PITT PUBLIC HEALTH

PhD in Health Services Research and Policy

Student Handbook

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Overview

The Ph.D. Program in Health Services Research and Policy in the Department of Health Policy and Management prepares individuals to enter a career in Health Services Research. 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." (IOM, 1995) Graduates will be prepared for positions in academia, government, or the private sector.

a. Mission

The mission of the Doctoral Program in Health Policy and Management is to train students for excellence in conducting health services research and teaching 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, law and ethics. The program integrates experiential and classroom learning. All students work as a teaching assistant for one term and also complete a manuscript as part of the preliminary exam (hich can provide the starting point for their doctoral dissertation). 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.

Application Procedures

a. All applications must be submitted online through the Schools of Public Health Application Service website: http://www.sophas.org.
b. Applicants will be requested via email to submit a supplemental writing sample directly to the Admissions Committee that accurately reflects their work and writing style.
c. Applicants whose credentials are reviewed favorably by the Doctoral Program Committee will be asked to participate in a face-to-face or telephone interview. One or more representatives from the Committee and at least one potential faculty mentor will take part in the interview.
d. The University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health Office of Student Affairs makes final admission decisions based upon the recommendation of the Admissions Committee. Applicants will be notified of the decision in writing by the Graduate School of Public Health Office of Student Affairs.

e. Minimum Requirements for Admission

a. Applicants must hold a baccalaureate degree with a GPA of at least 3.3 desirable. A Master's degree is not required. Official transcripts of all college-level study must be submitted.
b. College level coursework in calculus with a grade of 3.0 or better is required. Applicants will be required to indicate on SOPHAS which course on their transcript meets this requirement, or else successfully complete a course during the summer prior to matriculation.
c. Undergraduate or graduate level coursework in statistics and economics is strongly recommended. Familiarity with matrix algebra is also strongly recommended.
d. Applicants must demonstrate in their personal statement that they have a clear understanding of how the program of study will benefit them in achieving their career goals. The Doctoral Program Committee places a great deal of weight on the quality of the written personal statement.
e. The application must be submitted with three letters of recommendation from individuals who are in a position to judge the applicant's professional and or academic abilities. At least one recommendation should be from an individual who can comment on the applicant's academic qualifications (e.g., former instructor or advisor).
f. Applicants must submit scores on the verbal, quantitative and critical thinking and analytical writing portion of the Graduate Record Examination (GRE). GRE scores are used in conjunction with other parts of the application to reach a decision. There is no absolute cut-off. Quantitative score of 720 or higher, Verbal score of 560 or higher, and Analytical Writing of 5.0 or higher are desirable. Scores in the 75% percentile or higher are desirable.
g. Applicants who hold an international degree must submit their qualifications to World Education Services (WES) for evaluation. They must hold a degree equivalent to a US baccalaureate degree, as determined by WES.
h. Applicants for whom English is not their first language must submit scores from the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) exam. Students must score a minimum of 80 on the internet based TOEFL (or 550 on the paper-based version). The minimum score for the IELTS is 6.5.
i. After an initial screening of applicants, the admissions committee will solicit the prospective applicants writing sample. The writing sample

will be sent directly to the Doctoral Program Admissions Committee.

f. Transfer Students

a. Transfer credits are accepted pursuant to University of Pittsburgh and Graduate School of Public Health policy.
b. Students who have completed the Masters of Health Administration or the Masters of Public Health in the Department of Health Policy and Management can transfer up to 24 credits.
c. Where the same course is required for the doctoral program and the MPH or MHA programs, the credits will be accepted.
d. Transfer students who have completed the Pitt Public Health core (or equivalent at another institution) do not need to take PUBHLT 2011, "Essentials of Public Health".
e. Courses that are taught concurrently at the doctoral and masters level (e.g., the Health Economics and Health Policy Analysis and Methods will have two different course numbers) include additional material that transfer students will need to complete. At the discretion of their academic advisor and the course instructors, the student can register for an independent study to complete the doctoral level component of each course.
f. Courses that are not required courses can be counted toward the 'area of focus' only if they meet the requirements of defining an area where the student is seeking advanced training. In most cases, it is not likely that masters level coursework will meet this requirement.
g. Students that are enrolled in either the Masters of Health Administration or the Masters of Public Health in the Department of Health Policy & Management may apply to the Ph.D. program and transfer credits for courses already completed. In most cases, these students will need to follow the recommended sequence of courses beginning with year 1, but will be able to start early on their 'area of focus' if they have already completed courses that are required for both masters and doctoral programs (e.g., Health Policy, Health Insurance, Health Economics, and Health Policy Analysis & Methods).

