

**Epidemiology Program**  
**MPH & PhD Student Handbook**  
**2017–2018**



**Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center –  
New Orleans**

**School of Public Health**



Note: The Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center School of Public Health reserves the right to change, without notice, any programs, policies, requirements, or regulations in this Handbook.

This handbook, last updated in August 2017, presents useful information for current students in the Epidemiology program, prospective students, and faculty actively engaged with students.

**[EPIDEMIOLOGY PROGRAM](#)**

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## Introduction

Welcome to the Department of Epidemiology! We are delighted to welcome the newest cohort of students. Our degree programs are designed to prepare students for careers in a wide variety of public health research and service settings. Our students are provided the skills to design, conduct, interpret and apply research into the causes, prevention, and control of human disease towards the goal of improving the public's health.

Epidemiology has been defined as the study of the frequency, distribution, and determinants of disease in human populations and is the fundamental science of public health. Epidemiology covers a range of activities including surveillance, investigation and control of disease outbreaks, study of environmental hazards, evaluation of new preventive or curative clinical treatment, determination of the health needs of populations, and evaluation of effectiveness of prevention strategies and health services. Epidemiologic methodology is constantly evolving and includes not only statistical methodology and principles of study design but unique ways of thinking about causation. The development of new concepts of scientific investigation in human populations contributes to epidemiology being increasingly recognized as a key methodology for etiologic studies in groups of people. Epidemiology is considered the basic science of public health.

### Mission

The mission of the Epidemiology Program is to improve health through education, training, research and service in Epidemiology.

### Goals

As a leader in the field, the Program aims to:

- Provide high quality *education and training* in the principles and practice of modern epidemiology.
- Advance Public Health's theoretical and empirical foundation through rigorous multidisciplinary and innovative epidemiological *research*.
- Provide leadership and *service* in epidemiology through international, national, state, and local community collaborations.

NOTE: The academic catalog and this student handbook are for information purposes only and do not constitute any contractual agreement between a student and the Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center. The University reserves the right to make changes in curricula, degree requirements, course offerings, or academic regulations at any time when, in the judgment of the faculty, the Chancellor, or the Board of Supervisors, such changes are in the best interest of the students and the University.

## Master of Public Health (MPH) in Epidemiology

The Master of Public Health (MPH) is a professional degree in the field of Public Health. The core disciplines of the MPH are Behavioral and Community Health Sciences (BCHS), Biostatistics (BIOS), Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences (ENHS), Epidemiology (EPID), and Health Policy and Systems Management (HPSM).

The MPH in Epidemiology is for students who desire to learn the fundamental concepts and methods of epidemiology while gaining a breadth of achievement in the five core disciplines of public health.

The goal of the Epidemiology Program MPH is to prepare students for careers in a wide variety of public health research and service settings. Our students are provided the skills to design, conduct, interpret and apply epidemiologic research methods into the causes, prevention, and control of human disease towards the ultimate goal of improving the public's health

To obtain a basic understanding of epidemiologic principles and practice in the broader context of public health, full – time students will ordinarily complete the course sequence in two years. A minimum of 46 credit hours is required in the Epidemiology Program.

The MPH degree requires the completion of a formal practice experience involving the application of public health science and theory. In addition, a culminating experience is required that synthesizes and integrates knowledge acquired in coursework and other learning experiences.

Please refer to the LSUHSC School of Public Health [Catalogue](#) or [Student Handbook](#) for more information regarding the MPH program.

### MPH Admissions Requirements and Process

The Epidemiology Program takes several factors into consideration when evaluating an application for admission, including GRE scores, grades, letters of recommendation, and motivation for graduate study. A student with deficiencies in one area may be admitted if other parts of his or her application are very strong.

- A **bachelor's or professional degree** in the biomedical or social sciences from an accredited university or school. Prior coursework in biological or health sciences (for example, biology, biochemistry, anatomy, physiology, microbiology) and mathematics (algebra and above) are required and calculus and statistics are highly recommended, although not required. Applicants who are deemed to not have sufficient prior coursework or experience in these areas may be required to take additional coursework.
- A minimum of a **3.0 cumulative GPA** in undergraduate coursework and any subsequent academic coursework. If the GPA is below a 3.0, applicant should include an explanation of why it fell below a 3.0 and how the applicant plans to

address any prior academic deficiencies as a graduate student.

- **Official GRE** scores taken within the past five years are required. While we do not have a minimum score requirement, scores greater than the 50th percentile on each of the quantitative and verbal sections are recommended. Exceptions to the GRE requirement may be made for master's degree applicants with a prior PhD, MD, DO, DDS, DMD, DVM, or equivalent health-related degree from a U.S. university. MD/MPH applicants to the LSUHSC SOM and SPH may submit MCAT results only.
- **Official Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) scores.** International students whose native language is not English must provide official results of the Test of English as a Second Language (TOEFL) or the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). A minimum TOEFL score of 550 on the written test or 80 on the Internet test is required for all foreign students. The minimum acceptable score on the IELTS is Band 6.5. This test may be waived if a prior master's or graduate degree has been awarded from a U.S. institution.
- An **essay that addresses career goals and purpose for study**, approximately 500 words single spaced in length. The essay should describe past experience as it relates to the applicant's interest in Epidemiology, career goals, purpose for applying to the program, and how the program will serve future goals.
- **Three Letters of Recommendation.** It is strongly recommended that at least two letters come from a faculty member who can attest to the applicant's academic ability.
- **Resume or CV.**

To apply for admission to the LSU School of Public Health MPH program, applicants are required to complete the [online Schools of Public Health Application Service \(SOPHAS\) application](#).

### MPH Curriculum

The MPH Epidemiology program is intended for persons who anticipate careers in public health research or service. In addition, students who wish to enter doctoral-level epidemiology training should consider concentrating in epidemiology at the master's level. As part of the degree requirements for the LSU School of Public Health MPH program, students must complete core coursework in the areas of biostatistics, epidemiology, behavioral and community health, health policy and systems management, environmental health, and biological sciences. A minimum of 46 credit hours is required for the MPH degree in Epidemiology.

### School-wide Required MPH Core Courses (26 credits)

All students enrolled in the MPH program, regardless of discipline, must take the following courses:

- BIOS 6100 Biostatistical Methods I [4 credits]
- EPID 6210 Principles of Epidemiology [3 credits]
- ENHS 6238 Principles of Environmental Health [3 credits]
- BCHS 6212 Behavioral Science Theories in Public Health Practice [3 credits]

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- HPSM 6268 Health Services Administration and Management [3 credits]
- PUBH 6150 Foundations and Ethics of Public Health Ethics [1 credit]
- PUBH 6216 Biologic Basis of Health [3 credits] \*\*
- PUBH 6600 Culminating Experience [3 credits]
- PUBH 6800 Practice Experience [3 credits]

\*\* Required for students without a prior or concurrent clinical degree in nursing, medicine or dentistry

### **Epidemiology Program Required Courses (20 credits)**

In addition to the school-wide course listed above, students enrolled in the MPH in Epidemiology must also complete the following required epidemiology courses:

- EPID 6211 Intermediate Epidemiology [3 credits]
- EPID 6226 Epidemiologic Design and Analysis [3 credits]
- EPID 6213 Epidemiology Seminar [1 credit]\*
- BIOS 6102 Biostatistical Methods II [4 credits]
- EPID Electives [9 Credits]

\*While attendance at the Epidemiology Seminar is expected for MPH students over the two-year program, students should only register for credit in the last semester of their MPH program

### **Practice Experience (PUBH 6800)**

The practice experience takes the form of an organized internship at an agency or organization that is engaged in work related to public health, normally outside the School of Public Health (SPH). The practice experience is a three credit-hour course. The student is expected to spend approximately 12 hours per week (200 hours total) at the practicum site. This internship may include but is not limited to: community education, health promotion, program planning, program organization, data analysis, or management and/or grant writing. It is an excellent opportunity for students to gain practical applied experience and to broaden their skills in public health. Students register for the Practice Experience as they would for a regular class. It is normally taken during the summer between the first and second year of study, although it may be taken as soon as 11 credit hours including the BIOS 6100, EPID 6210 PUBH 6150, and another program's core are successfully completed. Students are strongly recommended to take more courses before engaging in their practice experience. More information on the Practice Experience can be found on the [Practice Experience website](#).

### **Culminating Experience (PUBH 6600)**

The culminating experience requires students to synthesize and integrate knowledge of the core principles of public health acquired in coursework and the practice experience and to apply these principles to a particular public health problem or situation similar to that found in a professional work setting. It must be used as a means by which faculty judge whether the student has mastered the body of knowledge and can demonstrate proficiency in the required competencies. The prerequisite for the Culminating Experience is successful completion of the school-wide and Epidemiology required

core courses for all five of the MPH disciplines. Students register for this class (PUBH 6600) as they would for a regular class. It is generally taken in their final semester.

### **Course Sequencing**

Suggested MPH Epidemiology course sequencing and course advising forms are located on the SPH [Epidemiology website](#).

