

University of South Carolina Post-baccalaureate Research Education Program

PREP Scholar Handbook

Introduction and Overview

Welcome PREP Scholars! The purpose of this handbook is to orient you to the goals of USC-PREP and to your own roles and responsibilities as a scholar.

As a PREP Scholar, you will:

- Spend a year working in a biomedical research laboratory to learn the nature of research in general and specific biomedical techniques in particular. You will receive research and academic guidance from faculty mentors as well as advanced graduate students and postdoctoral fellows. As a result, you will have the opportunity to demonstrate your aptitude for research and determine whether biomedical research is the right career choice.
- Take a graduate level course this summer and one graduate level course in the biomedical sciences per semester to demonstrate your ability to handle the intellectual requirements of graduate education. These courses should also give you a good start in your future formal graduate education since graduate credits obtained as PREP Scholars often are transferable.
- If needed, have the opportunity to enrich your undergraduate education through tutorials or appropriate coursework.
- Learn about the ethics and responsibilities of biomedical research.
- Have an opportunity to present your research at local and national meetings and ultimately publish it in peer-reviewed journals.

You have been matched with a member of the faculty who has an excellent reputation as a mentor and a well-respected biomedical research program. Besides participating in your mentor's research and taking graduate courses, you will have the opportunity to attend departmental seminars and journal clubs to help prepare you for success in graduate school. In addition, most of you will be working beside senior graduate students so that you can see research from a graduate student's perspective. We expect that PREP will enable you to apply successfully to the Graduate Schools of your choice. Your mentoring committee will be continually involved in advising you on your progress in the program and on career choices.

PREP scholars who demonstrate the potential to excel at biomedical research and who have a strong recommendation from their research advisory committee will be excellent candidates for acceptance into one of USC's Ph.D. programs (regardless of your GRE score, if you have taken the exam) and encouraged to apply for admission to other Ph.D. programs as well. Indeed, most of our PREP graduates go on to prestigious graduate programs around the country. Furthermore, we anticipate that your laboratory research experience and graduate coursework will not only ensure your acceptance into a graduate program, but also will shorten the time needed to complete the Ph.D. degree.

Schools to which USC-PREP Scholars have recently been admitted for doctoral education:

- Albert Einstein College of Medicine, New York
- New York University
- Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island
- Georgetown University, Washington

- Emory University, Atlanta
- University of Virginia, Charlottesville
- University of Maryland, Baltimore
- University of Alabama Medical School, Birmingham
- Duke University, Durham, North Carolina
- University of California, Santa Barbara
- University of California, Santa Cruz
- Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge
- Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio
- Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan
- New Mexico State University, Las Cruces
- Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia
- Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan
- University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina
- University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia

Contact and Financial Information

Direction of USC-PREP

Drs. Bert Ely, Alissa Armstrong and Richard Hunt are the directors of PREP.

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Financial Support

As a PREP scholar, you will receive an annual salary that is paid at the rate of \$640 per 40-hour week. Paychecks are issued twice per month on the 15th and the last day of the month. Take note that the amount of each check may vary since the pay period may cover a different number of days. You can view the payroll schedule [here](#). Usually, your first check will be a month after you start the program.

Take note that there will be a pay interruption over winter break since you will have to be rehired for the Spring 2025 semester. It is important that you plan accordingly. Fall 2024 pay starts June 15 and ends December 23. Spring 2025 pay starts January 2 with variable end dates.

USC PREP will pay your tuition and provide optional medical insurance.

Program Components

YOUR ADVISORY COMMITTEE/EVALUATION OF YOUR PERFORMANCE

You will have an advisory committee consisting of your mentor and Drs. Armstrong, Ely and Hunt who will evaluate your strengths and weaknesses and guide the progress of the apprenticeship. Your committee will meet with you regularly (at least once per semester) to evaluate progress. During these informal meetings, you will start by giving a short presentation on your research progress, followed by any questions and suggestions from the committee.