g. Application Procedures

Applicants whose credentials are reviewed favorably by the Doctoral Program Committee will be asked to participate in a face-to-face or telephone interview. One

or more representatives from the Committee and at least one potential faculty mentor will take part in the interview.

The Dean's Office makes final admission decisions based upon the Doctoral Program Committee's and Department Chair's recommendation. After the interview, applicants will be notified of the decision in writing by the Graduate School of Public Health, Office of Student Affairs.

h. Application Deadlines

The doctoral program only accepts applications for Fall (August) admission and follows the Graduate School of Public Health's application deadline, which can be found by visiting the school or program website: www.hpm.pitt.edu/doctoral_application.asp. For more information please direct all enquires to hsrp@pitt.edu.

Program of Study

a. Required Courses

The program of study includes HPM (departmental) core courses, Pitt Public Health school-wide courses, and electives. Additionally, as part of the doctoral program PhD students are expected to gain experience in the conduct of research and teaching experience. The following table provides a checklist of requirements for the PhD in Health Services Research and Policy.

Year	Term	Code	Title	Instructor	Credits	Total for Term
One	**Fall**					8.5
		BIOST 2041	Introduction to Statistical Methods 1	Chiappetta	3	
		HPM 2821	Current Topics in Health Economics and Policy	Castle	1.5	
		EPIDEM 2110	Principles of Epidemiology	Songer	3	
		PUBHLT 2022	Grand Rounds	Burke	0	
		PUBHLT 2030	Research Ethics	Parker	1	
			Elective (Students must pick approved elective courses)			
	Spring					12
		BIOST 2042	Introduction to Statistical Methods 2	Krafty	3	
		BIOST 2049	Applied Regression Analysis	Youk	3	
		HPM 2216	Health Insurance	Jarlenski	3	
		HPM 3501	HSR Research Writing	Degenholtz	3	
		PUBHLT 2022	Grand Rounds	Burke	0	
			Elective (Students must pick approved elective courses)			
Two	**Fall**					9.5
		BIOST 2046	Applied Cohort Analysis	Chang	3	
		HPM 2821	Current Topics in Health Economics and Policy	Castle	1.5	
		HPM 3065*	Advanced Health Policy Analysis: Implementation, Evaluation, and Translation	Donohue	2	
		HPM 3502	HSR Proposal Writing	Degenholtz	3	
			Elective (Students must pick approved elective courses)			
	Spring					13
		HPM 3125	Intermediate Health Economics	Driessen	3	
		HPM 2275	Preparation for the Comprehensive Examination	Castle	1	
		HPM 3505	Advanced Empirical Microeconomics Methods with Applications for Healthcare Research	Zhang	3	
		HPM 3010	Health Care Organizations and Environments	Rohrer	3	
		PUBHLT 2011	Essentials of Public Health	Martinson	3	
Required Courses				Total	43	

In addition to the list of required courses, all students are required to attend the Current Topics in Health Economics and Policy Seminar every semester and register for at least 2 semesters. A detailed description of the seminar series is provided below. Students without previous experience in health care are expected to audit HPM 2105: Health and Medical Care Organizations.

