



SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Public Health Sciences

Student Handbook

Academic Year 2014-2015

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INTRODUCTION

The Student Handbook (the Handbook) contains information in regards to the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Public Health Sciences at the University of North Texas Health Science Center (UNTHSC) School of Public Health (SPH). Current and prospective students should refer to the Handbook whenever they have questions or concerns about program requirements and/or doctoral policies/procedures. All current students will be held responsible for the contents outlined in the Handbook regardless of whether the students are notified of this information through other means.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Mission

The mission of the UNTHSC School of Public Health is to advance public health knowledge through research, service, and education of professionals who are dedicated to disease prevention, health promotion, and the achievement of efficiency, effectiveness, and equity in the delivery of health services while minimizing health disparities among populations.

Vision and Values

The vision of the UNTHSC School of Public Health is to build on a diverse foundation as it continually strives to address the public health needs of Texas' diverse population through innovative and distinguished research, high quality educational programs, and dedicated service to the local, state, federal, and international communities.

Mutual Tolerance and Respect

Public health deals with controversial issues from multiple perspectives, and consideration of these issues may cause disagreements among individuals or may evoke strong personal feelings, depending on the individual experience, histories, identities, and worldviews. Therefore, in all interactions and communications, it is important that all parties involved strive to have mutual respect and tolerance for one another. Any individuals (students or otherwise) who have concerns to that end are encouraged to discuss the matter with the faculty and their peers.

Concentrations

The PhD degree program emphasizes the scholarship of discovery and integration. PhD students focus on the creation of new knowledge through the testing of hypotheses with the overall objective of improving the health of populations. During the program, students develop skills in generating research questions to advance knowledge, research design, grant proposal development, collection and analysis of data, and communication of scientific findings. Courses focus on theory, research methods, statistics, and scientific writing. Employment opportunities include academic public health (research/teaching), state and national government agencies, and private research organizations. Advanced training with the specialized fields will be addressed within the five concentrations:

- **Biostatistics** focuses on the reasoning and methods for using data as evidence to address public health and biomedical questions. It is an approach and a set of tools for designing studies, analyzing data, quantifying evidence, and making decisions. The curriculum prepares students for three roles commonly expected of a biostatistician, researcher, collaborator/communicator, and educator.

- **Environmental Health Sciences** prepares students to research, teach, and apply knowledge on the interrelationships between the environment and human health and their regional, national, and global significance. Students will be equipped to apply their research skills and knowledge to recognize, evaluate, and prevent exposures that may adversely impact human health and environmental quality, whether in the natural or human-made environment.
- **Epidemiology** prepares students for careers as scientists employed in academia, research institutions, or in research units within industry or other agencies and organizations. This concentration is comprehensive with a strong emphasis on epidemiologic methodology, theory, and practice. The goal is to provide broad and rigorous training that will fully equip students with the skills they need to conduct cutting-edge epidemiologic research within the many areas of public health.
- **Behavioral and Community Health** focuses on advancing knowledge about etiology, interventions, and policies that promote healthy lifestyles and prevent risk behavior, injury, and disease in communities. The concentration provides a rigorous scientific approach to the multi-level study of the biological, behavioral, social, and community factors that impact human health. Students will be prepared to conduct research, to effectively teach university courses in a community health curriculum, and to serve and partner with communities, particularly those represented by priority populations.
- **Health Services and Policy** prepares students for careers in research, teaching, and service in the broad field of health care services and policy. This concentration aim is to strengthen students' knowledge and skills with respect to theories, research methodologies, and analytical skills. By developing these tools, students will be able to address a variety of issues including health care access, cost-effectiveness, and process quality and outcomes evaluation.

Curriculum

The PhD program requires a minimum of 90 semester credit hours (SCH) post-baccalaureate degree and full-time enrollment is required during the first year. The required SCH are designated as follows.

Public Health Sciences Core Courses	33 SCH	
Concentration Core and Elective Courses	45 SCH	
Professional and Academic Development		0 SCH
<u>Dissertation</u>	<u>12 SCH</u>	
Total	90 SCH	

Concentration-specific curriculum are provided at -

http://www.hsc.unt.edu/education/sph/PhD_Public%20Health%20Sciences.cfm

Overarching Competencies

To develop research skills, students interact and collaborate with researchers through a variety of courses and research experiences. Six overarching competencies are addressed throughout the educational experiences within the PhD program. Upon completion of the program, the graduate will be able to demonstrate the following abilities.

- **Research Theory:** Synthesize historical, contemporary, and emerging theories and paradigms of significance to public health.

- **Critical Analysis:** Critically evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of existing research evidence and identify significant gaps in knowledge.
- **Research Methodology:** Comprehend, design, and apply relevant and advanced research methods based on rigorous standards of evidence.
- **Scientific Communications:** Develop professional skills in scientific and grant writing, oral communication, and teaching.
- **Ethics:** Uphold the highest ethical standards in all professional endeavors, including the design and implementation of research and the participation of human subjects.
- **Discovery and Translational Research:** Conduct investigative research, including areas that facilitate the translation and application of discovery to practice.

PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS

Admissions Requirements

The UNTHSC-SPH is a member of SOPHAS (Schools of Public Health Application Service). Prospective students must apply to the program online at www.sophas.org. The application deadline to SOPHAS is January 15th each year. It is the applicant's responsibility to ensure that all application materials are received by the SPH by the designated admissions deadline. The SPH admits potential students once every academic year, and as such, all incoming students must enter the program in the Fall semester. Applicants to the program will fall under one of the following admissions categories:

1. Full Admission – Accepted without reservation to the program.
2. Denied – Not admitted to the program because application was not competitive.
3. Non-review – Not reviewed because the application was incomplete .