YOUR RESEARCH LAB

The core of the PREP is a 30-hour per week experience carrying out independent research in your mentor's laboratory. It is intended that you envisage yourself as an essential part of your home laboratory's research effort. You are expected to attend and participate in lab meetings. You will be given your own space in the laboratory or a nearby office, and access to computers. By the middle of the first semester, you should have learned basic laboratory techniques and be engaged actively in a research project. By the end of your PREP experience, you should have some significant research accomplishments. Many PREP scholars have been co-authors on research publications and many were working on papers by the end of their program.

Publications by UofSC PREP Scholars are listed [here](#)

PREP MEETINGS

All PREP Scholars will attend meetings every two or three weeks. These meetings will serve four purposes:

- to provide opportunities for PREP scholars to talk about their research
- to provide opportunities to PREP scholars to interact and establish networking relationships
- to provide a forum where students can learn about graduate school and strategies for success in PhD programs
- and to provide a structure that adds cohesion to the program and a forum for dealing with issues as they arise.

At these PREP meetings, we often have a guest speaker.

OTHER RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

Like regular graduate students, you are encouraged to attend and present at local and national meetings and workshops in order to convey your findings to your academic colleagues and gain visibility in the biomedical sciences job market. Funds are available to cover the costs of travel to at least one scientific meeting per year.

SEMINARS

The Biology and Chemistry (Biochemistry) Departments in the School of Arts and Sciences, the Department of Drug Discovery and Biomedical Sciences in the College of Pharmacy and the UofSC School of Medicine have weekly seminar series (plus additional seminars). In addition, there are seminar series presented by the Graduate Students on their work. PREP scholars are encouraged to attend these seminars.

COURSEWORK

Each scholar will have his or her program tailored to their individual needs. After the summer Biotechnology course, it is expected that each scholar will enroll in a 3 credit hour course each semester. In addition, there will be a research ethics course in the fall. You must also take all of the appropriate laboratory safety and hazardous materials courses that UofSC mandates for all researchers.

The Biotechnology course (BIOL 655) in the second half of the summer session and the ethics course are the only mandatory courses in UofSC PREP. All other courses are decided by you and your advisory committee according to your educational needs. BIOL 655, which is taught by Drs. Ely and Hunt, allows the directors of the program to assess your preparation for graduate school.

In discussion with their advisory committee, PREP scholars will indicate where their own interests lie, but it is essential that they have a basic grounding in biomedical science. It is expected that you will earn a B or better in each of your courses. If you are concerned about your coursework, please inform your faculty advisor and Dr. Ely immediately to help devise a plan that will allow you to learn the course material and earn the desired grade.

To Do (Getting Situated at UofSC and in Columbia):

IMMUNIZATIONS

You cannot do much at UofSC (no registration, no student I.D and no money) until you have met the immunization requirements for measles and rubella. If you have already received these shots, you will need to bring a photocopy of your medical record to the Thompson Student Health Center (behind Russell House) and fill out a simple form. If you are not immunized, you will need to set up a time to do so. For more information call 803-777-9511 or go to:

<http://www.sa.sc.edu/shs/tshc/immunizations.shtml>

CITIZENSHIP/RESIDENCY VERIFICATION

You will have no money, ID, or classes without first verifying your citizenship or legal residence with the university. In 2008, the South Carolina Legislature passed a law requiring "...that lawful presence in the United States is verified before enrollment at any public institution of higher education." So if you are a US citizen, please bring your official US birth certificate, US passport, or other approved document with you when you move to Columbia and be prepared to present it for verification either in person or via fax. Permanent residents should bring their immigration (green) cards.

For a full list of appropriate documents and more information about the verification process, please go to the following website:

<http://registrar.sc.edu/html/citizenshipverification.stm>

SELF SERVICE CAROLINA REGISTRATION

Self Service Carolina, our online system, is very important in your life as a PREP Scholar. You will use it to register for your courses, check your grades, update your W-4, check your upcoming paychecks, and much, much more. To access Self Service Carolina, please follow the directions below:

First time student users should go here and follow the directions:

<https://my.sc.edu/>

After your first use of the system, you will log in using your VIP ID. You should be able to find your VIP ID in your graduate school acceptance letter.

BANKING SERVICES

Membership at Carolina Collegiate Federal Credit Union is available to all students of the University of South Carolina. For more information, go to <http://www.carolina.org/>

There are other banks in the area such as Wells Fargo, Bank of America, etc. which you can find by

doing an internet search or looking in a Columbia area phonebook. If you have any problems obtaining a bank account, please see Dr Ely. You must have a bank account for direct deposit of your paycheck.

