

## **CPH Handbook for MS and PhD Students**

**Master of Science (MS) in  
Public Health Sciences**

**Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in  
Public Health Sciences**

**Academic Year 2025-2026**

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## INTRODUCTION

This Handbook (the Handbook) provides information about the components, requirements, operations and procedures that govern the Master of Science (MS) in Public Health Sciences degree program and the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Public Health Sciences degree program at the University of North Texas Health Science Center (UNT Health) College of Public Health (CPH). The purpose of the Handbook is to provide answers to questions that MS and PhD students may have about their course of study. General policies, procedures, and other information that applies to all students in the CPH and UNT Health can be found in the UNT Health catalog (<http://catalog.unthsc.edu/>).

## AIM OF THE DEGREE SEQUENCE

The MS and PhD degree programs are research-intensive programs with the goal of improving the health of populations. Thus, the MS/PhD sequence is designed to train public health scientists rather than public health practitioners. Students who commit themselves to this challenging path are expected to become future stewards of academic public health.

The MS program aims to equip students with the essential knowledge and research skills needed for careers in public health research. This program provides a strong foundation in public health research, preparing students to design and conduct studies that address critical public health issues. Additionally, the degree serves as an excellent stepping stone to a PhD, offering the advanced training and academic rigor necessary for doctoral studies and a future in academic or high-level research positions.

The PhD program aims to prepare students for post-doctoral fellowships or assistant professor positions at research-intensive universities. To be competitive for these positions, students will do more than complete coursework. Importantly, they will author or co-author peer-reviewed publications and other scholarly works, complete a rigorous dissertation process, and serve as an effective teacher. In other words, PhD students will demonstrate the ability to engage in the scholarship of discovery and the scholarship of teaching.

## MS/PhD Concentrations

**Epidemiology.** This concentration places a strong emphasis on epidemiologic methods, theory, and practice. This broad and rigorous training will equip students with the skills needed to conduct cutting-edge epidemiologic research and to teach university courses in an epidemiology curriculum. Upon completion, students will demonstrate proficiency in the following areas:

- Describe the theory underlying epidemiological methods.
- Design and apply epidemiologic methods to solve a variety of public health problems.
- Conduct etiologic or other analytic and descriptive research studies, through the appropriate formulation of a health problem, and the collection, assimilation, analysis, interpretation, and dissemination of data on human populations and the social, physical, and biological environment.

**Health Behavior Research.** This concentration provides a rigorous scientific study of the psychological, social and cultural factors that impact human health and health behavior. Students will be prepared to perform basic and applied research, teach university courses in a health behavior curriculum, and serve communities with the goals of promoting healthy lifestyles, reducing risk behaviors, and promoting health equity. Upon completion, students will demonstrate proficiency in the following areas:

- Identify the role and impact of the psychological, behavioral, social, and cultural factors that promote population health as well as those that contribute to increased morbidity and mortality.

- Effectively engage communities as partners in promoting health, reducing risk behavior, and changing social conditions that undermine public health and safety.
- Develop, test, and implement interventions designed to achieve social and behavioral change. Conduct scientifically rigorous research on the social and/or behavioral determinants of health, and ways to promote health equity.

## MS/PhD Sequence of Coursework

The MS/PhD degree sequence requires successful completion of a minimum of 89 semester credit hours beyond the baccalaureate degree. PhD students who hold a master's degree but did not complete the CPH's MS program must meet all requirements of the MS program by the end of the Summer Semester of their second year of study, including a discovery-based paper submitted for peer review. The required credit hours of each program are as follows.

MS Degree Requirements	38 SCH
PhD Degree Requirements	51 SCH
Total	89 SCH

Concentration-specific curriculums may be accessed at this link:

<https://www.unthsc.edu/college-of-public-health/future-students/phd-public-health-studies/>

## STUDENT EXPECTATIONS AND PERFORMANCE REVIEW

All MS and PhD students are expected to be engaged as full-time students for the duration of their studies. Students are expected to proactively engage and participate in both independent and collaborative research projects under the supervision of their Faculty Advisor. The student and Faculty Advisor will complete and submit a progress report each semester (Fall and Spring). The progress report identifies the student's goals for the semester and summarizes his or her accomplishments and steps towards graduation. All students will be reviewed annually by their Faculty Advisor and the Program Director. The review is based on the student's performance in coursework, feedback from faculty, and scholarly productivity.

