

Plant Sciences Five-Year BS/MS Degree Program

Meeting Degree Requirements [See FAQs (at end of file)]

To be eligible for consideration in the Plant Science Department's accelerated BS/MS degree program:

- A student must be a declared Plant Sciences major, with a minimum GPA of 3.4, must have completed at least 15 hours of credit in Plant Sciences, and must have completed at least 90 hours of the 120 hours of coursework required for the BS degree with a major in Plant Science.
 - For transfer students, calculation of your undergraduate GPA *will include* grades earned for coursework taken at colleges/institutions other than University of Tennessee.
- A student must complete a personal interview with their undergraduate faculty advisor, must correspond with the Undergraduate Coordinator and the Graduate Director in the Department of Plant Sciences, and a student must obtain a letter of graduate mentorship support from a Plant Sciences faculty member (i.e., the graduate mentor, also called "major professor").
- As part of the official application process, the student must submit to the Graduate Director the following: (1) *a letter of intent from the intended graduate mentor (this can be a different person than the undergraduate mentor)*, (2) *an updated resume*, (3) *a current degree audit (DARS report)*, and (4) *a letter of intent from student documenting their research interest*.
- Students must at least be conditionally admitted to the program prior to taking courses that receive credit for both the BS and MS degrees. Contact Sandy Kitts or the Undergraduate Coordinator (Dr. Pulte) for a copy of the *Plant Sciences Conditional Admission Application* form.
- Conditional admission also requires approval ([Senior Requesting Graduate Credit](#)) from the Plant Sciences Graduate Director and the Graduate School.

Degree Program Preparation

Actions prior to your Senior Year

- Contact your undergraduate faculty advisor and the undergraduate coordinator as soon as you think that you may be interested in pursuing studies in the [Plant Sciences Five-Year BS/MS degree program](#).

Actions leading into your Senior Year

- Schedule a meeting with your undergraduate faculty advisor upon completion of your Junior year or early in summer, ensure that you meet degree program requirements (see below) and prepare course plans needed to enter the conditional admission portion of the [Plant Sciences Five-Year BS/MS degree program](#).
- Prepare to apply and submit (online) proper graduate admission application and departmental paperwork for Plant Sciences.
- Prior to the start of each undergraduate semester, you will need to complete and submit signed copy of your [Senior Requesting Graduate Credit](#) form. *Without an approved form, you will not be eligible to receive graduate credit for graduate-level coursework. This form will be required for each semester in your Senior year during which you plan to take graduate level coursework.*
- *Notes about minimum requirements needed to succeed in [Requesting Graduate Credit as a Senior Student](#); you may only apply for graduate credit if **all of the following** are true:*
 - You are currently enrolled as a full-time undergraduate senior at the University of Tennessee with a minimum 3.0 grade-point average (GPA)* or have been admitted to an accelerated combined bachelor's/master's program. [*NOTE: understand that this form may apply to a GPA that is lower than the requirement than is needed for participation in the Plant Science department's five-year BS/MS degree program]
 - You are a senior who needs fewer than 30 semester hours to complete the requirements for your bachelor's degree.
 - You are requesting graduate credit for the course listed in your application.
 - The number of credit hours registered will not exceed 18 semester hours for fall/spring or 12 semester hours for summer.
 - You understand that courses taken for graduate credit **cannot be used towards both a baccalaureate and a graduate degree, except in the case of approved accelerated combined bachelor's/master's programs.**
 - You understand that there is a maximum of 9 hours of graduate credit that can be obtained at the 400 and/or 500 level.

The required **application process steps** are described on the Graduate School website for the form. All forms must be submitted to the Graduate School (gradspec@utk.edu) for processing and approval.

Applying to Graduate School

- All accelerated BS/MS students must apply to the master's degree program at UT (*see link below*).
- Students are not automatically admitted to the master's program when admitted into an accelerated program.
 - You must complete the [Graduate Admissions Application](#).
- Students are recommended to apply to the master's program during their senior year and, at a minimum, the semester prior to enrolling in Graduate School.
- Plant Sciences graduate degree program does require applicants to take the Graduate Requirement Exam (GRE), which is offered by Educational Testing Service (ETS) in an online testing format.

