HUMAN GENETICS, MASTER OF SCIENCE (M.S.)

Program goal

The goal of the master’s program in human genetics is to provide training in human and molecular genetics. The program is designed to provide students with the skills required to advance to positions as researchers and trainers in a broad spectrum of positions in human and molecular genetics. The structure of the program provides a framework for the progressive development of a mastery of the current state of the subject matter in human and molecular genetics and an ability to synthesize this information and apply this foundation to the identification of key areas of investigation and experimentation in this discipline. The program relates the above framework to the development of the ability to design, implement and interpret experimental approaches which address the questions identified. In addition, students will develop skills in the various means of communicating both the core of human and molecular genetics knowledge and the expression of experimental design, results and interpretation to a variety of potential audiences.

Student learning outcomes

1. Oral communication skills: Degree candidates will demonstrate the achievement of an appropriate level of oral communication skills with respect to the content, organization, logical flow, presentation and appropriate use of language incorporating the use of visual aids, as measured by rubric.

2. Written communication skills: Degree candidates will demonstrate the achievement of an appropriate level of written communication skill with respect to grammar, syntax, spelling and use of vocabulary to effectively present information including the use of figures, tables and citations as measured by rubric.

3. Experimental design: Degree candidates will demonstrate the achievement of an appropriate level of competence in the ability to appraise, modify and/or create, and implement experimental protocols and to design and develop experiments as measured by rubric.

4. Problem-solving skills: Degree candidates will demonstrate an appropriate level of skill in the identification and selection of meaningful problems to be addressed in research in human and molecular genetics, including the ability to defend said identifications and to design and develop appropriate methods to solve said problems as measured by rubric.

5. Integrated knowledge of human and molecular genetics: Degree candidates will demonstrate an appropriate level of knowledge of the current elements of human and molecular genetics as related to disciplinary specialization and a more detailed understanding of the individual area of scholarship, including an appropriate familiarity with the research literature and the ability to evaluate and critique publications as measured by rubric.

VCU Graduate Bulletin, VCU Graduate School and general academic policies and regulations for all graduate students in all graduate programs

The VCU Graduate Bulletin website documents the official admission and academic rules and regulations that govern graduate education for all graduate programs at the university. These policies are established by the graduate faculty of the university through their elected representatives to the University Graduate Council.

It is the responsibility of all graduate students, both on- and off-campus, to be familiar with the VCU Graduate Bulletin as well as the Graduate School website and academic regulations in individual school and department publications and on program websites. However, in all cases, the official policies and procedures of the University Graduate Council, as published on the VCU Graduate Bulletin and Graduate School websites, take precedence over individual program policies and guidelines.

Visit the academic regulations section for additional information on academic regulations for graduate students. (http://bulletin.vcu.edu/academic-regps)

Degree candidacy requirements

A graduate student admitted to a program or concentration requiring a final research project, work of art, thesis or dissertation, must qualify for continuing master’s or doctoral status according to the degree candidacy requirements of the student’s graduate program. Admission to degree candidacy, if applicable, is a formal statement by the graduate student’s faculty regarding the student’s academic achievements and the student’s readiness to proceed to the final research phase of the degree program.

Graduate students and program directors should refer to the following degree candidacy policy as published in the VCU Graduate Bulletin for complete information and instructions.

Visit the academic regulations section for additional information on degree candidacy requirements. (http://bulletin.vcu.edu/academic-regps/candidacy)

Graduation requirements

As graduate students approach the end of their academic programs and the final semester of matriculation, they must make formal application to graduate. No degrees will be conferred until the application to graduate has been finalized.

Graduate students and program directors should refer to the following graduation requirements as published in the Graduate Bulletin for a complete list of instructions and a graduation checklist.

Visit the academic regulations section for additional information on graduation requirements. (http://bulletin.vcu.edu/academic-regps/grad/graduation-info)

Other information

School of Medicine graduate program policies

The School of Medicine provides policies applicable to all programs administratively housed in the school. Information on master’s programs is available elsewhere in this chapter of the Graduate Bulletin.

Apply online at graduate.admissions.vcu.edu (http://www.graduate.admissions.vcu.edu).
**Admission requirements**

**Degree:** M.S.  
**Semester(s) of entry:** Fall  
**Deadline dates:** May 1  
**Test requirements:** GRE, MCAT or DAT

**Special requirements**
- International applicants must score 100 or greater on the TOEFL.

In addition to the general admission requirements of the VCU Graduate School, applicants wishing to specialize in human genetics should have courses in biology, chemistry through organic chemistry, genetics and mathematics through calculus.

