

**MDSC 408**  
**Research Design in Molecular Biology and Bioinformatics**

**Instructors:**

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**Office Hours/Policy on Answering Student Emails**

Office hours are by appointment only.  
Please note that all course communications must occur through your @ucalgary email.  
The instructors will respond to emails received during working hours by the next working day.

**Teaching Assistants:**

**Laboratory TAs:**

Kaylan Burns  
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**Bioinformatics TAs:**

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**Time and Location:**

TERM: Fall 2024 and Winter 2025

TIME: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:00 – 11:50 AM

LECTURES/ TUTORIALS: See D2L for location details LABS: See D2L for location details

*Please carefully consult the course schedule on D2L for room location of individual sessions.*

**Prerequisite/Co-Requisite:**

Medical Science 308, with a minimum grade of "B-", and Medical Science 341 and admission to the BHSc Honours program.

**Course Description:**

An introduction to the research methods utilized in the Health Sciences. Students will begin to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to conduct research in their respective fields. The importance of research design, qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods and the theoretical constructs that inform these approaches will be emphasized.

## Overarching Theme

After completing the course, a student should have a fundamental understanding of the basic molecular biology of prokaryotic and eukaryotic systems. In addition to acquiring an appreciation of underlying mechanisms and processes, the student is expected to understand the experimental approaches that are used to generate data in the field. A measure of this understanding will be the ability to use the acquired knowledge to explain and interpret experimental observations, and to design appropriately controlled experiments to test hypotheses.

**MDSC 408 Fall semester:** In the Fall semester, you will gain exposure to and experience with the approaches and tools for probing biological phenomena at the molecular level. You will work individually and in pairs on a project using a variety of genetic, biochemical, and molecular biological approaches. You will also be assigned a structural bioinformatics assignment that is related to the laboratory work so that you can integrate those concepts with practical lab experience.

The biological system we will be working with, in both the bioinformatics part and the laboratory part, is a fluorescent protein (for example, green fluorescent protein (GFP)). Not only are these proteins interesting in the way organisms use them in nature, but they are also widely used as laboratory tools. The system allows us to use many different methodologies and approaches within the time and resource constraints of the course. It has features that include: 1) detailed structural information to facilitate the development of rational site-directed mutagenesis strategies, through which we can easily alter the properties of the protein; 2) an extensive array of well characterized homologues (for the bioinformatics projects); 3) a simple method for production and isolation of recombinant protein, so that we can analyze the altered properties of the proteins. You will need some familiarity with this system to understand the approaches taken, but they will help you develop a fundamental understanding of various concepts and approaches that can be applied to virtually any biological system under study.

**MDSC 408 Winter semester:** The Winter term is an extension of the laboratory work and theory covered in the Fall. While the Fall semester focuses mainly on molecular biology techniques utilized in prokaryotic systems, the Winter term is designed to extend this knowledge to eukaryotic systems. However, similar principles and techniques are applied to both. The laboratory part of the Winter term will include the discussion of eukaryotic cell culture techniques, types of eukaryotic cell lines, uses for cultured cells, and eukaryotic transfection systems. You will get hands-on experience in maintaining eukaryotic cell lines. You will transfect cells, isolate RNA from cells, synthesize cDNA, and examine changes in the gene expression using reverse transcription PCR (RT-PCR) and quantitative real-time PCR (qrt-PCR). The bioinformatics components will consist of lectures/tutorials and assignments focusing on various sequence analyses and gene expression tools and approaches.

For the final assignment in the Winter semester, you will write a proposal that describes a number of experiments to study the effects of a protein (or gene) of your choice in eukaryotic cells. To design these experiments, you will have to use experimental evidence found in the current scientific literature. The purpose of the "letter of intent" is to give a one-page summary highlighting the proposed research you will be addressing with the experiments you are planning. This "letter of intent" will precede your research proposal and help you prepare for the final assignment. It will also help us ensure that you are on the right track with this assignment. The goal of these two assignments and the course is to teach you to integrate new knowledge with the existing knowledge and to design experiments. You will not only be required to explain the concepts covered in the lectures and readings, but to integrate the newly learned concepts into material that you have already learned in other courses or that you have encountered by reading the scientific literature.

