

# Pitt Public Health Academic Handbook Academic Year 2016-17

## Pitt Public Health Probation and Dismissal Guidelines

University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health (GSPH)

School-wide Probation and Dismissal Policy (SPDP)

### Scope

The provisions of this policy pertain to dismissal and probation for academic reasons and are developed in conformance with the University Council on Graduate Study's Regulations Governing Graduate Study at the University of Pittsburgh ("Regulations"), located at [www.pitt.edu/~graduate/regtoc.html](http://www.pitt.edu/~graduate/regtoc.html). This policy aims to provide a means of establishing and maintaining basic standards and requirements for graduate work at the Graduate School of Public Health (GSPH), and is applicable to all GSPH students.

The GSPH Academic Standards and Performance Policy consists of the School-wide Probation and Dismissal Policy (SPDP), auxiliary policies established by GSPH departments to address specific items not covered by the SPDP, and university-wide academic policies. GSPH departmental policies, although they may differ in details, must conform to the fundamental principles of the SPDP, and may not be more lenient than the SPDP. Policies not covered by the SPDP must be consistent with university-wide policies regarding admission, registration, and graduation requirements. Each department may develop its own policies for probation and dismissal. However, these department-specific policies must be approved by the GSPH Educational Policies and Curriculum Committee, and provided to students upon admission to the degree program, and updates/changes must be provided to students in a timely manner. If departments do not specify such requirements, the SPDP applies. If the SPDP does not specify such requirements, the University-wide policies apply. As a rule of thumb, departments may not retroactively enact policies affecting currently-enrolled students without the approval of the GSPH Educational Policies and Curriculum Committee ("EPCC").

Policies and procedures pertaining to non-academic performance are covered by the University of Pittsburgh's Student Code of Conduct and/or Academic Integrity guidelines. Students are subject to the dismissal for breaches of the Student Code of Conduct and/or Academic Integrity guidelines, and cases are adjudicated through the specific processes related to student conduct and academic integrity.

### Periodic Review and Documentation

All academic difficulties described should be documented in writing at each stage and should begin as soon as problems arise. The requirement for documentation applies to all degrees, academic programs, and academic shortcomings. Maintaining documentation of student

academic problems is primarily, although not exclusively, the responsibility of the student's academic advisor and the student's department. The absence of documentation, however, will not preclude academic remedies from being imposed upon students in appropriate cases.

All students should be given periodic departmental reviews of academic progress and constructive feedback. As problems are documented, students should receive written notice of documented problems, as well as the opportunity to respond to written notice.

#### Reasons for Dismissal from GSPH

##### 1. Failure to Maintain Minimum Grade Point Average (3.00)

A GSPH student whose cumulative grade point average (GPA is the same as QPA) falls below 3.00 is immediately placed on academic probation, and the student, his/her academic advisor, and department chairperson are notified by the EPCC. A student on probation may be permitted to take additional coursework over no more than two terms as a full-time student (part-time students may complete a maximum of an additional 18 credit hours) to reach a cumulative GPA/QPA of 3.00 (See Regulations, "Academic Standards," Located at: [www.pitt.edu/~graduate/reggeneral.html#standards](http://www.pitt.edu/~graduate/reggeneral.html#standards)). Students whose GPA/QPA is sufficiently low so as to make it impossible to achieve the GPA/QPA 3.0 standard according to these timeframes may be dismissed without the additional coursework.

##### 2. Failure to meet GSPH minimum grade requirement for GSPH Core Courses and Required Departmental Courses

All master's and doctoral students must meet GSPH minimum grade requirements for both GSPH core courses and courses required by their department.

The minimum grade requirement for school-wide core courses is a C. Students who are otherwise eligible are granted two opportunities to register for and achieve at least a C in GSPH school-wide core courses.

Students who are otherwise eligible also have a maximum of two opportunities to register for and achieve the minimum required grade for departmental core courses. The minimum grade requirement for those courses is established by departments.

##### 3. Failure to Make Normal Progress Towards Degree (Completion of Courses)

Except in unusual circumstances (e.g. medical leave of absence) students may not accumulate more than 15 credits of unresolved G grades. A student approaching 15 credits of unresolved G grades will receive a memo from EPCC, and the student and his/her academic advisor will be asked to develop a plan for timely resolution of the grades.

A student will not be permitted to register for additional credits until the G grades are converted as a result of completion of course work. Because the University requires resolution of G grades within one year, requests for change of G grades more than a year old must be accompanied by an appeal in support of the request from the student's department and must

be approved by the GSPH Assistant Dean of Student Affairs before they are submitted to the Registrar's Office.

#### 4. Failure of Master's or Doctoral Program Examinations

The University Regulations pertaining to Master's and Doctoral degrees describe the requirements for master's and doctoral examinations. Departments may determine the format and content of the examinations within the broad University guidelines and should provide students with formal written guidelines, and each department is responsible for specifying the procedure for administration of the master's comprehensive examination. Master's students on provisional status may not take a comprehensive examination (Regulations, "Comprehensive Examination," located at: [www.pitt.edu/~graduate/regmasters.html#comps](http://www.pitt.edu/~graduate/regmasters.html#comps)).

