PROGRAM OVERVIEW
The Office of Medical Student Research was established in 2012 to develop a research program across the four year medical school (MD) curriculum– the Inquiry Program. The overarching mission of the Inquiry Program at Vanderbilt is to educate our students about biomedical research through a series of coursework, training, and experience in order to help them develop critical thinking, innovation, leadership, and moral and civic capacities to the fullest. Students benefit from a rich awareness of not only the clinical realm, but also research method, critical evaluation, and understanding of the contribution of research to the clinical evidence base. As a result of the Inquiry program, our students are advocates for research and develop the skill set of researchers. Not only is this important in practicing clinical medicine, but also prepares them to effectively serve and lead in their chosen field.

This guide is a general overview of the Inquiry Program and is intended for our Vanderbilt medical student audiences, but we are confident that faculty, mentors, and staff will also find this to be a useful resource.

As you read through this guide, bear in mind that each research area has its own culture, career trajectories, and even terminology. Because of the variability that exists, you will find that specific items we discuss may or may not pertain to every research experience.
CONTACTS & RESOURCES

The faculty and staff of the Office of Medical Student Research are eager to assist you through the Inquiry Program. We will do our best to communicate with you in a timely and accurate manner. Please remember that it is ultimately your responsibility as a student to know, understand, and meet the requirements established by the Vanderbilt University School of Medicine and the Inquiry Program.

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Research Areas & Directors

Bench to Bedside
Julie Bastarache, MD
Mark de Caestecker, MBBS, PhD
Adriana Hung, MD, MPH
Pratik, Pandharipande, MD, MSCI
Chevis Shannon, DrPH, MBA, MPH

Community Health Research & Global Health
Douglas Heimburger, MD, MS

Epidemiology Research & Informatics
Jeremy Warner, PhD, MS (Informatics)
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Ethics, Education, Policy & Society [E2PS]
Kathleen Brelsford, PhD, MPH
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Medical Scholars & Year Out Programs
Lorraine Ware, MD
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Inquiry Program Handbook: 2018-2019 Academic Year
BRIEF INQUIRY PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Research within the Curriculum

The involvement of medical professionals in the biomedical research enterprise is invaluable due to their position of direct access to patients, evidence-based knowledge of diseases and therapeutics and perspective regarding health systems and the policies that govern. Research education, training and experience is integrated throughout the medical school curriculum in order to cultivate physicians with the knowledge and skill base critical to the clinical practice of medicine, the conduct of biomedical research, and leadership in any arena of medicine. Students will participate in research-focused coursework and training in the first two years, and a 1 month project planning course followed by 3 to 6 months of full-time mentored research during years 3 and/or 4. Students may elect to work in a variety of methodological areas sparking their clinical specialty and research interests.

Within the research curriculum, students:

- learn the importance and relevance of biomedical research
- gain exposure to research and faculty
- receive training in the fundamentals of research and scientific communication
- acquire hands-on experience conducting research in a chosen area
- improve research, professional, and social skills – inquisitiveness, observation, critical thinking, teamwork, leadership, effective communication, innovation

We believe that whether or not students actively pursue a career in academic medicine, the skills developed and research conducted during this program will be critical to their success as a physician and a leader.

Course Descriptions

Foundations of Medical Knowledge (FMK) Phase

CASE: Clinical Applications of Scientific Evidence

Course Director: Todd Rice, MD MSCI

The Foundations of Medical Knowledge, or FMK Phase, is the first phase, or year, in the medical school curriculum. During this Phase, students take the first Inquiry Program course – CASE. Critical appraisal of research studies is an important skill, which will be taught and practiced in this course. It is a systematic process used to identify the strengths and weaknesses of a research article in order to assess the usefulness and validity of research findings. This most important skill of critical appraisal is key not only in evaluating the validity and appropriateness of a study for a patient, but also in thinking about designing research studies. This critical skill will be taught in the context of evidence-based medicine,
taught in this class focused on the same clinical problems that students are learning about in the FMK block. The application of this skillset in Evidence Based Medicine is the explicit use of the current best evidence in making decisions about the diagnosis, investigation or management of individual patients.