**Basic science, research-intensive, non-thesis curriculum for medical students**

Individuals who are participants in medical training (the Doctor of Medicine program) at VCU may be eligible for enrollment in a research-intensive, non-thesis graduate curriculum. This basic science option builds on the core of disciplinary material embedded in the first two years of training in the medical school curriculum. Additional exposure is provided to specialized areas in basic science disciplines in concert with an intensive research experience leading to the preparation of a report in the form of a manuscript suitable for publication. The program is designed to be completed within 12 to 15 months. Subject matter related to the core material and/or suitable elective courses taken in the didactic phase of medical training correspond to a minimum of the equivalent of 24 graduate credit hours. The equivalent of 12 credit hours may be applied to the M.S. degree program in which the student is enrolled in accordance with Graduate School policy. Medical students interested in the basic science option should contact the M.S. graduate program director for additional information.

**Degree requirements**

The Department of Human and Molecular Genetics offers a comprehensive program in graduate study leading to a Master of Science in Human Genetics. The program includes the completion of an original research project under the supervision of a faculty adviser and a background/foundation of courses that prepare students for research-oriented careers in the rapidly expanding field of human genetics. Major areas of study available to master's students in the program include clinical and molecular cytogenetics, molecular genetics, developmental genetics, cancer genetics, behavior genetics, population and quantitative genetics, genetic epidemiology, clinical genetics and genetic counseling.

In addition to the general VCU Graduate School graduation requirements, the M.S. degree requires at least two years of full-time study for students entering with a B.S. or B.A. degree and must be completed within six years. Students must complete a minimum of 59 graduate credit hours. Students may be required to take an additional six hours of directed research after the second spring semester if needed.

Upon completing their thesis research, master's students must report their results in a thesis that is prepared in an acceptable form and style as detailed by the university Graduate School. A final oral examination is scheduled after the student's thesis has been approved by the student's advisory committee. This examination includes the subject matter of course work the student has completed as well as the thesis. It is administered by the student's graduate advisory committee who will vote on the student's performance in addition to rating them with regard to the rubrics defined by the School of Medicine.

**Curriculum requirements**

**Required courses**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Hours</th>
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<tr>
<td>BIOS 543</td>
<td>Graduate Research Methods I</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>or CCTR 702</td>
<td>Statistics for Genetic Studies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HGEN 501</td>
<td>Introduction to Human Genetics</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HGEN 502</td>
<td>Advanced Human Genetics</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HGEN 510</td>
<td>Classic Papers in Human Genetics</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HGEN 605</td>
<td>Experimental Methods in Human Genetics (variable credit; taken two semesters for a minimum of five credits) (^1)</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>HGEN 610</td>
<td>Current Literature in Human Molecular Genetics (^2)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HGEN 606</td>
<td>Introduction to Clinical Genetics</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HGEN 611</td>
<td>Data Science I</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HGEN 690</td>
<td>Genetics Research Seminar (^3)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OVPR 601</td>
<td>Scientific Integrity</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>or OVPR 602</td>
<td>Responsible Scientific Conduct</td>
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<tr>
<td>or OVPR 603</td>
<td>Responsible Conduct of Research</td>
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**Total Hours:** 27

**Electives**

Select at least two elective courses from the following:

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<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Hours</th>
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<td>PATH 670; courses at the 500 level or above in ANAT, BIOL, BIOL, BIOS, BNFO, HGEN, LFSC, MICR, NEUS, PHTX and PHIS excluding laboratory courses; courses specifically for professional programs (e.g. HGEN 600); directed research; independent study; seminar; current topic courses; MICR 608 and MICR 609</td>
<td>5</td>
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**Total Hours:** 5

**Directed research**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HGEN 697</td>
<td>Directed Research in Genetics (^4)</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The student and faculty member will design a project that can reasonably be completed in 12 weeks. The student will spend approximately 12 weeks in that laboratory for a minimum of eight hours a week. The student's performance in the laboratory will serve as the basis for the grade that is received for this course.

\(^1\) HGEN 610 should be taken every fall and spring semester beginning the spring term of the first year

\(^2\) HGEN 690 should be taken every fall and spring semester
HGEN 697 should be taken every semester following the first year of study.

**Total graduate credit hours required (minimum) 59**

**Typical plan of study**

The M.S. degree requires at least two years of full-time study for students entering with a B.S. or B.A. degree and must be completed within six years. Students complete this degree program on average within two years. Students should refer to their program websites (https://gen.vcu.edu/graduate-and-training-programs/ms-in-human-genetics/curriculum) and talk with their graduate program directors or advisers for information about typical plans of study and registration requirements.

**Graduate program director**
Rita Shiang, Ph.D.
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(804) 628-4083

**Additional contact**
Michael S. Grotewiel, Ph.D.
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(804) 628-4086

**Program website:** gen.vcu.edu (http://www.gen.vcu.edu)