Epidemiology students in their first fall semester of the MPH Program are expected to register for EPID 6210, BIOS 6100, PUBH 6150 and at least one, although 2 is strongly recommended, of the 3 remaining programmatic core courses (BCHS, HPSM, or ENHS), the remaining core course can be taken in the fall of their second year, or summer.

The three required Epidemiology core courses (EPID 6210, EPID 6211, and EPID 6226) are taken in sequential semesters, with EPID 6210 taken in the first semester. The two required Biostatistics courses (BIOS 6100 and BIOS 6102) are taken in the first and second semesters, respectively. Also, PUBH 6216 (Biologic Basis of Health) is to be taken in the spring semester of the first year.

Prior to participating in the [Practice Experience](#) students must have completed 11 credit hours of the required School–Wide core courses, including BIOS 6100, EPID 6210, PUBH 6150, and another program core (BCHS, ENHS, or HPSM).

Students also must have successfully completed the remaining three core courses (ENHS 6238, BCHS 6212, and HPSM 6268) before registering for the Culminating Experience.

Students are strongly encouraged to speak with their advisors, office of academic affairs, and the course directors of these experiences for additional requirements and expectations.

Students must have at least nine credit hours of Epidemiology Elective courses prior to graduation. Any remaining or additional credit hours can be met with either epidemiology or other SPH program courses.

While nine (9) credits hours per semester are required to be considered full time by the university, it is strongly encouraged and expected that epidemiology students maintain a course load of a minimum of 12 credits each semester in order to make satisfactory progress toward their degree completion.

### **Approved Epidemiology Electives\***

- EPID 6214 Infectious Disease Epidemiology [3 credits]
- EPID 6217 Database Management [3 credits]
- EPID 6218 Spatial Analysis [3 credits]
- EPID 6219 Nutritional Epidemiology [3 credits]
- EPID 6220 Molecular Epidemiology [3 credits]

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- EPID 6222 Cancer Epidemiology [3 credits]
- EPID 6223 Chronic Disease Epidemiology [3 credits]
- EPID 6228 Survey Design [3 credits]
- EPID 6301 Epidemiology of Sexually Transmitted Infections and Diseases [3 credits]
- EPID 6351 Public Health Surveillance System Theory and Methods [2 credits]
- EPID 6350 Epidemiology for Public Health Practice [3 credits]
- EPID 6352 Social Epidemiology [3 credits]
- EPID 6362 Environmental Epidemiology [2 credits]
- EPID 6400 Independent Study [1–3 credits]
- EPID 6450 Cardiovascular Epidemiology [3 Credits]

\* Epidemiology electives require the successful completion of EPID 6210.

### **Epidemiology Seminar (EPID 6213)**

This seminar series provides exposure to current research and special topics of interest in epidemiology. Full-time students are expected to attend and participate in the biweekly seminar series every semester of the program. MPH students are required to achieve at least 80% attendance over all four semesters. Only in the *last semester* of the MPH program should students register (pass/fail) for this course.

### **MD/MPH in Epidemiology**

The LSUHSC–NO School of Medicine (SOM) and the LSUHSC–NO School of Public Health offer a joint degree leading to the Doctor of Medicine (MD) and Master of Public Health (MPH) degrees. This program is designed for students who imagine a medical career that combines public health and medicine. The MD/MPH program prepares physicians for academic careers or for practice in today's health care environment with a population based perspective. More information about the LSUHSC–NO MD/ MPH can be found [here](#).

### **MD/MPH in Epidemiology Program Timeline**

Full time students will complete both degrees in four years.

- Summer before Medical School– Start MPH Coursework (EPID 6210, BIOS 6100 and another core)
- First Fall Semester of Medical School– No MPH Coursework
- First Spring Semester of Medical School –Continue MPH Coursework (EPID 6211, BOS 6102)
- Second Summer Session–MPH Practice Experience and Coursework (other cores)
- Second Fall Semester of Medical School–Continue MPH Coursework (EPID 6226, and electives)
- Second Spring Semester of Medical School –Continue MPH Coursework (EPID electives)
- Year 4 of Medical School–MPH Culminating Experience

### **MD/MPH in Epidemiology Admission Requirements**

1. Acceptance by LSU School of Medicine, New Orleans  
([www.medschool.lsuhschool.edu/admissions](http://www.medschool.lsuhschool.edu/admissions))
2. Submission of the focused LSU MD/MPH application to the LSU School of Public Health ([sph.lsuhschool.edu/admissions](http://sph.lsuhschool.edu/admissions))
3. Acceptance by the LSU School of Public Health Epidemiology Program

For more information and a discussion of MD/MPH programs in general, see the [MD/MPH Guide](#) at AMSA (American Medical Student Association).

### **MPH Competencies**

The Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center School of Public Health has embraced a competency-based curriculum. Competencies are statements of the characteristics that graduating students should demonstrate which indicate they are prepared to perform and function independently in professional practice. Competencies include more than just facts. They represent the integration and application of learned facts, skills and professional qualities needed to serve the community and profession. The competencies developed for the program are not taught as a whole, i.e. in a single course, but rather their components are presented throughout the curriculum. Several courses assist in attainment of each competency. The early phase of the curriculum consists primarily of mastering foundation knowledge and basic skills, but by program completion the parts culminate in the higher-level application of these concepts in real-practice situations.

### **MPH School Wide Core Competencies**

Upon completion of the five core MPH courses, the biologic basis of health and ethics courses, students should be able to:

- Examine social, developmental and behavioral theories of health, health behavior and illness, and their applicability to different types of health problems. (BCHS)
- Design social and behavioral change interventions based on these theories that are appropriate and responsive to the social and cultural context. (BCHS)
- Apply exploratory data analysis and descriptive statistics to summarize public health data. (BIOS)
- Apply common statistical methods for estimation and inference appropriately according to underlying assumptions and study design principles. (BIOS)
- Examine public health problems in terms of magnitude, person, time and place, and calculate basic epidemiologic measures. (EPID)
- Propose valid and efficient epidemiologic studies to address public health problems, including understanding the strengths and limitations of descriptive, observational and experimental studies. (EPID)
- Appraise the human health effects, both acute and chronic, of major environmental and occupational hazards such as air pollution, metals, organic pollutants, microbial contamination of drinking water, and physical hazards. (ENHS)
- Assess the mechanisms and the degree to which environmental and occupational exposures impact public health and welfare. (ENHS)

- Examine the main components and policy issues regarding the organization, financing and delivery of health services and public health systems in the United States. (HPSM)
- Illustrate the principles of program planning, development, budgeting, management and evaluation in organizational and community initiatives. (HPSM)
- Apply biological principles toward the development and implementation of disease prevention, control, or management programs (BBH).
- Analyze issues of public health practice and policy based upon basic principles of ethics (e.g. the Public Health Code of Ethics, human rights framework, other moral theories). (Ethics)

### **Epidemiology Program MPH Competencies**

- Estimate advanced epidemiologic measures for descriptive and etiologic studies.
- Examine basic ethical and legal principles pertaining to the collection, maintenance, use and dissemination of epidemiologic data.
- Inspect the processes involved in the design, analysis and evaluation of an epidemiologic study.
- Appraise the direction and magnitude of bias on measures of association and draw appropriate inferences from epidemiologic data.
- Apply biological principles to development and implementation of disease prevention, control, or management programs.
- Identify the principles and limitations of public health screening programs.
- Employ statistical computer packages to calculate and display descriptive statistics.
- Analyze categorical data for case control and cohort studies and perform multiple logistic regression analysis and describe the essential elements of survival analysis.
- Examine data for confounding and effect modification, and handle appropriately.
- Evaluate the strengths and limitations of epidemiologic reports and be able to communicate epidemiologic information to lay and professional audiences.

### **Academic Guidelines**

A comprehensive list of [student resources](#) is maintained by the SPH Office of Academic Affairs. In addition, the LSUHSC and SPH student handbooks can be viewed [here](#).

### **Voluntary withdrawal from the program**

Students who wish to withdraw or transfer from the Epidemiology Program should do so in consultation with their academic advisor and the Program Director. Students must submit a [change of concentration form](#) to the Office of Student Affairs. The change will take effect at the beginning of the following semester.

### **Academic Standards**

MPH students are required to maintain a 3.00 cumulative GPA. A student with less than a 3.00 GPA will be placed on probation. If after completing at least 9 additional credit hours (one semester), the student's GPA remains below 3.00, the student will be terminated from the program. Any class in which a student receives a grade less than C

must be retaken. Failure to achieve a grade of C or higher on the repeat of the course will result in dismissal from the program.

### **Advising**

Each Epidemiology MPH student will be assigned a faculty advisor who provides the student with course selection, academic guidance, practice experience placement, and general assistance. Students should meet with their faculty advisor at least once per semester to receive approval for all registered courses. Students and faculty should refer to the Epidemiology MPH advising and progress worksheet on the [Epidemiology Program website](#). It is available to guide students and their advisors through the MPH curricular requirements and expectations.

