PittPublicHealth

Master of Science in Health Services Research and Policy

Student Handbook

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I. Overview

The Master of Science (MS) in Health Services Research and Policy program prepares graduates for positions in health services research and policy, analytics and also prepares them for higher level education (such as a Ph.D.). Graduates will be prepared to conduct research on policy issues affecting the organization, financing, and delivery of health care and public health services.

Health Services Research is a "Multi-disciplinary field of inquiry, both basic and applied, that examines the use, costs, quality, accessibility, delivery, organization, financing and outcomes of health care services to increase knowledge and understanding of the structures, processes and effects of health services for individuals and populations."

As public health professionals, health services researchers and policy researchers use a systems approach to understanding health of populations. The research focus can be on policies at the national, state and local level, the management and operation of organizations or public health agencies, as well as the experience of individual users of health care and public health services.

A. Mission

The mission of the MS program is to train students for excellence in conducting health services research and policy.

B. Objectives

Students undertake a rigorous program of study that encompasses research skills and quantitative analysis and provides a strong theoretical grounding in health policy, economics, health behavior, research design and ethics. The program integrates experiential and classroom learning. Professional development as a researcher is encouraged through the Current Topics in Health Economics and Policy seminar series and attendance at regular health services research seminars.

II. Prerequisites for Admission

In addition to the standard Pitt Public Health admission requirements applicants must have:

- QPA of 3.0 of higher (undergraduate degree)
- undergraduate or graduate calculus with a 3.0 or higher
- GRE scores in at least the 50th percentile in all categories

Applicants must apply through SOPHAS, the centralized online application service: sophas.org.
More information on the application process can be found on the Pitt Public Health Website: www.publichealth.pitt.edu/hpm-admissions. For more information please direct all enquires to hsrp@pitt.edu.

III. Summary of Requirements

The Master of Science in Health Service Research and Policy is a 42 credit program typically completed over a two year period. All students will complete a core set of classes and have the opportunity to choose between two areas of focus: Health Policy and Economics or Decision Sciences.

A. Courses

Department Required Courses

Course Number	Course Name	Credits
BIOST 2041	Intro to Statistical Methods	3
BIOST 2049	Applied Regression Analysis	3
BIOST 2050	Longitudinal and Clustered Data Analysis	3
HPM 3508	Research Credits (Thesis)	2

Pitt Public Health Required Courses

Course Number	Course Name	Credits
EPIDEM 2110	Principles of Epidemiology	3
PUBHLT 2011	Essentials of Public Health	3
PUBHLT 2022	Public Health Grand Rounds (2 semesters required)	0

Area of Focus Courses

Decision Sciences

Course Number	Course Name	Credits
BIOST 2090	Agent Based Modeling	3
HPM 2217	Clinical Decision Analysis	1
HPM 2220	Cost Effectiveness Analysis	1
IE 2086	Decision Models	3
HPM 2123	Advanced Topics in Decision and Cost Effectiveness Analysis in Healthcare	3

Health Policy and Economics

Course Number	Course Name	Credits
CLRES 2107	Comparative Effectiveness Research	2
HPM 2028	Microeconomics Applied to Health	3
HPM 2220	Cost Effectiveness Analysis	1
HPM 2064	Health Policy Analysis	2
HPM 2216	Health Insurance: Financing Health Care	3

B. Sequence of Courses

Decision Sciences Area of Focus

Recommended Sequence of Required Courses for a MS in Health Services Research and Policy

Year	Term	Title	Code	Credits	Total for Term
One	Fall				10
		Intro to Statistical Methods 1	BIOST 2041	3	
		Health Policy and Management in Public Health	HPM 2001	3	
		Cost Effectiveness Analysis	HPM 2220	1	
		Clinical Decision Analysis	HPM 2217	1	
		Grand Rounds	PUBHLT 2022	0	
		Elective		3	
	Spring				12
		Applied Regression Analysis	BIOST 2049	3	
		Longitudinal and Clustered Data Analysis	BIOST 2050	3	
		Advanced Topics in Decision and Cost Effectiveness Analysis	HPM 2123	3	
		Grand Rounds	PUBHLT 2022	0	
		Elective		3	
Two	Fall				9
		Principles of Epidemiology	EPIDEM 2110	3	
		Decision Models	IE 2086	3	
		Quasi-Experimental Design for Health Services Research	HPM 2905	3	
	Spring				11
		Agent Based Modeling	BIOST 2090	3	
		Thesis	HPM 2037	2	
		Essentials of Public Health	PUBHLT 2011	3	
		Elective		3	
Required Courses			Total		43