PhD students receiving an academic stipend are expected to be accessible during normal working hours (e.g., 9 a.m.–4 p.m.), Monday through Friday. Outside of class, students are expected to devote at least 20 hours per week to teaching assignments and/or research projects under the guidance of faculty mentor(s). Research projects should generate scholarly products, such as peer-reviewed publications and conference presentations. Students will be asked to serve as teaching assistants, and more advanced PhD students may be assigned to independently teach MPH courses under faculty supervision. Any extended period of remote or off-campus work (e.g., longer than one week) requires prior approval. Requests must be submitted at least two weeks in advance by email to the student's Faculty Advisor, with the Program Director copied.

A separate handout, appended to this Handbook, gives a summary of expectations for stipend-supported PhD students.

All MS and PhD students are expected to attend the CPH Journal Club and the Emerging Public Health Leaders Forum.

**Journal Club:** The Journal Club is a student-centered gathering that meets throughout the year to critically evaluate studies in the scientific literature. It is intended to give students exposure to various health disciplines and fields, as well as to foster the development of skills necessary to write and present scientific manuscripts of their own. One or more students will lead the session with the help of a faculty facilitator. They will be responsible for choosing and distributing the article(s) that will be discussed during the meeting, as well as deciding the structure, format, and/or activities for the meeting.

**Emerging Public Health Leaders Forum:** EPHL focuses on career development in the field of public health. Topics are typically chosen by students, ensuring that the content is relevant and addresses the current needs and challenges they face. Through networking opportunities, skill-building sessions, and mentorship, the Forum aims to equip emerging leaders with the tools and insights needed to excel in their public health careers.

University policy indicates that all requirements for the MS degree must be completed in six years. However, in the CPH, successful MS students will typically graduate in less than two years (or 5 consecutive semesters). Though University policy indicates that the PhD degree must be completed within seven years, PhD students who complete all MS and PhD degree requirements on time will typically graduate within three to four years after being admitted to the program.

Students who anticipate exceeding the University time limits should apply for an extension by submitting a letter to the Office of Student and Academic Services before the appropriate MS or PhD time limit expires. All requests for extension will be critically evaluated by the appropriate Department Chair (see UNT Health Procedure No. 00.015 CPH - Time Limitations). Time spent in active service in the U.S. armed forces will not be used in computing the time limit. However, career members of the armed forces should consult with the Office of Student and Academic Services concerning credit given to coursework completed before or during active military service.

## THE ROLE OF THE FACULTY ADVISOR

Upon admission to the program, each MS student will be assigned a Faculty Advisor and each PhD student will be assigned both a primary and secondary Faculty Advisor. The roles of the Faculty Advisor include, but are not limited to academic advising, research mentorship, direction of the discovery-based paper and dissertation, and serving as a liaison between the student and other faculty who may have research opportunities. Students should meet with their respective Faculty Advisor(s) at least once a week. Requests to change the Faculty Advisor will be reviewed and evaluated by the Program Director. A Faculty Advisor must have a full-time academic appointment in the CPH and approval from the Program Director to serve as an Advisor. Faculty Advisors are assigned by the Program Director and Department Chair.

## MS CULMINATING EXPERIENCE: THE DISCOVERY-BASED PAPER

The culminating experience of the MS degree program is a discovery-based paper. The study and associated paper are conducted, under the supervision of faculty, over three consecutive semesters while enrolled in PHED 5338, PHED 5340, and PHED 5350. The specific tasks of carrying out the study and preparing the manuscript can be found at this link: <https://www.unthsc.edu/college-of-public-health/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/MS-Students-Discovery-Based-Paper.pdf>. The paper must report the findings of an empirical study and usually relies on secondary analyses of existing data. The paper must be suitable for submission to a peer-reviewed journal as determined by the student's Faculty Advisor.

## ADVANCED STANDING CREDIT IN THE PhD PROGRAM

Applicants accepted to the PhD program who did not complete the CPH's MS program may request that earned graduate-level coursework from U.S. accredited institutions be applied toward the 38 semester credit hours required for the MS program, thus potentially waiving some required prerequisite coursework at the master's degree level. Advanced standing credit is a form of transfer credit that refers to semester credit hours from past graduate coursework. The CPH allows advanced standing for up to 38 semester credit hours. There must be a close match between a completed course from another university and a course in the MS program. Only courses where a grade of B or higher was attained (or a grade of "pass" in a pass/fail course) are eligible for advanced standing credit. The PhD student is required to submit the paperwork for any course for advanced standing, including official transcripts and course syllabi from the university where the prior course

was completed, to OSAS and the Program Director. The Associate Dean for Academic and Student Affairs, in consultation with the Department Chair, approves advanced standing courses and develops the course plan.

