

MASTERS IN CLINICAL RESEARCH (MSCR)

Program Description

The Master of Science in Clinical Research (MSCR) Degree Program at McGovern Medical School is a focused, flexible, and affordable program that trains clinical investigators to design and conduct exemplary quality patient-oriented research. This 36-credit degree program is designed to accommodate clinicians' busy schedules, with most courses offered on Wednesday afternoons or evenings. The program is largely comprised of live, in-person small group classes; this is not an online or distance-learning program. The time required for degree completion depends on the amount of time and effort a student devotes to the program, and a minimum of three years is typical for most students with concurrent clinical obligations. The program includes graduate-level coursework in epidemiology, biostatistics, clinical trial design, health care economics, and clinical guideline development. Students in the MSCR program complete a series of courses, practica, as well as a thesis research project.

Students will receive training in planning and executing clinical research designs as well as analyzing and disseminating research results.

Upon completion of the program, graduates will be able to:

1. Apply the concepts of evidence-based medicine and health services research to clinical practice at the local, state, regional, and national levels using practice guidelines (informed by a literature review and critical evidence appraisal) as instruments of evidence-based practice.
2. Postulate a sound new research question and design a clinical research study to address this question using the most unbiased feasible design.
3. Perform statistical analysis and interpret the results in a manner that is consistent with the assumptions of the analytic models and the study design.

MSCR Admission Requirements

This program is primarily intended for those with a graduate healthcare-related professional degree (e.g., MD, DO, PharmD) who currently hold a full-time faculty or fellowship appointment at an academic institution. Applicants should have a commitment to pursue a career as an independent clinical investigator. The rapid pace of the curriculum assumes a working knowledge of clinical medicine and an excellent scholastic aptitude. Successful applicants must have the necessary departmental support, including protected time and an established relationship with a research mentor who should have a track record of external research funding. All applicants are required to be engaged in or preparing to conduct clinical research.

General admission requirements for the MSCR program are below:

1. Degree requirement: (one of the following degrees is required)
 - a. Advanced degree in health-related field (MD, DO, PhD in a related field, DDS or DMD, RPh or PharmD)
 - b. Bachelor's or master's degree from an accredited institution of higher education, with a G.P.A. of greater than 3.0 and previous work experience in a health-related field, such as nursing, psychology, dietetics, etc.

2. Pre-requisite training: At least one year of the Clinical Research Curriculum (CRC) is strongly encouraged before applying to the MSCR program. The CRC is an introductory level series of courses open to all clinical researchers at McGovern Medical School, other Texas Medical Center institutions, and CTSA-affiliated institutions. More information on the CRC can be found here (<https://med.uth.edu/crebm/clinical-research-education/clinical-research-curriculum/>).

Application and Admission Procedures

Applications should be submitted online to the UTHealth Houston Office of the Registrar (<https://www.uth.edu/registrar/applicants/application-forms.htm>)

Completed applications, including letters of reference and transcripts, must be received by June 15 for matriculation in the fall semester.

The following are required:

1. Completed application form with a curriculum vitae and personal statement. The personal statement is a narrative describing the applicant's motivation for applying to the MSCR program, including the applicant's career goals and how the MSCR degree program will support these goals, and a proposed timeline for completion of the program.
2. Letters of reference (2). Two professional letters of reference on official letterhead from at least two individuals who are qualified to evaluate the applicant's academic or professional performance, as well as ability and motivation to complete the program. If an applicant will be employed or in a training program while enrolled in the program, a letter of support/recommendation will be required from the applicant's supervisor to verify the supervisor's commitment to providing the applicant with adequate "protected" time to complete the program.
3. Official transcripts covering all periods of post-secondary enrollment in accredited institutions of higher education. Applicants should request the institution to send official (original) transcripts directly to the Office of the Registrar. Graduates of Texas colleges and universities should request that transcripts be sent in electronic format. Copies of official transcripts sent by the applicant are not considered. Transcripts must include both grades and credit hours.
4. Applicants who are nationals of countries where English is not the parent language are required to submit scores from the Test of English as Foreign Language (TOEFL). See application form for current requirements and exceptions.

Prospective applicants can contact the MSCR Program Manager, Deborah "Deb" Garcia (deborah.garcia@uth.tmc.edu) for further questions about the application process. The application must be completed by June 15 for admission to the class matriculating in August of the same year.

Address application inquiries to:

Office of the Registrar
The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston
P.O. Box 20036
Houston, Texas 77225-0036
713-500-3388

Once an application has been submitted, the applicant will receive a PIN number from the Office of the Registrar. The status of the application,

transcripts, and letters of reference can be checked online at myUTH (<https://my.uth.tmc.edu>) using this PIN number.