**CASE Faculty**

Todd Rice, MD, MSCI  
Leslie Gewin, MD  
Scott Pearson, MD  
Isaac Thomsen, MD, MSCI

**Foundational of Clinical Care (FCC) Phase**

**Discovery**

Course Director: Luke Finck, EdD, MA

The Foundations of Clinical Care Phase, or FCC Phase, occurs during the second year of the medical school curriculum. During this Phase, students take part in the Discovery Course, the second course in the Inquiry Program. The Discovery course exposes students to the numerous research opportunities and resources at Vanderbilt University as they identify a project and mentor to partner with for the “Developing a Research Project” course (PLAN) and ultimately the Research Immersion. The research project experience need not be in the student’s area of clinical interest as the skills developed through the mentored research project are highly transferable.

In most cases, it is during the FCC Phase that students identify a research area of interest, mentor and project that they are interested in pursuing.

**Discovery Faculty:**

Research Directors:  
Kathleen Brelsford, PhD, MPH  
David Stevenson, PhD  
Jeremy Warner, PhD, MS (Informatics)  
Alicia Beeghly-Fadie, PhD (Epidemiology)  
Douglas Heimburger, MD, MS  
Julie Bastarache, MD  
Mark de Caestecker, MBBS, PhD  
Adriana Hung, MD, MPH  
Pratik Pandharipande, MD, MSCI  
Chevis Shannon, DrPH, MBA, MPH
Immersion Phase

PLAN

Course Director: Carlos Grijalva, MD, MPH

The third course in the 4-year research curriculum, PLAN, provides students guidance and instruction around preparing for their Research Immersion. PLAN introduces students to the basic concepts and principles of research and their application to clinical practice and population health in preparation for their Research Immersion. The course provides the necessary research skills and competencies to develop a basic but complete and structured research proposal for the upcoming Research Immersion experience.

PLAN Faculty

Don Arnold, MD MPH
Alicia Beeghly-Fadiel, PhD, MPH, MPhil
Mario A. Davidson, PhD
Carlos G. Grijalva, MD, MPH
Bill Heerman, MD, MPH
Kirk Keegan III, MD, MPH, MS
Candace McNaughton, MD, MPH
April Pettit, MD, MPH
Michael Ward, MD, MBA
Jo Ellen Wilson, MD, MPH, PhD

Research Immersion

Course Directors: Joey Barnett, PhD and Luke Finck, EdD, MA

The Research Immersion is the final thread in the 4-year research curriculum, a 3-6 month of protected research time during the 3rd and 4th years of medical school. The goal of the Research Immersion is to cultivate an understanding of the research method, provide exposure to careers in research, and relay the importance of biomedical research to human health.

Note: The research experience need not be in the student’s area of clinical interest as the skills developed through the mentored research project are highly transferable.

Research Special Studies

Course Directors: Joey Barnett, PhD and Luke Finck, EdD, MA

Students who complete their Research requirements and wish to investigate other research interests may have the option of enrolling in a Special Study Research elective. Special studies require students to identify a project and mentor before submitting a proposal for approval. Registration process and information can be found on the [Office of Enrollment Services website](https://www.enrollmentservices.com) (IDIS 6150 or 7150)
For more detailed information about each course, please refer to the official course syllabi and materials in VSTAR.
Identifying a mentor may occur in several ways. You may have met a potential mentor during a clinical rotation, lecture, or meeting. Although these are perfectly acceptable ways to start the selection of a mentor, not every individual you meet may be prepared, or able to, mentor a student. The Inquiry Program offers a way to help streamline this process to help identify mentors who are actively seeking students and have projects in which students can participate. Students are expected to execute their research immersion projects with the guidance of their mentors in accordance the course requirements and expectations.

Most students will identify a mentor and project during the FCC phase, however others will continue to explore possible mentors during the Immersion phase. Either of these approaches is acceptable. However, a student must have an approved mentor and project prior to enrolling in the PLAN course (a prerequisite for the Research Immersion).

* Most students identify a research mentor and project by the end of their second year in the MD curriculum (June), but the program offers some latitude to students that have not decided the direction of their interests.

**Choosing a Mentor and Preparing for the Immersion: The Pathway to PLAN**

**Step ONE: Identify a Research Area & Possible Mentors**

Students are sent a link by vms.research@vanderbilt.edu that includes a link to complete the Step One form. Based on information submitted by the student, Research Directors will provide suggestions for approved mentors and possible projects.

