

## Premedical Graduate Health Sciences Certificate (CERT; CPG-BHS program code) Program Handbook

### **CERT Program Academics**

The Premedical Graduate Health Sciences Certificate (CERT) program is a one year (two semesters), in-person graduate-level post-baccalaureate program designed to provide opportunities to aspiring health professional (i.e., pre-medical and pre-dental) students to strengthen their academic record through rigorous graduate-level coursework in health-related science disciplines. The program also offers academic and professional advising that promotes an informed approach to the professional school application process and preparation for standardized tests through both didactic coursework and an included Kaplan test preparation course for the MCAT or DAT. CERT students are expected to commit full-time effort to their studies, manifest professional behavior, enhance dynamic study skills in varied course environments, and actively cultivate effective time management techniques.

CERT Program Admissions and Degree Requirements are described in the VCU Bulletin:

<https://bulletin.vcu.edu/graduate/school-medicine/premedical-graduate-health-sciences-certificate/>

The [CERT webpage](#) contains additional details and FAQs about the program and its curriculum, links to the application portal, program staff contact information, the CERT [QuickLook](#) form for prospective students, upcoming ‘Get on Track with a VCU Health Sciences Post-Bac’ webinar registration, and linked M.S. programs.

CERT is intended to be completed in 2 consecutive semesters. Students must earn a minimum of 27 credits in graduate-level coursework with grades no lower than a “C” and a cumulative GPA = 3.0 or higher in order to successfully graduate from CERT. Required coursework includes ANAT 611 Histology (5 cr., Spring), BIOC 503 Biochemistry, Cell, and Molecular Biology (5 cr., Fall), BIOC 504 Biochemistry, Cell, and Molecular Biology (5 cr., Spring), and PHIS 501 Graduate Physiology (5 cr., Fall). An example path of study might also include ANAT 609 Human Gross Anatomy (3 cr., Fall) and ANAT 612 Embryology (2 cr., Spring) and one additional elective course (3 cr., Spring). Spring elective course options include ANAT 608 Neuroanatomy (3 cr., Spring), IBMS 635 Cellular Signaling (3 cr., Spring), PHIS 512 Cardiac Function in Health and Disease (3 cr., Spring), and PHTX 548 Drug Dependence (3 cr., Spring). Options to enroll in additional electives, including non-graded Department Seminar (1 cr.) courses, non-graded Directed Research (variable credit), or courses offered by other SOM Departments or VCU Schools (including online courses) may be available on an individual basis with permission of the Program Director.

### **Linkage**

Excellent academic achievement in CERT, as evidenced by completion of the CERT curriculum within 2 consecutive semesters while maintaining a 3.5+ GPA and earning a qualifying standardized test score (508 MCAT, 20 DAT) are rewarded by eligibility for a guaranteed interview for the VCU School of Medicine or VCU School of Dentistry. Guaranteed interview offers must be used within two application cycles of CERT program completion and can only be used in one application cycle.

### **Outcomes**

An analysis (published in *The Advisor*, the newsletter of the National Association of Advisors to the Health Professions, June 2023, which is available [here](#)) of Allopathic (M.D. program) Medical School admissions from 2016-2021 demonstrates that despite exhibiting lower average undergraduate GPAs, CERT graduates with MCAT scores in the 501-511 range enjoy a substantial numerical advantage in matriculation rates over a non-CERT control cohort. The data compellingly demonstrate that the CERT program not only fulfills its primary objective – to provide academic enhancement to enrolled students – but also confers additional advantages. In addition, anecdotal testimonials from numerous CERT graduates who subsequently matriculated in the VCU School of Medicine report that their post-bac

experience helped increase their readiness for and decrease their anxiety about the rigors of medical education.

### **CERT Program Student Resources**

CERT employs several **Coordinators** who completed the program in the prior academic year to provide near-peer advising to current and prospective students, maintain open-door office hours, interface with alumni, guide Social Media activity, plan social events, and much more. The Coordinators are a valuable asset to current students and serve as a 'first stop' for questions, comments, or concerns about the program. Please feel free to contact the Coordinators by [email](#), [telephone](#), or in-person visit (Sanger 1-055E) during office hours.

