IQAA

INDEPENDENT AGENCY
FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN EDUCATION — IQAA

REPORT
ON THE EXTERNAL AUDIT
BAKU STATE UNIVERSITY

PROGRAM ACCREDITATION

7005001 – MOLECULAR BIOLOGY

Astana, 2026

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DEGREE OF CONFORMITY OF THE SELF-EVALUATION REPORT TO THE ACTUAL STATE OF THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM 7005001 "MOLECULAR BIOLOGY" FOR EACH STANDARD

Standards	**Indicate the degree of compliance of the self-assessment report with the actual state of affairs at the university for each standard**			
	Full compliance	**Significant compliance**	**Partial compliance**	**Non-compliance**
Standard 1 Policy on Educational Program Quality Assurance and Academic Integrity	+			
Standard 2 Development and approval of the educational program, information management	+			
Standard 3 Student-centered learning, teaching, and assessment	+			
Standard 4 Admissions, Academic Performance, Recognition, and Certification	+			
Standard 5 Faculty	+			
Standard 6 Learning Resources and Student Support	+			
Standard 7 Public Information	+			

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CHAPTER 1
BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES OF THE VISIT

Introduction

On March 12–13, 2026, an expert group conducted an on-site visit to Baku State University as part of the international program accreditation process. The on-site visit was conducted in accordance with the Program developed by the IQAA and agreed upon with the university. All materials necessary for the work of the external expert group (EEG)—the visit program, the self-assessment report for program accreditation, the composition of the external expert group, the list of interview participants, methodological recommendations for organizing and conducting the external evaluation, the expert code of ethics, and the template for the EEG's accreditation report—were provided to the members of the expert group prior to the start of their work at the educational institution, which enabled them to prepare for the external evaluation procedure in a timely manner.

The self-assessment report on the educational programs of Baku State University contains sufficient information presented in accordance with program accreditation standards, identifies strengths and weaknesses, and highlights external threats and opportunities for risk management and the university's further development.

In accordance with the EEG visit program, a visual inspection was conducted, which allowed the members of the expert group to gain a general understanding of the organization of the educational, methodological, and research processes, as well as the material and technical infrastructure, and to determine their compliance with standards. In addition, meetings were held with the university administration, vice-rectors, deans of faculties and department heads, faculty members, representatives of academic schools, undergraduate and graduate students, alumni, and employers.

During the external audit, experts reviewed the university's regulatory documentation to gain a more detailed understanding of its document management, educational and methodological, research, and material and technical support, the university's website, its navigation and content, as well as the presentation of the university's educational programs on the pages and tabs of the university's website, in the media, and on other electronic resources.

The activities planned during the external visit contributed to a more detailed understanding of the university's structure and operations and enabled the external experts to conduct an independent assessment of the self-assessment report on educational programs' compliance with the actual state of affairs at the university and program accreditation standards.

As part of the accreditation process, special attention was given to **the master's program 7005001— "Molecular Biology"**—offered by the Department of Biology. The program represents an interdisciplinary field that integrates concepts and methodologies from physics, biology, chemistry, and computational sciences to investigate the physical mechanisms underlying biological systems.

The main objective of the external evaluation was to determine the extent to which the educational program complies with **IQAA program accreditation standards**, including the quality assurance system, curriculum development and implementation, student-centered learning, faculty qualifications, educational resources, and transparency of public information.

The expert panel also assessed the program's alignment with the requirements of modern higher education and scientific research in the field of molecular biology. Particular attention was paid to the program's research potential, the qualifications and research productivity of the faculty, student involvement in research activities, as well as the program's relevance to the needs of the labor market and the scientific community.

The evaluation was conducted based on document analysis, interviews with key stakeholders, an inspection of the facilities and infrastructure, and a review of supporting materials provided by the university. These activities allowed the expert panel to gain a comprehensive understanding of the educational program and assess its compliance with established accreditation standards.

Key Characteristics of the University

Full name of the educational institution: **Baku State University**.
Year of foundation and establishment: **1919**.

The mission of Baku State University is to train highly qualified, competitive in the domestic and international labor markets, and imbued with a spirit of patriotism, in the fields of science, education, and engineering and technology, based on the acquisition of fundamental knowledge and skills in innovative research in the areas of interdisciplinary lifelong education and scientific research in accordance with international standards.

The University provides education at all levels of higher education, as well as pre-university and continuing education.

In the field of scientific activity, Baku State University conducts fundamental, theoretical, methodological, pedagogical, and applied scientific research, as well as the implementation of research results into practice and the industrial and innovative development of the country.

The university's highest governing body is the Academic Council.

Baku State University comprises **16 faculties** that train specialists in **55 bachelor's degree programs and 153 master's degree programs** across various academic fields; **4 institutes**; a well-stocked academic library; **21 scientific, methodological, and practical journals** published by the university; as well as a university clinic serving the university's faculty, staff, and students.

Baku State University has a well-developed and functional infrastructure that meets modern requirements. The university has **four academic buildings** equipped with lecture halls and computer labs featuring state-of-the-art technical equipment. All university buildings are connected to a unified corporate computer network, ensuring their integration into a common information space. The university library, equipped with electronic reading rooms and providing free access to the Internet, creates the necessary conditions for the effective organization of students' educational and research activities. The educational television studio provides additional opportunities for implementing innovative forms of organizing the educational process.

The Faculty of Biology, which offers **the Master's program in "Molecular Biology**," is one of the university's key academic units in the field of life sciences. The faculty combines educational activities with scientific research and maintains cooperation with national scientific and research institutes and scientific organizations. The Department of Molecular Biology and Biotechnology plays a leading role in implementing the educational program and supporting research activities in the interdisciplinary field of molecular biology.

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CHAPTER 2
EXTERNAL AUDIT REPORT PREPARED BY THE EXPERT GROUP

Introduction

An external evaluation of the Master's degree program 7005001 – "Molecular Biology" at Baku State University (BSU) was conducted as part of the international accreditation procedure for educational programs organized by the Independent Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (IQAA).

Baku State University, founded in 1919, is one of the oldest and leading institutions of higher education in the Republic of Azerbaijan and the South Caucasus region. The university offers a wide range of academic programs at the bachelor's, master's, and doctoral levels across many academic disciplines. The university is gaining increasing international recognition and is featured in global rankings such as the QS World University Rankings and Times Higher Education, reflecting its growing research potential and international standing.

