

## Frequently Asked Questions – Division of Basic Science

### Recent Changes

#### **Are the Chemistry and BME programs part of the Biological Sciences Umbrella program?**

No, beginning with the application cycle for Fall 2017, they are not. Each of these is a separate program, but you can apply to either, both or all 3 using the one online application. The chemistry track is now a full Organic Chemistry PhD program and its students, similar to the BME students, do not follow the same curriculum as the 9 programs under the Biological Sciences Umbrella.

#### **Which programs are included in the Biological Sciences Umbrella Program?**

The Biological Sciences Umbrella Program includes the following 9 PhD programs and 2 tracks:

Biological Chemistry PhD

Cancer Biology PhD

Cell and Molecular Biology PhD

Genetics, Development, and Disease PhD

Immunology PhD

Integrative Biology PhD

Molecular Biophysics PhD

Molecular Microbiology PhD

Neuroscience PhD

Computational and Systems Biology Track

Pharmacological Sciences Track

#### **Do you still have the Mechanisms of Disease and Translational Sciences track? I don't see it.**

Yes! We absolutely do, and it is available to students in any of the programs, including the umbrella, Organic Chemistry, and BME. On the application, there will be a separate question that allows you to indicate that you are applying to the Mechanisms of Disease and Translational Science track. If you answer yes, you will be required to upload an additional separate essay describing why you wish to participate in this program.

#### **What is the Division of Basic Science?**

The Division of Basic Science, or DBS, administers all of the research training programs leading to Ph.D. degrees in the basic biomedical sciences, including the Biological Sciences Umbrella, Biomedical Engineering, and Organic Chemistry. Therefore, all students in any of these programs are considered DBS students. The DBS includes more than 325 participating faculty.

### Questions and Answers common to all DBS Students (see DBS definition above)

#### **How many lab rotations do students have to complete?**

Students are encouraged to explore potential research areas by participating in at least two research rotations.

#### **When do I have to choose my permanent lab and mentor?**

During the first year, each student chooses a research topic, mentor, and specific PhD program. During the second year, students take qualifying exams to be admitted into candidacy and form dissertation committees that will monitor their progress through completion of the degree. The remainder of their time is spent focused on their dissertation research.

#### **Does my mentor have to be affiliated with the Graduate Program I want to join?**

No. You may join any graduate program, whether your mentor is affiliated with that program or not. Typically, students and mentors are affiliated with the same programs, but not always. Additionally, each of the eleven programs are independent of the traditional department-based structure. Faculty members and students in each graduate program may be affiliated with any basic science or clinical department on our campus.

#### **How many years will take to finish the program?**

Completion time varies for each student. Our average time to degree completion is 5.2 years.

#### **What types of research experiences do admitted students typically have at the time of application to the DBS?**

It really depends on individuals. The committee will review all of your application materials, including transcript(s), personal essay, standard tests scores, reference letters, CV, etc to reach an admission decision.

#### **What are the most heavily weighted factors in selecting students for the graduate program?**

The most heavily weighted factors are letters of recommendation and research experience(s). As far as the research experiences, not only who, what, when and where, but also how well you understand the research itself beyond just the techniques that you carried out, and ultimately, how you communicate these elements in your personal essay.

**Do I need to contact the professor whom I'm interested in prior to or during my application?**

It is not necessary for you to contact the professor you are interested in. Contacting them will not influence the outcome of your application. However, if you would like more information on their research and are interested in seeing if they will take any students, then it would be a good idea.

**Do most of your graduate students start their PhD work immediately after completing their undergraduate degree, or do students generally take time off?**

The majority of our students enter directly after finishing their undergraduate degree. Students who have taken time "off," usually haven't actually taken time "off." Time between degrees, when it comes to graduate school, is often used by students to compensate for some aspect of their application that they perceive as inadequate. If someone has grades that are not high enough in science courses, they will enter either a Masters or a Post-Baccalaureate program to remediate those classes and earn better grades. If a student has not had significant research experience or they have had clinical research experience and they want to enter a basic science graduate program, they will seek out a research experience that fills the gap. If a student is not 100% sure that they want to pursue a career in science that benefits from a PhD, then the best way to answer that question is to get a job as a research technician and judge whether that type of experience ignites a passion in them.

**If you have any problems in a class, are there tutors or other classroom help available?**

Yes! The graduate school provides tutoring for the first year genes, proteins, and cells courses. You can also contact the professor who gave the lecture with further questions. The professors are very willing to help with any questions.

**Do any of the programs in the Division of Basic Science (DBS) offer a Master's degree?**

No, none of the programs in the Division of Basic Science offer Master's degrees.

