

Pitt Public Health Academic Handbook Academic Year 2016-17

Part I: Advising and mentoring

Academic advising
How to get the mentoring you need
How to build your professional skills
Getting ready to graduate

Pitt Public Health Academic Handbook

Part I: Advising and Mentoring

Academic advising

As a student at Pitt Public Health, you have many different resources available to you. Advising systems vary among departments, but you should be able to take advantage of all of the following.

Departmental advising: Every student should have a faculty advisor assigned by the department, and a [departmental student services coordinator](#). This team, in addition to your program director, will be your main go-to resource for course advising, registration, and initial mentoring. As you progress through your program, you may acquire other formal mentors for your research, your practicum, etc. Faculty advisors are guided by the [University of Pittsburgh Elements of Good Academic Advising document](#).

The course registration process varies among departments but in most cases you should meet with your academic advisor, who will sign your [enrollment form](#). The [department-level student services staff](#) will take that form and activate your self-registration, at which point you can enroll yourself in classes. In some departments or programs your student services coordinator will do the registration for you. See the [classes Web page](#) for course descriptions, course schedules, and more detailed registration instructions.

For detailed information on course and credit requirements, make sure you are talking to an authoritative source. It never hurts to double check with the Office of Student Affairs, especially if you are doing something complicated like pursuing multiple degrees or transfer credits.

Office of Student Affairs: The Office of Student Affairs is always available as a backup for your departmental advisors, as a source of information on school-level policies and issues, and as your primary source of information on essay, thesis, and dissertation formatting and submission. For policy/requirements questions see the Assistant Dean for Student Affairs, [Mary](#)

[Derkach](#). For essay, thesis, and dissertation questions as well as graduation process questions, see [Joanne Pegher](#).

Course Evaluations: When you're considering elective courses, don't forget to check past [course evaluations](#).

Secondary mentors and advisors (including students): To get the maximum benefit from your time at Pitt Public Health, don't forget to reach out to other faculty and students, practicum advisors, Career Services, etc. Ideally you will graduate with a rich network of contacts who will provide you with mentoring and support for many years to come.

Grievance procedures: Your first approach to resolving any dispute should be a professional discussion with the faculty member involved. The next step is a discussion with the chair of your department. In situations in which it is not comfortable to talk to those individuals, you may always bring issues to the attention of the Assistant Dean for Student Affairs, [Mary Derkach](#) or the Associate Deans for Education and Student Affairs, [Eleanor Feingold](#) and [Cindy Bryce](#). Your [departmental student services coordinator](#) can also be a good source of advice. For issues regarding academic standing, see *section II* and *sections IV* of this handbook. For issues regarding academic integrity, see *section II* and *section IV* as well.

How to get the mentoring you need

The mentoring relationships you build at Pitt Public Health will be important for many years. This section of the handbook offers some starter advice on how to develop those relationships. We encourage you to refer to the excellent guidebook from the University of Michigan [How to Get the Mentoring You Want](#) at for more comprehensive suggestions.

Analyze your own needs: Start by thinking about what your own needs are and what you are hoping to get from your mentors. What are your objectives in entering graduate school? What kind of training do you need? What skills do you want to develop?

Find potential mentors: Next you'll want to locate potential mentors within and outside of your department and even perhaps outside the school. Research the work of these faculty and see if their interests match or complement yours. You can also talk to senior students about their advisors and mentors. Then reach out to potential mentors and ask to meet with them. Be patient and professional when requesting these initial appointments; most faculty are eager to help, but may not be available immediately. Good topics for this initial conversation depend on whether you are looking for a primary mentor or supplementary contacts. In either case, you should probably start with mutual research or practice interests and professional goals.

Develop the relationship: Working with the mentor is as much your job as his or hers. It is important to have regular meetings to discuss your work and get feedback from your mentor, but it is also important to regularly re-examine your own strengths and skills and your expectations for the mentoring relationship.

Communicate clearly about expectations for written work: Be sure to communicate with your mentor early on about expectations for authorship and about timelines for completion of written work. Some mentors will work with students on very rough drafts or informal documents, and others expect students to produce more polished work before they look at it. In either case, do your own proofreading – don't expect your mentor to be your copy editor.

How to build your professional skills

Your in-classroom and out-of-classroom experiences at Pitt Public Health should combine to give you a strong set of professional skills by the time you graduate. You need to take an active role in this process, taking advantage of opportunities to enhance your skills whenever you can. We hope you will use all of the resources described below, and many others as well.

Opportunities to improve your communication skills: Your written and oral communication skills will be your #1 career asset. Get feedback from instructors on your course writing and presentations. Volunteer to give as many presentations as you can. Participate in Pitt Public Health's Dean's Day student research day as many times as you can. Present posters and talks at professional meetings and local symposia. Take a course on scientific communication, professional communication, and/or grant writing.

External and internal speakers: You'll see many listings for seminars, speakers, and other events that excite you, and many times your reaction will be "that sounds fantastic, but I'm so busy." **Make the time at least several times a semester to get to these events anyway.** They are an invaluable opportunity to expose yourself to new possibilities and new ideas, and to meet new people. Sit in the front row. Ask questions. Introduce yourself to the speaker. Use the opportunity to network within and outside the school. During your first and second semesters take advantage of the access to external guest speakers during Grand Rounds events.

Career Services Office in Pitt Public Health: Services provided include workshops, one-on-one counseling/ resume review/ mock interviewing, access to the school's job opportunities portal (Pitt Bridges), and online resources including materials from [Career Services Web pages](#), Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn account.

Certified in Public Health Exam: Pitt Public Health continues its program to sponsor all eligible students to take the Certified in Public Health (CPH) exam. The National Board of Public Health Examiners (NBPHE) administers this credentialing exam for the public health profession. Read more about why it is important for public health professionals to be certified on the [NBPHE Web site](#). For details on the Pitt Public Health program please visit the [CPH Web page](#).

Getting ready to graduate

The [graduation Web page](#) contains full details on forms, logistics, etc. for graduation. You should familiarize yourself with that material no later than the beginning of the term in which you plan

to graduate. Deadlines for graduation application in each term are also listed on the graduation Web page.

Below is a checklist of things you should make sure you have done **well before** the semester in which you plan to graduate.

- 1) If your work involves data, policies, or experiences from an outside agency, organization, or practicum site, ensure that you follow the guidelines that may include a requirement to have a member of the agency, organization or site on your committee. Any student who will use data or experiences from an experience at the Allegheny County Health Department (ACHD) must include their ACHD preceptor as a member on their committee.
- 2) If you have not already done so, make sure your essay/thesis/dissertation committee is in place and has been approved.
- 3) If you have not already done so, familiarize yourself with essay/thesis/dissertation format requirements.
- 4) Meet with your academic advisor and your department student services coordinator to make sure you have [met all academic requirements](#).
- 5) Be sure you are [registered for the term in which you want to graduate](#).