Cancer Biology

The Undergraduate Program in Cancer Biology was established in 2020 as a joint program between the Department of Chemistry in the College of Arts and Sciences and the Department of Cell, Developmental and Integrative Biology (CDIB) in the Heersink School of Medicine. This program is the only one of its kind in the US to specifically train students in cancer biology.

The central mission of the new Cancer Biology undergraduate major is to provide students with a strong educational and research background that maximizes their chances to achieve career goals in cancer biology in particular and life sciences in general. This program is unique in that students will gain a broad background in the biomedical sciences by exposure to courses that support the current requirements of the biomedical enterprise and are applicable to academic, private, and government settings. Furthermore, by requiring a research component, all students within this major will have early exposure to a cutting-edge research environment through participation in current investigator-led programs in multiple research-intensive departments at UAB and in collaboration with the O’Neal Comprehensive Cancer Center.

UAB’s mission includes the promotion of discovery, knowledge dissemination and education. The Cancer Biology major helps to fulfill these goals by training students to take up positions in research and clinical laboratories, by providing a solid foundation for future graduate study, and by providing informed individuals appropriate for employment in multiple health-related settings. Disciplines covered will include not only cell biology and chemistry, but also microbiology, immunology, genetics, pathology, pharmacology and medicine. This interdisciplinary curriculum reflects the diverse nature of the disease itself.

Because of these features, students will be exposed to a robust and flexible educational experience. Undergraduates will have the opportunity to undertake high quality research in laboratory settings across campus. They will receive research training from world-class investigators at an earlier stage than their peers and have exposure to state-of-the-art technologies, which will increase the desirability of these students for both professional careers or post-graduate programs with an exceptional background in cancer biology and laboratory research.

Admissions

The Undergraduate Cancer Biology Program is designed for graduating high school seniors and college freshmen and sophomores with an outstanding academic record and the desire to pursue a career in biomedical research, medicine or the health professions. Successful applicants to the program should meet the admissions criteria below.

First-time freshmen applicants must have a high school cumulative GPA of 3.5 or higher (on a 4.0 scale) and an ACT composite score of 28 or higher (or the SAT combined V+Q score at 1300 or higher). High school students who do not meet these requirements may be accepted into the program as pre-Cancer Biology majors. Any student who is admitted as a pre-Cancer Biology major must have an overall GPA #3.0 after 24 credits of work at UAB, a GPA #3.25 in their Biology, Chemistry, Physics and Mathematics (MA 105 and higher) coursework, and have taken a freshman year curriculum that is compatible with the Program. Current UAB students and transfer students from other institutions who are freshmen or sophomores (non-direct admits) may select Cancer Biology for their major, but must have an overall GPA #3.0 and must have demonstrated excellent academic performance in science/mathematics courses and have a GPA #3.25 in those courses.

Students must maintain an overall GPA #3.0 in order to remain in good academic standing in the Cancer Biology Program. If a student’s overall GPA falls below 3.0, they will have one semester to bring their overall grade to 3.0 or better.

Those who wish to apply to the Program should contact the Program Directors for additional information. The Co-Directors of the Program, Dr. Braden McFarland and Dr. Sadanandan Velu, are available to meet with high school students and their parents, or with current UAB students to discuss the program.

Advising and Information

Program Leadership:

Dr. Braden McFarland
Co-Director, Undergraduate Cancer Biology Program
Assistant Professor of Cell, Developmental and Integrative Biology (CDIB)
(205) 934-3599
bdcox@uab.edu

Dr. Sadanandan Velu
Co-Director, Undergraduate Cancer Biology Program
Professor of Chemistry
(205) 975-2478
svelu@uab.edu

Academic Advising:

Jamie Grimes
Chemistry Building 212
cnbyadvise@uab.edu (chemadvise@uab.edu)

Bachelor of Science in Cancer Biology

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<td>CNBY 210</td>
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1. Demonstrated excellent academic performance in science/mathematics courses and have a GPA #3.25 in these courses.
2. Students must maintain an overall GPA #3.0 in order to remain in good academic standing in the Cancer Biology Program. If a student’s overall GPA falls below 3.0, they will have one semester to bring their overall grade to 3.0 or better.
PH 222 requires Calculus II (pass) and is not required for,

Area III credit requirements are included with major courses.

Recommended (but not required) courses for the general electives,

Recommended but not required courses include:

BY 115/BY 115L, BY 116/BY 116L, BY 245, BY 311, BY 327/BY 327L, BY 405/BY 405L, BY 416, BY 433, BY 437, BY 440, GGSC 310, GGSC 410, GGSC 420, GGSC 491, and MIC 275.

Sophomore
First Term Hours Second Term Hours
BY 124 4 BY 210 4
& 124L & 210L
CH 235 4 CH 237 4
& CH 236 & CH 238
CNBY 2102 1 CNBY 2102 1
Blazer Core Course1 3 CNBY 320 3
Blazer Core Course1 3 Blazer Core Course1 3

15 15

Junior
First Term Hours Second Term Hours
BY 330 3 CNBY 410 3
CH 460 3 CNBY 495 3
CNBY 420 3 PH 202 4
& 202L
PH 201 4 Blazer Core Course1 3
& 201L
PUH 250 or MA 180 3 Blazer Core Course1 3

16 16

Senior
First Term Hours Second Term Hours
CNBY 4803 1 CNBY 4803 1
CNBY 495 3 CNBY 499 3
Elective CH or CNBY 400 level course3 3 Elective CH or CNBY 400 level class3 3
General Elective5 3 General Elective5 3
General Elective5 3 General Elective5 3

13 13

Total credit hours: 120

1 See GPS for list of courses that can satisfy core and/or major requirements.
2 CNBY 210 must be taken twice.
3 CNBY 480 must be taken twice.
4 List of elective CH or CNBY 400 courses (students must pick two - all 3 credit hours): CH 461, CH 463 (or CH 464), CH 471, CH 472, CH 477, CNBY 430, CNBY 440, CNBY 461, CNBY 462.
5 Recommended (but not required) courses for the general electives include BY 115/BY 115L, BY 116/BY 116L, BY 245, BY 327/BY 327L, BY 311, BY 440, GGSC 310, GGSC 410, GGSC 420, GGSC 491, and MIC 275.

