**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 as a scholar and conservationist.*

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| **Student name:**  |  |
| **Date(s) of this LP revision:** |  |
| **Anticipated Graduation date:** |  |
| **\_\_\_ This an annual update *or* \_\_\_ Requesting final certification**  |
| **Department:** |  |
| **Previous Education:** |  |
| **OGAPS Committee:** |  |
| **Dissertation/Thesis Topic:** |  |
| **ABS Field of Disciplinary Depth:** | *choose one: \_\_ Ecological Functions & Biodiversity  \_\_ Communities & Governance* |
| **ABS Field of Interdisciplinary Breadth:** | *choose one: \_\_ Ecological Functions & Biodiversity  \_\_ 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:* |

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| 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 you have reviewed the learning plan. Note if you would like any specific feedback from the Curriculum Committee. If the student is requesting certification, please confirm you believe the Learning Plan is complete and ready for certification.* |
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**ABS COMPETENCIES**

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| **Category 1: Coursework** |
| **1. ABS Theory and Application: Human-Environment Interactions & Ethics** |
|  *Semester/YR*

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 | Theory: ABS I core course (or approved substitute) ANDApplication: ABS II core course (or approved substitute)  |
| *Explain how this aligns with the general ABS Learning Path:* |
| **2. Interdisciplinary Breadth**  |
| *Course no.*

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 | At least one course in your ABS Field of Interdisciplinary Breadth or endorsement from your faculty advisor about the interdisciplinary aspects of the research. |
| *Describe your coursework or research experience that satisfies this competency. What did you gain from this experience?* |
| **3 . Research Design** |
| *Course no.*

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 | 1. One relevant graduate course on research design OR2. Substitute course (e.g. from another institution) |
| *Explain your thinking on choosing the course or substitute course:* |
| **Category 2: ABS Skills and Perspectives** |
| **4. Regional Studies and Cross-Cultural Competence** |
| Whether you are working in another country or in your own backyard, understanding the local ecological, economic and cultural environment is critical for ABS. Cross-cultural competence refers to the knowledge and skills that will enable you to effectively conduct your research in diverse cultural contexts. You may gain these skills and understandings from a variety of opportunities, including, but not limited to, course work focused on the region (including language of the region), field school in the region, or other significant time spent in region. |
| *Write a thoughtful reflection regarding how you will or have achieved this understanding.* |
| **5. Disciplinary Depth** |
| Your expertise in your area of disciplinary depth is partially achieved by completing your OGAPS degree plan. Coursework partially prepares you for your research, teaching, and professional career. |
| *Explain the field which you consider to be your area of disciplinary depth and how your degree plan and research will help or helped to achieve your expertise.* |
| **Category 3: ABS Research** |
| **6. Interdisciplinary Collaboration** |
| One member of your dissertation committee should be from an ABS discipline other than your primary discipline. You should also complete one of the following:1. Publish a collaborative paper in the ABS Perspectives Series OR
2. Prepare a collaborative proposal/manuscript OR
3. Visit other study sites providing interdisciplinary advice OR

4. Collaborate with another student on a complementary dissertation project |
| *Explain your choices regarding this competency and how those choices will contribute or have contributed to your program.* |
| **7. Communication and Organization Skills**  |
| 1. Lead a session of the ABS Journal Club and participate regularly when possible  AND2. Present your research on campus (e.g., Ecological Integration Symposium, ABS Conference)  AND3. Present your research at a national-level conference.  |
| *Please detail the dates and conferences at which you have presented to satisfy this competency.* |
| **8. Applied Research** |
| 1. Complete internship OR 2. Conduct research in collaboration with host country institution/organization AND3. Disseminate research results in format accessible for those who might apply the results (e.g. reports, workshops, brochures, presentations, etc.). |
| *Explain in more detail what you plan to do or did to satisfy 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>).

**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.

**Regional Studies and Cross-cultural Competence:** 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. 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.

**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.

**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

**Communication and Organizational 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. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)