## **Global Objectives**

MDSC 408 is designed to give biomedical sciences and bioinformatics students the basic conceptual framework, knowledge, and skill set to work and think independently in a medical science or life science research environment. By the end of MDSC 408, students will be able to successfully utilize a number of bioinformatics tools and perform molecular biology techniques, interpret results, and troubleshoot when problems arise.

The global objectives MDSC 408 are to enhance the student's:

1. understanding and use of scientific methodology and thought process;
2. ability to understand and approach problems at the molecular level; and
3. ability to design experiments in a creative manner.

## **Course Learning Outcomes**

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the basic molecular biology techniques and will be able to successfully perform these techniques in a laboratory setting.
2. Apply the gained knowledge to troubleshoot and ultimately correct technically based problems that arise in the laboratory.
3. Understand experimental design and be able to think through an experiment from beginning to end.
4. Critically evaluate the appropriateness and limitations of using various molecular biology techniques and research designs.
5. Describe why the particular technique/s or research method/s was/were chosen to answer the research question, list the advantages and disadvantages of the chosen method/s and suggest alternative approaches.

## **Specific Learning Objectives of the Bioinformatics assignments:**

1. Perform basic bioinformatics searches and use Swiss-PDB tools to analyze the structure of the proteins.
2. Interpret the results generated by the bioinformatics searches and protein structure modeling and formulate a focused and well-defined hypothesis.
3. Propose methods to test the hypothesis in a framework of several specific aims.
4. Plan cloning and site-directed mutagenesis experiments in silico using various online and open-source software tools.
5. Analyze and interpret next generation sequencing data using R and R -studio

## **Specific Learning Objectives of the Research Proposal assignments:**

1. Write a research proposal similar to a common grant format and effectively describe the what, why and how of the experimental approaches.
2. Search current literature efficiently, investigate and evaluate the existing evidence, clearly state the problem to be investigated, and provide rationale for the proposed research.
3. Formulate strong, focused, well-supported and testable research questions/hypothesis and propose methods to test the hypothesis in a framework of several specific aims.
4. Clearly define the criteria for success or failure of proposed methods.
5. Assess feasibility of proposed experiments and research and supply the necessary information to answer them.

### **Transferable Skill Development:**

Many of the skills and abilities that you are developing in your coursework are transferable to the workforce, graduate and professional studies and other facets of life. Employers seek applicants with transferable skills because they can be an asset in the workplace, regardless of industry or sector. Transferable skills are core skills for your success in building your future career.

The work that you will do in MDSC 408 will help you build the following transferable skills:

- **Creativity and Innovation:** Find different and better ways to do things, being curious, thinking imaginatively.
- **Critical Thinking:** Actively and skillfully conceptualize, apply, analyze, synthesize, and/or evaluate information (data, facts, observable phenomena, and research findings) to make a reasoned judgement or draw a reasonable conclusion.
- **Information Literacy:** Find, understand, and use information presented through words, symbols, and images
- **Numeracy:** Use mathematical information such as numbers, symbols, words, and graphics to do tasks.
- **Problem solving:** Identify an issue, find and implement a solution, and assess whether the situation has improved.
- **Project Management:** Conceptualize, initiate, plan and execute a plan to achieve a predetermined goal (project) by effectively prioritizing activities and meeting deadlines.
- **Written Communication:** Share ideas and information by using words, images, and symbols.

### **Learning Resources**

You do not need to buy a textbook for this course.

### **A Note regarding readings**

A list of required readings will be outlined on D2L and links and documents will be made available, where possible. Required readings have been chosen carefully to inform you and enhance the lecture material. **Students are REQUIRED to complete assigned readings BEFORE each lecture.** Instructors will proceed in class on the assumption that students have read completely the assigned readings. Students should be aware that many of the readings they will be assigned may be of an unfamiliar nature and style. Students should allot sufficient time to allow for several reads of the assigned material.