Health Policy Area of Focus

Recommended Sequence of Required Courses for a MS in Health Services Research and Policy

Year	Term	Title	Code	Credits	Total for Term
One	Fall				9
		Intro to Statistical Methods 1	BIOST 2041	3	
		Microeconomics Applied to Health	HPM 2028	3	
		Health Policy and Management in Public Health	HPM 2001	3	
		Cost Effectiveness Analysis	HPM 2220	1	
		Grand Rounds	PUBHLT 2022	0	
	Spring				12
		Applied Regression Analysis	BIOST 2049	3	
		Longitudinal and Clustered Data Analysis	BIOST 2050	3	
		Health Policy Analysis & Methods	HPM 2064	2	
		Grand Rounds	PUBHLT 2022	0	
		Elective		3	
Two	Fall				11
		Principles of Epidemiology	EPIDEM 2110	3	
		Comparative Effectiveness Research	CLRES 2107	2	
		Quasi-Experimental Design for Health Services Research	HPM 2905	3	
		Elective		3	
	Spring				10
		Health Insurance	HPM 2216	3	
		Thesis	HPM 2037	2	
		Essentials of Public Health	PUBHLT 2011	3	
		Elective		2	
Required Courses				Total	42

C. Required Examination

Comprehensive Examination

Master's students must successfully pass the comprehensive exam given during the 1st semester of their second year in the program. Students must review a journal article of their choice and give an oral presentation to their peers and department faculty. The journal article must be relevant to Health Services Research and Policy. In the event of a failure, a student may apply to the Chair of the Department for a re-examination. Students who are not permitted to retake the examination or who do not pass the re- examination will be released from the program.

Information on rules regarding committee composition can be found in Pitt Public Health's Academic Handbook.

D. Thesis Requirements

Master's Thesis

A good thesis topic provides the student with an opportunity to apply health policy concepts and develop research skills. The thesis should advance knowledge and ideally, answer one or more important questions. The thesis is an important step in training the student to ask good questions as well as learning how to go about answering them. A good thesis will consist of a policy paper of publishable quality which must report on work done as a student and involve analytic methodologies used during the program. All theses must be prepared and submitted electronically, according to the University guidelines for the submission of ETDs (electronic thesis and dissertation). The guidelines for preparation and submission can be found here:
http://www.pitt.edu/~graduate/etd/formatguidelineshtml.html

Thesis Committee

The members of the thesis committee are selected by the student in conjunction with their faculty advisor. The Graduate School of Public Health and the University of Pittsburgh have established regulations for the composition of the committee. Please refer to Pitt Public Health's Academic Handbook for regulations governing the composition for the MS thesis committee. Once the committee members are identified the student is responsible for notifying the MS program coordinator of the committee members. A memo requesting approval of the student's committee is sent to the Assistant Dean for Student Affairs. **Committee meetings cannot be held until the committee is approved by** Student Affairs**.** The Student Services Coordinator will notify the student and their faculty advisor upon approval. The student is responsible for scheduling the committee meetings. If a conference room or audio-visual equipment is needed, the student must contact the MS program coordinator in advance of the meeting to reserve the room and/or equipment. Regardless of whether the student requires assistance for the meeting, they are to notify the MS program coordinator of their meeting date to allow for keeping of departmental records, and to ensure that the appropriate paperwork is completed at the meeting. The first thesis committee meeting is to be held within **five (5) months** of passing the MS comprehensive examination. **Please note: Prior to committee meetings, students must submit their research proposal/progress report to all thesis committee members two (2) weeks in advance.**

First Thesis Committee Meeting

After passing the master's comprehensive exam, the student must hold a thesis committee meeting and submit a research proposal for approval. **Please note: Prior to the first committee meeting, students must submit their research proposal to all thesis committee members two (2) weeks in advance.**

Information to include in proposal:
A. Project significance and background
B. Specific aims
C. Preliminary data
D. Research methods/design

Proposal Format:
A. 6-10 pages
B. Double spaced
C. Times new roman or Arial
D. 1" margins

Thesis Format
The format will include a narrative and tables/figures of the research and will be similar in format to that of a traditional doctoral dissertation. A student must be registered for at least one credit during the term in which they are graduating. A student who has an inactive status must be readmitted and registered for three credits in order to graduate.

