A RESOURCE MANUAL FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS IN THE DEPARTMENT OF MEDICAL GENETICS

A brief summary of where to go when you need help or have questions.

This manual is intended as a resource for graduate students in the department of Medical Genetics. It contains brief summaries, references and links to different resources and services that are available to graduate students at the University of Alberta in reference to academic, career and health issues. This not meant to be an exhaustive account of all services you may need but instead highlights those that may be of most use and students are encouraged to explore all the resources at their disposal.

Administrative Organization Within the Department

Medical Genetics has an administrative structure to assist our graduate students with their academic progress. This includes the graduate committee chaired by the Graduate Coordinator, and a graduate program administrator. The department provides the day-to day supervision of your program and ensures that registration, approval for exams, supervisory committees and supervisory committee meetings, defenses are properly set up and completed as per schedules as described in the department of Medical Genetics Graduate Manual.

Graduate Director – Dr. Zhixiang Wang, 8-35 MSB (zhixiang.wang@ualberta.ca)
On behalf of the Graduate Committee, I would like to welcome you to the Department of Medical Genetics. We are part of the Medical Sciences Graduate program (https://www.ualberta.ca/en/medicine/programs/graduatestudies/msgp/index.html). As a graduate coordinator, I oversee the administration and any changes to our graduate program. I also provide counsel to our students on academic, scientific, and departmental issues. I work closely with the Department Chair, program administrator, students, supervisors and supervisory committees to assist our students as they progress through their program. My goal is to facilitate each student be able to reach their full potential during their program. If you have any question or concerns, require guidance on specific issues please feel free to drop by my office or contact me to make an appointment.

Program Administrator – Ms. Tolulope Oni, 8-39 MSB, 780-492-9104 (too1@ualberta.ca)
Tolulope is the main administrator of the nuts and bolts of your program. If you have questions or concerns about your stipend, registration for courses, awards and so on please see Tolu. Any information regarding ethics training, scholarship deadlines, courses, professional development will be distributed by e-mail by Tolu. Please pay close attention to deadlines provided by Shari. Information on Departmental seminars will be distributed by Heather Allan.

Administrative Support within the University

In addition to resources within the department, there are many resources available across campus that are committed to providing assistance to graduate students as they adjust to and progress through their graduate program. These include:

Faculty of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies (GPS) (https://www.ualberta.ca/en/graduate-studies/index.html). All graduate students are members of the GPS. A nice overview of GPS and the services available can be found at the above website. GPS supports every aspect of a graduate students' experience from admission all the way through to convocation. This includes among other services: scholarships, awards (https://www.ualberta.ca/en/graduate-studies/fees-funding/scholarships-awards/index.html), loan information, leaves of absences, academic records, program changes, thesis preparation and thesis submission, teaching training, and professional development (https://www.ualberta.ca/en/graduate-studies/training-events/other-professional-development/index.html).

Medical Genetics interacts with GPS via the Graduate Director and Program administrator. The GPS decanal team is responsible for program-related matter such as issues arising regarding approvals for candidacy examinations,

external examiners, and final defense arrangements and drafting of conditions for academic probation. The GPS Associate Deans provide advice and support to graduate students. They can participate in both formal and informal processes to resolve issues as they arise. Students wishing to book an appointment with an GPS Associate Dean to discuss an academic issue should send a request by email to grad.assoc.dean@ualberta.ca.

The Graduate Students' Association (GSA) (http://www.gsa.ualberta.ca/). The GSA comprises a student-led representative body for graduate students at the University of Alberta. This group also advocates for various student issues. All graduate students are automatically members of the GSA. They also provide access to a range of services including a health and dental plan, home and auto insurance and the U-PASS (reduced cost for use of ETS and LRT). They also provide grants, awards and bursaries for emergency funding and travel to conferences.

Student Success and Experience (https://www.ualberta.ca/en/student-success-experience/index.html). The Office of the Dean of Students has changed its name to Student Success and Experience (SSE). Student Success and Experience holds student support at the heart of everything we do. We are committed to building an inclusive community that encourages students to flourish. We strive to provide accessible support that drives student success, working in collaboration with community partners.

Writing and Learning Centre (https://www.ualberta.ca/en/current-students/writing-learning/index.html). Writing is an essential skill we all need to work on and some students may find it more difficult. This centre offers free, one-on-one writing to all graduate students in any subject or discipline, in any program and at all levels of study. This can include assistance on research papers, grant proposal, resume, articles, thesis chapters. Check out the website for making on-line appointment or drop in at their office. The tutors do not write for you but assist you in improving your writing skills. Specific resources are available for EST students. Check out the website for hours, free workshops and writing tips.

International Student + Visitor Services (https://www.ualberta.ca/en/international/international-student-services/index.html). International Service Centre (ISC is located on the main floor of the TELUS Centre. The University of Alberta is committed to helping international students not only to adjust to life in Canada, but to also provide a supportive environment for them during their studies. This covers information and tips on immigration, visa and study permits, to dealing with the weather our city has to offer, dealing with a new culture and homesickness. There are also workshops on a variety of topics throughout the year, and many other events.

Assistance for Graduate Students at the University of Alberta

Graduate studies is hard work and sometimes you need a little extra assistance whether that be financially or for your physical and mental wellbeing. Being healthy and active can also assist in alleviating some of the stresses of graduate school. There are several resources on campus that are available to you.

Student Service Centre (https://www.ualberta.ca/en/services/student-service-centre/index.html)
The Student Service Centre supports prospective, undergraduate, graduate and continuing education students at every stage of their University of Alberta journey. We'll help you make the most of your experience by providing information, services and support for your academic, financial, mental and physical well-being. If we can't answer your questions, we'll connect you with someone who can.

Financial Support: Financial assistance programs, including bursaries, scholarships, and emergency aid, are managed within the unified Scholarships, Awards + Financial Support division of the Office of the Registrar (https://www.ualberta.ca/en/registrar/scholarships-awards-financial-support/index.html).

Physical and Mental Wellness: Graduate students have access to state-of-the-art recreation services, gym classes, and qualified personal trainers at the University of Alberta. All campus physical recreation spaces, bookings, and student memberships are now managed under the Campus & Community Recreation (CC_R) hub (https://www.ualberta.ca/en/campus-community-recreation/index.html).

University Health Centre on campus 2-200 SUB (https://www.ualberta.ca/en/services/health-centre/index.html). It is also very important to maintain one's health during their graduate studies. Whether you are feeling ill, need your regular check-up or have questions this is a walk-in clinic that is located on the second floor of the Students' Union Building (SUB). You will require your ONE card and proof of provincial health insurance coverage. This facility can also be accessed by your immediate family members (i.e. spouse, partner or children).

Counselling Opportunities: Graduate school can also be a challenging, and occasionally frustrating, experience. Our graduate students have access to several counselling opportunities to assist them through difficult times. Two such services are provided below.

- **Graduate Student Assistance Program (GSAP)** (https://gsa-ualberta.ca/programs-services/graduate-student-assistance-program). Administered by Homewood Health, GSAP provides confidential counselling services on a broad range of issues including, but not limited to: anxiety, stress, depression, conflict, managing multiple life roles, etc. The GSAP also offers a wealth of health promotion programs and services including nutritional and fitness consultations, legal and financial consultations, and a health and wellness library of articles and e-courses. Homewood Health's health professionals are registered psychologists or master's-level registered counsellors, chosen for their extensive experience dealing with a variety of psychological and health issues. The counselling provided is solution focused cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and the counsellor and client determine the number of sessions needed to address the issue. All GSA members are enrolled in GSAP, and their partners and dependents can also access the program. Homewood Health's services are accessible 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.
- **Counselling and Clinical Services –on campus -2-600 SUB** (https://www.ualberta.ca/en/current-students/counselling/index.html). Another option is the counselling and clinical services centre which is located on the second floor of SUB. As stated on their website, the Counselling and Clinical Services "Counselling & Clinical Services helps students like you tackle anxiety, depression, stress, loneliness, grief, trauma and more. We offer therapy, group therapy, workshops, psychiatric services, consultations and referrals. We have a diverse team of psychologists, psychiatrists, nurses, clinical social workers and student clinicians who are dedicated to providing inclusive, compassionate and affirming care. Our services are free and confidential. You can request your appointment to be in-person or remote (subject to availability)."

Progression Through Your Graduate Studies

As part of your graduate studies there are a variety of opportunities to acquire career and professional development skills and meet your goals. This can be participation in the Departmental Research Day, attendance at conferences, on-line courses, and seminars within the Department, Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry. We encourage students to explore the various opportunities at their disposal both online and across campus. A few possibilities and potential funding for different opportunities are highlighted below.

Support to attend Scientific Conferences: This is an excellent way to advance you knowledge in your field and to build networks.

GPS offers travel awards to support conference, or research-related travel to graduate students. More details can be found at the GPS website (https://www.ualberta.ca/en/graduate-studies/fees-funding/scholarships-awards/travel-awards-graduate-students.html).

The Graduate Students' Association (GSA) offers financial support for travel through the GSA Academic Travel Grant. This grant is designed to help graduate students cover the costs of attending or presenting at academic conferences, symposia, or workshops (https://gsa-ualberta.ca/financial-support/grants).

Travel award by MDGEN Department: MDGEN also offers travel award to our graduate students. Students can apply anytime during their graduate study in the department. The value is $500 for Poster presentation and $1000 for oral presentation.

Awards and Fellowships

Another way to build one's CV is to apply for funding opportunities within the University (QE II, 75th,), provincially (Alberta Innovates) or nationally (CIHR, NSERC). Generally, deadlines for these awards will be sent out to students from the main office, but students are encouraged to search out opportunities that are relevant to their studies. Be familiar with deadlines and requirements for different funding so that the best possible applications can be put forward. These awards are very competitive and you are encouraged to use the resources around you. Often there will be information and tip sessions held within the Faculty to assist in applying for awards.