**NOTE:** We will NOT post any recording of the lectures or tutorials. Lecture slides and documents will be posted on Brightspace (by D2L).

### **Learning Technology Requirements**

Brightspace (by D2L) is located on the University of Calgary server and will be used extensively for communication with students. **It is the student's responsibility to ensure that they receive all posted communications and documents and that they receive emails sent by instructors or fellow students through D2L.** Only your @ucalgary.ca email address may be linked to D2L. Please ensure that you are regularly checking your @ucalgary.ca account.

## Evaluation

The University policy on grading and related matters is described in section F of the 2024-2025 Calendar.

In determining the overall grade in the course, the following weights will be used:

Assessment *	Weight (% of Grade)	Due Date
<b>Assignments:</b>		
<b>Bioinformatics Assignments (Fall/Winter Semester)</b> This is a series of assignments and exercises that will help you to understand and gain practical experience in working with bioinformatics tools introduced in class	20%	2 assignments per semester (5% for each assignment) Adding up to a total of 20%
<b>Letter of Intent (Winter Semester)</b> One-page summary highlighting the proposed research	5%	Feb. 26, 2025
<b>Research Proposal (Winter Semester)</b> For the written final assignment of this course, you will write a proposal outlining the experimental approach for the research proposed in the LOI, 5 pages single-spaced, not including references or figures. This proposal describes the experiments to study the effects of a protein of your choice in eukaryotic cells.	15%	Apr. 4, 2025
<b>Exams:</b>		
<b>Exams/Quizzes:</b> Examination on all material presented in both the molecular biology and bioinformatics lectures and labs or tutorials up to the date. <b>These quizzes and exams consist of open-ended questions that will be given online through Brightspace (D2L) but written in person during class time and have a limit of 2 hrs.</b> Two quizzes in the Fall (10% each) One exam in the Winter (10%)	10% 10% 10%	Oct. 8, 2024 Dec. 3, 2024 Mar. 20, 2025
<b>Lab Notebooks:</b>		
Lab notebooks will be in an electronic online format. Grade includes flow charts due at the beginning of every lab, as well as, pre-lab preparation, participation, and lab work documentation. The lab notebook is handed in for grading at regular intervals throughout the semester. <b>Lab notebook includes lab attendance marks</b>	30%	Lab notebooks are worth 15% for each semester. Adding up to a total of 30%

\*Descriptions and rubrics/marketing guidelines of each assessment item will be posted in D2L

**There is no final exam for this course.**

**A student's final grade for the course is the sum of the separate assignments. It is not necessary to pass each assignment separately to pass the course.**

### A Note regarding Writing Assignments:

Writing skills are important to academic study in all disciplines. In keeping with the University of Calgary's emphasis on the importance of academic writing in student assignments (section E.2 of 2024-25 Calendar), writing is emphasized, and the grading thereof in determining a student's mark in this course. The Bachelor of Health Sciences values excellence in writing. Competence in writing entails skills in crafting logical, clear, coherent, non-redundant sentences, paragraphs and broader arguments, as well as skills with the mechanics of writing (grammar, spelling, punctuation). Sources used to complete each assessment must be properly documented, unless otherwise noted by the instructor. The University of Calgary offers instructional services through the Students' Success Centre's Writing Support Services (<http://www.ucalgary.ca/writingsupport/>) for students seeking feedback on assignments or seeking to improve their general writing skills. Students are **strongly encouraged** to take advantage of these programs.

### Grading Scheme:

Letter Grade	Description	Percentage
A+	Outstanding performance	96-100
A	Excellent performance	90-95.99
A-	Approaching excellent performance	85-89
B+	Exceeding good performance	80-84
B	Good performance	75-79
B-	Approaching good performance	70-74
C+	Exceeding satisfactory performance	65-69
C	Satisfactory performance	60-64
C-	Approaching satisfactory performance	57-59
D+	Marginal pass	54-56
D	Minimal pass	50-53
F	Does not meet course requirements	0-49

### Missed Components of Term Work:

#### All assignments:

Students will incur a 5% per day late deduction for submission past the deadline. Assignments will NOT be accepted more than 72 hours after the posted deadline and students failing to submit any assignment within this time frame will receive a mark of zero.