The Master's program **7005001 – "Molecular Biology"** is offered by **the Faculty of Biology**, and the specialization is an interdisciplinary field combining biology, chemistry, genetics, biotechnology, and computer science.

The program complies with **the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)** and consists of **120 ECTS credits spread over a two-year period (four semesters)**. Each semester corresponds to approximately **20 weeks of academic activity**. The curriculum includes theoretical classes, laboratory and practical sessions, research and teaching internships, as well as the preparation and defense of a master's thesis.

The educational program in the "Molecular Biology" specialization focuses on studying the molecular foundations of living organisms—from the cellular level to the level of the whole organism.

The program is based on modern research technologies, including molecular cloning, genetic engineering, proteomics, bioinformatics, and genome analysis, and enables the application of this knowledge in biotechnology, medicine, agriculture, and ecology. This approach fosters the development of analytical and critical thinking, the formation of an integrative knowledge base, and the resolution of challenges such as genetic diseases, environmental sustainability, and the production of biotechnological products.

Students participate in research activities and present the results of their work at scientific conferences organized at the faculty level and beyond. Such activities contribute to the development of scientific thinking and research skills among students.

According to the self-assessment report provided by the university and confirmed during the site visit, the academic performance of students enrolled in this program is high: the average grade ranges from 92 to 96 points. Discussions with graduates and employers revealed that many students secure employment while still

in school or shortly after graduating, especially if their internships and thesis projects are linked to external research institutes and applied laboratories.

Educational Program 7005001 “Molecular Biology” has a research focus and contributes to the training of specialists capable of working in the field of education and at research institutions, universities, medical laboratories, and other similar settings.

Standard 1. Policy on the Quality Assurance of the Educational Program and Academic Integrity

Evidence and Analysis

The implementation of the educational program in the "Molecular Biology" specialization is based on the quality assurance policy of Baku State University (hereinafter – BSU). The document titled "Policy and Standards for Quality Assurance in Education at BSU" was approved at a meeting of the BSU Academic Council on February 23, 2021 (Minutes No. 2) and is currently applied, alongside the Strategic Development Plan, academic policies, and internal quality assurance standards, as one of the key components of the university’s management system.

The BSU Strategic Development Plan (hereinafter referred to as the SDP) for 2021–2030 was developed taking into account existing global trends in science and education, national priorities, and the real needs of the labor market. The document defines strategic goals aimed at continuously improving the quality of teaching and research activities at the university, deepening integration into the international scientific and educational space, and developing an innovative educational environment. Within the framework of the Strategic Development Plan, the priority areas identified are aligning higher education with contemporary challenges, ensuring the training of competitive specialists, and strengthening the university’s research capacity.

Improving and continuously maintaining the quality of education encompasses all university structures. At this stage, the BSU administration, the Dean’s Office of the Faculty of Biology, the faculty of the Department of Molecular Biology and Biotechnology, as well as the instructors, play an active role. This process is constantly being improved and includes the development of a quality assurance culture across all areas of BSU’s activities. BSU’s mission in the field of quality assurance is to integrate scientific research, education, and industrial processes to train specialists who meet international standards. At the core of this mission is the training of competitive professionals who meet the requirements of stakeholders, are proficient in innovative technologies, and are capable of effectively addressing the socio-economic challenges of modern society based on scientific principles. (Self-Assessment Report).

During a visual inspection of BSU, all classrooms and laboratories were equipped with video surveillance systems; the system allows for real-time monitoring of the educational process.

At BSU, the integration of the educational process with research activities is regarded as one of the fundamental principles of implementing the quality assurance policy, with particular emphasis placed on upholding academic integrity. Academic integrity is one of the University's strategic priorities.

In accordance with the requirements of the Higher Attestation Commission under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the absence of plagiarism in academic dissertations is a mandatory requirement. Therefore, all dissertations for the degrees of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) and Doctor of Science submitted to the dissertation councils operating within the faculties of BSU are required to undergo anti-plagiarism checks. The protection of copyright for scientific and educational-methodological materials, as well as the prevention of plagiarism, is carried out by the Anti-Plagiarism Commission operating at BSU. Information obtained as a result of the Commission's activities is regularly submitted to the rector and annually presented to the Academic Council of BSU in the form of a report. The Anti-Plagiarism Commission, established by order of the rector, performs the primary function of checking scientific and educational-methodological works prepared at the University using the "StrikePlagiarism" system and analyzing the results obtained. All scientific works prepared by University staff, doctoral candidates, graduate students, master's students, and undergraduate students are subject to review by the Commission. This system is used to assess the originality of materials from national and international conferences held at BSU, as well as articles published in scientific journals. Academic papers are initially checked through the university account. If plagiarism is detected, the paper is returned to the author for corrections. The author is required to make corrections and resubmit the work for review within three months (for a fee). If plagiarism is detected after the second review, the author must request a third review from the rector. Research papers that do not pass this stage are not admitted for defense or publication. In accordance with the relevant decision of the Academic Council of BSU, the following criteria are applied when evaluating research papers for a master's thesis: if plagiarism is ≤ 10% and AI usage is ≤ 20%, the paper is admitted for defense; if plagiarism ranges from 11% to 50% and/or AI usage ranges from 21% to 50%, the work is sent for revision; if plagiarism exceeds 50% and/or AI usage exceeds 50%, the work is not admitted for defense.

Between 2017 and 2024, the Commission reviewed a total of 12,884 academic papers. The review procedure covers academic works prepared by BSU faculty and research staff, doctoral and master's students, fourth-year students, as well as students who have been required to repeat a year. All dissertations submitted to the University's dissertation councils undergo plagiarism checks. In the 2024/2025 academic year, the Commission reviewed the following number of scientific and educational materials: 45 textbooks, teaching aids, and monographs; 22 doctoral dissertations; 135 PhD dissertations; 13 conference proceedings; 956 master's theses; 987 bachelor's theses.

