

# CANCER BIOLOGY, PHD

The Cancer Biology, PhD program is a member of the Interdisciplinary Biological and Health Sciences Consortium (IBHSC). The consortium fosters a collaborative environment for research and study in the biological and health sciences. Click here for more information on the IBHSC. (<https://www.med.wisc.edu/education/graduate-programs/biological-health-sciences-consortium/>)

The graduate program in cancer biology offers a course of study and research leading to the PhD degree. Although a master's degree is offered under special circumstances, students are not admitted for a master's degree.

The Cancer Biology Graduate Program was established at the McArdle Laboratory for Cancer Research in 1940 as the first graduate program in the United States to offer a degree in basic cancer research. The program now includes more than 50 faculty trainers from multiple departments including Oncology, Medicine, Human Oncology, Cell and Regenerative Biology, Medical Microbiology and Immunology, and others. This interdepartmental structure offers students remarkably diverse training opportunities that span the entire breadth of cancer biology research from haploid or diploid genetics, viral and chemical carcinogenesis, eukaryotic cell and molecular biology, virology, molecular toxicology, and whole-animal carcinogenesis. Through the graduate curriculum, students are introduced to the body of knowledge that has been derived directly from experiments on the induction, properties, and therapy of cancer, and receive the necessary background to conduct independent research.

Curriculum requirements are designed to be flexible, providing a maximal opportunity for specialization within this multidisciplinary field. Students learn through core and elective courses; by participation in seminars, conferences, and journal clubs related to their specific areas of expertise; and most important, from their research advisors. Students who join the program select research advisors after conducting a minimum of three month-long rotations in different laboratories during the first semester. After choosing an advisor, students will also create an advisory committee of five faculty members who will provide guidance throughout the process of earning the PhD degree. The average time to complete the PhD is 5.5 years. The program prepares students for careers in teaching and research in academia, government, and industry.

## ADMISSIONS

### ADMISSIONS

Please consult the table below for key information about this degree program's admissions requirements. The program may have more detailed admissions requirements, which can be found below the table or on the program's website.

Graduate admissions is a two-step process between academic programs and the Graduate School. **Applicants must meet the minimum requirements (<https://grad.wisc.edu/apply/requirements/>) of the Graduate School as well as the program(s).** Once you have researched the graduate program(s) you are interested in, apply online (<https://grad.wisc.edu/apply/>).

Requirements	Detail
Fall Deadline	November 15
Spring Deadline	The program does not admit in the spring.
Summer Deadline	November 15
GRE (Graduate Record Examinations)	Not required.
English Proficiency Test	Refer to the Graduate School: Minimum Requirements for Admission policy: <a href="https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1241">https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1241</a> ( <a href="https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1241/">https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1241/</a> ).
Other Test(s) (e.g., GMAT, MCAT)	n/a
Letters of Recommendation Required	3

Students seeking admission to the program must complete a bachelor's degree in biology, biochemistry, chemistry, molecular biology, or a related area from an accredited college or university and should have a grade point average of at least 3.0 (on a 4.0 scale). The background of the applicant should include basic courses in these areas as well as several advanced courses in chemistry, microbiology, biochemistry, genetics, physiology, and molecular biology. Prior laboratory research experience is highly desirable.

Applicants must submit a completed online application, personal statement (reasons for graduate study), unofficial college transcripts, updated CV/resume (highlighting laboratory experience), and three letters of recommendation.

## FUNDING

### FUNDING GRADUATE SCHOOL RESOURCES

The Bursar's Office provides information about tuition and fees associated with being a graduate student. Resources to help you afford graduate study might include assistantships, fellowships, traineeships, and financial aid. Further funding information is available from the Graduate School. Be sure to check with your program for individual policies and restrictions related to funding.

### PROGRAM RESOURCES

The program is committed to ensuring continuing financial support for all cancer biology PhD students in good standing. Financial support includes a competitive stipend and tuition remission. All graduate students are also eligible for comprehensive health insurance. PhD students are supported from a variety of different sources including research assistantships from faculty research grants, fellowships, and NIH training grants. There is no teaching requirement for cancer biology students; however, many opportunities exist on campus for those who wish to gain teaching experience.

Students are admitted into the Cancer Biology Program as a Research Assistant (RA) unless they have received a fellowship or training grant. Find more information here (<https://cancerbiotrainninggrant.mcardle.wisc.edu/>).

