

A photograph of a modern, multi-story building with large glass windows and a sign that reads "Pharmaceutical Sciences" and "Skaggs School of Pharmacy & Pharmaceutical Sciences". The building is white with a grid of windows. A person is walking on a path in front of the building. The sky is blue with some clouds.

# Navigating the PharmD/PhD Program

## The Student Guide

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Hello aspiring PharmD/PhD student! This handbook will serve as your guide to navigating the PharmD/PhD program at UCSD, a joint program between SSPPS and the Biomedical Sciences Graduate Program (BMS). To be frank, this is no straightforward path—in fact, this handbook was born out of a PharmD/PhD student’s calamitous journey through acceptance into the program. But don’t let that discourage you! For context, there is no dedicated committee or team that manages the PharmD/PhD program—rather, various individuals in SSPPS and BMS are involved in certain aspects of the program, ultimately leaving it up to the student to make sure they are on the right track. That’s where this guide comes in: to ensure that you are on the right track every step of the way and, if not, you know where to seek help. While we tried to cover as much content and concerns as possible, please do not hesitate to reach out to **SSPPS Office of Student Affairs (OSA)** ([sspps-studentaffairs@health.ucsd.edu](mailto:sspps-studentaffairs@health.ucsd.edu)), **Leanne Nordeman** ([lnordeman@health.ucsd.edu](mailto:lnordeman@health.ucsd.edu)) or **Howard Phang** ([hphang@health.ucsd.edu](mailto:hphang@health.ucsd.edu)) for further guidance.

## II. TIMELINE

The most important thing about this program is knowing what to accomplish and at what time. Students typically follow a [2+PhD+2] timeline, i.e. 2 years of pharmacy school, completion of the PhD, then 2 more years of pharmacy school. While a [3+PhD+1] option exists, it isn't recommended because of the importance of learning therapeutics (P3 year) closer to the start of clinical rotations (P4 year). Please speak with **Dr. Victor Nizet** if you'd like to consider this option.

Below is a summary of events that you should complete following a [2+PhD+2] timeline. For a more detailed schedule of the graduate school years/courses, please refer to the **BMS Guidelines document** listed in [IV. List of Important/Helpful Webpages](#)

P1	Fall	(!!!) Meet with <b>Dr. Victor Nizet</b> & express interest in program, talk about research interests (!) Look for labs to rotate in (See <a href="#">IV. List of Important/Helpful Webpages</a> )
	Winter	(!!) Email <b>SSPPS OSA</b> with an official notice of interest to enter the PharmD/PhD Program (!!) Continue looking for labs to rotate in (See <a href="#">V. Setting Up Lab Rotations</a> )
	Spring	(!!!) Confirm 1 or 2 lab rotations for the summer (!!) Ask <b>Drs. David Gonzalez and Michael Gilson</b> about possible summer lab rotation stipend via SRP
Summer	Lab Rotations	
P2	Fall	(!!!) Meet with <b>Dr. Victor Nizet</b> & update him on lab rotations, discuss plans moving forward (!!!) Email <b>Leanne Nordeman &amp; Chris Watson</b> to express intent to apply to BMS (!!!) Prepare & submit BMS Application (See <a href="#">VI. The BMS Application</a> ) (!) Continue looking for labs to rotate in
	Winter	(!!!) Receive BMS Offer !!! (!!) Meet with <b>Andrina Marshall</b> to discuss finances (!!) Continue looking for labs to rotate in (!) Attend BMS Recruitment Event (Optional—email <b>Leanne Nordeman</b> for details)
	Spring	(!!!) Accept BMS Offer !!! After this, you are officially a PharmD/PhD student !!! (!!!) Notify <b>SSPPS OSA</b> about approval into program (!!!) Confirm last lab rotation(s) for the summer (Must complete at least 3 by end of summer) (!!) Ask <b>Drs. David Gonzalez and Michael Gilson</b> about possible summer lab rotation stipend via SRP
Summer	Lab Rotations	(!!!) Pick/declare thesis advisor before Sept 1 – email <b>Leanne Nordeman</b> and complete paperwork (!!!) Attend BMS Research Proposition introduction meeting (details provided by Leanne)
Graduate School !!!		
Spring Quarter before Returning to PharmD program: (!!!) Email <b>SSPPS OSA</b> to begin re-entering SSPPS process		

### Notes/Legend:

(!!!) = HIGH priority (!!) = medium priority (!) = important

Contact information of **Bolded names** can be found in section III. **List of Important/Helpful People**.