To strengthen the fight against corruption and implement preventive measures, the Academic Council of BSU, at its meeting on April 13, 2023, approved

the "BSU Action Plan for 2023–2026 to Strengthen the Fight Against Corruption and Offenses Contributing to Corruption," which was subsequently approved by the BSU Rector via Order No. R-47 dated May 2, 2023. Based on the approved Action Plan, a series of activities is being carried out, and reports on its implementation are presented at meetings of the University's Academic Council.

During a visit to one of the internship sites, a wide range of instruments and equipment in the laboratories was presented by staff of the Institute of Molecular Biology of the Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences, where graduates worked and where students enrolled in the master's program under this educational program also completed their internships.

Level of compliance with Standard 1 – Full compliance

Standard 2. Development and Approval of the Educational Program, Information Management

Evidence and analysis

The SPR was developed based on a number of important legal and regulatory documents. These primarily include the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan "On Education" and the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan "On Science." In addition, the document was prepared in accordance with the "State Strategy for the Development of Education in the Republic of Azerbaijan," approved by the Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated October 24, 2013, as well as with the "Action Plan for the Implementation of the State Strategy for the Development of Education in the Republic of Azerbaijan." At the same time, the SPR was developed in accordance with the "State Program for Enhancing the International Competitiveness of the Higher Education System of the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2019–2023" and the document "Azerbaijan-2030: National Priorities for Socio-Economic Development," approved by the Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated February 2, 2021. In addition, the Plan is based on the Action Plan prepared to implement Presidential Decree No. 2199 of July 13, 2016, "On Additional Measures to Improve the Business Environment in the Republic of Azerbaijan and Further Enhance the Country's Position in International Rankings." The Action Plan was also developed taking into account relevant government decisions, as well as regulatory and legal documents of the Ministry of Science and Education (hereinafter – MSE).

The Strategic Development Plan is approved by the University's Board of Trustees and implemented under the supervision of the University's Academic Council and under the leadership of the rector. According to statements by the university's leadership, BSU's mission is to provide high-quality educational services based on scientific principles and national-cultural values, in accordance with modern requirements, as well as to function as a leading institution of higher

education with an innovative and research-oriented academic environment and international competitiveness.

The master's-level educational program in the specialty "Molecular Biology" has been developed in accordance with the Laws of the Republic of Azerbaijan "On Education" and "On Science," relevant decrees and orders of the Head of State, the "State Standard and Program of Higher Education" and the "Requirements for the Content, Organization of Master's Education, and Awarding of the Master's Degree," approved by the relevant resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan, as well as regulatory documents of the Ministry of Education and Science and other applicable legal acts. The program's objective is to train specialists who study the processes occurring in living organisms at the molecular level, are proficient in modern laboratory and computational methods, and are capable of applying their knowledge in scientific research and in fields such as biotechnology, medicine, and ecology.

According to the Strategic Development Plan, the university has identified as priorities the strengthening of the integration of science and education through innovative and interdisciplinary approaches, the expansion of international scientific cooperation, and the development of human capital that supports sustainable development goals. In line with these objectives, the molecular biology program is designed to train specialists with research potential in genetics, biotechnology, and biomedicine using modern molecular and cellular technologies. The program aims to promote scientific innovation and the development of life sciences at the national and international levels.

The program's learning objectives and outcomes have been developed in accordance with the National Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning of the Republic of Azerbaijan (NQF), as well as with the priorities and needs of regional and international labor markets. The curriculum for the "Molecular Biology" specialization has been developed in accordance with modern educational principles and the priorities of the regional labor market. The program focuses on the study of the molecular foundations of living organisms—from the cellular level to the level of the whole organism.

The program is based on modern research technologies, including molecular cloning, genetic engineering, proteomics, bioinformatics, and genome analysis, and enables the application of this knowledge in biotechnology, medicine, agriculture, and ecology. The primary goal of the program is to acquire theoretical and experimental knowledge that enables the study of biological processes at the molecular level, to develop research capabilities based on modern methods of molecular biology and bioinformatics, and to train qualified specialists for careers in biotechnology, medicine, and ecology. The program also focuses on developing practical skills. The curriculum includes laboratory sessions, scientific seminars, and independent research projects. Graduates are proficient in methods such as RT-PCR, qPCR, electrophoresis, Western blot, CRISPR, and transfection, and possess in-depth knowledge of the structure and functions of DNA and RNA, gene expression, epigenetics, cellular processes, and apoptosis.

The development of educational programs in Azerbaijan is carried out by a commission led by an ARETN representative. The programs are approved by ARETN and are mandatory for all universities offering master's degree programs in the relevant field. The total program load is 120 credits. The curriculum includes required and elective courses, practical training, and a master's thesis.

Graduates acquire competencies in working with laboratory equipment, applying molecular biology methods, analyzing biological data, and using bioinformatics tools. The program is evaluated by internal and external bodies, including the agency for quality assurance in education. The curriculum is organized in accordance with the ECTS system. The duration of the program is 2 years (120 credits). Theoretical instruction is combined with practical training and research activities.

Systematic data analysis (student performance, graduate employment, and feedback) is used to continuously improve the program. The average student grade over the past five years has been 92–96, which attests to their high level of academic preparation.

Over the past five years, 26 master's students in the fall semester and 12 in the spring semester in this specialization received scholarships.

A survey revealed that over the past five years, based on the results of the fall semester exam session in the "Molecular Biology" specialization, 47 master's students received scholarships for excellent academic performance, and 16 received merit-based scholarships. Over the past five years, based on the results of the spring semester exam session, 23 master's students received scholarships for outstanding academic performance, 14 received merit-based scholarships, and 1 received a standard scholarship. Over the past five years, 25 students have graduated from the "Molecular Biology" specialization. The Faculty of Biology conducts regular surveys of graduates to gather information on the timing of employment, fields and job positions, the alignment of professional activities with their major, and opportunities for career growth. Sixty-seven people participated in the graduate survey conducted on November 4, 2025. In addition, based on an agreement between BSU and the National Observatory on Labor Market and Social Protection, employment indicators for university graduates were analyzed. The analysis utilized data on 23,978 BSU graduates and employment information for 12,500 individuals (Analysis of BSU Graduate Employment).

The Career and Alumni Relations Center collaborates with employers to study current and future labor market needs, and this information is taken into account when improving educational programs. The Faculty of Biology conducted a survey of employers on November 3, 2025, with 23 respondents participating.