To be considered for admission, applicants must meet the following requirements:

- Hold a baccalaureate or more advanced degree from a recognized institution.
- Submission of an application through the SOPHAS at www.sophas.org. All application materials need to be submitted to SOPHAS; UNTHSC-SPH does not require a supplemental application.
- Submission of complete, official transcripts from all colleges and universities attended. Foreign transcripts must also include an official WES or ECE transcript evaluation report listing course-by-course U.S. grade point equivalencies.
- International applicants must demonstrate satisfactory proficiency in oral and written English. The minimum TOEFL score requirements are as follows: written exam = 550, computer-based exam = 213, internet based exam = 79.
- Submission of official scores from one of the following graduate admissions examinations:
 - Graduate Record Examination (GRE) *use institutional code 6565*,
 - Graduate Management Aptitude Test (GMAT),
 - Medical College Admissions Test (MCAT),
 - Law School Admissions Test (LSAT),
 - Pharmacy School Admissions Test (PCAT),
 - Dental School Admissions Test (DAT).

The examination requirement is waived for applicants possessing a professional doctoral degree with a license to practice in the U.S.

- Three (3) letters of recommendation sent via SOPHAS from professionals who are familiar with the applicant's academic and/or professional work.
- Current resume or curriculum vita.
- Statement of purpose (1-2 pages) addressing the applicant's career goals and how the PhD in the desired concentration will assist career aspirations.
- In general, a minimum graduate grade point average (GPA) of 3.2. Note that, although a minimum GPA has been established, admission to the program is highly competitive.
- If invited, applicants are expected to participate in an interview either in person or remotely through other means.

In addition to the content of the above requirements, other criteria may be used to determine the admissions category of all applicants. Such criteria include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Applicants who have completed a MA, MS, MPH, or a related earned master's degree(s) from a recognized institution are preferred.
- Applicants will be reviewed for best fit with concentrations and available faculty mentors.

Information submitted in the application materials must be complete and correct. Prospective students must notify the proper institution officials regarding any changes in the information provided on their application. Falsification or omission of any information on the application documents will void a student's admission, cancel their enrollment, and/or result in appropriate disciplinary action. Note that this holds true even after full admission into the program. All materials submitted during the application process become the property of the Health Science Center and cannot be returned.

Admissions Decisions and Deferments

Applicants will be furnished written notification regarding their admission status by the SPH Office of Admission and Academic Services. Statements by other Health Science Center personnel concerning the applicant's admissibility are not valid until confirmed in writing by the Office of Admission and Academic Services.

Students who are admitted to the program and plan to enroll are required to submit an Admissions Decision Form along with a non-refundable \$200 assurance fee that will be used toward tuition upon matriculation into the program. Applicants admitted to the program that do not intend to enroll in the semester for which they applied must contact the Office of Admission and Academic Services to request deferment. Deferments must be made in writing and cannot exceed one year from the original acceptance date. There is a deferment fee of \$300; the deferment fee is due at the time the request is made.

Appeal/Grievance Process

Specific policies and procedures have been established for students seeking to appeal an admissions decision. Appeals concerning admission to the School of Public Health should be addressed to the Dean of the School.

ADMITTED AND CURRENT STUDENTS

Academic Policies and Procedures

Students are expected to read, be familiar with, and abide by the general academic policies and procedures for the UNTHSC as well as the SPH. Such information can be found on the UNTHSC policy [website](#).

Student Code of Conduct and Discipline

The primary concern of the University of North Texas Health Science Center (UNTHSC) is the student. The Health Science Center attempts to provide for all students a campus environment that is conducive to academic endeavor and social and individual growth. To that end, rules, regulations and guidelines have been established to govern student behavior. The student's relationship with the Health Science Center has been formulated into a student code of conduct and discipline. Enrollment at the Health Science Center is considered implicit acceptance of these and other policies applicable to students, all of which are educational in nature and designed to help students understand expectations and accept responsibility for their own actions. This code and other policies are subject to change with reasonable notice. The student is responsible for obtaining and becoming familiar with all published rules and guidelines. This information is available on the Health Science Center intranet web site.

The complete UNTHSC Student Policy Handbook and Student Code of Conduct can be found on the web at <http://www.hsc.unt.edu/Sites/DivisionofStudentAffairs/>.

Nondiscrimination Policy

It is the policy of the UNTHSC not to discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability or veteran status, Veterans of the Vietnam Era status, in its educational programs, activities, admission, or employment policies and practices.

In addition to complying with federal state equal opportunity laws and regulations, the health science center declares harassment that is based on individual differences (including sexual orientation) to be inconsistent with its mission and goals. The nondiscrimination policy is supported by the health science center policy statement on cultural awareness and diversity. The health science center specifically incorporates protections for qualified persons with disabilities; a prohibition against sexual harassment; and a prohibition against age limitations.

University compliance and grievance procedures provide employees and students with the means for the resolution of complaints that allege a violation of this Policy. For additional information or assistance with the equal opportunity, affirmative action, and harassment policies and procedures of the UNT Health Science Center, please contact the Equal Employment Opportunity Office, 3500 Camp Bowie Blvd., Fort Worth, TX 76107 or call at 817-735-2357. In addition, if you have a concern about unethical, illegal or unsafe activity, you can call the UNTHSC Ethics Hotline at 1-877-606-9187 and anonymously report your concern to a third party organization not affiliated with the Health Science Center.