The first step to choosing a mentor is identifying a research area that you may be interested in gaining more experience. Your interests may be quite specific or rather broad. While some may prefer to continue to narrow their focus during their research experience, the Discovery course provides you an opportunity to discover areas of interest that you may not yet had an opportunity to explore. Whatever your interests, reach out to the Research Directors to discuss your ideas, interests, and possible projects and they will help guide you toward potential mentors. Make sure to meet with a Research Director before asking someone to be your official Research Immersion mentor!

Each Research Area has provided a list of approved mentors that have been vetted to work with our students. If you are interested in working with someone that is not on these lists, you must gain the approval of the Research Director to develop a project with them.

**Step TWO: Identify a Mentor**
Students meet with possible mentors based on recommendations of Research Directors and as a result identify the mentor you will work with during PLAN and Research Immersion

The second step is to meet with your potential mentors. Knowing your strengths and areas you wish to strengthen, as well as your expectations and goals during this experience, engage your mentor in a conversation about their research and what role you might play if you joined the research team. Establishing a successful mentoring relationship relies heavily on being prepared during initial meetings and having realistic expectations. Once you have examined your research goals and objectives, review your potential mentor’s past and current work so you are prepared for your first meeting. Your first meeting should be an opportunity to explore similar interests and to identify opportunities where those interests intersect.

**Before you start meeting with potential mentors** it is important to consider what expectations and needs you have so you can recognize a mentor that can meet those needs. You may want to ask yourself:

- What questions do I have that may be potential research projects?
- What are my research strengths?
- What research skills do I need to develop?
- What research projects do I find intriguing?
- What kind of environment do I work best in – teamwork vs. independent?
- What are my career aspirations?
- What projects creatively complement my career trajectory?
- What are the characteristics/qualities that I want in a mentor?
- What are my expectations of this experience?

**During your exploratory meetings**, make sure to identify mutual interests, goals, availability, and expectations. Understanding each of the elements and whether or not they align with your goals will allow you assess the fit with this potential mentor. Regardless if this faculty member turns out to be your mentor, be respectful of their time and understand that most faculty members have several responsibilities that require significant amounts of time and effort. Remember to consider the “fit” between you and this potential mentor and know that your first potential mentor meeting doesn’t have to be your mentor for this experience. You may have to speak with a few potential mentors before choosing the mentor and project that works best for you.

Although it may seem obvious, ask the mentor in an official capacity (i.e., via a face-to-face conversation, phone call, or email). As always, be respectful and frame your message as a request – not a demand. Understand that if a faculty member is unable to mentor you it is likely due to their demanding schedule not because of an interpersonal issue. Regroup, discuss your options and next steps with a Research Director, and look for a new potential mentor.
By the end of STEP TWO, you should have a confirmed mentor to submit to your Research Director for approval to move forward to Step THREE.

Step THREE: Submit a Project Proposal

*Once you have an approved mentor, you should work with them to outline the aims of your project. These are **not** the overall aims of the larger project for which your mentor is Primary Investigator (PI) but the specific aspects that **you** will be working on during your experience.*

- Students submit a project proposal which includes finalized mentor information and specific aims that apply to the student’s particular role in the project.
- Mentors must review the student’s proposal along with all of the expectations of a mentor and officially agree to serve as the student’s mentor by completing the [mentor agreement form](#). This will also include the mentor supplying information on any compliance requirements or proprietary work to be done by the student.
- Research Director reviews mentor agreement form and student’s project proposal and gives feedback.

Step FOUR: Complete the Immersion Planning Form

- Applying the feedback provided by the mentor and the Research Director, the student submits their formal Immersion Planning form. This includes
  - Specific aims (updated if necessary)
  - First section of the PLAN project protocol
  - Registration plans for PLAN & Research Immersion blocks
- If through this process, the student’s project has changed they may be assigned to a different research area for their PLAN and Research Immersion.
- Research Director review and provide feedback, if needed.
- Students whose plans have been approved, are registered for the appropriate PLAN section and may register themselves for their planned Research Immersion blocks.
**PLAN Course**

Once you have been approved to develop a project with a mentor, the next step is to work with your mentor to complete a project plan. This is a project outline, which is completed during the PLAN course. PLAN faculty grade this document based upon understanding of the concepts covered during the course and are not evaluating or critiquing the project itself—that will be done by the Research Director once the project plan is finalized.