Upon acceptance, students will be allowed to submit an advanced standing request. In most cases, advanced standing requests and degree plans will be finalized before new students' matriculation in August.

## **PhD LEVEL REQUIREMENTS**

### **Doctoral Level Coursework**

In the CPH, 6000-level courses are designated as doctoral-level coursework, whereas 5000-level coursework constitutes the bulk of master's degree programs. The Faculty Advisor is responsible for ensuring that all degree requirements are met.

### **Comprehensive Examination**

The Comprehensive Examination (the Exam) is designed to assess the student's potential to conduct independent research. The content, format, length, and other details of the Exam vary by concentration. To sit for the Exam, a student must have completed or be concurrently enrolled in all required courses, have written permission from their Faculty Advisor, and enroll in the PhD Comprehensive Exam course (0 SCH) during the semester in which it is administered.

With Faculty Advisor permission, the student should notify (by email) the Program Director one semester prior of their intention to sit for the Comprehensive Examination (and thus enrolling in BACH 6000). The Program Director will work with the Advisor to assign faculty members to the Exam Committee. The Committee will consist of the Faculty Advisor and at least two additional faculty members from the CPH Faculty. The Committee is responsible for developing and grading the Exam responses.

The date for the Exam is mutually agreed upon by the student and Committee. The Exam is administered as a "take-home exam." The student has one week (7 calendar days) to prepare their exam responses off-campus and to return their work to the Committee. During the 7-day exam window, students are prohibited from speaking or consulting with anyone who could be considered to inform their submissions. All submissions should be properly referenced and demonstrate proper grammar, consistency of terminology and citations, and appearance.

All work should be original and abide by all CPH and UNT Health policies regarding plagiarism and academic integrity. Unapproved use of artificial intelligence (AI) programs, such as ChatGPT, Claude, Perplexity, and Microsoft Copilot, is in violation of the UNT Health student code and is considered academic misconduct. Referrals will be made if it appears AI was used for the student's work unless explicitly stated in the assignment description.

#### **The following are approved uses of AI tools:**

- Brainstorming and/or refining ideas;
- Fine-tuning research ideas or questions;
- Finding information on a topic (knowing that answers from AIs can be false and require human verification);
- Drafting an outline to organize thoughts;
- Checking grammar and style, and;
- Any other approved use, as defined by the Committee.

**The following uses of AI are NOT permitted:**

- Writing entire sentences, and/or paragraphs of a draft or final version of a paper, essay, reflection, discussion board post, etc.

Reporting any content that was AI-generated, including figures, tables, and text, without explicitly describing the role of AI in their generation.

For the PhD concentration in Epidemiology, the Exam will include at least one statistics question and two epidemiological methods-focused questions; thus three total questions.

For the PhD concentration in Health Behavior Research, the Exam will include one question in each of these areas: 1) Applied Health Theory; 2) Research Methods; 3) Statistical Research Methods; and 4) Concentration-specific question tailored to the student's area of research .

The Committee's decisions about the quality of the student's Exam responses will be based on a majority vote. Students will receive separate grades of "Pass," "Pass with Reservations," or "Fail" on each question. Students must receive a grade of at least "Pass with Reservations" on all sections of the Exam to advance to PhD candidacy. If the Committee believes one or more examination questions need further evaluation, they may request a follow-up oral examination (after the first examination responses are graded). Oral examinations will be scheduled within two weeks of the student being notified of the results of their Exam.

The Faculty Advisor will notify the Program Director of the results. The Program Director will notify the student of their results and successful advancement to candidacy (see below). If requested by the Committee, the Department Chair will schedule an oral examination. The Program Director will hold follow-up meetings with those students who fail any part of the examination and in consultation with their faculty committee, will identify remedial work, including the possibility of additional coursework.

Students will be allowed to retake the Exam one time. The Committee will determine the number of areas in which the student needs to be re-tested and will prepare new questions for the second examination to assess competence in these areas. In this case, the student is given a PR grade in BACH 6000 for the semester.