Please check the [UT Graduate School admission requirements and deadlines](#) for and information about the [Plant Sciences Graduate Program](#) to be sure that you do not miss the admission deadline.

After Admission to Graduate School

- Once admitted as a graduate student and eligible for registration, please check your schedule to make sure you are registered to receive graduate credit for your coursework.
- *If you are not registered to receive graduate coursework, please contact the Graduate School.*
- During your first semester as a graduate student, please make sure you are listed as a graduate student in the MyUTK portal, registered to receive graduate credit for your courses, and being charged graduate tuition.

FAQs About Plant Sciences' Five-Year BS/MS Degree Program

Q. Does this accelerated degree program permit project-based MS degrees, or is it only designed for thesis-based degree work?

- **Answer:** The intent of this program is that successful applicants to the Plant Sciences' Five-year BS/MS degree program are expected to conduct research and work that will support a thesis that also will result in authorship and submission of appropriate peer-reviewed journal articles.

Q. How does tuition and fees work in this program?

- **Answer:** In most cases, tuition and fees are the responsibility of the student during both years of study. In some instances, faculty advisors may have some external financial resources (often from externally sourced or competitive grant funds) that may assist in partial support for the student. Students may also apply for competitive scholarships and fellowships*, as well as partial research support through Herbert College of Agriculture, the UT Office of Research, and the UT Graduate School.

** a note about timing of fellowship/scholarship applications: Students who are planning to apply for competitive fellowships and external scholarships, are encouraged to plan ahead. Many of these opportunities are limited to applications made in Fall Semester (for consideration of support the following spring semester) Students who transition to a Masters program in spring, may not be eligible to apply.*

Q. Why are there not more students participating in this degree program?

- **Answer:** 1) Students often get started too late in their UG degree program to be eligible; students need to begin the process before coursework for their senior year begins. 2) Costs to prepare and implement research projects can be very high and resources to support interesting projects aren't always available. 3) Plant Sciences faculty who might agree to mentor a student in support of this degree option have difficulty identifying high-performing students. Graduate advisors must seek students who bring key skills and capabilities to the faculty's lab team. Among these are demonstrated excellence in: oral and written (particularly technical writing) communications, critical thinking and problem solving related to the studied area of interest, intellectual curiosity, willingness to work and self-motivation to engage (and stay engaged) in the research project, willingness to fail (and to seek solutions/be resilient enough to try again [and again]), ability to work in and with a team, etc. **These characteristics are best demonstrated by participation in Undergraduate Research (e.g., PLSC 499) within a faculty lab. Getting started in undergraduate research early after joining the major can be extremely helpful.**

Q. Must UG Senior year UG research and G Masters' year both be centered within Plant Sciences?

- **Answer:** Yes, the program was initiated to assist a student and faculty mentor team toward completing both years of academic and research effort within the Plant Sciences department. Previous undergraduate training and effort undertaken within a previous research context can help establish key skills and capabilities that a Plant Science faculty member is seeking.

Q. What factors may require extension of the degree completion timeline beyond five years?

- **Answer:** Plant Sciences' five-year BS/MS degree program is designed to enable a student taking a full course load each semester to complete the academic (curricular) requirements to achieve both BS and MS degrees. Depending upon type and scope of research project(s) undertaken, it may be necessary for the student to spend additional time in pursuit of degree to enable research studies (e.g., field/greenhouse crop production cycles, plant transformation/clonal plant propagation requirements prior to experimental initiation, etc.) to be completed. Extended timelines may be necessary to achieve statistical validity, multi-year replication of experimental plots, and overcome crop/plant losses due to factors (e.g., unanticipated abiotic, pest, or disease issues, etc.) that can disrupt experimental studies, especially when field or greenhouse based.

Q. About when should the student identify additional faculty (in addition to the faculty mentor) to serve as graduate committee members who will assist with advising about the research project?

- **Answer:** The Application to the degree program paperwork allows you to identify two other faculty members who may be willing to assist you (and your Plant Sciences faculty mentor) with your degree pursuit and research project. You do not need to have identified these faculty at the time that the application is submitted. It is recommended that you work with your faculty mentor as soon as possible (usually during the first term of admission into your first Senior semester after starting the degree program). Doing so will optimize the feedback and input that your committee members can offer in helping to plan a meaningful and successful research project with appropriate experimental design(s) and data collection components.