*Keep in mind that in order for you to complete the course work with your mentor this course will require dedicated blocks of time outside of class. Therefore, scheduling these meetings with your mentor, prior to the start of the course, will be crucial for your success in this course.*

The completed, mentor approved, project plan is submitted to the student’s Research Director for approval after the conclusion of PLAN. In addition, the student with their mentor must provide the OMSR & Research Directors with documentation that any necessary protocols, training, safety requirements, or other compliance issues (e.g., including IRB or IACUC approval) meet University guidelines. Research Directors may also ask for clarification in order to approve the feasibility of the project in the proposed timeline.

*Note: Students are manually enrolled in PLAN (a prerequisite for the Research Immersion).*

**Research Immersion**

The Research Immersion course provides students the opportunity to engage in a research project of their choosing, executing the project plan they developed during the PLAN course.

*Note: Students will be expected to provide an updated project plan within the first week of their Research Immersion. This should act as a kind of agreement, specifically outlining the aims of the student’s project. Often this does not vary from the project plan created during PLAN, but the aims of the project may change due to developments in the intervening time. This final, updated plan does provide an opportunity to refine or revise plans before executing the project.*

**Length of the Research Immersion**

The typical Research Immersion lasts between 3 – 6 blocks long (3 blocks minimum is required). These blocks do not have to be contiguous, unless the project itself demands it. The timing of the project will rely on the mentor and the goals of the student’s project. All proposed terms must have Research Director(s) approval.

If a student plans on a research experience in excess of six blocks, in addition to approval from the respective Research Director(s), the Assistant Dean of Physician-Researcher Training and School of Medicine leadership must approve these experiences. In these cases, it may be more appropriate for a
student to consider one of the many research year-out programs available – including Vanderbilt Medical Scholars Program and other funded year out programs.

Research Location

As a top research institution, Vanderbilt has vast resources and supportive faculty that are eager to work with students. The Inquiry Program is designed to help students identify potential mentors and projects here at Vanderbilt. This provides the opportunity to work with talented, innovative leaders in their fields while immersed in a research experience.

During the Research Immersion, students are required to attend mandatory course sessions and area-specific meetings during the Research Immersion experience. During the course it is important that students immerse themselves in their research experiences. This includes attending regular meetings with your mentor as well as related conferences, grand rounds, journal clubs, symposia, etc. These activities enrich your experiences and deepen understanding of projects and field of study.

There may be an occasion where a student has identified an opportunity outside of Vanderbilt. These proposals will be taken into consideration, but the Research Directors, Assistant Dean of Physician-Researcher Training and School of Medicine leadership must approve these experiences.

The Role of the Research Director

During the Immersion, Research Directors are responsible for advising students of program requirements, expectations, obligations, milestones, deadlines, etc. as well as providing feedback, approval of mentors and projects and feasibility of project execution. In addition to these responsibilities, Research Directors hold Research Area meetings each Research Immersion block, meet with students one-on-one, suggest co-curricular activities and evaluate student journals, abstracts, posters and presentations at the end of the experience.

Although they may provide advice regarding a student’s research interests, Research Directors are not academic coaches and students are responsible for meeting corresponding medical school requirements.
Student Expectations during the Immersion

The Research Immersion is designed to immerse a student in research. During this experience students should be developing a greater understanding of their project as well as how this research impacts the field and relates to other systems. This increased depth of understanding is supported by engaging in their projects as well as other co-curricular activities such as attending regular meetings with your team, related conferences, grand rounds, journal clubs, symposia, etc. It is expected that students will be engaged in research full-time. This experience should be focused on executing the proposed research project – time used for vacations, weddings, residency interviews, etc. are appropriate for student “Flex Months”, not the Research Immersion. See the Immersion Attendance Policy for more information. Research months are also not to be used as “place holders” while students wait to learn of acceptance into other courses.

In addition to the previously mentioned activities, the Research Immersion course requires students participate in block meetings and completion of course requirements including submission of bi-weekly journal entries, a project abstract, and a poster and oral project presentation. Please make your mentor aware of these requirements and work together to accommodate your attendance.

Earning Honors in the Research Immersion

The distinction of “honors” is reserved to support and identify work demonstrating exemplary effort and recognizes advanced, motivated, engaged, and immersed scholarship. The objective of this additional effort is focused on increasing the depth and thoroughness of understanding of a project, enabling students to gain a more profound appreciation of the subject than is typical during this experience. The identification and emphasis of “honors” is on quality rather than quantity.

