



THE UNIVERSITY *of* NORTH TEXAS
HEALTH SCIENCE CENTER *at* FORT WORTH

SPH Handbook for MS and PhD Students

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

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

Academic Year 2021-2022

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INTRODUCTION

This SPH 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 (UNTHSC) School of Public Health (SPH). The purpose of the Handbook is to provide answers to questions that current MS and PhD students may have about the course of study. General policies, procedures, and other information that applies to all students in the SPH and UNTHSC can be found in the UNTHSC catalog (<http://catalog.unthsc.edu/>) and are not included here.

AIM OF THE DEGREE SEQUENCE

The MS and PhD degree programs are research-intensive academic programs that jointly provide a pathway to a career in academia focused on research, teaching, and service, with the overall objective of improving the health of populations. Thus, the MS/PhD degree 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 the future stewards of academic public health.

The specific aim of the MS program is to prepare students for subsequent uninterrupted study in the PhD program. In the Fall Semester of their second year, MS students are expected to apply for admission to the SPH's PhD program, among other PhD programs. It is important to note that the MS in Public Health Sciences is not a terminal professional degree. Students who do not wish to move without interruption to the PhD degree program should instead pursue the MPH degree.

The specific aim of the PhD program is to prepare students for post-doctoral fellowships or assistant professor positions at research universities. To be competitive for these positions, successful PhD students will do more than complete coursework. Importantly, they will author or co-author multiple peer-reviewed publications, 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. Supported by the Department of Biostatistics and Epidemiology, this MS/PhD 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 primarily 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 biologic environment.

Health Behavior Research. Supported by the Department of Health Behavior and Health Systems, this MS/PhD concentration provides a rigorous scientific approach to the study of the psychological, social and cultural factors that impact human health and health behavior. An understanding of these factors at multiple social-ecological levels including: individual, interpersonal, organizational, community, and population, is expected. Students will be prepared to perform basic and applied research, to teach university courses in a health behavior curriculum, and to serve communities with the goals of promoting healthy lifestyles, reducing risk behaviors, and eliminating health disparities related to race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or gender. 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 reduce health disparities.

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 SPH’s MS degree 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/school-of-public-health/doctor-of-philosophy-in-public-health-sciences/>

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. As a condition of accepting an SPH’s offer of admission, outside employment of any kind is prohibited. The MS/PhD degree sequence is much more than completing coursework. It is intended to provide rigorous training in research and teaching with the goal of producing graduates who will become independent investigators. Students are expected to proactively engage and participate in both independent and collaborative research projects under the supervision of their Faculty Advisor. As such, students, in general, are expected to be accessible to their Faculty Advisor during normal working hours, Monday through Friday. Outside of class, both MS and PhD students are expected to be working on teaching assignments and/or research projects 20 or more hours a week under the guidance of faculty mentor(s). These projects should lead to scholarly products, such as peer-reviewed publications and conference presentations. Students will be asked to serve as a teaching assistant for courses, and advanced PhD students may be asked to independently teach courses in the MPH curriculum under supervision.

Additionally, all MS and PhD students are expected to regularly attend the SPH Journal Club. The Journal Club is a student-centered gathering that meets regularly 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 prepare and present scientific manuscripts of their own. For each Journal Club meeting, 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.

University policy indicates that all requirements for the MS degree must be completed in six years. However, in the SPH, successful MS students will graduate in less than two years (or 5 consecutive semesters) and then continue in the PhD program. Though University policy indicates that the PhD degree must be completed within seven years, PhD students who successfully complete all MS and PhD degree requirements in a timely

manner will be graduated three to four years after being admitted to the program. Thus, the entire MS/PhD degree sequence is expected to be completed in five years.

