

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 graduate-level post-baccalaureate training opportunity designed to provide opportunities for aspiring health professional (i.e., pre-medical and pre-dental) students to strengthen their academic record through rigorous graduate-level coursework in health-related basic science disciplines, academic 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.

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, upcoming 'Get on Track with a VCU Health Sciences Post-Bac' webinars, linked M.S. programs, and opportunities to earn guaranteed interviews at medical and dental schools.

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 grade and a cumulative GPA = 3.0 or higher in order to complete the degree requirements for the Certificate. Required coursework includes 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), ANAT 611 Histology (5 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), PHTX 548 Drug Dependence (3 cr., Spring), PHTX 5641 Clinical Pharmacology (3 cr., Spring). Options to enroll in additional electives, including Department Seminar (1 cr.) courses, Directed Research (variable credit), or courses offered by other SOM Departments or VCU Schools (including online courses) may be available on an as-needed basis with permission of the Program Director.

Successful 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.

Linkage and Outcomes

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 is rewarded by eligibility for a guaranteed interview in the VCU School of Medicine (508 MCAT score), VCU School of Dentistry (20 DAT score), or Edward Via College of Osteopathic Medicine (500 MCAT score). Guaranteed interviews may be used in only one application cycle and must be redeemed within two years of CERT program completion.

An analysis (published in *The Advisor*, the newsletter of the National Association of Advisors to the Health Professions, June 2023 and available [here](#)) of Allopathic Medical School (M.D. program) 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. CERT

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. The CERT program also supports **Tutors** for large courses; enrolled students have access to Tutors through each supported course's Canvas page and a Canvas [course page](#) dedicated to Tutoring activities.

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.

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 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.*

Student Concerns and Appeals

The VCU School of Medicine Office of Graduate Education hosts a [Graduate Student Resources](#) webpage that includes valuable information that all CERT students should be familiar with, including the process for [reporting a concern or appealing an outcome](#). The CERT program does not have a separate appeal policy.

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.