Americans with Disabilities Act

The UNTHSC does not discriminate on the basis of an individual's disability and complies with Section 504 and Public Law 101-336 (American with Disabilities Act) in its admissions, accessibility, treatment and employment of individuals in its programs and activities. The UNTHSC provides academic adjustments and auxiliary aids to individuals with disabilities, as defined under the law, who are otherwise qualified to meet the institution's academic and employment requirements. For assistance, contact the Equal Employment Opportunity Office at the health science center (Reference Policy 7.105 Americans with Disabilities Act Protocol in the Student Policy Handbook).

Full-Time Enrollment for Financial Aid

Students must enroll for nine (9) semester credit hours (SCH) every Fall and Spring semester to be considered full-time for financial aid. Enrollment in a total of six (6) SCH is considered full-time for the Summer semester. Students who have completed all but the Doctoral Dissertation requirement for the degree will be considered full-time if enrolled in three (3)

SCH in any given semester. Students are responsible for meeting enrollment requirements for federal or state financial aid purposes.

Leave of Absence

All doctoral students are expected to make continuous academic progress toward the completion of the degree. In circumstances where this may not be possible, students in good academic standing may request a leave of absence (LOA) from the SPH for a defined period of time (up to three consecutive semesters), during which no academic progress need to be made. To request a LOA, students should consult their Academic Advisor and the PhD Program Director, and then complete a Request for LOA form that can be obtained from the Office of the Registrar. The request does not necessary guarantee approval of a LOA.

Concurrent Enrollment at another Institution

Students must secure written permission from their academic advisor and the PhD Program Director before registering for any course(s) at another institution while registered for any course(s) at the UNTHSC. Failure to secure the required permission for concurrent enrollment prior to registration at the second institution may cause the UNTHSC to refuse degree credit for the work taken at said institution.

Time Limit for Degree Completion

All requirements for the PhD degree must be completed within seven (7) years, but in general, students are expected to graduate in 3-5 years after being admitted to the program. Excluding extenuating circumstances approved by the PhD Program Committee, time limits are strictly enforced, and students who do not complete all requirements within the allotted time are immediately dismissed from the program. Students who anticipate that they will exceed the time limit should apply for an extension in writing by submitting a letter to the Office of Admission and Academic Services before the seven-year time limit expires. All requests for extension will be reviewed and evaluated by the PhD Program Committee. Any student whose request is denied will be dismissed from the program unless all requirements for the degree are met prior to the original time limit. Any student whose request is granted may be mandated to fulfill additional requirements deemed appropriate by the Committee. Such requirements may include, but are not limited to, repeating out-of-date credits/courses or showing evidence of being up-to-date in the major field of study. Holding a full-time job is not considered in itself sufficient grounds for granting an extension. 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 Admission and Academic Services concerning credit given to coursework completed before or during active military service.

Program Engagement

Regular and punctual class attendance is expected. Although, in general, students are graded on intellectual effort and performance, absences may lower the students' grade where the faculty member deems class participation essential. In such classes where participation is considered as part of the grade, the instructor should give written notice of the requirement at the beginning of the semester. An instructor may request the Registrar to drop a student from a course for lack of participation or one unexcused absences. If the instructor-initiated drop action falls within the time that the student is eligible to drop with instructor consent, a grade of W will be assigned. If the drop falls after this period, a grade of W or WF will be assigned as appropriate.

Doctoral study is much more than just completing a set of courses. Students are expected to be engaged in the active development of their competencies and therefore will seek learning opportunities outside of their courses which are a component of the student's continuing professional and academic development. This is accomplished through mentored

experiences with faculty, attending conference, seminars, and journal club presentations, participation in the development of grants and papers for peer review, and professional and community service. The development of the academic portfolio documenting these activities is described in more detail below.

Professionalism

At the UNTHSC-SPH, all academic activities, in class or otherwise, prepare students for future careers in public health. As such, students are expected to approach all academic activities in a professional manner. These include, but are not limited to, the following:

- **Dress code** – Students are expected to dress comfortably but in such a way that does not detract from learning activities. In particular, during classes with guest lecturers or when an instructor gives specific instructions related to attire, it is expected that students dress appropriately to represent the school in a professional manner.
- **Activities outside of the UNTHSC** – When students are afforded the opportunity of attending and/or presenting at local, national, or international meetings of professional organizations, students are expected to conduct themselves professionally and dress appropriately, being mindful that they are representing the UNTHSC.
- **Communication** – During class room discussions, conversations, e-mail correspondences, etc. with faculty, staff, peers, or other professionals, students are expected to uphold the highest standard of courtesy and respect.

Quality of Work

The Quality of Work statement can be found at the UNTHSC policy [website](#).

Grading Policies

Grade Point Average

The overall grade point average (GPA) is used to determine academic standing and eligibility for graduation. All GPA calculations are subject to post-audit and correction by the Office of the Registrar. The number of semester hours attempted for calculation of the GPA includes all courses with grades of A, B, C, F, and WF unless replaced by a later grade. Courses with grades of I, S, U, W, or Z are not counted as courses attempted for the purpose of calculating a GPA.

Grading System

Below are designations of grades that will appear on the official UNTHSC transcript.