The student must re-take the examination within 12 months of the failed attempt or be dismissed from the PhD program. A second failing grade on the Exam will result in the student being dismissed from the PhD program.

## **Advancement to Candidacy**

Advancement to candidacy, i.e., transitioning from a PhD student to a PhD Candidate, indicates that the student has demonstrated the high likelihood of becoming an independent scholar and is qualified to begin dissertation research under the supervision of their Dissertation Chair (typically the Faculty Advisor). Advancement to candidacy is attained after successful completion of the Comprehensive Examination. Once advanced to candidacy, candidates must register for a minimum of 3 dissertation credit hours every semester until the PhD degree is granted.

## **PhD Dissertation**

The dissertation is the culminating experience for the PhD degree. Dissertation research may commence after the student has been advanced to candidacy. The reputation and quality of the CPH and its PhD program are measured, in part by the quality of dissertations, which are available for scrutiny by scholars and the general public. As such, dissertations must be prepared with exceptional rigor, not only with respect to proper references and conclusions, but also with respect to grammar, consistency of terminology and citations, and appearance.



The Dissertation Chair will guide the PhD student throughout the dissertation process. The Dissertation Chair is responsible for ensuring that the dissertation is correct in form, grammar, and content. The Program Director is responsible for ensuring that all procedures for proposing and defending the dissertation are followed by the student and committee.

## Forming the Dissertation Committee

The Dissertation Committee will consist of at least four faculty members. At least two must come from the CPH with expertise to the dissertation topic. One committee member shall be from outside the CPH, but from within the UNT Health faculty. One committee member can hold an academic appointment at another accredited U.S. university, but this member will be counted as a CPH member. The Program Director and Department Chair will approve the composition of dissertation committees.

The ***Dissertation Committee form*** must be submitted before beginning any work on the dissertation proposal. The form can be found at: <https://www.unthsc.edu/college-of-public-health/office-of-admission-and-academic-services-forms/>. The Dissertation Chair is responsible for obtaining the signatures of committee members and submitting the signed form to the Office of Student and Academic Services via email at [CPH@unthsc.edu](mailto:CPH@unthsc.edu).

Once formed, the composition of a Dissertation Committee cannot be changed except under special circumstances with approval by the Associate Dean of High Impact Educational Practices and Student Services. Permissible reasons for Committee composition change include a faculty member leaving UNT Health employment or a faculty member having health issues or on leave. A committee member cannot be removed from a Dissertation Committee for rendering a negative judgment on the quality of the Candidate's work.

## Dissertation Format

### I. Preliminary Pages

- Title Page
- Note to Reader (if applicable)
- Dedication (optional page)
- Acknowledgments (optional page)
- Table of Contents
- List of Tables (if applicable)
- List of Figures (if applicable)
- Abstract

### II. Main Text

- Chapter 1: Introduction
- Chapter 2: Review of the Literature
- Chapter 3: Methods
- Chapter 4: Results
- Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### III. References (APA style recommended)

### IV. Appendices (by numbered sections, including IRB approval and other documents)

### V. About the Author (required)

## Overview of Dissertation Chapters

The PhD candidate, with the feedback and final approval of the Dissertation Committee, will agree upon a research problem to be examined, and then develop a research proposal to address them. All work should be original and abide by all CPH and UNT Health policies regarding plagiarism, academic integrity, and use of AI as defined above. The dissertation research proposal will consist of Chapters One, Two, and Three. Chapters Four and Five will be completed before the final defense of the dissertation.



**Chapter One (Introduction):** Provides background and describes the nature and purpose of the study. The significance of the study and its justification are described in detail. This chapter should also present the specific hypotheses or research questions to be addressed by the dissertation study, clearly relating these to existing lines of investigation and conjecture detailed in current literature. This chapter often ends with a brief overview of the remaining chapters.

**Chapter Two (Review of the Literature):** Presents a thorough and critical analysis of prior scholarship related to the central questions of the dissertation. In most cases, the literature review:

- demonstrates thorough understanding of the subject of the dissertation, through review and analysis of previous research;
- identifies chief researchers and documents in the community of scholars to which the dissertation is meant to contribute;
- identifies areas of consensus, dispute, and ignorance in the scholarship of the field and evaluates the nature and quality of support for various contentions;
- draws new insights or new questions from the literature to offer a conceptual or theoretical framework in which the dissertation should be understood;
- examines and weighs previous and potential methods for investigating the hypotheses or research questions to be addressed in the dissertation;
- prepares the reader to appreciate how the dissertation will contribute significant new understanding to this framework;
- focuses only on literature and conclusions that are directly pertinent to the subject and the problem(s) addressed in the dissertation; and
- provides proper citation of all work reviewed in the chapter.

