

VCU SOM Dean's Summer Research Fellowship

The purpose of Dean's Summer Research Fellowship program is to help students get valuable research experience in an area of their interest by offering them 8 weeks paid summer research fellowship at VCU.

Eligibility criteria and requirements for students and faculty mentors

- Fellowship is limited to current first-year VCU medical students to conduct funded research during the summer between years M1 and M2.
- Students may conduct research with any faculty member in the School of Medicine.
- Faculty members with primary appointments at the VA hospital and having VCU affiliation are eligible to mentor students.
- Projects in both clinical and basic sciences are eligible for funding.
- A student may submit only one application for the fellowship.
- A student should identify a faculty mentor in the area of their interest, discuss potential research projects with their mentor, write their own proposals, and seek faculty approval before submission.
- A list of over 300 potential mentors is available on the [student research website](#). Mentor searches should not be limited to this list only as some faculty members who are not part of this list.
- Each department has a point of contact (POC), also listed on the [website](#), who should be approached by email to facilitate engagement with potential mentors.
- Students who are selected for a Dean's Summer Research Fellowship receive a stipend of \$3,000 that will be paid in two equal installments. The number of these fellowships is limited and they are, therefore, competitive.
- Fellowships are awarded for a period of 8 weeks. Full time student commitment is required.
- A faculty member may mentor more than one fellowship-funded student, as long as the faculty member has time and resources to do so.
- Mentors must be present for at least 6 weeks to supervise students. Mentors should state their availability in the support letters.
- Dean's fellowship funding cannot be used for research outside of VCU and its affiliated institutions.

Application process

- Applicants must complete the [School of Medicine Student Summer Research Fellowship Application Form](#). Only online submissions will be accepted. Please use the following URL to submit your application.
<https://redcap.vcu.edu/surveys/?s=NDFRJE7NXXK7X9RA>
- The applicant's prospective research mentor must prepare an NIH-style Biosketch and a letter in which the mentor agrees to supervise the research and to be present for at least

six weeks of the research period. Instructions for the Biosketch can be found at the following link: <https://grants.nih.gov/grants/forms/biosketch.htm>.

- The applicant must upload the mentor's Letter and Biosketch online as part of the [School of Medicine Summer Research Fellowship Application](#).

Review of applications

Applications will be judged on three criteria:

1. **The quality of the mentorship plan** (Does the mentor have a history of successful research? Has the mentor made a commitment to supervise the student? Does the mentor have a prior history of mentorship success?).
2. **The quality of the applicant** (Does the applicant have prior research experience? Does the applicant demonstrate an understanding of and ability to describe the proposed research?). Please note that prior research experience is not required to apply for the fellowship.
3. **The quality of the research plan** (Is there a clearly stated and testable hypothesis? Is a clear rationale for the project presented with a statement of the research problem, prior research, and gaps in knowledge? Is the project feasible in the duration of the project? Will the project provide an educational experience for the student? Does it appear that the student wrote the proposal themselves?).

Student Obligations

- The student will devote full time to the research project and will not hold other jobs during this eight (8) week period.
- Students can apply for other fellowships while their application of the Dean's fellowship is under consideration. However, Dean's fellowship cannot be combined with other fellowships that require students to conduct research in summer.
- The student should promptly notify Dr. Zakir Ullah at the Office of Research when a student is unable to start the project or encounter serious problems that they are unable to resolve.
- The student will submit a poster of their research for presentation at Medical Student Research Day in April/May of the following year. Not all submitted research summaries are accepted for presentation. The best presentations are awarded prizes: First prize gets \$1,000, 2nd \$500 and 3rd \$250.
- Any publication resulting from this research should acknowledge support by the School of Medicine.

Important dates

- Announcement: November 15, 2024
- Application Submission Deadline: January 10, 2025, 5:00pm
- Decision Notification: February 2025

Contact Information

- Dr. Zakir Ullah, Director Scientific Review, (Zakir.Ullah@vcuhealth.org)

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the timeline for the application cycle?
Application are accepted from November to January. Review of applications is completed in January/February and students are notified in February. Exact dates and submission deadlines are subject to change and are communicated to eligible students each year
2. Who is eligible to apply for the fellowship?
Fellowship is limited to current first-year VCU medical students. Other students are not eligible to apply.
3. How can I apply for the fellowship?
Applications are accepted through online submission form. A link to the online submission form and other information can be found on the student research website (<https://medschool.vcu.edu/research/medical-students/>). Scroll down to the section titled “Dean’s Summer Research Fellowship”. Fellowship announcement sent to eligible students also have a submission link
4. Can I submit multiple projects for consideration?
No. A student may submit only one project for consideration.
5. Who can serve as a research mentor?
Any VCU SOM faculty member working on health-related research projects can be a mentor for the summer fellowship. Faculty members with primary appointments at the VA hospital and having VCU affiliation are also eligible to mentor students.
6. Can I work with a resident or fellow?
Residents and fellows usually don’t have faculty appointments at VCU. Students need to have a faculty mentors for their research projects. A resident or fellow who is working with a faculty member can serve as a mentor for the student, but students must provide the name of the faculty mentor on their fellowship application.
7. Is there a list of potential faculty mentors that I can use?