The student's thesis must provide evidence of original scholarly research. The student's thesis committee will meet at the time the student's research is nearing completion and will authorize the student to begin writing the thesis. At this time, students should make certain that all required courses have been taken. This can be verified by the MS program coordinator. The style and format of the thesis must conform to the standards set forth by the Graduate Council as shown below. The thesis will contain the following:

A. Title Page
B. Abstract
- 350 words or less
- State the principle objective or purpose and the scope of the thesis
- Briefly describe the methodology use
- Summarize the result (own words, DO NOT USE CITATIONS)
- State the principle conclusions
- MUST include a statement of the study's public health significance/importance or relevance

C. Introduction
- Identify the problem
- State the scope and focus of the study
- State the purpose/objective of the study of the hypothesis to be tested (research project)

D. Review of the Relevant Literature
- Review the journal articles, books, etc. that relate to the topic
- Summarize the major findings from these studies
- Indicate gaps, weaknesses, and deficiencies in these studies that relate to the current knowledge of the topic

E. Methodology or Program Design
- Describe in full detail how the information (data) in the study is collected and analyzed
- Include definitions of terms (if any)

F. Results/Findings
- Present the representative data
- Repetitive determinations should be given in tables and graphs

- o Present the results with crystal clarity, clearly and simply stated
- o Avoid redundancy/repetition
- o If there are tables and graphs, briefly summarize the important and pertinent points from them

G. Discussion
- o Present the principles, relationships, and generalizations shown by the results
- o Discuss, do not recapitulate the results
- o Point out any exceptions
- o Define unsettled points
- o Show how the results and interpretations agree or contrast with the previously published work in the literature review
- o State the limitation of your study or problems that were identified
- o Discuss the theoretical implications of the study as well as any practical applications
- o Give any recommendations

H. Conclusions
- o Summarize the major findings and the evidence for each conclusion
- o State the conclusion(s) as clearly as possible
- o Present the public health significance/importance, or relevance of the study

I. Bibliography (follow APA style)
- o Include all citation in the thesis from the Introduction, the Literature Review and Discussion
- o Choose one format. Consistency is the key.

Thesis Presentation and Defense

Upon completion of the thesis work, the students will present their work in a seminar and defend their dissertation in an oral examination. The student is responsible for scheduling the presentation and defense of their master's thesis. ***The student is required to submit their thesis to the committee at least two weeks prior to the defense date to allow ample time for the committee to review the thesis.*** Noncompliance with this rule could necessitate rescheduling of the defense date.

Submission of Thesis

Information on submitting the thesis can be found in the Pitt Public Health Academic Handbook.

IV. Learning Objectives

Upon completion of the MS degree, the graduate will be able to:

1. Demonstrate ***breadth of HSR theoretical and conceptual knowledge*** by applying alternative models from a range of relevant disciplines.
2. Apply appropriate quantitative methods in analysis and problem solving.
3. Apply ***in-depth disciplinary knowledge and skills*** relevant to health services research.
4. Apply knowledge of the structures, performance, quality, policy, and environmental context of health and health care to ***formulate solutions for health policy problems***.
5. ***Pose innovative and important health service research questions***, informed by systematic reviews of the literature, stakeholder needs, and relevant theoretical and conceptual models.
6. Know how to collect primary health and health care data obtained by survey, qualitative, or mixed methods.
7. ***Implement research protocols*** with standardized procedures that ensure reproducibility of the science.
8. ***Ensure the ethical and responsible conduct of research*** in the design, implementation, and dissemination of health services research.

V. Policies and Procedures of Pitt Public Health

A. Forms and Deadlines

- Enrollment Form

Registration for each term must be done with the advice of the student's academic advisor and the academic advisor must sign the registration form. **Registration deadlines are set by the University and it is the student's responsibility to be aware of them.** The registration should list PPBHL as your school and HPM-MS as your plan. **Please use your PeopleSoft numbers in lieu of your social security numbers.**

Course schedules for the Pitt Public Health are available online at: http://www.publichealth.pitt.edu/home/academics/courses/printable-course-schedules or at the Pitt Public Health Office of Student Affairs (G007 Public Health). Registration and other forms related to enrollment are available in the Office of Student Affairs. Enrollment forms can also be found here: https://www.registrar.pitt.edu/assets/pdf/EnrollmentForm.pdf. Most forms require a faculty or administrator's signature. Students who have any problems in accessing these forms should contact the department, and we will be happy to make accommodations for them. Please return all registration forms to the MS program coordinator who will then register you for class.

Please note that a student can add or drop classes without penalty during the first ten days of each semester, but if he or she does not complete an initial registration by the deadline (noted on the University Academic Calendar, available online through the University's Calendar site, https://www.registrar.pitt.edu/assets/pdf/Academic%20Calendar%202018-2019_Final.pdf), he or she will be assessed a late fee.