### **Transfer of Credit**

Students may request to transfer up to 10 hours of credit from another accredited graduate institution towards earning a Master's degree with approval of the Program Director. Graduate credits cannot have been counted toward another degree. Requests must be accompanied by adequate documentation (official transcript showing successful completion of the course, course syllabus, etc.). Transfer credits can only be submitted following the successful completion of one semester of coursework at the SPH. Courses approved for transfer must have been completed within five years of application with a grade of B or better and taken for graduate credit. Written request using the [Transfer of Credit form](#) clearly listing the courses to be transferred must be forwarded to the Program Director for approval.

## Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Epidemiology

### Introduction

The School of Graduate Studies establishes and administers doctoral student policies and procedures campus-wide for the Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center–New Orleans. Policies and requirements listed in this handbook are either clarifications of those described in the [Graduate School Catalog](#) or additional requirements or policies of the PhD Program in Epidemiology and/or the School of Public Health. The PhD in Epidemiology is administered through the Epidemiology Program based at the School of Public Health. The PhD is a research degree, granted on evidence of overall proficiency in epidemiology, and particularly on ability to apply the skills in an independent investigation as demonstrated in a dissertation presenting original research with a high degree of literary skill. The degree is awarded jointly by the School of Public Health and the School of Graduate Studies.

### PhD in Epidemiology Degree Overview:

The PhD in Epidemiology at the LSU School of Public Health trains students for careers as leaders in research and teaching in academic settings, research institutes, government agencies and industry. It has been designed for students whose careers will focus on conducting investigator-initiated and collaborative epidemiologic research. Coursework in mathematics (e.g., calculus) and statistics as well as a strong background in the biologic and/or social sciences are highly recommended. On average, the doctoral program requires approximately four to five years for completion.

The first two years of this time are usually devoted to coursework, the qualifying exams, and development of doctoral research. The program is research oriented and centers on a major research project. This degree signifies outstanding scholarly achievement: a mastery of epidemiologic concepts, theories, and methodology and a significant capacity for independent research. Subsequent years are spent conducting the doctoral research and in writing and defending the doctoral dissertation.

### Admissions Requirements and Process

The Admissions Committee holistically evaluates each applicant. No one application criterion determines an applicant's admission or denial. The committee also takes note of an applicant's knowledge and motivation toward a career in epidemiology and the public health profession through close evaluation of the applicant's essay and letters of recommendations.

- Applicants to the PhD program must have completed, or be in the process of completing, a **master's degree in epidemiology** or a closely related field.
- **Recommended background.** Successful applicants should demonstrate commitment to public health, a clear understanding of what epidemiology entails, and research interests and career goals appropriate to a career linked to epidemiology.
- **Official transcripts** must be submitted from all undergraduate and graduate schools attended. World Education Service evaluation of all foreign transcripts is

required for international applications.

- A minimum of a **3.0 cumulative GPA** in undergraduate and graduate coursework.
- **Official GRE scores.** Test results should not be older than 5 years. This requirement may be waived for individuals possessing an earned doctoral or advanced degree, such as DDS, DVM, DO, MD or PhD from a university in the U.S. While we do not have a minimum score requirement, the average scores of the accepted applicants for the Fall 2016 semester were: 50th percentile quantitative and 55th percentile verbal.
- **English as a Foreign Language.** International students whose native language is not English must provide official results of the Test of English as a Second Language (TOEFL) or the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). A minimum TOEFL score of 550 on the written test or 80 on the Internet test is required for all foreign students. The minimum acceptable score on the IELTS is Band 6.5. This test may be waived when the prior master's or graduate degree is awarded from a U.S institution.
- **Written statement** that addresses educational and career goals, professional experience and area of research interest. Approximately 1,000 to 1,200 words, single spaced in length.
- **Resume or CV.**
- **Three Letters of Recommendation.** It is strongly recommended that all letters come from faculty or professionals who can evaluate the applicant's promise as a graduate student.
- **Interview.** Either an in-person or telephone interview is required of all finalists.

To apply for admission to the LSU School of Public Health PhD in Epidemiology, applicants are required to complete the [online Schools of Public Health Application Service \(SOPHAS\) application.](#)

### Degree Requirements

Completion of the PhD in Epidemiology will require:

1. A minimum of 61 credit hours of course work beyond an Epidemiology master's degree as prescribed by the program's curriculum
2. A minimum cumulative grade point average of 3.0
3. Passing the doctoral Written Comprehensive Examination
4. Passing the candidacy Oral Prospectus Examination
5. 9 of the 61 credit hours are required for a minor in an additional discipline
6. A minimum of 15 of the 61 credit hours are required for Dissertation Research [EPID 7900] and no more than 15 credits will count toward the 61 credit hours (though students may take more).
7. Doctoral Journal Club: students are required to attend every semester they are in residence, but only up to 3 credit hours may be applied toward the minimum 61 credit hours.
8. Completion of the Teaching Practicum [EPID 7410]
9. A dissertation comprising a minimum of three first-authored publishable manuscripts.

10. Successful passing of the dissertation defense.

All students must complete the Epidemiology required PhD Core Courses, Epidemiology electives, and Biostatistics electives. Additional credits come from elective coursework offered at the School or elsewhere in the University, doctoral journal club, teaching practicum and dissertation research credits.

Attendance at epidemiology seminars and dissertation defense seminars is mandatory for all epidemiology graduate students. Each PhD student is required to present work in progress at the epidemiology seminar series at least once after passing the Written Comprehensive Examination.

The student is responsible for filing all forms required by the Program and the School at the proper time. Students will meet with their committee on a regular basis (usually every six to twelve months) to monitor the progress of the dissertation work.

**Core Competencies for the PhD in Epidemiology**

The core competencies were based on guidelines developed by a joint working group of the American College of Epidemiology and the Association of Schools of Public Health in 2002. They have been modified to represent the characteristics of the Program and School faculty as well as the Health Sciences Center and regional resources.

Graduates of the Epidemiology PhD program are expected to have attained the competencies described below and be independent investigators capable of developing epidemiological methods and applying them to problems of human health and disease.

**Graduates must attain the following specific competencies:**

Domain	Competency
Descriptive Epidemiology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Produce the descriptive epidemiology of a given condition, including case definition, calculation of the primary measures of disease morbidity and mortality, and appropriate comparisons by person, place and time.</li> <li>• Explain the strengths and limitations of descriptive studies.</li> </ul>
Biology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apply course work or equivalent in human physiology and pathophysiology, with special competence in the disease addressed in the student’s dissertation.</li> </ul>
Problem Conceptualization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review and critically evaluate the literature</li> <li>• Synthesize available information.</li> <li>• Identify meaningful gaps in knowledge.</li> <li>• Formulate an original and key hypothesis or statement of the research problem.</li> </ul>
Study Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design a study using any of the main study designs</li> <li>• Outline the advantages and limitations of each design for addressing specific problems, as well as</li> </ul>

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	<p>the practical aspects of their uses, including trade-offs. This understanding will be reflected in selecting the most appropriate and efficient design for a designated problem.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Calculate the requisite sample size or power.</li> <li>• Identify and minimize sources of bias; describe both the direction and magnitude of the bias and the effect of potential biases on the measures of association.</li> <li>• Apply basic population sampling methods.</li> </ul>
Data Collecting and Monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use methods of measurement – design data collection forms assessing both exposures and outcomes; determine the validity of the instrument; identify the presence and magnitude of measurement error; adjust for measurement error when appropriate data are available.</li> <li>• Demonstrate and monitor the conduct and progress of data collection; develop, implement and assess quality control measures.</li> </ul>
Data Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prepare data files appropriate for analysis; carry out the steps needed to create new variables, clean the data sets, etc.</li> </ul>
Data Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use statistical computer packages to calculate and display descriptive statistics, analyze categorical data, and perform multivariable regression, survival analysis, and longitudinal analysis.</li> <li>• Examine data for the presence of confounding and interaction (effect modification), identify their presence, and manage them appropriately</li> </ul>
Interpretation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interpret the research results, make appropriate inferences based on results, and recognize the implications of the research results; (also see study design above).</li> </ul>
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Summarize research results orally and in writing to both scientists and non-scientists (includes preparation of a manuscript suitable for publication in a scientific journal and presentation of research proposals).</li> </ul>
Ethics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Illustrate the concepts of human subjects' protections and confidentiality, and awareness of particular issues relevant to the study of specific populations.</li> <li>• Apply this understanding as evidenced in the design and conduct of their research.</li> </ul>

Substantive Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrate mastery of a substantive area, including knowledge and application of that knowledge in conducting original research related to a specific topic</li> </ul>
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**Advisors**

Upon admission, the Epidemiology Program appoints a faculty advisor working in an area related to the student’s field of interest. The advisor provides the student with academic guidance, information, and general assistance. The advisor and the advisee must meet at least twice during the academic year (before the start of the fall and spring semesters) to discuss the student's proposed course of study and any procedural or personal issues relevant to the student's academic experience. Although advisors initially assigned often serve through the qualifying examinations and sometimes through to the dissertation defense, students may request a change once they become familiar with the faculty and their interests become more focused. The advisor may or may not serve as the research mentor. If a student elects a different epidemiology faculty member as their primary research mentor, that person may become the student’s advisor and dissertation committee chair as well. Primary research mentors who are not in the Epidemiology Program traditionally serve on the Prospectus and Dissertation exam committees, although not in the capacity of Committee Chair (refer to these sections below).

