**LEARNING PLAN[[1]](#footnote-1)**

*Throughout the Learning Plan, provide brief but thoughtful comments about how you seek or have sought to develop the competencies of an applied biodiversity scientist. Do not treat this as simply a way to check off boxes. Rather, think of it as both a planning tool and an opportunity to consider what it means for you to be an ABS professional.*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Student name:** | |  |
| **Date(s) of LP revision:** | |  |
| **Anticipated Graduation date:** | |  |
| **Are you requesting final certification at this time?** | |  |
| **Department:** | |  |
| **Previous Education:** | |  |
| **OGAPS Committee:** | |  |
| **Dissertation/Thesis Topic:** | |  |
| **ABS Field of Disciplinary Depth:** | | *choose one: \_\_ Ecological Functions & Biodiversity   OR \_\_ Communities & Governance* |
| **ABS Field of Inter-disciplinary Breadth:** | | *choose one: \_\_ Ecological Functions & Biodiversity   OR \_\_ Communities & Governance* |
| **Integration:** *How does your program bridge ecology, culture and governance for effective conservation?* | | |
| **ABS-IGERTfundingproposal_Page_03** | *Scientific Disciplines:* | |
| *Institutions & Actors:* | |
| *Broader Impacts:* | |

|  |
| --- |
| Learning plans should be submitted to the Curriculum Committee only after being reviewed by the student’s committee chair. |
| **Advisor:** |
| **Advisor comments** *Please indicate below that you have reviewed the learning plan and discuss any issues on which you would like Curriculum Committee feedback. If the student is requesting certification, please confirm that you believe the learning plan is complete and ready for certification.* |
|  |

**ABS COMPETENCIES**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **1. ABS Theory and Application: Human-Environment Interactions & Ethics** | |
| *Semester/YR*   |  | | --- | |  | |  | | Theory: ABS I core course (or approved substitute) AND  Application: ABS II core course (or approved substitute) AND  Regular attendance (>60%) at ABS Seminar Series while on campus (record on sign in sheet) |
| *Explain how this aligns with the general ABS Learning Path:* | |
| **2. Interdisciplinary Breadth** | |
| *Course no.*   |  | | --- | |  | | At least one course in your ABS Field of Inter-disciplinary Breadth. |
| *Explain how this will aid you in achieving this competency:* | |
| **3. Regional Studies** | |
| *Check off*   |  | | --- | |  | | Understanding the ecological, economic and cultural environment in which you work (i.e. the region in which you study) is critical for ABS. You may gain this understanding from a variety of opportunities including, but not limited to, course work focused on the region, field school in the region, or other significant time spent in region. |
| *Describe the steps you will take or have taken to develop this understanding:* | |
| **4. Interdisciplinary Collaboration** | |
| *Check off*   |  | | --- | |  | |  | |  | | One member of your dissertation committee should be from an ABS discipline other than the student’s primary discipline. You should also complete one of the following:   1. Publish a collaborative paper in the ABS Perspectives Series OR 2. Prepare a collaborate proposal/ manuscript OR 3. Visit other study sites providing interdisciplinary advice OR 4. Collaborate with another student on a complementary dissertation project |
| *Explain how your choices regarding this competency and how they contribute to your program:* | |
| **5 . Research Design** | |
| *Course no.*   |  | | --- | |  | |  | | 1. One relevant graduate course on research design OR  2. Substitute course (e.g. from another institution) |
| *Explain your thinking on choosing the course or substitute course:* | |
| **6. Disciplinary Depth** | |
| *Date approved*   |  | | --- | |  | | Courses listed on OGAPS degree plan |
| *Explain the field which you consider to be your area of disciplinary depth:* | |
| **7. Cross-cultural Skills** | |
| *Course/YR*   |  | | --- | |  | |  | | Cross-cultural competence refers to the knowledge and skills that will enable you to effectively conduct your research in diverse cultural contexts. |
| *Describe the steps you will take or have taken to develop this competency:* | |
| **8. Language Skills (as appropriate)** | |
| |  | | --- | |  | |  | | 1. Course work OR  2. Must pass ACTFL Language Exam or equivalent |
| *Explain how you have (or are preparing to have) the language skills sufficient to carry out your research:* | |
| **9. Communication Skills (Research Presentation)** | |
| Date   |  | | --- | |  | |  | |  | | 1. Presentation at Ecological Integration Symposium / ABS Conference OR  2. National-level conference  AND  3. Lead a session of the ABS journal club and participate regularly when possible  AND  4. Present at a collaboration workshop |
| *Explain how your choice fits into your overall ABS Learning Path:* | |
| **10. Applied Research** | |
| Check off   |  | | --- | |  | |  | |  | | 1. Complete internship OR  2. Conduct research in conjunction with host country institution/organization  AND  3. Disseminate research results in format accessible for those who might apply the results (e.g. reports, workshops, brochures, presentations, etc.). |
| *Explain in more detail your plans to meet this competency:* | |

**Learning Plan Tips and Explanations**

**Overall Guidance on Process of Learning Plan (LP) Submission and Review**: Each student working toward certification of completion in the ABS program should submit an annual update of their learning plan, typically in May. The document is organic and will change as you develop as an ABS scholar. Please submit an MS Word version since the Curriculum Committee (CC) will give feedback using Word’s track-change and comments features. Before submitting your plan for CC review, your advisor should review the LP and approve. As you near completion of your program, you may submit a plan and request certification at any time. Please allow at least one month for review prior to graduation.