**Do you accept students for Spring entrance into the program?**

No, the DBS only accepts students for fall admission.

**Do you accept transfer students into the program?**

No, we do not. For more information, please email us at [DBSINFO@utsouthwestern.edu](mailto:DBSINFO@utsouthwestern.edu).

Stipend, Tuition, Fees, and Insurance

**Are graduate students in the DBS guaranteed funding?**

Yes, funding is guaranteed provided students exhibit satisfactory progress towards the Ph.D. degree. All students studying for a Ph.D. in the 11 basic science programs receive a nationally competitive research assistantship/stipend of \$34,500 per year throughout the course of their Ph.D. studies in addition to full payment of tuition and fees. This support during the first year of graduate school is provided by the graduate school and allows students to choose freely among the graduate programs and their participating faculty mentors. In subsequent years, students receive financial support from research grants awarded to their dissertation mentors, from one of the institutional National Institutes of Health (NIH) training grants associated with various areas of research training, or from individual pre-doctoral fellowships obtained through an external competition such as NSF or HHMI. Many of our students have been awarded the NSF-GRFP fellowships, HHMI Gilliam Fellowships, the Ford Foundation Fellowships, and HHMI International Student Fellowships.

**How much is your stipend?**

Graduate students at UT Southwestern receive nationally competitive research assistantships/stipends; our Fall 2016 stipend is \$34,500/year plus funds to cover tuition and student service fees.

**Do you waive tuition and offer healthcare in addition to the stipend?**

Tuition and fees are paid by the institution. The student is responsible for purchasing their health insurance from the stipend if they are not covered by an outside source. There are two options for a student who requires single adult coverage only: a student academic health plan that costs approximately \$2,200 annual, or a PPO plan that costs approximately \$3,600 annual. Both are provided through Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Texas. If you have a spouse or family who also requires coverage, the costs increase.

**Who do I contact with additional questions?**

Please email us at [DBSINFO@UTSouthwestern.edu](mailto:DBSINFO@UTSouthwestern.edu).

## How To Apply; Fee; Letters of Recommendation

### **How do I apply?**

The application is online. You may apply for the program and find more information about the admission timeline [here](#). Admission to the DBS is granted for the fall semester only.

### **How do I apply to the Mechanisms of Disease and Translational Science program?**

To apply to the [Mechanisms of Disease and Translational Science Track](#), check the “yes” box where the application asks if you are applying to this program and upload the additional essay required on the appropriate tab.

### **When is the application deadline?**

The application deadline is December 1 each year. You may apply for the program and find more information about the admission timeline by clicking [here](#). Supporting materials, such as transcripts and letters of recommendation, must be received within two weeks after the deadline to be reviewed by the committee in a timely manner.

### **What is the application fee?**

There is no application fee. We want our scientific community to mirror that of the global scientific community. Therefore, we do not place financial barriers between a student and higher education.

### **Where do I send additional application materials?**

We accept letters of recommendation and undergraduate and graduate transcripts electronically. There is no need for hard-copies of these documents during the review phase. Students may also upload a resume, CV, or other documents directly within the online application. Official test scores sent by the testing agency and transcripts sent by the institution will be required prior to matriculation if an applicant decides to attend UTSW.

### **How many letters of recommendation are we allowed to submit?**

A minimum of 3 letters is required, and you may submit up to 5.

### **Do my letters of recommendation need to be received by December 1<sup>st</sup>?**

No. Supporting materials, such as transcripts and letters of recommendation, *must be received within two weeks after the deadline to be reviewed by the committee in a timely manner.*

### **When will my recommenders be notified of my request?**

The requests for letters of recommendation will be sent to your writers within two days of submission of your application. The requests cannot be sent prior to submission of the application.

### **Why can't the requests for letters be sent before I have completed and submitted my application?**

With all applications now being processed electronically, there is no applicant record with which to file the letters until your application has been officially submitted.

### **I made a mistake on the application, but already submitted it. Now what do I do?**

Please send an email to [admissions@utsouthwestern.edu](mailto:admissions@utsouthwestern.edu).

### **When will applicants be notified about admissions decisions?**

Application review is conducted on a rolling basis, with invitations to interview emailed directly to the primary email address provided by the applicant no later than March 1<sup>st</sup>. If an applicant has not received an invitation by this time, they are not being considered for an interview for the DBS program.

### **How do I check my application review status?**

Administrative staff cannot inform you of your application status via email or phone.

You will be notified via the primary email address supplied by you if you have been invited to interview for our program. All other applicants will be contacted with a final status determination when all interview invitations have been extended.