#### Quizzes/Exams:

Students who miss a quiz will receive a mark of zero unless the instructor has been previously notified. There will be NO exceptions to this policy.

NOTE: There will be no make-up exams/quizzes. If you miss an exam/quiz for a legitimate reason the weighting of the exam/quiz will be combined with the next exam/quiz or assignment.

*As per University Calendar Section G.2.3, **students who are absent from an in-class assessment will receive a mark of zero on the missed component.** Students who are absent are responsible for contacting their instructor to discuss the impact of their missed assessment. Alternative opportunities for completing missed assessments or shifting of the assessment weight **may** be possible but are not guaranteed. Students who are identified as falsifying information related to missed assessments will be subject to investigation for academic misconduct.*

**Extensions will NOT be granted** on any assignment or quizzes MDSC 408. The only exceptions to this are those in keeping with the University Calendar (debilitating illness, religious conviction, or severe domestic affliction) that are received in writing and with supporting documentation. Traffic jams and late or full buses are common events in Calgary and are NOT acceptable reasons for late arrivals to class, meetings and examinations. Please note that while absences are permitted for religious reasons, students are responsible for providing advance notice and adhering to other guidelines on this matter, as outlined in the University Calendar

<https://calendar.ucalgary.ca/pages/02ffccb6b1a541db880fe4223d122b5e>

### **Course Evaluations and Student Feedback**

Student feedback will be sought at the end of the course through the new UCalgary Course Experience Survey and a qualitative student evaluation. Students are welcome to discuss the process and content of the course at any time with the instructor. Students may also address any concerns they may have with Dr. Fabiola Aparicio-Ting, Associate Dean (Undergraduate Health and Science Education) in the Cumming School of Medicine (feaparic@ucalgary.ca).

### **Attendance**

Regular attendance is advised in order to succeed in MDSC 408.

Note that attendance to the laboratories is **mandatory** and will form part of the lab notebook grade.

### **Conduct During Lectures**

The classroom should be respected as a safe place to share ideas without judgement - a community in which we can all learn from one another. Students are expected to frame their comments and questions to lecturers in respectful and appropriate language, always maintaining sensitivity towards the topic. Students, employees, and academic staff are also expected to demonstrate behaviour in class that promotes and maintains a positive and productive learning environment.

Students are expected to take notes during class and should not rely solely on material supplied by the instructors. Instructors may or may not post lectures notes to D2L, at their individual discretion. In-class discussion and all content presented in class, including concepts and examples, can constitute substantial learning and can be considered for assessment.

As members of the University community, students, employees and academic staff are expected to demonstrate conduct that is consistent with the University of Calgary Calendar, the Code of Conduct and Non-Academic Misconduct policy and procedures, which can be found at

<https://ucalgary.ca/student-services/student-conduct/policy>.

### **Use of Internet and Electronic Communication Devices in Class**

The Bachelor of Health Sciences program aims to create a supportive and respectful learning environment for all students. The use of laptop and mobile devices is acceptable when used in a manner appropriate to the course and classroom activities. However, research studies have found that inappropriate/off-topic use of electronic devices in the classroom negatively affects the learning of others during class time.

Students are responsible for being aware of the University's Internet and email use policy, which can be found at <https://www.ucalgary.ca/legal-services/university-policies-procedures/acceptable-use-electronic-resources-and-information-policy>.

## Use of Artificial Intelligence Tools

Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI), and specifically foundational models that can create writing, computer code, and /or images using minimal human prompting includes not only GPT-4 (and its siblings ChatGPT and Bing), but many writing assistants that are built on this or similar AI technologies.