Yes, a list of some faculty members who have expressed interest in serving as mentors is available on the [student research website](https://medschool.vcu.edu/research/medical-students/) (<https://medschool.vcu.edu/research/medical-students/>). There are over 300 potential mentors listed on the website. However, please note that there are many additional faculty members who can be excellent mentors but are not included in the list. Students should not to limit their mentor searches to the list available on the student research website.

8. Will I get paid during the fellowship?

Yes. All fellowship awardees receive a stipend of \$3000 that will be paid in two installments. In addition, there are prizes for the best proposal and best research presentations at the end of the projects.

9. When will I get paid?

Payment dates vary from year to year and are dependent on how soon students provide information required for processing payments, and availability of personnel in the finance department who process payments. Generally speaking, students are paid in two installments, one in mid-June and the other in mid-July.

10. How long will I need to do the research?

Eight weeks. Typically, from mid-June to Mid-August, between the years M1 and M2. Students are required to work full time on their research projects.

11. Can I submit a project I am already working on, to apply for the Dean's fellowship?

Existing research projects are eligible for the Dean's fellowship. However, the student must work full time during the summer to conduct new experiments/collect or analyze data. Experiments previously completed cannot be used to apply for the fellowship.

12. Are data science projects eligible for the fellowship?

Yes. Data science projects related to human health and analysis of charts to extract useful information can be used to apply for the fellowship.

13. Can I use TriNetX for my research project?

Yes. Students interested in data science projects are encouraged to use TriNetX when appropriate.

14. How are the applications evaluated?

Applications will be judged on three criteria; the quality of the research plan, the quality of the applicant, the quality of the mentorship plan.

15. Is previous research experience necessary to apply for Dean's fellowship?

Although it helps to have some previous research experience, it is not required to apply for the fellowship.

16. Can I use the fellowship funds to conduct research at another institution/university?

Dean's fellowship funding cannot be used for research outside of VCU and its affiliated institutions.

17. What should I do when I face issues in communicating with my mentor?

If, after repeated efforts with the mentor, a student is unable to initiate their research project in time or finds that the mentor does not have enough time for them, they should inform the Office of Research (Zakir.Ullah@vcuhealth.org) and ask for guidance.

18. Will I need to present my work at the end of the fellowship?

Yes, all students are required to present their research at the *annual medical students' research day*, held in March/April, regardless of the outcome of their projects.

19. Do I need training before I start a research project?

Students may need to complete one or more trainings before starting a research project at VCU. The most common types of trainings are CITI training for project involving human subjects and laboratory safety training for projects that require work in the lab. Students are encouraged to complete the required training as soon as possible.

[Click here](#) to find out more about CITI training at VCU.

[Click Here](#) to find out more about safety training at VCU.

20. How are the best projects selected and prizes awarded?

Three posters are selected by a group of judges for the first, second and third positions that carry prizes of \$1000, \$500 and \$250 respectively. Best research proposal is also awarded a prize.

21. What is the success rate of applications for the Dean's fellowship?

Success rates for Dean's fellowship are high, but vary from year to year and depend on the number of applications received each year and availability of funds.

22. Can I combine the Dean's fellowship with other fellowships?

Students can apply for other fellowship while their application is under consideration for the Dean's Fellowship. Students with fellowship offers from other institutions will need to choose between the Dean's fellowship and the other offers. Dean's fellowship cannot be combined with other offers and require full time commitment for 8 weeks.

23. Can I submit a project that requires IRB approval?

Students should avoid submitting projects that will require submission of a new IRB application because there is a risk that such projects will not receive approval in time. If the project already has an approved IRB protocol then the student needs to be added to the protocol before working on the project.

24. Can I do my project remotely?

With the mentor's permission, appropriate projects may be completed in whole or part from a remote location.

25. Can I continue to work on my project after the 8 weeks fellowship period?

A student may continue to work on the project if approved by the mentor but will not be paid any additional sum.

26. When Can I start working on my fellowship project?

Start dates are flexible, and depend on availability of the mentor and the student. However, a full time 8 weeks commitment is required for the fellowship.