STUDENT IDENTIFICATION CARD

One of the first things you should do is get your South Carolina ID. These can be obtained at the Carolina Mall, which is located on the bottom floor of Russell House (the Student Union). You will need your ID to check out library books, attend athletic events, and other university functions. PREP Scholars based at the School of Medicine should obtain a VA campus ID from the Auxiliary Services office in the basement of building 3.

PARKING/VEHICLE REGISTRATION

It currently costs between \$280 and \$340 per semester to park in one of the garages, but many consider it to be well worth the money. If your finances are really tight you can pay \$75 a year to park in designated student parking lots, which fill up VERY QUICKLY. There are outlying lots from which shuttle buses bring students onto the main parts of campus. In addition, many apartment complexes near the main campus offer a shuttle to the Horseshoe area; however, the shuttles only operate on days when there are classes.

The Parking Services Office is located on the bottom floor of the Pendleton St garage and you can get information about parking here. For more information call 803-777-5160 or go to: <http://www.sc.edu/vmps/park.html>.

Scholars based at the School of Medicine campus can obtain a VA campus parking permit from Auxiliary Services. Please note which parking areas are available at the VA campus to School of Medicine students and employees. Parking in the wrong lot can lead to fines.

ESTABLISHING SC RESIDENCY

Details can be found here: <http://www.sc.edu/bursar/residency.shtml>. For tuition purposes, you qualify for in-state tuition since you are a full time UofSC employee. If your account shows that you are being charged out-of-state tuition rates, please contact Dr Hunt or Dr Ely immediately. They will certify to the residency office that you qualify for in-state tuition rates.

EMAIL

All PREP Scholars will be assigned a university email account

LOCAL UTILITY INFORMATION

You will need to contact the appropriate utility companies to turn on your service after you obtain a house or apartment. Please note that the companies listed below are not the only utility companies available in Columbia, rather they are just a sampling, and UofSC does not endorse any particular company. For a more comprehensive list of companies, please check a Columbia area phonebook or search the internet.

Electric and Gas

Dominion Energy - 1-800-251-7234 or www.sceg.com

Home telephone

ATT (BellSouth) <http://www.bellsouth.com/consumer/residentialservice/index.html>
Vonage <https://www.vonage.com/>

Water

Columbia Water Department - 803-545-3300 <http://www.columbiasc.net/waterservices>

Cable TV/Internet

Spectrum Cable - 803-252-2253 <https://www.spectrum.com/?cmp=TWG>

While on the main campus and at the medical school you have access to UofSC Wi-Fi

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE CITY OF COLUMBIA

For information about Columbia neighborhoods, city history, area attractions, arts and culture, bike paths, parks, etc. go to: <http://www.columbiasc.net/>

HOUSING

As full time temporary employees of the University of South Carolina, PREP Scholars are not eligible for student housing. Before coming to Columbia, we will put you in touch with other PREP Scholars with whom you may wish to share an apartment and, when you are here, we will provide you with information on suitable, affordable housing near the main and medical school campuses. Apartments in Columbia are relatively inexpensive.

WHERE TO GO WITH SPECIFIC COMPLAINTS

There is no one designated way to handle every request or complaint. Your options include talking with your graduate student colleagues, your faculty mentor, your advisory committee, or other members of your lab. The PREP meetings are also a good forum for asking questions and discussing issues. In all cases, Drs. Hunt, Ely and Armstrong are always willing to help.

EVALUATION OF THE PREP PROGRAM

Dr. Brittany Cook of The Wandersman Center will conduct evaluations of all aspects of UofSC PREP. Evaluations will be carried out each semester and will be reported to the PREP Steering Committee. PREP scholars are expected to attend evaluation meetings and to fill out evaluation forms as requested. Dr Cook also carries out exit interviews with all PREP Scholars.

ONE YEAR OR TWO

Scholars normally stay in PREP for one year. If you think that you will need more than one year to make a successful application to a graduate school of your choice, you should discuss this with the PREP directors. A second year is an unusual option and will only be decided by the directors near the end of year 1.

