

Cancer Biology, PhD

Degree Requirements

Cancer Biology

The Cancer Biology Program is a graduate training program at WashU, housed under the Roy and Diana Vagelos Division of Biology and Biomedical Sciences (DBBS).

The goal of research within this program is to explain the mechanisms of the fundamental processes of cancer biology in molecular terms. Such processes include cell motility and metastasis, proliferation and growth, the tumor microenvironment, adhesion of cells to matrix and to each other, receptor-ligand interactions, DNA, RNA and protein modifications, tumor suppressor and oncogene function, and cell signaling. A common theme that unites these diverse endeavors is the desire to push the limits of our understanding of these processes to the highest possible molecular resolution.

To earn a PhD at within the Roy and Diana Vagelos Division of Biology and Biomedical Sciences at Washington University, a student must complete all courses required by their department; maintain satisfactory academic progress; pass the qualifying examination; complete all requirements for doctoral candidacy; create a Research Advisory Committee (RAC); submit a Title, Scope, and Procedure Form; fulfill residence and Mentored Experience Requirements; write, defend, and submit a dissertation; and apply for program completion (graduation) via Workday Student.

Program Requirements

- **Total Units Required:** 36 units
- **Degree Length:** Seven years
 - Students are expected to maintain satisfactory academic progress in accordance with academic milestones. Students entering their seventh year in the program will receive a warning letter in regards to reaching their stated degree length. Students entering their eighth year in the program will be required to obtain permission from the Associate Dean of Graduate Education. Across DBBS programs, the average time to degree is 5.6 years.
- **Note:** Students must be enrolled in 9 graduate credits each semester to retain full-time status. As students complete their coursework, if enrolled in fewer than 9 graduate credits, they must enroll in a specific Biology & Biomedical Sciences research graduate course to maintain full-time status. Prior to completing 36 credit units, student will enroll in BBS 5900 Research for research credit; after completing 36 credit units,

students will enroll in BBS 9000 Full-Time Graduate Research/Study, which will show 0 credit units but fulfills full-time status. Students should follow advising instructions to ensure proper enrollment prior to Add/Drop.

- Continued support is guaranteed for the duration of the student's graduate studies, provided that they maintain satisfactory progress toward completion of the degree.
- **Grade Requirement:** Required courses generally consist of four to nine courses in areas fundamental to the student's program. Students are expected to maintain a B average in graduate courses.

Required Courses

DBBS Required Courses

- BBS 5098 Graduate Research Fundamentals
- BBS 5011 Ethics & Research Science

Program Required Courses

- BBS 5920 Foundations in Cancer Biology
- BBS 5929 Experimental Cancer Biology

Journal Club Requirement

- Students must complete 2 credit units of journal clubs. They should consult the program guidelines for common journal club options.

Laboratory Rotations

Selecting a thesis advisor is the most important decision a student makes in graduate school. To help each student make an informed, thoughtful choice, the Division builds in flexibility to explore options. Students usually participate in three lab rotations during their first year. Additional rotations can be arranged, and rotation lengths are flexible. Students usually begin their thesis research by the end of their first year.

Scientific Scholarship

Keeping abreast of scientific developments is critical for faculty and students alike. The Division offers many ways to stay current. More than 15 weekly biology seminars provide excellent opportunities to meet outstanding scientists from outside Washington University. Several annual symposia bring internationally recognized speakers to campus. Journal clubs meet weekly for students, postdoctoral fellows, and faculty to present and discuss current scientific literature. A number of Interdisciplinary Research Pathways allow students to enhance their PhD program. Program retreats allow for informal interaction among students and faculty. The Division also provides funds for each student for professional development.