

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Division of Basic Science?

The Division of Basic Science, or DBS, encompasses eleven research training programs leading to Ph.D. degrees in the basic biomedical sciences. The DBS includes 270 participating faculty and offers doctoral training in: Biological Chemistry; Biomedical Engineering; Cancer Biology; Cell and Molecular Biology; Genetics, Development, & Disease; Immunology; Integrative Molecular & Biomedical Sciences; Molecular Biophysics; Molecular Microbiology; Neuroscience; and Organic Chemistry. There are also special emphasis tracks in Computational and Systems Biology; Mechanisms of Disease & Translational Science; and Pharmacological Sciences.

Which programs are part of the Biological Sciences Umbrella Program and which are not?

Organic Chemistry and Biomedical Engineering are **not** part of the Biological Sciences Umbrella Program. All other nine programs are, and they include: Biological Chemistry; Cancer Biology; Cell and Molecular Biology; Genetics, Development & Disease; Immunology; Integrative Molecular & Biomedical Sciences; Molecular Biophysics; Molecular Microbiology; and Neuroscience.

Why am I applying to the Biological Sciences Umbrella Program in the DBS instead of a specific program?

Prospective students apply to the Division of Basic Science because, once accepted at UT Southwestern, first year 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.

How do the curricula differ between the Umbrella, Organic Chemistry, and Biomedical Engineering?

Please refer to each program's specific [Degree Plan](#) for coursework schedules. Organic Chemistry and Biomedical Engineering students follow plans that differ from the Umbrella students' but details cannot be covered adequately here.

When do I take program-specific coursework?

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

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. Our students average 5.5 years to complete their Ph.D. degrees.

How many years will it take to finish the program?

Completion time varies for each student. Our average time to degree completion is 5.5 years.

What types of research experiences do admitted students typically have?

It really depends on individuals. The committee will review all your materials, including transcript, personal essay, reference letters, CV, etc to reach a 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 understood 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 reflect on 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 work immediately after undergrad, or do students generally take time off?

The vast 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 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 bring in 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 also provides tutoring for the 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.

In terms of funding, do you apply for it or does the department find that for you?

Your stipend is paid by the graduate school for the 1st year. Once you join a lab, your PI will fund you for the remaining time you are in school. We also highly encourage our students to apply for external fellowships. Additionally, some programs have NIH-funded training grants that can support a subset of students. So there are definitely no worries regarding your funding at UT Southwestern.

Does the Division of Basic Science (DBS) offer a Master's degree?

No, the Division of Basic Science contains only Ph.D. programs. Each of these eleven programs are independent of the traditional department-based structure. Faculty members and students in each Graduate Program can be affiliated with any basic science or clinical department on our campus.

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.

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

At UT Southwestern, 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.

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 stipend of \$34,500 per year throughout the course of their Ph.D. studies in addition to full support 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 fellowship, Gilliam Fellowship, and the Ford Fellowship.

How much is your stipend?

Graduate students at UT Southwestern receive nationally competitive research assistantships/stipends; our current 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 \$2500 annual, or a PPO plan that costs approximately \$3800 annual. Both are provided through Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Texas. If you have a spouse or family who also need coverage, the costs increase.

Who do I contact with additional questions?

Please email us at 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 complete the MoDTS Essay that is located in a separate tab at the end of the application. This will complete your application to the MoDTS track.

When is the application deadline?

The application deadline is December 1. 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 competitively 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 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, but you may submit up to 5.

Do my letters of recommendation need to be received by December 1st?

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

When will my recommenders be notified of my request?

While completing the application and prior to submission of your application, you will be able to send an initial request by clicking a button next to that recommender’s completed information. For any recommender that you did not send a request prior to submission, the request will be sent within two days of final submission of your application. After your application has been received and you have been provided access to your student self-service area of the application system, you have the ability to resend letter requests to any writers whose letters have not been received.

How can I check if my application is complete?

After you officially submit your application, within about 24-48 hours, you will receive an email from UTSW with instructions for logging into our student system that 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 for you to be able to resend the request for a letter from one of your letter writers.

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

Please send an email to admissions@utsouthwestern.edu.

When will applicants be notified about admissions decisions?

Admission 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 1st. 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.

GPA and GRE

Is the GRE exam required?

No. GRE test scores may be submitted by the applicant but are **not required** at this time. The GRE Institution Code is 6686.

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.

Is there a minimum GPA requirement for your program?

UT Southwestern's Graduate School has no minimum GPA, but incoming students historically average a GPA of 3.6 on a 4-point scale. We consider each applicant holistically when reviewing for admissions. 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 is the average GPA of a student at UTSW?

Our average GPA is 3.6.

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 TOEFL score reporting?

Our 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 English language test be waived?

Yes, the TOEFL/IELTS can be waived upon request and review on a case-by-case basis. In general, if an international applicant has completed an undergraduate degree in the US a waiver is typically granted. Applicants who have attended a primarily English-speaking university in a non-English-speaking country may request a waiver, but typically must still submit a TOEFL/IELTS score. In order to request a waiver, a student must email Dr. Stuart Ravnik, Stuart.Ravnik@UTSouthwestern.edu.

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

You must submit a waiver request via email to Dr. Stuart Ravnik, Stuart.Ravnik@UTSouthwestern.edu. Requests will be reviewed and you will be notified of the waiver decision.

My previous TOEFL/IELTS is expired. Can I use the previous score for my application?

Similar to the waiver request, such a request will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis and all requests must be submitted via email to Dr. Stuart Ravnik, Stuart.Ravnik@UTSouthwestern.edu.

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.

I am currently in the US, but not on an F-1 Visa. What kind of Visa is needed to be a graduate student at UT Southwestern?

Our International Office requires that graduate students hold an F-1 Visa which provides the maximum flexibility for your graduate studies and transitions to employment after graduate school. We will help you transfer Visa types as applicable.

I received a request to submit a secondary application with additional questions. What is the purpose of the secondary application and is it required?

Because of the very diverse nature of International Institutions, we request this information from all international applicants to help us better review and assess your application. Submission of the secondary application materials is required if you wish your full application to be reviewed further.

Do you interview international applicants?

All international applicants are interviewed. Typically, if an international applicant has received a bachelor's degree from a U.S. institution and is currently living in the U.S., an in- person interview will be offered. All other international applicants who receive an offer to interview are interviewed via video conference.