Research Mentor Overview

In Curriculum 2.0, Vanderbilt MD students are required to complete a 3-6 block research project during the Immersion Phase (last two years of the MD curriculum). These blocks may be contiguous or spread out based on the specific nature of the project, contingent upon mentor input and approval.

The Office of Medical Student Research provides $2,000 in unrestricted funds to the mentor’s cost center to support the student’s research involvement. Suggestions for use of these funds include: student travel reimbursement, statistical software, VICTR funds matching, lab supplies, poster printing, etc.

Timing for Student Research

Students should identify a research mentor and project to be involved in by the end of their second year in the MD curriculum (June), with some latitude afforded to students that have not decided the direction of their interests. Students must have a completed project plan by no later than the end of September of their 4th year of medical school (though we recommend they begin their project no later than April of their 3rd year so that they may share products on their residency applications).

Overall Expectations

- Assist student in planning their project by setting reasonable, attainable goals & establishing a timeline for completion of the project
- Meet with the student on a regular basis
- Direct the Immersion project of the medical student
- Provide an environment that is intellectually stimulating, emotionally supportive, safe and free of harassment
- Hold students accountable for their time and effort by following the expectations of the Immersion Absence Policy

Specific Expectations (please see attached course descriptions for further details)

- Once you have agreed to serve as a research mentor, review your mentee’s plan for completing their Research Immersion blocks to ensure that their schedule is compatible with the project.
- At least one month prior to the start of their PLAN course
  - Meet with student to set specific aims for their role in the project. Students must have specific aims approved by Research Area Director prior to beginning participation in PLAN.
  - Work with the student to ensure Research Immersion blocks are scheduled to provide maximum benefit to the student and the project.
- During PLAN
  - We are grateful for your contribution to the Research Immersion experience. This highly collaborative culture and spirit of innovation stem in significant part from the commitment and effort of its faculty.
  - PLAN is a 1 month-course offered in March and September. Instructors work with students in small group sessions to develop a structured research protocol that will be executed during the subsequent Research Immersion phase with you. Students are expected to coordinate their protocol development activities with their mentors, so your active involvement in this process will be very important.
  - During PLAN, students will receive timely feedback regarding their projects from the Course Instructors. This feedback will often require clarifications about the project’s research question, population, methodology, design, statistical analysis, limitations, etc. It is important to understand
that the intention of the instructors is to facilitate the development of the students’ proposal, and work synergistically with the mentor-student research team. PLAN faculty will also share all of their feedback with you, in order to make sure all communications are fluid and transparent.

- As PLAN has weekly assignments, it will be important that the student make some arrangements for weekly feedback from you on their project plan through your preferred communication method. As we anticipate your busy schedule, we ask that you plan these meetings in advance.
- By the end of PLAN, students will have a structured and complete research protocol that will be ready to be executed directly under your supervision, during the Research Immersion phase.
- It is our hope and expectation that all students will complete the projects as proposed. If at any point you are concerned about the progress of a student’s work, it is essential that you keep the Course Instructor and Office of Medical Student Research informed about your concerns so that we can offer support for you and the student.

- **During Research Immersion Block**
  - Mentors must be available to give students feedback on their work; suggest background reading and other texts that will be important to the student’s work.
  - Identify events (journal clubs, conferences/meetings, educational events) that the student should participate in to gain knowledge related to the research project.
  - We suggest meeting weekly or bi-weekly (if another daily supervisor is involved) to ensure the student’s project is on course or is adapted in a way that is productive.
  - Give feedback on work products for the course: abstract, poster, presentation.
  - Provide financial resources (from the research support funds) to provide the student a rich research experience.
  - Communicate with the Research Directors & Office of Medical Student Research (vms.research@vanderbilt.edu) about any concerns during the Research Immersion experience so that they may be addressed promptly, including attendance concerns. (The expectation is that students are actively engaged in their research project consistent with an average work week, no extended vacations during research blocks)

- **During the student’s last Research Immersion Block**
  - Complete an evaluation of the student’s work at the completion of his/her enrollment in Research Immersion blocks.
  - Provide fair and constructive feedback that can be used by course faculty and Research Area Directors to assess his/her grade (which includes Honors).
  - Please note that evaluation of the student’s experience during the Research Immersion is focused on his/her execution of the research process and not the additional rewards (publications, national presentations, etc.) that will likely result from this work. The mentor will be expected to comment on the students’ engagement in the research process and related activities.