Students who anticipate exceeding the University time limits identified above should apply for an extension by submitting a letter to the Office of 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 UNTHSC policy 15.613 – SPH 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 Academic Services concerning credit given to coursework completed before or during active military service. All MS and PhD students are reviewed each December and July by their Faculty Advisor and the MS/PhD Program Director. The review is based on the student's performance in coursework, grade point average (GPA), feedback from faculty, and scholarly productivity. The student will receive an evaluation notifying them of the results of the review indicating either satisfactory or unsatisfactory progress in the program. An unsatisfactory review is equivalent to a course letter grade of F. Two unsatisfactory reviews can be cause for dismissal from the program.

THE ROLE OF THE FACULTY ADVISOR

Upon admission to the program, each student will be assigned a 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. Students may request a change of Faculty Academic Advisor during the first academic year of their studies. Such requests will be reviewed and evaluated by the MS/PhD Program Director. A Faculty Advisor must have a full-time academic appointment in the SPH and an SPH research designation level of 2 or 3 in the student's PhD concentration.

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 the course of 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/school-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 instructor of PHED 5340/5350, and the student's Faculty Advisor.

ADVANCED STANDING CREDIT IN THE PhD PROGRAM

Applicants accepted to the PhD program who did not complete the SPH's MS degree 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 possibly 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 SPH 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 were attained (or grade of "pass" in a pass/fail course) are eligible for advanced standing credit. The burden for demonstrating the worthiness of any course for advanced standing rests with the accepted PhD applicant. As such, it is the accepted PhD applicant's responsibility to provide official transcripts and course syllabi from the university where the prior course was completed.

Upon acceptance, program applicants will be given the opportunity to submit an advanced standing request. Advanced standing requests and subsequent degree plans will be finalized at least two months prior to new students' matriculation in August.

PhD LEVEL REQUIREMENTS

Doctoral Level Coursework

In the SPH, 6000-level courses are designated as doctoral-level coursework, whereas 5000-level coursework constitute the bulk of master's degree programs. A limit of nine credit hours, earned from completion of 5000-level coursework in the SPH, may be used to satisfy doctoral-level course requirements. 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 and are described below. 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 that semester in which it is administered to the student. A student has two attempts to successfully pass the Exam.

Examination Procedures for the PhD Concentration in Epidemiology

With Faculty Advisor permission, the student should notify (by email) the Chair of the Department of Biostatistics and Epidemiology one semester prior to their intention to sit for the Comprehensive Examination (and thus enrolling in EPID 6000). The Department Chair will be responsible for assigning faculty members to the Comprehensive Examination Committee. The Committee will consist of the Faculty Advisor and two additional faculty members from the Department of Biostatistics and Epidemiology. Faculty who have level 2 or 3 SPH research designations in epidemiology may serve on the Committee. The Comprehensive Exam Committee is responsible for developing and grading the Exam responses.

The date for the Exam is mutually agreed upon by the student and faculty examiners and coordinated through the Department Chair. Generally, the Exam will include at least one statistics question and two epidemiological methods-focused questions; thus three total questions. The Exam is administered as a "take-home exam." The student has one week (7 total days) to prepare their exam responses off-campus and to return their work to both the Comprehensive Examination Committee and the Department Chair. During the week of the Exam the student is prohibited from speaking with or consulting with anyone regarding their responses. All work should be original and abide by all School and HSC policies regarding plagiarism and academic integrity.

The members of the Comprehensive Examination Committee will independently evaluate the student's work and then convene to discuss its quality. Facilitated by the Department Chair, the Committee must make one of the following four consensus decisions:

- 1) Pass, nothing further needed; student is notified by the Chair of the Department (see section below on Advancement to Candidacy).
- 2) Oral examination is needed to explore weaknesses, after which:
 - a. student may Pass or
 - b. student may need to re-write sections or all of the Exam. A plan is developed as noted in #3 and #4 below.
- 3) Student made poor progress in addressing weaknesses in their responses and is assigned remedial work (can include but is not limited to formal courses, or work with advisor); student is given a PR grade in EPID 6000 for the semester and must re-sit for the Exam in the subsequent semester.