**Chapter Three (Methods):** Describes the methods of the study in detail. This chapter is typically divided into subsections. Often a subsection describing participants or subjects is followed by subsections describing data collection, testing or other measurement procedures to be undertaken, and a subsection describing how the resulting variables will be analyzed to help resolve the problems stated in the Introduction. Tense should be appropriate to the situation. If methods have yet to be done, they should be written in the future tense, whereas methods that have already been completed should be written in the past tense. Examples of conventionally labeled subsections include the following.

- Subjects and setting: The characteristics of participants of the study, how they were selected, and the setting of the study should be presented in detail.
- Instrumentation: Any tools or instruments that might be important for readers to understand (such as assessment instruments, surveys, interview formats, observation protocols, and data collection devices) should be described in detail.
- Data collection procedures: The readers should be given a thorough description of all the steps involved in data collection. Timelines are helpful, either in outline or graphical representation. Efforts to protect the reliability of findings and the validity of inferences should be detailed.
- Data analysis: Regardless of the data collection method used, an analytic strategy must be applied to make sense of the observations. Chapter 3 should describe the analytic strategies employed and a rationale for their use. Methods of “data cleaning” and refinement, categorization schemes and how they

were developed, data transformations, statistical tests, and checks on the validity and generalizability of conclusions are suitable topics.

**Chapter Four (Results):** Summarizes and analyzes the study's data with only minimal interpretation. This chapter should bring readers as close as possible to the original data and experiences of the study. This involvement with the data gives the reader some chance to form their own inferences and match them against conclusions presented in Chapter 5. The results should be presented first in their simplest form (such as simple narrative descriptions, simple counts of frequency, and descriptive statistics), and later in more complex forms (multivariable interactions and generalized patterns or inferential statistics).

**Chapter Five (Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations):** Presents the contribution of the research to the broader literature. It discusses the implications of the results, draws conclusions, and lays out an agenda for future research on the issues addressed in the dissertation. Typically, this section begins with a summary of essential points made in Chapters 1 and 3, i.e., why the topic is important, the purpose of the study, and how the study's design contributed to the understanding of the topic. The presentation in Chapter 5 should closely follow the guiding questions or hypotheses articulated earlier in the dissertation.

The chapter should discuss the implications of the study's findings. It may be helpful to group and identify implications in the following order: theory or generalization, public health practice, and future research. Theoretical implications involve interpretation of the dissertation findings in terms of the questions and hypotheses that guided the study. It is appropriate to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the research, including the degree to which conclusions are credible given the method and data. It also should provide a retrospective examination of the framework presented in the literature review in light of the dissertation's findings. Practice implications should present applications of new insights derived from the dissertation to solve significant public health problems. Two kinds of implications for future research are possible: one based on the study's actual findings and the other based on its limitations. Generally, future research could look at different settings, interventions with new protocols or dependent measures, or new theoretical issues that emerged from the study.

The conclusions should provide an enduring "take-home" message. They should be presented in the simplest possible form, being sure to preserve the conditional nature of the insights.

### Oral Defense of the Dissertation Proposal

The dissertation proposal defense is a formal meeting of the student and their Dissertation Committee. The meeting is open to other faculty, students, and the general public. However, family members of the Candidate are not permitted to attend. The Dissertation Chair will seek to schedule a date, time, and location for the oral defense of a dissertation proposal after Committee members have had at least 30 days to provide feedback on drafts of Chapters 1, 2, and 3 of the dissertation, and the Candidate has had time to revise the Chapters based on the feedback from all Committee members. The Dissertation Chair is also responsible for informing the Program Director, Department Chair, and Associate Dean for Academic and Student Affairs at least three weeks in advance of the proposal defense.

The Candidate and Dissertation Chair will work with the CPH Communications Manager to announce their proposal defense to CPH faculty and students at least three weeks before the proposal defense. The Candidate and Dissertation Chair are responsible for arranging webcasting (e.g., Zoom/Teams), if applicable. Proposal defenses must be scheduled during weeks that Fall, Spring, or Summer Semester classes are in session.