Factors Considered in Admissions Decisions

The Admissions Committee of the MSCR Program will review all completed applications. The committee considers the following factors in evaluating applicants for admission:

- Previous research experience, accomplishments and publications, enrollment in research-related courses, and current involvement in research projects
- Expressed commitment to a career involving biomedical research
- Grade point average from previous transcripts
- Career goals
- Previous graduate-level study
- Work experience in a health-related field
- Honors and awards for academic achievement

Preference will be given to candidates who have an established committed departmental mentor. Plans for departmental mentoring must be established prior to enrollment in the program. Candidates from institutions outside of UTHealth Houston will be considered for admission if arrangements can be made for appropriate departmental and methodological mentorship from the applicant's own clinical/academic institution.

Non-degree status

Current Clinical Research Curriculum students may alternatively apply for non-degree status. Non-degree status allows enrollment in MS-level Advanced Courses (tuition costs apply), however students are not assigned mentors and do not complete practica or thesis requirements. Non-degree applications are accepted twice a year (applications due June 15 and October 15) with the same application requirements as the MSCR degree program. Accepted non-degree students may begin advanced coursework in the next semester. Non-degree students may apply for a change to Degree Status in a subsequent June admission cycle, however there is no guarantee of eventual acceptance into the MS Degree Program. Non-degree status will expire after a two-year period of no activity in the program.

Current degree students may request a change in enrollment status to non-degree student. Reinstatement in the degree program will be considered at the discretion of the Admissions Committee.

Tuition and fees

For the 2024-2025 year, the MSCR tuition will be \$96 per semester credit hour for Texas residents. The non-resident tuition will be \$506 per semester credit hour. Tuition and fees are subject to change according to the actions of the Texas Legislature or the UT System Board of Regents and are effective when enacted.

The Texas Legislature does not set the specific amount for any particular student fee. Student fees are authorized by state statute; the specific fee amounts and the determination to increase fees are made by the university administration and The University of Texas System Board of Regents.

Please refer to the Bursar's Office website (<https://www.uth.edu/bursars/student-resources/tuition-fees/>) for the current Tuition and Fee

Schedules. This site reflects current information regarding tuition and fee exceptions and/or waivers, Veterans education benefits, and the Policy for Texas Resident Tuition.

Degree Requirements

To be eligible for graduation with an MSCR degree a student must:

- complete a minimum of 36 credit hours of coursework within five years of admission to the program
- have a minimum cumulative 3.0 grade point average
- satisfactorily complete three practica
 - a. Institutional Review Board
 - b. Scientific Presentation
 - c. Scientific Writing
- satisfactorily complete thesis project(s) that collectively demonstrate competence in each of these areas:
 - a. Apply the concepts of evidence-based medicine and health services research to clinical practice at the local, state, regional, and national levels using practice guidelines (informed by a literature review and critical evidence appraisal) as instruments of evidence-based practice.
 - b. Postulate a sound new research question and design a clinical research study to address this question using the most unbiased feasible design.
 - c. Perform statistical analysis and interpret the results in a manner that is consistent with the assumptions of the analytic models and the study design,
- be enrolled during the term of graduation/program completion
- pay the required graduation fee of \$150

Academic Expectations

Transfer of Credit

A student may be given up to 18 hours of credit for formal coursework completed previously in a comparable program. Students who transfer into the program must meet the same overall degree requirements as students who undergo all of their training at UTHealth Houston.

Petition for Course Equivalency

A student wishing to receive credit for courses taken outside the MS in Clinical Research Program at UTHealth Houston may submit a Petition for Equivalency form, available by email from the Program Coordinator. This includes the Clinical Research Curriculum courses and courses taken at other institutions that are similar in content to courses offered for the MS in Clinical Research Program. The student must complete the form and obtain the approval of his/her program advisor. For courses taken outside McGovern Medical School, the student must supply the required documentation about course requirements for approval of credit hours by the Curriculum Committee.

Advisory Committee

Each student in the program will work jointly with two different advisors—a program advisor/mentor who provides methodological expertise and a departmental advisor/mentor from their own basic or clinical science department or institution who provides expertise in the participant's specific area of clinical research. For fellows and other trainees, the training program director will also serve as a member of the Advisory committee. At the end of each semester, the student will meet with their

Advisory Committee to review academic progress, course selection, and thesis development.

Satisfactory Academic Progress

Individual faculty members are responsible for identifying students with academic difficulty and determining whether the deficiency can be remediated. Satisfactory academic progress is defined for each student by following the degree plan for that student. Each student's Advisory Committee will review the student's course work to assist him/her in achieving the maximum potential and in assessing progress toward academic goals. Students are expected to complete the program within five years, unless extraordinary circumstances warrant an extension. At least one thesis component must be completed each academic year after admission to the MS Degree Program. Overall consideration of performance will be used by the Advisory Committee to determine which students have progressed satisfactorily and which students should be placed on academic probation.

