

Plant Pathology & Microbiology

PLP**PM**

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

Graduate Student Handbook



College of Agriculture & Life Sciences
Department of Plant Pathology & Microbiology

2024-2025

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The Aggie Code of Honor

An Aggie does not lie, cheat, or steal or tolerate those who do

WELCOME TO THE DEPARTMENT OF PLANT PATHOLOGY & MICROBIOLOGY!

The decision to pursue graduate studies is one of the most important choices you will make in your career path. You are mapping the course of your future. With your undergraduate degree, you could have entered the workforce as a scientist, but by continuing your education you are enhancing your future professional opportunities. By choosing graduate studies you have decided that you want to be a leader in the arena of life science research, teaching, and/or extension.



Texas A&M Plant Pathology & Microbiology Building

We are pleased to have you join our department to pursue your goals. We feel that plant pathology and microbiology offers exciting opportunities that are likely to continue to increase in the future. The national and global food supply and the quality and safety of our food will become increasingly important in the future. The potential to reduce the effects of plant pathogens, increase the beneficial uses of microorganisms for generating or improving bio-based products and the use of microorganisms to solve environmental problems is just beginning to be realized. You have chosen a career that will offer you an exciting variety of opportunities.

Rest assured our faculty, are committed to providing you with the best training possible. Graduate study will be different from your experiences as an undergraduate. Our goal is not so much to provide you with masses of information, but to help you learn how to learn. The "facts" of science change continually, so you are starting a process that will continue throughout your lifetime as a scientist. Our success will be measured by how well you develop the discipline, the self-confidence, and the ethical standards necessary for your future success. Much of what we teach will be by apprenticeship methods. There is considerable "art" in scientific research, teaching and extension. The best way to teach this is by the laboratory rotations, laboratory classes, seminar courses, field trips, and the research experiences you have when you join a laboratory. Therefore, our best advice to you is to start to wean yourselves from textbooks and other methods of undergraduate education. Now more of your learning should be from the primary literature and from your personal contacts with professors, technical staff, and fellow students. Our primary purpose as University faculty is to share our knowledge and skills with students. We feel it is best to do this by including you in our current research, teaching, and extension activities.

Welcome to the Department!

Dr. Won Bo Shim

Professor & Department Head

PLPA Room 314

Email: wbshim@tamu.edu

Roles & Responsibilities

I. STUDENT

Graduate students are expected to be actively involved in and committed to the pursuit of excellence in all aspects of their academic and research endeavors during their tenure within the Department. Students should strive to maintain and enhance an environment conducive to the highest levels of scholarship and scientific inquiry. As important members of the Department, graduate students are expected to attend, support, and fully engage in department events and activities. In particular, department full participation of graduate students in seminars, assignments to any department committees, and the graduate student organization are essential. Academic excellence, advanced studies, and research pursuits are to be pre-eminent goals for every graduate student. Each student will be responsible for these additional requirements:

1. Know and follow the specific degree requirements of the Texas A&M University and the Office of Graduate and Professional Studies.
2. Know and follow the specific degree requirements established by the Department of Plant Pathology and Microbiology.
3. Enroll in the appropriate course work to complete your specific degree plan and maintain full- time status if receiving an assistantship or scholarship.
4. Maintain the appropriate levels of academic achievement to continue in the graduate program. Graduate students must maintain a minimum grade point ratio (GPR) of 3.00 on a scale of 4.00 in all courses required by their degree plan.
5. Represent Texas A&M and the Department with professionalism and excellence in research, teaching and service on- and off-campus.

Departmental degree requirements for the M. S. and Ph. D. include satisfactory advanced study and research as determined in consultation with the Major Professor and student Advisory Committee. The M.S. (Master of Science) and Ph. D. (Doctor of Philosophy) are research degrees and must be approached as such. These degrees are not granted solely for the completion of course work, residence, and (or) technical requirements, although these also must be met. These degrees are awarded upon the completion of an independent research project with the accompanying thesis or dissertation. The Master of Agriculture or M.S. without a thesis is based upon the requirements presented by the Office of Graduate and Professional Studies. These degrees and the requirements for successful completion of each are described in detail at the following link: <http://catalog.tamu.edu>. Another helpful link is the Office of Graduate and Professional Studies: <http://grad.tamu.edu/>