Used in calculation of GPA (Letter grades)		Not used in calculation of GPA	
A	4 grade points for each semester credit hour (SCH)	P/NP	Pass/No Pass
B	3 grade points for each SCH	S/U	Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory
C	2 grade points for each SCH	W	Withdrawal
F	0 grade points for each SCH	I	Incomplete
WF	Withdraw Failing, 0 grade points for each SCH	PR	In Progress
		Z	Grade incorrectly recorded or not recorded

Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory (S/U) Grading

The SPH may elect to assign satisfactory/unsatisfactory grades in courses in which the student is engaged in individual research and is not attending an organized class. The student should inquire at the time of registration for such courses whether a letter grade or a satisfactory/unsatisfactory grade will be granted. Satisfactory/unsatisfactory grades are not taken into account in computing the student's grade point average.

Incomplete (I) Grades

The Incomplete Grade policy can be found at the UNTHSC policy [website](#).

Removal of Incomplete (I) Grade

A student must remove a grade of "I" by the last day of the subsequent semester in which the incomplete grade was obtained; no extensions will be granted. If, at the end of the following semester, the incomplete grade has not been removed, a grade of F will be recorded.

An "I" is removed by completing the stipulated work and obtaining the appropriate signatures (on a Removal of Incomplete Grade/Change of Grade form available from the Academic Services Office). The instructor then files the form with the Academic Services Office so that the grade and the GPA can be adjusted accordingly. If a student does not complete the stipulated work within the time specified, a grade of F will be recorded and the student's GPA will be adjusted accordingly.

Grade Changes

No grade except for a grade of "I" may be removed from a student's record once properly recorded. Changes are not permitted after grades have been filed except to correct clerical errors. Requests for an error correction must be initiated immediately after the close of the semester for which the grade was recorded. A faculty member who believes that an error has been made in calculating or recording a grade may submit, in person, a request for a grade change to the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs. The Office of the Registrar accepts requests for grade changes only from the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs.

Grade Appeal: Course Assignment & Course Grade

The grade appeal policy can be found at the UNTHSC policy [website](#).

Repeating of Courses

If a grade of F is received in a required course, the course must be repeated. Students are not obligated to repeat a course if a grade of F is obtained in an elective. Students may repeat any course twice (maximum enrollment of 3 times). The best grade obtained will be used in the calculation of the GPA. If a grade of W is recorded on the student's transcript, this is considered one of the three allowable attempts at successfully completing the course.

Withdrawal Limit

The withdrawal policy can be found at the UNTHSC policy [website](#).

PhD Degree Requirements and Logistics

Academic Advisor

Upon admission to the program, students will be assigned to an Academic Advisor according to the "best fit" in the area of research interest as approved by the SPH PhD Program Committee. Although highly discouraged, students may request a change of Academic Advisor during the first academic year of their studies. Such requests will be reviewed and evaluated by the PhD Program Committee. The submittal of the request does not necessarily guarantee approval. An Academic Advisor must have a full-time faculty appointment in the UNTHSC-SPH, and must be from the department where the student was admitted.

Program Profile

A program profile is a listing all courses that must be completed by the PhD student to successfully complete the program. The PhD student is required to meet with his/her academic advisor a minimum of once a semester to discuss program progress. Should changes to the curriculum be approved, the student should submit written documentation to the Office of Academic Services.

For students requesting advanced standing (see section below), approval of coursework will be determined by a content expert, approved by the academic advisor, and final approval will be provided by the PhD committee. Upon approval, the “Advanced Standing” form will be forwarded to the Academic Services Office, who will enter the information into the student file.

Advanced Standing Credit

Students may apply semester credit hours (SCH) earned in relevant graduate coursework from other U.S. accredited graduate institutions toward the 90 SCH required for the PhD program.

- **Advanced standing credit** refers to SCH from past graduate coursework regardless of whether it was used for another degree or not. The UNTHSC-SPH allows up to 42 SCH of such credit.

Listed below are some general guidelines and/or procedures for approval of transfer credit.

- Advanced standing is subject to approval by the Academic Advisor and the PhD Program Committee.
- Only courses where a grade of B or higher were attained are eligible for advanced standing.
- For any course taken more than seven (7) years prior to entry into the program, justification must be provided explaining why the course is still relevant.
- The burden of proof of accuracy and relevancy for any course considered for advanced standing is on the student. As such, it is the student’s responsibility to provide the Academic Services Office with official transcripts and course syllabi from the institution in which they wish to receive credit.

Non-Transfer Course Substitution

Students who have completed courses that meet the degree requirements of the PhD program may request to substitute a course on their curriculum plan with another course. In these instances, students are required to complete the equivalent number of semester credit hours that are being substituted because they are not eligible for transfer credit. PhD students must identify course substitutions in conjunction with their Academic Advisor and the PhD committee and must document the substitution on the “Request for Modification to Degree Plan” form.

Academic Residency Requirement

PhD students must complete a minimum of 18 semester credit hours during their first academic year (Fall, Spring, and Summer) to meet the School’s academic residency requirement. Failure to do so without just cause may result in an unsatisfactory progress report put into the students’ academic file and/or dismissal from the program.

Major Professor

Within the first year of study, PhD students will be encouraged to meet with all faculty members within their concentration and with other faculty within the UNTHSC within SPH or otherwise who have related research interests. By the time students accumulate 63 SCH (including traditional transfer and advance standing credit), the students must finalize the selection of their Major Professor who will guide them through their remaining doctoral studies and independent research. Essentially, the Major Professor assumes the role of the Academic Advisor of record. If the Major Professor is different than the originally assigned Academic Advisor, the Major Professor becomes the Academic Advisor of record for the PhD student. A Major Professor must have a full-time faculty appointment in the UNTHSC-SPH. Any Major Professor must be further approved by the student’s Department Chair and the Department Chair of the Major Professor, if different. Although highly discouraged, students may request a change of Major Professor even after the accumulation of 63 SCH or more. Such requests will be reviewed and evaluated by the PhD Program Committee. The submittal of the request does not necessarily guarantee approval.