The minimum credit requirement for the PhD program is 72 credits of completed course work and independent research. Twenty-four credits may be awarded for a previously earned master's degree in a similar field (i.e. MPH or MHA) toward the 72 credit total. PhD students will typically earn 3 credits preparing for their comprehensive exam and a minimum of 1 dissertation credit or FTDR must be earned.

b. Electives & Area of Focus

Students must take at least 12 credit hours of electives that form a coherent area of focus from any school or department of the University or from schools that are part of the Pittsburgh Council on Higher Education cross-registration agreement. A list of suggested electives is available from the program director (several topic areas include decision science, quantitative methods, aging, quality and patient safety). Students can select from the listed electives or identify other courses to construct an area of focus that is approved by their Academic Advisor. The area of focus must identify a goal or theme that will be met by completing the listed courses. By the end of their second year, students must complete the Area of Focus form on the Doctoral Program web page for approval by their academic advisor and acceptance by the doctoral program director.

c. Current Topics in Health Economics and Policy Seminar

Students are required to attend the seminar for at least 6 terms; they must register for the course in two terms for a total of 3 credits. The purpose of the seminar is to introduce students to the field of Health Services Research and Health Policy and to stay current with issues and articles in the literature. The format of the journal club is a seminar, with a student leading the discussion. Students must lead the discussion at least once during their 6 terms. Additionally, researchers in the field will present their research and/or discuss recent developments in health policy, health services research and health economics throughout the academic year as well. Grading is based on attendance and participation.

d. Teaching Requirement

It is recommended that students successfully complete a teaching requirement before graduation (based on availability). The teaching requirement is to serve as a Teaching Assistant to a course that they have successfully completed (B or higher). Students will receive academic credit for this experience. The teaching experience does not have to be within the Department, and it may be paid or unpaid. However,

the class must have some bearing on the field of health services research or on the individual student's program of study.

The student must obtain approval in advance from their Academic Advisor regarding the course for with they will serve as the teaching assistant (TA). The Certification of Teaching Requirement Form must be signed by the course instructor and submitted to the Academic Advisor at the end of the term. The Academic Advisor will forward the form to the Doctoral Program Committee.

Advising

Each student admitted to the program will be matched to an Academic Advisor based on interest areas identified during the application procedure. The Academic Advisor will review course registrations and advise the student on important milestones. In particular, the Academic Advisor has the responsibility to ensure that the student is taking required courses in the proper sequence to be prepared for the preliminary and comprehensive examinations. The Academic Advisor will help the student select electives that best match the student's interest and that form a cohesive area of focus.

The Academic Advisor does not have to be the Dissertation Chair or play any formal role in the student's dissertation.

Changing Academic Advisors can be done at the request of the student at any time. In recognition that some students may be reluctant to breach the issue with their advisor or with a new potential advisor, they may make the request of the Doctoral Program Director.

Policies and Procedures

a. Forms and Deadlines

All departmental forms and deadlines are posted on the Doctoral Program web page.

Course registration for each term must be done in consultation with the student's Academic Advisor who 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-PhD as your plan. **Please use your PeopleSoft numbers in lieu of your social security numbers.**

b. Student Status

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 Preliminary Examination. You will not be able to sit for the Preliminary 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 preliminary and comprehensive examinations, conduct overview and final defense of dissertations. Students must be registered for at least one credit or Full-Time Dissertation and Research (FTDR) credits during the semester in which they plan to graduate.

Doctoral students must meet the residency requirement of at least one term of full-time doctoral study, excluding other employment except as approved by the Doctoral Committee.

c. Credit Requirements

The doctoral program is a 72 credit program designed for full-time study. Students may be enrolled on a part-time basis. A minimum of 36 credits must be completed at the University of Pittsburgh. A full credit load is 9 to 15 credits per term. Twenty-four credits are awarded for an earned, relevant, master's or post-baccalaureate degree that is the equivalent of a U.S. master's degree. For those of you who earned a post baccalaureate degree abroad, the decision to award credit for that degree will be made on a case by case basis. In all cases, application for Advanced Standing credit must be submitted to the Assistant Dean for Student Affairs. Additionally, twelve (transfer or advanced standing) credits may be awarded for relevant graduate work taken after earning your master's or post-baccalaureate degree.

d. Dissertation Credits & Graduation

Doctoral students must register for at least one credit of Full Time Dissertation Research (FTDR) in the 12-month period preceding defense of their dissertation and be registered for at least one credit of FTDR during the term in which they graduate. A waiver of the requirement to be registered during the term of graduation may be granted by the Pitt Public Health Assistant Dean for Student Affairs. You may register for FTDR (the zero-credit full-time doctoral dissertation course) only after you have earned a minimum of 48 credits beyond the Master's degree, including advanced standing credits. **To register for FTDR or dissertation credits, you must also have passed the comprehensive examination.**

e. Statute of Limitations (from the Graduate and Professional Bulletin):
All requirements must be completed within 10 years, or within 8 years if the student has received credit for a master's degree appropriate to the field of study. Under extraordinary circumstances, a student may apply for an extension of the statute of limitations. The request must be approved by the Doctoral Committee, the Department Chair and the Dean.

f. 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.

g. 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.

h. 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.

i. 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.

j. 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.