Employers include: the Azerbaijan Food Security Institute; the Public Legal Entity "Research Institute of Vegetable Growing"; the Institute of Plant Growing; the Institute of Botany of the National Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan; the Institute of Molecular Biology and Biotechnology of the National Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan; Azerbaijan Coca-Cola Bottlers LLC; the Institute of Zoology / the Abdulla Karayev Institute of Physiology of the National Academy of

Sciences of Azerbaijan; Baku State University; the Institute of Microbiology of the National Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan.

During interviews with master's students majoring in "Molecular Biology," it became clear that they are completing their internships at research institutes and industrial facilities, and are very satisfied with the internship sites and the quality of instruction provided by the department's faculty.

There is a student health clinic on campus. The "Student House" dormitory, with a capacity of 220 beds, is available for student housing.

Graduate employment rates are regularly analyzed in collaboration with the National Observatory of the Labor Market and Social Protection. Efforts are also underway to establish an alumni network to strengthen ties between the university and its graduates.

Interviews with master's students revealed that they actively participate in scientific conferences and have publications in other journals.

During a meeting with graduates of this program, it became clear that they continue their professional activities in the fields of education, healthcare, pharmaceuticals, environmental protection, biotechnology, and nanobiotechnology. Some of them work in research centers and laboratories abroad.

The university regularly conducts student surveys to assess satisfaction with the educational process. According to the survey results, master's students in the "Molecular Biology" program expressed 100% satisfaction with the course content, the professionalism of the faculty, and the teaching methods.

Level of compliance with Standard 2 – Full compliance

Standard 3. Student-centered learning, teaching, and assessment

Evidence and Analysis

In the "Molecular Biology" educational program, students are viewed as key participants in the learning and teaching process, and the systematic collection of their opinions, needs, and expectations plays an important role in ensuring the quality of the educational program. Feedback from students, obtained through surveys, student councils, and other mechanisms, is regularly collected and taken into account when reviewing and further developing the program content.

The effectiveness of educational programs in the "Molecular Biology" field of study is assessed based on the extent to which they contribute to students' academic achievements and progress. Higher education institutions, acting in accordance with the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan "On Education," state standards, and educational documents, implement student-centered, learning-outcome-oriented, and competency-based approaches.

According to Resolution No. 348 of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated December 24, 2013, master's students must complete the courses specified in the Individual Study Plan (ISP) and earn 120 ECTS credits. In

addition to the mandatory 30 credits per semester, students may take an additional 10 credits, allowing for flexible distribution of the academic workload. The IUP itself is based on the curriculum: in the first year, it is developed by the faculty, and in subsequent years, by the student, with the option to make changes before the start of the academic year. The plan is approved before the start of the academic year, with one copy remaining with the student and the other in the university's archives. The IUP mechanism is designed to unlock students' academic potential, support their academic achievements, and provide a high-quality, personalized education.

Course registration is organized on the principles of transparency and accessibility, allowing students to plan their studies effectively. Students who have not met academic requirements can take advantage of support mechanisms, including a summer semester to make up for missed coursework, retake courses, and improve grades.

Grading is based on a 100-point scale: up to 50 points are from exams, and the remainder from ongoing performance. The minimum passing score is 51. Assessment criteria are communicated to students in advance and outlined in the syllabi, ensuring transparency and a clear understanding of the requirements. To ensure objectivity, exams are typically graded by two instructors. Appeal procedures and opportunities to retake exams for valid reasons are also provided. The university has an examination office and appeals committees, and students may file appeals within two days of the results being announced. Student satisfaction is regularly assessed through anonymous surveys, the results of which are analyzed and used to improve the educational process.

Academic mobility provides students with the opportunity to study at other universities, including those abroad. Credits are recognized upon agreement with the home university, but their total must not exceed 30% of the program. Documents required for participation in mobility programs include an academic transcript, an application, a learning agreement, and an information package. The recognition of learning outcomes is carried out by a special commission, taking into account credits, course content, and learning outcomes, ensuring compliance with international standards and the principles of the Bologna Process.

During the interview, it was revealed that second-year master's students in the "Molecular Biology" program won the international scholarship program in Turkey and received the opportunity to study for free at Erciyes University during the fall semester of the 2025/2026 academic year.

Experts have determined that academic mobility exists, which is governed by the rules of the credit system. Students may earn credits at other institutions, including partner universities abroad. The total number of credits earned at other institutions must not exceed 30% of the program's total credit load.

In accordance with the requirements of the ECTS system and the Bologna Declaration, BSU ensures that students have the right to study at both domestic and foreign universities. A special commission is established by order of the rector to recognize and determine the equivalence of credits. When recognizing credits,

special attention is paid to the number of credits, the course content, and learning outcomes.

Best practices:

The administration of this university, its structural units, the dean's office, departments, and faculty members welcome student-oriented and student-centered approaches, as well as inclusivity, and actively encourage feedback.

Level of compliance with Standard 3 – Full compliance

Standard 4. Student Admission, Academic Performance, Recognition, and Certification

Evidence and Analysis

The full academic cycle of a student in the BSU Master's program in Molecular Biology—including admission, orientation, instruction, assessment, monitoring of academic progress, and awarding of the degree upon completion—is regulated in accordance with the "State Standards and Master's Degree Program," approved by Resolution No. 88 of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated May 12, 2010, as well as BSU's internal academic regulations. Admission to master's programs is conducted by the State Examination Center (SEC) in accordance with the "Rules for Admission to Master's Programs at Higher Education Institutions and the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Azerbaijan," approved by Resolution No. 40 of the Cabinet of Ministers dated February 8, 2017. The admission process is based on the principles of transparency and equal opportunity for all applicants. Information on admission requirements, program selection, and application procedures is published on the official SEC portal and in the magazine Magistr. Admission of foreign students is coordinated by the BSU International Relations Department in accordance with the "Rules for the Education of Azerbaijani Citizens Abroad, as well as Foreign Citizens and Stateless Persons in the Republic of Azerbaijan," approved by Resolution No. 125 of the Cabinet of Ministers dated May 1, 2015, as well as international standards approved by the Ministry of Science and Education. Detailed information on admission procedures for foreign citizens is available on the university's website. Additionally, information about BSU for international applicants is available on the Study in Azerbaijan platform (https://studyinazerbaijan.edu.az/ru?activeTab=2). Over the past five years, a total of 46 students have been admitted to the "Molecular Biology" program. The enrollment rate relative to the quota ranged from 83% to 100%. At BSU, admission to the master's program in "Molecular Biology" is also conducted through SABAH groups—a mechanism designed to select the most prepared, motivated, and creatively talented students. The SABAH initiative (an Azerbaijani acronym meaning "knowledgeable, skilled, and well-prepared") is a national

program launched by the Ministry of Science and Education to improve the quality of higher education, foster an innovative educational environment, and support talented youth. SABAH groups provide students with high academic achievements the opportunity to study under a more intensive, modern, and expanded curriculum. As part of the program, students utilize modern teaching methods, participate in research projects and international cooperation, and work in innovative laboratories.