AFTER PREP

Your advisory committee will discuss career options with you and provide advice and assistance. There will be seminars on various career paths throughout the PREP year. These will include such topics as:

- Working at a large university
- Being a minority or woman in academia
- Working at a small college
- Careers in government research such as CDC or NIH
- Research in a large pharmaceutical company
- Research in a small biotech company

Many of these seminars are presented by former PREP Scholars. In addition, in November when you will be making your graduate school applications, we will have seminars on making a good

application, presented by graduate directors of UofSC programs, and we will arrange mock graduate school interviews so that you will know what to expect.

You will be advised on your choice of graduate programs and guided through the application process. The directors will ensure that the application process goes smoothly.

Once you complete PREP and get into a graduate program, it is important that you keep in touch with Dr. Ely and Dr. Hunt. We want to know your success stories and we are **required** by NIH to keep track of your progress through the completion of your Ph.D., any postdoctoral programs, and your first job; in fact, we are asked to track your career for at least 15 years after you leave UofSC PREP. Your continued success helps ensure that UofSC PREP will be able to renew its funding.

Please note: Although you will be assigned either a UofSC or UofSC Medical School email account, these are usually terminated when you leave the university. So that we are able to keep in touch with you, we would appreciate that you give us a personal email address (Gmail, Yahoo, Hotmail etc.).

PREP SCHOLAR TOOLKIT

INTRODUCTION

The following section of the handbook includes tools designed to help you to set a timeline for your completion of PREP and to meet goals you have for yourself while in the program. These tools can help facilitate communication between you and your faculty mentor, as well as with the PREP directors. The tools are designed to lead the PREP scholars in a more proactive direction about planning for your time in USC PREP. The tools should make the time during your mentor meetings more efficient and direct discussion of your progress between you and your faculty mentor. Each tool will be prefaced by directions about how the tool is to be used.

PROGRAM COMPLETION TIMELINE CHECKLIST DIRECTIONS

The major goal of UofSC PREP is to prepare you for graduate study in the field of bio-medical sciences. The following timeline checklist is designed to help you keep on track of all the steps in the application process. Most Scholars complete PREP in one year.

It will be helpful to look at these timelines when you begin PREP and to decide your trajectory early so that you can complete your goals in the PREP in just one year. Many of the steps in the graduate school application process need to be started in your first semester.

Many schools are no longer requiring the GRE but some still do and you may want to apply to one of these. Taking the GRE includes allowing enough time to prepare properly. If you decide you want to take the GRE more than once, you must wait a month between each test. UofSC has GRE preparation classes. Please see Dr Ely for more information.

The timeline will also help your faculty mentor see where you are in the process and help direct discussion that you will have about your transition to graduate school. You should raise any questions you may have about the application process with your mentor and with the PREP directors. Sharing your timeline with your mentor and the PREP directors will help keep you on the same page and allow them time to help you in the process.

PREP Scholar
Individual Development Plan
University of South Carolina

The Individual Development Plan (IDP) is a mechanism for creating and accomplishing both long and short term goals in pursuit of a desired career goal. To receive maximum benefit from the IDP process, it is essential that both PREP Scholar and their faculty mentor participate in the process. The PREP Scholar should complete the initial draft of the IDP and then review it with their research mentor.

Name of PREP Scholar _____

Signature _____

Date _____

Name of Primary Mentor _____

Signature _____

Date _____

Part I. Goals for This Year (to be completed by the PREP Scholar)

A. Research Goals

Provide a timeline of research activities planned for this year.

B. Training and Professional Goals and Progress

List all planned activities for the rest of the year in the following categories. Provide as much detail as possible.

Planned coursework

Graduate training research focus area

PhD program application process

Professional meeting attendance

Part II. Career Goals and Planning (to be completed by the PREP Scholar)

What is your current career goal? (Need ideas? Look here:
<http://www.sc.edu/career/exploremajors.html>)

Why does this career appeal to you?

What other career path(s) interest(s) you?

Why does this (do these) other career path(s) appeal to you?

In order to be competitive for your desired career path(s), what additional training or experience is needed prior to applying for positions?