



Combined Doctor of Medicine and Doctor of Philosophy Program

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

(Updated October 2021)

Mission

The primary mission of the UBC combined Doctor of Medicine and Doctor of Philosophy (MD/PhD) Program is to train clinician-scientists, providing a route through which superstar trainees from amongst the excellent pool of students entering the MD program can concurrently develop first-rate research skills. The program aims to be an international leader in preparing a future generation of clinician-scientists.

Overview

The combined MD/PhD Program is an integrated program jointly administered by the Faculty of Medicine and the Faculty of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies. Its purpose is to provide selected and highly qualified students the opportunity to combine their medical school experience with intensive scientific training in a PhD graduate program, in order to pursue careers as clinician-scientists. The program is designed such that students can receive the combined MD/PhD degree after successful completion of seven years of enrolment. The program of study is built upon the standard MD curriculum, but it is further “customized” to meet the unique PhD training program requirements of individual students based on their background, previous research experience, and chosen medical field of expertise.

In addition to fulfilling the requirements of the regular undergraduate MD curriculum, MD/PhD students will also undertake graduate level coursework as required by their field of research. Curriculum planning, coursework, and research training are to be closely integrated and coordinated between the basic sciences and clinical disciplines throughout the 7-year program. Thus, graduates of the MD/PhD Program are trained as competent physicians as well as skilled scientists. The combined MD/PhD degree prepares its graduates to pursue a research-intensive track of residency and/or postdoctoral training in a specialty discipline of their choice, ultimately leading to an internationally-competitive, independent clinical investigative career.

Student selection, curriculum planning, research supervision, and clinical training are jointly coordinated through the MD/PhD Committee. Close integration and coordination between foundational sciences and clinical disciplines ensures smooth transitions between academic course work, basic science training, research, and clinical rotations.

Program Administration

Director:

Dr. Torsten Nielsen

Associate Director:

Dr. Liam Brunham

MD/PhD Committee (2021-2022):

Dr. Maureen Ashe, Department of Family Practice
Dr. Karen Cheung, School of Biomedical Engineering
Dr. Thalia Field, Department of Medicine
Dr. Melanie Murray, Department of Medicine
Dr. Lynn Raymond, Department of Psychiatry
Dr. Paul Yong, Department of Obstetrics & Gynaecology
Mr. Andy An (Student Liaison)

Ex-Officio Members (2021-2022):

Dr. Cheryl Holmes, Associate Dean, Undergraduate Medical Education, Faculty of Medicine
Dr. Shahin Shirzad, Assistant Dean, Admissions, Faculty of Medicine
Dr. Cary Cuncic, Regional Associate Dean, Vancouver Fraser, Faculty of Medicine
Dr. Robert McMaster, Vice Dean, Research, Faculty of Medicine
Dr. Laurel Farrell, Interim Associate Dean, Undergraduate Student Affairs, Faculty of Medicine
Dr. Michael Hunt, Associate Dean, Graduate & Postdoctoral Education, Faculty of Medicine
Dr. Ravi Sidhu, Associate Dean, Postgraduate Medical Education, Faculty of Medicine
Dr. Susan Porter, Dean and Vice-Provost, Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies

Coordinator:

Ms. Jane Lee

MD/PhD Committee

From among those involved in the program's administration, the MD/PhD Admissions/Advisory Committee consists of four Ex-officio and six appointed members. Ex-officio members are the Assistant Dean of MD Admissions, Associate Dean of Graduate & Postgraduate Education, MD/PhD Program Director and MD/PhD Associate Program Director. Appointed members are composed of a group of clinician-scientists, basic scientists, graduate program advisors, student research supervisors and a senior student representative. To ensure that the MD/PhD Committee may benefit from diverse faculty involvement with a healthy turn-over rate, the appointed members' term is for three years, renewable once. The Committee meets at least twice a year (typically November and February) to review the admissions process, to finalize the ranking of MD/PhD applicants and to assign studentship awards to individual MD/PhD students. Members of the Committee also serve on the student Supervisory Committees, the PhD Comprehensive Examination Committees and the PhD Final Oral Examination

Committees. Program policy decisions are discussed at these meetings and at dedicated additional meetings called when sufficient issues have come up for discussion.

Admission

Application for the MD/PhD Program is made by completing:

- 1) the on-line application form for admission to the MD Program, and
- 2) the on-line application form for admission to the MD/PhD Program.