In order to capture and identify this level of exemplary effort, data is gathered throughout, and at the conclusion of the experience, from several evaluators. Based upon productivity, development, and demonstration of engagement, a committee reviews this data to determine if a student has earned the distinction of Honors for the Research Immersion course. (Refer to the course syllabus in VSTAR Learn for specific course requirements.)

Mentorship

A key component of the Research Immersion is the important role of the research mentor. Mentoring is important to medical students not only because of the knowledge and skills that are shared, but also because of the many other aspects of professional socialization and personal support that are needed to facilitate success in both the medical profession and beyond. While students work with a number of professors, the research mentor also plays a vital role in preparing students for their future careers as physician researchers.

Inquiry Program Handbook: 2018-2019 Academic Year
We highly recommend that mentors and mentees review a great document produced by the Rackham Graduate School of the University of Michigan (2015): [How to get the mentoring you want: A guide for graduate students](#). Parts of this document are included here, with permission, for your reference.

**Benefits of mentoring include:**

- Supporting advancement in research activities, presentations at conferences, publications, and grant-writing collaborations
- Increased resources for maneuvering professional opportunities and challenges
- Constructive, personalized, purposeful feedback that enhances engagement in the field of study

Consider this multi-faceted definition of mentors as people who:

- Take an interest in developing another person’s career and well-being;
- Have an interpersonal as well as a professional relationship with those whom they mentor;
- Advance the person’s academic and professional goals in directions most desired by the individual;
- Tailor mentoring styles and content to the individual

**Your Responsibilities as a Mentee**

As a medical student engaged in the Research Immersion, it is imperative that you demonstrate your ability to function as a kind of junior colleague—an independent scholar and researcher as well as a supportive and engaged member of a team. Your mentor is there to provide guidance and support, not to provide excessive amounts of help with completing your work. Keep in mind that this experience is designed to develop skills that will serve you well beyond this course.

**While enrolled in the PLAN course,** it is vital that you work closely with your mentor to complete course assignments and your Research Project Plan. Due to the structure and delivery of the course, being offered during one block on Tuesday afternoons, it is best to have meetings scheduled prior to the start of this block to ensure you are able to complete the course assignments and successfully pass the course.

**During the Research Immersion course,** it is important that you immerse yourself in your research experience. This includes attending regular meetings with your mentor as well as related conferences, rounds, journal clubs, symposia, etc. These co-curricular activities will enrich your experience and deepen our understanding of your project and field of study. Discuss with your mentor how best to engage in these types of activities.
In addition to the aforementioned activities, the Research Immersion course requires participation in monthly meetings and completion of course requirements including submission of journals, a project abstract, and a poster and oral project presentation.

**Helpful Tips for Mentees:**

- When possible, get instructions in writing. This will make it much easier for you, the student, and will save your mentor a lot of time in the long run. If it is not possible to obtain written instructions beforehand, take notes during your discussion, and then type up the instructions and email them to your mentor for confirmation.

- If you will be working with hazardous materials, or need other compliance training and certification (IRB, IACUC) make sure that you are properly trained and instructed. Ask your mentor if their department offers a lab safety course and sign up for it at the beginning of your research experience.

- Please share your contact information (email/phone) and discuss your availability and preferred method of communication during the research immersion. If your mentor is planning to be away, please inform the Research Director and the Program ([vms.research@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:vms.research@vanderbilt.edu)). Make sure that you receive written instructions prior to your mentor leaving. Find out if there is someone else that you can consult with when your mentor is away.

- Make sure that you understand the overall goal of your part of the research project.

- If you are interested in working on a publication, discuss this goal with your mentor. Students are also encouraged to present their work at scientific meetings; some travel funds are available through the Office of Medical Student Research (OMSR). Additional costs beyond the funding from the OMSR may be covered by the mentor support funds, but this is at the discretion of the mentor.

