MD-PhD: Is it Right for me?

Communications Committee of the MD-PhD Section of the Group of Research, Education, and Training (GREAT) AAMC

• Application Process
• Training
• Careers
Why an MD-PhD?

Biomedical scientists use the power of research to understand and cure human disease.
Students interested in careers as MD-PhDs are...

- **fascinated** by human biology and disease
- **creative**
- **persist** in seeing a project to completion
MD-PhD graduates sit at the intersection of science and medicine
Where is MD-PhD training done?

• There are ~90 MD-PhD programs affiliated with medical schools:
  • 50 programs (with ~40-190 trainees) are supported by NIGMS training grants known as Medical Scientist Training Programs (MSTPs)
  • Most MD-PhD programs offer financial support: stipends, tuition waivers and health insurance
MD-PhD Program Overview

Goal: Prepare trainees for a career that combines research and clinical care, emphasizing research

- Curriculum integrates MD and PhD training
  - complete both in 7 or 8 years
- Many PhD fields are possible
  - Non-traditional PhD training opportunities
MD-PhD Alumni.....

• Choose a variety of **residency training** specialties
• Do **research** more than 50% of the time
• **Enjoy their careers**; more than 80% would choose their career again
MD-PhD Careers: long term outcomes

Most MD-PhDs work in academia. 68%

Academia
- Institutes 5%
- Other 6%
- Private practice 14%
- Industry 7%

MD-PhDs conduct various types of research.

- Basic science 60%
- Translational 70%
- Patient-oriented
- Health services
- Other

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A Career as a Physician Scientist

Juanita Merchant, MD, PhD
Professor of Medicine
Chief, Division of Gastroenterology

...studies transcriptional control of gastrointestinal peptides that regulate cell growth and cancer
Preparing for and Applying to MD-PhD Programs
Elements of a successful MD-PhD application

- Holistic review
- Physician scientist career commitment
- Productive research
- Strong academics
- Integrity and maturity
- Experience in caring for others
- Activities and life experiences
- Physician scientist career commitment
- Experience in caring for others
- Activities and life experiences
What constitutes a substantive research experience?

- Enough research experience to understand what you are getting into:
  - Multiple summer projects
  - Undergraduate research, Senior research thesis
  - One or more years pursuing research after undergraduate degree (Post-bac)

Become familiar with testing a hypothesis
• 5,563 MD-PhD trainees nationally

• 2018-2019 Application cycle (matriculated Summer/Fall 2019):
  • 1855 MD-PhD applicants (>50K straight MD)
  • 14 applications submitted/applicant (avg)
  • 672 matriculants: ~1/3 of MD-PhD applicants will enter an MD-PhD Program in 2019
    - 46% women entering 2019
    - 10.4% racial/ethnic URM
    - 8.9% multi racial/ethnicity
### MD-PhD Applicant Statistics (2018-19)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table B-10: MCAT® Scores and GPAs for MD-PhD Applicants and Matriculants to U.S. Medical Schools, 2018-2019</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mean</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total applicant pool (n = 1,855)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>MCAT</td>
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<td>GPA</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Matriculants (n = 672), 36%</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>MCAT</td>
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<td>GPA</td>
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Application Timeline
Candidates Matriculating in the Summer of 2021

Pre-application (2-3 years)
- Courses
- Research
- Clinical exposures
- Activities and life experiences

Winter-Spring 2020
Preparing an exceptional application

Summer 2020
Apply

Fall 2020
Interview

Winter 2020/21
Acceptance

Summer 2021
Start

~1.5 year process
What should you look for in a MD-PhD program?

- Environment (research and academic)
- Students, program activities & professional development, community involvement
- Alumni achievement
- Location
- A sense of belonging or “good fit”
For more information:

- https://www.aamc.org/mdphd
- NIH.gov/training
- Role models

- Knowledgeable people who care about you:
  - Directors and Mentors (Summer Program and Post-Bac)
  - Professors, Lab Heads and Department Chairs
  - MD-PhD Students, Graduate Students and Post-Docs
  - Career Advising Offices
  - PhD and MD-PhD Program Directors