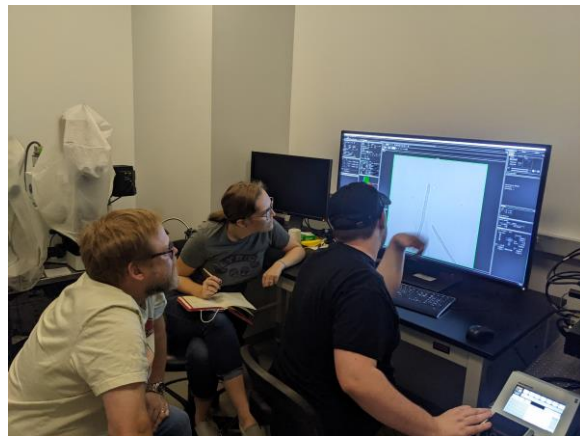


II. STUDENT'S ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The selection of a Major Professor is one of the most important decisions a graduate student will make. This person will act as mentor, thesis or dissertation advisor, research director, and mediator on behalf of the student to the departmental administration. Also, the student's Advisory Committee shall be selected jointly by the student and their Major Professor, who will serve as the Chair of the Advisory Committee. The Committee will be composed according to the regulations established by the Office of Graduate and Professional Studies as described in the Graduate Catalog. The graduate committee shall provide guidance and advice to the student. Specifically, the graduate committee will work with the student to develop a degree plan which meets the individual needs of the student and satisfies all requirements of the University, the Office of Graduate and Professional Studies, the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (AGLS), and the Department of Plant Pathology and Microbiology.



The committee will also work with the student to develop an appropriate Research Proposal for M.S. or Ph.D. degree programs; and provide advice and counsel during the research. The responsibility of the committee, working in concert with the Department Head, is to judge the academic qualities of the student and the student's work. This shall be accomplished through the required preliminary examination (Ph.D.) and final oral examinations (M.S.) and oral defense of thesis or dissertation (M.S. and Ph.D.). Each of these examinations will result in a pass or fail decision by the graduate committee. The graduate committee will meet with the student no less than once every 12 months. Written records of each meeting must be kept. Graduate students will be responsible for ensuring the appropriate forms are submitted. See the ADH or Graduate Academic Advisors for instructions. In addition, once a year a progress evaluation will be filed with the Associate Department Head for Graduate Programs.



III. DEPARTMENTAL GRADUATE ADVISOR

The role of the Departmental Graduate Advisor is to provide orientation, advice, and interim guidance to incoming graduate students prior to selection of a Major Professor. Accordingly, students who have not selected a Major Professor should seek the advice and counsel of the department Graduate Advisor, especially with regard to registration for course work.

Dr. Brian Shaw

Professor and Associate Department Head

PLPM Room 301

Email: brian.shaw@ag.tamu.edu

Tel: 979-862-7518

IV. AGLS ACADEMIC ADVISING

Our academic advisor is;

Dr. Casey Flint

Academic Advisor III | Kleberg Advising Hub

Email: casey.flint@ag.tamu.edu

Phone: 979-845-7616

V. DEPARTMENT CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE

The Curriculum and Assessment Committee (CAC) is responsible for deliberations concerning graduate degree programs in PLPM. Duties include coordination of graduate course content, review of proposed new courses, and other significant changes in the graduate curriculum, and recruitment of graduate students. The Graduate Recruiting Committee actively engages in recruiting efforts and evaluation of applications for Departmental assistantships and scholarships, and regularly reports all progress to the CAC and the Associate Department Head (ADH).



A primary responsibility of the students themselves is to ensure compliance with the system of requirements and deadlines in this manual and provided by the Office of Graduate and Professional Studies. It is also important to note that the student must communicate with our Academic Advising Center to keep track of degree requirements. If students fail to adhere to the guidelines, they and their Major Professor will be notified by the Departmental Staff, or the ADH. If a student consistently fails to make satisfactory progress in their degree program, the Department Head will take the matter into consideration for further action.

