Master of Science in Human Development and Early Childhood Disorders Degree Program

Student Guide

Fall 2024

Welcome to our Student Guide for the Master of Science in Human Development and Early Childhood Disorders (HDCD) degree program.

If you are considering applying to our program, thank you for your interest. To learn about our admissions process and to help you decide if this program is a good fit for you, please read this entire guide carefully.

If you have been admitted to our program, congratulations and welcome! Please review this guide carefully because it includes information you need to succeed in this program.

I. Goals of the Program

The Master of Science in Human Development and Early Childhood Disorders (HDCD) degree program prepares students to work with young children (from birth to five years) and their families in clinical, hospital, non-profit, and educational settings. The curriculum introduces students to core concepts related to children's physical, cognitive, emotional, and social development. Students gain an advanced, specialized understanding of:

- Developmental assessment and identification methods
- Diagnostic and intervention techniques
- Developmental delays and disorders
- Best practices for working with families

Coursework is combined with supervised practicum and internship experiences, which are tailored to students' interests and training needs. They take advantage of the diverse and innovative early intervention programs serving young children and their families in North Texas, including those conducted by the UT Dallas Center for Children and Families.

Graduates are qualified to work as Early Intervention Specialists, Developmental Specialists, and Parent Educators. With one additional year of work experience, graduates typically qualify for Level 2 Infant Mental Health Endorsement by First3Years (formerly the Texas Association for Infant Mental Health), an internationally recognized credential. The MS HDCD degree program does not meet the academic requirements for child life certification. Therefore, graduates interested in becoming certified will need to pursue additional education and supervised internship experience.

The MS HDCD degree requires 39 graduate credit hours: 21 hours of core courses, 9 hours of approved electives, and 9 hours of applied practicum and internship experience. The graduate catalog provides an overview of course descriptions and the plan of study is provided in this document later.

Although the HDCD MS program is an applied program, some students may choose to find research assistant positions (RA) in laboratories on campus to count as one elective credit (3 credit hrs). With permission from their research lab advisor, they may also choose to stay in the lab to work on an independent study project to count as one additional elective credit (3 credit hrs). Students interested in

research options may explore opportunities by reaching out directly to BBS faculty who have developmental research labs. Visit the BBS Faculty Listing page to search for faculty with labs that you may be interested in. Be mindful that not all faculty can take on RAs every semester.

II. Admissions

A. **Suggested background:** Applicants are encouraged to have a strong academic and/or professional background in child development or a related field. We look for several qualities, including goodness of fit in the program, professional experience working with children, leadership and/or service experience, inclusivity/awareness, problem-solving and perseverance, and academic success. Previous coursework is also considered with particular attention to developmental courses such as:

- Child Development
- Developmental Psychology
- Exceptional Children
- Cognitive Development
- Social Development
- Language Development
- Language and Literacy

B. **When to Apply:** Applications are only accepted for fall semesters; not for spring or summer semesters. Progression through the HDCD program is sequential and the courses that new students will need to take first are offered only in the fall semester. **The priority application deadline is February 15th of each year.** Applications are accepted after this deadline on a rolling admissions basis until May 1st of each year. However, priority consideration is given to applications submitted by the February 15th.

C. **Steps to apply**

(1) Most applicants will submit their online application, documents, and application fee through UT Dallas Graduate Admissions website.

- *Official college transcripts*: upload a photocopy or PDF of official transcripts for admission consideration.
  - Online printouts, grade reports, unofficial downloaded transcripts, etc., are not acceptable.
  - If granted admission, official copies will need to be submitted to the Office of Admission and Enrollment before enrolling in classes. It is strongly recommended that official transcripts are submitted electronically using an approved system (e.g., Joint Services Transcript, Parchment, WES International Credential Advantage Package). If institutions do not support sending official documents electronically, documents should be mailed in an institution-sealed envelope to The University of Texas at Dallas, Admission and Enrollment, 800 W. Campbell Road, Richardson, Texas, 75080.
- *Resume*
- *Essay*: brief narrative outlining academic interests – include any current or long-range interests in research, teaching, or other professional objectives. If you have progressed far enough in your career to have publications or other evidence of scholarly endeavor, you may also describe these.

