Microbiology

Program Description

The Department of Microbiological Sciences offers graduate study leading to M.S. and Ph.D. degrees in Microbiology. Faculty in the department have expertise in microbiomes, microbial genomics, biotechnology, synthetic biology, molecular biology, virology, immunology, microbial physiology, and discipline-based education research. The M.S. in Microbiology emphasizes research methodology and laboratory techniques. The Ph.D. in Microbiology is an outcomes-based program focused on developing research project leaders.

M.S. in Microbiology

The master’s program in Microbiology emphasizes research methodology and laboratory techniques. Student research and academic programs support a strong foundation of knowledge in microbiology and are individually tailored to meet the needs and interests of each student. Graduates are prepared for positions in research or commercial laboratories or for further graduate study. Students select a major adviser by the end of the first semester in residence. By the end of the first year in residence, the student and major adviser will select a supervisory committee. Students can earn an M.S. in Microbiology by completing a research thesis under the advisement of a research faculty member or by completing a comprehensive research paper in the program.

Graduating master’s students will be able to:

1. Adhere to ethical and professional standards in Microbiology, including managing individual projects, engaging with the public, and being ready for the workplace.

2. Display an essential foundation in knowledge in Microbiology and/or Immunology, including proficiency in a range of techniques.

3. Critically analyze and write high quality technical documents. Contribute significantly (co-authorship) to scientific journal articles.

Ph.D. in Microbiology

The Ph.D. program in Microbiology encompasses many sub-disciplines, including plant-microbe and animal-microbe interactions, microbiome research, virology, vaccine development, soil microbiology, biofilm research, immunology, and discipline-based education research. The program trains students in the foundation of knowledge, process of inquiry, and philosophy of microbiology. It breaks with traditional programs by focusing training on seven well-defined learning outcomes that can be attained with or without supporting coursework. This includes outcomes for professional, ethical, and civic development. Doctoral graduates are prepared for a variety of career paths including academic or industry research and academic teaching.

Graduating doctoral students will be able to:

1. Demonstrate professional and ethical behavior consistent with the expectations of the discipline

2. Conduct scholarly inquiry relevant to societal challenges and the field of study
3. Utilize and apply discipline appropriate knowledge, concepts and theoretical frameworks
4. Demonstrate proficiency with a variety of classical and modern techniques
5. Communicate scientific research results to diverse audiences
6. Develop professional skills such as collaboration and personal effectiveness to be competitive in the job market
7. Demonstrate civic responsibility, citizenship and inclusiveness

The program of study is customizable to each student's training needs. In the absence of course requirements, the program holds students accountable for year-over-year progress toward the learning goals via annual assessments of student progress by the mentor and research advisory committee.

In addition to the Graduate School requirements (https://bulletin.ndsu.edu/graduate/admission-information/), applicants must have evidence of a strong academic record in the biological sciences. The following science courses are required or recommended:

**Biology**
- One year of general biology with laboratory (required)
- One course in genetics (required)
- At least one course in cellular biology, cellular physiology, animal physiology, or bacterial physiology (required)
- Microbiology and immunology (recommended)

**Chemistry**
- One year of general chemistry with laboratory (required)
- Two sequential terms of organic chemistry with a laboratory course (required)
- Biochemistry (required)

**Physics**
- Two sequential terms of physics with a laboratory (required)

**Additional application requirements**

The statement of purpose should include the following:
- An explanation of how obtaining a graduate degree in our program fits your career goals.
- A description of the qualities you possess that will contribute to your success in your chosen field.
- A description of any research experiences you have had. If you have had a research experience, it is important to include a letter of recommendation from your research adviser.
- A list of the areas of research in the department that interest you.

**Financial Assistance**

The student must first apply to the Graduate School and be accepted in full or conditional status before he/she is eligible for an assistantship. Research and teaching assistantships are contingent upon availability of funds and are awarded competitively. Applicants are considered on the basis of scholarship, potential to undertake advanced study and research, and financial need.

**M.S. in Microbiology**

The master's program requires 24 months of full-time study, completing a minimum of 30 semester credits with an overall GPA of 3.0 or better.

Students are required to select from a list of core courses for eight to nine didactic credits toward their degree.