Advancement to Candidacy

Advancement to candidacy indicates that the faculty believes the student has potential to become an independent scholar and is qualified to begin significant dissertation research under faculty supervision. Those students who successfully complete the following requirements are advanced to candidacy.

- Completion of all core and concentration required courses for the PhD in the degree plan;
- Maintain an overall GPA of 3.0 throughout all coursework;
- Successful completion of the PhD Comprehensive Examination (see details below);
- Completion of appropriate Institutional Review Board (IRB) training designated by the UNTHSC Office for the Protection of Human Subjects (OPHS) and HIPPA;
- Selection of a Dissertation Committee;

* If a change occurs prior to the dissertation proposal defense, the "Memorandum of Understanding" must be amended.

PhD Comprehensive Examination

The PhD Comprehensive Examination (the Exam) tests mastery of the overarching competencies as well as the concentration specific competencies. It is designed to assess the student's potential to conduct independent research. In general, the Exam is administered once per academic year in the Summer semester by each Department. Although the content, format, length, and other details of the Exam vary by department, the rigor of the Exam is similar. As such, students should communicate with the Comprehensive Exam Coordinator of the department regarding specifics of the Exam. The minimum requirements for sitting for the Exam are as follows:

- Completion of or concurrent enrollment in all core and concentration required courses in the degree plan;
- Enrollment in the department specific PhD Comprehensive Examination course (BACH, BIOS, EOHS, EPID, or HMAP 6000) in the semester in which the Exam is taken;
- Written permission from the student's Academic Advisor, i.e. a permission number to enroll in the above course.

Students have two (2) attempts to successfully pass the examination. Students who do not pass after two attempts may be dismissed from the program.

Any student who believes a grade on the examination has been inequitably awarded should contact the Comprehensive Examination Coordinator within five (5) working days after the grade was assigned to discuss and resolve the issue. If unable to resolve the issue, the student should submit a written appeal to the Department Chair within five (5) working days. If unable to resolve after discussion with the Department Chair, the student can submit a written appeal in the form of a letter to the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs within five (5) working days of their meeting with the instructor. Every stage of the appeal process will be carried out in an efficient manner to render a decision within thirty (30) days of the original appeal request.

Dissertation

Overview

The PhD dissertation is the culminating experience and the final product required for the fulfillment of the degree. The dissertation research may commence once the student has advanced to candidacy or earlier in situations where approval is granted by the PhD Program Committee.

The reputation and quality of the UNTHSC-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 at large. As such, dissertations must be prepared with exceptional care, not only with respect to proper references and conclusions, but also with respect to grammar, spelling, consistency of terminology and citations, and appearance. In addition, all research protocols must be approved by the UNTHSC institutional review board (IRB). The Major Professor will guide the doctoral student throughout the dissertation

process and will chair the dissertation committee. This faculty member will ensure that all requirements and procedures for the dissertation are met and that the dissertation is correct in form, grammar, and content.

Dissertation Formats

Students are permitted to choose either a traditional or non-traditional dissertation format (three-paper model). In either case, it must comprise a genuine contribution to knowledge in a public health field.

- **Traditional format:** This format normally includes at least five chapters. The first chapter provides a statement of the problem, its background and significance, the hypotheses to be tested and/or aims to be achieved, and an overview of the remaining chapters. Chapter two provides an analytic literature review that thoroughly reviews and critiques what is already established, identifies knowledge gaps, and explains which of the identified gaps in the literature will be filled-in by the proposed research as well as how this will be accomplished. The third chapter presents a detailed presentation and justification of the design of the proposed study and the research methods as well as the analytic procedures that will be used to conduct that investigation. Chapter four presents the results of the research study in considerable detail. Chapter five discusses the implications of those results, draws the appropriate conclusions, and lays out an agenda for future research on the issues addressed in the dissertation. For the traditional dissertation, although publication is not required, the quality of a dissertation must be sufficient to warrant multiple publications in professional journals, books, or monographs.
- **Three-paper format:** This format normally includes at least five chapters as well. However, the body of the dissertation consists of at least three thematically related original article-length manuscripts. The first chapter provides a statement of the problem, its background and significance, the hypotheses to be tested and/or aims to be achieved, the rationale and justification for how the three manuscripts are thematically related, and an overview of the remaining chapters. Chapters two, three, and four are the article-length manuscripts themselves. Chapter five discusses the implications of the cumulative results of all three manuscripts, draws the appropriate conclusions, and lays out an agenda for future research on the issues addressed in the dissertation. In most situations a copyright release may need to be obtained. The student must be the first (or sole) author on at least two of the manuscripts, but may be the second author on the other. Two of the manuscripts must have been fully accepted for publication in a peer-reviewed journal(s). All journals must be deemed appropriate by the dissertation committee. The third manuscript must be considered publishable by the dissertation committee and be submitted for peer review prior to scheduling of the dissertation defense.

Memorandum of Understanding

For the three-paper model and some traditional dissertations, it will be necessary for the student to begin the dissertation work prior to the advancement to candidacy. In such cases, the student must have finalized his/her selection of a Major Professor and the rest of the dissertation committee, as well as work out with the dissertation committee a “Memorandum of Understanding” (no more than five pages). The Memorandum anticipates the more fully developed formal presentation of the dissertation plans, at the dissertation proposal defense, and must be approved by the dissertation committee. No dissertation research shall occur prior to the approval of the committee, completion of the Memorandum, and all necessary IRB approvals.

