

CLINICIAN-SCIENTIST ACADEMIC RESEARCH EXCELLENCE (CARE) PHD DEGREE

The Clinical-scientist Academic Research Excellence (CARE) PhD program is an innovative pathway to a PhD degree for students in existing residencies or fellowships. The program is designed to empower motivated individuals to pursue advanced research endeavors while leveraging their existing medical training. Students are able to complete the degree program in an accelerated timeline of approximately three years through the acceptance of credit transfers for previous medical school training and coursework. As a result, advanced coursework and thesis research are undertaken almost immediately. The elements of the training for students enrolled in the CARE Ph.D. program are generally the same as those for non-CARE Ph.D. candidates, except for laboratory rotations and requirements satisfied by transferred credits.

- MJ Clarke, M.D., Ph.D., Program Director

Nomination Process

The MCGSBS operates on a year-round, quarter system. The new academic year begins on July 1st. Specific dates for the current academic year can be found here (<https://catalog.mayo.edu/graduate-biomedical-sciences/academic-calendar/>).

For the Clinician-scientist Academic Research Excellence (CARE) PhD Program, nomination materials may be submitted at any time during the two nomination windows – from January 1st through April 30th for a summer term start or May 1st through August 31st for a winter term start. This will allow for ample time to discuss goals and develop a custom degree plan so that the scholar may begin coursework with the new academic year.

Nomination materials include basic demographic information, statement of intent, letter of support, financial support documentation, and unofficial transcripts. Once all materials are collected, the nominee may submit them using the nomination form.

Transfer Credits

A key benefit of the CARE PhD program is the accelerated timeline. To accomplish this goal, CARE PhD students may transfer up to 21 credits for previous education and training as part of the program nomination and acceptance process. The estimated time to completion is three years. The use of a track-specific CARE PhD Degree Planning Tool (DPT) is required to list the coursework to fulfill degree requirements, including transfer credits. CARE PhD DPTs outline the specific MCGSBS courses that have been satisfied by transferred credits. Credit transfer evaluation will be conducted automatically after full nomination to the program. A personalized degree planning tool will be provided.

Protected Time

The CARE PhD is a full-time doctoral program. While some flexibility exists to accommodate ongoing clinical roles, students are strongly advised to plan for a **minimum of 20–30 hours per week** dedicated

to program activities. This includes coursework, seminars, mentoring meetings and thesis research.

Departments sponsoring students should aim to provide **at least 50–75% protected time**, particularly during the first two years when intensive coursework and research ramp-up occur. Any additional work beyond that, including clinical duties, should be carefully evaluated for feasibility.

Some content may be delivered virtually or recorded to support flexible scheduling. However, this should not be misconstrued as a reduction in program rigor. The flexibility exists to facilitate adult learners' complex schedules, not to make the PhD easier or "side-compatible."

It is also vital to underscore the **qualitative difference between PhD thesis research and casual, exploratory, or "after-hours" research projects**.

Thesis research is not an elective or a side project. It demands deep engagement, critical thinking, rigorous methodology, scholarly output, and sustained mentorship.

PhD-level research requires generating new knowledge, contributing to the scientific field, and demonstrating independence over time, standards that go well beyond participating in a few projects or collecting data off-hours. The scholarly intensity, expectations for innovation, and accountability (e.g., publications, dissertation, defense) are not achievable in limited, discretionary time alone.

Prospective students should critically assess their **professional responsibilities, personal obligations, departmental expectations, and career goals** to ensure they are fully prepared for the commitment this program demands.

Lab Rotations

Each CARE PhD student must complete two four-week lab rotations in two different laboratories (one credit each) for a total of two credits. A third rotation may be completed but is considered optional.

Code	Title	Hours
MGS 5105	CARE Ph.D. Laboratory Rotation	1
MGS 5106	CARE Ph.D. Laboratory Rotation	1
Total Hours		2

Track Requirements

CARE Ph.D. students must complete all track-required courses, journal clubs and seminars; however, there are exceptions allowed for CARE laboratory rotations and requirements satisfied by transferred credits. CARE Ph.D. students are still expected to complete the required number of credits for the track-specific degree program.

Laboratory Rotations

Each CARE PhD student must complete two, four-week lab rotations in two different laboratories (one credit each) for a total of two credits. A third rotation may be completed but is considered optional. Often, students may enter this pathway knowing who they will select as their primary mentor. Students may choose to rotate with this preferred mentor. The student may also choose to use rotations as an opportunity to identify thesis advisory committee members, explore laboratory techniques, or pursue advanced learning experiences. Rotations are not meant to replace the advanced research phase, but to allow for opportunities to make connections across the Mayo Clinic research community. CARE PhD students are not required to rotate with lab hosts with full faculty privileges. However, CARE PhD students are still required

to meet the expectations for mentor selection and thesis advisory committee structure.

Mentor Selection

Upon completion of lab rotations, CARE PhD students are expected to select a PhD degree mentor and the laboratory for their thesis studies. Mentor selection should be completed by the end of the first quarter.

Thesis Advisory Committee

CARE Ph.D. candidates are expected to submit to the MCGSBS office the composition of their Thesis Advisory Committee (TAC) by the end of the second quarter of the program. It is recommended that students include at least one clinical member in their Thesis Advisory Committee.

Qualifying Exams and Thesis Research

Upon completion of lab rotations, CARE PhD students are expected to select a PhD degree mentor and the laboratory for their thesis studies. Mentor selection should be completed by the end of the first quarter. Written Qualifying Exams will be facilitated by the track. See specific track program page for details. To continue on the accelerated timeline, students should complete the WQE by the end of the 4th quarter of their first year. Oral Qualifying Exams will be facilitated by the track. See specific track program page for details. To continue on the accelerated timeline, students should complete the OQE by the end of the 6th quarter.

Submission of a Fellowship Application

All CARE PhD students will work with their Mentors to prepare and submit an application for an NIH F or equivalent fellowship. Students should be aware that F30 grants must be submitted before their 48th month in the program and that F31 grants must be submitted before their 36th month in the PhD phase per NIH rules. Students not eligible for submission through NIH should consider other options (AHA, American Epilepsy Society, MCGSBS Intramural Application, etc.) Submission of a fellowship application is a program requirement. All CARE PhD students must demonstrate competence of completing a fellowship application, satisfied through one of the following:

- Submit an NIH F31 fellowship application (or equivalent) extramurally
- Submit draft NIH F31 for intramural review
- Submit draft of comparable award for intramural review, e.g. K08, K23, R01, etc.