**Responsibilities of a Mentor**

A research mentor is responsible for assisting their student with planning their research project by:

- Setting reasonable, attainable goals & establishing a timeline for completion of the project
- Meeting with the student on a regular basis
- Advising the student on development of final products, including abstract, manuscript, poster and presentation

**Directing the Immersion research project**

- Providing an environment that is intellectually stimulating, emotionally supportive, safe and free of harassment
- Holding the student accountable for their time and effort
- Following the expectations of the [Immersion Absence Policy](#)

**During each Research Immersion Block**

*Inquiry Program Handbook: 2018-2019 Academic Year*
• Mentors must be available to give students feedback on their work; suggest background reading and other texts that will be important to the student’s work.
• Identify events (journal clubs, conferences/meetings, educational events) that the student should participate in to gain knowledge related to the research project.
• We suggest meeting weekly or bi-weekly (if another daily supervisor is involved) to ensure the student’s project is on course or is adapted in a way that is productive.
• Give feedback on work products for the course: abstract, poster, and presentation.
• Provide financial resources (from the mentor support funds) to provide the student a rich research experience, if you deem appropriate.
• Communicate with the Research Directors & Office of Medical Student Research (vms.research@vanderbilt.edu) about any concerns during the Research Immersion experience so that they may be addressed promptly, including attendance concerns. (The expectation is that students are actively engaged in their research project consistent with an average work week, no extended vacations during research blocks)

During the student’s last Research Immersion Block

• Complete an evaluation of the student’s work at the completion of their enrollment in Research Immersion blocks.
• Provide fair and constructive feedback that can be used by course faculty and Research Directors to assess their grade (which includes Honors).
• Please note that evaluation of the student’s experience during the Research Immersion is focused on their execution of the research process and not the additional rewards (publications, national presentations, etc.) that will likely result from this work. The mentor will be expected to comment on the student’s engagement in the research process and related activities.

Evaluation by Mentors

During the Immersion Phase of the Vanderbilt University School of Medicine curriculum students have the opportunity to earn “honors”. The distinction of “honors” is reserved to support and identify work demonstrating exemplary effort and recognizes advanced, motivated, engaged, and immersed scholarship. The objective of this additional effort is focused on increasing the depth and thoroughness of understanding of a project, enabling students to gain a more profound appreciation of the subject than is typical during this experience. The identification and emphasis of “honors” is on quality rather than quantity.

In order to capture and identify this level of exemplary effort, data is gathered throughout and at the conclusion of the experience from several evaluators. Of these evaluations, the mentor’s evaluation is one of the most important. These assessments will occur at the conclusion of the student’s experience.
The Office of Medical Student Research will reach out to each mentor and project collaborator identified by the student regarding these assessments and corresponding deadlines.

**Mentor Support Funds**

The Office of Medical Student Research transfers funds to mentors. The purpose of these funds is to help provide the student with a rich mentoring experience. These unrestricted funds are used at the discretion of the mentor. Some mentors use these funds to cover costs related to travel, statistical software, VICTR funds matching, lab supplies, poster printing, etc. It is the student’s responsibility to work with the mentor to identify possible needs.

**Notes:**

1. Mentor support funds are provided to Vanderbilt faculty only.
2. Students can apply for funding from the Office of Medical Student Research toward travel expenses. These funds are only available to students who are presenting their first author research at the conference. These funds are separate from the support funds provided to mentors. The OMSR website includes detailed information for students regarding travel.
3. The Global Health Research Area funding structure is different due to these kinds of experiences. Contact your Research Director regarding specifics related to Global Health Research Area funding.

**Frequently Asked Questions**

**What if my research interests overlap the designated areas?**

Your interests may overlap research areas (which is fine). Try to contact the Research Directors that you think best align with your interests and they will work with you to find an area that best fits your interests. (Each student can only have one “official” research area for the purposes of registration and assessment.)

**Can I start my research project before I take the PLAN course?**

Many students conduct extracurricular research during their first two years of the med school curriculum. You may certainly do this, but these projects may or may not qualify for an official Research Immersion project. If you want to continue to work on a project you already started, you must meet with a Research Director early on to ensure that the project is a suitable one for the Research Immersion. Regardless of whether you are continuing a previous project or starting a new one, all students just complete all program requirements (Pathway to PLAN, PLAN, Research Immersion).

**How many Research Immersion blocks should I prepare for?**

Most student projects are 3 – 6 blocks long, however students may wish to do a project that exceeds 6 months/blocks. If a student plans on a research experience in excess of six months, the Assistant Dean
of Physician-Researcher Training and School of Medicine leadership must approve these experiences. In these cases, it may be more appropriate for a student to consider one of the many research year-out programs available. Please refer to our webpage for more information at: https://medschool.vanderbilt.edu/student-research/.

