



UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE



University of Cambridge-National Institutes of Health - Health Sciences Research Scholars Program

FAQs for applicants (updated July, 2004)

1) What makes this program different from other graduate programs? This program was founded in 2001 in recognition of the fact that the most innovative and exciting biomedical research is increasingly a global and collaborative process. It provides outstanding students with an advanced training in collaborative interdisciplinary research in an enjoyable and unique program. By merging the resources of one of the world's premier research universities with the U.S. National Institutes of Health, the world's largest biomedical research center, it creates a faculty without borders that provides an unparalleled international training experience. Moreover, all students are members of one of the Colleges at Cambridge. This integrates them into the rich educational tradition of one of the great Universities in Occidental civilization and provides a residence during their time at Cambridge. With the help of faculty advisors, students are encouraged to create their own dissertation projects in a collaborative arrangement between a mentor at NIH and a mentor at Cambridge who have complementary research interests. Alternatively, students may choose from a large curriculum of pre-arranged collaborative projects. The selection of projects is continually being increased and is not confined by traditional departmental boundaries. Applicants to the program are typically college seniors; however qualified postgraduates, including medical students, who have a strong interest in a career in biomedical research are encouraged to apply. Science students winning Marshall or Churchill Scholarships may also apply for a Scholarship with the NIH-Cambridge Scholarship to provide additional support to pursue a Ph.D. degree.

2) How long is the Cambridge-NIH program? Students may complete the program in as little as 3 or 4 years but will be supported by the NIH for up to 5 years. The emphasis in the program is to accelerate the path to the completion of the doctorate so that individuals can begin their independent careers earlier. Students successfully completing the program will be awarded the Doctor of Philosophy degree (Ph.D.) from Cambridge.

3) Where will I perform my dissertation research? Scholars will spend roughly half their time at Cambridge and half their time at NIH and will be co-mentored by the principal collaborating investigators from the faculty of each institution. Some Scholars have also carried out part of their doctor work in other countries such as Australia, Africa, and China when their project involved resources in these countries. The exact division of time will be dictated by the nature and pace of the research and by the residency requirements for Cambridge which stipulate that a student must work at the University for a minimum of approximately 1.5 years to be eligible for the doctoral degree.

4) What areas of research/study does the Cambridge-NIH partnership support? Students can carry out dissertation work on any topic in laboratory or clinical research in which a joint project involving faculty members at NIH and the University of Cambridge can be established. This includes almost all areas of contemporary biomedical research.

5) How do I find a dissertation project? Students who accept an offer of admission to the Program will gain access to a Web site containing a database of faculty members at NIH and Cambridge who have developed collaborative research projects in which they serve as principal investigators and student mentors. In the spring prior to matriculation, the Scholars will be invited to spend one week each at NIH and Cambridge visiting potential mentors and labs. It is anticipated that most, if not all, Scholars will choose their dissertation projects from the database. However, any student who has a particular interest in an area not represented in the database will have the option of developing a dissertation project of their own choosing, under the guidance of program advisors. As with the other projects, this will take the form of a collaborative project with a mentor at NIH and a mentor at Cambridge. Students then spend the first eight weeks of the program at NIH creating a project proposal with the help of their Mentors and Advisor which serves as a blueprint for their doctoral training.

6) What is the funding mechanism for the Cambridge-NIH program? The NIH intramural program will provide support for living stipend, health insurance, travel stipend, and other educational expenses.

7) What courses are required during the program? The program is based on the British system in which students carry out doctoral research with little emphasis on formal courses. At present there is no formal coursework required as part of the degree requirements. We will admit students who already have a sophisticated scientific background and who have already completed basic coursework in biology, chemistry (both inorganic and organic), physics, and mathematics. Nevertheless, the academic background of each Scholar will be reviewed by a faculty member in the scientific discipline of the intended area of research who will make recommendations regarding coursework that would be valuable to take to fill any deficiency and/or to ensure that the Scholars will have a well-rounded background. It is possible that special tutorials or small individualized courses will be offered to students to enhance their knowledge in emerging areas of research such as bioinformatics or genomics.

8) Where will I take the required courses? If specific coursework is needed, arrangements will be made with Cambridge, with local universities near NIH, or with the NIH faculty.

9) Where can I find housing while performing my dissertation research in the UK and the US? Cambridge has agreed to provide housing within one of the College residence halls. This allows the student to take meals in the residential college and thereby associate with students from a variety of academic disciplines including those outside science. While at the NIH, students live in the very pleasant suburban neighborhood surrounding the campus in Bethesda, Maryland. The Scholarship has recently established a Scholar's Residence across the street from the NIH which provides some year-round and short stay accommodations for students in the program which is available on a first-come, first-served basis.

10) When will I be notified as to whether or not I was selected for the Cambridge-NIH program? Students must apply for consideration for selection to the Scholarship by January 15, 2005. The most highly qualified candidates will be interviewed at the NIH campus in Bethesda, MD in February 28 and March 1, 2005, and final admissions decisions before the end of March, 2005. If you intend to apply, please reserve these interview dates now since it will not be possible to schedule interviews at other times.

11) When will I leave for the UK? This will be determined individually by the particular research project. Most previous students have elected to begin their work at Cambridge in the fall of their first year in the program, but they have the flexibility to begin at NIH.

12) Is the program restricted to US citizens? Admission to the first year class is restricted to citizens and permanent residents of the United States of America. We will also accept applications from outstanding UK students who have already completed at least two years of graduate work at Cambridge to work in NIH laboratories as Advanced Scholars in the program.

13) Sounds terrific, how do I apply? Submit a completed application package – there is no fee to apply. Students may also submit an application to the Oxford-NIH program simultaneously. The application package must include:

- a completed Application Form. The form can be obtained online at <http://gpp.nih.gov/admissions/index.html>
- a photocopy of the official report of either the basic Graduate Record Examination (GRE) or the Medical College Admission Test (MCAT). An advanced GRE test in biology, chemistry, or biochemistry, cell and molecular biology is not required but will be considered favorably.
- a photocopy of the college transcript
- three letters of reference, with at least one being from a current or former research advisor. Letters should be in sealed envelopes bearing the signature of the person serving as reference across the seal.

The deadline for submission of applications is January 15, 2005

14) Who do I contact if I have further questions?

Graduate Partnerships Program
National Institutes of Health
Department of Health & Human Services
2 Center Drive
Building 2 / 2nd Floor East
Bethesda, MD 20892 USA
Tel: 301-594-9605 (or toll-free 877-422-7882)
E-mail: gppapply@nih.gov

Additional information is also available on an “unofficial” website designed by students who are currently in the Oxford-NIH program (<http://users.ox.ac.uk/~chri1906/>). A similar website describing the Cambridge-NIH program is under construction.