- *Three letters of recommendation*: provide information about the individuals you would like to invite to fill out a recommendation for you. Once their information is entered, an e-mail containing the recommendation form will be automatically sent to them.
- *Graduate Record Exam (GRE) scores*: You may request your GRE General Test scores be sent to the Office of Admission and Enrollment. To learn more about the GRE visit the ETS website.
- *Application fee*
  - **Note:** Application fees and late application fees are automatically waived for UT Dallas alumni and/or UT Dallas current students. International credential evaluation fees may still be applied.

(2) The MS HDCD program participates in UT Dallas Quick Admit – Expedited Review, an application path for applicants who are currently pursuing or have recently received an undergraduate degree at UT Dallas. To qualify, your undergraduate GPA in your major must be at least a 3.0 GPA.

- Eligible applicants are exempt from the following requirements: application fee, letters of recommendation, college transcripts, and GRE General Test scores
- Eligible applicants will need to submit an essay and resume for admission consideration

(3) The MS HDCD program also participates in UT Dallas Fast Track. This path enables current senior undergraduate students to pursue graduate courses while enrolled in their undergraduate program. Students can take up to 15 hours of graduate courses in the MS HDCD program to earn credit toward their master's degree at the undergraduate tuition rate. Applicants must have completed at least 90 undergraduate credit hours.

- Eligible applicants are exempt from the following requirements: application, college transcripts, and GRE General Test scores.
- Eligible applicants will need to complete a Fast Track application along with submitting an essay, three letters of recommendation, and a resume. Please contact the program's academic support coordinator for more information.

(4) International applicants should read through the general university requirements here: http://www.utdallas.edu/admissions/graduate/international-students/. International applicants may be required to submit proof of English proficiency in addition to the abovementioned requirements.

III. Getting Started in the Program

A. **Initial contact:** At first, applicants should regularly check the email account they referenced on their applications. However, once a student has been admitted to the university, a UTD email account will be created for them. From that point on, all official communication between representatives of the university and students will be routed through that email address. Students must regularly check their UTD email account.

B. **Ongoing communication:** Students in the HDCD program will be added to a Microsoft Teams channel through which we often communicate announcements and solicit feedback. Students must regularly check Teams and chime in. We like to hear from our students!

C. **Enrolling in courses**: Graduate-level courses are carefully monitored by the department. Therefore, students aren't able to register themselves online. After students are admitted to the program, they will receive an email from the academic support coordinator with information

about the next steps for enrolling, including instructions for which classes to take. After receiving that email, students should communicate with the program academic support coordinator to get registered in classes.

D. **Parking:** Once students are registered for courses, they can purchase a parking pass. Parking permits may be purchased **online**.

E. **Financial aid:** Questions about financial aid should be directed to the **Office of Financial Aid**.

F. **Academic calendar:** The current academic calendar can be accessed from the **UT Dallas homepage**.

IV. Expectations for Full-Time Participation in the Program

The program is designed for full-time students. Many required classes and events are during the day. A full-time, graduate course load is 9 credit hours (which means nine hours spent in the classroom weekly during the first year). Students should expect to spend about three times that amount of time outside the classroom preparing for class. In addition, students are required to attend professional development meetings to discuss program requirements, professionalism in the workplace, and more. Students are also strongly encouraged to take advantage of the many lectures and seminars offered in the School of Behavioral and Brain Sciences.

Students are expected to make a full-time commitment to the program. The classes, class preparation, and later involvement in applied practicum and internships do not leave much time for additional work responsibilities. Thus, students are encouraged to think carefully about their schedules before taking on part-time jobs.

A. **Expectations for Coursework**

(1) Academic advising: Students will be advised by the program head each semester about the courses they should be taking and the approved elective options that are available at that time.

(2) Required courses/degree plan: Each student will have a degree plan upon which they can chart their progress and ensure that they are meeting the program requirements to graduate on time. The academic support coordinator will support the student in keeping this document up to date each semester and the program head will consult this document to support the student with any questions about their path towards success in the program.