Information on admission requirements, admission deadlines, application package components, selection and application processes are available on our website at

<http://mdprogram.med.ubc.ca/mdphd/admission-requirements/>

MD/PhD Curriculum

The MD/PhD Program is interdisciplinary in nature and is jointly administered by the Faculty of Medicine and the Faculty of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies. In addition to fulfilling the requirements of the standard 4-year MD curriculum, MD/PhD students will also undertake graduate level coursework and research as recommended by their Supervisory Committee. Curriculum planning, coursework, and research training are to be closely integrated and coordinated between the basic sciences and clinical disciplines throughout the 7-year program.

The MD component of the MD/PhD curriculum has been developed to capitalize on a programmatic and multidisciplinary approach that represents a natural progression of the learning experience. This will allow overlap and concurrent activities in clinical training and research, and facilitate timely completion of the MD/PhD degree with the least possible interruption in either clinical experiences or research endeavours. Students must complete all the [required courses](#) in the regular Medical Undergraduate Program.

The PhD component of the Program is coordinated in conjunction with hosting departments, academic units and research programs within the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies and the Faculty of Medicine. Students must complete 12 credits of coursework for the PhD component, of which at least 9 credits must be 500-level or above and at least 9 credits must be completed with first class standing. Students must demonstrate proficiency in required coursework by examination, and are expected to complete graduate coursework by the end of Year 3 in the Program. Students must also successfully complete the PhD comprehensive examination requirement as proscribed by their hosting department within the first 36 months of starting their program. Advancement to PhD candidacy should also be done by the end of Year 3 in the Program.

Additionally, each student will be evaluated at least annually by their PhD Supervisory Committee as well as by the MD/PhD Director or Associate Director. Continuation in the combined degree program is contingent upon satisfactory scholastic and research progress.

The timeline for MD/PhD studies is available at <http://mdprogram.med.ubc.ca/mdphd/links/timeline/>

Research Co-ordination

a) Research Supervisor

Each MD/PhD student must have an identified research supervisor by the end of their first year of admission. The research supervisor must be a full member of the Faculty of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies, and is usually from a Department, Interdisciplinary Program or Institute within the Faculty of Medicine. The research supervisor must hold a current CIHR research operating grant or an equivalent peer-reviewed competitive grant from a provincial granting agency or national charitable foundation.

b) Hosting Department

The hosting department is usually the department in which the research supervisor has their primary academic appointment. Selection of and arrangement with the hosting department must have prior approval of the MD/PhD Program Director, the Graduate Advisor of the hosting department, the research supervisor and the MD/PhD student. The primary responsibility of the hosting department is to register the MD/PhD student in the PhD dissertation course, and to coordinate the student's Oral Comprehensive Examination and Final Oral Defence.

c) Supervisory Committee

Each MD/PhD student is required to be guided by a Supervisory Committee that minimally consists of: 1) the research supervisor; 2) a second faculty member from the hosting department; 3) a third faculty member from a different department; and 4) a faculty member representing the MD/PhD Program (usually a clinician-scientist or clinical investigator approved by the MD/PhD Program Director). The committee's constitution must meet any additional requirements of the hosting department. It is the responsibility of the Supervisory Committee to recommend required course work, to evaluate academic and research progress at least annually, to approve the PhD project and progression to Oral Comprehensive Examination, and to approve the PhD dissertation before its presentation for Final Oral Defence.

Supervisory Committee Meetings

The Supervisory Committee is responsible for guiding the student in selecting any required courses, planning the research and preparing the PhD dissertation. The committee should be established as soon as possible after the student has registered and the PhD dissertation topic is known, and within the first 12 months. Towards the end of the first year of studies in the MD/PhD Program, and not later than 31 August, the student will provide to the Graduate Advisor of the hosting department and the MD/PhD Program Director a research proposal summary (one page) which has been approved by the Supervisory Committee. It is expected that the student will have had at least one Supervisory Committee meeting before the submission of this research proposal summary.

Meetings of the Supervisory Committee must be held at least once every 12 months, and after a meeting is held, the research supervisor and student should sign a formal report and send it to the MD/PhD Program Director, Program Administrator and to the Graduate Advisor of the hosting department. The report form is available at

<http://mdprogram.med.ubc.ca/mdphd/links/thesiscommitteereport/>.

PhD Comprehensive Examination

Students in the MD/PhD Program are required to pass the comprehensive examination in the hosting department within the first 36 months of starting the 7-year MD/PhD Program. The MD/PhD students follow the graduate coursework and comprehensive examination guidelines in their hosting department for completion of examination and advancement to candidacy (with no additional or alternate regulations being imposed by the MD/PhD Program).

External Research Rotation

The MD/PhD Program supports and encourages national and international research training opportunities that scientifically integrate within the trainee's PhD program. These training opportunities can contribute to outstanding thesis work and world-class scientific productivity that contributes to the Faculty of Medicine's commitment to excellence. A [policy](#) for external research rotation is in place.

