The Flinders MD Advanced Studies Program: Information for Potential Research Supervisors

This document provides information about the Flinders Doctor of Medicine Advanced Studies program for potential research supervisors.

What is Advanced Studies?

Advanced Studies is a compulsory research and scholarship theme that is integrated across all four years of the Flinders Doctor of Medicine (MD) program. Advanced Studies has been a core theme of the MD program since 2014.

- In MD1, students are introduced to fundamental principles of research and scholarship. Towards the end of the year, students must select between the two pathways available: research and coursework. To facilitate decision-making, students are provided with a list of available research projects (submitted by supervisors and approved by the Advanced Studies Portfolio Advisors), and a list of researchers who are willing to supervise Advanced Studies projects. Students may also choose to identify a supervisor who is not on the list, to develop a project based on their individual interests.
- In MD2 and MD3, research pathway students work on a research project supported a supervisor, while coursework pathway students undertake postgraduate coursework topics from an approved list.
- In MD4, all students complete the Advanced Studies Capstone and complete assessments in accordance with their chosen Advanced Studies pathway.

As a guide, in 2022, 60% of MD4 students completed the Advanced Studies Capstone as a research student.

Irrespective of students' chosen pathway, students are expected to undertake a minimum of 135 hours per year over three years (totalling a minimum of 405 hours).

An overview of the Advanced Studies structure over the four-year program is provided overleaf.

The remainder of this document provides further information about Advanced Studies.

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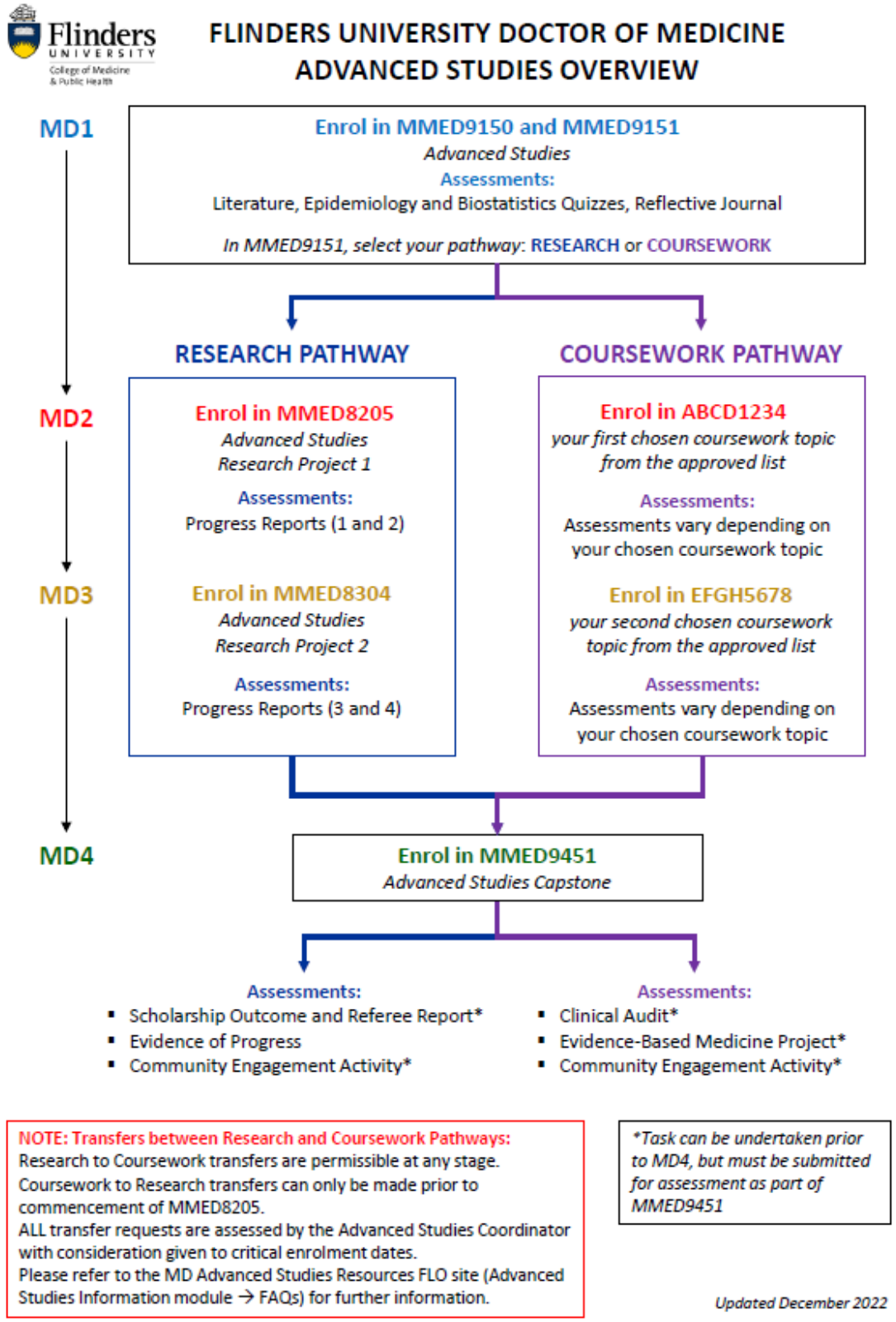
Advanced Studies Overview