(3) Grades required for satisfactory progress: Graduate students are expected to maintain a grade point average (GPA) of 3.0 (B-) or higher overall and in each of their core courses. If a student's GPA falls below 3.0 the student is automatically placed on Academic Probation by the university, effective the following semester. Dr. Grant will work with students in this situation to develop a Growth Plan with steps for a successful semester. If a student fails to make sufficient academic progress during the probation period, they will be automatically dropped from the university.

(4) Making the most of each class: Most courses taken by HDCD students are doctoral-level courses taught in a seminar format, with heavy reading loads and high expectations for active course participation. Students should plan to spend 9 or more hours preparing outside of class for each three-credit-hour course. Students are expected to read all assigned readings before each class meeting and to attend all classes prepared with questions and points for discussion.

(5) Recommended plan of study

- Students should plan to follow our recommended plan of study to ensure that they take mandatory courses in sequence so that they are prepared to enroll in practicum and internship courses on time. There may be semesters where additional approved electives are offered. Dr. Grant will inform you of these opportunities when they arise.
- Students are required to take three electives for 9 credit hours with some flexibility in when they choose to take elective courses. They may choose to take more than three electives too. During the first year in the spring semester, students can choose to take an elective (4 courses) or not (3 courses). Students might choose to take an elective because there is a course offered in spring that they want to take and/or to take an elective earlier in their degree plan because it will lighten their course load during the summer or fall of the second year.
- For students interested in pursuing a research-oriented doctoral degree upon completion of the HDCD MS program, it is highly recommended that:
  a. You identify a developmental lab that is willing to have you work in their lab as a master's level research assistant during your time in the program. If your lab supervisor agrees, you may enroll in HDCD 7v80 as an advanced elective for your work in the lab for one semester.
  b. Take Research Methods in BBS course sequence (HCS 6312 in the fall and HCS 6313 in the spring). These courses may both be counted as advanced electives toward your degree.

B. **Recommended Plan of Study for Regular Students**

First Year-Fall	**Second Year-Fall**
HDCD 6319 Infants and Toddlers HDCD 6315 Assessment Theory HDCD 6312 Atypical Development	HDCD 6V70 Practicum (3 cr) **Elective* **Elective*
First Year-Spring	**Second Year-Spring**
HDCD 6320 Toddler and Preschool Years HDCD 6316 Development Assessment HDCD 6395 Medical/Biobehavioral Aspects of Early Childhood Disorders **Elective*	HDCD 6v70 Internship (6 cr) **Elective*
First Year-Summer	
HDCD 6370 Intervention with Young Children **Elective*	

C. **Recommended Plan of Study for Fast Track Students:** Undergraduate students in the Fast-Track program may earn credit for no more than 5 graduate courses. Students should anticipate the rigors of this course load, including spending more than 40 (or 50) hours in class and studying. They also must maintain a GPA of 3.0 or higher overall and in each HDCD core course to stay in good standing in the graduate program. Fast-Track students may choose to follow one of the below options.

OPTION 1	
Undergraduate Year-Fall HDCD 6315 Assessment Theory HDCD 6312 Atypical Development AND 2 or 3 undergraduate courses	**Graduate Year-Fall** HDCD 6V70 Practicum (3 cr) HDCD 6319 Infants & Toddlers **Elective*
Undergraduate Year-Spring HDCD 6320 Toddler & Preschool Years HDCD 6316 Developmental Assessment HDCD 6395 Medical/Biobehavioral Aspects of Early Childhood Disorders AND 1 or 2 undergraduate courses	**Graduate Year-Spring** HDCD 6V70 Internship (6 cr) **Elective*
Graduate Summer HDCD 6370 Intervention with YC **Elective*	

OPTION 2	
Undergraduate Year-Fall HDCD 6319 Infancy HDCD 6315 Assessment Theory HDCD 6312 Atypical AND 1 or 2 undergraduate courses	**Graduate Year-Fall** HDCD 6V70 Practicum (3 cr) **Elective* **Elective*
Undergraduate Year-Spring HDCD 6316 Dev. Assessment HDCD 6320 Preschool AND 2 or 3 undergraduate courses	**Graduate Year-Spring** HDCD 6V70 Internship (6 cr) HDCD 6396 Medical/Biobehavioral Aspects of Early Childhood Disorders
Graduate Summer HDCD 6370 Intervention with YC **Elective*	

