



**UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE**

**GRADUATE CERTIFICATE**  
**IN**  
**BIOINFORMATICS**  
**with a Life Sciences Concentration**

**PROGRAM POLICY**  
**STATEMENT**

**October 4, 2019**

# I. PROGRAM HISTORY

## A. RATIONALE

The completion of the human genome sequence marked the beginning of a new era of biological research. Scientists have begun to systematically tackle gene functions and other complex regulatory processes by studying organisms at the global scales. Advances in high-throughput biotechnologies and large-scale bioscience have further enabled modeling and simulation over a multitude of length, time and biological scales from biomolecules, cells, tissues and organs to organisms and population. With the enormous volume of data being produced, biology is becoming an increasingly quantitative science. Computational approaches, in combination with experimental methods, have become essential for generating novel hypotheses, deriving new scientific knowledge, and driving discovery and innovation.

*Bioinformatics & Computational Biology* is an emerging field where biological and computational disciplines converge. According to the National Institutes of Health, the working definitions of Bioinformatics and Computational Biology are as follows:

- *Bioinformatics*: Research, development, or application of computational tools and approaches for expanding the use of biological, medical, behavioral or health data, including those to acquire, store, organize, archive, analyze, or visualize such data.
- *Computational Biology*: The development and application of data-analytical and theoretical methods, mathematical modeling and computational simulation techniques to the study of biological, behavioral, and social systems.

Fundamental to the modern day biological studies and key to the basic understanding of complex biological systems, Bioinformatics & Computational Biology is impacting the science and technology of fields ranging from agricultural and environmental sciences to pharmaceutical and medical sciences. The research requires close collaboration among multi-disciplinary teams of researchers in quantitative sciences, life sciences, and their interfaces.

According to many accredited scientific and industry reviews, bioinformatics and computational biology may well be the single fastest-growing specialty in the life sciences. The University of Delaware currently does not offer a specialized graduate degree in Bioinformatics & Computational Biology, although related courses have been taught in several departments for a number of years. The Master's program in Bioinformatics & Computational Biology will offer graduate education in a discipline essential for UD as a major research university. According to the International Society for Computational Biology, there are presently 180 bioinformatics-related degree programs worldwide, almost 100 in the United States alone.

The Graduate Certificate program in Bioinformatics is administered through its academic home, the Department of Computer & Information Sciences, and is coordinated by the Center for Bioinformatics & Computational Biology. The scientific curriculum builds upon the research and educational strength from departments across the Colleges of Arts & Sciences, Engineering, Health Sciences, Agriculture & Natural Resources, and Earth, Ocean & Environment.

## **B. DATE OF PERMANENT STATUS**

Provisional status, May 2010; Pending review for permanent status in 2016

## **C. DEGREES OFFERED**

The program will offer the *Graduate Certificate in Bioinformatics (BINF-CERT)* with a Life Sciences Concentration (LS).

# **II. ADMISSION**

## **A. ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS**

Admission to the graduate program is competitive. Those who meet stated requirements are not guaranteed admission, nor are those who fail to meet all of those requirements necessarily precluded from admission if they offer other appropriate strengths.

The following are the admission requirements to the Graduate Certificate program in Bioinformatics:

- A bachelor's degree at an accredited four-year college or university with a minimum grade average of 3.0 on a 4.0 system;
- Applicants may have undergraduate degrees from biological, computational, or other disciplines. However, applicants are expected to have scholarly competence in mathematics, computer science and/or biology;
- The following GRE scores are competitive: Quantitative: 650, Verbal + Quantitative: 1200 if taken prior to August 1, 2011 or Quantitative: 151, Verbal + Quantitative: 307 if taken after August 1, 2011. No GRE subject test is required;
- International student applicants must demonstrate a satisfactory level of proficiency in the English language if English is not the first language. The University requires an official paper-based TOEFL score of at least 550, , or at least 79 on the Internet-based TOEFL. TOEFL scores more than two years old cannot be considered official;
- Three letters of recommendation are required. At least one letter must be from professors, other letters can be from employers or others who have had a supervisory relationship with the applicant and are able to assess the applicant's potential for success in graduate studies; and
- Applications must also include a resume outlining work and academic experience, as well as an application essay consisting of the answers to the following questions:
  1. What educational background and scientific research or employment experience prepare you for this bioinformatics degree program?
  2. What are your long-term professional objectives?

3. What specific attributes of the bioinformatics program make you feel that this degree is appropriate to help you achieve your professional objectives?

## **B. APPLICATION**

Application to the Graduate Certificate program in Bioinformatics will be submitted using the on-line graduate admission application that includes transcripts from all previous college or university study, letters of recommendation, resume, application essay, and official GRE and TOEFL scores (if applicable). If any part of an application is missing, evaluation of the application cannot begin. The applicant will apply to the Department of Computer & Information Sciences.