- Graduation Application

This form allows a student to apply for graduation from his or her program. The Pitt Public Health Office of Student Affairs sets an internal deadline for these applications to ensure that all paperwork is properly processed. Please note that these deadlines usually occur early in the semester that the student intends to graduate. Students can check these deadlines by contacting Joanne Pegher by phone at 412-624-3005 or by email at jpegher@pitt.edu. More information on graduation and the application can be found here: http://mypublichealth.pitt.edu/graduation.

B. Cross Registration

Students may register for courses offered at institutions participating in the Pittsburgh Council on Higher Education (PCHE) cross-registration agreement (Carnegie Mellon University, Duquesne University, the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary and Robert Morris University). Such coursework must

be approved in advance by the Academic Advisor. Credits will not be counted as transfers and will count toward the degree and GPA calculations.

C. Grade Point Average

According to Pitt Public Health policy, any time a student's GPA falls below 3.0 they will be automatically placed on academic probation by the Educational Performance and Curriculum Committee (EPCC). Students on probation will be counseled by their advisor and be informed in writing of the procedures to remove the probation in an appropriate period of time.

As noted below, students must maintain a 3.3 average in required courses to be eligible to take the preliminary and comprehensive examinations.

D. Incompletes and Withdrawing from Class

In order to graduate, your outstanding incomplete grades of "G" or "I" must be changed to letter grades, N, or W, or a memo must be submitted from the Program Office to the Assistant Dean for Student Affairs stating that the incomplete course is not required for your graduation. A "W" is given when you complete a Monitored Withdrawal permission form (contact program coordinator for more information) to withdraw from the class. The class instructor's signature is required and the form must be complete by the Monitored Withdrawal deadline specified in the academic calendar for the given term. You must register again for the class at a later time when it is offered, if it is required for graduation. You may choose to audit any graduate course on a space available basis. After obtaining the instructor's permission to audit a course, you follow the same procedures as registering for credit. Tuition is assessed for all audits. The "N" grade is given for courses audited. Please remember that N or W grades come with zero credits.

E. Exemption from a Required Course

You may apply for a course waiver if you have already taken a course you believe is equivalent to a required course in the doctoral program. To do this, you must fill out a Course Exemption form and obtain approval from your advisor and the program director. The paperwork must be accompanied by a transcript showing a passing grade and by a syllabus. If you are requesting to waive a school core course, the designated instructor will make the decision. If it is a departmental core class, the instructor for that course will make the decision.

F. Student Progress

The progress of each student will be reviewed at least annually by the Doctoral Program Committee. The Committee may place a student on inactive status which may require a student to reapply to the program and take additional coursework if adequate progress is not being made in the student's academic program.

G. Application for Graduation

Each candidate for graduation must file an official Application for Graduation in the Pitt Public Health Office of Student Affairs. Deadlines, usually posted outside the Office of Student Affairs, are usually three months before the date of graduation. The timetable for submission of documents pertaining to graduation must be strictly observed. There is a penalty for late filing.

Students must be registered for at least one credit in the term in which they graduate. Degree requirements must be completed in the semester the student applied for graduation. If not, the student must re-apply for graduation in the term in which he or she completes these requirements. Before the degree can be posted, I and/or G grades must be changed.

If you are a student who has been admitted provisionally, you must make sure that you have met the requirements for full status prior to applying for graduation. If you have been admitted pending receipt of a final transcript from your post-baccalaureate degree, you must submit your final transcript to the Office of Student Affairs prior to taking the Comprehensive Examination. You will not be able to sit for the Comprehensive Examination until receipt has been confirmed.

Students must be registered for at least one credit in each 12-month interval to maintain active status. Students should not expect to receive guidance or direction from members of the faculty, be able to use the library or online services unless they are registered. Students must be registered in the term in which they take the comprehensive examination and also during the term in which the thesis is submitted. Students must be registered for at least one credit during the semester in which they plan to graduate.

There are four graduations per year: December, April, June and August. However, the University holds one ceremony per year, in late April or early May. Pitt Public Health holds a separate ceremony on the weekend of the University commencement event. Graduates of the previous June, August, and December are invited to participate in the spring ceremony. Diplomas are mailed to graduates. Diplomas are not ordered until after graduation and usually are received several months after graduation.

From the Office of Disability Resources:

If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both your instructor and Disability Resources and Services (address below) as early as possible in the term. DRS will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course:

140 William Pitt Union
412/648-7890 or
412/838-7355 (TTY)

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