At the dissertation writing stage, Academic Advisors will assess progress each semester by completing a Dissertation Progress Report.

Milestones

There are two examinations to establish progress and achievement of general knowledge and skills appropriate for a health services researcher with a Doctorate in Health Services Research and Policy: the Preliminary Examination and the Comprehensive Examination. Subsequent to successful completion of these two examinations, there are two examinations specific to the students selected area of research, the Dissertation Overview and the Dissertation Defense (Final Oral Examination). A third year paper is required of all students.

For each milestone the Program Coordinator will prepare a form called Report on Requirements for a Doctoral Degree. This must be signed by the committee and the Department Chair, and then submitted to the Office of Student Affairs for official recording. Please contact the Program Coordinator about obtaining and completing this form.

a. Preliminary Examination

From the University of Pittsburgh Regulations Governing Graduate Study:

> *The preliminary evaluation should be designed to assess the breadth of the student's knowledge of the discipline, the student's achievement during the first year of graduate study, and the potential to apply research methods independently. The form and nature of the evaluation should be approved at the school level and described in the school bulletin. It should be conducted at approximately the end of the first year of full-time graduate study. The evaluation is used to identify those students who may be expected to complete a doctoral program successfully and also to reveal areas of weakness in the student's preparation.*

Evaluation results must be reported promptly to the dean's office, but no later than the last day of the term in which the evaluation occurs.

Requirements

To sit for the preliminary examination, you must have:

- Full academic status (if you were admitted with any provisions they must be cleared before
  you can take the preliminary examination).
- Completed the IRB online modules related to human subjects research: At a minimum, "Research Integrity" and "Human Subjects Research in Social and Behavioral Sciences" (https://cme.hs.pitt.edu/).
- **Taken all designated courses (i.e. those required in year one) on the Program of Study** for the doctoral program.
  - The required courses are: BIOST 2041, BIOST 2042, BIOST 2049, EPIDEM 2110, HPM 2216, and HPM 3501.
- A 3.3 or higher grade point average.

The Topic

For the Preliminary Examination, you will choose a topic of your choice related to Health Service Research and Policy. This topic does not need to be related to your dissertation topic. Keep in mind that for this exam you are expected to demonstrate your knowledge of the discipline and apply research methods, both quantitative and qualitative, while addressing your topic. Also, it is advisable that your topic be sufficiently narrow that you can propose research designs that you could actually do yourself.

Once you have selected a topic, contact Dr. Castle to discuss. Dr. Castle will help you determine the appropriateness of your topic and approve it. If your topic is not appropriate, the faculty will assist you in revising it**.** You will have from March 1st of your first year to September 1st of your second year to work on the preliminary exam. You must submit your exam electronically to the program coordinator by close of business September 1st. Failure to do so will result in you having to redo the exam.

The Examination

The format of the preliminary exam will be a 5,000-6,000 words (please provide a word count), not including references, research paper. No more than four tables may be included in the paper. Please use a standard 12 point font and standard one-inch margins. The paper should follow a standard format (abstract, introduction, methods, etc). An acceptable approach would be to pick a well-respected journal (such as Health Services Research [HSR]) and follow the article submission format. Example sections are further highlighted below.

Approximately one week after the paper is submitted to the Program Office, you will give a 15-minute oral presentation of your work to the Examination Committee. This can include a PowerPoint presentation of approximately 10 minutes in length (5 minutes for questions). Prior to presenting to the exam committee, you must schedule a meeting with Dr. Castle and present your presentation to him first.