CNBY 210. Colloquium in Cancer Biology. 1 Hour.
This course will introduce students to current topics in cancer biology. The goal is to cover a wide range of subjects, with speakers from UAB and if appropriate from outside institutions. Topics covered will be very broad and will range from basic science to clinical and translational medicine, and if appropriate will also address some of the ethical issues surrounding cancer treatment and the sociological impact of chronic disease. The goal will be to build interest in the topic and for students to gain a broad appreciation of the many facets of the disease.
CNBY 320. Introduction to Cancer Biology. 3 Hours.
This course will introduce students to cancer biology. Topics will include the history of cancer, hallmarks of cancer biology on a cellular level, common cancers in the body, cancer treatment, and prevention and risk factors. This course will serve as a foundation and prerequisite to the more advanced upper level CNBY courses.
Prerequisites: BY 123 [Min Grade: C] and BY 124 [Min Grade: C]

CNBY 410. Proliferation and Carcinogenesis. 3 Hours.
This course will cover the basic tenets of cell biology as they apply to cancer. Topics to be covered will include the cell cycle, how cells normally grow and divide, how they stop growing and how that process is disrupted in cancer; the normal processes associated with cell death such as autophagy, apoptosis and necrosis; the concepts of “stemness” and immortalization in relation to cancer cells and the role of telomerase, mutagens, environmental toxins and DNA repair.
Prerequisites: CNBY 320 [Min Grade: C]

CNBY 420. Genetic Basis of Cancer. 3 Hours.
This course will provide an overview of genomic organization transcription and translation, prior to commencing an in-depth study of cancer genetics and the roles of oncogenes, tumor suppressors, RNA, DNA methylation, gene amplification and the control of gene expression and the viral causes of cancer. Students will also be introduced to basic concepts in bioinformatics and database mining using The Cancer Genome Atlas (TCGA) as a model.
Prerequisites: CNBY 320 [Min Grade: C]

CNBY 430. Tumor Survival and the Microenvironment. 3 Hours.
This course will examine cancer cell physiology in terms of the tumor microenvironment, nutrients and angiogenesis and will explore how these influence cancer cell survival, invasion and metastasis.
Prerequisites: CNBY 320 [Min Grade: C]

CNBY 440. Cell Signaling and Cancer. 3 Hours.
In this course the major cell signaling pathways involved in cancer cell development will be examined. An initial overview of signaling (cytosolic, nuclear, dual-address), receptors and basic second messenger pathways (PKA/PKC) will be followed by an in-depth study of pathways of particular relevance to cancer such as receptor tyrosine kinases, RAS, PI3 kinase/PTEN, growth factors (e.g. EGF, TGF-#, integrins, Wnt/#-catenin and JAK/STAT pathways. The role of post-translational modifications of proteins, such as glycosylation will also be discussed.
Prerequisites: CNBY 320 [Min Grade: C]

CNBY 460. Tumor Pathobiology and Immunology. 3 Hours.
This course will examine the pathological changes that occur in cancer cells and tissues. The course will start with a brief overview of normal histology and will then focus on pathological changes that occur in some select cancers, e.g., colon, lung and breast. This will be followed by exploration of the roles of infection and immunity in cancer that will involve the role of innate and adaptive immunity and cancer cell defenses. The course will conclude by discussing cancer staging and classification of different cancers.
Prerequisites: CNBY 320 [Min Grade: C]

CNBY 470. Cancer Treatment. 3 Hours.
Major advances have been made in the diagnosis and treatment of multiple cancers. This course will review current therapeutic approaches to cancer treatment including radiotherapy, chemotherapy, surgery and gene therapy. This course will also include an introduction to the role of personalized medicine in cancer treatment. The course will conclude by considering other facets of caring for the patient with cancer including maintenance of nutrition, mental health and palliative care.
Prerequisites: CNBY 320 [Min Grade: C]

CNBY 480. Journal Club in Cancer Biology. 1 Hour.
This journal club will be appropriate for senior students. Students, either individually or in small groups will select, read and present articles from the current cancer literature as guided by their instructor.

CNBY 495. Undergraduate Research in Cancer Biology. 0-6 Hours.
In this major, students will be required to undertake a research project and register for 6 credit hours of CNBY 495 Undergraduate Research, as well as this CNBY 499 Senior Research Capstone course during their final semester of research.
Prerequisites: PSDO 200 [Min Grade: P]

CNBY 499. Senior Undergraduate Research Capstone Course. 3 Hours.
In this major, students will be required to undertake a research project and register for 6 credit hours of CNBY 495 Undergraduate Research, as well as this CNBY 499 Senior Research Capstone course during their final semester of research. This latter course will serve as the opportunity for students to write their research into a manuscript for publication, present a poster or give an oral presentation describing their research for presentation at the UAB EXPO or another scientific meeting. Students will work closely with faculty mentors to ensure quality of research and writing.
Prerequisites: CNBY 495 [Min Grade: P]