UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

Doctor of Philosophy Degree in Translational Science

The Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) degree in Translational Science (TS) at The University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) is offered through a joint graduate program with The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio (UTHSCSA) and The University of Texas at Austin (UT Austin). The TS Ph.D. will prepare scientists to lead multidisciplinary biomedical research teams in Type 1 (T1) Track (bench-to-bedside) or Type 2 (T2) Track (bedside-to-community) translational research, toward the goal of translating basic biomedical scientific discoveries into strategies that will improve human and global health. Areas of research emphasis/excellence include, but are not limited to, Hispanic health, military medicine, comprehensive cancer research, aging and longevity, obesity and diabetes/metabolic syndrome, infectious diseases, addiction, and targeted drug delivery. The Ph.D. degree in Translational Science will be awarded to candidates who have displayed an in-depth understanding of the subject matter and demonstrated the ability to make an original contribution to knowledge in their specialized area of study.

The regulations for this degree comply with the general University regulations (refer to Student Policies, General Academic Regulations, and the Graduate Catalog, Doctoral Degree Regulations).

Admission Requirements

The TS Ph.D. is an advanced scientific research doctoral program. In addition to satisfying the University-wide graduate admission requirements (refer to Student Policies, Admission Policies), the following admission requirements will be applied to all applicants:

1. Completion of, or enrollment in, an advanced Professional Degree (e.g., M.D., D.O., D.D.S., MSN, Pharm.D.), completion of a Master’s or Doctoral degree, preferably in a health-related, science, public health or social science discipline, or enrollment as a M.D./Ph.D. student with successful completion of the two-year pre-clinical curriculum. Enrollment/graduation must be from an accredited college or university in the United States, or proof of equivalent training at a foreign institution, with a minimum grade point average of 3.0 in the professional and/or graduate work.

2. Official Graduate Record Examination (GRE) scores. Applicants may request a waiver for the GRE requirement if they provide evidence that they have earned a doctoral degree (i.e., M.D., D.O., J.D., D.V.M., Pharm.D., D.D.S., Ph.D., etc.) from an accredited U.S. institution, are currently certified by the Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG), have passed all three steps of the United States Medical Licensing Examination (USMLE), or were previously enrolled in the Graduate School of one of the joint degree institutions.

3. Official Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) score, with a score of at least 65 (paper test) or online equivalent, or a score of 7.0 on the Academic Examination of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), for applicants whose native language is not English. Applicants whose scores fall below the minimum requirement will be further assessed for English comprehension skills. TOEFL may be waived for applicants whose post-secondary education was conducted with English as the language of instruction. ECFMG certified physicians will also be granted a TOEFL waiver. NOTE: Consistent with Texas Education Code, Section 51.842(b), an applicant’s standardized test scores, when used to make admission or scholarship decisions, will be compared with scores of other applicants from similar socioeconomic backgrounds, to the extent such information is available. The applicant’s performance on a standardized test (i.e., GRE) will be considered in addition to other admission criteria, and will not be used as the sole criterion for consideration of an applicant.

4. A personal statement (1–3 pages) that describes the applicant’s past training and experience, future career goals and objectives, scientific research interest, and how the TS Ph.D. program will prepare them to achieve their stated research interest and career goals. The Personal Statement should include but is not limited to:
   • A statement of the applicant’s background and purpose for applying to the TS Ph.D. program
   • Applicant’s interest in and commitment to a translational science career
   • Applicant’s potential to develop into a successful scientist, as evidenced by research training/experience, prior publications, etc.
   • Research interest and its applicability to the TS Ph.D. program
   • Identification of a potential Supervising Professor, if applicable
   • Career goals and how the TS Ph.D. program will contribute to their attainment

5. Recommendation Forms and letters of recommendation from three (3) faculty or other individuals who are familiar with and can provide information about the applicant’s academic, research, and/or professional abilities and performance, in addition to the applicant’s potential to succeed in a doctoral program and develop into an independent research investigator

6. A current Curriculum Vitae

7. A copy of the applicant’s U.S. medical or other health professional license or certificate, if applicable

Full-time students accepted for the program are eligible to apply for financial support in the form of competitive teaching assistantships, research assistantships, or research fellowships.