REQUIREMENTS

MINIMUM GRADUATE SCHOOL REQUIREMENTS

Review the Graduate School minimum degree requirements (<https://guide.wisc.edu/graduate/#requirementstext>) and policies (<https://guide.wisc.edu/graduate/#policiestext>), in addition to the program requirements listed below.

MAJOR REQUIREMENTS

MODE OF INSTRUCTION

Face to Face	Evening/ Weekend	Online	Hybrid	Accelerated
Yes	No	No	No	No

Mode of Instruction Definitions

**Accelerated:** Accelerated programs are offered at a fast pace that condenses the time to completion. Students typically take enough credits aimed at completing the program in a year or two.

**Evening/Weekend:** Courses meet on the UW–Madison campus only in evenings and/or on weekends to accommodate typical business schedules. Students have the advantages of face-to-face courses with the flexibility to keep work and other life commitments.

**Face-to-Face:** Courses typically meet during weekdays on the UW–Madison Campus.

**Hybrid:** These programs combine face-to-face and online learning formats. Contact the program for more specific information.

**Online:** These programs are offered 100% online. Some programs may require an on-campus orientation or residency experience, but the courses will be facilitated in an online format.

CURRICULAR REQUIREMENTS

Requirement Detail	
Minimum Credit Requirement	51 credits
Minimum Residence Credit Requirement	32 credits
Minimum Graduate Coursework Requirement	26 credits must be graduate-level coursework. Refer to the Graduate School: Minimum Graduate Coursework (50%) Requirement policy: <a href="https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1244">https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1244</a> ( <a href="https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1244/">https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1244/</a> ).
Overall Graduate GPA Requirement	3.00 GPA required. Refer to the Graduate School: Grade Point Average (GPA) Requirement policy: <a href="https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1203">https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1203</a> ( <a href="https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1203/">https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1203/</a> ).
Other Grade Requirements	Students must earn a B or above in all required Core Courses, otherwise the course must be repeated.

**Assessments and Examinations** All doctoral students must pass an oral preliminary examination. All requirements for a doctoral degree, except for the dissertation, must be completed at this time.

Six months before the final oral defense, all doctoral students must present a semifinal dissertation proposal to their committee for approval.

All doctoral students must pass a final oral defense of their doctoral dissertation and subsequently deposit the dissertation in the Graduate School.

**Language Requirements** No language requirements.

**Graduate School Breadth Requirement** The Cancer Biology Program does not require students to complete a doctoral minor or graduate/professional certificate; however, the option is available to those who wish to do so. Acceptance of the minor or certificate requires the approval of the Advisor and respective department in which the minor or certificate is administered.

If you wish to complete a minor or certificate, you must inform the Program Coordinator of your minor option selection by the end of the first year. The minor or certificate must be approved by your Certification Committee and must be completed along with the major course requirements by the end of your second year. Please note that breadth coursework may count towards the elective course requirements.

REQUIRED COURSES

The curriculum for Cancer Biology is designed to introduce you to research related to the induction, properties, and therapy of cancer and to ensure that you have the necessary background in one or more areas of related, fundamental science to enable you to do original research. Courses are drawn from the Department of Oncology as well as various related departments, including Bacteriology, Biochemistry, Biomolecular Chemistry, Chemistry, Genetics, Human Oncology, Medical Microbiology and Immunology, Pathology and Laboratory Medicine, and Pharmacology.

The Graduate School at UW–Madison requires PhD students to complete a minimum of 51 credits in order to obtain a PhD Degree. These credits are fulfilled via core curriculum courses, 990 research, and electives. Courses numbered below 300, audit, and pass/fail do not satisfy the minimum requirement. It is suggested that you take approximately 2 courses per semester with the remaining credits being 990 research. All courses must be completed by the end of your second year, before completing the Preliminary Exam.

Code	Title	Credits
<b>Core Courses</b>		
ONCOLOGY/ M M & I/ PL PATH 640	General Virology–Multiplication of Viruses	3
ONCOLOGY 703	Carcinogenesis and Tumor Cell Biology	3
ONCOLOGY 715	Ethics in Science	1
ONCOLOGY 725	Readings in Cancer Biology	2
ONCOLOGY 735	Current Problems in Cancer Biology	2

ONCOLOGY 901	Seminar (presentation) <sup>1</sup>	1
<b>Research Credits</b>		<b>minimum 28</b>
ONCOLOGY 990	Research <sup>2</sup>	
<b>Quantitative Requirement</b>		
B M I/STAT 541	Introduction to Biostatistics	3
or ONCOLOGY 778	Bioinformatics for Biologists	
<b>Electives (two courses)<sup>3</sup></b>		<b>3-6</b>
<b>Total Credits</b>		<b>51</b>