Since 1968, BSU has been admitting and educating international students. The admission of foreign citizens is carried out in accordance with the aforementioned regulations. International applicants submit their documents electronically via the "Electronic Application" subsystem of the Centralized Education Information System (ECIS). A personal account is created in the system, allowing applicants to track the status of their application. Applicants fill out an electronic form and upload scanned documents. To simplify the application process, a centralized electronic system was implemented via the edu.az portal, ensuring a uniform standard for document submission and transparency of procedures. In 2019, the "Study in Azerbaijan" initiative was launched, aimed at promoting Azerbaijani higher education on the international stage and attracting foreign students. Foreign citizens can enroll at BSU in the following programs:

- based on an individual agreement with the university;
- through intergovernmental scholarship programs;
- as part of academic exchange programs;
- based on the results of the State Unified Entrance Exam;
- through transfer from other universities.

After admission, students receive introductory information about the program, courses, academic regulations, and grading criteria. At orientation sessions held by the Department of Biology, first-year students are given a detailed overview of the university's structure, department operations, the use of electronic systems, and academic advising. Adaptation workshops are also conducted. Master's students' academic performance is tracked throughout their studies: exam results, credits, and overall progress are recorded in the electronic system. Academic advisors provide regular feedback and support.

Over the past five years, the retention rate for first-year master's students in this specialization has been 100% in the fall semester (grade **range:** 87.5–100%) and 100% in the spring semester (grade **range:** 50–100%). In the second year of study, the rates reached 100%. The recognition of qualifications obtained abroad is carried out by the Agency for Accreditation and Quality Assurance (İQAE) and is regulated by relevant regulations, including Presidential Decree No. 2306 of August 18, 2023. Recognition may be full, conditional, or denied. Transfer, reinstatement, and academic leave are regulated by the resolution of February 21, 2024, and are processed through the SEMS electronic system.

Upon successful completion of the program, students receive a master's degree provided they have earned all required credits, prepared, and defended their thesis. Diplomas are issued in accordance with state regulations. Documents may be collected in person or through an authorized representative.

Furthermore, interviews with graduates and employers revealed that graduates work in this field not only in education and science but also in industry, making this specialty even more in demand.

Level of compliance with Standard 4 – Full compliance

Standard 5. Faculty

Evidence and Analysis

BSU's human resources management policy, covering all stages related to academic and administrative-technical staff—including recruitment, promotion, performance incentives, talent pool development, as well as procedures for staff reductions and dismissals—is regulated and implemented in accordance with the Labor Code of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan "On Education," the Charter of Baku State University, and other relevant regulatory and legal acts.

The recruitment of academic staff at BSU is governed by the "Regulations on the Procedure for Filling Positions of Professors, Faculty Members, and Department Chairs in Higher Education Institutions," approved by Order No. 401 of the Ministry of Education dated August 7, 1996. Competitions are announced for the positions of department chair, professor, associate professor, senior lecturer, and lecturer upon the expiration of the term of office established as a result of election or appointment, or when a vacancy arises. Announcements of the competition are published in the newspaper "Xalq qəzeti" and on the university's official website.

Only professors and individuals holding a Doctor of Science degree may participate in the competition for the position of professor. Professors, associate professors, Doctors of Science, and Candidates of Science (PhD) may apply for the position of associate professor. Candidates for the position of senior lecturer must hold a PhD and have at least three years of research and teaching experience, or a master's degree and at least five years of research and teaching or professional experience, provided they have published research and teaching materials. Candidates for the position of lecturer may include PhDs with at least one year of research and teaching or relevant professional experience, as well as individuals with a master's degree who have at least three years of research and teaching or professional experience and research and methodological publications. Competitions are announced throughout the academic year, and job openings are posted on the official website of BSU. Candidates must submit the required documents within 30 days of the announcement's publication.

In the "Molecular Biology" specialization, the curriculum systematically integrates various research activities in accordance with the department's scientific focus areas. Courses in the curriculum are linked to current scientific topics aimed at studying the molecular-genetic, physicochemical, and biotechnological foundations of life processes in living systems.

Scientific research conducted at the Department of Molecular Biology and Biotechnology is primarily focused on the following areas: screening of microorganisms from natural sources and the study of their physiological, molecular-genetic, and biotechnological properties; investigation of the rhizosphere microbiota of agriculturally significant plants; biosynthesis of biologically active compounds; and analysis of the effects of combined stress factors on biological systems. These research areas are directly integrated into the curriculum of master's-level courses such as "Research Methods in Molecular Biology," "Molecular Biology of Photosynthesis," "Molecular Mechanisms of Stress Response," "Molecular Mechanisms of Biomolecule Transport," and "Molecular Mechanisms of Physicochemical Effects on Biological Systems." Students select dissertation topics corresponding to the department's priority research areas, which ensures a continuous link between education and research.

The annual teaching load of BSU academic staff is regulated by the Decree of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated November 24, 2010, "On Establishing Teaching Load Standards for Teaching Staff of Educational Institutions (excluding teachers at state general education and vocational educational institutions whose knowledge and skills have undergone diagnostic assessment)". According to these standards, the annual workload for full-time faculty members is 500 hours, of which at least 60% must consist of classroom instruction (lectures, seminars, laboratory, and practical sessions). For part-time faculty, the annual workload is 250 hours, of which at least 150 hours must be classroom-based work.