### **How can I check if my application is complete?**

After you officially submit your application, within 24-48 hours, you will receive an email from UT Southwestern with instructions for logging into our student system. This will allow you to check on the completion status of your application and which transcripts and letters have been received. This email will also include instructions on how to resend the request for a letter of recommendation from one of your letter writers.

## GPA and GRE

### **Is the GRE exam required?**

Yes. The general GRE exam, which includes the Verbal, Quantitative and Analytic sections, is required for admission into the DBS. An official score report must be submitted. The GRE Institution Code for UT Southwestern is 6686.

### **Will you accept the MCAT score instead of the GRE?**

No, the MCAT is specific for medical school admissions and measures characteristics that may or may not be applicable to graduate training.

### **What is the school code for the GRE and TOEFL score reporting?**

Our GRE and TOEFL institutional code is 6686. No departmental code is needed.

### **Are there minimum GRE score or GPA requirements for your program?**

UT Southwestern Graduate School has no minimum GPA or GRE. We consider each applicant holistically when reviewing for admission. Individual programs and tracks may have one or more additional requirements specific to the area of training. Additional requirements or considerations can be found in descriptions of individual programs.

### **What are the average GRE scores and GPA of a student at UTSW?**

Our average GRE scores for the Fall 2016 class are 156V, 161Q, 3.9W. The average GPA is 3.6.

## Additional Information for International applicants

### **Do you offer admission/funding for international students?**

Yes, international students are encouraged to apply to the DBS. International applicants will be considered with their cohort during the admissions cycle. Positions in the program are highly competitive.

### **Is a TOEFL/IELTS score required for international applicants? Is there a minimum score requirement?**

Yes, international applicants must submit a TOEFL/IELTS score. TOEFL scores are preferred for international applicants; there is no minimum TOEFL score requirement, however, competitive TOEFL scores are 100 or above (iBT). IELTS scores are accepted in place of TOEFL scores; while there is no minimum required score, a competitive candidate would score 7.0 or above. Applicants who have attended a primarily English-speaking university in a non-English-speaking country must still submit a TOEFL/IELTS score.

### **What is the school code for the GRE and TOEFL score reporting?**

Our GRE and TOEFL institutional code is 6686. No departmental code is needed.

### **Do you accept the IELTS exam in place of the TOEFL?**

Yes, as long as the exam is current.

### **Can the TOEFL be waived?**

Yes, if an international applicant has completed an undergraduate degree in the US or at an institution where the primary language is English, then the TOEFL can be waived, upon request and review. In order to do so, a student must email Dr. Stuart Ravnik, [Stuart.Ravnik@UTSouthwestern.edu](mailto:Stuart.Ravnik@UTSouthwestern.edu).

### **I completed my Master's degree in the US or in an English Language course. Can the TOEFL be waived for me?**

You must submit a waiver request via email to Associate Dean Stuart Ravnik, [Stuart.Ravnik@UTSouthwestern.edu](mailto:Stuart.Ravnik@UTSouthwestern.edu). Requests will be reviewed and you will be notified of the waiver decision.

### **My institution does not use the 4.0 GPA scale, how do I calculate my GPA?**

The section for entering GPA in the application offers you the opportunity to enter the information in the appropriate score format.

### **Do I need to use an international transcript translation service to submit my grades?**

No, you can submit the transcripts or copies of the transcripts in their original format.

## The Biological Sciences Umbrella Program

### **Why am I applying to the Biological Sciences Umbrella instead of a specific program?**

Prospective students apply to the Biological Sciences Umbrella because, once accepted at UT Southwestern, all first year

students, except Organic Chemistry and Biomedical Engineering students, take a 2-month core course covering major themes in the biology of proteins and genes before choosing which program to join and taking advanced courses specific to that program.

**When do I take program-specific coursework?**

Each program that is part of the umbrella requires and offers advanced coursework during the late fall and spring of the first year of study to provide more in-depth knowledge of specific topics. All didactic coursework is completed in the first year for these programs.

**Some schools require students to take their courses during their first year and second year. How about at UT Southwestern?**

At UT Southwestern, in the Biological Sciences Umbrella program, all required coursework is completed in 1 year. There may be mini-courses that are offered on an elective basis that can be taken at any point in a student's career. Students in specialized curricular tracks or training grant programs may be required to take a few courses after the first year.

The Biomedical Engineering PhD Program

**Some schools require students to take their courses during their first year and second year. How about at UT Southwestern?** At UT Southwestern, in the Biomedical Engineering program, students take courses in their first and second year.

The Organic Chemistry PhD Program

**Some schools require students to take their courses during their first year and second year. How about at UT Southwestern?** At UT Southwestern, in the Organic Chemistry program, all required coursework is completed in 1 year.