<sup>1</sup> Beginning in your second year, you will be required to give an annual, formal presentation in the Cancer Biology Student/Postdoc Seminar Series. You will register for ONCOLOGY 901 Seminar during the semester in which you present. Your seminars will be recorded and you will receive feedback from the seminar course instructor to help improve your public speaking and presentation skills. **Attendance at this seminar series is required.**

In addition, you are expected to attend the Cancer Biology Seminar throughout your graduate career (no registration required). The Cancer Biology Seminar, which features local and outside faculty speakers, is held on Wednesdays at 10:30 a.m. in 1345 HSLC. The schedule is posted on the McCardle website (<https://mccardle.wisc.edu/seminar-schedules/>).

<sup>2</sup> Students will enroll in up to 12 credits per semester as pre-dissertators (only 2 credits during the summer term).

<sup>3</sup> Students must select electives in consultation with their advisor. These courses should be numbered 500 and above. The list below provides some examples of commonly taken courses.

### Suggested Electives

Code	Title	Credits
BIOCHEM 601	Protein and Enzyme Structure and Function	2
BIOCHEM/ GENETICS/ MICROBIO 612	Prokaryotic Molecular Biology	3
PATH-BIO/ M M & I 528	Immunology	3
M M & I 740	Mechanisms of Microbial Pathogenesis	3
PATH 803	Pathogenesis of Major Human Diseases	3
BIOCHEM/ GENETICS/ MD GENET 620	Eukaryotic Molecular Biology	3
BIOCHEM 625	Mechanisms of Action of Vitamins and Minerals	2
CRB 640	Fundamentals of Stem Cell and Regenerative Biology	3
CRB 650	Molecular and Cellular Organogenesis	3
CRB/MEDICINE 701	Cell Signaling and Human Disease	1
B M E 520	Stem Cell Bioengineering	3
CBE/B M E 783	Design of Biological Molecules	3
PATH 750	Cellular and Molecular Biology/ Pathology	2
M M & I/PATH-BIO 750	Host-Parasite Relationships in Vertebrate Viral Disease	3

## POLICIES

### GRADUATE SCHOOL POLICIES

The Graduate School's Academic Policies and Procedures (<https://grad.wisc.edu/acadpolicy/>) serve as the official document of record for Graduate School academic and administrative policies and procedures and are updated continuously. Note some policies redirect to entries in the official UW-Madison Policy Library (<https://policy.wisc.edu/>). Programs may set more stringent policies than the Graduate School. Policies set by the academic degree program can be found below.

### MAJOR-SPECIFIC POLICIES

#### PRIOR COURSEWORK

##### Graduate Credits Earned at Other Institutions

With program approval, students may transfer no more than 9 credits of graduate coursework from other institutions. Coursework earned ten or more years prior to admission to a doctoral degree is not allowed to satisfy requirements.

##### Undergraduate Credits Earned at other Institutions or UW-Madison

With program approval, students may transfer no more than 7 credits numbered 300 or above from a UW-Madison undergraduate degree, or the equivalent from other institutions.

##### Credits Earned as a Professional Student at UW-Madison (Law, Medicine, Pharmacy, and Veterinary careers)

Refer to the Graduate School: Transfer Credits for Prior Coursework (<https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1216/>) policy.

##### Credits Earned as a University Special Student at UW-Madison

With program approval, students may transfer no more than 15 credits of coursework numbered 300 or above taken as a UW-Madison Special student. Coursework earned ten or more years prior to admission to a doctoral degree is not allowed to satisfy requirements.

#### PROBATION

A semester GPA below 3.0 or an incomplete grade (I) will result in the student being placed on academic probation. If a semester GPA of 3.0 is not attained or the Incomplete grade is not cleared during the subsequent semester of full-time enrollment, the student may be dismissed from the program or allowed to continue for 1 additional semester based on advisor appeal to the Graduate School.

#### ADVISOR / COMMITTEE

All students are required to have an advisor. Students must create a certification committee (advisor plus four additional faculty members) by the end of their first year. After passing their preliminary examination, students are required to conduct a progress report meeting with their certification committee each year. Failure to do so may result in a hold being placed on the student's registration.

#### CREDITS PER TERM ALLOWED

15 credit maximum. Refer to the Graduate School: Maximum Credit Loads and Overload Requests (<https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1228/>) policy.