VI. ASSOCIATE DEPARTMENT HEAD FOR GRADUATE PROGRAM

The Associate Department Head for Graduate Program (ADH) serves in an advisory capacity to the Department Head for all matters dealing with undergraduate and graduate student affairs, curriculum development, and classroom instruction. The ADH also serves as liaison between the Head and the CAC and Graduate Recruiting Committee. In these capacities, the ADH serves as a voting member of these committees. Routine academic matters and normal operation will be administered by the ADH, with regular reporting to the Head.

Dr. Brian Shaw
Professor & Associate Department Head
PLPM Room 301
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GRADUATE DEGREE REQUIREMENTS

I. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

All students are expected to fulfill University requirements as outlined in the TAMU Graduate Catalog and to complete the degree requirements of the Department of Plant Pathology and Microbiology as outlined in this document. Be aware that our graduate curriculum is constantly evolving, so that changes may occur and be implemented prior to being altered in this Handbook. Therefore, you are encouraged to consult with the Graduate Advisor, your Major Professor, the Associate Department Head for Graduate Programs (ADH), and the Office of Graduate and Professional Studies during the preparation of degree plans, thesis or dissertation proposals, and other important stages of your academic career.



Helpful links regarding Graduate courses:

<http://catalog.tamu.edu/>

The Graduate Catalog has detailed course descriptions.

<http://grad.tamu.edu/>

The Graduate and Professional School is the site for forms that are required for various phases of your graduate career.

<http://plantpathology.tamu.edu>

Departmental website, and additional course information



Course Requirements continued...

All incoming students, regardless of previous background or experiences, are **required to take the following courses**. The courses are designed to be taken in sequential order to prepare students for a modern understanding of plant pathology.

Fall Semester

PLPA 611 (2)* Advanced Plant Pathology
PLPA 613 (1) Advanced Plant Pathology Laboratory
PLPA 616 (2) Methods in Molecular Biology of Plant-Microbe Interactions
PLPA 681 (1) Seminar in Plant Pathology
PLPA 685 or 691 (variable credit but **minimum 1**) Directed Studies
Enroll up to 9 credits total.
Take 691 with your lab PI, or 685 with Shaw if rotating

Spring Semester

PLPA 604 (1) Plant Bacterial Diseases
PLPA 605 (1) Molecular Plant Virology
PLPA 606 (1) Fungal Biology
PLPA 690 (1) Theory of Research

Summer Semester

PLPA 623 (2) Diagnosis of Plant Disease
or
PLPA 626 (3) Diseases of Field Crops

Fall Semester

PLPA 609 (2) Defense Hormone Signaling
PLPA 690 (1) Theory of Research

Spring Semester

PLPA 607 (2) Pathogen Strategies

A graduate student (domestic or international) is considered full-time if he or she is registered for a minimum of:

- 9 semester credit hours during a fall or spring semester
- 6 semester credit hours in a 10-week summer semester;
or
3 semester credit hours in each five-week summer term

NOTE: A reminder that all students are required to enroll in:

PLPA 690 Theory of Research (1) for two semesters

**Indicates the credit hours*

Additional Course Options

Other PLPA courses for consideration:
PLPA 610 (3) Host Plant Resistance
PLPA 619 (3) Plant-Associated Microbes
PLPA 634 (3) Turfgrass Pathology
PLPA 689 (3) Genome Informatics

Other Special topics courses (PLPA 685), such as a rotation in the Plant Disease Diagnostic Clinic, are also available. Research credits are taken as PLPA 691.

II. DEPARTMENTAL SEMINAR REQUIREMENTS

PLPA 681. Seminar, 1 credit hour

The intent is to provide instruction in the presentation of formal seminars (abstract preparation, visual aids, etc.) that reflect a critical review of current literature and original research in plant pathology and microbiology. This is a class designed to discuss the techniques for preparation and presentation of formal seminars. This seminar is required of all entering graduate students.

In addition to PLPA681, all graduate students (M.S. and Ph.D) are required to present an exit seminar on the original research conducted for their degrees upon completion of the degree program. This seminar will be scheduled as a presentation in the Department's weekly seminar series.

III. MINIMUM REQUIRED CREDIT HOURS FOR GRADUATE DEGREES

A graduate student (domestic or international) is considered full-time if he or she is registered for a minimum of:

- 9 semester credit hours during a fall or spring semester;
- 6 semester credit hours in a 10-week summer semester; or
- 3 semester credit hours in each five-week summer term.