PhD Dissertation and Final Oral Defence

The MD/PhD students defend their PhD dissertation by oral defence (usually at the end of Year 5), which is coordinated by the Graduate Advisor of the hosting department. The PhD Final Oral Defence is subject to the same regulations as all graduate programs of the Faculty of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies. The MD/PhD Program Director will ensure that the oral defence is completed in a timely manner before the students re-entering the basic clinical clerkship rotations.

Tuition

The 2021/2022 tuition is \$5298.66 per year, payable in 3 instalments of \$1766.22 per year for the first six years, and a single continuing fee of \$2328.03 per year in each subsequent year. Students who are able to graduate early remain obligated to pay the minimum 18 instalments. This fee is charged in place of, rather than in addition to, the MD-only program tuition fee. It is expected that there will be a modest tuition increase of fees for MD/PhD students in the coming years.

Financial Assistance

Funding will be provided to the MD/PhD student by a combination of program sources for a maximum of 6 years and four months for the 7-year combined program. Beginning January of the first year of the combined program, the student will receive an annual stipend of at least \$21,000 from the program. Students should refer to our [stipend policy](#) for details. [The minimum annual stipend amount will be increased to \$27,000 in September 2021.]

Financial Structure and Support of Students

Due to budgetary considerations, all MD/PhD Studentship stipends and research allowance are administered by the MD/PhD Program office. These resources are pooled and shared among the students.

The research allowance is used to support research related travel by our students. All expenses charged to the research allowance must receive prior approval by the Program Director.

Other top-up stipend awarded to the students from other funding institutions is currently maintained by the Faculty of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies. The research supervisor is responsible for the legitimate use of any research allowance connected to these top-up awards.

Student Activities Specific to the MD/PhD Program

The MD/PhD Program is devoted to creating a cohesive group of students, with their own identity in a medical scientist training program which is distinct from other medical or graduate programs. In order to create a supportive and nurturing ambience, special research seminars, informal gatherings and social interactions, a regular newsletter, a national journal devoted to the training clinician-scientists (Clinical and Investigative Medicine), and other communication devices have been implemented to promote morale and facilitate collegial interactions among the students. The semi-formal monthly MD/PhD student meeting organized by the Associate Director enables the students to meet with clinician-scientist role models in different fields, and to carry out various discussions of special interest to MD/PhD students.

The UBC MD/PhD Student Research Forum and Open House is held annually in September. This annual function provides a valuable opportunity for the MD/PhD students to showcase their research and promote the program to the University community and to interested students from across Canada (this event having transitioned to an on-line virtual format from 2020). MD/PhD students are given the opportunity to meet various graduate advisors, research supervisors, other students, and potential applicants to the program.

MD/PhD students are offered the opportunity to attend and present their research annually at national and international research forums such as the annual CSCI/CITAC Joint Program for Clinician Scientist trainees, the Canadian Student Health Research Forum, the Western Student Medical Research Forum in conjunction with the Western American Federation for Medical Research, and the National MD-PhD Student Conference.

MD/PhD students are also required to regularly attend and to present their research in designated research seminar series organized by the program and the hosting department of the student.

MD/PhD incoming students are offered a formalized peer mentor relationship with a senior student who is ~2-4 years ahead of them in the program. Upon request, students in other years can be matched up with a mentor of their own from a few years ahead in the program.

Transitions (MD to PhD and PhD to MD)

To recognize and identify the potential challenges of the research-to-clinical transition point and clinical-to-research transition point in MD/PhD training, the MD/PhD Program Directors and the senior students facilitate two transition sessions annually for 1) students entering PhD year and 2) students entering clinical rotations.

Student Progress Evaluation

MD/PhD students, except for those who are completing clinical rotations, are required to provide an annual progress report to the Program Director. All students and the supervisor(s) are required to meet with the Program Director at least once a year. The purpose of the meeting is to evaluate student annual progress and review academic/research goals in the coming year.

Exit interviews are also arranged for graduating students, in May, after CaRMS matching is complete.

Responsible Conduct of Research Course

The Responsible Conduct of Research Course is mandatory for all biomedical research graduate students within the Faculty of Medicine. MD/PhD students are encouraged to complete this mandatory [course](#) before the beginning of Year 3.

Student Vacation Timeline

Students are required to discuss their vacation plan with the research supervisor at the beginning of the academic year. Students should follow the MD Undergraduate Program student vacation policy.

For additional information, please contact:

Program Coordinator
UBC MD/PhD Program
11/F Gordon and Leslie Diamond Health Care Centre
2775 Laurel Street
Vancouver, BC V5Z 1M9
Email: md.phd@ubc.ca
Website: <http://www.med.ubc.ca/mdphd>