D. **Core Classes: These classes (below) are offered once a year, but only in the semester listed (F = Fall, S = Spring, U = Summer)**

HDCD 6312	F	Atypical Development (Fall)
HDCD 6315	F	Assessment Theory (Co- or Prerequisite HDCD 6319)
HDCD 6316	S	Developmental Assessment (Prerequisites: HDCD 6319, 6315)
HDCD 6319	F	The Developing Child: Infants and Toddlers (0-3 years)
HDCD 6320	S	The Developing Child: Preschool Years (3-5 years) (Prerequisite: HDCD 6319)
HDCD 6370	U	Intervention with Young Children (Prerequisites HDCD 6319, 6315, 6312)
HDCD 6395	S	Medical and Biobehavioral

E. **Approved Electives** (select 3 electives for 9 credit hours): These courses below are not guaranteed to be offered every year. The semester in which the course is *usually* offered is listed next to the course (F = Fall, S = Spring, U = Summer, V = Variable), but this is also not guaranteed. Please check with Dr. Grant if there is a particular course that you might be interested in taking.

COMD 6307	V	Language Acquisition (or HCS 6368 Language Development)
COMD 7V62	V	Seminar in Autism
HCS 6331	S	Cognitive Development
HCS 6350	F	Social Development
HCS 7382	V	Health Psychology
HDCD 6310	U	Working with Parents and Caregivers
HDCD 6330	V	Families and Culture
HDCD 6335	S	Intervention Paradigms
HDCD 6351	V	Play Matters
HDCD 6355	V	Advanced Seminar in Family Outreach and Assessment (FOA)
HDCD 6360	F	Behavior Management
HDCD 6365	F	Social Communications in Early Childhood Disorders
HDCD 6385		Child Psychopathology
HDCD 6395	V	Medical and Biobehavioral Factors in Early Childhood
HDCD 6V81	V	Special Topics in Human Development and Early Childhood Disorders
HDCD 7V80	V	Independent Research
HDCD 7V98	V	Independent Study

F. **Required Monthly Professional Development Luncheon Meetings**
Students are required to attend a few professional development meetings. These meetings will be vitally important for conveying program expectations and for professional development and may feature guest speakers. Students are notified of these meetings in advance with plenty of email reminders. Attendance is mandatory. Refreshments are provided.

G. **Required Assessment Surveys**

At the end of their first and second year, students will be asked to complete a survey about their progress in the program. This information is to support us in evaluating how well we are reaching learning outcomes and supporting students' needs. Completing this survey is mandatory.

H. **Practicum/Internship**

The supervising professor for practicum and internship carefully considers students' needs when assigning placements. To receive a placement, students are required to provide their application materials (e.g., CV) and complete any necessary paperwork at the end of their first year in the program. Students are notified in advance of necessary materials and deadlines for those materials through plenty of email reminders.

V. Student Resources

A. **Shared Office Space**: MS students are fortunate to have access to a shared group office space in JO 3.112 (the Jonsson building connects to the Green Hall building on the 4th floor). To access the office, students should get in touch with the academic support coordinator and ask for the door code. The office has a conference-style table with chairs, a few individual carrel desk spaces, some comfortable seating, a computer, and a microwave and refrigerator. Students are encouraged to use the space to study or work between classes and to gather for study groups. Students are asked to be considerate of others sharing this space and to clean up after themselves. For everyone's protection, students should not share the door code with anyone who is not a student in our MS program.

B. **UTD Library:** The University of Texas at Dallas has an excellent library, with vast electronic resources and helpful, knowledgeable staff. Students can use PsychInfo and other databases to access research articles electronically from computers both on- and off-campus. Materials not owned by our library system can usually be provided electronically within 24 hours by the Interlibrary Loan Department.

C. **The Writing Center:** Students are encouraged to take advantage of this resource provided by the Office of Graduate Education.