You must register for the appropriate number of hours to obtain the benefits of a full-time student (benefits such as the stipend, health care, and tuition payments). Failure to maintain full time status directly jeopardizes your ability to be funded.

A minimum of 32 semester credit hours of approved courses and research is required for the thesis option Master of Science degree. The M.S. without a thesis options requires 36 hours of courses (excluded are research hours, PLPA 691). For a student who has completed a master's degree at a U.S. institution, a minimum of 64 hours is required on the degree plan for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. For a student who as completed a baccalaureate degree but not a master's degree program, a minimum of 96 hours is required on the degree plan for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

The number of required Departmental course credits does not total these TAMU hourly requirements. Thus, a graduate student pursuing a M.S. with a thesis or Ph.D. uses other courses, research hours (PLPA 691), or special topic courses (PLPA 689) to obtain the necessary hours for graduation. Graduate students pursuing a MS (with or without a thesis) should consult the graduate catalog for the appropriate selection of courses. OGPS has limitations on the number of hours for certain and combination of courses.

DEADLINES FOR COMPLETION OF DEGREE REQUIREMENTS

The Associate Department Head for Academic Affairs will be responsible for tracking student progress through the degree program and will provide timely notices of approaching deadlines. Failure to comply with degree program requirements may result in blocked registration. A student may request an extension of a deadline by written request from the student and Major Professor to the Associate Department Head for Academic Affairs and the Department Head.

REQUIREMENT	COMPLETION SEMESTER ‡	
	M.S.	Ph.D.
Identify Major Professor	1 st	2 nd
Committee Formation [♯]	2 nd	3 rd
Degree Plan [☼]	2 nd	4 th
Research Proposal Submitted	3 rd	5 th
Preliminary Exam	-	7 th
Exit Seminar	Last Semester	Last Semester
Final Exam	Established by Major Professor, and Committee	Established by Major Professor, and Committee

‡ Times are semesters after first enrollment and **include summer semesters**. Please see page 10 for schematic overview.

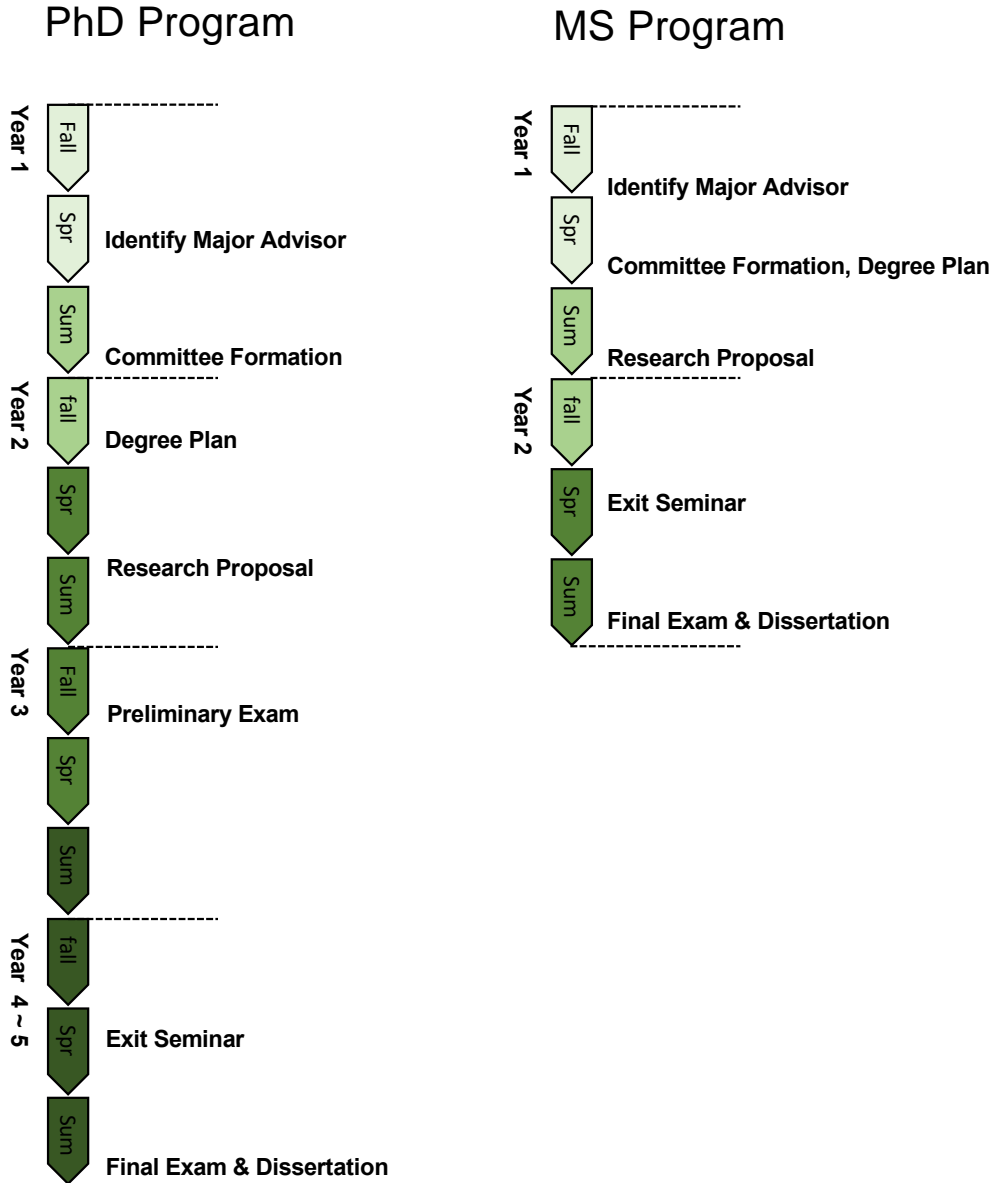
☼ This requirement is mandated by the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and non-compliance will result in blocking from registration.

