

Guidelines for the Fisk/Vanderbilt Masters-to-PhD Bridge program

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I. General

The Fisk-Vanderbilt Masters-to-PhD Bridge Program was designed by Fisk and Vanderbilt faculty dedicated to expanding opportunities for students to succeed in earning a PhD. At this time there are four participating Vanderbilt PhD programs: (1) Department of Physics & Astronomy, (2) Interdisciplinary Program in Materials Science and Nanophysics, (3) Biomedical Research, and (4) Medical Imaging. This program is intended for motivated students who seek careers in the physical or biomedical sciences, but who may need (or want) additional coursework, training, or research experience before beginning PhD-level work. While all students begin with Masters-level coursework in physics at Fisk, the program is flexible and highly individualized to the goals of the student. Courses are selected to address any gaps in undergraduate preparation, and research experiences are designed to help pave the way for PhD-level work in the chosen area of study. While at Fisk, students enjoy regular interaction with Vanderbilt faculty and graduate students. This includes access to research facilities and instructional opportunities at Vanderbilt and, in some cases, Masters thesis work performed under the supervision of Vanderbilt faculty. In all cases, we develop mentoring relationships between students and faculty that will foster a successful transition from the Masters to the Ph.D.

II. Admission to Fisk and to the Fisk-Vanderbilt Bridge program

- A. The student must first apply for admission to the Fisk MA program in physics. Admission to the Fisk Masters program is decided by the Fisk faculty following Fisk's standard admissions procedures. This is a prerequisite to admission to the Bridge program.
- B. The student should indicate on the Fisk application that they wish to be considered for the Fisk-Vanderbilt Bridge program. The GRE is not required for entrance into the Fisk program, but the general GRE (and for some programs the subject GRE as well) is ultimately required for admission to the Vanderbilt PhD program. Students already at Fisk and in good standing may also request admission to the Bridge program. This must be done at least one year prior to the planned completion of the Fisk MA degree. These students are also required to take the general and subject (physics) GRE in order to gain admission to the Vanderbilt PhD program.
- C. Admission to the Fisk-Vanderbilt Bridge program will be determined by the Fisk-Vanderbilt Bridge program committee, consisting of three faculty members each from Fisk and Vanderbilt, and specifically including the Chair of the Physics Department at Fisk, the Director of Graduate Studies in the Vanderbilt Department of Physics & Astronomy, the Fisk representative to the Vanderbilt Interdisciplinary Program in Materials Science, and the Fisk representative to the Vanderbilt Medical Center's Biomedical Research Program.

III. Facilitating a Successful Transition to the PhD: Programmatic Elements

It is the explicit goal of the Fisk-Vanderbilt Bridge program that students in the program will be well known to a number of Vanderbilt faculty by the time that they are ready to apply to the

Vanderbilt PhD program, thus allowing for an admissions decision that is more holistic in nature, and informed by more personal experience, than is often possible in the admissions process. Indeed, fostering individual mentoring relationships between Fisk students and Vanderbilt faculty is at the very heart of the Bridge program, and is the key metric by which its success is to be evaluated. To this end, the Bridge program includes the following key elements:

- A. Students admitted to the Bridge program receive full financial support in an amount that is standard for full-time graduate research assistants at Fisk University. Funding will be provided through a combination of institutional support and extramural support, as appropriate, for a minimum of two years.
- B. Upon admission to the Bridge program, the student will be assigned, in addition to a primary Fisk advisor, a secondary Vanderbilt advisor. For students who are certain of the area of research interest, the secondary advisor will be matched to that interest. The role of the secondary advisor is to serve as a mentor and as an expert on the rules and procedures at Vanderbilt.
- C. Students in the Bridge program, in addition to the interactions with their advisors, will meet at least two times per year (in approximately December and August) with the Fisk-Vanderbilt Bridge program committee to review progress and receive guidance.
- D. Students in the Bridge program are required to participate in supervised research, either at Fisk or at Vanderbilt, during at least the second academic year of the program.
- E. Students in the Bridge program are required to participate in supervised research at Vanderbilt during each summer of the program. These will be paid research internships in an amount that is standard for summer research assistants at Vanderbilt University. Funding will be provided through a combination of institutional support and extramural support, as appropriate.
- F. Students in the Bridge program will be eligible to: cross-register for Vanderbilt courses; receive a discounted Vanderbilt parking permit; receive a Vanderbilt photo ID card; receive a Vanderbilt email account; access Vanderbilt library facilities; receive a city bus pass for transportation to and from Fisk.

IV. Admission to the Vanderbilt PhD program

Admission to the Vanderbilt PhD program will be decided by the standard admissions procedures of the relevant Vanderbilt graduate program. The policy of Vanderbilt's graduate programs is to admit students for whom the total of the evidence strongly indicates that the student is capable of completing the PhD degree. All students in the Vanderbilt PhD program receive financial support, in the form of Teaching Assistant and/or Research Assistant support, for a minimum of four years. Requirements for admission are:

- A. Complete the requirements for the Fisk MA degree in physics. Admission can be offered contingent upon the student completing the Fisk degree.
- B. Maintain a minimum 3.5 GPA and achieve A or B grades in the "core" courses (e.g., for physics, these are Mechanics, E&M, and Quantum), and in thesis and research courses while at Fisk. For astronomy students, receive at least B grades in astronomy courses.
- C. Take at least one course at Vanderbilt. Additional courses at Vanderbilt are highly recommended. The student must receive at least a B grade in each course taken at Vanderbilt.
- D. Complete the Vanderbilt application for the relevant PhD program by the January

deadline of the year for which Fall admission is being sought. Applications for admission to Vanderbilt at other times of the year are discouraged as a vast majority of financial support is on a yearly cycle that starts with the Fall semester. Note that the Biomedical Research PhD program uses a separate “fast-track” application process for Fisk-Vanderbilt Bridge program participants. Links to all application forms are available from the Bridge program website (see below).

- E. A minimum of three letters of recommendation: one from the student’s Fisk advisor, one from the student’s secondary Vanderbilt advisor, and one from a Vanderbilt faculty who has taught the student a course. More than three letters is encouraged.

Note: While a Fisk student, all of the student's academic and financial matters will be handled through Fisk University, and while a Vanderbilt student, all the student's academic and financial matters will be handled through Vanderbilt University.

Up-to-Date Program Information: [<http://www.physics.vanderbilt.edu/bridge>]