Current CERT students are automatically subscribed to the program's continuous **Canvas** [course page](#), which hosts CERT Orientation slides and recorded videos, information about CERT Courses and Tutors, Workshops and Application Preparedness activities, links to local volunteer opportunities, and more. All CERT students are assigned a faculty **Advisor** whom they will have an opportunity to meet with individually and get to know during their student tenure. CERT Advisors are responsible for writing a personalized Letter of Support on behalf of the program that may be included in professional school applications. **Academic advising** is also provided to all CERT students through scheduled individual meetings with the Coordinators (i.e., to discuss application preparedness and professional school plans), regular Workshops during the academic year that cover a variety of topics relevant to pre-professional students, and individual appointments with the Program Director.

**Tutors** for large courses offered by Basic Science Departments in the VCU School of Medicine that are populated by CERT, MS, and PhD students are supported by the Office of Graduate Education and supervised by the CERT Program Director. Students enrolled in supported courses will have access to Tutors through each course's Canvas page, a Canvas [course page](#) dedicated to Tutoring activities, and Google groups as needed.

### **VCU Student Resources**

The University provides access to a number of resources for current students, including:

[Recreation and Well-Being](#) (RecWell) – Fitness centers and sports, leadership and employment opportunities, and 1-on-1 or small group coaching.

[Division for Academic Success](#) (DAS) – Offers disability and academic support services to students in VCU Health Sciences schools (including CERT). Academic accommodations (i.e., additional time or testing center use) must be obtained from DAS and presented directly to Course Directors. DAS also offers access to Academic Wellness resources, including mentorship and counseling in the use of the Let Me Learn Learning Connections Inventory (LCI).

[University Counseling Services](#) – Creates spaces for healing and growth by providing 24/7 access to mental health professionals, in-person counseling services at both MCV and Monroe Park campus locations, Survivor Support Services, and Rams in Recovery.

[Student Health Services](#) – University Student Health Services is a nationally accredited health care provider that offers primary care services to currently enrolled VCU students at clinics are located on the Monroe Park & MCV campuses. Vaccination services and information about health insurance are also available.

**Important Note:** the VCU School of Medicine requires that all students in graduate academic programs (including CERT) hold [active health insurance coverage](#). CERT students are not currently eligible for the [student health insurance program](#), so please plan your healthcare needs accordingly.

### **Satisfactory Academic Progress, Student Concerns and Appeals**

The VCU School of Medicine Graduate Education Office hosts a [Graduate Student Resources](#) webpage that includes valuable information that all CERT students should be familiar with, including:

- Definition of [Satisfactory Academic Progress](#) in VCU SOM graduate programs
- Terms for [Dismissal](#) from a graduate program
- [Leaves of Absence](#)
- [Course Drop and Withdrawal](#)
- Appeal of Course [Grades](#)
- Process for [Reporting a Concern](#)

The CERT program follows policies published by the Graduate Education Office; students who have questions about the policies described above are advised to contact the CERT Program Director directly.

### **Financial Aid**

Eligibility for certain forms of financial aid requires that students maintain Satisfactory Academic Progress. The CERT program does not directly support academic study through scholarships or work-study programs. Questions about eligibility for financial aid and additional information about sources of financial aid should be directed to the VCU School of Medicine [Office of Financial Aid](#).

### **Research and Master's Degree options**

Individual research opportunities are widespread on the MCV campus. CERT students can set up *ad hoc* non-credit volunteer or non-graded, for-credit Directed Research projects with Faculty Investigators in the Departments of Anatomy and Neurobiology, Biochemistry, Microbiology and Immunology, Pharmacology and Toxicology, and Physiology and Biophysics. Credits earned as a CERT student can be applied toward the completion of a Master of Science (M.S.) degree in any of 6 different Graduate Programs hosted by the aforementioned academic Departments. CERT program completion is required prior to admission into a VCU SOM M.S. program.

### **Clinical Training and non-clinical Community Service**

Admission into health professional schools requires exposure to and experience in both clinical environments and non-clinical volunteer community service settings. CERT program staff can assist students in identifying suitable opportunities to gain extracurricular experience through our network of local non-profit organizations and the VCUHealth Clinical Observership program.