Can I do my research with a mentor at a site outside of VUMC?
On occasion, students may find a unique research experience outside of Vanderbilt. The Assistant Dean of Physician-Researcher Training and School of Medicine leadership, in agreement with SOM leadership, must approve these rare experiences. If a student has a possible non-VUMC experience, they should alert vms.research@vanderbilt.edu during the Pathway to PLAN process to start the conversation. Global Health projects with VIGH approved mentors/sites are part of the normal Research Immersion process and are organized and approved by the Global Health Research Area.

My mentor said that I can “work from wherever” as long as I do my work. So it’s okay if I spend my research time at the beach, right?
No. In addition to having course required and area-specific meetings, this is not demonstration of being immersed in your research experience. An immersive experience includes attending regular meetings with your mentor as well as related conferences, rounds, journal clubs, symposia, etc. These activities will enrich your experience and deepen our understanding of your project and field of study. Furthermore, “work[ing] from wherever” is not supportive of honors eligibility.

What is the mentor expected to do with the funds they are given?
The support funds are provided to support the student’s project at the mentor’s discretion and can cover costs related to travel, VICTR funds matching, supplies, etc. Students can discuss the use of these funds with their mentor. *Global Health funding is handled differently due to the travel expenses related to these experiences. Please refer to the Research Director for details.

I need citation or statistical software for my research. Where can I get this?
If you need software for your research project, please work with your mentor to see if you may access the funds provided to help support your experience. Your mentor may likely refer you to her/his financial administrator who can help process your request.

You can check the VU student software, but also consider free citation software. Zotero (free) seems to have wide support at Vanderbilt, with training sessions at the main library and EBL.

I want to travel to a conference to present my research. Do I have funds available to support my Research Immersion?
The Office of Medical Student Research provides mentors support funds. The purpose of these funds is to help provide the student a rich mentoring experience. These unrestricted funds are used at the discretion of the mentor. Some mentors use these funds to cover costs related to travel, statistical
software, VICTR funds matching, lab supplies, poster printing, etc. It is your responsibility to work with the mentor to identify possible needs.

Notes:

1. Students can apply for up to $750 to cover travel expenses (for the purpose of traveling to present research). These funds are separate from the funds provided to mentors. The OMSR has a webpage with detailed information for students regarding travel.

2. The Global Health Research Area funding structure is different due to these kinds of experiences. Contact your Research Directors regarding specifics related to Global Health Research Area funding.

I’ve already used my travel funds from OMSR, but I have been accepted to present at a national conference. Can I still get funding?
Currently, students can apply for $750 max to cover travel expenses (for the purpose of traveling to present research). If a student has already used their allotment, they may want to request support from their mentor. Again, the uses of mentor funds are at the discretion of the mentor.

I’m not sure, but I think I am interested in one of the research year-out programs. Where can I find more information about these kinds of programs?
Please refer to the Vanderbilt Medical Scholars Program and Extracurricular Research pages for more information.
Forms

Absence Policy and Request
Absence Policies and request forms are available from Medical Student Affairs and are specific to the phase in which the student is currently enrolled.

Research Immersion Planning Form
Once a student has been approved to develop a project with a mentor, they will work with their mentor to complete their Research Immersion Planning Form. This is essentially a brief project outline, highlighting the specific aims that the student is working on during their experience, planned months, etc. This form is completed as part of the Pathway to PLAN in REDCap. (Link is provided to student during FCC or upon request)

Mentor Agreement Form
The mentor agreement form is a simple document that allows the Office to track student mentor selection. A Research Director, who will either approve or redirect this pairing, reviews this form. Once approved, the Office will correspond with you regarding any additional information we may need from you.

Project Plan
This is a project outline, which is completed during the PLAN course. (PLAN faculty grade this document based upon understanding of the concepts covered during the course and are not evaluating or critiquing the project itself). The student completes this project plan, with assistance from their mentor, detailing plans for what the student will execute during the Research Immersion.

Research Immersion Extension Request
Students who find themselves in their last block of Research Immersion but for valid reasons, discussed and approved by their mentors, would like to extend their Research Immersion experience by adding a block or more, must submit this request by the 10th working day of the Immersion Block for consideration by the Office of Medical Student Research.