## TIME LIMITS

All doctoral students must pass their preliminary examination by the end of their second year (August 31). Under special circumstances, a one-semester extension may be granted when justified in writing by the student and advisor.

Refer to the Graduate School: Time Limits (<https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1221/>) policy.

## GRIEVANCES AND APPEALS

These resources may be helpful in addressing your concerns:

- Bias or Hate Reporting (<https://doso.students.wisc.edu/bias-or-hate-reporting/>)
- Graduate Assistantship Policies and Procedures (<https://hr.wisc.edu/policies/gapp/#grievance-procedure>)
- Hostile and Intimidating Behavior Policies and Procedures (<https://hr.wisc.edu/hib/>)
  - Office of the Provost for Faculty and Staff Affairs (<https://facstaff.provost.wisc.edu/>)
- Employee Assistance (<http://www.eao.wisc.edu/>) (for personal counseling and workplace consultation around communication and conflict involving graduate assistants and other employees, post-doctoral students, faculty and staff)
- Employee Disability Resource Office (<https://employee disabilities.wisc.edu/>) (for qualified employees or applicants with disabilities to have equal employment opportunities)
- Graduate School (<https://grad.wisc.edu/>) (for informal advice at any level of review and for official appeals of program/departamental or school/college grievance decisions)
- Office of Compliance (<https://compliance.wisc.edu/>) (for class harassment and discrimination, including sexual harassment and sexual violence)
- Office Student Assistance and Support (OSAS) (<https://osas.wisc.edu/>) (for all students to seek grievance assistance and support)
- Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards (<https://conduct.students.wisc.edu/>) (for conflicts involving students)
- Ombuds Office for Faculty and Staff (<http://www.ombuds.wisc.edu/>) (for employed graduate students and post-docs, as well as faculty and staff)
- Title IX (<https://compliance.wisc.edu/titleix/>) (for concerns about discrimination)

### Grievance Policy for Graduate Programs in the School of Medicine and Public Health

Any student in a School of Medicine and Public Health graduate program who feels that they have been treated unfairly in regards to educational decisions and/or outcomes or issues specific to the graduate program, including academic standing, progress to degree, professional activities, appropriate advising, and a program's community standards by a faculty member, staff member, postdoc, or student has the right to complain about the treatment and to receive a prompt hearing of the grievance following these grievance procedures. Any student who discusses, inquiries about, or participates in the grievance procedure may do so openly and shall not be subject to intimidation, discipline, or retaliation because of such activity. Each program's grievance advisor is listed on the "Research" tab of the SMPH intranet (<https://intranet.med.wisc.edu/>).

### Exclusions

This policy does not apply to employment-related issues for Graduate Assistants in TA, PA and/or RA appointments. Graduate Assistants will utilize the Graduate Assistantship Policies and Procedures (<https://hr.wisc.edu/policies/gapp/>) (GAPP) grievance process to resolve employment-related issues.

This policy does not apply to instances when a graduate student wishes to report research misconduct. For such reports refer to the UW-Madison Policy for Reporting Research Misconduct for Graduate Students and Postdoctoral Research Associates (<https://research.wisc.edu/kb-article/?id=84924>).

### Requirements for Programs

The School of Medicine and Public Health Office of Basic Research, Biotechnology and Graduate Studies requires that each graduate program designate a grievance advisor, who should be a tenured faculty member, and will request the name of the grievance advisor annually. The program director will serve as the alternate grievance advisor in the event that the grievance advisor is named in the grievance. The program must notify students of the grievance advisor, including posting the grievance advisor's name on the program's Guide page and handbook.

The grievance advisor or program director may be approached for possible grievances of all types. They will spearhead the grievance response process described below for issues specific to the graduate program, including but not limited to academic standing, progress to degree, professional activities, appropriate advising, and a program's community standards. They will ensure students are advised on reporting procedures for other types of possible grievances and are supported throughout the reporting process. Resources (<https://grad.wisc.edu/current-students/#reporting-incidents>) on identifying and reporting other issues have been compiled by the Graduate School.

