

UIC School of Public Health Student Handbook 2006-2007

The Doctor of Philosophy

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Learning objectives for the PhD (Doctor of Philosophy degree):

PhD degree students are prepared to assume academic or research careers in a basic or applied science related to public health or careers in public health practice within both the public and private sectors. In general, the PhD graduate will be able to:

1. Demonstrate an in-depth knowledge and understanding of issues in his/her substantive interest area in the biological, physical or behavioral/social sciences related to public health.
2. Display a high degree of mastery in appropriate theories, analytical skills, research design and methodology in the biological, physical or behavioral/social sciences related to public health.
3. Identify knowledge gaps in the selected field, synthesize relevant information, and formulate focused research questions to address these gaps.
4. Design and conduct original research that contributes to the knowledge in his/her selected field.
5. Incorporate knowledge of cultural, social, behavioral and biological factors in formulating research questions, and design and implement research.
6. Communicate effectively and clearly both orally and in writing, and present public health issues and research findings in his/her area of expertise to peers, students and the general public.
7. Demonstrate teaching skills in working with students and other professionals in academic, research or practice settings.

Doctor of Philosophy (Public Health Sciences)

The Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree in Public Health Sciences is an academic degree awarded by the Graduate College of The University of Illinois and is subject to the

requirements described in the UIC Graduate Catalog. (For this degree program, the School of Public Health acts as the Department of Public Health Sciences (DPHS) of the Graduate College.) The program is designed to develop scholars capable of conducting research and teaching in public health sciences. The program also prepares students for research careers in governmental, private, and voluntary organizations. Programs of study leading to a PhD (in Public Health Sciences) may be taken in one or more of the Divisions of the School of Public Health: Community Health Sciences, Epidemiology and Biostatistics, Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences, and Health Policy and Administration. Interdisciplinary studies that combine two or more of these areas are encouraged.

Admission Requirements

Please see the [Admissions](#) section of the SPH website for information.

Deadlines for Completing Degree Requirements

A student who is admitted to the Graduate College with a master's degree, or who continues in the Graduate College after completing the master's degree at the University of Illinois at Chicago, must complete the degree requirements within seven years after initial registration as a doctoral student. A student who is admitted to the Graduate College without a master's degree and proceeds directly to the doctorate must complete degree requirements within nine years of initial registration as a doctoral student. The Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) will periodically review the progress of doctoral candidates. If the DGS determines that the student is not making satisfactory progress toward the degree, the student may be recommended for dismissal from the program.

Time spent on a leave of absence approved by the program and the Graduate College is not counted toward the degree time limit (See Leave of Absence).

Preliminary examination time limitation: Failure to complete the degree requirements within five years of passing the preliminary examination requires retaking the examination. Graduate College rules require that a minimum of one year elapse after passing the preliminary examination, before defending the dissertation.

Program of Study

After admission to the PhD program, the student is assigned a major advisor with interests and expertise compatible with the student's goals. Together, the student and advisor develop an overall program of study which is approved by the Division Director and the Graduate College. The approved program proposal form shall be submitted prior to the completion of the second semester of study. Revised proposals may be submitted thereafter.

The curriculum is individually designed to meet the interests and goals of the student. The student is encouraged to utilize any of the resources of The University of Illinois at

Chicago plus those in neighboring institutions. (See description of Traveling Scholar Program.) The primary requirement is that a meaningful, cohesive, health-directed, research-oriented program be constructed.

Introductory courses in biostatistics and epidemiology are the only ones specifically required in the PhD program. (These requirements may be waived if justified on the basis of equivalent prior experience or course work.) The division of credit hours between course work and dissertation research is highly dependent on the background of each student. Course work must be designed to assure preparation for the preliminary examination and subsequent doctoral research. Course work does not, however, usually dominate the PhD program. The program of study must total at least 96 credit hours, distributed as follows:

Courses* Semester Hours

EPID 403, BSTT 400, BSTT 401** 10 sh

Formal 500 series courses in student's major area of 9 sh concentration (not necessarily in one division)***

Collateral area, if required (at the 500-level) 6 sh

Research (minimum) 32 sh

Seminars and Electives 40-46 sh

TOTAL (minimum) 96 sh

Students with a master's degree in public health or a related area may receive 32 sh of credit toward the 96 sh total.