A final copy of the dissertation proposal should be given to the Committee members, and the Program Director seven days before the defense. No further changes may be made to the dissertation proposal until after the defense.

### Purpose of the Dissertation Proposal Defense

The dissertation proposal defense gives the Candidate the opportunity to present a plan for their dissertation research. The proposal defense should also generate discussion that leads the Candidate to further refine the study methods, and gather additional information that will strengthen the proposed work. Following the proposal presentation and discussion, the Committee members convene to make a final determination of the quality and appropriateness of the research being proposed as well as to make recommendations for improving the dissertation proposal.

At the proposal defense, the Committee members will arrive at one of the following decisions about the Candidate's dissertation proposal defense: Pass, Defer with Minor Revisions, Defer with Major Revisions, or Fail. The Committee shall rely on Defer with Minor Revisions or Defer with Major Revisions when it concludes that Chapters 1, 2, or 3 are not in final or near final Dissertation form.

The Dissertation Committee's consensus decision will be documented on the **Dissertation Proposal Defense form** at the end of the defense. If the decision at the defense is to Defer with Minor Revisions or Defer with Major Revisions, members sign the **Dissertation Proposal Defense form** with a Pass decision at a later date and only after the corrections, additions or changes have been made in writing, and the corrected final copy has been approved by the Committee and saved in the Candidate's file in the Office of Student and Academic Services, i.e., multiple defense forms may be needed to document a Pass decision. The **Dissertation Proposal Defense form** can be found at <https://www.unthsc.edu/college-of-public-health/office-of-admission-and-academic-services-forms/>. The Dissertation Chair will submit the completed form(s) to the Office of Student and Academic Services where it will be saved in the Candidate's student file.

A Committee decision of Pass constitutes acceptance of the final or near final content of dissertation Chapters 1, 2, and 3. However, Committee acceptance does not preclude requiring the Candidate to make modifications to the data analysis plan or the review of the literature at a later date. All Committee members must approve changes to the dissertation proposal version that previously received a Pass decision. The Dissertation Chair is responsible for managing and documenting any modifications to the proposal (Chapters 1, 2, and 3), including circulating proposed changes, organizing meetings of committee members to discuss the revisions of the dissertation proposal, and reaching consensus on proposed changes. A copy of a Committee-approved revised proposal (that already had a Pass decision) will be sent by the Dissertation Chair to the Office of Student and Academic Services where it will be saved in the Candidate's student file.

## Format of the Dissertation Proposal Defense

The dissertation defense meeting is conducted in the following format:

- Introduction by the Dissertation Chair, including stating the purpose of the meeting, explaining the meeting format, and introductions of the Candidate and Committee members.
- Oral presentation of the dissertation proposal by the Candidate not to exceed 30 minutes (usually a PowerPoint presentation).
- Questions by Committee members.
- Questions by attending non-committee faculty members and students.
- Additional questions by the Committee, if desired.
- The Candidate and non-committee attendees are excused.
- Committee members deliberate to make a consensus decision about the proposal and to identify specific recommendations for improvement of the proposal.
- The Candidate is brought back to the room to meet with the entire Committee.
- The Dissertation Chair leads a discussion about the Committee's decision and recommendations.
- The Candidate takes notes and may ask questions of any Committee member to clarify feedback.
- If revisions are sought by the Committee, the Dissertation Chair provides deadlines for revisions before ending the meeting.

## Conducting the Dissertation Research

The Dissertation Chair is responsible for supervising the Candidate in their dissertation research. However, all Committee members are expected to contribute to the study and to provide guidance to the Candidate. If the Candidate receives contradictory feedback from two or more members of the Committee, it is the student's responsibility to request a meeting of the entire Committee to resolve the differences.

## Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval

In collaboration with their Dissertation Chair, the Candidate is responsible for seeking a determination from the North Texas Regional IRB as to whether their proposed research will involve human subjects. If it is determined that human subjects are involved, the Dissertation Chair and Candidate are responsible for applying for formal review by the IRB. This task is accomplished by preparing a protocol giving a complete description of the proposed research, a detailed application and, when appropriate, a sample of the proposed informed consent forms. The procedures of the North Texas Regional IRB can be found at: [www.unthsc.edu/north-texas-regional-irb/](http://www.unthsc.edu/north-texas-regional-irb/). The Candidate student shall have completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) IRB course online and must comply with all IRB regulations related to their research.