Students may use artificial intelligence tools, including generative AI, in **MDSC 408**. **However, students are ultimately accountable for the work they submit.** Students may choose to use generative artificial intelligence tools as they work through the assignments in this course; this use must be documented in an appendix for each assignment. The documentation should include what tool(s) were used, how they were used, and how the results from the AI were incorporated into the submitted work. **Failure to cite the use of AI generated content in an assignment/assessment will be considered a breach of academic integrity and subject to Academic Misconduct procedures.**

## UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY POLICIES AND SUPPORTS

### Copyright

All students are required to read the University of Calgary policy on Acceptable Use of Material Protected by Copyright (<https://www.ucalgary.ca/legal-services/university-policies-procedures/acceptable-use-material-protected-copyright-policy>) and requirements of the Copyright Act (<https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-42/index.html>) to ensure they are aware of the consequences of unauthorized sharing of course materials (including instructor notes, electronic versions of textbooks, etc.). Students who use material protected by copyright in violation of this policy may be disciplined under the Non-Academic Misconduct Policy <https://www.ucalgary.ca/legal-services/university-policies-procedures/student-non-academic-misconduct-policy>

### Instructor Intellectual Property

Course materials created by instructors (including course outlines, presentations and posted notes, labs, case studies, assignments and exams) remain the intellectual property of the instructor. These materials may **NOT** be reproduced, redistributed or copied without the explicit consent of the professor. **The posting of course materials to third party websites such as note-sharing sites without permission is prohibited.** Sharing of extracts of these course materials with other students enrolled in the course **at the same time** may be allowed under fair dealing.

### Academic Accommodations

It is the student's responsibility to request academic accommodations according to the University policies and procedures listed below. The Student Accommodations policy is available at <https://ucalgary.ca/student-services/access/prospective-students/academic-accommodations>. Students needing an accommodation based on disability or medical concerns should contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) in accordance with the Procedure for Accommodations for Students with Disabilities (<https://www.ucalgary.ca/legal-services/sites/default/files/teams/1/Policies-Accommodation-for-Students-with-Disabilities-Procedure.pdf>).

Students who require an accommodation in relation to their coursework based on a Protected Ground other than Disability should communicate this need in writing to Dr. Fabiola Aparicio-Ting (feapartic@ucalgary.ca), Associate Dean (Undergraduate Health and Science Education).



## Academic Misconduct

The University of Calgary is committed to the highest standards of academic integrity and honesty. The University of Calgary has created rules to govern all its members regarding the creation of knowledge and the demonstration of knowledge having been learned.

Academic Misconduct refers to student behaviour that compromises proper assessment of a student's academic activities and includes (but is not limited to): cheating, fabrication, falsification, plagiarism, unauthorized assistance, failure to comply with an instructor's expectations regarding conduct required of students completing academic assessments in their courses, and failure to comply with exam regulations applied by the Registrar. **It also includes using of third party websites/services to access past/current course material, essay/assignment writing services, or real-time assistance in completing assessments, seeking answers to assessment questions and similar, whether paid, bartered or unpaid.**

For information of the Student Academic Misconduct Policy and Procedures, please visit;

<https://www.ucalgary.ca/legal-services/university-policies-procedures/student-academic-misconduct-policy>.

Additional information is available on the Academic Integrity website at: <https://ucalgary.ca/student-services/student-success/learning/academic-integrity>.

## Recording of Lectures

Audio or video recording of lectures (or similar) by students is prohibited except where explicit permission has been received from the instructor.

## Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act

Student information will be collected in accordance with typical (or usual) classroom practice. Students' assignments will be accessible only by the authorized course faculty. Private information related to the individual student is treated with the utmost regard by the faculty at the University of Calgary

## Appeals

If there is a concern with the course, academic matter or a grade, first communicate with the instructor. If these concerns cannot be resolved, students can proceed with an academic appeal, as per Section I of the University Calendar. Students must follow the official reappraisal/appeal process and may contact the Student Ombuds' Office (<http://www.ucalgary.ca/student-services/ombuds>) for assistance with this and with any other academic concerns, including academic and non-academic misconduct. Students should be aware that concerns about graded term work may only be initiated **within 10 business days** of first being notified of the grade.