4) Student fails. A formal remediation plan is developed. Committee decides when it will be appropriate for the student to re-sit for the Exam.

Two failing grades on the Exam results in dismissal from the PhD program.

All Comprehensive Examination Committee decisions about the quality of the student's responses must be communicated to the student by the Department Chair within two weeks of the work being submitted.

Examination Procedures for the PhD Concentration in Health Behavior Research

Forming the Comprehensive Exam Committee. With Faculty Advisor permission, the student should notify (by email) the Chair of the Department of Health Behavior and Health Systems one semester prior of their intention to sit for the Comprehensive Examination (and thus enrolling in BACH 6000). The Department Chair will be responsible for assigning faculty members to the Comprehensive Examination Committee. The Committee will consist of the Faculty Advisor and at least two additional faculty members from the Department of Health Behavior and Health Systems. Faculty who have level 2 or 3 SPH research designations in health behavior research may serve on the Committee. The Comprehensive Exam Committee is responsible for developing and grading the Exam responses.

Format of the Comprehensive Exam. The Exam will typically be offered in week #10 of the Fall and Spring Semesters, and week #4 of the Summer Semester. The Exam is administered as a "take-home exam" comprised of four questions to be responded to within a 72 hour period. Three of the questions will assess competency in the following areas:

- Applied Health Theory
- Research Methods
- Statistical Research Methods

The fourth Exam question is tailored to the student's area of research interest and is intended to assess the student's depth of knowledge in their chosen area of expertise. The response to each Exam question must be no more than five pages (double spaced) and submitted as a discrete document. Therefore, at the conclusion of the 72 hours, the student will submit four separate documents.

It is expected that students submit intellectually honest work. During the 72-hour exam window, students are prohibited from speaking or consulting with anyone that could be considered to inform their submissions. All submissions should be properly referenced and demonstrate proper grammar, consistency of terminology and citations, and appearance.

Evaluating the Comprehensive Exam. The Examination 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 candidacy. If the faculty examination 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 Department Chair will notify students by email communication of the results of their Exam. If requested by the Examination Committee, the Department Chair is responsible for scheduling an oral examination. The Department Chair 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 re-take the Exam one time. The Comprehensive Examination 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 earliest opportunity to re-take the Examination will be the following semester. Hence, the student's progression in the PhD program will be delayed for at least one semester if any part of the Exam is failed.

The student must re-take the examination within 12 months of the failed attempt or they will 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 potential and high likelihood of becoming an independent scholar and is qualified to begin significant dissertation research under supervision of their Faculty Advisor. Advancement to candidacy is attained after successful completion of the Comprehensive Examination.

The student receives an official Letter of Candidacy from the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs upon notification from the Faculty Advisor of Comprehensive Examination results. Once advanced to candidacy, PhD 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 required for the fulfillment of the PhD degree. Dissertation research may commence after the student has been advanced to candidacy. The reputation and quality of the SPH and its PhD program is 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 quality of a dissertation must be sufficient to warrant multiple publications in peer-reviewed journals.

The Faculty Advisor will hold the SPH Level 3 faculty research mentoring designation, and thus will guide the PhD student throughout the dissertation process and will chair the dissertation committee. The Faculty Advisor is responsible for ensuring that the dissertation is correct in form, grammar, and content. The MS/PhD Program Director is responsible for ensuring that all procedures are met for defending the dissertation are followed by the student and the committee.

Forming the Dissertation Committee

The Dissertation Committee will consist of at least four faculty members. At least two must come from the Department supporting the student's concentration. One committee member shall be from outside the Department, but from within the HSC faculty. All committee members from the SPH faculty must have a research mentoring designation of Level 2 or Level 3. One committee member can hold an academic appointment at another accredited U.S. university, but this member will be counted as a Department committee member. The Associate Dean for Academic Affairs will approve the composition of all dissertation committees.