Academic Probation and Dismissal

A student will be placed on academic probation by the program director following the completion of the semester in which any of the following occur:

1. a second grade of F or WF is earned,
2. the student fails to meet with their Advisory Committee within a 12-month period, or
3. the student fails to make satisfactory progress toward the degree (see above).

Once on probation, the student will be re-evaluated at least once each semester by his/her Advisory Committee. A student placed on probation for failing grades will be taken off probation when he/she has passed at least two courses and has passed the same or an equivalent course for any required courses that were failed. The student will be given one year to satisfy these requirements or up to two years if the failed required course is offered only every other year. A student placed on probation for failing to make satisfactory progress and/or meet with his/her Advisory Committee will be taken off probation when he/she successfully completes at least four credit hours over the next year. If the academic probation is not removed within the stated remediation time period, the student will be dismissed by the Program Director.

If the student wishes to request a reconsideration of the dismissal, a written request to the Student Evaluations and Promotions Committee must be submitted within seven calendar days of receipt of the dismissal letter. The Student Evaluations and Promotions Committee will review the request and render its recommendation in writing to the Dean. The student will be notified in writing of the Dean's decision within five working days of the committee's recommendation. The determination of the Dean is final.

Academic Conflict Resolution

Individual faculty members retain primary responsibility for grading and evaluations. The faculty member's judgment is final unless compelling evidence suggests discrimination, differential treatment, or mistake. In attempting to resolve any student grievance regarding academic matters, it is the obligation of the student first to make a serious effort to resolve the matter with the faculty member with whom the grievance originated. If the student and faculty member cannot resolve the matter, the student may file a formal written grievance to the MSCR Program Director within seven (7) calendar days of the failed resolution. The Program Director will meet with appropriate parties (students, course

director, advisory committee) to seek a resolution that is in the best interest of the individual student, student body, and the MSCR Program as a whole. If the conflict is with the Program Director, then the grievance will be submitted to the Director of the Institute for Clinical Research and Learning Health Care. The Program Director will respond, in writing, within ten (10) working days of receiving the written complaint. The student will be notified in writing of the resolution, as will any other pertinent parties. The student has the right to formally appeal the decision of the Program Director, in writing, to the Director or Co-Director of the Institute for Clinical Research and Learning Health Care. The Institute Director will make a final decision. If the student feels this resolution does not follow university policy or was made with bias, the student has seven (7) calendar days from the date of receiving the decision from Institute Director or Co-Director to formally write to the Dean of the McGovern Medical School. In this case, the Dean will review the written grievance and previous recommended resolutions and decide on the final resolution of the matter. The student will be notified, in writing, of the resolution, as will any other pertinent parties. The decision of the Dean is final.

Long-term Absences

Students who are unable to maintain active status may request a long-term absence of up to one year. If the absence lasts for more than one year, reinstatement will be considered at the discretion of the Admissions Committee. Any degree student who has not been granted a leave of absence and who fails to complete at least one degree requirement every academic year after enrollment (course, practicum, or thesis component) will be considered to have withdrawn from the program. Once withdrawn, a student who wishes to resume participation in the program must apply to be readmitted. Degree students may request a change in enrollment status to non-degree student. Reinstatement in the degree program will be considered at the discretion of the Admissions Committee. Non-degree status will expire after a two-year period of no activity in the program.

Grading policy

Advanced courses in the MS in Clinical Research Program are graded A, B, C, or F. An 'F' in a required course requires repetition of that course (or a course deemed equivalent by the student's advisors). Practica and thesis credit hours are graded pass (P) or fail (F). An incomplete (I) grade may be assigned at the discretion of the instructor when the course requirements have not been satisfied by the end of the semester. An incomplete grade will remain on the transcript until a final grade is assigned by the instructor. If an incomplete is not changed by the end of the following semester, it will be converted to an 'F'.

Criteria upon which grades are based are provided at the beginning of each course. Students may withdraw from a course through the last class day of the term. When a student withdraws from a course, a Withdrawn Passing (WP) or Withdrawn Failing (WF) grade will be recorded depending on the student's standing at the time of withdrawal. This WP or WF grade will remain on the transcript even if the course is repeated and passed.

Courses for the MS in Clinical Research Program

Code	Title	Hours
CLRS 5010	Advanced Biostatistics for Clin Investig	4
CLRS 5015	Using Rsrch to Infrm Hlth Cre Polcy&Prac	4
CLRS 5017	Advanced Clinical Research Design	4
CLRS 5020	Economic Evaluations in Clinical Research	4
CLRS 9994	Institutional Review Board Practicum	1

CLRS 9996	Scientific Writing Practicum	1
CLRS 9997	Scientific Presentation Practicum	1
CLRS 9998	Clinical Research Thesis	3
Electives (totaling 14 SCH) ¹		14
Total Hours		36

¹ See school website (<https://med.uth.edu/crebm/clinical-research-education/ms-in-clinical-research/ms-in-clinical-research-curriculum/>) for elective options.