

FOCUSED ACADEMIC START FOR TRAINEES (FAST) PHD DEGREE

The Focused Academic Start for Trainees (FAST) Track PhD Degree is a specialized initiative designed to recognize and reward incoming PhD students with prior graduate-level coursework in the biomedical sciences. All eligible students will receive up to 21 credits toward their PhD program, primarily substituting foundational courses and advanced elective courses. This streamlined path supports an accelerated timeline, with participating students expected to complete their degree in four years instead of the traditional five. FAST-Track reflects our commitment to academic excellence, flexibility, and honoring the advanced preparation of high-achieving scholars.

• John R. Hawse, IV, Ph.D., *Program Director*

Students cannot apply directly to the FAST-Track. Newly matriculated students are selected based on their application to the PhD program. MD-PhD students are not eligible for this pathway. Eligible matriculants are selected based on the prior completion of graduate coursework or graduate degree. A transcript is required and should be submitted with the standard PhD application. After review of materials, students will be notified of acceptance into FAST-Track. A formal letter will be provided to learners with a modified degree plan.

Learners are expected to complete all degree requirements and are expected to maintain the degree planning tool that is provided. Students will also complete abbreviated laboratory rotations to facilitate earlier placement in their chosen lab and allow them to begin working with their mentor sooner.

Program leadership and the thesis advisory committee, in collaboration with the student's mentor, may require the student to take additional coursework to support their success in the program. The decision to assign additional courses is at the discretion of the program leadership and advisory committee.

Students enrolled in the FAST-Track (Focused Academic Start for Trainees) pathway are expected to complete all standard PhD program milestones within an accelerated four-year timeline. These milestones include, but are not limited to, completion of coursework, qualifying or comprehensive examinations, thesis committee meetings, research progress evaluations, and the dissertation defense.

While academic rigor and research expectations remain consistent with the traditional pathway, milestone timing may be adjusted to reflect the student's advanced standing and prior graduate-level coursework. A modified degree plan will be provided, and students are expected to work closely with their faculty mentor and advisory committee to ensure timely progress. Maintaining alignment with milestone expectations is required for good academic standing in the FAST-Track pathway.

Completion of milestones will vary and depend on the individual's prior graduate coursework and chosen track. Students and program directors will work together to determine the appropriate timing of milestones. See track page for more details on milestones.