**Stages in the Doctoral Degree**

After admission to the Doctoral Program, there are two major stages to be completed prior to obtaining the PhD degree. These stages are the *Pre-Candidacy* and the *Candidacy* stages.

**Pre-Candidacy (The Qualifying Process)**

As a Pre-Candidate, the major tasks are to:

- Complete the Epidemiology PhD course requirements
- Complete a Doctoral Plan no later than the beginning of the second semester
- Successfully pass the Written Comprehensive Exam
- Develop a written research prospectus that describes the student’s research plan
- Complete the Oral Prospectus Examination during which the student must present and defend their research prospectus to his/her dissertation committee and receive approval for the proposed research.

These two exams (Written Comprehensive and Oral Prospectus) constitute the Qualifying Examinations.

**Candidacy**

As a candidate, the major tasks are to:

- Complete the proposed research identified in the prospectus with the ongoing guidance of the dissertation committee.
- Submit the final Doctoral plan in advance of the Dissertation Defense.
- Submit a written Dissertation to the LSUHSC–NO School of Graduate Studies

The dissertation must be presented as an oral Dissertation Defense to the Dissertation Committee and the School of Public Health community.

In general, the Epidemiology PhD Program takes a total of 4 to 5 years to complete. This time frame largely depends on how soon a student completes and passes his/her qualifying examinations, completes his/her Prospectus, and completes and defends his/her Dissertation.

Although every student differs in his/her time frame, a typical timeline might be:

1. Matriculation in the fall term with a relevant Master's degree or pre-requisite coursework;
2. Successful completion of the Written Comprehensive Examination around the end of the first year;
3. Development and approval by the Dissertation Committee of the dissertation prospectus and completion of the Oral Prospectus Examination by the end of the second year;
4. The execution and completion of the research effort, including the final written dissertation and oral dissertation defense by the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> year.

One full academic year (three semesters) must elapse between the completion of the oral prospectus exam and the submission of the final dissertation and defense.

## **PhD Requirements and Policies**

### **Time Limits for Degree Completion**

A full-time student in the PhD program must complete the Oral Prospectus Examination within 3 years from the date of first enrollment. All additional requirements regardless of full-time or part-time status must be completed within a total of 8 years from the date of first enrollment.

### **Residence**

The LSUHSC-NO Schools of Graduate Studies and Public Health requires three years (9 semesters) of full-time residence, although in most instances more time is needed. Exceptions may be made by petition to the School Dean. One year (three consecutive semesters) must be taken in residence at the Health Sciences Center following completion of the qualifying examinations (written and oral) (part-time students have modified requirements).

### **Transfer of Credit**

Students entering with a master's degree in epidemiology or a related field may transfer up to 18 hours of credit with approval of the program director and in accordance with the School of Graduate Studies policy. Students may not transfer in courses that were used to complete degree requirements for another degree. Courses approved for transfer must have been completed within five years of application with a grade of B or better and taken for graduate credit. The transfer of the credit does not reduce the residency

requirement. Written notification using the [Transfer of Credit form](#) clearly listing the courses to be transferred must be forwarded to the Program Director for approval.

### **Prospective Doctoral Plan of Study**

This is a preliminary plan in which students list the formal course work they intend to take to support their doctoral education. Students are expected to be actively involved in planning, implementing and evaluating their plan of study. It is strongly recommended that students meet regularly with their advisor to determine his/her goals and objectives so that his/her course work, research and dissertation proceed at a reasonable pace. The student develops an initial Prospective Doctoral Plan of Study with his/her advisor during the first semester of study. The form can be obtained from the [Epidemiology Program website](#). This form must be submitted no later than the beginning of the second semester after admission to the doctoral program. A signed electronic copy of this Plan of Study must be given to the Advisor and the Program Director. Students shall also be given a signed copy of the approved plan of study and a copy placed in their school record. It is the responsibility of the student to submit the plan to the Epidemiology Program Director and to assure all other copies are appropriately distributed. The dissertation committee must approve any changes in the approved plan of study and the amended plan must be resubmitted to the Advisor, Epidemiology Program Director and the Office of Academic Affairs. The Epidemiology Program will monitor courses students' register for against the Plan of Study Worksheet.

### **Curriculum**

Students must complete at least 61 credit hours beyond the master's degree. It is expected that at least half of these courses will be from the Epidemiology and Biostatistics course offerings at the School of Public Health. The core curriculum includes a required sequence of coursework in epidemiologic methods and theory. Additional coursework is available focusing on specific content areas as well as topics in biostatistics, such as survival analysis and the design and analysis of clinical trials. PhD students will gain teaching experience through a formal teaching practicum [EPID 7410]. Students will also have the opportunity to take elective courses in the other core disciplines in the School of Public Health and School of Graduate Studies. Such classes might include genetics or molecular biology.

A minimum of two epidemiology courses (i.e., Principles of Epidemiology [EPID 6210] and Intermediate Epidemiology [EPID 6211]) and two biostatistics courses (i.e., Biostatistical Methods I [BIOS 6100] and Biostatistical Methods II [BIOS 6102]) at the master's level are required prior to entering the doctoral program. If these courses or their equivalents have not been obtained, students must enroll in these courses, or their equivalents, as additional requirements.

### **Epidemiology Requirements:**

- EPID 6226 Epidemiologic Design and Analysis [3 Credits]
- EPID 7200 Advanced Epidemiologic Methods I [3 Credits]
- EPID 7201 Advanced Epidemiologic methods II [3 Credits]
- EPID 7410 Teaching Practicum in Epidemiology [3 Credits]

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- EPID 7700 Epidemiology Journal Club (Doctoral Seminar)\* [3 Credits]
- INTER 220 Ethics in Biomedical Sciences
- BIOS 6210 Categorical Data Analysis [3 Credits]
- EPID 7900 Dissertation Research [15 credits required] \*\*
- Content Electives [6 Credits]
- Methods Electives [6 Credits]
- BIOS Electives [6 Credits]

\*Maximum of 3 credits count towards degree, but must register for it every semester the student is in residence.

\*\* Maximum of 15 count toward the degree but more credit hours may be taken

### Suggested Epidemiology Content Electives

- EPID 6214 Infectious Disease Epidemiology [3 Credits]
- EPID 6220 Molecular Epidemiology [3 Credits]
- EPID 6222 Cancer Epidemiology [3 Credits]
- EPID 6223 Chronic Disease Epidemiology [3 Credits]
- EPID 6301 Epidemiology of STDs [3 Credits]
- EPID 6352 Social Epidemiology [3 Credits]
- EPID 6362 Environmental Epidemiology [3 Credits]
- EPID 6450 Cardiovascular Epidemiology [3 Credits]

### Suggested Epidemiology Methods Electives

- EPID 6217 Database Management [3 Credits]
- EPID 6218 Spatial Analysis [3 Credits]
- EPID 6219 Nutritional Epidemiology [3 Credits]
- EPID 6228 Survey Design [3 Credits]
- EPID 6351 Public Health Surveillance [2 Credits]
- EPID 7202 Grantsmanship And Proposal Development for Epidemiologic Research [3 Credits]
- EPID 7214 Mathematical Modeling of Infectious Diseases [3 Credits]
- EPID 7350 Evolution of Epidemiologic Theory and Methods [2 Credits]

### Suggested Biostatistics Electives

- BIOS 6202 Applied Linear Models [3 Credits]
- BIOS 6212 Survival Analysis [3 Credits]
- BIOS 6302 Longitudinal Data Analysis [3 Credits]
- BIOS 6314 Clinical Trials Methodology [3 Credits]
- BIOS 6312 Sampling Methods [3 Credits]

### Other Electives

Additional credits come from elective coursework offered at the School or elsewhere in the Health Sciences Center and Dissertation Research credits.

- Additional courses from other SPH programs or from the LSUHSC School of Graduate Studies, Nursing, or Medicine with approval from the advisor.
- Courses from other Louisiana State University campuses with approval from the

Program Director.

- Courses from other universities with approval from the Program Director

In addition, students without adequate biology or clinical training may be required to complete relevant coursework in biology, pathobiology, or clinical sciences as additional requirements. All of the courses toward the PhD program with the potential exception of research credits [EPID 7900], independent study [EPID 7400], and Journal Club [EPID 7700], must be taken for a letter grade and cannot be taken pass/fail.