The committee members will then ask you questions about your paper and presentation. Be mindful that questions may relate to different aspects of the topic you are addressing. They also may relate to the research methods you are using or to those methods you are not using. After the question and answer session, you will leave the room and the Committee will discuss your performance.

In assessing your performance, no particular weight has been assigned to any one part of the examination. Rather, your work will be graded as a whole, based on the paper, the presentation and the question and answer session. Finally, the Committee will ask you to return to the room and will discuss its evaluation with you.

The Committee will make written comments to all students regarding their performance. Students may pass the exam outright without any changes, may be asked to make revisions to their paper or they may fail. If failed, the Preliminary Examination can be retaken only once. After your presentation, you must schedule a meeting with Dr. Castle to receive feedback on your presentation.

Additionally, the research paper must be developed into a poster and presentation for Dean's Day the following spring semester.

You are expected to take the Preliminary Examination after two semesters of full time study or the equivalent amount of part time study. **You must complete the Preliminary Exam by the end of the third semester of full time study or after completing no more than 30 credits in the program.**

Format and Examination Detail's

Paper: Limit the paper to **5,000-6,000 words double-spaced pages** (**excluding references**) and be sure to address all of the topics in the attached outline. Papers should be typed using a 12 point font and 1 inch margins. Parts I, II, and III should be approximately of the same length. Part IV may be relatively shorter.

Oral presentation: Use this opportunity to highlight the most important points of your paper. Remember that all committee members have read your paper and you should not repeat everything that is in it. Please prepare the presentation using Power Point. Equipment for the Power Point presentation will be set up for your use. Your presentation should be **15 minutes** in length.

Example Format

In preparing your paper, it is suggested that you address the following areas and components as relevant:

Part I: Background (4-6 pages)

A. Description of the Health Services / Public Health Topic
Identify and describe the specific issue you are addressing and its significance. In what ways is this issue, specifically, a health services problem, that is, an issue that can be appropriately addressed by health services research?

B. Relevant Aspects of the Health Services Topic
Discuss aspects of the health services issue you have chosen as it relates to the different relevant aspects (e.g., individual, interpersonal, community, organizational and policy). Who are the main stakeholders and/or constituency groups involved in the issue and how have they impacted policy around the issue?

C. Conceptual Framework
All issues are constructed and embedded in fundamental sociocultural contexts. These are often depicted as conceptual frameworks for research. Describe the social, structural and cultural factors that impact the issue you are addressing. If appropriate, discuss the issue as it relates to the analyses conducted. State your major research/evaluation question(s), posing specific hypotheses.

D. Conclusion:
How this Background Informs Your Research. Plan to end this section with a brief summary of how the conceptual framework you have described informs your research/evaluation question(s) and research designs. Finish by briefly stating your general research/evaluation question, and summarize the significance of this question.

Part II: Quantitative Research/Evaluation Study (4-6pages)

In describing your design:

A. Conceptualize the major constructs related to your research or evaluation question(s) and hypotheses.
B. Describe your study population and indicate why you chose this population
C. Describe your study design (e.g., cross-sectional, quasi-experimental, time series).
D. Discuss the methods you used to collect your data and justify why you would use these particular methods. Specifically, be prepared to justify your choices.

- What methods would you use to collect your data and why?
- Describe each method in enough detail that the reader gains a clear sense of your procedures.
- Explain the advantages and disadvantages of the methods you have chosen.
- Explain how you operationalize your constructs into variables and how you measure your variables.

E. Describe your selection strategy. Include the following:
   - Describe and justify your sampling strategy.
   - Describe your sampling unit and your sampling frame
   - Discuss what factors will influence your sample size
   - How will your choice affect the generalizability of your findings?
   - What steps will you take to deal with sample bias?

F. Discuss your analysis. Include the following:
   - Discuss the general goals, procedures, and principles of data analysis.
   - Include the statistical tests you would use and why.

G. Address issues of validity and reliability in your research/evaluation study.
H. Identify and discuss the ethical issues associated with your research/evaluation study. How are you addressing them in your design?

