

Senior Scholars FAQs:

What is Senior Scholars?

The Senior Scholars Program provides an opportunity for scholarly activities that serve not only as an introduction to the philosophy of research based on answering questions through hypothesis generation, information gathering, experimentation, and critical interpretation, but as a tool for growth in an evidence-based health care environment.

Senior Scholars is a Type C research elective for students who want to conduct a research project mentored by a faculty member. Overall, the Senior Scholars Program offers students the following:

- Allows a first-hand view of "scientific principles" and their application in medicine;
- Provides an opportunity for performing high-quality clinical, epidemiology-based, quality improvement, or basic science research;
- Provides a basis for critical interpretation of the medical literature; and
- Assists in career decisions.

Why might a student want to participate in Senior Scholars?

Previous students have provided many reasons to the Senior Scholars Committee and other UMMS medical students why this has been a positive experience for them in which to participate. Among the many testimonials provided by former students are:

- "My research was the #1 topic for all of my residency interviews." "It gives you something to talk about right off the bat."
- "It's very flexible." "It's easy to get involved in research."
- "I learned a lot about data collection." "I learned a lot about publishing a paper." "I learned a lot about research in-depth."
- "It was great to work one-on-one with a mentor and get to know an attending at a different level." "Faculty really enjoy having students to work with on their research."
- "It's a different way of thinking; a different pace of thinking. It's can be stressful, but not the same stress as in the clinical setting."
- "It allowed me an opportunity to exercise other parts of my brain."
- "I was able to understand the different roles of people in research; I more fully understood the role of collaboration."

Are there particular areas of research that a student chooses from in picking a Senior Scholars project?

No. UMMS Senior Scholars have completed projects in all major fields of basic science, clinical medicine, epidemiology, and public health. Recent graduates have completed projects in primary care (Pediatrics, Family Medicine and Internal Medicine), Cardiology, Orthopedics, Emergency Medicine, the Cancer Center, Infectious Disease, Health Policy, Dermatology, Neurology, Medical Education, OB/GYN, Palliative Medicine, Anesthesiology, Surgery, Quality Improvement, and many more!

Are there minimum or maximum amounts of time a student must spend to get Senior Scholars credit?

The student must spend a minimum of 2 months on their Senior Scholars project. They can get credit for up to 3 months. Beyond 3 months, the student may apply for independent research elective credits or might apply to do a month-long Scientific Writing elective.

Do the months of Senior Scholars have to be back-to-back?

No, the 2-3 months need not be contiguous as long as you have the approval of your mentor. Many projects need the continuity of back-to-back months, but not all do.

Are there any restrictions as to 'when' a student can complete their Senior Scholars months?

Senior Scholars months must be completed by March of the student's graduating year so that April can be used to complete the required Abstract and prepare a scientific poster for presentation at Senior Scholars Poster Presentation Day (in late April or early May of each year).

In addition, unless there are extenuating circumstances, students are not allowed to use both of their Senior Scholars months which are typically reserved for residency interviews (e.g., November/December or December/January – depending on residency interview schedules of a particular specialty). While there are often many aspects of research that can be done 'off-campus', the Senior Scholars Committee has chosen not to allow both months (if only 2 are being completed) to be during residency interview blocks.

Can Senior Scholars projects be done with a mentor outside of UMMS?

Yes, students may work on a Senior Scholars project at another institution as long as it meets the requirements from a research perspective. Additionally, since this is a UMMS internal elective program, students conducting their research outside of UMMS must also identify a UMMS faculty advisor to co-mentor them (though in a secondary role to the primary mentor at the outside institution).

Can Senior Scholars projects be done internationally?

Yes, as noted above, projects may be done at other institutions, including international settings, as long as the minimum number of months are 'research' months in addition to the international travel, medical education, and language immersion experiences that are often tied into reasons why a student might want to go abroad during their clinical years (and obtain credit).

In addition to the time commitment, are there other requirements of the Senior Scholars Program?

Yes, students are expected to write/submit a 1-2 page Abstract summarizing their project in the March/April timeframe of their graduating year. Students are also required to present their Senior Scholars project at the Senior Scholars Poster Presentation Day which is held in late April/early May of each year. Both of these requirements are necessary to fulfill the goal that scientific exploration isn't truly complete until you disseminate your findings.

Additionally, with permission from the student and his/her mentor, abstracts and posters are uploaded onto the university's eScholarship@UMMS digital repository. This allows additional dissemination of a summary of the project's findings. Students are provided a link to this site so that they may include it on their resume and/or residency application. To view some of the current listings for Senior Scholars projects on eScholarship@UMMS, go to: <http://escholarship.umassmed.edu/ssp/>.

Are there requirements to present Senior Scholars findings at a conference or submit an article to a peer-reviewed medical journal once the project is complete?

No, neither of these is formally required, though we encourage all students and their mentors to explore scholarly outputs of a Senior Scholars project. Nearly one-third of previous Senior Scholars (over the past 15 years) have presented their findings at a regional/national conference and/or published their work in a peer-reviewed medical journal.

What's the difference between doing a Senior Scholars project and an independent research elective?

The scope of the projects is often not different at all. However, Senior Scholars requires a minimum of 2 months commitment while independent research electives can be just one month in length. Also, independent research electives do not have the requirements of a written Abstract and a formal Poster presentation as do Senior Scholars.

What's the difference between doing a Senior Scholars project and my Capstone project? Can my Capstone project 'count' towards Senior Scholars?

These are great questions and ones that are just being rolled out as the next cohort of Senior Scholars (Class of 2016) is the first one to have the Capstone project graduation requirement. While we continue to work through details of various scenarios, it's definitely possible that one's Capstone project may be 'converted' into a Senior Scholars project (e.g., students in the CTRP – research pathway) given the scope of some Capstone projects and their research focus. However, not all Capstone projects are research-based per se and there might be some that don't have the same depth as a Senior Scholars project. We (the Senior Scholars Committee) hope to be fairly flexible over the next 2 years in seeing how some Capstone projects transition to Senior Scholars. If a student does a Senior Scholars project, they are likely to be 'waived' the Capstone requirement and will only have to do the reflective writing piece that's part of the 4th year deliverables within the Capstone Scholarship and Discovery (CSD) course. The other CSD deliverables will be completed through Senior Scholars. Stay tuned as we work through this transition period – we'll be very open to student input!

Where can I find additional information about the Senior Scholars Program and the necessary program application?

Our UMMS web page is: <http://www.umassmed.edu/oume/rso/ssp.aspx>. The program's application can be found at this site as well as several other links of interest.

Are there individuals I can contact to find out more about the program or to ask questions about whether my project idea(s) might fit the Senior Scholars Program?

Yes, you may contact either of the individuals below:

Program Director: Judy Savageau, MPH
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Department of Family Medicine and Community Health
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