*Individual Divisions may have additional course requirements.

**Biostatistics majors are expected to have completed the equivalent of BSTT 502 and BSTT 504 as a condition of admission.

***The 595 seminar series may not be counted in fulfilling this requirement.

Instructional Experience

Each PhD student is required to obtain experience in classroom teaching.

1. The teaching experience for doctoral candidates should consist of planning, leading and evaluating a minimum of two classroom sessions, which may be online or in-class sessions. If students are clear that they will be pursuing a career

- in academe, they should be encouraged by their advisors to go beyond this minimum.
2. All PhD students' efforts should be supervised and evaluated by appropriate faculty. Documentation should accompany this evaluation so that PhD students are clearly rated on their efforts at planning, teaching, and evaluating the students in their classes. PhD students should also be evaluated by the students they teach using a "Session Evaluation Questionnaire" (SEQ). Once the form is completed the advisor, instructor, and student should meet to discuss the feedback. Efforts of students who are laboratory or teaching assistants should be considered vital teaching experiences as long as there is appropriate evaluation of such efforts by faculty and students. It is the responsibility of the student and his or her faculty advisor to make sure the student's instructional experience is properly evaluated.
 3. PhD program proposal forms include areas for the date and description of the student's teaching experience. The expected term for satisfying this requirement should be identified at the initial submission of the program proposal, and, if known, a description of the proposed teaching experience. A revised program proposal must be submitted to the student's advisor near the graduation term (if not required earlier as a result of other changes to the student's program) reflecting a brief description of the instructional experience.
 4. Students with relevant and appropriate prior teaching experience may petition to waive this requirement. At a minimum, the prior teaching experience should meet the criteria identified above in #1.

Preliminary Examination

Prior to sitting for the preliminary examination, the student selects a Preliminary Examining Committee with the assistance and approval of the major advisor. The committee must be approved by the Graduate College. The committee works with the student until the preliminary examination is completed. It consists of a minimum of five members, of whom at least three (3) are UIC Graduate College faculty with full membership and two (2) of whom must be tenured, who have interest and expertise in the student's major and collateral areas. The Chair of the Committee must be a full member of the UIC Graduate College Faculty. If a collateral area is required, at least one member must represent the student's collateral area. Up to two of the members may be selected from outside the DPHS or UIC. The preliminary examination should be undertaken as soon as possible after completion of the required program of study. It is a rigorous test of the student's knowledge and understanding of his/her chosen program of study, and the ability to apply such knowledge to the field of his/her specialization. The Preliminary Examining Committee certifies the results and reports them to the Division Director, the Director of Graduate Studies for DPHS, and the Graduate College.

The preliminary examination consists of two parts--a written part prepared for the individual student by the examining committee, and an oral part administered by the committee sitting together with the student. These parts will be separated by no more than four weeks. In the case where the student has failed the written portion of the examination, the Committee may elect not to give the oral examination. The written

questions will cover broad conceptual issues and problems, providing the principal (but not necessarily exclusive) focus of the oral examination. At the discretion of the Division the format and scheduling of the written exam may vary, but will include the following information:

- Core principles, concepts, and approaches in the general area of specialization.
- Basic knowledge of the facts and current status of the discipline of specialization.
- Problem-solving, applying principles and facts to issues in the area of specialization.
- Collateral area principles, facts, and problem-solving.

The oral examination may consist of further discussion and elaboration of the answers to the written questions and/or any other relevant topics raised by the examiners.

The evaluation of the student's performance will result in one of several findings:

Pass - This finding indicates that the student is progressing satisfactorily in the acquisition of knowledge and understanding in the elected area of specialization. The student is, as a consequence, encouraged to proceed with additional specialized course work and to begin preparatory work on the dissertation topic. Passing this examination formally admits the student to PhD candidacy.