### Procedures

1. The student is advised to initiate a written record containing dates, times, persons, and description of activities, and to update this record while completing the procedures described below.
2. If the student is comfortable doing so, efforts should be made to resolve complaints informally between individuals before pursuing a formal grievance.
3. Should a satisfactory resolution not be achieved, the student should contact the program's grievance advisor or program director to discuss the complaint. The student may approach the grievance advisor or program director alone or with a UW-Madison faculty or staff member. The grievance advisor or program director should keep a record of contacts with regards to possible grievances. The first attempt is to help the student informally address the complaint prior to pursuing a formal grievance. The student is also encouraged to talk with their faculty advisor regarding concerns or difficulties.
4. If the issue is not resolved to the student's satisfaction, the student may submit a formal grievance to the grievance advisor or program director in writing, within 60 calendar days from the date the grievant first became aware of, or should have become aware of with the exercise of reasonable diligence, the cause of the grievance. To the fullest extent possible, a grievance shall contain a clear and concise statement of the grievance and indicate the issue(s) involved, the relief sought, the date(s) the incident or violation took place, and any specific policy involved.
5. On receipt of a written grievance, the following steps will occur. The final step must be completed within 30 business days from

the date the grievance was received. The program must store documentation of the grievance for seven years. Significant grievances that set a precedent may be stored indefinitely.

- a. The grievance advisor or program director will convene a faculty committee composed of at least three members to manage the grievance. Any faculty member involved in the grievance or who feels that they cannot be impartial may not participate in the committee. Committee composition should reflect diverse viewpoints within the program.
  - b. The faculty committee, through the grievance advisor or program director, will obtain a written response from the person or persons toward whom the grievance is directed. The grievance advisor or program director will inform this person that their response will be shared with the student filing the grievance.
  - c. The grievance advisor or program director will share the response with the student filing the grievance.
  - d. The faculty committee will make a decision regarding the grievance. The committee's review shall be fair, impartial, and timely. The grievance advisor or program director will report on the action taken by the committee in writing to both the student and the person toward whom the grievance was directed.
6. If either party (the student or the person or persons toward whom the grievance is directed) is unsatisfied with the decision of the program's faculty committee, the party may file a written appeal to the SMPH senior associate dean for basic research, biotechnology and graduate studies within 10 business days from the date of notification of the program's faculty committee. The following steps will occur:
- a. The grievant will be notified in writing, within 5 business days of the written appeal, acknowledging receipt of the formal appeal and establishing a timeline for the review to be completed.
  - b. The senior associate dean or their designee may request additional materials and/or arrange meetings with the grievant and/or others. If meetings occur, the senior associate dean or their designee will meet with both the grievant and the person or persons toward whom the grievance is directed.
  - c. The senior associate dean or their designee will assemble an ad hoc committee of faculty from outside of the student's graduate program and ask them to prepare a written recommendation on whether to uphold or reverse the decision of the program on the student's initial grievance. The committee may request additional materials and/or arrange meetings with the grievant and/or others. If meetings occur, the committee will meet with both the grievant and the person or persons toward whom the grievance is directed.
  - d. The senior associate dean or their designee will make a final decision within 20 business days of receipt of the committee's recommendation.
  - e. The SMPH Office of Basic Research, Biotechnology, and Graduate Studies must store documentation of the grievance for seven years. Grievances that set a precedent may be stored indefinitely.

7. The student may file an appeal of the School of Medicine and Public Health decision with the Graduate School. See the Grievances and Appeals section of the Graduate School's Academic Policies and Procedures (<https://grad.wisc.edu/documents/grievances-and-appeals/>).

### Time Limits

Steps in the grievance procedures must be initiated and completed within the designated time periods except when modified by mutual consent. If the student fails to initiate the next step in the grievance procedure within the designated time period, the grievance will be considered resolved by the decision at the last completed step.

### OTHER

n/a

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT GRADUATE SCHOOL RESOURCES

Take advantage of the Graduate School's professional development resources (<https://grad.wisc.edu/pd/>) to build skills, thrive academically, and launch your career.

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. Articulates research problems, potentials, and limits with respect to their research and how it relates to the field of cancer biology.
2. Formulates novel ideas, concepts/hypotheses, designs experiments to test the hypotheses, and shows proficiency in the necessary techniques to carry out their dissertation research.
3. Creates and carries out scholarly research that asks a novel and important biological question and makes a substantive contribution to the field of cancer research.
4. Demonstrates the breadth of their knowledge through thoughtful and creative design of their research and their ability to answer questions from varied audiences.
5. Advances contributions in cancer biology to society through publication, presentations at national and international meetings, and various outreach activities.
6. Communicates complex ideas in a clear and understandable manner both in their oral and written presentations.
7. Fosters ethical and professional conduct in all aspects related to their development as a scientist.