Part III: Qualitative Research/Evaluation Study (4-6 pages)

In describing your design:

A. Conceptualize the major constructs related to your research or evaluation question(s).
B. Describe your setting and indicate why you chose this it.
C. Describe your study design.
D. Discuss the methods you used to collect your data and justify why you used these particular methods. Specifically, be prepared to justify your choices.
   - What methods you used to collect your data and why? Describe each method in enough detail that the reader gains a clear sense of your procedures
   - Explain the advantages and disadvantages of the methods you have chosen.
   - Explain how you explored the constructs you defined for your study.
   - Explain how you gained access to the setting and how you maintained field relations.

E. Describe your selection strategy. Include the following:
   - Describe how you selected study participants, or contexts for observation for each of your data collection methods. Justify your decision.
   - Explain how you determined the number and characteristics of the participants, and justify your choice.
   - Describe the times and places you have chosen for your data collection. Justify your choices.
   - Discuss any major issues, considerations, and concerns that entered into selection of study participants.

F. Discuss your analysis. Include the following:
   - Discuss the general goals, procedures, and principles of data analysis.
   - Include how you examined the data to identify themes, issues etc.
   - Discuss the role of triangulation in your research/evaluation study.

G. Address issues of authenticity/constituent validity in your research/evaluation study.
H. Identify and discuss the ethical issues associated with your research/evaluation study. How are you addressing them in your design?

Part IV: Discussion Section (2-4 pages)

A. Be sure to tie your discussion back to the background of the topic. Discuss in what ways the results impact the topic. Note the hypothesis. Was the conceptual framework adequate? What is the relative contribution of the methodological approach to the topic you have chosen?

B. Discuss dissemination and utilization of your results. Include the following:
   - Describe and justify your intended audience(s) and/or stakeholders.
   - Identify and discuss the ways you will disseminate your results.
   - Discuss the ways your research or evaluation results will be helpful to your intended audience.

b. Comprehensive Examination

From the University of Pittsburgh Regulations Governing Graduate Study:

> *The Comprehensive Examination should be designed to assess the student's mastery of the general field of doctoral study, the student's acquisition of both depth and breadth in the*

area of specialization within the general field, and the ability to use the research methods of the discipline. In some programs, the comprehensive examination is combined with the overview or prospectus meeting. It should be administered at approximately the time of the completion of the formal course requirements and should be passed at least eight months before the scheduling of the final oral examination and dissertation defense. In no case may the comprehensive examination be taken in the same term in which the student is graduated. Examination results must be reported promptly to the dean's office but no later than the last day of the term in which the examination is administered. A student who is unable to complete all degree requirements within a five-year period after passing the comprehensive examination may be re-examined at the discretion of the department or school. (Revised 2000)

Requirements

- You must have passed your preliminary examination and completed all of the departmental and school required core courses in addition to a substantial number of your elective credits. Typically, students will take the comprehensive examination after four semesters of full-time study or its equivalent of part-time study (approximately 48-52 credits).
- You must have a minimum grade point average of 3.3.
- You must be registered during the semester in which you take your comprehensive examination.

Preparing for Your Comprehensive Examination

To prepare for your comprehensive exam, you will register for a 1-credit course, "Preparation for the Comprehensive Examination HPM 2275." The chair of your Examination Committee will be the primary faculty working with you on this course, although you are strongly encouraged to seek advice from the other members of your committee as well. This course will be tailored for each student.

Students will be given a set of sample exam questions in the spring of their second year to guide preparation for the Examination.

The Examination

The Comprehensive Examination will be held in the summer following the second year of study. The exam will be based on core classes that students have taken during the first two years. The format will be a take-home, open-book, timed exam that will test the students' knowledge and analytical abilities. Students will complete the exam over a week-long time period. They will have 2 days to complete first two sections, 24-hour break, 2 days to complete the following two sections, 24-hour break, and 2 days to complete the remaining two sections. A bibliography in APA format must be

included with each section of the exam. Students will be allowed to use a computer to type their responses, and may use any resource available electronically or in the library system. Students are not allowed to consult or discuss the exam with other students, faculty members, or outside sources. You must submit each section of your exam electronically to the program coordinator by the given deadline. Failure to do so will result in you having to redo the exam.