♯ Annual Committee meetings are expected to ensure appropriate student progress toward degree. These requirements will be monitored via graduate annual reports to the ADH.

PLPM Standard PhD Proposal Format (Approved by PLPM Faculty Spring 2020)

- USDA NIFA Predoctoral Fellowship format with some modifications
- 6 pages, size 12 font and line spacing not exceeding 6 lines per inch
- Figures and tables (if applicable) must be included in 6-pages
- Project Narrative must have:
 - Introduction
 - Rationale and Significance
 - Approach
 - Evaluation plan
- References – no page limit

PLPM Graduation Timeline and Milestones



Updated August 2023

LABORATORY ROTATION SYSTEM

Having new graduate students, especially Ph. D. candidates, spend time working in several different laboratories provides an opportunity for the student to be exposed to different research programs of the Department and adds breadth to their educational experience. This experience also provides students with a basis for choosing a Major Professor and research problem for their thesis or dissertation. The Department of Plant Pathology and Microbiology strongly encourages all students supported by departmental funds and (or) university funds (Graduate Merit or Diversity Fellowships) to undertake five-week rotations in up to three different laboratories. These rotations should be completed by the end of the second semester in residence.

A student should spend the first week of their first semester in residence becoming familiar with the research programs of each faculty member. Following discussions with prospective faculty, the student will then submit to the Graduate Advisor a prioritized list of up to three laboratories in which they wish to conduct research. Students may work in two laboratories during the first semester and complete the third rotation in the second semester. Students will be expected to register for PLPA 685 (Directed Studies) credit for these rotations. The laboratory rotation is an educational experience and as such research projects are seldom completed during this short time.

The student and the faculty member will be allowed to extend the rotation experience beyond the allotted five weeks if both have agreed that the student will perform the thesis/dissertation research in that laboratory and the professor will serve as Major Professor.

ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORTING

In addition to the academic requirements, graduate students are required to submit an annual report to the ADH and Department Head. The purpose of this report to 1) acclimate graduate students to the habit of tracking their annual progress 2) to encourage annual holistic discussion of accomplishments/progress between the student and Major Professor and 3) provide the department with data necessary for graduate program assessment. These reports will be requested by the ADH in early summer and will span the academic year (September to August). Information in these reports will be used to follow-up with students and Major Professors about progress toward degree.

