



DVM-PhD FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. What are the options to enter the DVM/PhD program at Mississippi State University?

If a student in the DVM program at Mississippi State University is accepted into the Veterinary Medical Sciences PhD program or the Environmental Toxicology PhD program, he or she is automatically admitted into the DVM/PhD program. This can occur at any time during the four years of the DVM/PhD program. A student may also apply for admission into the DVM/PhD program prior to being accepted into a PhD program at two possible times: 1) while they are applying for admission into the Mississippi State University DVM program (prior to the start of the DVM program) or 2) during fall semester of the second year (after completing the Summer Research Experience program).

2. What financial support is available for students in the DVM/PhD program?

During semesters when the student is primarily pursuing the PhD degree, the student is on a graduate student stipend, which also provides a full tuition waiver. Students in the program are responsible for covering the full DVM tuition, but the College of Veterinary Medicine provides a limited number of scholarships that students may apply for. The DVM/PhD scholarships provide up to \$10,000 per year toward DVM tuition. Students have two opportunities when they may apply for the DVM/PhD scholarship: 1) while they are applying for admission into the Mississippi State University DVM program (prior to the start of the DVM program) or 2) during fall semester of the second year (after completing the Summer Research Experience program).

3. Do you recommend a student committing to the DVM/PhD program when they start veterinary school, or should they decide later in the veterinary curriculum or after completing the DVM?

For many veterinary students, we have found that they are not ready to commit to pursuing a 7+ year DVM/PhD program at the start of veterinary school. For these students, it is best to wait before deciding and gain additional research experience by participating in the Summer Research Experience program or other research opportunities. At Mississippi State University, a student can apply and be admitted to the DVM/PhD program at any time during the veterinary curriculum.

However, our experience has shown that there are some students who have already decided that both the DVM and PhD degrees are essential to meeting their professional goals, and they are ready to commit to a DVM/PhD program from the start. For these students, the DVM/PhD program is an important deciding factor in which veterinary school they will attend. Pursuing both degrees in a structured program can offer these students the opportunity to save time and expenses to obtain their professional goal.

4. *What qualities is Mississippi State University seeking in DVM/PhD applicants?*

Applicants to the DVM/PhD program at Mississippi State University must first be admitted into the veterinary professional curriculum, so first the student must demonstrate all the qualities that are sought for admission into the DVM program: academic strength, experience, and evidence of commitment to the protection of animal and human health. Beyond this, the most important quality for DVM/PhD students is a genuine passion for research as demonstrated by taking advantage of opportunities for research experience as an undergraduate. We are also seeking students who demonstrate they are willing to commit to completing a 7+ year program to achieve their professional goals.

5. *For students in the program, how much time should they plan on committing to the PhD during phase 1 and 2 of the curriculum?*

Students in the DVM/PhD program are required to conduct research in the summer between first- and second- years during phase 1. Students are strongly encouraged to conduct this project with their prospective PhD mentor. In phase 2, students are expected to commit their time off in third year to pursuing PhD research and/or taking graduate courses. In the fourth year, students have the option to pursue graduate courses and PhD research after the required fourth year rotations are completed. For students who elect to use all possible elective time in fourth year for the PhD, they can spend an entire semester working on the PhD. It is important to note that DVM/PhD students at Mississippi State University are allowed to count up to 18 hours of PhD graduate coursework or dissertation research hours toward DVM elective credits.

6. *How should a DVM/PhD student identify his or her PhD mentor?*

Based on a student's research interest, each DVM/PhD student is strongly encouraged to meet with potential PhD mentors during the first year in the DVM/PhD program (during first year of the veterinary curriculum). Each student is strongly encouraged to conduct the required research project during summer after first year with a mentor that has best potential to be his or her PhD mentor. Dr. Lawrence and the DVM/PhD steering committee are all committed to assisting students in this process and are available to recommend potential mentors and facilitate the mentor selection.

7. *When can applicants expect to know if they are accepted?*

At Mississippi State University, students may be admitted into the DVM/PhD program at any time during the veterinary curriculum. For students who apply for the DVM/PhD scholarship prior to entering veterinary school, they are notified prior to April 15 so it may be considered in their decision-making process. For students who apply for the DVM/PhD scholarship during fall of second year, they are notified prior to start of the spring semester so they may receive priority scheduling of third year rotations and so the scholarship can be applied in the spring semester.