During P1-P2 year you must remain a full-time Pharmacy Student and be in good academic standing.

### III. LIST OF IMPORTANT/HELPFUL PEOPLE

Dr. Victor Nizet (vnizet@health.ucsd.edu)

PharmD/PhD program coordinator. Should be aware of your existence & progress throughout the program.  
[Contact this person for:](#) Initial visit, identifying research labs, program logistics, referral to any BMS contacts

SSPPS Office of Student Affairs (OSA) (sspps-studentaffairs@health.ucsd.edu)

Office of Student Affairs for SSPPS. Your go-to for all things SSPPS!  
[Contact this person for:](#) General questions regarding SSPPS

Leanne Nordeman (lnordeman@health.ucsd.edu)

Director of Graduate Affairs for BMS. Your go-to for all things BMS!  
[Contact this person for:](#) General questions regarding BMS

Patricia Luetmer (pluetmer@health.ucsd.edu)

Student Affairs Coordinator for BMS. Works with Leanne on BMS related things.  
[Contact this person for:](#) Academic questions regarding BMS

Chris Watson (c9watson@health.ucsd.edu)

Program Affairs Coordinator for BMS. Works with Leanne on BMS related things.  
[Contact this person for:](#) Admissions and general questions regarding BMS

Howard Phang (hphang@health.ucsd.edu)

Current PharmD/PhD student. Created and developed this handbook.  
[Contact this person for:](#) General questions, candid & informal advice

Andrina Marshall (amarshall@health.ucsd.edu)

Associate Dean for Business Administration and Fiscal Affairs for SSPPS. Oversees all SSPPS fiscal affairs.  
[Contact this person for:](#) Discussion about finances

Dr. David Gonzalez (djgonzalez@health.ucsd.edu)

Summer Research Program (SRP) director for SSPPS. Will help you get a stipend during your lab rotations.  
[Contact this person for:](#) Summer lab rotation stipend

Dr. Michael Gilson (mgilson@health.ucsd.edu)

Summer Research Program (SRP) director for SSPPS. Will help you get a stipend during your lab rotations.  
[Contact this person for:](#) Summer lab rotation stipend

### IV. LIST OF IMPORTANT/HELPFUL WEBPAGES

SSPPS Faculty Research & Areas of Expertise

<https://pharmacy.ucsd.edu/research/faculty>

BMS Faculty Research

[https://biomedsci-db.ucsd.edu/faculty\\_index](https://biomedsci-db.ucsd.edu/faculty_index)

BMS Guidelines

<https://biomedsci.ucsd.edu/students/index.html>

BMS Application

<https://connect.grad.ucsd.edu/apply/>

## V. SETTING UP LAB ROTATIONS

- Don't stress! Setting up lab rotations may seem like a daunting task, but it isn't and shouldn't be. It is NOT akin to finding a research lab as an undergrad. Here are a few tips for setting up lab rotations (NOT rules -- just guidelines!)
- [Explore the SSPPS and BMS faculty web pages](#) to get an idea of the type of research being conducted at UCSD. Additionally, you can talk to Dr. Victor Nizet, other pharmacy faculty, or current graduate students for their input on different research groups.
- [Contact the PI](#) of the lab you are interested in to set up a meeting. In your email subject heading, it may be helpful to include "PharmD/PhD Rotation" or something of that nature so it's easier for the PI to notice your email. Introduce yourself and ask to meet with the PI to talk more about their research and potential research opportunities. Be persistent - researchers are busy people, so if they don't reply within a week, don't be afraid to follow up!
- [Meet with the PI](#) face-to-face (or virtually) to talk about their research and opportunities in their lab. This meeting is VERY important to see if you are interested with their current research and also for you to ask them questions.

Important questions you should consider asking:

- What are some of your ongoing research projects?
- I am interested in \_\_, is there space for me to explore this in your lab?
- Do you have the funding to support a graduate student?

PLEASE do not be afraid to ask about funding!! In fact, this is probably the most important question to address before considering working with a PI. It is not wise to spend your limited summer rotating in a lab that you cannot eventually join. Lastly, you do not need to solidify a lab rotation right then and there. You can, if you are confident that you want to work with that PI. Otherwise, let them know that you are still exploring different options and will follow up with them afterward.