Under an agreement between the Ministry of Science and Education and Cambridge University Press, the country's researchers can publish for free in 422 high-impact-factor journals, and more than 140 scientific and educational institutions have received unlimited access to these journals. Over the past five years, the department's faculty has published a total of 174 scientific papers. Approximately 32% of these publications appeared in internationally indexed Q1–Q3 journals, indicating a high level of peer-reviewed scientific productivity. About 33% consist of materials from international conferences, reflecting the department's active participation in global scientific networks and knowledge exchange.

At BSU, the activities of the faculty are systematically organized and planned in accordance with institutional requirements. To this end, each faculty member develops an individual work plan for the academic year. The individual work plan is drawn up in accordance with the "Rules for the Organization of Scientific and Scientific-Methodological Activities in Higher Education Institutions," approved by Resolution No. KQ-12 of the Board of the Ministry of Higher Education and Science dated September 3, 2024, and is approved by the head of the relevant department. The individual work plan reflects the faculty member's teaching load, research activities, scientific and methodological work, as well as organizational, advisory, and educational activities. At the end of the academic year, the faculty member submits a report on the implementation of the individual plan, based on which the effectiveness of their activities is evaluated.

The evaluation of the faculty is based on criteria such as student feedback, the quality of teaching and methodological materials, the use of innovative teaching methods, and student learning outcomes. The evaluation of research activities, in turn, is determined by indicators such as the quantity and quality of publications, participation in international conferences, involvement in research projects, and the receipt of competitive grants.

At BSU, the creation of a supportive psychological environment, the protection of students' rights, and the regulation of teacher-student relationships within the framework of ethical standards are ensured in accordance with the "Code of Ethical Conduct for Educators," approved by Resolution No. KQ-07 of the Board of the Ministry of Higher Education and Science on May 15, 2024. These rules require the faculty to adhere to the principles of fairness, objectivity, responsibility, and transparency. The professionalism of BSU's faculty is systematically evaluated as part of the continuous improvement of educational quality. This process involves monitoring the pedagogical and scientific activities of faculty members, as well as analyzing the effectiveness of the teaching methods used based on established criteria. The primary tool for such evaluation is open classes, which are assessed according to criteria approved by the Academic Council of the Faculty of Biology.

Interviews with the department's faculty revealed that in the educational process for the "Molecular Biology" program, the faculty uses modern interactive teaching methods and innovative scientific approaches. Over the past five years, there has been a steady increase in the average monthly salary of faculty members working in the "Molecular Biology" program. High indicators of scientific productivity—including publications in prestigious scientific journals, participation in grant projects, and the presentation of research results at scientific conferences—are key criteria for the financial incentives provided to academic staff. Researchers' participation in various grant programs and scientific training opportunities contributes to the development of their practical research skills and allows them to acquire new scientific competencies.

The department's academic staff actively participates in international collaboration and carries out joint research projects with foreign universities and research institutes. Partner institutions **include** Lomonosov Moscow State University, the Department of Materials Engineering at the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin (Poland), Mardin Artuklu University (Turkey), Izmir Institute of Technology, Saarland University (Germany), Ege University, Batman University, Hacettepe University, and the Kazan Institute of Physics and Technology (Russia).

The academic qualifications and educational backgrounds of the faculty members working in the "Molecular Biology" program fully correspond to the content and requirements of the disciplines they teach. In addition, part-time faculty members with significant practical experience at leading scientific institutions—such as the Institute of Genetic Resources and the Azerbaijan Institute of Food Safety—make a substantial contribution to integrating theoretical knowledge with practical skills.

To further improve the quality of education, the BSU Department of Biology regularly invites international experts and highly qualified specialists to teach specific courses and provide academic consultations. For example, Professor Muhammad Zafar from Quaid-i-Azam University (Pakistan) and Professor Sibel Taş from Bursa Uludağ University (Turkey) delivered lectures and conducted scientific seminars for faculty and students. Such initiatives not only expand the faculty's academic potential but also contribute to the integration of international experience into the educational process, enabling students to acquire more in-depth scientific knowledge and research competencies.

At BSU, a healthy psychological environment, the protection of students' rights, and the regulation of pedagogical relationships within an ethical framework are governed by the "Rules of Ethical Conduct for Educators," approved by a decision of the Board of the Ministry of Science and Education on May 15, 2024. According to these rules, faculty members must adhere to the principles of fairness, objectivity, responsibility, and transparency; treat students with respect; avoid discrimination; and ensure an inclusive educational environment and equal opportunities, as confirmed during interviews with the dean's office, department leadership, as well as faculty members, master's students, and alumni.

Best Practices:

The department's goal is to recruit talented, experienced, and actively engaged researchers while maintaining a fair, transparent, and regulations-based personnel policy at the university.

Joint projects and publications significantly expand the department's research potential and contribute to the development of cutting-edge research in the field of molecular biology.

Level of compliance with Standard 5 – Full compliance

Standard 6. Learning Resources and Student Support

Evidence and Analysis

BSU places importance on creating an environment that fosters the academic and personal development of students, faculty, and researchers. BSU has established a comprehensive infrastructure that meets modern requirements for the "Molecular Biology" program: technologically equipped classrooms, laboratories with modern equipment, a library collection, and various social spaces for student recreation contribute to enhancing the effectiveness of teaching and research processes.

The university's budget policy also supports the professional development of faculty members. The university funds staff participation in professional educational programs in the field of molecular biology, which facilitates the integration of cutting-edge scientific methods, new trends, and international experience into the educational process. BSU's financial policy ensures not only the high-quality

implementation of the “Molecular Biology” program but also the development of a research environment and the training of specialists who meet modern scientific and technological requirements. Targeted and sustainable financial management enhances students’ theoretical and practical training and strengthens the university’s scientific and institutional capacity. Additional sources of revenue for BSU include international and national grants, fee-based educational services, research projects, and internal university grant programs. These sources contribute to the funding and continuous development of educational programs, as well as the advancement of scientific research. BSU’s budget is centrally managed by the Department of Finance and Procurement, which oversees faculty salary payments and all financial transactions, including expenditures on instructional and laboratory materials. Reports on completed financial transactions are published annually on the university’s official website.

