

BBSP Application Advice

Hi prospective BBSP students! We have made this document to help you put together your application for the Biological and Biomedical Sciences Program. Our goal is to help you understand what our program is looking for and provide some advice on each section of the application. If you have additional questions, our weekly drop in office hours are a good place to get these answered. Information can be found here: <https://bbsp.unc.edu/prospective-students/apply/>.

Good luck with your BBSP application!

Application Deadlines

- Our priority deadline is November 17th and final deadline is December 3rd. The application closes at 11:59EST on December 3rd and you will no longer be able to submit after this date.
 - **Does the priority deadline affect the chances of an interview?** Our data shows applicants who meet the priority deadline have a higher rate of selection for an interview and an offer. Last year, priority applicants were ~25% more likely to receive an interview, and 62% of our admit offers went to priority applicants.
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Start the application here: <https://applynow.unc.edu/apply/>

After creating an account, be sure to select Master's or Doctorate Degree

(below is a breakdown of each section of the BBSP application along with additional instructions and advice)

Programs of Study Page

- Select Major = Biological and Biomedical Sciences Program
- Make sure to indicate payment method on this page. Paying by credit card will allow you to pay for the application immediately after submitting it.
- Fee Waivers: Please check the grad school [website](#) to determine if you are eligible for a fee waiver. If you are a US citizen or permanent resident with demonstrable financial need, or if you participated in an NIH-sponsored PREP program or many summer research programs at UNC (U-RISE, [SUP](#)), you are likely eligible for a fee waiver.
- If eligible for a fee waiver, an additional section will be available in your application for you to select your eligibility category and provide the necessary documentation.
- Departmental Fee Waivers: BBSP is **NOT** offering fee waivers currently, any waivers must be attained from the graduate school.

Areas of Interest

Your answers here should reflect your interests as you apply to the program. BBSP uses this information when applications are being assigned for review. You may choose up to 5 areas, if you have less than 5 interest areas it is appropriate to not use all 5 choices.

Personal Background

Address- you can list multiple addresses if you wish. However, BBSP would like to know where you are living at the time of application so, please be sure to include this address as your mailing address.

Academics

Please do not list high schools – this is not important for your PhD application.

BBSP doesn't have specific course prerequisites when applying to the umbrella program. (You can read about program eligibility & Entering student characteristics here:

<https://bbbsp.unc.edu/prospective-students/apply/>) That said, some of the PhD programs under our umbrella are looking for more specific coursework and/or experience. For more information about requirements for specific graduate programs, you may visit [this site](#) where you can find links to each program's website.

Statement of Purpose

- The research statement is viewed as the most important section of your statement of purpose. Be sure to provide good descriptions of your previous experiences, demonstrating a big picture knowledge of the project and what your role was within this project.
- For the motivation section, in addition to following our prompts, be sure to give us a glimpse of how you will fit into the PhD program. Take the time to research faculty and talk about your fit into their research. This section should not be generic, instead very specific to our program.
- In the resilience statement, we are more interested in hearing about how you responded/adapted to the challenge than the challenge itself. For example, if an experiment failed, we are less interested in hearing about the problem, and more about the solution, and what you learned from this experience. How did this obstacle cause you to revise your hypothesis, or change your approach. In a good resilience statement, a reader can understand how the candidate responds when times are tough and can start to make parallels for similar potential challenges in grad school.

Work and Volunteer Experience

- BBSP just needs your most updated CV or Resume for this section. Please put the time into making this document complete and up to date.
- We recommend skipping the job or volunteer experience. Your CV or resume should cover the important experience that makes you a competitive applicant.

Grad Program Supplemental Questions

- We receive many questions about the Financial Award Interest question. A reminder that all BBSP students are guaranteed full funding while they are in grad school. However, there are

some fellowships applicants can be nominated for. Please look at the webpage listed to see if you might qualify for any of these fellowship programs and indicate this in this question. BBSP will notify you if you are the recipient of any fellowships.

- Additionally, if you have external funding or scholarships, please let us know in the answer to this question.
- Faculty Interest: List faculty whose research interests you. As the instructions point out, we do not expect to contact these faculty in advance. There is also no expectation that you end up working with these faculty as we expect some changes in interests from the time you apply to the time you start the program.
- BBSP does not require a supplemental document so skip this question.
- BBSP Question – see below
- Previous research experience question. The answer you provide here isn't seen by reviewers. The reason for asking this question is many NIH training grant applications require us to provide an average amount of experience from the applicant pool. However, as we indicate on our apply page, a competitive applicant typically has significant full- and/or part-time research experience. Our admissions committees look at the quality and breadth of your research, not just a total number of months.

Biological and Biomedical Sciences Question

- Read through the choices and pick the selection that best represents your current research interests and the previous research experience you will bring to the application.
- Some programs expect trainees to have rigorous previous academic preparation in coursework related to this field before starting their PhD training. If you have questions about this, please join our weekly virtual office hours (Fridays 1-2pm), reach out to our office, or contact the Director of Graduate Studies for the [program](#) that interests you.
- Your selection for this answer will automatically place you in a corresponding admissions committee for your application review. Note, all admissions committees have similar interview offer rates, so your selection will not give you competitive advantage or disadvantage. In fact, you are more likely to be hurt by selecting a committee which does not align with your prior research experiences. Occasionally, we move applicants to another committee when the fit is poor.

Test Scores

- The GRE is not required for your application and even if you submit scores, BBSP does not evaluate them as part of the review process.
- TOEFL scores are required for international candidates but be sure to read these requirements on the grad school website.
<https://gradschool.unc.edu/admissions/instructions.html#toefl>

Recommendation Letters

- BBSP must have three letters of recommendation received before it will start review of your application. *If you plan to apply by the priority deadline (November 17th), your letters must be received by this date.*

- Letters can arrive at any time, even after you submit the application. We don't recommend that you wait to submit until all your recommendation letters arrive.
- You can always check the status of your recommendations by logging back into your application even after you submit.
- You are welcome to request more than three letters, but it is rare for an applicant to have more than four, and more is not always better. Letters should come from PhD-level scientists (most important), course instructors, and/or academic advisors who can attest to your scientific and research experiences and qualifications. If you have only been in a lab for a short time, you may consider asking your bench mentor to contribute to the letter from your PI (but the letter should come from your PI).

Pro-Tip: Stay in touch with your letter writers and give them deadlines well before the application deadline. We often find applications incomplete due to letter writers not submitting the letter. If you are staying in touch with your recommenders, it is less likely they will miss the deadline.

International Applicants Only

- BBSP does accept international students each year; however, we limit the total accepted to typically ~15% of the class size due to restrictions on funds available for tuition remission (the difference between in-state and out-of-state tuition). BBSP funds all students, but international students are typically more expensive since they are not eligible for in-state tuition. We limit our class size to ensure we can continue to fund all students at the same level throughout their time in grad school.
- On average, BBSP typically has 550 international applications and only has space for ~15-20 in the incoming class. Thus, the competition for these slots is very tough. If you are a non-citizen/permanent resident conducting research outside of the US, you should only apply if you have multiple years of research experience, and at least one publication in an English-language, recognized (PubMed) journal or letters of recommendation from UNC faculty.