

MENTOR GUIDELINES FOR THE RWJMS DISTINCTION IN RESEARCH (DIR) PROGRAM*

The Distinction in Research Program at Robert Wood Johnson Medical School is a prestigious program that provides medical students with an opportunity to learn the procedure for conducting research studies in different areas of medical, basic, behavior, and social sciences research. We believe that participation in the DIR program can be a first step for medical students to becoming independent investigators and contribute significantly to medical research in the future.

Because of the required work load of work for the medical student to accomplish the DIR program requirements, the mentor will have a significant level of responsibility. The mentor has to instruct the medical student during process of submission of the DIR Application, supervise his/her research activities in a timely fashion, and participate in the interpretation of the study results.

The DIR application requires the formulation of a research question (hypothesis), study design (experiments), methods, and plan for data analysis (see Program Application). The DIR application can be submitted twice a year; deadlines are March 1 or August 1. The mentor's signature is required on the application forms. Mentor as well as student must provide their CV along with the DIR application.

A letter, signed by the mentor, *on his letterhead*, must accompany the student's application. It must describe or confirm the following:

1. the student's role in the proposed research project
2. the scientific merit of the project
3. the significance of the applicant's contribution to the development of the research project
4. the applicant's commitment to completing the project within the proposed time frame
5. plans for reporting the results and student's authorship

It is expected that the student will carry out the majority of the experiments himself/herself and will take primary responsibility for writing the manuscript. In the case where the student contributes to a multi-investigator project precluding first authorship, the student may submit a written research report for evaluation, as described under "Requirements."

Approval from Institutional Review Board (IRB) and/or Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) must be obtained prior to initiation of study, and a copy of the IRB/IACUC approval letter (s) must be submitted to the DIR office with DIR application or within six months of submission of initial application. Participation of medical students in a research project that is not approved by the IRB/IACUC or has expired **is prohibited**. Students will not be able to earn the DIR designation if the Research Office cannot confirm that the research was conducted with the required approvals.

The Robert Wood Johnson Medical School DIR Parent Committee will make the final decision on acceptance of the proposal.

Students should be encouraged to apply for extramural funding from foundations or professional societies to support their work, since this will provide them an introduction to grant-writing skills. However, this is not obligatory.

The following criteria must be met

1. After acceptance, each student will be afforded the guidance of DIR Student Advisory Committee (DIR SAC) that will consist of the student's research mentor, RWJMS faculty member (typically suggested by the mentor and/or the student), and a member of the DIR committee who will act as the DIR Liaison.
2. Plan for student interaction with mentor, DIR Sac, and DIR Liaison:
 - a. Interface with their mentors on a regular basis
 - b. Meet (in person) with DIR SAC at the initiation of the project to review the research plan within 1 month of acceptance into the program. DIR SAC Initial Meeting Form has to be documented and the signed completed form should be submitted to the Office of Research and Sponsored programs.
 - c. Meet (in person) annually with full DIR SAC and document this meeting using the DIR SAC Interim Meeting Form, which should be submitted to the Office of Research and Sponsored programs once complete. Completion of the Interim Meeting Form is not mandatory; however, we urge students to meet with their SACs at regular intervals (at least once per year) in advance of either the March 01 or August 01 DIR deadline.
 - d. Meet (either in person, by phone or by email) with DIR Liaison at least twice per year – once in advance of the March 1 DIR deadline and once in advance of the August 1 DIR deadline. It is the student's responsibility to make contact with their DIR Liaison. Students are sent frequent reminders regarding this obligation. Meetings with the DIR Liaison are mandatory; failure to keep their DIR Liaison updated on their progress may result in a student being dropped from the DIR program.
4. Students are expected to produce a **suitable final written scholarly product** in order to graduate with the DIR designation. This product can take one of the following forms:
 - a. An accepted peer-reviewed journal article with the student as first author
 - b. A submitted peer-reviewed journal article with student as first author (with a copy of the letter of submission to the journal should be included)
 - c. A written report (15-20 pages, single spaced) written by the student which includes an expanded literature review and research methods, results and discussion section.
5. Student should submit the **suitable final written scholarly product** along with the mentor's letter to the DIR SAC for review. The student must meet with the DIR SAC to review the work and complete the SAC Final Evaluation Form.
6. The DIR SAC will decide if the report qualifies the student for graduation with Distinction in Research. The SAC can ask the student to modify the written work before the DIR SAC will accept it and sign the SAC Final Evaluation Form.
7. An electronic copy of the final written product, the mentor's letter and a hard copy of the signed completed SAC Final Evaluation Form must be submitted to the RWJMS Office of Research and

Sponsored Programs by March 1 or August 1 to be considered for final approval by the DIR Parent Committee.

Graduation with the DIR designation requires the students to submit all written products, letters and the fully-executed SAC Final Evaluation Form **by March 1** of their graduation year.

Graduation with inclusion in the Dean's letter a statement indicating that the student will graduate with Distinction in Research requires the student to submit all written products, letters and the fully-executed SAC Final Evaluation **by August 1st** of their graduation year.

The final deadline for completion of the program and submission to the RWJMS Office of Research and Sponsored Programs is March 1 of the student's graduation year.

8. Mentors will be asked to comment on the student's performance for the purpose of the "Unique Characteristics" section of the Medical Student Performance Evaluation (MSPE).

9. Graduation with Distinction in Research will be noted on the student's diploma and also on the graduation program.

*Several elements of this document were adapted from the Mount Sinai Medical School Web Site with the kind permission of Dr. Karen Zier, Associate Dean for Student Research at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine.