



New Jersey Alliance for Clinical and Translational Science

Advancing clinical and translational science to develop new therapies and treatments and improve health care

NJ ACTS FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM For predoctoral students and postdoctoral trainees

Overview

NJ ACTS - The highly prestigious NIH Clinical Translational Science Award (CTSA) was granted to Rutgers University and its partners in 2019 to encourage and enable the development of innovative solutions that will improve the efficiency, quality and impact of the process for turning observations in the laboratory, clinic and community into interventions that improve the health of individuals and the public. Rutgers, with its academic partners Princeton University and the New Jersey Institute of Technology; industries, hospital systems and communities, has created the New Jersey Alliance for Clinical Translational Science (NJ ACTS). In addition to its commitment to the growth of the clinical and translational research infrastructure across New Jersey, NJ ACTS is dedicated to the training of the clinical/translational scientists of the future. Funded by the NIH CTSA, we developed the NJ ACTS Fellows program in Fall 2019.

NJ ACTS Fellowship Program -This program equips its Fellows with enhanced knowledge, skills, and abilities that provide a broad introduction to clinical and translational research *concurrent* with their current pre- or postdoctoral research program. The goal of the fellowship is to enhance career development beyond that encountered in traditional pre-and postdoctoral programs by focusing on the knowledge and expertise needed to conduct translational team research across disciplines. Fellows will gain a broader understanding of challenges and opportunities in translational science as well as a deeper knowledge of the extensive research, professional, and technical resources within NJ ACTS and the national CTSA consortium designed to support and further their professional learning.

For the 2021-2022 TL1 cohort (August - July), **3 predoctoral and 3 postdoctoral fellowship slots** are available.

Fellowship Application: Key Dates

- ◆ Letter of intent due: **April 30, 2021**
- ◆ Applications due: **Thursday, May 27, 2021 (by 5PM)**
- ◆ Letters of reference due: **June 4, 2021**
- ◆ Interviews: **July 2021**
- ◆ Award notifications: **August 2021**
- ◆ Earliest award start date: **September 1, 2021**

Program Value

This competitive program offers 'precision training', customized to each Fellow over a 2-3-year period against a backdrop of didactic learning, seminars, workshops and experiential learning opportunities provided across the academic partners - Rutgers University, Princeton University, and the New Jersey Institute of Technology. An NJ ACTS-specific *Precision Training Plan* to guide training and acquisition of translational science knowledge and skills will be developed with input from the Fellow, the Fellow's primary research mentor, NJ ACTS Academy Mentors (see *below*) and program leadership.

Rigorous, individualized training in translational research methodology, interdisciplinary professional skills and multidisciplinary mentoring structure the program. Focused learning, skill-building, and experiential learning activities in topics such as scientific communications, team science, current healthcare systems challenges, boundary barriers across disciplines, clinical research, and informatics will inform the translational science principles that NJ ACTS Fellows acquire.

As part of NJ ACTS, the Fellowship program offers a distinct platform for its Fellows - and their mentors - to encounter others outside their primary area of research, engage with domain experts, and explore translational science challenges and successes within and outside the academic research environment.

Award provisions

The NJ ACTS Fellowship Program (TL1) program supports 6 Fellows/year (3 predocs, 3 postdocs). **One year** of financial support is provided and includes:

- ◆ For predoctoral applicants: one year of stipend, health benefits, and tuition consistent with applicant's school/institution policy.
- ◆ For postdoctoral applicants: stipend and tuition commensurate with current NRSA level (<https://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-21-049.html>).
- ◆ Additional tuition support is available for fellows who wish to pursue certificate or master's programs in clinical translational sciences (https://rwjms.rutgers.edu/gsbs/prospective/ms_cts.html)
- ◆ Up to \$1,500 for travel (including remote or in-person participation in relevant conferences) and \$2,000 to the Fellow for training/research-related expenses pertinent to the program*.

**Does not pertain to Princeton-based postdoctoral applicants.*

For Princeton applicants only:

- ◆ For predoctoral applicants, the budget for stipend and tuition will be commensurate with the current NRSA level for predoctoral trainees and fellows.
- ◆ Postdoctoral applicants should only budget up to Princeton's current institutional allowance under training/research related fees. Tuition should be budgeted up to the NRSA rate for tuition and fees.
- ◆ Indirect cost rate is 8% on stipend, travel and training/research-related fees (tuition is excluded).
- ◆ Please contact Bianca Freda (biancaf@princeton.edu) for any questions on the award provisions or earlier Princeton submission deadlines. See application process for details on internal approval process prior to submission.

Program requirements

Successful participation in the program requires:

- ◆ A 2-3-year commitment. The 3-year period is recommended, as it allows flexibility to schedule the didactic and experiential learning opportunities and avoid disruption of the Fellow's primary degree/research program; shorter commitments may be permitted if the fellow progresses more rapidly through the program.
- ◆ Adherence to the Fellow's customized NJ ACTS-specific Precision Training Plan to guide successful training and acquisition of translational science knowledge and skills.
- ◆ Completion of the program's core curriculum (approximately 10-15% of the Fellow's time each year during a 2-3-year training period). In addition to participating in NJ ACTS meetings, seminars, and workshops, all fellows are expected to complete (or demonstrate satisfactory completion prior to the start of the fellowship) the following coursework by the end of their participation in the program:
 - Team Science
 - Grant writing
 - Biostatistics
 - Communicating Science
 - Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR)

(Any substitution for a similar course must be done in consultation with and prior approval by program leadership.)

Those Fellows who compile 18 approved credits of eligible and approved coursework will receive a Rutgers [Certificate in Clinical and Translational Research](#). Fellows may also opt for a Master of Clinical and Translational Sciences (30 credits) by participating in additional required courses or electives. Didactic content and modalities continue to be developed by the program to provide optimum precision training options.

- ◆ Satisfactory completion of mandatory online Research, Ethics, and Compliance (CITI) training.
- ◆ A minimum of 24 contact hours of experiential learning chosen from a variety of program opportunities, customized to each NJ ACTS Fellow.

In addition to the program's requirements, Fellows are expected to publish their findings in well-respected scientific journals and present their research at relevant NJ ACTS and national conferences; attend required NJ ACTS, NIH and Association of Clinical and Translational Sciences meetings. Fellows are also expected to prepare applications for fellowships (pre- and postdoctoral trainees) or independent funding (postdoctoral trainees) prior to program completion. In most cases, these expectations are already aligned with their research studies and development plans.

Eligibility criteria

To be eligible for the NJ ACTS fellowship program, applicants must:

- ◆ Be a current predoctoral student or postdoctoral trainee at Rutgers, NJIT or Princeton University
- ◆ Be a US citizen or a Permanent Resident of the US
- ◆ Have a strong science background, as demonstrated by performance in didactic courses, prior research experience and letters of reference

- ◆ Have a research Preceptor or co-Preceptor who is a member of the NJ ACTS Academy of Mentors (see below) or fulfills the requirements of an Academy Mentor and is accepted into the Academy prior to application review
- ◆ Be involved in a research project with strong translational potential and be committed to applying the knowledge acquired during the fellowship program to moving the current research project along the translational research spectrum
- ◆ Have joined a laboratory and be able to articulate a mature and complete proposal of the PhD project (for PhD or PhD-phase students) or agreed research project (postdoctoral applicants) by the due date of the application
- ◆ Not currently hold or be a prior recipient of an externally funded research fellowship in current position

Application process (2-steps)

Our Commitment to Diversity

We are committed to becoming an inclusive learning community that fosters respect, belonging, and value for all with zero tolerance for bias, racism, and other negative 'isms'. We strive to provide an inclusive academic environment where all members of our community can thrive and achieve their fullest potential.

Applications are strongly encouraged from women and individuals from groups that are underrepresented in medicine and translational research including, but not limited to, ethnic minorities and individuals with disabilities or from disadvantaged backgrounds. Please see NIH's statement regarding [NOT-OD-20-031](#) for more information.

The entire application process is submitted securely online, including attachments. Please follow the steps below to successfully submit an application to the program.

1. Submit a required letter of intent by 5PM, Friday, April 30th

A completed letter of intent by the deadline is required in order to submit a full application.

Use the link provided below to initiate a letter of intent to submit to the program that includes basic information used to ascertain the anticipated pool of applicants and assign reviewers.

Submission of this will initiate a custom application link to you via email to submit a full application.

<https://redcap.link/i8pwun1p>

2. Submit your application by 5PM, Thursday, May 27:

In addition to basic contact and demographic information, the application includes:

- NIH fellowship biosketch (<https://grants.nih.gov/grants/forms/biosketch.htm>)
Note: the personal statement section must address: 1) what has inspired you to pursue a career as a researcher in your field and 2) how NJ ACTS resources will accelerate or transform your research and/or contribute to your career in the translational realm that otherwise might not be as readily achieved. Include your long-term career aspirations.

- Project description (thesis if predoctoral, research if postdoctoral) - no more than 2 pages single spaced. Include:
 - Brief description of your project
 - Specific aims
 - Progress to date
 - Given where your research is situated within the NIH-defined [translational science spectrum](#), define and describe potential pathways that might advance its translational reach, including opportunities, current barriers/challenges, and potential benefit to improve health environments and lifestyles.
- Names and contact information of referees: 2 (for predoctoral applications) or 3 (for postdoctoral applications).
These will be submitted directly to the program team by the referees with unique links generated upon submission of the online application.

One letter must be from the thesis (or research) mentor stating the applicant's qualifications as well as the mentor's commitment to guarantee completion of the TL1 training program. The letter must also address how the applicant's success will be propelled and enriched by completion of the program. The letter should also specifically address how the primary research mentor's laboratory area of focus and research interests might be advanced by the collaborative opportunities and resources provided by NJ ACTS.

If the primary mentor is not a Preceptor in the Academy and does not qualify at this time for that status, a Preceptor from the Academy must act as co-mentor and provide a letter stating his/her commitment to support the applicant's progress through the program, if selected.

- Research regulatory approvals (if applicable): IRB and IACUC approvals are not necessary at the time of application; however, they must be in place prior to the award start date. As these approvals must also be obtained from a separate NIH panel, applicants are strongly encouraged to begin the process immediately.

*For Princeton applicants only: online applications and attachments must be saved in progress, printed to pdf and routed through a departmental grants manager in Princeton ERA for approval **prior to submission to NJ ACTS**. Please contact Bianca Freda (biancaf@princeton.edu) with any questions.*

Selection process and review criteria

After formal evaluation by the review panel, the most promising candidates will be contacted and invited to interview with members of the NJ ACTS Fellowship (TL1) Selection Committee. Final selections will be based upon the initial application as well as evaluations by the reviewers, each interviewing faculty member, and program leadership.

***All review criteria are weighed equally:**

Distinct value: ability of program to add value and opportunities that are otherwise not within reach of applicant: Is the program unique enough in the context of other opportunities within applicant's primary area of research, organizational location, mentor, funding, and interest to add value to the applicant's

training? Or is this similar to opportunities already available to applicant and thus would diminish the full usefulness that the program seeks to offer its trainees?

Professional merit: applicant's proficiency in current primary area of research, demonstrated by quality of proposed or ongoing research study; publications/presentations; related academic activities and scholarship; demonstrated strong academic track record of trainee; reference letters demonstrate applicant's ability to work as a constructive team member, receive constructive feedback, maintain appropriate level of collegiality with peers

Academic potential: academic potential of applicant to engage in and contribute to translational research: student's/postdoc's project lends itself to translational science; personal statement and/or reference letters reflect independent thinking, intellectual curiosity, identify strong skill set for time management

Mentor capacity and commitment: primary mentor's ability and commitment to applicant: sustainable and robust funding preferably from a federal or other extramural funding source e.g.; recommendation letters demonstrate commitment to applicant to allow time; mentor willingness to incorporate translational science into primary research to the extent possible; mentor's availability to the applicant as needed for successful program completion; articulated enthusiasm for the applicant's participation in the TL1 program; strength of mentor's training record; mentor's own interest in translational science

Career alignment for translational science: applicant's ability to extend into translational science that would be meaningful to the applicant's research career: evidence of previous ability, skill-building, knowledge-seeking indicating strong capability to grow outside of primary area of research; appropriate stage of training - is there enough time for applicant to learn and apply translational science principles or integrate into research as reflected in personal statement and reference letters, accomplishments to date

Mentoring

Active mentoring is a key component of the fellow's success in the program and it is expected that the primary research mentor demonstrate a genuine interest and knowledge of best practices that foster a supportive environment and successful mentorship for the applicant. Examples of this include successful completion of mentoring training, workshops, and programs. Not only is active mentor participation beneficial for the Fellow; it also creates collaborative research opportunities for the primary mentor's lab and increased awareness/usage of NJ ACTS resources.

Mentor Training Resources

NJ ACTS partners offer faculty mentoring resources: These include:

Rutgers University

<https://academicaffairs.rutgers.edu/rutgers-office-faculty-development>
<https://facultyaffairs.rbhs.rutgers.edu/faculty-development/mentoring/>

Princeton University

Princeton offers faculty members a variety of learning and professional development opportunities, including access to mentor training and resources, through the [Office of the Dean of the Faculty](#), the [National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity](#), the [Faculty Advancement Network](#), and the [McGraw Center for Teaching and Learning](#).

NJIT

<https://www.njit.edu/ite/faculty-mentoring-program>

Additionally, through a partnership with educators at the University of Rochester Clinical and Translational Science Institute, mentors may participate in a course for research mentoring. The courses are available to anyone at Rutgers, Princeton or NJIT including mentors of the KL2 Scholars and TL1 Fellows:

<https://clic-ctsa.org/education?search=mentoring>

Academy of Mentors

The Academy is comprised of faculty from Rutgers, Princeton, and NJIT based on 1) their recognized expertise in a key clinical/translational discipline; 2) their demonstrated commitment to clinical/translational research; and 3) their passion for contributing to the education and training of the next generation of clinical/translational sciences.

The Academy membership consists of two categories:

Preceptors are those faculty who have the qualifications to act as Thesis Mentors to our students or as Primary Research Mentors to our postdoctoral trainees (including expertise, funding, and training record; or, for more early-career faculty, strong potential for excellence in training). Preceptors are expected to play an active role during the course of the award by fostering the Fellow's career development as a translational/clinical scientist. They are expected to act as advocates for the Fellow at the departmental, institutional and professional levels and provide scientific guidance for the proposed project.

Advisors are those faculty who may not have all of the qualifications to act as Preceptors for these fellows but who bring a critical skill set to their training (e.g. expertise in human disease, epidemiology, design and execution of clinical trials, biostatistics, informatics, career development, etc.). Industry partners who will contribute to educating our trainees about key issues in drug development, regulatory considerations and commercialization also fall into this latter category.

All research preceptors for TL1 Fellows must be members of the NJ ACTS Academy of Mentors. (Preceptors who are not currently members of the Academy can apply for membership prior to the NJ ACTS fellowship application deadline.)

In addition to the primary research preceptor, each Fellow will establish a Mentoring Committee that includes faculty whose translational or clinical research expertise is pertinent to the research project and will supplement that of the research preceptor.

For a current list of faculty members of each participating institution in the Academy of Mentors, please see: <https://rutgers.box.com/s/dihz2k3t914mqxzhmx24tu5juyibcmu2>

For faculty interested in joining the Academy of Mentors, please contact:

Anda Cytroen, Executive Director, Research Training and Development SGS-BHS
Email: Anda.cytroen@rutgers.edu

For faculty interested in joining the Academy of Mentors, please contact:

Rutgers & NJIT faculty - Anda Cytroen, Executive Director, Research Training and Development SGS-BHS

Email: anda.cytroen@rutgers.edu

Princeton faculty – Bianca Freda, Manager, Research and Administration, NJ ACTS

Email: Biancaf@princeton.edu

Program leadership and staff

Kathleen W. Scotto, PhD

Program Director, NJ ACTS Fellows Program

Rutgers, State University of New Jersey

Email: Kathleen.Scotto@rutgers.edu

Phone: 973-972-5455

Daniel A. Notterman, M.D., M.A.

Co-Director, NJ ACTS Fellows Program

Princeton Lead, NJ ACTS

Princeton University

Email: dan1@princeton.edu

Rutgers University

Anda Cytroen, MPH

Email: anda.cytroen@rutgers.edu

Wayne Zhou, PhD

Email: wz241@gsbs.rutgers.edu

Princeton University

Bianca Freda, MPH

Email: biancaf@princeton.edu

Links, award #, NJ ACTS logo, citation information

NIH award: 1TL1TR003019



Logo (for presentations, e.g.):

Publication Acknowledgment

“Research reported in this publication was supported by the National Center For Advancing Translational Sciences of the National Institutes of Health under Award Number TL1TR003019. The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the National Institutes of Health.”

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