At BSU, academic and career guidance for students is organized to a high standard and provides significant support for their development. The Career Counseling Service helps students align their study plans with their career goals and prepare for internships and employment. All dining halls are equipped with ventilation and safety systems, including stations for hot and cold dishes, additional storage space for dry goods, and dishwashing areas. The university campus features a 35-seat café for students to relax. The Biology Department building features spacious laboratories and lecture halls for lectures and practical classes, with a total area of 2,343.2 m². The department operates 26 laboratories in the following fields: Molecular Biology and Biotechnology; Biophysics and Biochemistry; Botany and Plant Physiology; Ecology; Zoology and Physiology. There are 31 lecture halls available for educational purposes.

The department has established a laboratory infrastructure that supports teaching and research activities. Three specialized rooms are provided for faculty members to use , and there are also three fully equipped laboratories for experimental work and research projects. The laboratories are equipped with the following equipment: PCR machines; Horizontal and vertical electrophoresis units; UV transilluminators; Microcentrifuges; Vortex mixers; Spectrophotometers; Gel documentation systems; Biological safety cabinets (laminar flow hoods); Autoclave; Refrigerated centrifuges; Orbital shakers; Analytical balances; Temperature-controlled refrigerators and freezers; Uninterruptible power supplies (UPS). In these laboratories, students can perform practical work: DNA and RNA extraction, amplification, electrophoresis, protein isolation, and cell culture. All equipment complies with biological and industrial safety standards and is regularly updated through national programs and international grants. To improve the quality of education and student safety, the laboratories are equipped with safety logs, fire safety instructions, personal protective equipment, first-aid kits, and firefighting equipment.

Pursuant to Order No. 161 of May 7, 1971, issued by the Ministry of Education of Azerbaijan, the Scientific Library serves as a methodological center for the libraries of higher education institutions, collaborates with the country’s university

libraries, exchanges literature, and provides methodological support. The library also establishes ties with leading foreign universities and research centers through international information exchange, acquires electronic and print publications relevant to the university's field of study, and conducts book exchange programs. In addition to existing electronic resources, the library provides access to more than 13,000 electronic journals, approximately 8,000 e-books, and various specialized databases through annual subscriptions from international publishers. More than 500 readers can simultaneously use the library's 11 reading rooms. The Scientific Library has implemented the IRBIS-64 Automated Library Information System, a product of the Russian State Scientific and Technical Library. The Scientific Library actively participates in international projects, conferences, and symposia. It consistently represents BSU at events organized by international library organizations such as EIFL, IFLA, ANKOS, and others.

Curricula and syllabi are regularly updated to reflect current scientific advancements, labor market demands, and international standards. This updating process requires corresponding revisions to teaching materials. Textbooks and teaching guides for specialized disciplines are developed by department faculty and updated in accordance with qualification requirements. For each course, faculty members at are responsible for identifying, evaluating, and integrating new and relevant literature into the teaching process. Over the past five years, textbooks and teaching materials published by faculty members teaching the Master's specialization in "Molecular Biology" at the Department of Molecular Biology and Biotechnology include:

To ensure continuous access for master's students to information systems, the faculty and department are equipped with modern technological infrastructure. Computer labs connected to the local network provide access to regularly updated educational resources. The Department of Molecular Biology and Biotechnology has four classrooms and laboratories equipped with interactive whiteboards. Computer labs located in BSU's academic buildings are equipped with high-speed internet, projectors, and other multimedia tools. Numerous Wi-Fi hotspots installed in academic buildings, laboratories, student centers, and libraries provide continuous and stable internet connectivity, allowing users to conveniently work with digital resources. To digitize the educational process and optimize management, BSU uses the Academic and Research Management System. This web platform provides faculty and students with convenient access to class schedules, curricula, course materials, assessment results, and faculty-student communication channels. All courses in the "Molecular Biology" specialization are fully integrated into the system, ensuring the use of modern digital educational resources. The library's electronic catalogs, access to specialized databases, extensive collections of scientific literature, and modern reading rooms create the necessary conditions for master's students to conduct high-level scientific research.

The Scientific Library provides services to users through specialized reading rooms, circulation departments, and an electronic library system. The library's collection comprises a total of 2,166,583 copies of rare and valuable publications.

The Scientific Library's eleven reading rooms can simultaneously accommodate more than 500 readers. Access to electronic information resources is provided through the official BSU website and made available to users via the electronic library, electronic catalog, and full-text databases. Currently, the electronic library provides open access to more than 4,500 electronic resources in Azerbaijani, Russian, and English, corresponding to the university's educational programs. A significant portion of the digital library's materials consists of textbooks, study guides, and other academic and methodological publications prepared by BSU faculty. As part of the university's infrastructure ( ), the "Book House" operates as an open-access space for students and staff. In addition to educational literature, a wide selection of fiction and academic publications is available here. Students can order all necessary textbooks and educational materials through the "Book House."

It has become clear that students have access to international electronic academic databases. These resources provide master's students with extensive opportunities to conduct research, keep abreast of current academic trends, and prepare research papers of a high academic standard.

During interviews with faculty members of this program at the faculty, department, and throughout BSU, a positive moral and psychological atmosphere for learning and conducting lectures, practical, and laboratory classes was observed. The students described how the department's faculty treat them objectively and provide every possible support to help them achieve their goals in conducting research and writing publications.

Additionally, during separate conversations with faculty members, graduates, and master's students, it was confirmed that inclusive education is practiced not only for individuals with disabilities but also for those with hearing or visual impairments, as well as those with speech disorders, etc.

Thus, the educational environment created at BSU for the "Molecular Biology" specialization fully complies with the standards of research-oriented higher education. The university's material and technical capabilities, financial resources, laboratory and educational infrastructure, as well as library and information systems complement one another and ensure the high-quality implementation of the educational program. Such an integrated system contributes to the comprehensive development of master's students' theoretical knowledge, practical skills, and research competencies.