NOTE: Transfers between Research and Coursework Pathways:
Research to Coursework transfers are permissible at any stage.
Coursework to Research transfers can only be made prior to commencement of MMED8205.
ALL transfer requests are assessed by the Advanced Studies Coordinator with consideration given to critical enrolment dates.
Please refer to the MD Advanced Studies Resources FLO site (Advanced Studies Information module → FAQs) for further information.

**Task can be undertaken prior to MD4, but must be submitted for assessment as part of MMED9451*

Updated December 2022

What are the aims of Advanced Studies?

Advanced Studies aims to provide Flinders MD graduates with a solid understanding of medical research and scholarship. More broadly, Advanced Studies aims to enhance the quality of medical care by producing doctors with a perspective of medicine that facilitates leadership and advocacy in medical research for the benefit of the community and the future health workforce.

For research pathway students, Advanced Studies aims to provide students with an opportunity to develop practical research skills. For coursework pathway students, Advanced Studies can offer a pathway towards a Graduate Certificate in a chosen area related to health and medicine.

What are the Advanced Studies Learning Outcomes?

Advanced Studies is underpinned by nine learning outcomes which students are expected to achieve by the time they complete MD4.

Advanced Studies Learning Outcomes (LO)	
1	Apply extensive knowledge of research design and methods to a scientific, community or clinical context
2	Analyse, interpret, and critically appraise research outcomes and data using conceptual frameworks grounded in relevant fields
3	Extend and advance personal knowledge in a specialised area of biological, clinical, epidemiological, social and/or behavioural sciences that will enhance professional practice and/or build professional capacity
4	Identify and exercise ethical responsibilities in reviewing processes in the conduct of research
5	Self-reflect and improve professional practice
6	Demonstrate a high standard of personal and professional behaviour as part of a collaborative or interprofessional team
7	Demonstrate leadership in a specialised area of health practice
8	Communicate acquired knowledge of expertise to a variety of audiences to relevant community and professional audiences, potentially using new technologies and systems
9	Demonstrate the significance of Advanced Studies work to the community and/or the profession in relevant contexts

What topics are relevant to Advanced Studies?

Because of the nature of health and medicine, a broad range of topics are relevant to Advanced Studies. This is reflected in the diversity of research and coursework topics that are available to students.

Advanced Studies research projects span many disciplines broadly related to medicine and are conducted in collaboration with clinical, academic and research staff within and across sites associated with Flinders University. These projects can include laboratory-based projects, qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods studies, and reviews of the literature.

Advanced Studies coursework topics provide students with an opportunity to expand their knowledge and expertise in a selected range of postgraduate coursework topics. These topics are regularly reviewed by the Advanced Studies team and currently cover topics such as Public Health, Health Care Management, Clinical Education, Chronic Conditions Management, Cognitive Behaviour Therapy, Biostatistics, Remote and Indigenous Health, and Climate Change.

What constitutes an acceptable Advanced Studies project?

Advanced Studies research projects should provide students with an opportunity to make an intellectual or scholarly contribution whilst addressing the Advanced Studies learning outcomes. Providing routine technical support or assistance, for example, is insufficient.