<https://calendar.ucalgary.ca/pages/e31a7115dca740ec83579e946d4a4193>

## Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Policy

The University recognizes that all members of the University Community should be able to learn, work, teach and live in an environment where they are free from harassment, discrimination, and violence. The University of Calgary's sexual violence policy guides us in how we respond to incidents of sexual violence, including supports available to those who have experienced or witnessed sexual violence, or those who are alleged to have committed sexual violence. It provides clear response procedures and timelines, defines complex concepts, and addresses incidents that occur off-campus in certain circumstances. Please see the policy available at <https://www.ucalgary.ca/legal-services/university-policies-procedures/sexual-and-gender-based-violence-policy>

## **Resources for Support of Student Learning, Success, Safety and Wellness**

Student Success Centre	<a href="http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/">http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/</a>
Student Wellness Centre	<a href="http://www.ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/">http://www.ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/</a>
Student Advocacy and Wellness Hub (CSM)	<a href="https://cumming.ucalgary.ca/mdprogram/current-students/student-advising-wellness">https://cumming.ucalgary.ca/mdprogram/current-students/student-advising-wellness</a>
Distress Centre	<a href="http://www.distresscentre.com/">http://www.distresscentre.com/</a>
Library Resources	<a href="http://library.ucalgary.ca">http://library.ucalgary.ca</a>

## **Wellness and Mental Health Resources**

The University of Calgary recognizes the pivotal role that student mental health plays in physical health, social connectedness and academic success, and aspires to create a caring and supportive campus community where individuals can freely talk about mental health and receive supports when needed. We encourage you to explore the excellent mental health resources available throughout the university community, such as counselling, self-help resources, peer support or skills-building available through the SU Wellness Centre (<https://www.ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/services/mental-health-services>) and the Campus Mental Health Strategy (<http://www.ucalgary.ca/mentalhealth/>).

## **Student Ombuds' Office**

The Student Ombuds' Office supports and provides a safe, neutral space for students. For more information, please visit [www.ucalgary.ca/student-services/ombuds/](http://www.ucalgary.ca/student-services/ombuds/) or email [ombuds@ucalgary.ca](mailto:ombuds@ucalgary.ca)

## **BHSc Student Faculty Liaison Committee (SFLC)**

The BHSc SFLC, with elected representatives from all majors, serves to raise issues of interest to BHSc students to the program administration, including items pertaining to curriculum, scheduling and events. A list of current representatives can be found on the BHSc website.

## **Student Union (SU) Information**

The SU Vice-President Academic can be reached at (403) 220-3911 or [suypaca@ucalgary.ca](mailto:suypaca@ucalgary.ca); the SU representatives for the Cumming School of Medicine can be reached at [medrep1@su.ucalgary.ca](mailto:medrep1@su.ucalgary.ca) or [medrep2@su.ucalgary.ca](mailto:medrep2@su.ucalgary.ca).

## **Student Success Centre**

The Student Success Centre provides services and programs to ensure students can make the most of their time at the University of Calgary. Our advisors, learning support staff, and writing support staff assist students in enhancing their skills and achieving their academic goals. They provide tailored learning support and advising programs, as well as one-on-one services, free of charge to all undergraduate and graduate students. For more information visit: <https://www.ucalgary.ca/student-services/student-success>

## **Emergency Evacuation/Assembly Points**

As part of the University of Calgary Emergency Evacuation plan, students, faculty, and staff should locate the closest Assembly Point in case of Fire Alarm. Safety signage is posted throughout the campus showing the locations and the possible route to these locations. All students, faculty, and staff are expected to promptly make their way to the nearest Assembly Point if the Fire Alarm is activated. No one is to return into campus facilities until an all clear is given to the warden in charge of the Assembly Area. For more information, see <https://www.ucalgary.ca/risk/emergency-management/drills/assembly-points-and-evacuation-maps>

**Safewalk**

Campus security will escort individuals, day or night, anywhere on campus (including McMahon Stadium, Health Sciences Centre, Student Family Housing, the Alberta Children's Hospital and the University LRT station). Call 403-220-5333 or visit <http://www.ucalgary.ca/security/safewalk>. Use any campus phone, emergency phone or the yellow phone located at most parking lot pay booths. Please ensure your personal safety by taking advantage of this service.