Level of compliance with Standard 6 – Full compliance

Standard 7. Public Information

Ensuring that students, graduates, and other stakeholders are informed is carried out in accordance with the University's principles of transparency, informed decision-making, accessibility, and quality assurance. To this end, comprehensive, up-to-date, and objective information on each educational program is disseminated

through the University's official website, its official social media pages (LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram), , the official YouTube channel, as well as through various informational brochures. To develop and maintain effective relations with the media and the public, as well as to cover changes in the educational process, research activities, and the social life of the University, BSU has a Department of Public Relations and Information. The Department coordinates the interaction of the University's structural units with the media and the public, ensuring the prompt and continuous dissemination of information about the University's development, ongoing events, and research results. Student life is featured in a separate section of the website. Information about student clubs and organizations, as well as various social and cultural events held at both the faculty and university levels, serves an important informational function, fostering students' social integration and encouraging their active participation in university life.

Interviews with the department's faculty revealed that career guidance activities are conducted in schools and universities, and open house events are held for high school and college students who may apply for the bachelor's program, as well as for prospective master's students in this program.

BSU Open House events, organized for prospective applicants, aim to provide the public with an open and transparent presentation of the University's educational, scientific, and social environment, as well as to support informed choices regarding academic programs. As it turns out, during these events, prospective applicants receive information about the activities of the faculties, the content of educational programs, admission requirements, laboratory and research infrastructure, the scientific potential of the faculty, as well as the social and academic aspects of student life.

To keep the public informed about the University's development, scientific events, innovations in the educational process, and the achievements of students and faculty, Baku State University publishes the newspaper "Baku University." The newspaper covers issues related to the educational process, the development and availability of textbooks and teaching materials, research activities, the work of laboratories and research centers, library services, social initiatives, international relations, and student life. BSU TV also serves as an authentic educational environment where students majoring in media and communications develop practical skills. Through this platform, students can gain hands-on experience in professional activities such as video production, editing, reporting, news anchoring, and editorial work. The Baku State University Publishing House ensures the high-quality preparation and publication of textbooks, teaching materials, methodological guides, scientific journals, and monographs; the publishing house provides students with access to reliable and scientifically sound information resources. In the field of public relations, BSU has entered into cooperation agreements with television channels, including Khazar TV, ARB TV, and other media organizations.

Such cooperation agreements allow the University to systematically and purposefully utilize media resources, thereby enhancing the overall effectiveness of its communication policy.

Areas for improvement:

Supplement the university's website with comprehensive information about the educational program, including research achievements, publications, and student work, and keep it up to date.

Compliance Level for Standard 7 – Full Compliance

CHAPTER 3
CONCLUSION

Comments and areas for improvement from the expert group based on the audit results:

Standard 1. Policy on educational program quality assurance and academic integrity – Full compliance

Standard 2. Curriculum Development and Approval, Information Management – Full Compliance

Standard 3. Student-centered learning, teaching, and assessment – Full compliance

Standard 4. Admissions, Academic Performance, Recognition, and Certification – Full Compliance

Standard 5. Faculty – Full compliance.

Standard 6. Learning Resources and Student Support – Full Compliance

Standard 7. Public Information – Full Compliance

Areas for improvement:

Add comprehensive information about the educational program to the university website, including research achievements, publications, and student work, and keep it up to date.

Appendix 1

PROGRAM
of the external audit by the IQAA expert group at Baku State University for program accreditation March12-13, 2026

Time	Event	Participants	Location
	Day 1: March 12, 2026		
8:45	Arrival at the university	L, EG, C	EG office
9:00-10:00	Briefing, discussion of organizational issues	L, EG, C	EG office Conference link
10:00-10:45	Interview with the University Rector	L, EG, C,Rector	Rector's Office Conference link
10:45-11:00	Exchange of views among members of the external expert group	L, EG, C	EG Office Conference link
11:00-11:45	Interview with the Vice-Rectors of the University	L, EG, C, Vice-Rectors	Rector's Office Link for the conference
11:45-12:00	Exchange of views among members of the external expert group	L, EG, C	EG office Conference link
12:00-12:45	Interviews with heads of structural divisions	L, EG, C, RSP	EG office Conference link
12:45-13:00	Exchange of views among members of the external expert group	L, EG, C	EG Office Conference link
13:00-14:00	Lunch	L, EG, C	
14:00-14:45	Interview with deans, department heads	L, EG, C, Dean of the faculty, Head of the department	EG office Link for the conference
14:45-15:00	Exchange of views among members of the external expert group	L, EG, C	EG Office Conference link
15:00-15:45	Interview with faculty members of the department on the accredited educational program	L, EG, C, teaching staff of the department	EG office Link for the conference
15:45-16:00	Exchange of views among members of the external expert group	L, EG, C	EG office Link for the conference
16:00-16:45	Interview with employers	L, EG, C, Employers	EG Office Conference link
16:45-17:00	Exchange of views among members of the external expert group	L, EG, C	EG Office Conference link
17:00-18:30	Visual inspection of material, technical, and educational laboratory facilities	L, EG, Heads departments	Academic building Conference link

18:30-18:45	Exchange of views among members of the external expert group	L, EG, C	EG office Conference link
Day 2: March 13, 2026			
8:45	Arrival at the University	L, EG, C	Academic Building
9:00-11:00	Academic and scientific support for master's students. Selective attendance at academic exams and practical training bases	L, EG	Academic building Practical training bases
11:00-11:45	Interviews with students	L, EG, C, Students	EG office Conference link
11:45-12:00	Exchange of views among members of the external expert group	L, EG, C	EG Office Conference link
12:00-13:00	Invitation to department heads at the request of experts.	L, EG, C, department heads	EG Office
13:00-14:00	Lunch	L, EG, C	
14:00-16:00	Preparation of external audit reports. Review of documentation on the accredited educational program. Invitation of individual representatives of the department and structural units at the request of experts.	L, EG, Head of Department, HSU	EG office Link for the conference
16:00-17:00	Exchange of views among members of the external expert group. Preliminary results of the external audit	L, EG, C	EG office Link for the conference
17:00-17:30	Meeting with management to present preliminary results of the external audit	L, EG, C	Rector's Office Conference link

Note: L – Leader of EG, EG – Expert Group, C – Group Coordinator, HSU – Heads of Structural Units

Appendix 3

LIST OF DOCUMENTS ADDITIONALLY REVIEWED AT THE UNIVERSITY

1. Curriculum
2. Working Curriculum
3. Syllabi for disciplines (courses)
4. Internal policies and quality assurance system
5. Materials from collegial bodies governing the educational program
6. Materials for systematic monitoring of student performance
7. Student Theses