**Plan A (Thesis-based) MS:** Of the 30 credits, 16 credits must be in didactic graduate courses. Plan A (Thesis-based) MS students can apply 6 to 10 credits towards MICR 798 research. This degree in microbiology requires a research-based thesis, a public seminar of the thesis research, and a final oral defense of the thesis. The supervisory committee administers the oral thesis examination.

**Plan B (Paper-based) MS:** Of the 30 credits, 21 credits must be in didactic graduate courses. Plan B (Paper-based) MS students can apply 2 to 4 credits towards MICR 797 paper-based research. This degree in microbiology requires the presentation of a thoroughly researched paper. The supervisory committee administers a oral examination at the culmination of the student's progress.

Students with inadequate undergraduate training in microbiology will be required to complete undergraduate courses in microbiology in addition to the required minimum 30 semester credits.
Examinations

Final Thesis Exam (Plan A, M.S. only): The final examination will be an oral defense of the student’s research results. The students research advisory (thesis) committee will administer the exam after a public presentation of the work.

Paper-based Exam (Plan B, M.S. only): M.S. students in this option will produce an in-depth research paper on a specific topic in Microbiology. The paper will be reviewed by the student’s graduate committee and approved when completed.

Ph.D. in Microbiology

The Ph.D. program is based on defined training outcomes. Degree requirements are in agreement with NDSU Graduate School requirements. The student and major adviser will prepare a plan of study by the end of the first year in residence. The Graduate School requires the plan of study for the Ph.D. degree to include no less than 90 semester graduate credits (60 credits for students matriculating with a master’s degree). An overall GPA of 3.0 or higher must be maintained. Please refer to the department website for more information on requirements for this program.

Examinations

Qualifying Exam: Two preliminary examinations must be completed successfully before advancement to candidacy for the doctoral degree. The first examines fundamental areas of knowledge that will be essential for success as a doctoral candidate. The second requires the student to write a research proposal targeted at a program administered by NIH, NSF, or NIFA and defend the proposal in an oral examination. After successful completion of the comprehensive written and oral preliminary examinations, the student will be formally admitted to candidacy for the Doctor of Philosophy degree.

Final Exam: The final examination will be an oral defense of the student’s research results. The students research advisory committee will administer the exam after a public presentation of the work.

Samat Amat, Ph.D.
University of Calgary, 2019
Research Interests: Leveraging livestock microbiomes to improve nutrition and animal health, and reduce antimicrobial resistance.

Samiran Banerjee, Ph.D.
University of Saskatchewan, 2012
Research Interests: Soil and plant microbiome, agricultural intensification, climate change

Danielle Condry, Ph.D.
University of North Dakota, 2013
Research Interests: Discipline-based education research; designing authentic, inquiry curricula that includes elements of civic engagement; community engaged learning and its impacts on student success in the classroom

Glenn Dorsam, Ph.D.
Virginia Commonwealth University, 1998
Research Interests: Signaling by the gut hormone Vasoactive Intestinal Peptide and its role in gut microbiome development, abnormal inflammation, and fat deposition

Barney Geddes, Ph.D.
University of Manitoba, 2014
Research Interests: Using molecular genetics, functional genomics, and synthetic biology approaches to understand mechanisms of beneficial plant-microbe interactions

Penelope S. Gibbs, Ph.D.
University of Georgia, 2001
Research Interests: Avian E. coli, bacterial molecular pathogenesis, antimicrobial resistance, food safety

John M. McEvoy, Ph.D.
University of Ulster, 2002
Research Interests: Cryptosporidium ecology, evolution and host-parasite interactions; environmental microbiology

Birgit Pruess, Ph.D.
Ruhr-Universitat Bochum, 1991
Research Interests: Global gene regulation in enteric bacteria; complex regulatory networks

Sheela Ramamoorthy, Ph.D.
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 2006
Research Interests: Virology and vaccinology

Jane M. Schuh, Ph.D.
North Dakota State University, 2000
Research Interests: Immunology; biomedical significance of the initiation and maintenance of allergic asthma; the innate immune response in health and disease; murine models of human asthma; *Aspergillus fumigatus*-induced immune response