### **B.1. APPLICATION DEADLINES**

Admission decisions are made on a rolling basis as and when applications are complete. Decisions on financial aid awards are usually made in March-May for the Fall Semester, and in November-December for the Spring Semester. The central graduate admissions office continues to process applications and transcripts throughout the year and follows the stated two (2) week processing timeline for all materials received in the office.

The application deadlines are:

- Fall Semester: July 1<sup>st</sup> (regular application); March 1<sup>st</sup> (financial aid)
- Spring Semester: December 1<sup>st</sup> (regular application); October 1<sup>st</sup> (financial aid)

### **B.2. CHANGE OF CLASSIFICATION**

Students currently matriculated in other graduate degree programs should complete a “Change of Classification” Form to seek approval to enter the Graduate Certificate program in Bioinformatics. The Bioinformatics Graduate Committee will evaluate each Change of Classification request on a case-by-case basis and determine whether the student is required to submit a completed admission application form to the Office of Graduate and Professional Education and follow the same procedures for admission as other applicants.

## **C. ADMISSION STATUS**

Students may be admitted into the Graduate Certificate program in Bioinformatics with regular status or provisional status.

**Regular.** Regular status is offered to students who meet all of the established entrance requirements, who have a record of high scholarship in their fields of specialization, and who have the ability, interest, and maturity necessary for successful study at the graduate level in a degree program.

**Provisional.** Provisional status is offered to students who are seeking admission to the degree program but lack one or more of the specified prerequisites. All provisional requirements must be met within the deadline given before regular status can be granted. Students admitted with

provisional status are generally not eligible for assistantships or fellowships. Students who file an application during the final year of undergraduate or current graduate work and are unable to supply complete official transcripts showing the conferral of the degree will be admitted pending conferral of the degree if their records are otherwise satisfactory and complete. For students lacking appropriate preparatory course work, additional courses applicable to certain areas of study may be required prior to admission or students may be admitted with the provision that completion of certain area content courses be completed concurrent with the courses in the degree program.

### III. ACADEMIC

#### A. DEGREE REQUIREMENTS

BINF-CERT: Life Sciences Concentration (LSC2) – Degree Requirement	
15 Credit Hours Total	
Bioinformatics & Computational Biology Core – Life Sciences	15 Credits

#### B. COURSE CURRICULUM

The tables below list the course curriculum for the major components of the Graduate Certificate program in Bioinformatics.

##### BIOINFORMATICS SCIENCE CORE – LIFE SCIENCES

Bioinformatics & Computational Biology Core – Life Sciences (15)	
Bioinformatics (3)	BINF644: Bioinformatics
Introduction to Discipline (3)	MAST697: Bioinformatics Programming for Biologists
Systems Biology (3) [select one]	BINF694 Systems Biology I
	BINF695 Computational Systems Biology
Database (3) [select one]	CISC637: Database Systems (3)
	BINF640 Databases for Bioinformatics (3)
Biostatistics (3) [select one]	STAT656: Biostatistics (3)
	HLPR632 Health Science Data Analysis (3)

#### C. COMMITTEES AND DIRECTOR

The development, administration and progress assessment of the Graduate Certificate program in Bioinformatics will be guided by the Director and the Bioinformatics Steering Committee and the Bioinformatics Graduate Committee, as outlined below.

### **C.1. BIOINFORMATICS STEERING COMMITTEE**

The Steering Committee will advise the development and progress assessment of the Graduate Certificate program in Bioinformatics. The committee consists of faculty members from all ten Departments across four Colleges participating in this degree program.

### **C.2. BIOINFORMATICS GRADUATE COMMITTEE**

The Graduate Committee will be responsible for admission, advising, and progress assessment of the students in the Graduate Certificate program in Bioinformatics, working closely with the students' Faculty Advisors. The committee consists of at least two representative faculty members from each participating College in this degree program.

### **C.4. DIRECTOR**

The Director of the Graduate Certificate program in Bioinformatics will be responsible for the overall implementation, quality and progress of the degree program, advised by the Steering Committee and the Industry Advisory Board. The Director will also be the Chair of the Bioinformatics Graduate Committee. We propose that the Director of the Graduate Certificate program in Bioinformatics be a rotating position. Because of a significant amount of time and effort spent in starting up the program, we propose that the Director be located in Computer & Information Sciences for the first two years to get things started. Then, the position will rotate for a three-year term. The Director may appoint a Coordinator to provide day-to-day program management and assist with student recruitment, admission, advising, progress assessment, and career planning.

## **D. SATISFACTORY PROGRESS**

### **D.1. FACULTY ADVISOR**

Students are required to choose an appropriate Faculty Advisor from a list of faculty members participating in the degree program or have an appropriate Faculty Advisor appointed by the Director of the Graduate Certificate program in Bioinformatics. The participating faculty members are faculty approved by the Bioinformatics Steering Committee to advise students and/or serve as research mentors or co-mentors. The list of participating faculty, along with their departments and research interests, are available from the Bioinformatics program web site (<http://bioinformatics.udel.edu/Education>).