8. *Is guidance/mentoring for DVM/PhD students built into the program?*

In addition to helping students find a mentor, the DVM/PhD Steering Committee monitors each student's progress every fall and spring semester. A member of the DVM/PhD Steering Committee meets annually with the student to make sure appropriate progress is being made. Dr. Lawrence and the DVM/PhD Steering Committee are committed to students' success and are available to meet and provide guidance as needed. The DVM/PhD students also annually elect a student leader, and they meet monthly for peer support.



DVM-PhD FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS - *continued*

9. Which degree is started first in the DVM/PhD program? Is there a choice?

The recommended structure of the program is to start the DVM first. Students conduct research between first and second years in the veterinary curriculum and continue progress on the PhD during time off during third year and during elective time in the fourth year. Students complete the DVM, then pursue full-time completion of the PhD. However, if the student and PhD mentor agree, students may elect to start with the PhD and complete 2-3 years of the PhD prior to starting the DVM. Students pursuing this route must still be admitted into the DVM program first, and the admission is deferred for 2-3 years while the PhD is started.

10. What is the program completion rate?

Since the Mississippi State University DVM/PhD program started in 2008, nine students have successfully completed the program. Eight students withdrew from the program (personal or medical reasons) or were dismissed due to academic reasons. Nine students are currently enrolled in the program and are in good standing.

11. Is there a recommended time to apply for the DVM/PhD scholarship? Is there an advantage to apply during second year of veterinary school or prior to starting the DVM curriculum?

There is no advantage to applying for the DVM/PhD scholarship either during fall of second year or prior to starting the DVM program. Students should apply at the time when they are ready to commit to the full program. Since the two application windows have been opened, two students were offered scholarships during fall of their second year, and two were offered scholarships prior to starting the DVM program.

12. When should a DVM/PhD student apply to the Mississippi State University graduate school for admission into the PhD program?

It is important to note that a student must have completed a Bachelor's degree prior to being admitted into the DVM/PhD program. Having a BS degree is a Mississippi State University requirement for being admitted into a PhD program.

A student can apply and be accepted into the DVM/PhD program (and start receiving the DVM/PhD scholarship) prior to applying to the graduate school for admission into the PhD program. If the student is accepted into the DVM/PhD program prior to the start of their first year in the veterinary curriculum, the student should apply and be admitted into the PhD program prior to the end of spring semester in the first year. If the student is admitted into the DVM/PhD program during fall of his or her second year, then he or she should apply and be admitted into the PhD program prior to start of the spring semester in second year. For students that want to join the DVM/PhD program after fall of the second year, they should first apply for admission into the PhD program, and they will be admitted into the DVM/PhD program once they are accepted into the PhD program.

13. If a DVM/PhD student does not complete the program, is he/she responsible for paying back the DVM/PhD scholarship?

If a student on DVM/PhD scholarship withdraws or is dismissed from the program, he or she is responsible for paying back DVM/PhD scholarship funding that was received. The student may receive forgiveness for up to one year of scholarship funding depending on the circumstances.

14. Are there current DVM-PhD students and/or graduates that applicants can communicate with?

Yes, applicants may communicate with current DVM/PhD students or with graduates. Applicants may contact Dr. Mark Lawrence if they would like name and contact information.

15. What options are available for me to secure funding for my PhD while I'm in the DVM program?

The most critical factor to securing funding for a PhD is to identify a PhD mentor and to work closely with the student's mentor to obtain funding. A student should not seek funding independently without the assistance and approval of the PhD mentor. There are funding options available for students during the PhD, including research/training grant funds or stipends funded by the college of veterinary medicine. But the key is to work with the PhD mentor to identify and apply for funding.

16. Are there opportunities for the CVM to help provide support for student travel, conference attendance, etc.?

It is primarily the responsibility of the student and mentor to identify travel funding. If research/training grant funds are not available, there are opportunities through the Mississippi State University College of Veterinary Medicine or the Office of the Graduate School where the student and mentor can apply for travel funding.

17. How can DVM/PhD students best prepare themselves for grant writing and publishing data?

The best training for PhD students in grant writing and publishing is to actively participate in these processes with the PhD mentor. In addition, Mississippi State University has training opportunities including the Preparing Future Faculty program (<https://www.ctl.msstate.edu/programsandservices/preparingfuturefaculty/>). The College of Veterinary Medicine offers a graduate-level course called Scientific Writing that trains students in grant and manuscript writing.

18. What are the best approaches for prospective students to find a lab that they will be successful in?

The most critical factor in finding a research lab is identifying a research mentor with shared research interest, which is addressed in question 6. In addition to making sure the PhD mentor's research matches student's interest, it is also helpful to talk to the mentor's current students and check the mentor's publication track record.