Fail - This finding indicates that the student is deficient in knowledge of the elected area of specialization and may lead to either of two consequences. The student may be required to withdraw from the PhD program, or may be asked to retake the examination after completion of deficiency-oriented course work. The Preliminary Examining Committee and Division Director have jurisdiction for remedial programming, but dismissal will be the prerogative of the Director of Graduate Studies for DPHS with the advice of the Executive Committee. The decision may be appealed to the Dean. The Dean, on the recommendation of the Committee, may permit a second examination. A third examination is not permitted.

Selection of Dissertation Examining Committee:

After successfully completing the preliminary examination, the student, in conjunction with the major advisor, will select a dissertation advisor and Dissertation Examining Committee. This committee consists of five members, at least two of whom must be tenured faculty members, and one who is from outside the Division. The dissertation advisor, who must be from the student's division, serves as chair of the committee and must be a member of the UIC Graduate College faculty. After approval of the Graduate College, this committee will be responsible for conducting the Dissertation Proposal Examination and Final Examination.

It is highly recommended that the PhD student at the point of beginning work on his or her thesis or dissertation obtain a copy of the Thesis Handbook from the student's

division or SPH Office of Student Affairs. Copies may also be obtained from the Graduate College on the 6th floor of University Hall or [online](#).

Dissertation Proposal Examination (SPH requirement):

The Dissertation Proposal Examination, given orally by the Dissertation Examining Committee, serves two primary functions:

- To ascertain whether the student is adequately prepared to pursue the dissertation topic. If deficiencies are discovered, additional course work may be required.
- To indicate to the student whether the Dissertation Examining Committee feels that the proposed research is feasible and whether the research should result in a useful, satisfactory product within the time and resources available.

The SPH Dissertation Proposal Examination should not put the student into a pass-fail situation. Rather, it should, when necessary, guide the student into a more feasible and/or fruitful research plan. It is strongly recommended that not more than two semesters elapse following passage of the preliminary examination before approval of the dissertation proposal. The major advisor will notify the Division Director and the Director of Graduate Studies for DPHS when the SPH Dissertation Proposal Examination has been passed. A "pass" constitutes a contract between the Examining Committee and the student that all major elements of the research proposal have been identified and agreed to.

Research and Dissertation:

The student's research is carried out under the guidance of a dissertation advisor and Dissertation Examining Committee. The research may take any or a combination of many forms: field, laboratory, or computer applications are some examples. The research must be creative and original, advancing a field of public health by adding significant new knowledge, testing current theory, or leading to a new theory. Completion of the assigned research credit does not guarantee an acceptable dissertation; additional research effort may be necessary.

The dissertation may be presented in the traditional thesis format or may be one or more manuscripts of publishable quality with respect to peer-reviewed journals. The specific requirements for both are to be established by the dissertation committee in accordance with Division requirements.

Final Oral Examination: Both a final examination and dissertation presentation are required. This typically takes the following format. The candidate presents his/her findings at an open meeting of faculty, students, and the Dissertation Committee. Immediately following the open session the committee meets with the student in executive session. Finally, the Dissertation Examining Committee reports to the Graduate College that the student has or has not passed his/her examination and thus has or has not

satisfied all requirements for the PhD degree. Upon approval of the Director of Graduate Studies for DPHS, the student is recommended to the Graduate College for award of the degree.

SPH Doctoral Student Forum

At the request of doctoral students and with the goal of enhancing the doctoral student experience at SPH, the SPH Doctoral Student Forum was established in Fall, 2004. The forum meets 4 to 5 times a year at varying times (designed to provide an opportunity for most doctoral students to be able to attend at least one or two of the sessions in an academic year). These sessions provide opportunities for meeting other doctoral students in SPH, student-to-student mentoring, expanding one's intellectual community (including seminar type discussions with invited guests), and learning from each other (and invited guests) about how to "negotiate" the process of doctoral student education.

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