## Oral Defense of the Dissertation

The dissertation oral defense is a formal meeting of the student and their Dissertation Committee. The meeting is open to other faculty, students, and the general public. However, family members of the Candidate are not permitted to attend. The proposal date, time, and location are scheduled by agreement of the Committee members. The Dissertation Chair will seek to schedule a date, time, and location for the oral defense of a dissertation only after Committee members have had 30 days to review the final draft of the dissertation. The Dissertation Chair will also inform the Program Director, the Department Chair, and the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs at least four weeks in advance of the dissertation defense.

The Candidate and Dissertation Chair will work with the CPH Communications Manager to announce their proposal defense to CPH faculty and students at least four weeks before the proposal defense. The Candidate and Dissertation Chair are responsible for arranging webcasting (e.g., Zoom/Teams), if applicable. Dissertation defenses must be scheduled during weeks that Fall, Spring, or Summer Semester classes are in session.

After a defense is scheduled and announced, no further changes may be made to the dissertation until after the oral defense. Scheduling of the oral defense of the dissertation is by mutual agreement of the Committee members. However, the scheduling is not an endorsement of the dissertation as a completed research project.

Successful completion of the dissertation oral examination is the culminating step of the PhD program. Following the oral presentation and discussion, the Committee members convene to make final determination of the quality of the research. At the defense meeting, the Committee members must arrive at one of the following decisions about the Candidate's dissertation defense: Pass, Pass with Minor Revisions, or Fail. Committee members will sign the **Dissertation Defense form** to document their unanimous decision. If the decision is "Revisions with Minor Revisions," the Dissertation Chair will notify the Office of Student and Academic Services via email when all revisions are made and approved by the Committee. If the defense is adjourned with a decision of "Fail", the Dissertation Chair will prepare a statement regarding the circumstances. The **Dissertation Defense form** can be found at <https://www.unthsc.edu/college-of-public-health/office-of-admission-and-academic-services-forms/>.

## Format of the Dissertation Defense

The defense meeting is conducted in the following format:

- Introduction by the Dissertation Chair, including stating the purpose of the meeting, explaining the meeting format, and introductions of the Candidate and Committee members.
- Oral presentation of the dissertation by the Candidate not to exceed 30 minutes (usually a PowerPoint presentation).
- Questions by Committee members.
- Questions by attending non-committee faculty members and students.
- Additional questions by the Committee, if desired.
- The Candidate and non-committee attendees are excused.
- Committee members deliberate to make a final, consensus decision about the dissertation and to identify any minor revisions if needed.
- The Committee members sign the ***Dissertation Defense form***.
- The Dissertation Chair brings the Candidate back to the room and announces the Committee's decision.
- The Dissertation Chair summarizes any revisions that may be needed to complete the dissertation.
- The Dissertation Chair submits the ***Dissertation Defense form*** to the CPH Office of Student and Academic Services.

## OTHER PhD STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES DURING THE FINAL SEMESTER

- File an intent to graduate form following the deadlines identified in the UNT Health academic calendar.
- Follow all requirements on the graduation checklist that can be found on the CPH "Current Students" webpage
- Complete the UNT Health graduating student survey, the CPH graduating student survey, and provide regalia and commencement information that will be requested by the Office of Student and Academic Services.
- Obtain approval from your Dissertation Chair of a final copy of your PhD dissertation within two weeks of the successful completion of your dissertation defense.
- Once approval is obtained, submit via email a final, electronic copy of the dissertation to the CPH Student and Office of Academic Services ([CPH@unthsc.edu](mailto:CPH@unthsc.edu)), your Dissertation Chair, and all Dissertation Committee members. The student will then submit a copy to the Gibson D. Lewis Library. The Office of Student and Academic Services will save a copy in your student file.
- Although degree conferral occurs at the end of each semester (Fall, Spring, and Summer), there is only one UNT Health commencement ceremony which occurs in May. Students who graduate in Summer or Fall Semesters are eligible to attend commencement in the following May.
- If you have questions about any of these steps or any forms that you need to file, please contact the Office of Student and Academic Services at: [CPH@unthsc.edu](mailto:CPH@unthsc.edu).
- Celebrate - you have completed the PhD in Public Health Sciences degree!

