Graduate Student Organization: BU Minority Grad Student Survival Guide
<https://sites.google.com/view/ugssosurvivalguide/>
- Howard Thurman Center for Common Ground: <https://www.bu.edu/thurman/>
- Newbury Center for First-Generation Students: <https://www.bu.edu/newbury-center/>

Resources for the LGBTQIA+ Community

- List of General Resources: <https://www.bu.edu/dos/lgbtqia-resources/>
- oSTEM: <https://sites.bu.edu/ostem/>
- LGBTQIA+ Center for Faculty & Staff: <https://www.bu.edu/thecenter/>
- BU Out List: <https://sites.bu.edu/outlist/>
- Howard Thurman: <https://www.bu.edu/thurman/resources-lgbtqia-community/>

Anonymous Feedback

Graduate students can submit anonymous feedback to the Department or University:

- Department of Biology: [Anonymous Form](#)
- Boston University: <https://www.bu.edu/compliance/report-a-concern/>

Department of Biology Contacts for 2025/2026 Academic Year

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All individuals above are required by law to report Title IX violations to the Boston University Title IX Office. A list of confidential resources can be found here:

<https://www.bu.edu/eoo/get-help-now/confidential-resource-providers/>.