The ***Dissertation Committee form*** must be submitted prior to beginning any work on the dissertation proposal. The form can be found at: <https://www.unthsc.edu/school-of-public-health/office-of-admission-and-academic-services-forms/>. The Faculty Advisor is responsible for obtaining the signatures of individual committee members and submitting the signed form to the Office of Academic Services via email at sphacademics@unthsc.edu.

Once formed, the composition of a Dissertation Committee cannot be changed except under special circumstances with approval by the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs. Permissible reasons for Committee composition change include a faculty member leaving HSC employment, a faculty member becoming disabled,

or faculty member death. A faculty member cannot be removed from a Dissertation Committee for rendering negative judgment on the quality of the PhD 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 Three: 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 entire Dissertation Committee, will agree upon a research problem or problems to be examined, and then develop a research proposal to address them. 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. Terms likely to be used throughout the proposal should be defined in this chapter. This chapter will often end 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. Although the degree of completion of the literature review at the proposal stage is a matter of deliberation with the committee, in most cases it is important that the literature review in a proposal:

- 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 labeled subsections. Often a subsection describing participants or subjects, including a description of the population from which they are drawn, is followed by subsections describing data collection, testing or other measurement procedures to be undertaken with the participants, 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 conventional 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. If subjects interacted with special equipment or software, or other materials, a detailed description is essential.
- 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. To the degree that readers may be unfamiliar with the strategy, greater detail may be needed. 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): is perhaps the most crucial chapter because it presents the contribution to the research literature. It discusses the implications of the results, draws the appropriate conclusions, and lays out an agenda for future research on the issues addressed in the dissertation. It is conventional to begin with a brief 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 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 critical retrospective examination of the framework presented in the literature review in light of the dissertation's findings. Practice implications should delineate applications of new insights derived from the dissertation to solve real and 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. It is appropriate to suggest which of these possibilities are likely to be most fruitful.

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 PhD Candidate are not permitted to attend. The proposal date is scheduled by common agreement of the Dissertation Committee members. The Faculty Advisor will seek to schedule a date, time, and location for the oral defense of a dissertation proposal only after Committee members have had 30 days to provide feedback on drafts of Chapters 1, 2, and 3 of the dissertation, and the PhD Candidate has had time to revise the Chapters based on the feedback from all Committee members. The Faculty Advisor is also responsible for informing the MS/PhD Program Director, the Department Chair, and the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs at least three weeks in advance of the proposal defense.

The PhD Candidate is responsible for announcing their proposal defense to the SPH faculty and student body via email and University information channels at least three weeks in advance of the proposal defense. The MS/PhD Program Director can provide the student with specific information about the content to be provided in the proposal defense announcement and procedures for its dissemination. Proposal defenses must be scheduled during weeks that Fall, Spring, or Summer Semester classes are in session.

A final copy of the dissertation proposal is provided to the Dissertation Committee members, the MS/PhD Program Director, the Department Chair, and the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs seven days prior to the defense. No further changes may be made to the dissertation proposal until after the defense. The scheduling of the proposal defense is not an endorsement of the dissertation proposal as a completed research plan.

Purpose of the Dissertation Proposal Defense

The purpose of the dissertation proposal defense is to provide the PhD Candidate with the opportunity to present a plan for their dissertation research. The proposal defense should also generate discussion that leads the PhD 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 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 must arrive at one of the following decisions about the PhD 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. A decision of failure will result in an unsatisfactory 6-month performance review of the PhD candidate.

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 PhD Candidate's file in the Office of 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/school-of-public-health/office-of-admission-and-academic-services-forms/>. The Faculty Advisor will submit the completed form(s) to the Office of Academic Services where it will be saved in the PhD Candidate's student file.