Applications must be submitted online (http://gsbs.uthscsa.edu/prospective_students/gsbs-application). A complete application includes the application form, official transcripts, GRE scores or waiver request, letters of recommendation, Curriculum Vitae, a copy of the health professions license/certificate (if applicable), and a personal statement. TOEFL or IELTS scores, or waiver request, are required for applicants whose native language is not English. Incomplete applications will not be considered. The TS Committee on Graduate Studies (TS COGS), with members from each of the participating institutions, is responsible for reviewing applications for admission and selecting the most qualified applicants. Authorization of Security Background and Sanction check is required before a recommendation for admission consideration.

Degree Requirements

The degree requires a minimum of 72 semester credit hours beyond the master’s or professional degree. Students will elect either T1 Track (bench-to-bedside) or T2 Track (bedside-to-community). The curriculum consists of core courses (24 semester credit hours), track elective courses (12 semester credit hours) and free elective courses (6 semester credit hours), plus 30 semester credit hours of research and completion of a dissertation. Students will work with a graduate advisor or the supervising professor to complete an individualized degree plan that will meet the student’s research interest and goals. Using the individualized degree plan as a guide, courses may be taken at any participating institution with the written approval of the graduate advisor or supervising professor.
Any grade lower than a “B” in a graduate course will not count toward the minimum number of required semester credit hours. Students matriculating with a Master’s degree may use up to 30 semester credit hours toward the degree, provided the courses are comparable to core and elective courses and are approved by the TS Committee on Graduate Studies.

Advancement to Candidacy

TS Ph.D. students will advance to candidacy after completing and receiving an overall grade of “Pass” on each of their written and oral qualifying examinations. The Qualifying Examination will be administered before the start of dissertation research, and admission to candidacy will be contingent on receiving an overall grade of “Pass” on each component. Methods for administration of the qualifying exam will be written and oral. The exam will be comprehensive and will include questions covering:

- Knowledge/Information gained through the translational science coursework; and
- The basic knowledge required for the chosen area of research.

The format of the exam and composition of the Qualifying Examination Committee (QEC) will be determined by the TS COGS. Additional criteria may be set by the home institution, such as approval by an institution-specific committee, such as a Graduate Studies Committee (GSC), in addition to the TS COGS. At a minimum, each QEC will have representatives from two UT institutions and at least one graduate faculty member from a discipline outside the student’s main area of study. The QEC will administer the qualifying exam at a set date and time, will utilize the results as the basis for evaluating the student’s performance, and will report its judgment of performance to the TS COGS and the home institution’s committee, if applicable.

The qualifying exam is composed of two parts:

1. Written Exam on Course Content: The written exam is a series of assignments designed to test the student’s background in translational science and their ability to apply this knowledge to research and core didactic coursework. Students will have up to three weeks to complete the written portion of the qualifying exam:
   a. The exam will be a take-home exam, and a three week period will be allowed for completion.
   b. The exam will include one question per domain in the TS PhD curriculum (eight questions total). The instructor for the course taken by the student to fulfill the course requirement for each domain will write the question.
   c. The response to each question will be limited to 1,000 words. Literature citations are not part of the word count. Students who wish to add exhibits or other addenda must get prior approval from the instructor/question writer.
   d. Responses will be typed and submitted electronically as a PDF file.
   e. Students will not be released from lab or class responsibilities while they are completing this portion of the qualifying exam.
   f. The Written Exam will be scheduled at a time mutually agreed upon by the student, the Supervising Professor, and the participating instructors/question writers and graders.

2. Dissertation Proposal: The Dissertation Proposal will consist of the Written Dissertation Proposal and the Oral Exam on the Dissertation Proposal. The Dissertation Committee, chaired by the Supervising Professor, will be responsible for evaluating and grading these components.