Because of the time allocation for Advanced Studies (135 hours per year over three years, totalling 405 hours), research projects are relatively small in scope. That is, Advanced Studies projects should be considered more along the lines of an Honours equivalent, rather than a PhD.

Advanced Studies research students work towards the development of a 'scholarship outcome'. This is essentially a draft manuscript that could ideally be submitted for peer review to a scholarly journal, by the end of MD4.[1] Additionally, another one of the Advanced Studies Capstone assessments requires students to communicate their research work to a relevant audience. This may take the form of a presentation at a local, national, or international conference, or departmental meeting.

There are many activities that students could undertake as part of a research project that would constitute acceptable contributions towards Advanced Studies:

- Undertaking a literature review
  A literature review can constitute an Advanced Studies project if it follows a literature review methodology (e.g., a systematic review and/or meta-analysis, scoping review, or a review performed with the rigour outlined in the Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews of Interventions). The intention of this is to provide students with an understanding of literature review methodology and apply this to a project.
- Contributing to the development of an ethics application
  Whilst students are encouraged to contribute to the ethics application, they must not assume sole responsibility for this.
- Collecting and analysing data using appropriate methods (e.g., qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods)
  This may involve several students gathering data from different locations for a given project.
- Undertaking a longitudinal or parallel component of an existing research project
- Conducting a small clinical trial with appropriate supervision

Can a project involve more than one Advanced Studies student?

Yes. More than one student can be involved on a given project, where the supervisor deems that the scope of the project is beyond what a single student could complete within the allocated timeframe. In these instances, supervisors must ensure that each student's individual contribution is clearly defined to ensure that they can achieve the Advanced Studies learning outcomes by the end of MD4.

[1] Publication is encouraged, particularly as it can enhance a student's portfolio when applying for postgraduate training. It is important to note, however, that **satisfactory completion of the Advanced Studies Capstone does not require research students to have their work published in a scholarly journal**.

Do I need to obtain ethics approval for a project before it can be considered?

No. Projects do not require ethics approval before they can be made available to Advanced Studies students. Where ethics approval is required, however, it is expected that the necessary approvals will be sought and obtained prior to data collection, in accordance with ethical research conduct.

Although students may contribute to ethics application processes, it is important to note that it is the research supervisor's responsibility to obtain the necessary approvals for the project.

Supervisors should be aware of the timeline for obtaining ethics approvals and make the necessary arrangements as early as possible. For example, due to the workload of the Southern Adelaide Local Health Network's (SALHN) Office for Research, applications for ethics and governance should be lodged early in the year, preferably before 1 March, to minimise the risk of substantial delays. This should be discussed with the student before the student is assigned to the project.

COVID-19 Considerations

It is important to note that COVID-19 may interfere with planned research activities, particularly those involving direct patient contact. Hence, supervisors should be aware that projects may need to be modified to ensure that students can complete their Advanced Studies research work within the given timeframe. Modifications might include scaling down the project, changing the scope of the study, or modifying the data collection approach. Supervisors are reminded that any major modifications would require approval from the relevant ethics committee (if required).

What should I do if my project involves intellectual property considerations or concerns with risk and/or insurance?

All students and supervisors should make themselves aware of the Flinders University Intellectual Property policy.

You should also familiarise yourself with the University's Risk and Insurance information.

Who is eligible to supervise an Advanced Studies project?

We welcome researchers from a range of disciplines to contribute to the supervision of Advanced Studies projects. Advanced Studies supervisors can be academics, clinicians, or scientists and can be employed across a range of different contexts (e.g., university, hospital, community-based settings, government, and non-government organisations) in both metropolitan and rural settings.

When you complete the Advanced Studies Research Proforma, we ask you to indicate the location of the research to help our students assess the feasibility of engaging in a project. For example, if your research must be undertaken in the Northern Territory, we would offer your project to students who will be based in the Northern Territory during their medical program. Alternatively, if your project involves a systematic review that requires computer access, this may appeal to students who may be undertaking rural clinical placements during MD3.

If you are employed by the Southern Adelaide Local Health Network (SALHN) or Flinders University, your Advanced Studies research is covered by existing agreements between the hospital and the University.