- [Plan & organize your lab rotations](#) for the summer. Ideally, you would set up two lab rotations for the first summer and one for the second. Identify specific time frames (e.g. June 8th - July 13th) and follow up with your prospective PI's to ask if that time frame works for them. Most PI's are aware that students in dual-degree programs have a limited rotation window and might need to have shorter lab rotations - that is fine, as long as expectations are set beforehand (such as the rotation project, time commitment, etc.). Try not to schedule a lab rotation shorter than 6 weeks, otherwise you will not have ample time to conduct a rotation project. Remember the goals of a lab rotation:
  - Conduct a short rotation project that reflects the type of research you would be doing as a graduate student in the lab
  - Meet the lab staff and other trainees to get a feel for the lab culture
  - Assess whether or not the PI's mentorship style suits your needs. Are they a hands-on, micromanaging researcher? Or a distant, lax supervisor?
- [Confirm your lab rotation](#) during spring quarter just to make sure everything is in order. Again, researchers are busy people!

## VI. THE BMS APPLICATION

- Apply online via <https://connect.grad.ucsd.edu/apply/> during **fall quarter of P2 year**
- On the application, be aware of the following caveats:
  - [Transcripts](#): Upload both your unofficial Undergraduate AND SSPPS transcripts
    - SSPPS transcripts can be found on Tritonlink
  - [Statement of Purpose](#): Upload a word document with the following text: "See Pharmacy Application"
  - [Letters of Recommendation](#): Submit Letter of Recommendation requests to SSPPS OSA, Leanne Nordeman, and Pat Luetmer with the following message: "PharmD/PhD Applicant - See Pharmacy Application"
    - No actual letters are necessary—this is just a formality to complete the application
  - [Fee Waiver](#): Complete the Fee Waiver Request section and click on the "Exception" option
- Otherwise, fill out the entire BMS Application as normal.
- Please email **Leanne Nordeman & Chris Watson** before applying to notify BMS of your intent to apply, and to address any questions you may have about the process.

## VII. GRADUATE HOUSING

- PharmD/PhD students are eligible for an extended month-to-month housing contract (not 2-year-limited) with HDH.
- Please contact **SSPPS OSA** for more information after acceptance into the BMS program.

## VIII. FAQ

**Q. I am unsure if I really want to commit to the PhD - can I still follow the program, even if I decide to drop it later on?**

**A.** Sure! You will not be technically “committed” to the PharmD/PhD program until you receive & accept an offer from the BMS Program at the end of P2 year. Of course, by then, you should be sure that you want to commit to research. But until then, you are free to follow the PharmD/PhD timeline and explore whether or research/the PhD is right for you.

**Q. I am well into P1 or P2 year... is it too late for me to join the PharmD/PhD program?**

**A.** No! It is possible for late-comers to join the PharmD/PhD program, however special care must be taken to ensure all requirements are met in time. For example, you might have to consider the [3+PhD+1] timeline. Please contact Dr. Brookie Best or Dr. Victor Nizet to discuss this further.

**Q. Do I need to take the GRE?**

**A.** No. In fact, as of 2018 the BMS program no longer requires GRE General or Subject tests. See [VI. The BMS Application](#) for more information on what is required.

**Q. How many PharmD/PhD students are there every year?**

**A.** It ranges from 0-2 students per year that officially commit to the PharmD/PhD program.

**Q. Wow so few! Is this program difficult/competitive to get accepted into?**

**A.** No! There really is no competition or selection process— generally, any student who follows the timeline, is on good academic standing, and meets the appropriate requirements qualifies for the PharmD/PhD program. The low number of committing students simply boils down to the fact that only a handful of students are interested each year.

**Q. Can I have a Pharmacy Intern job as a PharmD/PhD student?**

**A.** You can have an intern job during your P1-P2 years, however upon admission into the BMS Program, you cannot have any jobs outside of being a full-time PhD student (per BMS rules). In fact, SSPPS will pause your Intern License because of its limited duration (6 years maximum), and will have it re-instated when you return to the pharmacy program.

**Q. Can I start my lab rotations in Spring Quarter/earlier?**

**A.** You technically can, but it will be difficult to manage considering Spring Quarter is very rigorous in both P1 and P2 year. Lab rotations, for your own benefit, should be considered and treated as full-time research. This will ultimately be a discussion between you and the PI.