- Written Dissertation Proposal: The student will prepare a written research proposal that will be the basis for the dissertation research. The Dissertation Proposal will be submitted to the Dissertation Committee at a time mutually agreed upon by the student and the Dissertation Committee, but at least two weeks prior to the scheduling of the Oral Exam.
- Oral Exam on Dissertation Research Proposal: The oral exam will consist of a presentation of the Dissertation Proposal (a preliminary explanation of the proposed research project which will be defended at the completion of the dissertation) and should include background, methods, and proposed analyses. The relevance of the proposed research to Translational Science must also be addressed. QE Assessment Forms are available online. It is recommended that students review the assessment forms to ensure that all criteria are met. The Dissertation Committee, through questioning, will engage the candidate in a discussion of the proposed research to delineate the strengths and weaknesses of the approach. The oral exam will follow the submission of the written Dissertation Proposal and will be scheduled at a time mutually agreed upon by the student and the Dissertation Committee.

Students who do not pass the qualifying exam will have their performance reviewed by the QEC. If the qualifying exam is not passed, the QEC may recommend:

1. Specific remediation in areas that require further study, including taking further coursework
2. The student be allowed to retake the qualifying exam or section(s) of the exam, as appropriate
3. The student be dismissed from the graduate program

Students who retake the qualifying exam and who do not pass it on the second attempt will be dismissed from the TS Ph.D. program. Any student wishing to transfer to a Master’s program will be responsible for identifying an appropriate program and applying.

Dissertation

Candidates must demonstrate their ability to conduct independent research by completing and defending an original dissertation. The research topic is determined by the student in consultation with the supervising professor and the Dissertation Committee. A student must choose a Dissertation Committee by the end of the second semester of study or within 90 days following the student’s admission to candidacy. The Dissertation Committee will include at least four members, but may have additional members if required by the Graduate School of the student’s home institution. Minimum Dissertation Committee requirements are:

1. The Supervising Professor, who will act as the Chair
2. Graduate faculty from the TS Ph.D. program from the student’s home institution
3. Graduate faculty from the TS Ph.D. program from a second institution participating in the joint degree program
4. A member from an outside institution who is not part of the TS Ph.D. program and is an expert in the student’s dissertation field

Approval of the Dissertation Committee and the completed dissertation will follow the guidelines established by the Graduate School of the student’s home institution. Refer to the UT Health Handbook (http://iims.uthscsa.edu/sites/iims/files/Education/phd/Student%20Handbook-
Final Oral Examination (Defense of Dissertation)
Completion of the dissertation will require a satisfactory final oral examination, as evaluated and approved by the Dissertation Committee. The final oral examination will cover aspects of the dissertation, information derived from the general field of the dissertation research, and other parts of the student's individualized curriculum as determined by the Dissertation Committee. The relevance of the dissertation to the field of Translational Science will also be evaluated. Satisfactory completion of the final oral examination will be evaluated based on whether the student has:

1. Completed all work assigned by the Dissertation Committee
2. Passed all examinations, including the final oral examination
3. Completed the minimum requirements as outlined in the student's individualized curriculum plan
4. Completed a dissertation that meets the criteria outlined above for independent investigation and contribution to the scientific discipline
5. Submitted an approved abstract for publication

Following a thorough review of the completion of these requirements, the Dissertation Committee will sign the approval sheets and provide an official recommendation to the TS COGS regarding the award of the doctoral degree.

If the dissertation is considered meritorious by a majority vote of the TS COGS, the TS COGS will accept the Dissertation Committee's approval and then inform the Graduate School of the student's home institution. Awarding of the degree is based on the approval of the Dissertation Committee, approved by the Dean. The UTSA Dean of the Graduate School certifies the completion of all University-wide requirements. The TS COGS will also inform the Graduate Schools of the other UT components.

Program of Study
The TS Ph.D. curriculum is designed to meet requirements and display expertise in eight educational domains:

1. Translational Science
2. Responsible Conduct
3. Research Design and Analysis
4. Team Science and Leadership
5. Multi-level Cultural Proficiency
6. Scientific Communication
7. Business of Translational Science
8. Evidence-based Implementation and Policy