Grading

The committee will judge the quality of your work. The committee may decide that you will make modifications. The Committee will sign off on the Report on Requirements for a Doctoral Degree once its members decide that you have satisfied the requirements.

An "S" will be assigned to you on the "Preparation for the Comprehensive Examination" after your committee has signed off on your comprehensive examination.

A student who has not completed all degree requirements within 5 years of passing the Comprehensive Examination will be required to re-take the exam based on contemporary standards. This requirement is to assure that students graduate with mastery of current knowledge in the field.

c. First Independent Research Manuscript (FIRM)

By their fourth year in the program, all students are required to complete a publishable single-authored, original research paper demonstrating their ability to initiate health services research. The rationale for this experience is to engage students during their third year in the development of ideas that can form the kernel of their doctoral dissertation. The paper can be an extension of a paper from a course and can count as part of the doctoral dissertation. Starting the task during the third year and continuing into the summer provides structure to the intellectual exploration that necessarily occurs after students have completed their required courses.

A timeline and guidelines for completion of this requirement are as follows:

1. Submission of a short (2 or 3 page) research proposal by December 1 of the third year to the Doctoral Program Committee. This proposal must clearly state the problem or question the student intends to address; how the student's work fits into the relevant literature and what the student's original contribution to this area of research will be. The proposal should provide as much detail as possible on the methods the student will use to address the problem. The proposal should also list the name

of the faculty member who has agreed to supervise the project.

2. Submission of a complete, single-authored paper by the final full week of August after their third year. The paper should be of a sufficient quality that it has the potential to be submitted to a peer-reviewed journal.
3. The faculty advisor will provide a referee report to the student and the Doctoral Program Committee advising that the paper be accepted as is or suggesting changes that need to be made in order for the paper to be deemed acceptable. The Doctoral Program Committee will function analogously to a journal editorial board and will review all submissions and can either accept the paper as is or require revisions and resubmission.
4. Presentation of the paper in a seminar that occurs during the Fall semester of the fourth year in the program. This activity provides experience making a formal presentation, and should prepare students for job seeking and participation in scientific meetings. The timing of the presentation is selected to assure that the underlying work is well polished.
5. Failure to pass the FIRM requirement is grounds for dismissal from the Program.

d. Dissertation Overview

The purpose of the Dissertation Overview is to establish a formal research plan for the doctoral dissertation. At successful completion, the student is admitted into candidacy for the Ph.D. Degree. The research plan identifies the topic, research question, and sets the scholarly parameters for the proposed project. Students must complete all required coursework and planned electives, and have passed both preliminary and comprehensive examinations.

a. Committee Formation

The doctoral dissertation committee must be formed in accordance with Pitt Public Health guidelines. The student will identify a faculty member who agrees to be the Dissertation Advisor and Chair. This faculty member may be their Academic Advisor, or someone different. Additional committee members should be selected in consultation with the Dissertation Advisor.

b. Process

The student and Dissertation Advisor should discuss the research focus and objectives. It is the responsibility of the student to prepare a written dissertation proposal that outlines the conceptualization, rational and methodology of the proposed doctoral dissertation. In particular, the proposal must identify the tentative topic for each of the three manuscripts that form the written text of the final dissertation.

The dissertation overview shall be scheduled through the Pitt Public Health Office of Student Affairs.

The Dissertation Overview is an in-person meeting between the student and his or her Dissertation Committee. **Two weeks prior to the scheduled meeting, the student will have provided the committee members with a copy of the written dissertation proposal.** At the Overview meeting, the student will make an oral presentation of the proposed research and will be examined by the committee. The Dissertation Committee has the responsibility of ensuring that the student meets appropriate academic standards. This Committee has the authority to require that the student revise his or her proposal. Committee approval does not imply acceptance of the dissertation. In addition, the student may need to revise the methodology as the research progresses, necessitating further meetings of the entire committee.