### **Epidemiology Seminar**

Every other week during the academic year, Epidemiology Seminar provides a forum for speakers to present information or research pertaining to diverse topics in epidemiology. Seminars are scheduled Wednesday from 12:10–12:50. Attendance at all Epidemiology Program seminars and dissertation defense seminars is mandatory for all Epidemiology graduate students. Each year 2 student and beyond is required to present on a work in progress at the seminar series once during each calendar year of enrollment.

### **Epidemiology Doctoral Journal Club**

Every other week during the academic year, Journal Club meets to discuss articles of interest in the field. Journal Club is scheduled on alternate Fridays from 12:00–12:50. Information about the schedule is distributed to students each semester. PhD students are required to participate throughout their residence in the program and should register each semester, although only 3 semesters of Journal Club credit can be applied toward the required program credits for graduation.

### **Minor Field**

Some of the earned credit hours for the PhD must be in a minor field, and it is expected that the student will have at least nine credit hours in the minor field. PhD students in Epidemiology will identify a minor field and program of study, which must be approved by the student's Dissertation Committee.

### **Data Collection**

All doctoral students should have experience in data collection. The data collection experience may be part of the dissertation research, independent study credits or another project approved by the student's advisor. The goal is to provide a meaningful, practical learning experience (outside of class). Examples of data collection projects that fulfill the requirement are:

- Collecting data for a new study, a sub study or a validation study
- Supervising data collection and management in an ongoing study
- Developing and collecting new exposure or new disease/outcome measure(s) in a cohort study or case–control study
- Conducting the laboratory component of a project
- Designing and distributing a questionnaire and subsequent data analysis

### **Academic Standards**

PhD students are required to maintain a 3.00 cumulative GPA. A student with less than a 3.00 GPA will be placed on probation. If after completing at least 9 additional credit hours (one semester), the student's GPA remains below 3.00, the student will be terminated from the program. Any class in which a student receives a grade less than C must be retaken. Failure to achieve a grade of C or higher on the repeat of the course will result in dismissal from the program.

### Teaching Practicum

Many PhD students assume teaching or administrative positions in higher education after graduation. Teaching skills are important to virtually all leadership roles related to effective presentation, communication, supervision, evaluation, training, and mentoring activities. In addition, participation of graduate students in the teaching mission of the program will help to develop teaching, presentation, leadership, and interpersonal skills while assisting the program in discharging its teaching responsibilities. All doctoral students are required to participate under faculty guidance in the teaching mission of the program. The teaching practicum gives graduate students an opportunity to become familiar with a range of MPH teaching through participation in classes taught by a member of the program faculty. As a part of the preparation for and fulfillment of the teaching practicum requirement, the students are encouraged to attend [Office of Medical Education Research and Development](#) seminars emphasizing teaching and communication skills; lead tutorials or seminars; supervise laboratory sessions; develop instructional workshops; develop instructional material; and grade homework, workshop reports, and exams.

All students are required to fulfill at least a two-semester teaching requirement by serving as a teaching assistant, typically in an introductory or intermediate level epidemiology course. The goal of this activity is to provide experience in graduate level teaching, in mentoring students, to reinforce knowledge and skills in epidemiologic principles, and to prepare for the qualifying exams.

Each semester, the Program Director assists students in finding teaching assistant opportunities. Students may also search out opportunities, which is acceptable if the Program Director approves the arrangement. Students are expected to participate as a teaching assistant in a minimum of two MPH courses. They assist the faculty in preparing and teaching a lecture course, as well as lead laboratory/workshop sessions. The Faculty member must formally evaluate the teaching of the TA and give constructive feedback on their teaching skills and lecture content.

Registration for the Teaching Practicum [EPID 7410] is the culmination of the student's teaching experience while in the LSUHSC Epidemiology Program. During the semester in which the student is formally enrolled in the course he/she is required to complete a teaching portfolio. The portfolio is composed of two components:

1. A summary of all teaching activities completed while enrolled in the doctoral program
2. A document describing the key elements of a new course including a course description providing an overview of the content of the course, a syllabus, and

three sample lectures.

Students register for EPID 7410 after successfully completing their qualifying examinations with the permission of their advisor and the program director.

The portfolio documents the student's teaching experience and is an important self-assessment tool. It consists of general assignments and assignments specific to particular programs. The portfolio must include a teaching philosophy statement

### Other Courses

- **Prospectus Development EPID 7800** [1–9 Credits]
  - Research related work for PhD degree students prior to passing the Oral Prospectus Exam.
- **Dissertation Research EPID 7900** [15 credits]
  - The Dissertation research must be a contribution of new knowledge and be eligible for publication in a major peer-reviewed journal. The PhD program requires a minimum of 15 hours of dissertation research credit. While many students need to make take more, those hours do not count toward fulfilling any degree requirements although they appear on the academic record.
- **Exam Only EPID 9999** [0 Credits]
  - Students may register for "Exam Only" when they have completed their PhD requirements including: preliminary exams, dissertation research and the dissertation is complete or in the final stages of revision. They should have scheduled, or at least have a reasonable expectation to be able to schedule their defense during this semester.

### Qualifying Examinations

The Qualifying Examinations (Written Comprehensive & Oral Prospectus) are traditionally administered during the second year of the doctoral program, although this time frame is flexible if the oral prospectus examination is completed within three years from the date of enrollment. The Written Comprehensive Exam is only offered one time during a calendar year, usually in August before the start of the fall semester of classes. It is recommended that students who plan to take the Written Comprehensive Exam consult with their faculty advisor and discuss required and elective coursework and their readiness for taking the examination several months in advance of the scheduled examination date.

The Qualifying Examinations are not designed to be a recitation of a collection of facts presented in a specific course, but rather to probe the student's ability to identify important issues when presented with a problem, generate a series of arguments relevant to the issues, and formulate a well-reasoned approach based on the arguments being presented. These exams are also designed to evaluate a student's knowledge of basic and advanced epidemiological (e.g., study design, internal validity) and biostatistical methods (e.g., logistic regression, survival analysis) and skills (e.g., interpretation of statistical output).

**Written Comprehensive Exam**

The exam will occur approximately one to two years after beginning the PhD program in Epidemiology for full-time students. After the advisor has agreed that the student has completed the required program methods coursework (EPID 7200, EPID 7201 BIOS 6210, an additional BIOS elective, and two EPID content electives), the student may request to take the exam. All students must notify the [Exam Director](#) of their intention to take the exam at the start of the spring term preceding the exam. Students who intend to take the exam will be notified with specific details pertaining to the exam.

Grading Process

Each exam question will be read and graded by two faculty members with appropriate expertise in the question’s content. Each question will be graded on a point scale. The Examination Committee will collectively assign a final grade and make a recommendation of pass, conditional pass, or fail. Finally, the Examination Committee will suggest any conditions or remediation for students who received a conditional pass. Whenever there are at least two students taking the exam, faculty graders will be blind with respect to the name of the students. Final grades are communicated to students by the Program.

Remediation

If a student does not pass the exam, he/she may be allowed to retake the exam at the next time the exam is offered. If the student does not pass on the second attempt, he/she will be terminated from the program.

**Preparation for the Written Comprehensive Examination**

The Written Comprehensive Examination should not be regarded as the equivalent of a “final exam” for a specific course, but as a means of integrating the content available through multiple courses the student may have taken as part of his/her doctoral training. The table below lists the specific courses that are relevant to the exam. The list is by no means exhaustive. Foundation coursework (program pre-requisites) and foundation concepts are important and relevant content areas for the qualifying examinations. Additionally, students are required to complete all core coursework prior to taking the Examination. Students should consult with their faculty advisor to decide on the best strategy to prepare for the examination.

<b>Content Area</b>	<b>Courses</b>
<b>Epidemiology</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intermediate Epidemiology</li> <li>• Epidemiologic Design &amp; Analysis</li> <li>• Advanced Epidemiologic Methods I</li> <li>• Advanced Epidemiologic methods II</li> </ul>
<b>Biostatistics</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Categorical Data Analysis</li> <li>• Longitudinal Data Analysis</li> <li>• Survival Analysis</li> </ul>
<b>Electives (varies)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Infectious Disease Epidemiology</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cancer Epidemiology</li> <li>• Social Epidemiology</li> <li>• Others</li> </ul>
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**Written Dissertation Prospectus and Oral Prospectus Examination**

In addition to the Written Comprehensive Examination, doctoral students are required to satisfactorily develop and defend their research proposal in the form of a written dissertation prospectus and oral prospectus examination. After passing the Written Comprehensive Examination, the student works to develop their Dissertation Prospectus. The Dissertation Prospectus details an epidemiologic research project of high scientific merit with substantive downstream public health impact. It is developed with the research advisor but also involves consultation with other interested faculty who will serve as the Dissertation Committee.