Career Centre (https://www.ualberta.ca/en/career-centre/index.html)
The Career Centre empowers U of A students, postdoctoral scholars and alumni to develop the skills, knowledge, experiences and connections they need to confidently manage their careers. They also offer in person appointment for a student to meet with a Career Advisor (https://www.ualberta.ca/en/career-centre/programs-services/advising-appointments/index.html). This service is available to all students and is a source for career and employment information and expertise at the University of Alberta. This can cover everything form assistance with resume, CV cover letter preparation, writing your LinkedIn profile, job shadowing, career fairs and mixers, career advising consultation, mock interviews for academic or industry jobs.

The Graduate Teaching and Learning Program (GTLP) (https://www.ualberta.ca/en/career-centre/index.html)
GTLP is an official professional development initiative run by the Faculty of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies (GPS). The program is open to all University of Alberta graduate students and postdoctoral scholars (PDS) who want to build post-secondary pedagogical skills. All workshops and courses in the program are free, pass/fail, and non-credit. As participants complete each step, they receive an official letter of completion, and graduate students receive a formal notation directly on their academic transcripts.

Mygradskills (https://www.mygradskills.ca)
MyGradSkills.ca is a free, self-paced online professional development platform built specifically for graduate students and postdoctoral fellows. It features over 18 short, interactive modules designed to help students transition smoothly into both academic and non-academic careers.

At the University of Alberta, complete modules from this platform are officially recognized by the Faculty of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies (GPS) and can be counted toward fulfilling your mandatory Graduate Professional Development (PD) Requirement or Academic Integrity/Ethics hours (https://www.ualberta.ca/en/kinesiology-sport-recreation/programs/graduate-programs/student-resources/ethics-and-professional-development-requirements.html). There are also professional development weeks or series of events and seminars held throughout the year that can provide useful information (https://uofa.ualberta.ca/graduate-studies/professional-development/workshops-classes-and-events/professionalseries).

For graduate students with an interest in pursuing academic science, another useful professional development site is found at:

MyIDP (https://www.ualberta.ca/en/graduate-studies/training-events/ethics-and-pd-requirements/required-professional-development/individual-development-plan.html)
The Individual Development Plan (IDP) is a mandatory career planning tool for all graduate students at the University of Alberta. It forms one half of your mandatory Graduate Professional Development (PD) Requirement (the other half being your 8 Hours of Professional Development Activities). Filling out your IDP helps you assess your current skill sets, identify structural career gaps, and establish milestone tracking systems for both academic and non-academic career paths.

Day to Day Life in the Department and Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry

On occasion, despite best efforts, members of our department, including students and supervisors, can experience difficulties that affect their performance. Many interpersonal issues can be resolved through respectful fair-minded discussion between the involved parties. We encourage this as a first step. In cases where one does not feel this is possible or a resolution cannot be found then there are different options that can be followed.

Within the Department

The Graduate Director and Department Chair are committed to your success. Please feel free to talk with them and we will work with the affected parties to seek out successful strategies. This is your first step in seeking advice and help.

Within the Faculty

The **Associate Dean Research, Graduate Studies** (currently Dr. Alan Underhill) oversees all graduate training in the Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry. This office is to ensure that graduate programs within the Faculty adhere to GPS policies. This individual is able to meet with graduate students to discuss issues related to graduate students including student life, academic progress, professionalism, graduate student/supervisor relationships. These are similar issues that can be discussed with the Graduate coordinator in the Department, but as they are outside the Department may be able to provide a different perspective.

To make an appointment please contact: Associate Dean Research, Graduate Programs, Office of Research, Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry 213 Heritage Medical Research Centre; (780) 432-8903; email underhil@ualberta.ca.

There is also a **professionalism submission portal** where concerns or accolades can be submitted (https://www.ualberta.ca/en/medicine/resources/faculty-and-staff/professionalism/professionalism-submission.html). This is to promote professionalism within the Faculty and to provide assistance when lapses occur. This can be done anonymously or if you name yourself nothing will go forward without your consent.

Within the University

Office of the Student Ombuds (https://www.ualberta.ca/en/current-students/ombuds/index.html). This is a confidential service that strives to ensure that university processes related to graduate students operate as fairly as possible. This office is located at 5-02 in the Students' Union Building. They offer information, advice and support and mediation to students and faculty as they deal with academic, disciplinary, interpersonal or financial issues related to the student's program. If they are not the right person to talk to they know where to direct you. The ombuds office is not a legal advocate but are impartial third parties in any dispute with the goal to find the best possible resolution within the rules of the university. To make an appointment with an ombudsperson, please phone (780)492-4689, or email ombuds@ualberta.ca.

Office of Safe Disclosure & Human Rights (https://www.ualberta.ca/en/provost/portfolio/office-of-safe-disclosure-human-rights/index.html). The University of Alberta is committed to providing a safe work, study and living environment for all staff, students, faculty and members of our volunteer community. To ensure the university meets this commitment, the university created the Office of Safe Disclosure and Human Rights (OSDHR) to support students, faculty and staff at the U of A. OSDHR supports the university community in three ways:

- Provide a safe, neutral and confidential space to disclose concerns
- Provide strategic advice to staff and faculty relating to human rights and policy
- Ensure that Human Rights are sustained at the University of Alberta.