KEY SAFETY AND RESEARCH ETHICS TRAININGS

- TrainTraq Trainings
- Responsible Conduct of Research Trainings

GENERAL EMPLOYMENT ISSUES / GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIPS

Full-time Status Requirements: Students on assistantship must maintain a 3.0 GPA and **be enrolled full-time** (<https://catalog.tamu.edu/graduate/tuition-fees-financial-information/financial-assistance/>). Assistantships require at least 20 hours of service per week.

Pay day is on the first working day of the month. Checks can be picked up from Sonya Bouse in PLPM Room 306 or arrangements can be made to have your check deposited directly with your bank. Graduate students are not eligible for paid vacation or sick leave.

Travel and Leave: If you are attending a meeting or will not be reporting to work, you must complete a travel form and submit it in advance for approval via Concur through SSO sign on. Students must follow all State of Texas travel rules, which will be provided to you through Krista McCallum in the main office.

Vehicle Usage: Graduate students on assistantships are eligible to drive departmental vehicles for State of Texas business. Any tickets, either parking violations or moving violations, are the responsibility of the driver. If the driver is negligent in an accident, there is also a possibility of personal liability. Also, procedures for check-out, record-keeping of mileage, etc. must be followed. The loading dock is available for loading and unloading only (15 minute limit-tickets are issued by TAMU Parking Enforcement!)

Safety Issues: Any problems with the building should be reported immediately to Elena Kolomiets in PLPM Room 202 (Lab), 320 (Office), or via phone/email (979-571-3505/elena.kolomiets@ag.tamu.edu). Accidents or injuries should be reported IMMEDIATELY to both your supervisor and to Ms. Sonya Bouse (Business, PLPM Room 306, 979-845-8272, sonya.bouse@ag.tamu.edu). Graduate students will be expected to use good lab safety (using fume hoods, wearing gloves, etc.). Please do not wear gloves or lab coats in non-lab areas (elevators, restrooms; mail/copy rooms. etc.). Pesticide usage is NOT allowed in the PLPM Building!! Any pest problems should be reported to the administrative office.

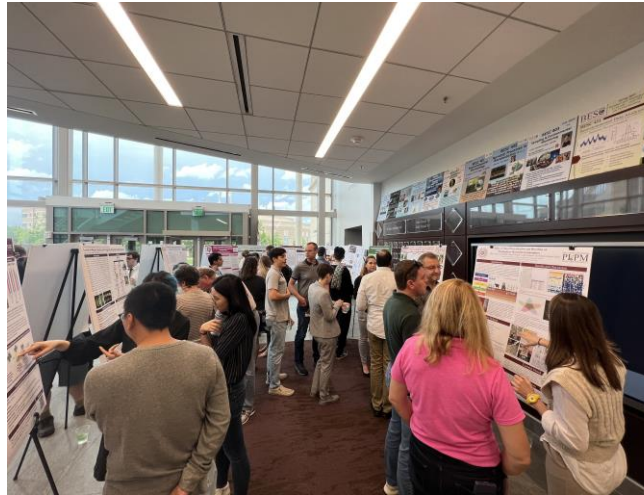
Equipment: Equipment in the building is for business use, although phones can be used for personal local calls and e-mail can be used for personal business. The computer lab is available for student use. Copy machines and faxes for personal use can be found in the library. Our copy machines require a code before you can use them and the charge will be assigned to the code.

Parking: The department does not have parking allocations available for graduate students. Student parking can be obtained through Parking, Traffic and Transit. Lot74 is the most preferred parking lot for access to PLPM building (Another option is the west campus garage (WSC)).

A MESSAGE FROM THE GRADUATE STUDENT CLUB

The club exists to make life a little easier, both academically and socially, for all graduate students in the department. We try to keep students current with any administrative changes that may affect us by calling meetings when necessary, sometimes inviting a faculty member along to give a more detailed explanation if needed. We also set up meetings with visiting scientists to talk about their research on a more personal basis. The club also takes the visitors to lunch, to give them a taste of the local Texas "culture".

By becoming a graduate student in this department you automatically become a member of the graduate student club. Don't hesitate to ask for advice if there's any way that we can help you along in your program.



So - Welcome! The graduate student club is glad to have you!

Mr. Oli Bedsole, President
Plant Pathology & Microbiology
Email: olib@tamu.edu