Students should successfully defend their dissertation prospectus within six months of successfully completing the Written Comprehensive Examination. During the defense of the Prospectus, the student presents his/her research prospectus to the dissertation committee and submits to questioning by the committee members. This Oral Prospectus Examination is designed to test both the student's depth of knowledge in the major area of study and to test the student's ability to conceive and conduct independent epidemiologic research and to evaluate the proposed research plan. Students should complete the Oral Prospectus Examination no later than one year after passing the Written Comprehensive Examination. The Epidemiology Program Director will give exceptions only upon written petition and approval. This should be a challenging examination that delves into how well the student understands not only the proposed project itself, but the principles underlying its design and analysis, alternative designs and analysis, and any underlying biologic aspect of the project

**Formation of the Dissertation Committee**

At the beginning of the second year of graduate study after the written qualifying exam is successfully passed, the student and mentor will select a Dissertation Committee. In preparation for the Prospectus/Dissertation, students will identify a Chair of their Dissertation Committee, with consultation and collaboration from their advisor (most often the same individual but this is not required). The Committee oversees and mentors the PhD student through completion of the dissertation phase.

The Chair of the Committee is usually the Research Mentor if they have a primary faculty appointment in the Epidemiology Program and are a member of [LSUHSC-NO Graduate Faculty](#). If the Research Mentor is not a primary faculty member in the Epidemiology Program, then a primary faculty member in Epidemiology will be selected to serve as Chair of the Committee; the Research Mentor may elect to be Co-Chair. The Chair, as the head of the Committee, has the ultimate responsibility to ensure that the dissertation meets all the rigorous standards of a PhD in Epidemiology.

The student should then choose the remaining dissertation committee members, in consultation and collaboration with their Dissertation Chair (and their faculty advisor, if

different).

The Dissertation Committee must have at least five members in accordance with LSUHSC School of Graduate Studies guidelines and program requirements. Other requirements as to the composition of the Committee members are as follows:

- The chair of the Committee must have a primary appointment as an Assistant Professor or higher in the Epidemiology Program and be a member of the School of Graduate Studies Faculty.
- The Committee will comprise at least 5 Graduate Faculty Members of LSUHSC including:
  - At least three members, including the Chair, must have a primary fulltime appointment in LSUHSC SPH Epidemiology.
  - At least one member should be from a SPH Program other than Epidemiology.
  - One member should be from outside the School of Public Health and a member of the LSUSHC Graduate Faculty. In some circumstances a non-LSUHSC faculty may serve as a member of the committee, provided they are a member of their institution's graduate faculty. This is subject to approval by the Program Director.
- The membership of the committee must be approved by the Program Director. Dissertation Committee Members must be included on the Final Doctoral Plan of Study.

The Dissertation Committee reviews the student's dissertation prospectus, provides feedback, and determines whether the proposal is sufficiently developed for the student to move on to the Oral Prospectus Examination. This committee will be the student's committee throughout the dissertation development and completion process. The Epidemiology Program Director must approve any changes to the committee composition.

### **Initial Committee Meeting**

A good time to schedule the first meeting is early in the development of the prospectus. At this meeting, the committee will confirm the chair who is responsible for the conduct of committee meetings. Meetings should occur, at a minimum, every 6 months. The student must provide a report to all committee members **at least 3 days before** the committee meeting. \*

### **\* Written requirements of student prior to committee meetings:**

- A 'specific aims' style document of one page in length, including a short introduction of the subject area; the significance of project, and the specific aims of project. This document should be in NIH style, but can be less formal, e.g. bullet form.
- A 1 to 2-page progress report describing the work accomplished since the previous meeting. This must address each of the 6-month goals stated in the previous committee report and should NOT be replaced by a copy of any PowerPoint/seminar presentation.
- Goals for the next 6-month period.

### **Final Doctoral Plan of Study**

The Final Plan updates the Prospective Plan and notes any changes from the Prospective Program. The [Final Plan of Study](#) form should be submitted as early as possible and at least one month before the Oral Prospectus Examination. It includes the following:

- The final program of course work
- The research and dissertation topic
- The prospective dissertation advisor
- Oral Prospectus Examination Committee

The Dissertation Committee shall meet and approve the final plan prior to submission. A signed copy of this Plan of Study must be given to each member of the Dissertation Committee, the Advisor, the Program Director, and the Academic Affairs Office. Students shall be given a signed copy of the approved plan of study. It is the responsibility of the student to submit the plan to the Program Director and to assure all other copies are appropriately distributed.

### **Scheduling the Oral Prospectus Exam**

Students should schedule the Oral Prospectus Examination after the Program Director approves the student's Final Plan. Students must have completed all course work listed on their Final Plan prior to taking the examination. Student GPA must be above 3.0 in order for the student to sit for the oral exam.

At least two (2) weeks prior to the Oral Prospectus Examination (Preliminary Examination) students must submit a completed LSUHSC–SPH [Request For Preliminary Examination](#) form to the Program Director who submits the completed form to the Dean's Office. This document formally names the student's Committee and sets the date of the Preliminary Examination (Prospectus Defense). The student is also expected to reserve a room for the examination; three hours is the suggested length of time.

### **The Written Prospectus**

Before the Oral Prospectus Examination, the student distributes a written dissertation prospectus that describes the aims and methods of her/his dissertation proposal to the committee. Ordinarily, students should present plans for their three principal dissertation papers. It is not necessary to present preliminary data, although if preliminary data is available and will assist the committee in making a determination regarding the student's readiness to conduct the research, it should be included. The written dissertation prospectus should be a detailed outline of the research plan, including background material that may become the introduction to one or more of the papers. The purpose of the written prospectus is to provide the student and the committee members with a clear understanding of the nature of the proposed dissertation, its feasibility, and its relevance to the field before dissertation research work is started. The goal is not to produce a finished polished research project, but rather a springboard towards advancing the three dissertation papers, and a starting point for the Oral Prospectus Examination.

The written dissertation prospectus is also an efficient way to engage committee members as they assist the student in articulating and meeting the dissertation goals. By preparing a written document—and by defending it—the student and her/his committee have a process through which they can agree upon the scope of the final product (i.e., the final dissertation). Thus, it is important that the student should not have completed appreciable work on their dissertation before the committee reviews the plan. The Written Prospectus thus can ensure that the student and the committee members know what product to expect at the dissertation defense.

### Written Prospectus Guidelines

The Prospectus should be written in clear, plain English with minimal jargon, abbreviations, or colloquialisms and is limited to 30 pages (double-spaced). All tables, graphs, figures, diagrams, and charts must be included within the 30-page limit. References are not part of the page limit. Be succinct and remember that there is no requirement to use all 30 pages.

The student must review drafts with her/his advisor, as well as other committee members well in advance of submitting the final prospectus to the full committee. The student's advisor should give guidance as to when the prospectus is sufficiently strong and is ready to defend.

The final Written Prospectus must be distributed to the Committee at least **two weeks prior to the Oral Prospectus Examination**. The format of the research prospectus should follow NIH PHS 398 grant application guidelines (except that the prospectus is to be double-spaced with a higher page limit) and should include the following sections:

1. Title page
2. Abstract – 60 lines of text similar to a NIH grant abstract
3. Specific aims (1–2 pages): A self-contained description of the project. It must state concisely the goals of the proposed research and summarize the research question and hypotheses.
4. Research Strategy: Use the following subsections:
  - (a) *Background and Significance (3–6 pages)*: This section should place the research project in context. This should include a brief, but critical, evaluation of the relevant literature, highlighting the existing knowledge and gaps in knowledge. Also, how the proposed research project will advance scientific knowledge and to fill those gaps.
  - (b) *Innovation (2–3 pages)*: Explain how the proposed research challenges and seeks to shift current research paradigm(s). Describe any novel theoretical concepts, approaches or methodologies, instrumentation or interventions to be developed or used, and any advantage(s) over existing methodologies, instrumentation, or interventions.
  - (c) *Preliminary Studies (optional, 1–3 pages)*: Describe what work has already been done as a pilot test or leading up to the work to be done.

(d) *Approach (10–20 pages)*: Discuss in detail the design and the procedures to be used to accomplish the specific aims of the project. Describe the overall strategy, methodology, protocols, data sources, independent, dependent variables, potential confounders, effect modifiers or mediators, along with a proposed sample size with power analyses and the statistical analyses to be used. Acknowledge pitfalls and limitations of the research, and if possible suggest alternative strategies to achieve the aims.

5. Protection of human subjects (1–2 pages)
6. References: Should be included at the end (not counted in the page limit).

### **Format of the Oral Presentation for the Oral Prospectus Examination**

The Oral Prospectus Examination is closed door and takes the form of an oral presentation that is approximately 45 minutes long supported with visual aids, focusing on the proposal topic and methodology. Although the format and specific content of the oral presentation of the dissertation prospectus is up to the Chair and the Committee, the oral presentation of the dissertation prospectus should include a statement of research questions and/or hypotheses and the following elements:

1. Specific Aims
2. A background for the objectives including the public health significance or implications
3. Study design and approach
4. Adequacy of the study design to address the research questions
5. Data analysis plan including implications for inference and generalizability
6. Strengths and Limitations of the study

### **Oral Prospectus Examination**

The Oral Prospectus Examination is conducted by the Committee, chaired by the student's Dissertation advisor, and focuses on the proposed dissertation design and analysis. Typically, the exam covers practical, theoretical and analytic aspects of the proposal including broad epidemiologic principles. Therefore, the exam is not limited to the prospectus, but it provides the context for this exam. The exam will begin with an approximately 45–minute closed presentation by the student about his/her planned research.