If you are not affiliated with either the University or SALHN, you can still supervise an Advanced Studies project. We ask that you ensure an agreement is in place with Flinders University prior to commencing the project to ensure that the students are covered by the University's insurance.

If you are unsure about whether an agreement is in place, the Work Integrated Learning team (cmph.placements@flinders.edu.au) can support you with this.

What are the responsibilities of an Advanced Studies supervisor?

Advanced Studies research supervisors are expected to:

- Ensure the project is appropriately resourced and feasible within the allocated timeframe
- Assume primary responsibility for ensuring that relevant ethics and governance approvals are in place
  Whilst students are encouraged to contribute to the ethics application, they must not assume sole responsibility for this
- Maintain regular contact with the student throughout the research project
- Provide guidance to students regarding the appropriate level of work required for each of the relevant aspects of the project (e.g., literature review, recruitment, data collection and analysis)
- Make regular assessments about the student's progress with the research and raise any concerns that may prevent timely completion with the Advanced Studies Portfolio Advisors
- Assist the student to recognise the impact of their research and how this may be translated into a publication (e.g., at a national or international conference, or scholarly journal article) (recognising that a journal publication is not a requirement to satisfactorily complete the Advanced Studies Capstone)

What are students' previous experiences with research?

Students who are enrolled in the MD program come from a diverse range of personal and professional backgrounds. Some students come to medicine having had an established professional career, while others may have progressed through secondary education and completed an undergraduate degree. Similarly, students' previous experiences with research are equally diverse. Some students have completed PhDs in various disciplines before coming to medicine and, therefore, have a solid understanding of research. Others, however, may have never undertaken any form of research before. Hence, it is important to consider your expectations as a supervisor with this in mind.

It is important to note that it is unlikely that a student will be able to undertake their research project entirely independently, although there may be a few exceptions. Hence, a well-defined research question coupled with supervision that is appropriate to the student's research knowledge and skills are important considerations in designing an Advanced Studies research project proposal.

What is the anticipated time commitment for Advanced Studies work?

Students are expected to undertake a minimum of 135 hours per year towards Advanced Studies.

In MD1, this takes the form of formal teaching across a range of topics related to: epidemiology; biostatistics; research methodology; research policies and procedures; and ethical considerations. This time commitment includes students' preliminary meetings with potential research supervisors.

In MD2, students are expected to undertake a minimum of 135 hours in undertaking either their research work, or coursework. The expected time commitment is the same in MD3.

In MD4, students are expected to undertake a minimum of 135 hours to finalise their Advanced Studies work and complete the Capstone requirements.

Please Note: 135 hours per year is the *minimum* expected time commitment.

What support is available for Advanced Studies?

There are two formal support mechanisms in place for Advanced Studies support.

Firstly, **funding support is available** to students who enrol in the Advanced Studies research pathway. Once a student is allocated to a research project, a total of $2000 is made available for the student and supervisor to access for the duration of the Advanced Studies project (i.e., until the student graduates from the MD program). These funds can be accessed to support the purchase of project consumables, costs associated with conference and/or workshop attendance, and publication fees. **These funds will lapse once the student graduates.**

Secondly, **biostatistical support is available** for Advanced Studies projects and is provided by the College of Medicine and Public Health biostatisticians. This support can be accessed by both students and supervisors to facilitate analysis of quantitative data related to Advanced Studies work (e.g., research projects and, for coursework pathway students, clinical audits).

What is the timeline for submitting research project proposals?

The timeline below outlines the general timeline for receiving and processing research project proposals.

Please Note: This timeline is an estimate only. Exact dates will vary from year to year.

Advanced Studies Research Project Proposal Timeline	
March	Main Call for Projects disseminated to potential supervisors
May	Deadline for projects
Early June	Final Call for Projects
July	Project proposals reviewed by the Advanced Studies team
August	MD1 students receive project proposals and a list of potential supervisors
September	MD1 students apply for research/coursework and, if research, nominate three projects in order of preference
October	Potential supervisors notified of interested students and make selections
November	Research students notified of projects and commence work with their supervisors

How do students decide on a research project?

Students have two options in deciding on a research project:

1) Select from the list of approved research projects
   Details of all approved research projects are made available to MD1 students in July/August, with preferences due in September.

