Educational Neuroscience PhD Program: Frequently Asked Questions

What makes the Vanderbilt Educational Neuroscience program unique?

1) Grounding in high quality basic science:

Our program is housed within the Vanderbilt Neuroscience Graduate Program (recently selected as the top neuroscience program in the nation by the Society for Neuroscience), setting it apart from programs at other institutions that are housed in education schools or psychology departments. As such, our program offers an unparalleled platform from which students can become expert in neuroscience research methods ranging from single-cell recording in primates through to functional magnetic resonance imaging in children. World class neuroimaging facilities at the Vanderbilt University Institute for Imaging Sciences (VUIIS) are combined with an array of the world’s leading neuroscientists, making Vanderbilt an international hub for cutting-edge neuroscience research.

2) Integration with Peabody College of Education:

Educational Neuroscience is distinguished from traditional cognitive neuroscience by its focus on research questions that have direct educational relevance. As such, expertise in education and cognitive psychology research is essential for an educational neuroscientist. Vanderbilt boasts one of the nation’s most prestigious and highly ranked education schools in Peabody College. Students in the Ed Neuro program will have the opportunity to work closely with faculty at Peabody College, either as primary or secondary mentors, gaining experience in research techniques ranging from classroom studies, through intervention studies, to working with atypically developing children in a range of settings.

Students will be able to register for specialized graduate courses in the neuroscience program as well as standard graduate courses offered by the school of Arts & Sciences and Peabody College.

What type of students should apply to the Educational Neuroscience program?

Vanderbilt welcomes applications from students from a wide range of backgrounds. However, given the focus of the program on basic research as it applies to questions of
educational relevance, the ideal candidates will typically be psychology or neuroscience graduates, and will have some form of research experience. This experience often takes the form of working as a research assistant for credit during undergraduate, working as a paid research assistant post-graduation, or graduating from a master’s program with a research component.

What type of career does the Educational Neuroscience program prepare me for?

Bearing in the mind the program’s focus on rigorous research methods, graduating students will most often move on to postdoctoral or faculty positions, typically at research oriented universities. This program does not prepare students to be educational practitioners working in classrooms, but instead trains students to be leading research scientists in an exciting and emerging field.

What type of research project could I expect to be engaged in as a student in the program?

Some examples of ongoing projects include, fMRI and DTI studies investigating the neural function and structure of children with reading and math learning disorders. Other studies use neuroimaging methods to assess the effectiveness of educational interventions, while others might use neuroimaging methods to predict which children might be at higher risk of developing a specific learning disorder.