## MAJOR MILESTONES AND RESPONSIBLE PARTY(IES)

	Task	Responsible Party(ies)
	Assign primary and secondary faculty advisors	Program Director (PD) and Department Chair (DC)
	Approve advanced standing courses	Associate Dean of Academic and Student Affairs (ADAS) and DC
	Prepare degree plan	Associate Dean of ADAS
	Submit progress report (Each Fall and Spring)	Faculty Advisor and Student
	Conduct annual reviews of student progress	Program Director and Faculty Advisor
	Form comprehensive exam committee → Approve comprehensive exam committee	Faculty Advisor → Program Director
	Identify exam questions; schedule date	Faculty Advisor and exam committee
	Notify PD and DC of exam results	Faculty Advisor
	Notify student of exam results and advancement to candidacy	Program Director
	Form dissertation committee → Submit Dissertation Committee Form	Student and Faculty Advisor
	Approve changes to dissertation committee	Associate Dean of ADAS
	Schedule dissertation proposal	Student and Faculty Advisor
	Prepare Advertisement → Distribute	Student and Faculty Advisor/Dissertation Chair → CPH Communications Manager
	Arrange Webcasting for Proposal (e.g., Zoom, Teams), if applicable	Student and Faculty Advisor/Dissertation Chair
	Oversee proposal → Submit Dissertation Proposal Defense Form	Faculty Advisor/Dissertation Chair → Program Director
	Schedule dissertation defense	Faculty Advisor/Dissertation Chair
	Prepare Advertisement → Distribute	Student and Faculty Advisor/Dissertation Chair → CPH Communications Manager
	Arrange Webcasting for Defense (e.g., Zoom, Teams), if applicable	Student and Faculty Advisor/Dissertation Chair
	Oversee defense → Submit Dissertation Defense Form	Faculty Advisor/Dissertation Chair → Program Director
	Approve final copy of dissertation	Faculty Advisor/Dissertation Chair and Committee → Program Director → Associate Dean of ADAS, CPH Dean
	Submit electronic copy to OSAS, Dissertation Chair, Committee members	Student
	Submit filing form to ETD Administrator	Student

## PhD Program Expectations

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The PhD program in the College of Public Health at the University of North Texas Health Science Center is designed to prepare future leaders in public health research, teaching, and practice. This document outlines the core duties and expectations for PhD students enrolled in the program who are receiving an academic stipend. Expectations outlined here reflect both programmatic requirements and best practices for doctoral training in public health.

### 1. Time Commitment

- Students receiving a stipend are expected to contribute 20 hours per week toward research and academic duties under the supervision of their primary faculty advisor. Depending on their interests, some students may split their time between primary and secondary advisors.
- This includes individual research projects, data collection/analysis, manuscript preparation, grant writing, and Teaching Assistant (TA)/teaching duties.
- Students must have prior approval for extended periods of remote or off-campus work.

### 2. Academic Progress

- Maintain satisfactory progress in coursework.
- Fulfill all academic milestones on schedule.
- Update and submit the PhD Career Planning Tool each semester.

### 3. Research and Scholarly Output

- Actively engage in research leading to:
  - Presentations at local, regional, national, or international conferences.
  - Peer-reviewed publications (at least one first-author manuscript is expected prior to graduation).
  - Other products that promote public health scholarship (e.g., curricular products, community projects, policy briefs, practice-related products, educational websites).
- Participate in journal clubs and relevant research development seminars.

### 4. Teaching and Service

- Serve as a course TA or instructor at least once per academic year. TA/teaching responsibilities vary, with a typical weekly responsibility of 5-10 hours. When students are serving as a TA or teacher, their research hours should be adjusted accordingly so that the numbers sum to 20 hrs/wk.
- TA/teaching duties are set by the academic department and negotiated with the course instructor. TA assignments are typically conveyed shortly before/after the semester start date. Course instruction opportunities typically occur later in the student's academic career.
- Engage in departmental, college, or university-level service or leadership opportunities as available.

### 5. Professional Development

- Engage in career development activities such as:
  - Grant or proposal writing workshops



- Teaching development opportunities
- Ethics/RCR training
- Leadership forums or writing retreats

## **6. Mentorship and Evaluation**

- Attend regular meetings with mentor(s) (weekly or biweekly is typical).
- Meet at least twice per year with your primary faculty advisor to set and review goals.
- Submit a current CV and signed mentorship form to the program director by the second week of each semester.

## **7. Conduct and Compliance**

- Uphold academic integrity and professional ethics in all scholarly and research activities.
- Adhere to institutional policies regarding human subjects, data security, authorship, and conflicts of interest.