The Faculty Advisor will be the primary contact of the student for questions and advice. The student will develop a plan of study for the program with the Faculty Advisor before the beginning of the second semester. The Director of Graduate Certificate program in Bioinformatics will verify that the student has completed the requirements for the program and will approve the application for the degree upon successful completion of the requirements.

### **D.2. ACADEMIC LOAD**

The BINF-CERT program (15 credits) can be completed in one year, or longer on a part-time basis.

Students enrolled in at least 9 credit hours or in sustaining credit are considered full-time students. Those enrolled for fewer than 9 credit hours are considered part-time students, although students holding assistantships are considered full-time with six credits. Generally, a maximum load is 12 graduate credit hours; however, additional credit hours may be taken with the approval of the student's adviser and the Office of Graduate and Professional Education. A maximum course load in either summer or winter session is 7 credit hours. Permission must be obtained from the Office of Graduate and Professional Education to carry an overload in any session

### **D.3. TRANSFERABILITY**

Prior to admission to the Graduate Certificate program in Bioinformatics, a prospective student from another institution can be approved by the Bioinformatics Graduate Committee to take up to 9 graduate credits that, if/when admitted to the degree program, would be applied to that degree. Once the student has successfully completed 9 approved graduate UD credits and been admitted to the degree program, then a maximum of 9 graduate credits, but not the grades or quality points, can be transferred into the Master's program from another institution with the approval of the Graduate Committee.

Students who complete graduate credits with the classification of CEND (Continuing Education Non-degree) at the University of Delaware may use a maximum of 9 graduate credits earned with this classification toward their graduate degree.

All requests for transfer credit should be directed to the academic home department, Department of Computer & Information Sciences, using a "Request for Transfer of Graduate Credit" Form. Transfer credits will be accepted provided that such credits: (i) were earned with a grade of no less than B-, (ii) are approved by the Bioinformatics Graduate Committee, (iii) are in accord with the Program Policy Statement of the Master's program in Bioinformatics & Computational Biology, (iv) are not older than five years, (v) are graduate level courses, and (vi) were completed at an accredited college or university. Graduate courses counted toward a degree received elsewhere may not be transferred into a degree at UD. Credits from institutions outside of the United States are generally not transferable to UD.

### **D.4. GRADE REQUIREMENTS**

Only graduate courses completed with a grade of B- or higher count towards the requirements of *Graduate Certificate in Bioinformatics (BINF-CERT)* with a Life Sciences Concentration (LS); the overall GPA of the Certificate courses must be no lower than 3.0. Students receiving a C or lower in a required core course are subject to dismissal from the program. However, they may file an appeal to the Bioinformatics Graduate Committee for approval to retake the course and remain in the program if the appeal is approved.

### **D.5. CONSEQUENCES OF UNSATISFACTORY ACADEMIC PROGRESS**

The Bioinformatics Graduate Committee will meet at least once each semester to evaluate each student's progress. If a student is failing to make satisfactory progress towards a degree, the

committee will recommend suitable action to the Director of the Master's program in Bioinformatics & Computational Biology. Possible actions include (but are not limited to): (i) requirement for additional courses, (ii) suspension of financial support, and (iii) recommendation for dismissal.

#### **D.6. STANDARDS OF STUDENT CONDUCT**

All graduate students are subject to University of Delaware regulations regarding academic honesty. Violations of the UD regulations regarding academic honesty or other forms of gross misconduct may result in immediate dismissal from the Program.

#### **D.7. DISMISSAL**

The procedures for dismissal as detailed in the University Catalog will be followed. Briefly, the Graduate Committee will report its recommendation and reason for dismissal to the Director of the Bioinformatics Master's program. The Director will make a recommendation to the Office of Graduate Studies, who will decide whether to dismiss the student. The student may appeal this decision to the Office of Graduate Studies, following the procedure given in the University Catalog.

#### **D.8. GRADUATE STUDENT GRIEVANCE PROCEDURES**

Students who feel that they have been graded inappropriately or receive what they perceive as an unfair evaluation by a faculty member may file grievances in accordance with University of Delaware policies. Students are encouraged to contact the Director of the Bioinformatics Master's program prior to filing a formal grievance in an effort to resolve the situation informally.

## **IV. FINANCIAL AID**

### **A. FINANCIAL AWARDS**

Admission to the Graduate Certificate program in Bioinformatics does not automatically entitle an applicant to financial aid. Students may seek financial aid opportunities, such as fellowships or scholarships from sources within the University and from private and federal agencies. Interested students should check the Office of Graduate Studies for the most current opportunities.

Financial aid is awarded on a competitive basis from the pool of admitted applicants. The University of Delaware's policies apply to all forms of financial aid. Please refer to the University Policies for Graduate Student Assistantships and Fellowships.



## **B. CONTINUATION OF FINANCIAL AID**

Students who are awarded financial aid must maintain satisfactory academic progress with satisfactory performance of assistantship duties (when applicable). Satisfactory academic progress includes registering for a minimum of 9 graduate-level credits each Fall and Spring semester, and maintaining a minimum 3.0 GPA.