Examining committees for the doctoral overview/prospectus meeting and the final doctoral defense should be unanimous in their recommendation that a student be passed (Regulations, "Doctoral Students," located at: [www.pitt.edu/~graduate/regphd.html#doctor](http://www.pitt.edu/~graduate/regphd.html#doctor)).

If the committee does not vote unanimously to pass a student, the matter will be sent to the department chair, and, if necessary, to the GSPH Dean for resolution. Students who fail a doctoral or master's examination (doctoral overview or defense: less than unanimous vote to pass; other exams: see department standards), will be permitted one re-take of the examination. If a student fails a re-take, the student's department chair, if he/she feels that a second re-take is justified, may appeal to the GSPH Dean on the student's behalf. If the student's department chair feels that a second re-take should not be granted the student may appeal for a second attempt by submitting a letter to the Chair of the school's Educational Policies and Curriculum Committee (EPCC). The EPCC has a detailed procedure for administering this process. More specific rules governing program examinations may be covered by department-specific academic performance policies.

#### 5. Inability to Conduct Research or to Perform According to Professional Standards

*Inability to Conduct Research:* Faculty are responsible for guiding the research of a GSPH student accepted for participation in their research project, and for meeting the advising requirements set forth in the University of Pittsburgh's document, "Elements of Good Academic Advising." However, no faculty member is obliged to accept a specific student as a member of his/her research team. The student, not the faculty advisor, is expected to: (1) design and plan the research project; (2) conceptualize and formulate the hypothesis and methodology; (3) perform data analysis; and (4) write an acceptable essay, thesis, or dissertation. If a student is judged by GSPH faculty members to be unable to conduct independent research as appropriate to the discipline, the student may be dismissed.

Primary responsibility for determining whether a student has demonstrated the ability to apply research methods and to conduct independent research as appropriate to the discipline rests with the student's academic and research advisors (including the master's or doctoral

committees). However, in order that evaluation of a student's work be fair and objective, failure to demonstrate the ability to conduct research must be well-documented by the faculty advisor(s) and reviewed by: (1) a committee convened by the department chair and consisting of other departmental faculty and students; or (2) if the student has already formed one, the doctoral committee. Upon the recommendation of these committees, the department chair must notify the EPCC of his/her decision to dismiss the student, and provide the documentation for the EPCC to review. If a majority of the elected faculty EPCC members concurs, the EPCC chair will notify the department chair, who must notify the student of his/her dismissal, and the reasons for dismissal.

*Inability to Perform According to Professional Standards:* Faculty who are responsible for supervising GSPH students during professional activities are required to ensure that the student is able to perform according to professional standards. The student is expected to: (1) participate in professional development activities, including but not limited to involvement in professional associations; (2) behave in a manner consistent with the norms of the discipline / professional field during a field placement, practicum, or residency.

Primary responsibility for determining whether a student has demonstrated the ability to perform according to professional standards rests with the student's academic and field placement advisors. However, in order that the evaluation of a student's work be fair and objective, failure to demonstrate the ability to perform according to professional standards must be well-documented by the faculty advisor(s) and reviewed by: a committee convened by the department chair and consisting of other departmental faculty and students. Upon the recommendation of this committee, the department chair must notify the EPCC of his/her decision to dismiss the student, and provide the documentation for the EPCC to review. If a majority of the elected faculty EPCC members concurs, the EPCC chair will notify the department chair, who will notify the student of his/her dismissal and the reasons for dismissal.

#### Probation and Dismissal Process and General Appeals Process

Both the GSPH Assistant Dean of Student Affairs and the EPCC chair are available for consultation regarding the GSPH policies. Any GSPH faculty member can request the department chair to review a GSPH student's performance. Subsequently, the department chair should contact the EPCC chair to request a review, and provide the EPCC chair with documentation to support the department's decision. The EPCC will review the documentation and notify the department chair regarding its support of the decision. If the EPCC concurs with the decision to dismiss, the EPCC chair will notify the department chair. The department chair will contact the student who is being dismissed to inform him/her of the action. The department chair must identify which of the reasons for dismissal is applicable. If the EPCC disagrees with the department's decision to dismiss a student, the matter is referred to the GSPH Dean for resolution.

A student may appeal a decision to dismiss by filing a written appeal with his/her department

chair. The department chair must then bring the appeal to the attention of the EPCC, which will meet with the department chair and student's academic advisor to discuss the basis for dismissal. The EPCC must then provide its recommendation to the GSPH Dean, who will approve or reverse the department's decision to dismiss the student. The GSPH Dean's decision is final, and this appeal exhausts all remedies available to the student.

The EPCC must create an ad hoc committee to provide objective feedback on dismissal cases related to *Inability to Conduct Research or to Perform According to Professional Standards*. The department chair will bring the GSPH student's appeal to the attention of the EPCC, which will set up an ad hoc committee to review documentation consisting of at least one faculty member and at least one student from the same GSPH department, and at least one faculty member and at least one student from outside the department (i.e., at a minimum, an ad hoc committee must consist of two faculty and two students). If the ad hoc committee disagrees (by majority vote) with the department's decision to dismiss, the EPCC chair will contact the GSPH Dean to approve or reverse the department's decision.