- **Traditional format:** For a traditional dissertation, the problem, methodologies, and relevant literature should be noted and characterized.
- **Three-paper format:** For the three-paper model, the Memorandum should delineate the nature, structure, content, and anticipated authorship of all three papers. No research articles can be submitted for peer review and publication until the Memorandum is approved. Only one manuscript is allowed to be submitted prior to successful completion of the Comprehensive Exam and the dissertation proposal defense; no additional manuscripts may be submitted for peer review prior to successful defense of the proposal.

It is important to note that the approval of the Memorandum does not guarantee that the student advances to candidacy, successfully defends the proposal, successfully defends the dissertation, or successfully completes the dissertation process. Its approval merely acknowledges the fact that the work proposed has the potential to be worthy of a PhD dissertation, and that the said work may commence prior to the advancement of candidacy.

Dissertation Process

The following steps outline the general dissertation process with approximate timelines. The latter steps should commence once the student has advanced to candidacy. However, some of the earlier steps should commence or be completed prior to the advancement to candidacy.

1. **Identify dissertation topic (prior to candidacy):** Students are encouraged to discuss potential dissertation projects with their Academic Advisor and other faculty while in the early stages of their doctoral coursework. For students who begin the dissertation process prior to advancement of candidacy, the topic should be finalized prior to the completion of 63 semester credit hours toward the degree (including traditional transfer and advanced standing credit), and the Memorandum of Understanding must be submitted.
2. **Select Major Professor (prior to candidacy):** By the time 63 total semester credit hours (including traditional transfer and advanced standing credit) are complete, the student must have already selected a Major Professor who conducts research in the chosen area and agrees to supervise the student during the completion of the dissertation. The student will work closely with the Major Professor to develop a dissertation proposal, identify dissertation committee members, and create a timeline for the following: advancing to candidacy, writing the research proposal, obtaining IRB approval, defending the proposal, conducting the research, defending the dissertation, and completing all other requirements for the doctoral degree.
3. **Form PhD dissertation committee (prior to candidacy with approval of Memorandum of Understanding otherwise, after candidacy):** The Major Professor and the doctoral student will identify potential committee members. The dissertation committee will consist of a minimum of three faculty members: the Major Professor, one full time faculty member from within the student's concentration if requirement not met by the Major Professor, and remaining additional members who may be from Departments with the SPH, other Schools within the UNTHSC or the UNT System, and in some cases, from another accredited university. When appropriate, the student may have as many as five members on the dissertation committee and all must approve all dissertation matters. The Major Professor shall serve as the chair of the dissertation committee and should be a faculty member with experience in the dissertation process. The chair leads the proposal approval, the final dissertation defense, and ensures that the dissertation process moves forward smoothly. The dissertation committee shall be approved by the PhD Program Director and the SPH Associate Dean for Academic Affairs.
4. **Write dissertation proposal (after candidacy):** The dissertation proposal should follow the National Institute of Health guidelines for research proposals and should contain the following sections: Specific Aims, Significance, Innovation, Approach, Environment and Bibliography. The written proposal should not exceed 25 pages.
5. **Defend dissertation proposal (after candidacy):** The dissertation proposal approval process consists of a public defense. The public defense should be attended by the entire dissertation committee and an additional faculty identified by the PhD Program Committee to ensure the consistency and rigor of the process. All dissertation committee members shall have read the proposal and provided feedback to the doctoral candidate prior to the presentation of the proposal. The student must present an oral review of the proposal and answer questions by the dissertation committee members, the faculty representative, and other attendees. After which the public audience will be asked to leave the room. Based on review of the proposal and the oral presentation, the committee members will provide one of the following ratings. A pass or defer rating must be based on a unanimous decision:
 - a. Pass with no revision;
 - b. Defer with minor revisions – the requested revisions must be completed and the revised proposal must be submitted to the Major Professor for approval and subsequent passing of the proposal defense;
 - c. Defer with major revisions – the requested revisions must be completed and the revised proposal must be submitted to the entire dissertation committee for approval and subsequent passing of the proposal defense;
 - d. Fail – the dissertation proposal is not acceptable even with major revisions, and the candidate may be requested to select a different research topic to undergo the entire dissertation process again. Failure of the proposal defense may be considered as unsatisfactory progress toward the completion of the degree.
6. **Obtain IRB approval (prior to candidacy with approval of Memorandum of Understanding otherwise, after candidacy):** The student or the candidate must obtain approval from the UNTHSC IRB and other participating sites (if

applicable) prior to starting the data collection for the dissertation. The student or the candidate shall have completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) IRB course online and complied with all IRB regulations that may be related to their research.