Following the student's presentation, over about 45 minutes the committee members will ask questions to address such topics as:

- Literature evaluation skills
- Theoretical application
- Scientific background
- Specific Aims
- Study design
- Models of disease/conditions
- Analytical methods
- Measurement methods
- Data and statistical analysis plans

Immediately following the examination, the committee will meet privately to evaluate the success or failure of the student by a closed ballot after the discussion of the candidate's performance. The options for evaluating a student include: (1) Pass; (2) Conditional Pass – further evidence of qualifications is necessary; and (3) Failure. If the student fails the exam, the committee may recommend a reexamination. If the student is permitted a reexamination, he or she must be reexamined within 6 months. The student will be informed of the committee's decision immediately following the vote. The form signifying successful completion of the prospectus examination will not be submitted until after the specified conditions have been met.

The Committee Chair will obtain the pre-filled [Report of the Preliminary Examination](#) form from the student on the day of the prospectus examination. The report must be completed by the committee members and returned to the Epidemiology Director for review and signature and subsequently submitted to the SPH Associate Dean for Academic Affairs Office immediately following the exam (unless the student achieves only a Conditional Pass, in which case the form is submitted upon completion of the specified conditions). The results of the examination are reported to the School of Graduate Studies.

Note that the preliminary exam must be passed at least one academic year (i.e. 3 consecutive semesters) before graduation.

### **Formally Advancing to Candidacy**

When a student has satisfied all the pre-candidacy requirements, passing both the Written and Oral Qualifying Exams, he/she becomes a doctoral candidate. Students can then register for Dissertation Research [EPID 7900] credits. Doctoral candidates need to remain mindful of the total credits needed to complete the program.

### **Institutional Review Board (IRB)/ Human Subject Protection Approval**

If data collection involves working with human subjects, including use of surveys, interviews, inventories, or questionnaires, the candidate must submit an IRB/ Human Subjects Protection Application

### **Doctoral Dissertation Content and Completion**

After successful development and defense of the dissertation prospectus, the student is ready to execute his/her research plan. This phase generally takes 1–2 years. It is expected that the student will meet with his/her Dissertation Chair regularly during this time to ensure the accurate and timely completion of his/her research plan.

In the Epidemiology Program the dissertation consists of at least three high-quality original papers suitable for publication. The student is expected to have at least one of the three first author manuscripts submitted and positively reviewed for publication before the dissertation defense. Many believe this format enhances a student's publication record. These papers should revolve around some common theme, but need not be closely linked. The goal is to establish expertise in the area under study.

One of the dissertation papers may be a qualitative or quantitative review paper if this review results in a novel and compelling hypothesis (subject to approval by the dissertation committee). Students are required to pursue the three–paper dissertation approach in order to obtain maximum publications.

All papers included in the dissertation must contain complete study data and be ready to submit for publication. “Ready to submit” means that the content and analysis have been approved by the dissertation committee and that the student and the advisor believe the manuscript is ready to be submitted to a journal with only edits needed to meet specific journal submission requirements (even though it may be awaiting comments from coauthors or other sign–offs). Ideally, at least one of the dissertation papers should be submitted, if not published, by the time of the defense. All dissertation committee members must approve all three dissertation papers before scheduling the defense. To make most efficient use of faculty and student time, no paper should be circulated to the entire committee until the committee chair has reviewed the draft, and comments have been incorporated. It is expected that committee members review all drafts of the dissertation papers in a timely fashion (usually within 2 weeks) and provide requisite feedback to the student. The final dissertation must be compiled in the format specified by the LSUHSC-NO School of Graduate Studies 9 (see below) and must be circulated to committee members no less than two (2) weeks before the scheduled dissertation defense.

### **Dissertation Format**

The LSUHSC–NO School of Graduate Studies dissertation guidelines may be downloaded [here](#). It is expected that the three manuscripts will represent chapters 2, 3 and 4 in the dissertation. In addition, there are Introduction and Conclusion Chapters that tie the three manuscripts together. The graduate school publishes in the academic calendar the latest date that the signed completed dissertation must be submitted by for graduation each semester.

### **Dissertation Defense**

One year (three consecutive semesters) following the successful completion of the Oral Prospectus Examination, the student is eligible to sit for their dissertation defense if the dissertation is complete to the satisfaction of the Doctoral Committee. A completed [Request for Dissertation Defense](#) form and a copy of the Dissertation Abstract must be received by the Epidemiology Program Director two weeks prior to the dissertation defense date. Copies of the Dissertation must be circulated to the committee at least two weeks prior to the defense date. The dissertation must adhere to the LSUHSC–NO School of Graduate Studies Dissertation Guidelines.

The dissertation defense is to be publicized two weeks prior to the defense date. The student should consult the Dean’s Office to request a room and to facilitate announcement of the defense in advance.

The dissertation defense has two parts. Part 1 is a 45–50-minute public presentation (seminar) by the candidate on the main aspects of the research reported in the

dissertation. Questions from the audience may be taken afterward. The Chair of the Dissertation Examination Committee shall have discretion to decide whether such questions are germane to the topic of the dissertation and how much time shall be allotted for the questions and answers.

Part 2 is the formal examination by the Dissertation Examination Committee and is open only to the Dissertation Examination Committee. Traditionally, this examination is a test of the student's dissertation research. However, at the discretion of the Committee or the Dean, the examination may include questions from the major or minor fields in general. The chair will invite questions in turn from each member of the Committee. The questioning may continue as long as the Committee feels that it is necessary and reasonable for the proper examination of the student. The student will have ample opportunity to answer the Committee's questions.

After questioning has been completed the student will be asked to leave the room and the Dissertation Examining Committee will discuss whether or not the dissertation (including its defense) has been satisfactory. A successful defense requires that all committee members believe that each paper will be ready to submit to the identified journal after the suggestions made by the committee are incorporated.

Voting is by ballot, and to pass the examination there may be no more than one negative vote. The student should bring with them a copy of the [Dissertation Defense Final Exam Report](#). The Chair of the Dissertation committee is responsible for completing the exam report, obtaining the Program Director's signature and submitting the completed report to the office of Academic Affairs. The final approved dissertation is submitted to the Graduate School for binding at least three weeks before the graduation date.

### **Authorship on Dissertation Papers**

Prior to the start of the dissertation, the faculty advisor and student should discuss authorship of the papers to be included in the dissertation. If the student conducts the data analysis and writes the major parts of the paper, the student should be the first author of the paper. Generally, the student will be first author on all three papers included in the doctoral dissertation. A paper will not qualify for inclusion in a dissertation if the student did not lead the research in a way that justifies first authorship (e.g., conducts the data analysis and writes the major parts of the paper). Generally, the student will be first author on published papers stemming from the dissertation, however, if the papers are not submitted for journal consideration within a reasonable timeframe (e.g., two years from the doctoral dissertation defense date), authorship order may be renegotiated to reflect the level of effort involved in preparing the manuscript for journal submission.

Committee members are often included on the papers produced by the dissertation work, however, authorship by committee members should not be assumed. Paper authorship should be determined by the chair and candidate based upon usual authorship guidelines in the professional journals to which the papers are being

submitted, and the degree to which a given committee member influenced or contributed to each paper. For example, International Committee of Medical Journal Editors' Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journal suggest that authorship credit should be based on 1) substantial contributions to conception and design, acquisition of data, or analysis and interpretation of data; 2) drafting the article or revising it critically for important intellectual content; and 3) final approval of the version to be published. Authors should meet conditions 1, 2, and 3.

## Academic Policies for MPH & PhD Students

A full listing of SPH policies and procedures are located on the [Student Resources](#) section of the SPH website.

### General Grading Policies and Expectations

There is an expectation of a steady increase in each student's level of performance throughout the program, with a concomitant expectation of steadily increasing ability to integrate and apply the critical elements from all preceding classes. Students are graded on their performance in all aspects of the curriculum.

- a) It is expected that all assignments be submitted on time. Failure to do so may result in a lower grade.
- b) MPH students must maintain a 3.0 GPA throughout their enrollment. If the GPA drops below 3.0 they will be placed on academic probation and have one semester to correct the deficiency. Any course in which receives
- c) PhD students must maintain a 3.0 GPA throughout their enrollment. If the GPA drops below 3.0 they will be placed on academic probation and have one semester to correct the deficiency
- d) If a student receives a grade below C in any class, they must retake that course. The original course grade also remains on their transcript and is averaged in with all other courses.

### Minimum/Maximum Course Load

At least nine credit hours is required for full-time enrollment during fall and spring semester. Twelve credit hours is considered the average course load.