A Committee decision of Pass of the dissertation proposal constitutes acceptance of final or near final content of dissertation Chapters 1, 2, and 3. However, Committee acceptance does not preclude requiring the PhD Candidate to make modifications to the data analysis plan or the review of literature at a later date. All Committee members must approve changes to the dissertation proposal version that previously received a Pass decision. The Faculty Advisor is responsible for managing and documenting any modifications to the dissertation 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 dissertation proposal (that already had a Pass decision) will be sent by the Faculty Advisor to the Office of Academic Services where it will be saved in the PhD Candidate's student file.

Format of the Dissertation Proposal Defense

The dissertation defense meeting is conducted in the following format:

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

Conducting the Committee-Approved Dissertation Research

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

Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval

In collaboration with their Faculty Advisor, the PhD 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 Faculty Advisor and PhD 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/. The PhD Candidate student shall have completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) IRB course online and must comply with all IRB regulations that may be 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 PhD Candidate are not permitted to attend. The proposal date, time, and location are scheduled by common agreement of the Dissertation Committee members. The Faculty Advisor 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 Faculty Advisor will also inform the MS/PhD Program Director, the Department Chair, and the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs at least four weeks in advance of the dissertation defense.

The PhD Candidate is responsible for initiating and coordinating the announcement of their dissertation defense to the SPH faculty and student body via email and University information channels at least four weeks in advance of the dissertation defense. The MS/PhD Program Director can provide the student with specific information about the content to be provided in the dissertation defense announcement and procedures for its dissemination. 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 Dissertation 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 the research. At the defense meeting, the Committee members must arrive at one of the following decisions about the PhD 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 Faculty Advisor will notify the Office of 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 Faculty Advisor will prepare a statement regarding the circumstances. A decision of failure will result in dismissal of the PhD Candidate from the PhD program. The **Dissertation Defense form** can be found at: <https://www.unthsc.edu/school-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 Faculty Advisor, including stating the purpose of the meeting, explaining the meeting format, and introductions of the PhD Candidate and Dissertation Committee members.
- Oral presentation of the dissertation by the PhD Candidate not to exceed 30 minutes (usually a PowerPoint presentation).
- First round of questions by Dissertation Committee members.
- Second round and subsequent rounds (if needed) of questions by Committee members.
- One round of questions by attending non-committee faculty members and students.
- A final round of questions by the Committee, if desired.
- The PhD 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 Faculty Advisor brings the PhD Candidate back to the room and announces the Committee's decision.
- The Faculty Advisor summarizes the minor revisions that may be needed to complete the dissertation.
- The Faculty Advisor submits the ***Dissertation Defense form*** to the SPH Office of Academic Services.

OTHER PhD STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES DURING THE FINAL SEMESTER

- You need to file an intent to graduate form following the deadlines identified in the HSC academic calendar.
- You need to follow all requirements on the graduation checklist that can be found on the SPH "Current Students" webpage
- You need to complete the HSC graduating student survey, the SPH graduating student survey, and provide regalia and commencement information that will be requested of you by Office of Academic Services.
- You need to obtain approval from your Faculty Advisor of a final copy of your PhD dissertation within two weeks of the successful completion of your dissertation defense.
- Once approval is obtained, you need to submit via email a final, electronic copy of the dissertation to the SPH Office of Academic Services (sphacademics@unthsc.edu), your Faculty Advisor, and all Dissertation Committee members. The Office of Academic Services will submit a copy to the Gibson D. Lewis Library and save a copy in your student file.
- Please note that though degree conferral occurs at the end of each semester (Fall, Spring, and Summer), there is only one HSC 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 Academic Services at: sphacademics@unthsc.edu.
- Celebrate - you have completed the PhD in Public Health Sciences degree!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Portions of the Handbook were adapted from the *Qualifying Examination & Dissertation: A Guide for Ph.D. Students* developed by the Department of Community and Family Health at the University of South Florida and from the *Components of the Research Proposal and Dissertation* developed by Gallaudet University.