7. **Complete dissertation proposal approval process (after candidacy):** After obtaining IRB approval, the Major Professor, all dissertation committee members, the Public Health Education Program Director, and the PhD Committee School Representative shall sign the PhD Dissertation Proposal Form (http://www.hsc.unt.edu/education/sph/documents/General_Forms/PhD_Dissertation_Proposal_Form.doc) indicating their approval for the student's research to proceed and submit the form to the Academic Services Office after final approval by the SPH Associate Dean for Academic Affairs.
8. **Write and revise the dissertation (after candidacy):** The dissertation must be acceptable to the Major Professor and the dissertation committee. The PhD candidate shall have had the primary role in the design and execution of the dissertation research and must be the sole author of the dissertation document submitted to the University.
9. **Schedule and complete the dissertation defense (after candidacy):** Once the Major Professor and the other members of the dissertation committee agree that the candidate is ready to defend the dissertation, the candidate distributes the draft to all dissertation committee members. No less than four weeks and no more than eight weeks should be allowed for the dissertation committee members to review the draft submitted for the defense. The candidate shall submit the Dissertation Defense Application Form (http://www.hsc.unt.edu/education/sph/documents/General_Forms/PhD_Defense_Application_Form.doc) to the Academic Services Office no later than two weeks prior to the requested defense date and time. The form requires signature approvals by the Major Professor and the SPH Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, and specifies the date, time, and location for the dissertation defense. The Academic Services Office will create a public announcement for the defense. As such, the candidate will be responsible for submitting the following information to the Academic Services Office at least two weeks prior to the defense: the title, date, time, location, candidate's name, the name of the Major Professor and committee members, and an electronic copy of the abstract.

The candidate should take the PhD Oral Defense form

(http://www.hsc.unt.edu/education/sph/documents/General_Forms/PhD_Oral_Defense_Form.doc) to the dissertation defense so that appropriate persons can sign the form after successful completion of the defense. The public defense must be attended by a minimum of three members of the dissertation committee and an additional faculty identified by the PhD Program Committee. The session will include a formal public presentation of the research and major findings, usually about 30 - 45 minutes in length, followed by questions to the candidate by the dissertation committee members and other attendees. Subsequently, a closed session will commence with only the candidate and the dissertation committee. Following that, the candidate will be asked to leave the room temporarily so that the dissertation committee can review the candidate's defense and will grade the performance with one of the following ratings based upon a majority decision.

- a. **Pass** – the candidate is deemed to have passed the defense;
- b. **Pass with minor revisions** – the candidate must complete the revisions and submit the revised paper to the Major Professor for final approval, no later than two months from the date of the defense;
- c. **Fail** – the dissertation is not acceptable even with major revisions, and the candidate is not recommended for the degree and possibly dismissed from the program.

Finally, the student will be brought back into the room for discussion with the committee and communication of results. The committee members will describe any additional changes that need to be made moving forward. After successfully defending the dissertation, the final dissertation must be submitted to the Academic Services Office for proper publication and cataloging no later than six months from the date of the successful defense. This process ensures that the research is accessible for other scholars and the general public.

10. **Award of the degree:** After the successful defense and submittal of the dissertation, the degree is awarded on the next conferral date provided that all other requirements of the degree are satisfied.

Professional and Academic Development (PAD)

Each doctoral student will be required to demonstrate proficiency of the PhD competencies through the successful completion of the *Doctoral Professional and Academic Development (PAD)* portfolio. The student will continuously expand and enhance the content of the portfolio throughout the doctoral study. The student's Academic Advisor and/or Major Professor as well as the PhD Program Committee will review the PAD portfolio annually prior to the Fall Semester to measure the performance and progression in the program. The review will result in the PAD portfolio being deemed either "satisfactory" or "unsatisfactory". A satisfactory review will require the completion of all academic milestones (details below) for any given academic year. An unsatisfactory review will result in specific expectations and milestones for the following year determined by the PhD Program Committee. Milestones for students that receive advance standing and/or part-time students will be determined on a completed semester credit hours (SCH) basis. Students with two unsatisfactory reviews may be dismissed from the PhD Program. At the time of any given review, a satisfactory review will also require a minimum overall GPA of 3.0 at the time of review;

Academic Milestones

In general, for successful completion of the Portfolio, a minimum of 27 total points must be earned during the entirety of the student's doctoral studies. For students who start the program with at least 36 SCH of transfer credit (traditional plus advanced standing), minimum point total is adjusted to 22 total points. The makeup of the minimum total points is subdivided into minimum points from various milestone areas. Each student must complete the specified tasks and/or accumulate the specified number of points (or more) to successfully achieve the academic milestone by the time the student completes a certain number of semester credit hours (SCH).

After the first academic year in the program, all students must satisfy the following.

All students regardless of accumulated SCH from traditional transfer and advanced standing credit	
Tasks that must be completed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completion and submittal of advisor approved curriculum plan by end of first semester • Completion and submittal of all forms and attachments for course transfer and/or advanced standing • Completion of 18 SCH at the UNTHSC • Completion of IRB/HIPPA requirements

By the time 36 SCH are accumulated (equivalent to 2 academic years) the following must be satisfied.

	<u>Less than</u> 36 SCH of traditional transfer and advanced standing credit	<u>At least</u> 36 SCH of traditional transfer and advanced standing credit
Minimum PAD milestone points that must be earned	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Journal club = 1 point • Research = 1 point • Service = 1 points • Professional development = 2 points 	N/A

By the time 54 SCH are accumulated (equivalent to 3 academic years) the following must be satisfied.