Doctoral dissertation research must have appropriate clearance from the University of Pittsburgh Institutional Review Board (IRB). This clearance must be in place before research commences, but may not be required prior to the Dissertation Overview.

e. Dissertation Defense

The doctoral dissertation defense presents the background and significance of the research, a synthesis of the appropriate literature, the research design and the results of the research. The dissertation research should represent an original study that makes a significant contribution or advancement in the area of investigation.

a. Process

During the preparation of the dissertation, the student should be in frequent contact with the committee chair and meet, as appropriate with the committee members for continued guidance.

The dissertation defense shall be scheduled through the Pitt Public Health Office of Student Affairs.

The dissertation is in the form of three thematically linked manuscripts with an introduction that provides an overview to the body of work. Each component must be clearly written with careful documentation. It involves a substantive piece of original and independent research grounded in an appropriate body of literature and theory. The written work must conform to the University of Pittsburgh style manual. All dissertations must be submitted electronically using the Electronic Theses and Dissertations (ETD).

Students may use a professional editor in the preparation of the dissertation. This assistance must be limited to the use of language and not to subject matter or interpretation. Students must describe and acknowledge all editorial assistance in the text of the document.

A final draft of the dissertation must be given to each committee member at least two weeks prior to the scheduled defense.

b. Defense

The dissertation defense is a public, oral presentation and examination of the student's research and is conducted by the doctoral dissertation committee. The student should provide an overview of the three manuscripts that form the text of the dissertation and, importantly, provide thematic linkage between them.

All members of the committee must attend the examination. Other individuals may participate in the examination, however only members of the committee may be present during the final deliberations and vote on the passage of the candidate. A Report on Requirements for a Doctoral Degree form must be completed and signed by the committee. This form must be submitted to the department chair then to the Assistant Dean for Student Affairs. The dissertation chair has the responsibility to ensure that all modifications and revisions to the dissertation requested by the committee are adequately completed as well as ensuring that the dissertation meets all University formatting requirements before requesting signatures of the members of the committee.

c. Unsatisfactory Performance

If the written text of the dissertation or performance at the defense does not meet the expectations of the committee, the student will have one additional opportunity to submit and defend a revised document.

A student may appeal the decision of the committee through discussion with the doctoral program director, who may discuss the issue with the department chair. (If the doctoral program director is on the committee, the appeal may go directly to the department chair.) The program director may uphold the committee decision, attempt to mediate the differences, or recommend that a new committee be constituted. Further consideration or resolution may be referred to the Dean or his or her designee.

Governance

The Doctoral Program has a Program Director and a full time Program Coordinator. The Doctoral Program Committee has responsibility for the curriculum, admissions,

and overseeing student progress. Membership on the committee is open to faculty at any rank with primary or secondary appointments in the Department and who are members of the Graduate Faculty. Persons outside the Department may be invited to participate as needed.

To the extent feasible, the Doctoral Program Committee will work with the existing Admissions and Curriculum committees in the Department to execute Committee functions. Subcommittees may be formed as needed to execute Committee functions.

Curriculum. The Doctoral Program Committee will have responsibility for approving changes to the Doctoral Degree. Proposed changes to the curriculum will be presented to the Departmental curriculum committee for discussion and resolution of any conflict with other degree programs. Changes to the Doctoral Degree curriculum may also originate in the Departmental Curriculum Committee for approval by the Doctoral Program Committee.

Admissions. The Doctoral Program Committee will set the standards for admission and will transmit those standards to the Departmental Admissions Committee. The Departmental Admissions Committee will review all applications in conformance with Pitt Public Health policy. Eligible applicant files will be reviewed by the Doctoral Program Committee for final approval.

Student Progress. The Doctoral Program Committee will oversee all aspects of student progress, including advising, preliminary and comprehensive examinations, and FIRM papers. The Committee will write, proctor and score preliminary and comprehensive examinations, review and approve FIRM submissions, and conduct an annual review of all doctoral students.

Checklists and Forms

The following checklists/forms are available on the Doctoral Program web page:

a. Application Instructions
b. Program of Study
c. Elective Courses
d. Eligibility for Preliminary Examination
e. Eligibility for Comprehensive Examination
f. Area of Focus form
g. Certification of Teaching Requirement
h. FIRM proposal
i. FIRM referee report
j. Dissertation Overview Outline
k. Dissertation Progress Report (each semester while writing)
l. Graduation Checklist

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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