When you submit drafts of your learning plan in progress, you may often use the future tense. However, you need to return to these items as your program proceeds and by the time you request certification, virtually everything should appear in the past tense.

**Courses to satisfy the ABS Competencies:** A list of courses that may be appropriate to satisfy a number of the competencies will be made available on the ABS web site: [biodiversity.tamu.edu](http://biodiversity.tamu.edu). The courses listed there have been suggested by students and/or faculty and are not necessarily right for any one ABS student. Hence, before enrolling in a course with the intent of satisfying an ABS competency, you should discuss it with your advisor and/or CC members to ensure that it is right for your program.

**ABS Field of Disciplinary Depth and Multi-disciplinary Breadth**: By ABS field of disciplinary depth, we mean either “Ecological Functions & Biodiversity” or “Communities and Governance.”

**Integration:** The text in this section does not need to be exhaustive. We are looking for a vision of how your graduate program will cover all aspects of the ABS triangle. As you develop your learning plan, give some reflective thought as to how you want to “sell yourself” when you have completed this program. Explain your accomplishments with respect to the three “pillars” that have formed a foundation for your career in Applied Biodiversity Sciences. Think of these paragraphs as practicing an interview for your dream job of the future. See Fitzgerald & Stronza (2009, <http://www.interciencia.org/v34_08/563.pdf>).

**Interdisciplinary Collaboration**: We define “interdisciplinary” by referencing they manner in which we cross over ABS fields of disciplinary depth. Principally we aim to transcend “communities and governance” and “ecological systems and biodiversity.” This means that you will need to work with scholars trained in fields quite disparate from your own. Simply working with people outside your department may not achieve true interdisciplinary collaboration, while in some cases this can be achieved by working with people within one department

**Regional Studies:** There are many ways to develop sufficient understanding of the region in which you work and students are asked to develop their own path. Coursework at TAMU or elsewhere or significant previous experience in the region are two paths. Other options could include independent study (a reading list could be provided) or working with scholars in your region of interest.

**Research Design:** Statistics courses are not sufficient to satisfy this requirement as they address techniques for analysis, but not the discipline-specific norms for defining and answering questions in a scholarly manner. These norms differ for the natural and social sciences. A course in research design helps you learn the jargon and expectations of your “disciplinary depth.” If you want to cross-train, you will need to know the jargon in your areas of “breadth” so you can communicate effectively within interdisciplinary teams.

**Disciplinary Depth**: Here we are looking for a more in-depth explanation of what you see as your area of disciplinary depth, i.e., how you would describe your area of expertise to someone from your own department.

**Cross-cultural Skills:** If you have learned to bridge cultures as part of your life experience (e.g. growing up in a different country, a high school exchange student experience, diverse family members), explain how these transferable skills will help you bridge cultural gaps in your study area. Note that cultural gaps include diverse perspectives of stakeholder groups with respect to how they see the world and their place within nature. See Petriello and Wallen (2015); Diaz et al. (2015) <http://journals.plos.org/plosbiology/article?id=10.1371/journal.pbio.1002040>. Some ways to satisfy this competency include training in cross cultural communication skills, experience living in different cultures (e.g., Peace Corps or extensive study abroad) and projects such as mapping stakeholder perspectives in a study area. If you are having difficulty determining how to satisfy this requirement, discuss with your advisor and then contact members of the CC.

**Language Skills:** This competency can be achieved through formal education at schools/colleges/universities in the language of your intended study area. If your language skills have been acquired through informal education (e.g. total immersion) you may request an interview with a native speaker who is willing to write a letter assessing your language competency. If English is the language for your study area, then simply indicate this and no further training is required. If you plan to work in a region with a language that you do not speak, it is imperative that you begin early to develop the needed language skills.

**Communication Skills:** For each year you are on campus, please indicate how frequently you attended the Journal Club meetings and, if attendance was not regular, explain why. Though not required, the ABS Peer-Review Workshops provide a valuable opportunity to get feedback on your research and practice in presenting. Presenting your work at the Ecological Integration Symposium is recommended and all students should be able to accomplish at least this level of presentation.

**Applied Research:**You must do 3 and, in addition, do 1 or 2. Setting up internships or finding an organization to work with is hard, but not impossible. Many organizations are happy to host you if you reach out to them and offer something to them – it can’t be just about you and your research; you have to give them something that they want too.

1. Additional guidance on the ABS program and learning plan is available in the Tips and Explanations section at the end of this document and on the web at  [↑](#footnote-ref-1)