	<u>Less than</u> 36 SCH of traditional transfer and advanced standing credit	<u>At least</u> 36 SCH of traditional transfer and advanced standing credit
Minimum PAD milestone points that must be earned (points are cumulative from the previous year)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Journal club = 2 points • Research = 2 points • Teaching = 2 points • Service = 2 points • Professional Development = 3 point 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Journal club = 1 point • Research = 1 point • Teaching = 2 points • Service = 1 points • Professional Development = 1 point
Tasks that must be completed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completion of all Public Health Science core courses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completion of all Public Health Science core courses

By the time 72 SCH are accumulated (equivalent to 4 academic years) the following must be satisfied:

	<u>Less than</u> 36 SCH of traditional transfer and advanced standing credit	<u>At least</u> 36 SCH of traditional transfer and advanced standing credit
Minimum PAD milestone points that must be earned (points are cumulative from the previous years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Journal club = 3 points • Research = 4 points • Teaching = 4 points • Service = 4 points • Professional Development = 3 point 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Journal club = 2 point • Research = 3 point • Teaching = 4 points • Service = 3 points • Professional Development = 1 point

By the time 90 SCH are accumulated (equivalent to 5 academic years) the following must be satisfied:

	<u>Less than</u> 36 SCH of traditional transfer and advanced standing credit	<u>At least</u> 36 SCH of traditional transfer and advanced standing credit
Minimum PAD milestone points that must be earned (points are cumulative from the previous years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Journal club = 4 points • Research = 7 points • Teaching = 7 points • Service = 4 points • Professional Development = 5 point 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Journal club = 3 point • Research = 6 point • Teaching = 7 points • Service = 3 points • Professional Development = 3 point
Tasks that must be completed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful presentation and dissertation proposal defense • Successful dissertation defense 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful presentation and dissertation proposal defense • Successful dissertation defense

Points for PAD can be earned in various ways. The table below shows the minimum total number of points required for each milestone area as well as the most common ways points are earned. It may be possible to earn points from other means. However, all such means must be approved by the PhD Program Committee.

Milestone Area (minimum points)	Common Scoring Mechanisms
Research (7 or 6 points)	
Manuscripts	Submission to a peer-reviewed journal = 0.1. Acceptance by a peer-reviewed journal = 0.3~1.0 base on authorship: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1.0 for first author; • 0.5 for second or third author; • 0.3 for fourth and other author. Manuscripts may include those that address dissertation requirements.
External funding proposal preparation	Submission to any funding organization = 0.1. Grant funded = 0.3~2.0 based on role: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2.0 for principal investigator; • 0.5 for co-investigator; • 0.3 for any other roles.
Presentations (must be the presenter)	Presenting at a conference/professional meeting = 0.3~1.0 based on type: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1.0 for national and international; • 0.5 for regional; • 0.3 for local and institutional.
Teaching (7 points)	
Class instruction	One hour of satisfactory assessment* by students and/or faculty = 1.0. Note: Teaching as part of PHED 6321 does not count toward these points.
Service (4 or 3 points)	
Academic/professional organizations/committees	Leadership role within the UNTHSC = 0.5. Membership on a committee or organization outside the UNTHSC = 0.5. Leadership role outside of the UNTHSC = 1.0.
Professional Development (5 or 3 points)	
Seminars, conferences, workshops, and grand rounds	Each hour attended = 0.05.
Journal Club (4 or 3 points)	
	Attending a session = 0.1. Leading a session = 0.5.
Minimum Total Number of Points	27.0 or 22.0

** It is the students' responsibility to ensure that a teaching evaluation/assessment process is in place for each teaching activity.*

Journal Club

The Journal Club is a student-driven gathering that meets regularly throughout the year with the main purpose of critically evaluating articles in 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 in preparing and presenting 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.

Annual Portfolio Review Process

All doctoral students and candidates are responsible for updating their respective Portfolios each academic year through Canvas in preparation for the annual review by the PhD Program Committee. In general, the annual review occurs once every academic year prior to the Fall semester. As such, all Portfolios must be updated by July 31st each year. Students and candidates will be notified of the result of the review prior to the Fall semester. However, any candidate who wishes to graduate in any given semester must update and complete the Portfolio at least two weeks prior to the deadline to submit all graduation requirements for that semester as designated on the SPH Academic Calendar. Soon thereafter, the PhD Program Committee will convene in a special session to review the Portfolios of all graduating candidates.

The general process of updating the Professional and Academic portfolio requires the students and candidates to do as follows:

- Upload the most recent copy of the (unofficial) UNTHSC transcript;
- Complete all forms used for documenting milestone points;
- Obtain appropriate signatures on all forms;
- Upload scanned copies of all forms to Canvas.
- Upload additional documents required to show proof of milestone points attained, e.g., copy of the abstract for a manuscript submitted, reaching evaluations, copy of the proposal defense form, etc.

FOR GRADUATING CANDIDATES

Application to Graduate

It is the responsibility of the student to keep track of his/her progress toward the degree and to file the Intent to Graduate form (http://www.hsc.unt.edu/education/SPH/documents/GraduationForms/Intent_to_Graduate_Form.docx) with the Office of Admission and Academic Services. Consult the Academic Calendar for the appropriate dates. Reference the Instructions for Submitting Graduation Materials for instructions on specific forms that are needed for graduation. Information concerning graduation fees are available in the Tuition and Fee Register, on the School of Public Health website under *Forms and Guidelines*, or may be obtained from the Office of Admission and Academic Services.

Commencement Exercises

The UNTHSC commencement exercises and the SPH hooding ceremony are held once every academic year in May. Diplomas may be obtained from the Office of the Registrar at the conclusion of any semester in which all graduation requirements have been met and verified.

Participation in Commencement Exercises

The guidelines to participate in commencement exercises can be found at the UNTHSC policy [website](#).

Awarding of the Diploma

No diploma will be awarded until the UNTHSC-SPH has verified that the student has completed all academic requirements and the Office of Student Financials has verified that the student has met all financial obligations to the UNTHSC. Diplomas will be mailed by the Office of the Registrar to those students who have been granted this option and who have subsequently satisfied all requirements.