D. **Disability Services:** Students with documented disabilities and/or have concerns about disabilities are strongly encouraged to contact the Office of Student AccessAbility. This office provides qualified students with equal opportunities to experience the academic and social opportunities at the University of Texas at Dallas. Students with documented learning disabilities can get assistance with arranging for academic accommodations.

E. **The Counseling Center:** Students facing personal difficulties are encouraged to make use of the UTD Counseling Center.

VI. What To Do If You Are Having Academic Difficulty

A. **Consult with the professor:** Students should first contact their professor to address any type of academic difficulty. If they do not understand an assignment or a misunderstanding arises, students should politely ask the professor for help, and keep asking respectfully if they do not understand.

B. Consult with Dr. Grant: If a student cannot find the help they need from their professor, they should contact Dr. Grant. She is glad to help students with addressing their concerns and will consult with relevant faculty when appropriate to support learning needs.

C. **Academic probation:** If a student's GPA falls below 3.0, the student is automatically placed on Academic Probation effective the following semester. If a student fails to make sufficient academic progress during the probation period, the student will be automatically dropped from the university. Students should be advised that per university regulations, graduate students must earn grades of B- or higher in all core courses. Students earning a C in the sequenced cores must retake the class and earn a B- or higher before taking the second class in the sequence. To apply for graduation, students must be off of academic probation.

D. **Growth Plan:** Students in serious academic difficulty, regardless of whether they are on academic probation or not, will meet with the program head to discuss a stringent Growth Plan. A Growth Plan is a series of specific goals the student will have to achieve to return to good academic standing. The purpose of the Growth Plan is to outline specific steps for improvement and to clarify expectations.

VII. Graduation

A. **Applying for Graduation:** Students should apply for graduation just before the beginning of their last semester. During their final advising session before the start of the last spring semester, students should carefully review their degree plans with the academic support coordinator to ensure that they have met the program requirements. If everything is satisfactory, Dr. Grant will approve the degree plan. Then, the academic support coordinator will provide further instructions to students on how to apply for graduation. It is important to note that graduation is conditional at this point—a student must concurrently meet the requirements outlined in the degree plan to graduate.

B. **Participating in Commencement:** Students who have met all of the program requirements will participate in spring commencement. Times and dates of spring commencement are announced by the university. Once students have applied to graduate, they should receive emails from the Graduation Team about important deadlines, how to purchase tickets for commencement ceremonies, how to purchase a cap and gown, and other graduation-related notices.

VIII. Getting Ready for What Comes Next

Many students in the HDCD program seek employment. Other students apply to nationally prominent doctoral programs, either in their second year of the program or a little later.

Applying for doctoral programs: Students interested in attending doctoral programs immediately after completing the MS degree should begin discussing this goal in the first year of the program. They should find an opportunity to work in a research laboratory on campus for at least two full semesters. They should also plan to investigate doctoral programs during the summer between the first and second year, and start preparing applications in the fall of the second year.

Working with the Career Center to find employment: The Career Center at the University of Texas at Dallas offers a wide variety of services for students seeking professional positions. The Career Center offers valuable advice for launching a job search, preparing a resume, and interviewing; these topics will also be covered during one of the professional development luncheon meetings.

Consulting with the faculty and supervisors: Students should consult with the faculty and practicum/internship personnel about their career interests and seek guidance about doctoral programs and employment opportunities. Many professionals are eager to offer their wisdom and use their connections to help strong students find the right positions.

IX. Program Contacts

There are two primary contacts for this program: the academic support coordinator and the program head.

- Kristi Noel is the academic support coordinator (Kristi.Noel@UTDallas.edu). Ms. Noel handles admissions and enrollment, adding/dropping courses, and graduation procedures.
- Dr. Meridith Grant is the program head (MGrant@UTDallas.edu). She advises students, oversees admissions to the program, coordinates the curriculum and course offerings, and oversees degree plan completion.

Though we both work closely together, your questions should generally first go to the academic support coordinator. Please feel free to reach out to us by email. If needed, we can set up appointments.

We hope that you find this student guide helpful as you pursue your Master's degree!