   During July/August and September, students have the opportunity to review the approved projects in relation to their individual interests. Students are encouraged to contact potential supervisors to learn more about the project before nominating their top three

preferences via a formal submission process, administered by the Advanced Studies team.

Supervisors are welcome to meet the student to share further details about the project; however, it is important to note that **a student should not be accepted to join a project until the application process has closed**, and all received applications have been reviewed. This ensures that the process is fair for all students.

2) Develop a research proposal in collaboration with a supervisor
Students can elect to develop their own research project in collaboration with a supervisor. In these instances, the student works with the supervisor to submit a research project proposal, using the template provided to supervisors in the Call for Research Projects. The proposal must be attached to the student's application (due in September). The Advanced Studies Portfolio Advisors then review all research project proposals to assess feasibility prior to final approval.

Once applications close, they are processed in three rounds according to students' preferences. During October and November, the Advanced Studies team forward students' applications to the relevant project's principal supervisor for review and to decide which student(s) will be invited to join the project(s).

When reviewing applications, the lead supervisor may request a meeting with the students(s) to determine their suitability and skills prior to making a final decision.

What happens once students decide between research and coursework?

MD1

Once research pathway students are notified of the project on which they will be working (towards the end of MD1), they are strongly encouraged to make early contact with the supervisor to negotiate a plan to commence their research work.

In November, coursework pathway students are provided with a list of approved coursework topics from which to enrol. Students must complete two 4.5-unit topics by the end of MD3, as outlined below.

MD2

Although MD2 research students only formally enrol in the Advanced Studies research topic (MMED8205) in second semester (July to December), students are strongly encouraged to commence work on their research throughout first semester. This is intended to facilitate engagement with the supervisor and the project.

MD2 coursework students select and enrol in one 4.5-unit topic from the list of approved coursework topics available in second semester.

MD3

In MD3, research students enrol in the Advanced Studies research topic (MMED8304) which is undertaken in first semester (January to August). Research students continue working with their supervisor on the same research project in which they were engaged in MD2.

MD3 coursework students select and enrol in a second 4.5-unit topic from the list of approved coursework topics available in first semester.

MD4

In MD4, all students complete the Advanced Studies Capstone. During this topic, research students finalise their research work with their supervisors while coursework students undertake a clinical audit and an evidence-based medicine project. By the end of MD4, the intention is that students will be well positioned to demonstrate achievement of the Advanced Studies learning outcomes.

Can students switch between research and coursework?

Yes, students can move between the research and coursework pathways.

From time to time, issues arise where it is no longer feasible for a student to remain in the research pathway for Advanced Studies. These issues vary but may include: personal circumstances that make it difficult for the student to remain engaged with the research; issues with the planned research (e.g., delays in obtaining necessary approvals, participant recruitment difficulties); and there can sometimes be a breakdown in the relationship between the student and the supervisor.

In these situations, it may be necessary to move the student out of research and into coursework. It should be noted that this is reserved for special circumstances and approval must be granted by the Advanced Studies Portfolio Advisors following discussion with the student and/or supervisor.

I'm interested in becoming an Advanced Studies supervisor. What do I do next?

If you have a research project in mind, you can prepare and submit a research proposal (using the *Research Proposal Proforma* attached with this document).

Alternatively, if you don't have a research project but would be interested in acting as an Advanced Studies supervisor, you can submit your name, contact details and a short bio outlining areas of research interest that you would be willing to supervise to md.advancedstudies@flinders.edu.au.

Advanced Studies Contacts

If you would like to discuss a research project idea or if you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact one of the Advanced Studies Portfolio Advisors, or the Advanced Studies team using the contact information provided below.

Advanced Studies Coordinator	
A/Prof Savio George Barreto	Email: savio.barreto@flinders.edu.au
Advanced Studies Academic Portfolio Advisor Contact Details	
For Bedford Park students (including Flinders Medical Centre)	A/Prof. Savio George Barreto Email: savio.barreto@flinders.edu.au Dr Faran Khalili Email: faran.khalili@flinders.edu.au
For MD Rural Stream students	Dr Nicola Parkin Email: nicola.parkin@flinders.edu.au
For the Northern Territory (NT) students	Prof Gurmeet Singh Email: gurmeet.singh@menzies.edu.au