### Adding & Dropping courses

Please refer to the LSUHSC School of Public Health [Handbook](#) for general requirements concerning adding and dropping of courses. The University Registrar sets these policies.

### Incompletes

If the student does not complete assigned work during the prescribed period, an "I" (incomplete) may be given by the instructor. It is expected that the student will initiate a meeting with the instructor prior to the end of the semester to discuss the work expectations and establish a mutually agreed upon timeline for completion. If the work is not completed within the time allowed by the Registrar's office, which is usually two weeks after the start of the following semester, a final grade of "F" will be recorded and the student may be required to repeat the course for credit.

### Transfer Credits

Following program specific guidelines, students in the MPH and PhD degree programs may apply for transfer credit for any graduate level courses taken outside of the School of Public Health that the student would like to apply to his or her SPH degree. All requests for transfer credit will be considered on an individual basis by the Program Director.

Up to 10 credits may be considered for transfer toward the MPH degree and up to 18 credits may be considered for transfer toward the PhD degree. Grades assigned to transfer credits will not be included in the calculation of the student's grade point average (GPA) at the School of Public Health.

The requirements for requesting transfer credits are:

- The transfer course must be a graduate level course taken for a grade.
- The transfer course must have been taken in a graduate or professional program at an accredited institution.
- For transfer credits to be approved they cannot have been counted towards another degree and the letter grade must be a B or higher.
- This completed Request for [Transfer of Credit form](#) and the transfer course syllabus, must be submitted to the Epidemiology Program Director before the student registers for the semester in which the course(s) will normally be taken.
- Transfer credits requests can only be submitted after the successful completion of one semester of coursework.
- The Program Director will seek appropriate instructor and advisor approval and will notify the student once a decision has been made.

### **Course Waivers**

Students who have taken coursework elsewhere that replicates material in a required epidemiology course may request a course waiver. A course waiver does not reduce the overall number of course credits required to be completed at the School of Public Health. A maximum of six credit hours may be waived for the MPH or PhD Program. Epidemiology students may request to be waived from a core program course based on previous coursework and an examination. Relevant courses must have been taken within the past five years. Students must have earned a grade of B (3.0) or better in the classes in question. Students must submit a written request for waiver to the Epidemiology Program director provide the supporting documentation form. Students may be asked to demonstrate their proficiency through an examination in the courses to be waived. The decision to grant a waiver is at the discretion of the program.

### **Graduate Student Stipends**

Depending on the availability of funds, the Epidemiology Program awards in-state tuition waivers and/or assistantships to a limited number of students. Students who accept assistantships agree to work in the Program for twenty (20) hours per week. Continuation of an assistantship depends on satisfactory academic and work progress. If at any time a student with an assistantship has a cumulative GPA of less than 3.0, the student's Advisor will be notified. If the student does not bring his/her GPA up to 3.0 after the next semester, the Program Head will notify the student in writing that he/she will lose the assistantship if the cumulative GPA is not at least 3.0 within one semester.

### **Academic Integrity**

As detailed in the School of Public Health Student Handbook, plagiarism, cheating, forgery or other forms of academic misconduct are not tolerated at this institution, and if

allegations of misconduct related to academic integrity are upheld, a student may be expelled from the school. It is the responsibility of each student to ensure that his/her study and participation in the academic process is so conducted that there can be no question concerning his/her integrity. All assignments, unless clearly designated group projects, are expected to be the work of the individual student. Any use of ideas, data or wording of another person must include explicit acknowledgement of the source. Failure to give such credit is plagiarism. Any alteration/fabrication of data or inaccurate reporting of actual participation in an assignment are examples of academic misconduct. Any violations of the above will be dealt with utilizing the policies and procedures described in the [SPH Student Handbook](#).

**Turnitin:** Some courses may use Turnitin to submit written assignments. Faculty can also use Turnitin at their discretion to evaluate any student's written assignments, including dissertation proposals and dissertations.

### **Leave of Absence**

Students who find it necessary to take a leave of absence from the School should seek advice from their academic advisor. Upon recommendation of the student's advisor, the Epidemiology Program Director, and with approval from the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, a student may take a leave of absence for a maximum of two years for reasons of military service, family care, serious illness, or another reason deemed adequate for interrupting graduate studies. The student must submit a request in writing to the Epidemiology Program Director. The Associate Dean for Academic Affairs provides the final approval. Leaves of absence do not stop the time-to-degree requirement unless they are taken for service in the military, maternity, and enrollment in an approved professional degree or other special circumstances.

### **Voluntary withdrawal or transfer from the program**

Students who wish to transfer out of or withdraw from the program should do so in consultation with their advisor and the Program Director. Students must then submit a [change of concentration form](#) to the Office of Student Affairs.

### **Probation/Dismissal**

A student is placed on academic probation if the GPA falls below 3.0 for MPH, 3.0 for PhD, or if the PhD Qualifying Examinations are not satisfactorily completed. Remediation is based on criteria developed by the faculty advisor and Program Director. Students not completing all requirements within eight years may also be dismissed. Students may also be dismissed due to academic misconduct

Students placed on academic probation may be dismissed if conditions for remediation are not met to the satisfaction of the faculty advisor and Program Director.

Students whose cumulative GPA is below the minimum cannot graduate from the program.

### **Required Human Subjects and Research Training**

All students in the MPH or PhD program are required to complete successfully an online human subjects research protection training program (HSRPP) through the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) (For More Information see: [LSUHSC-NO's Human Research Protection Program](#) ). The successful completion of the basic course will satisfy institutional requirements for 3 years, after which time a refresher course is required.

All students must take either:

- Group 1, Biomedical Research Investigators and Key Personnel – Basic Course
- or
- Group 2, Social and Behavioral Research Investigators and Key Personnel – Basic Course.

Decision about which group to complete should be made in consultation with the faculty advisor.

In addition, PhD students are required to complete the CITI training in Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR). The RCR basic course covers essential topics to be a responsible researcher: authorship, collaborative research, conflicts of interest, data management, financial responsibility, mentoring, peer review, plagiarism, research misconduct, and research involving humans and animals.

Completion certificates for HSRPP and HIPAA should be turned into the LSUHSC SPH research office. The completion certificate for RCR should be forwarded to the Epidemiology Program Director.

If you are a new learner who needs to complete human research training for the first time, please visit [CITI](#).

### **Student Travel Award**

The School of Public Health's Epidemiology Program provides a limited number of travel awards (\$500) to full-time students (2nd year MPH and PhD students) to encourage student participation in academic meetings, conferences and other related activities. Grants are limited and received once per fiscal year (July to June) per individual. Further information about student travel grant can be found [here](#).

Applications for the Epidemiology Travel Grant should be completed and submitted to Director of Epidemiology, along with all supporting materials: application check list, detailed budget, student statement, advisor statement, and proof of presentation acceptance. The application must be submitted at least a full month before the date of the meeting. You can access all the application documents [here](#).

## Summary of Forms

### **MPH Advising and Progress Worksheet**

This form can be found on the [Epidemiology Website](#). It is available to guide students and their advisors through the MPH curricular requirements and expectations.

### **Transfer of Credit Form**

This form can be found [here](#). It is completed by the student and forwarded to the Program Director and Dean for approval.

### **Change in Concentration Form**

This form can be found [here](#). It is completed by the student, their advisor, signed by the Program Director and submitted to the Office of Student Affairs.

### **Prospective Doctoral Plan of Study Form**

This is a preliminary plan in which students list the formal course work they intend to take to support their doctoral education and this form can be found [here](#). The PhD student completes it no later than the beginning of the second semester after admission to the doctoral program. A signed copy of this form is given to the advisor, program director and Academic Affairs office. The dissertation committee must approve any changes in the Doctoral Plan of Study Form and the amended plan submitted to the program director and Office of Academic Affairs.

### **Request for Written Comprehensive Examination**

All students must notify the [Exam Director](#) of their intention to take the exam at the start of the spring term preceding the exam.

### **Request for Oral Prospectus Examination**

This form can be found [here](#). It is completed by the PhD student and submitted to the Program Director upon formation of the Dissertation Committee. If the composition of the Dissertation Committee changes at any point in time, the student must submit a revised form. This form must be submitted at least two weeks before the date of the Oral Exam to the Program Director, who will submit it to the Dean's Office.

### **Final Doctoral Plan of Study**

The Final Plan is submitted at least one month in advance of the Request for the Oral Prospectus Examination. This Final Plan of Study form can be found [here](#).

### **Report of the Oral Prospectus Examination**

This form can be found [here](#). The student brings the form to the oral examination for completion by the Committee members. Upon completion of the exam, it is submitted to the Program Director for review and then submitted to the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs.

### **Request for Dissertation Defense Form**

This form can be found [here](#). The student must submit this form along with a copy of the Dissertation abstract to the Program Director at least two weeks prior to the dissertation defense date.

**Report of the Dissertation Defense**

This form can be found [here](#). The student brings the form to the oral examination for completion by the Committee members. Upon completion of the exam, it is submitted to the Program Director for review and then submitted to the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs.