



Ph.D. in Epidemiology Student Handbook

2025-2026

Disclaimer: This Handbook describes the program, policies, and practices of the UNC Charlotte Ph.D. program in Epidemiology. In the event of a conflict between this document and University documents on any issue, University documents shall have precedence.

Who is Covered by the Requirements Given in this Handbook: All matriculating students to the Epidemiology Ph.D. program are governed by the policies described in this Handbook.



Table of Contents

The Ph.D. Program in Epidemiology	1
Overview	1
Program Goals	2
Ph.D. Program in Epidemiology Competencies	2
PhD Student Resources Dropbox Folder	2
Advising, Coursework, and Enrollment Requirements	3
Academic Advising	3
Course Sequence Full-Time Students with MPH	5
Full-Time Students without MPH	6
Other Requirements	8
Directed Study Courses (Independent Study)	8
Graduate Certificate Opportunities	8
Transfer Credit	8
Time Limits for Completion	8
Continuous Registration Requirement	9
GRAD 9999	9
GRAD 9800	9
Dissertation Research Credits Application	9
Leave of Absence	10
Academic Standards, Progress, and Graduation Requirements	11
Accumulated Low Grades	11
Program of Study	11
Annual Progress Report	11
Deadlines for Form Submission	12
Residency Requirement	12
Graduation	13
Qualifying Examination	14
Purpose of Qualifying Examination	14

Examination Guidelines	14
Qualifying Examination Committee	14
Examination Format	14
Examination Grading	15
Second Attempt at Qualifying Exams	16
The Dissertation Process	16
Definition of the Doctoral Dissertation.....	16
Expectations for the Dissertation and Academic Integrity	17
Selecting a Dissertation Chair.....	17
Chair(s) Responsibilities	18
Students Responsibilities	18
Forming a Doctoral Dissertation Committee	19
Developing the Dissertation Proposal	19
Scheduling the Dissertation Proposal Oral Defense	21
Defending the Dissertation Proposal.....	22
Grading the Dissertation Proposal.....	23
Candidacy.....	24
Submitting Graduate School Forms.....	24
Human Subjects Considerations.....	24
Conducting the Dissertation Research	24
Writing the Dissertation.....	24
The traditional five-chapter dissertation format.....	25
The Three-Article Dissertation Format	26
Special Considerations for the Three-Manuscript Format.....	27
Defending the Dissertation	28
Support Opportunities for Ph.D. Students.....	29
Graduate Assistantships.....	29
Professional Responsibilities of Students with Graduate Assistantships	30
Rescinding Graduate Assistantships	31
Conference Support and Travel	32

Research Support	33
UNC Charlotte Student Resources.....	34
Center for Graduate Life and Learning	34
Career Services.....	34
Disability Services	34
Counseling Center	34
Ombudsman Services	35
Professional Student Organizations.....	36
Graduate and Professional Student Government (GPSG)	36
Graduate Public Health Association (GPHA)	36
Doctoral Student Responsibilities and Code of Ethics	37
Code of Student Academic Integrity.....	37
Applicable Policies	37
Appeals and Complaint Process.....	38
Laptop Policy	39
Email Communication Expectations	39
iThenticate.....	39

The Ph.D. Program in Epidemiology

Overview

Public health is a broad field encompassing many disciplines, activities, and stakeholders and is focused on serving entire populations, from communities, cities, and counties to states and nations. As early as 1920, public health was defined as "the science and art of preventing disease, prolonging life and promoting health and efficiency through organized community effort" (Turnock, 2004), and more recently as "fulfilling society's interest in assuring conditions in which people can be healthy" (also Turnock citing IOM). Public health encompasses research in social and behavioral health factors, epidemiology, environmental and occupational health, biostatistics, and health policy. These five core areas form the basis for public health research and practice and are required teaching for any accredited public health school or program.

Epidemiology, a core discipline of public health, is the study of the distribution and risk factors of diseases and health conditions in populations. Our post-master's Ph.D. program in Epidemiology prepares future researchers and public health practitioners to develop and conduct studies and apply quantitative methods to understand and solve complex public health problems. Through its rigorous coursework in epidemiologic and public health methods, electives, and teaching experience, the program prepares graduates for a career in academia, government, or industry. Students receive training in core public health methods, epidemiologic methods, and electives in the area of their choosing.

The cornerstone of the program is the student's dissertation, which is expected to be a significant contribution based on original and independent research leading to publications in peer-reviewed, indexed journals.

The Ph.D. Program in Epidemiology is primarily designed for full-time students. Part-time students will be admitted based on discussion and approval by the Program Director and the Program Committee.

Graduates of the Ph.D. Program in Epidemiology will be prepared for employment as researchers and academic scholars in various settings, including colleges and universities, federal and state governmental agencies, public health organizations, health care organizations, and advocacy organizations.

Students train to be well-rounded public health professionals: partnering with community agencies and stakeholders, learning how to disseminate research to diverse audiences, publishing in peer-reviewed formats, teaching in an academic environment, and conducting themselves with high ethical standards in all venues. Full-time students can complete the degree requirements within 4 years.

Program Goals

The Ph.D. program in Epidemiology aims to prepare independent scientists and scholars who can conduct rigorous and ethically sound epidemiologic research to improve the health and well-being of populations.

Ph.D. Program in Epidemiology Competencies

Graduates from the Ph.D. Program in Epidemiology will achieve the following competencies:

1. Synthesize epidemiologic evidence and critically appraise epidemiologic literature for internal and external validity.
2. Apply advanced statistical methods using statistical software to analyze and interpret epidemiologic data.
3. Identify threats to validity and develop strategies to prevent or minimize them in epidemiological studies.
4. Develop and conduct rigorous epidemiologic hypothesis-driven research using ethical principles.
5. 5, Demonstrate proficiency in communicating research findings in oral and written format.
6. 6. Demonstrate proficiency in teaching using current instructional strategies.

PhD Student Resources Dropbox Folder

A Dropbox folder titled "*PhD Student Resources*" has been shared with all PhD Epidemiology students. This folder contains copies of commonly used forms you will need throughout your program, including but not limited to:

- Annual Student Progress Report
- Student Travel Application Form
- Independent Study Application Form
- Dissertation Research Credit Application Form
- Research Funding Application Form
- Proposed and Final Defense Rubrics

To access the folder, you must create a Dropbox account using your NinerNET username and password. If you encounter difficulties accessing the shared folder, please contact the PhD Program Director for assistance.

Advising, Coursework, and Enrollment Requirements

Academic Advising

All course selections require the approval of the Ph.D. Program Director and/or the student's academic advisor. The Program Director will provide structured academic advising to all students during the first year of study.

During the first year of full-time or two years of part-time study, students are expected to begin narrowing the focus of their research interest to an area of proposed dissertation study. Each student will typically identify a Dissertation Committee Chair during the second year of full-time study. Those enrolled part-time may take longer than two years to select a Dissertation Committee Chair. Once the Dissertation Committee Chair is selected, she or he becomes the student's academic advisor for the remainder of the program.

Course Requirements and Options

The program requires 69 post-master's credit hours. All coursework must be taken at the 6000 level or above. The majority of the courses are at the 8000 level. The five major areas are:

1. Public Health Methods (15 credits)
2. Professional Seminars (9 credits)
3. Epidemiologic Methods (18 credits)
4. Electives (9 credits)
5. Dissertation (18 credits)

As defined in the Graduate Catalog, a semester course load of nine credit hours is considered full-time. However, to complete the didactic coursework in two years, students will have to take at least 12 credit hours per semester. Doctoral-level courses are considerably more time-consuming than most courses at the master's level, and doctoral students should also typically be involved in conducting research in collaboration with faculty. Students should not typically register for more than 12 credit hours in a given semester. A course load of fewer than nine hours is considered part-time.

Required courses in the Ph.D. curriculum include the following.

Public Health Methods (15 credits)

- | | |
|-----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| HSRD 8260 | Design of Health Services Research (cross-listed with HLTH 8201) (3) |
| HLTH 8270 | Applied Biostatistics: Regression (3) |
| HLTH 8271 | Applied Biostatistics: Multivariate (3) |

- EPID 8202 Introduction to Data Management (3)
HLTH 8282 Health Survey Design and Research (3)

Professional Seminars (9 credits)

- HSRD 8600 Seminar in Health Services Research (3)*
HLTH 8601 Ethics in the Public Health Profession (3)
HLTH 8603 Teaching Portfolio (3)

*Three one credit hour seminars

Epidemiologic Methods (18 credits)

- HLTH 6260 Analytic Epidemiology (3)
EPID 8274 Advanced Methods in Epidemiology (3)
EPID 8272 Survival Analysis (3)
EPID 8273 Multilevel and Longitudinal Data Analysis (3)
EPID 8275 Spatial Epidemiology (3)
EPID 8276 Systematic Reviews and Meta-analysis (3)

Electives (9 credits)

Students may take up to nine credit hours of elective coursework, selected in consultation with their academic adviser and program director. Electives should align with the student's research interests or career objectives and may be drawn from relevant disciplines. All elective courses must be at the 8000 level or above; however, under certain circumstances, 6000-level courses may be approved as electives.

Dissertation (18 Credits)

HSRD 8901 Dissertation Research (May be taken as 3, 6, or 9 credits)

The doctoral program of study must include a minimum of 18 hours of dissertation research credit. The doctoral candidate must be continuously enrolled in dissertation credit hours until the semester of graduation.

A grade of "SP" Satisfactory Progress is contingent upon making an appropriate degree of progress during the semester, as evidenced by frequent communication with and products submitted to the Dissertation Chairperson(s).

Course Sequence

Full-Time Students with MPH

Sequence	Course Number	Course Name	Credit
Year 1 - Fall	HSRD 8260	Design of Health Services Research	3
Year 1 - Fall	EPID 8202	Introduction to Data Management	3
Year 1 - Fall	HLTH 6260	Analytic Epidemiology	3
Year 1 - Fall	HLTH 8603	Teaching Portfolio	3
Year 1 - Spring	EPID 8274	Advanced Methods in Epidemiology	3
Year 1 - Spring	HLTH 8282	Health Survey Design and Research	3
Year 1 - Spring	HLTH 8270	Applied Biostatistics: Regression	3
Year 1 - Spring	HLTH 8601	Ethics and Integrity in Health Research and Practice	3
Year 2 - Fall	EPID 8272	Survival Analysis	3
Year 2 - Fall	EPID 8275	Spatial Epidemiology	3
Year 2 - Fall	HLTH 8271	Applied Biostatistics: Multivariate	3
Year 2 - Fall	...	Elective	3
Year 2 - Spring	EPID 8273	Multilevel and Longitudinal Analysis	3
Year 2 - Spring	EPID 8276	Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis	3
Year 2 - Spring	...	Elective	3
Year 2 - Spring	...	Elective	3
Year 3 - Fall	HSRD 8901	Dissertation Research	3, 6, or 9

Sequence	Course Number	Course Name	Credit
Year 3 - Fall	HSRD 8600	Seminar in Health Services Research	1
Year 3 - Spring	HSRD 8901	Dissertation Research	3, 6, or 9
Year 3 - Spring	HSRD 8600	Seminar in Health Services Research	1
Year 4 - Fall	HSRD 8901	Dissertation Research	3, 6, or 9
Year 4 - Fall	HSRD 8600	Seminar in Health Services Research	1
Year 4 - Spring	HSRD 8901	Dissertation Research	3, 6, or 9

Full-Time Students without MPH

Sequence	Course Number	Course Name	Credit
Year 1 - Fall	HSRD 8260	Design of Health Services Research	3
Year 1 - Fall	HLTH 6200	Case Studies	3
Year 1 - Fall	HLTH 6211	Evidence Based Methods in Public Health*	3
Year 1 - Fall	HLTH 6271	Public Health Data Analysis*	3
*Students who receive transfer credits for any one of these courses will take EPID 8202 instead; students who receive transfer credits for 2 of these courses will take EPID 8202 & HLTH 8603			
Year 1 - Spring	EPID 8274	Advanced Methods in Epidemiology	3
Year 1 - Spring	HLTH 8282	Health Survey Design and Research	3
Year 1 - Spring	HLTH 8270	Applied Biostatistics: Regression	3
Year 1 - Spring	HLTH 8601	Ethics and Integrity in Health Research and Practice	3

Sequence	Course Number	Course Name	Credit
Year 2 - Fall	EPID 8272	Survival Analysis	3
Year 2 - Fall	EPID 8202	Introduction to Data Management	3
Year 2 - Fall	HLTH 8271	Applied Biostatistics: Multivariate	3
Year 2 - Fall	HLTH 6260	Analytic Epidemiology	3
Year 2 - Spring	EPID 8273	Multilevel and Longitudinal Analysis	3
Year 2 - Spring	EPID 8276	Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis	3
Year 2 - Spring	...	Elective	3
Year 2 - Spring	...	Elective	3
Year 3 - Fall	HLTH 8603	Teaching Portfolio	3
Year 3 - Fall	EPID 8275	Spatial Epidemiology	3
Year 3 - Fall	...	Elective	3
Year 3 - Fall	HSRD 8600	Seminar in Health Services Research	1
Year 3 - Spring	HSRD 8901	Dissertation Research	3, 6, or 9
Year 3 - Spring	HSRD 8600	Seminar in Health Services Research	1
Year 4 - Fall	HSRD 8901	Dissertation Research	3, 6, or 9
Year 4 - Fall	HSRD 8600	Seminar in Health Services Research	1
Year 4 - Spring	HSRD 8901	Dissertation Research	3, 6, or 9
Year 5 - Fall	HSRD 8901	Dissertation Research	3, 6, or 9

Other Requirements

All newly admitted doctoral students are required to enroll in the online non-credit course, GRAD 8990 - Academic Integrity. Students must successfully complete this course prior to registering for the next semester.

Directed Study Courses (Independent Study)

The Graduate School imposes no specific limitations on the number of directed study credits that a Ph.D. student may take. However, students considering more than a total of 6 credits of directed study should consult with the Program Director.

Generally, students are not permitted to take a directed study class to fulfill a required course. Students should consult with the Epidemiology Program Director if any circumstance warrants this course of action. Students must complete the "**Independent Study Application**" located in the shared Dropbox folder. **The Program Director must approve all independent study courses taken to fulfill the requirements of the Epidemiology Ph.D. program.**

Graduate Certificate Opportunities

With careful course selection, students can also earn a Graduate Certificate in Health Informatics and Analytics. Please consult the [Graduate School website](https://graduateschool.uncc.edu/) for more information (<https://graduateschool.uncc.edu/>)

Transfer Credit

Effective AY 2026-2027, students in the PhD program in Epidemiology may transfer up to 27 graduate-level credits from a regionally accredited university toward a doctoral degree, provided that the transferred courses sufficiently cover the content required in the PhD program in Epidemiology. Course transfer requires approval of the PhD Epidemiology Program Director in consultation with the Program Committee and the Graduate School. Only courses in which the student earned a grade of B or above (or its equivalent) may be transferred. Credit for dissertation research cannot be transferred. Courses taken to fulfill the master's-level prerequisite public health courses do not count toward the 69-credit-hour total.

Time Limits for Completion

Students must pass all sections of the Qualifying exam within one year of finishing their required coursework. Students may not defend their dissertation proposal before passing all components of the Qualifying exam. Students must pass their dissertation proposal defense within 6 months of passing the Qualifying exam. Students must pass their dissertation defense within five years of the proposal defense, but no later than the end of their eighth year following matriculation as a doctoral student. Students must complete their degree, including the dissertation, within nine years of first registering as a doctoral student.

Continuous Registration Requirement

Students in graduate degree programs are required to maintain continuous registration (fall and spring semesters) for thesis, dissertation, project, or directed study until work is completed. Students are not required to enroll in any summer term unless they are using campus facilities or they are completing degree requirements in that term. Students using University resources should enroll in the number of graduate credit hours that best reflects the amount of resources being used (typically three (3) or more graduate credit hours). **The continuous registration requirement begins with the semester in which the student first registers for their thesis, dissertation, project, or directed study.**

Note: Students must be enrolled during the term (semester or summer) in which they graduate from the University.

GRAD 9999

GRAD 9999 (Doctoral Graduate Residency Credit) has no fees associated with it (only tuition) and is only 1 credit. This course meets the Graduate School requirement for continuous enrollment during the final term prior to graduation when all degree requirements (including dissertation) have been completed. This course is non-graded, and credit for this course does not count toward the degree. Doctoral students who are not using University resources and have already defended their dissertation – but have yet to graduate – can register for 1 credit hour of GRAD 9999. Note: GRAD 9999 requires a petition in the Banner system.

GRAD 9800

GRAD 9800 – Full-time Enrollment for Research is an option for graduate students completing their thesis or dissertation research. Students who have completed all required credits and passed all milestones, except for the defense, are eligible to enroll. This 3-credit course can be used to elevate the qualifying student to full-time enrollment. Students working toward their defense should use this course and not the 1-credit residency course, GRAD 9999. That course (GRAD 9999) should be requested only when a student misses the deadline to defend their thesis/dissertation in one semester and must defend it within the first four weeks of the next semester to graduate. That student is using a few university resources and simply needs to be registered to graduate. When more thesis or dissertation work is needed, the GRAD 9800 course is appropriate. To be approved for enrollment in GRAD 9800, students must have defended their proposal, completed all coursework, and accumulated 18 hours of dissertation credit. Note: GRAD 9800 requires a petition in the Banner system.

Dissertation Research Credits Application

Prior to registering for any dissertation research credits, students must complete the **"Dissertation Research Application"** found in the shared Dropbox folder. This application must then be approved by the Program Director. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that the course has been properly added to their schedule. Note: this application requirement applies to

all dissertation credit course prefixes, including HLTH, HSRD, and GRAD. A new application should be submitted each semester prior to registering for dissertation credits.

Leave of Absence

The Leave of Absence adheres to the current Graduate School Catalog. Please carefully consult the Graduate School Catalog for details regarding who is eligible to apply for a leave of absence, the required forms and processes, timeframes, special instructions for international students, and the consequences of an extended leave of absence. Students experiencing a medical emergency should contact the Dean of Students Office. Students with questions about the leave of absence option can contact the Center for Graduate Life.

Academic Standards, Progress, and Graduation Requirements

UNC Charlotte requires that graduate students maintain academic standards as outlined on the Graduate School Website.

Graduate students must average at least a B (3.0 on a 4-point system) over all courses attempted as part of the requirements to qualify to receive a graduate degree. Note: A grade of U or NC in any course constitutes an automatic termination of enrollment.

Accumulated Low Grades

Doctoral studies require excellence in academic performance. A student earning a large number of "B" grades as a doctoral student should recognize that this may indicate questionable preparation for the dissertation and may be viewed negatively by some potential employers—particularly colleges and universities. A total of two C grades or a single grade of U results in suspension. A suspended student may not register for classes unless approved for reinstatement. While it is unlikely that the program would reinstate a student in this scenario, there may be extenuating circumstances that apply. If the program reinstates a student, a subsequent grade of C or U will result in immediate dismissal from the program. If a program does not approve reinstatement, the student is dismissed from the program. (Note that even a single C grade is unexpected in the doctoral study; it is unlikely that the Epidemiology Ph.D. Program Committee will consider reinstating a student in this situation in the absence of unusual extenuating circumstances.)

Program of Study

DegreeWorks provides students with access to their plan of study, enabling them to be accountable for their progress. Using DegreeWorks will reduce errors by automating much of the manual clearance process. Students can access DegreeWorks through <https://my.charlotte.edu>. A link to DegreeWorks can be found under the Academic Resources heading.

Changes to the Program of Study may be necessary due to changes in course offerings or changes in course choices. In the event that a course(s) is added or deleted, the student must submit an academic petition for course substitution, which is available online through Banner Self-Service (accessible at <https://my.charlotte.edu>). All changes must be approved and submitted prior to sitting for the Qualifying Examination.

Annual Progress Report

Doctoral students and candidates are evaluated annually to ensure that they are making sufficient progress to complete the degree in a timely manner. This evaluation is especially important during the dissertation process when students have less programmatic interaction and structure as they work more independently conducting their dissertation research.

Each academic year (Fall and Spring semesters), students will complete a checklist of scholarly activities and submit their curriculum vitae accompanied by a formal cover letter highlighting significant academic accomplishments during the calendar year and progress toward the degree. The evaluation content includes academic and research progress, professional development evaluation, and plans for the following year. Students must submit an Annual Progress Report to be in good academic standing. **Students are also required to attach a CV with relevant items highlighted from the current academic year.** Upon completion of this evaluation and agreement between the student and the advisor/chair regarding the content, the advisor/chair or the student will submit the completed and signed form to the Ph.D. Program Director for final approval. The advisor/chair may also provide additional confidential feedback regarding the student's performance. These materials will be submitted to the student's Academic Advisor or, later, the Dissertation Chair and then forwarded to the Ph.D. Program Director. All materials are due by April 15. Students can download the form from the shared Dropbox folder.

Time Limits for Completion of the program follow those set by the Graduate School; please review the Time Limits for Completion previously discussed in this Handbook.

Deadlines for Form Submission

Deadlines for submission of various forms, such as for Admission to Candidacy and Application for Graduation in a particular semester, are available in the [Academic Calendar](#). Students should note that dates for submission of candidacy forms and applications for graduation occur very early in each semester; for May graduation, for example, the date for the Application for Graduation and the final date for the Application for Candidacy typically occurs in the 3rd week of January. The Application for Candidacy for a Degree and the Application for Candidacy for Graduate Certificate forms are paper forms that are available from the "Graduate School Forms" page of the [Graduate School Website](#). Similarly, the last day to file a dissertation with the Graduate School for May graduation typically occurs no later than the 3rd week of March. See the Academic Calendar for exact dates that apply for a given semester.

Residency Requirement

The student must satisfy the UNC Charlotte continuous residency requirement for the program by completing 21 credit hours. Residency is considered to be continuous if the student is enrolled in 1 or more courses in successive semesters until 21 hours are earned. Continuous enrollment in the fall and spring semesters is adequate for the purpose of establishing continuous residency.

The purpose of the residency requirement is to ensure that doctoral students benefit from and contribute to a broad array of educational and professional opportunities provided on the UNC Charlotte campus. When establishing residency, it is expected that the student will regularly interact with faculty and peers by regularly participating in courses, and seminar series and

actively use the library and other facilities, including laboratories, available for graduate education.

Graduation

During the semester before the Ph.D. candidate expects to receive the degree, the candidate will review their academic record and progress on the dissertation with the Chair(s) of their Dissertation Committee. If the Chair(s) of the Dissertation Committee agrees that all work on the dissertation, including the defense, is likely to be successfully completed by the end of the following semester, the candidate will complete the "**Application for Degree**" form on Banner Self Service. The candidate will then be billed by Student Accounts for the Application for Degree fee. Graduation announcements may be ordered through the campus bookstore. Caps, gowns, and hoods may be either rented or purchased through the bookstore.

Doctoral students must apply for graduation by the published deadline in the final term. Students who fail to apply for graduation by the published deadline will not be evaluated for graduation and will be ineligible to participate in the commencement ceremony.

Qualifying Examination

Purpose of Qualifying Examination

The purpose of the qualifying examination is to assess a student's ability to apply and synthesize knowledge and quantitative skills acquired during the doctoral coursework to progress in the program. The qualifying exam ensures that the student has acquired a solid foundation of knowledge in epidemiology. It assesses their understanding of core concepts, theories, methodologies, and statistical techniques used in epidemiological research. This includes topics such as study design, data collection and analysis, biostatistics, disease surveillance, causal inference, and the interpretation of epidemiological findings. The exam assesses students' analytical and critical thinking skills by evaluating their ability to analyze and interpret epidemiological data, identify potential biases or confounding factors, and draw meaningful conclusions from empirical evidence. Students are expected to demonstrate their research competence by designing epidemiological studies, analyzing data sets, critiquing published research, or proposing novel research methodologies to investigate epidemiological issues.

Examination Guidelines

The Qualifying Examination will take place in August and January of each year (exact dates to be announced to students at least two months in advance). The examination must be taken and passed prior to enrollment in dissertation research credit hours (HSRD 8901).

Qualifying Examination Committee

The Epidemiology Ph.D. Qualifying Examination Committee is responsible for administering the exam, writing questions and detailed rubrics that encompass the subject matter for the classes in an integrative manner.

Examination Format

The Qualifying Examination will have two parts. Part 1 will be a closed-book, closed-notes, in-class, half-day (4-hour) written examination, assessing the student's core knowledge of epidemiology and biostatistical concepts and methods. Students are not allowed to use cell phones or other electronic devices during the examination unless instructed otherwise. On the day of the exam, students will be provided with a laptop or PC to type the responses. The examination questions may include, but are not limited to, short essays, critiques of epidemiology articles, study designs, and brief computational exercises.

Part 2 will be an open-book, notes, take-home exam, assessing students' quantitative data analysis and interpretation skills. Students will be given exam questions after submitting Part 1 of the examination and will have until 11:59 p.m. the following day to complete the exam. Students will be provided with a research scenario along with research questions and/or hypotheses and dataset(s). The student will analyze the data set to address the research

questions/hypotheses using appropriate epidemiological and statistical methods. Students are allowed to seek help from any individual or internet bot, such as ChatGPT, Bard, or similar AI-based algorithms, for **coding purposes only**. All examinations will be subject to plagiarism AI detection software. If the qualifying examination committee suspects any violation of the academic integrity code or seeks clarification of student responses, it may invite the student for an oral defense. The examination must be taken and passed prior to enrollment in dissertation research credit hours.

The Qualifying Examination Committee has determined that the following Methods classes may be included in the examination:

HLTH 6260: Analytic Epidemiology
HLTH 8282: Health Survey Design and Research
EPID 8274: Advanced Methods in Epidemiology
EPID 8272: Survival Analysis
EPID 8273: Multilevel and Longitudinal Data Analysis
EPID 8275: Spatial Epidemiology
EPID 8276: Systematic Reviews and Meta-analysis

The schedule for the Qualifying Examination is provided below (note: times are approximate):

Day 1: In-Class

9am-1pm: Core Knowledge

Day 2: Take-Home

Due by 11:59pm: Data analysis skills

Examination Grading

Questions will be graded independently by the faculty member who wrote the question and one additional grader familiar with the course material using the rubric provided to the Epidemiology Ph.D. Qualifying Examination Committee. If the scores of the two graders do not agree, a third grader will be asked to grade the student's response. Individuals responsible for grading the Knowledge section will be provided with the responses to those questions during the afternoon of Day 1. Individuals responsible for grading the Skills section will be provided with those responses by the evening of Day 2. It is expected that all grading will occur within 48-72 hours of receipt of the responses, so students can be notified of the outcome of their Qualifying Examination in a timely manner. Please note that, in January, graders may require more than 72 hours, as they will also be grading final exams for their own courses.

The scores for the questions within the Knowledge section will be averaged to derive an overall score for that section. Similarly, the scores for questions within the Skills section will be

averaged to derive an overall score for that section. To pass the Qualifying Examination, a student must achieve a passing score of at least 70 in both sections.

Second Attempt at Qualifying Exams

If a student fails one section of the Qualifying Examination, they may retake just that one section the next time the Qualifying Examination is offered. If a student fails both sections, they will need to retake the entire examination the next time it is offered. If the student fails a second time, they will be dismissed from the program.

Students may not register for HSRD 8901 until they have successfully passed their Qualifying Examination. In the event that a student does not pass the Qualifying Examination on their first attempt, the student should consult with their advisor and Program Director to determine additional classwork that should be taken to assist in preparing for a subsequent iteration of the Qualifying Examination.

The Dissertation Process

The dissertation is an original research project conceived, conducted, analyzed, and interpreted by the student to demonstrate expertise in their concentration and chosen specialty area as it relates to epidemiology. The research must make a distinct, original contribution to the field of epidemiologic research. Students cannot register for dissertation credits until they have passed their Qualifying Examination. Students must complete a minimum of 18 credit hours of dissertation research activity. Per University policy, students must be continuously enrolled in dissertation credit hours beginning with the semester after the dissertation topic proposal is approved through and including the semester of graduation.

Definition of the Doctoral Dissertation

An appropriate dissertation provides an original and significant contribution to epidemiologic research within the candidate's chosen field of concentration as judged by the candidate's doctoral Dissertation Committee. The dissertation is the culmination of the research experience in the Epidemiology Ph.D. program.

"Original contribution" implies that the body of work undertaken and intellectual contribution of the research is the candidate's own. The candidate is expected to be an expert in the contributions of other scholars, providing a foundation for their original research.

"Significant contribution" implies that the result of the dissertation scholarship notably advances a useful area of epidemiologic research as judged by peer scholars. The most meaningful criterion in this regard is that the research is judged by the committee to be appropriate for submission as at least one manuscript (or at least three for those who select the three-manuscript format) to scholarly, peer-reviewed journals.

Doctoral students should demonstrate the competent application of epidemiologic research methods that are appropriate to the research question in their area of study; these methods may include quantitative or mixed methods. **Candidates selecting mixed methods must take either HLTH 8221, Qualitative Research in Behavioral Sciences, or an equivalent qualitative research course.**

The rubric used to assess the quality of the dissertation proposal is provided in the shared Dropbox folder.

Expectations for the Dissertation and Academic Integrity

Candidates must conduct their research in a manner that reflects the policies of their institution and program. Before collecting any data for research, candidates must ensure that they comply with the rules and regulations established by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). No research may be conducted prior to submission of the appropriate forms and receiving the proper approvals. Completing a Dissertation allows the candidate the opportunity to demonstrate the attainment of the necessary skills to join a wide community of academic scholars. It is, therefore, essential that candidates conduct their research in a manner that reflects academic integrity and upholds the values that have long been a tradition of the endeavor. Accordingly, candidates must be familiar with all policies regarding plagiarism and data falsification; candidates may refer to the University Code of Student Academic Integrity. All aspects of the dissertation must be completed by the candidate, be their own work, and ultimately must reflect the ability to conduct independent research. Outsourcing any element of the dissertation to be completed by a third party is strictly forbidden. This includes, but is not limited to, using consultants to collect and/or analyze data. Translation or transcription services may be used with prior approval of the Program Director, Committee Chair(s), and IRB Board. If the candidate is uncertain about the originality of their work, they may consult a plagiarism detection service, or contact the Research Integrity Office. Candidates are always permitted and encouraged to consult with their dissertation committee members for assistance.

Selecting a Dissertation Chair

Each student will typically identify a Dissertation Committee Chair during the second year of full-time study. Those enrolled part-time may take longer than two years to select a Dissertation Committee Chair. Once the Dissertation Committee Chair is selected, they become the student's academic advisor for the remainder of the program. The Dissertation Chair will advise the student in their area of specialization and guide the student in recommending additional courses relevant to the planned dissertation.

The selection and/or invitation of a Dissertation Chair should be discussed in consultation with the Program Director. Dissertations are chaired by graduate faculty and are selected by agreement between the student and the faculty member. Graduate faculty is a status category determined by the Graduate School. Tenure track faculty are graduate faculty and a handful of others. Faculty are aware of their graduate faculty status. The Dissertation Chair must be

Program Faculty in the Epidemiology Ph.D. Program. If a committee has co-chairs, at least one member must be Program Faculty in the Epidemiology Ph.D. program. The other co-chair can also be Program Faculty or Affiliate Faculty in the Epidemiology Ph.D. Program.

If the Dissertation Chair has content expertise but lacks quantitative epidemiologic expertise, the student must select a committee member as Co-Chair who has epidemiologic methods expertise. Similarly, if the Dissertation Chair has epidemiologic methods expertise but lacks content expertise, the student may select a committee member as Co-Chair who has content expertise. For brevity, Dissertation Chair and Co-Chair (if applicable) are hereafter referred to as Dissertation Chair(s). Co-Chair can be Affiliate faculty.

Chair(s) Responsibilities

The Dissertation Chair(s) play an important role in guiding the student throughout the dissertation process. The dissertation chair(s) typically:

1. Meet with the student regularly, at least once a month.
2. Provides guidance on research questions and hypotheses.
3. Provides guidance on research methodology.
4. Reviews drafts of dissertation chapters and provides constructive feedback.
5. Ensure that the dissertation is original, rigorous, reproducible, and meets academic and ethical standards (see item 3 of Developing the Dissertation Proposal)
6. Facilitate communication with other members of the committee.
7. Ensure the student is ready for the defense.
8. Complete dissertation rubrics and graduate school forms at the end of the defense.

The Dissertation Chair(s) will guide the student in formulating their Dissertation Committee and through the dissertation process. Having identified a Chair(s) who agrees to serve in that role, the student can commence forming a Doctoral Dissertation Committee as outlined below.

Students Responsibilities

A PhD student has several responsibilities toward their dissertation chair(s) throughout the dissertation process. Some of these include:

1. Maintain regular and open communication with the dissertation chair(s) to keep them updated with your progress. This may include monthly face to face, virtual or email communications.
2. Prepare a list of deliverables and deadlines at the beginning of the semester.
3. Meet the deadlines.
4. Schedule meetings with the dissertation chair(s) in advance.
5. Be prepared for meetings and provide any documents that you need to review at least one week in advance.
6. Be proactive in suggesting new ideas and seeking feedback from the dissertation chair(s).
7. Have the dissertation chair(s) review DUAs before submitting them for approval.
8. Establish a good working relationship with your dissertation chair(s).

9. Be respectful of their time and expertise.

Forming a Doctoral Dissertation Committee

The student should consult with the Dissertation Chair to identify and invite the other Dissertation Committee members. The student should work closely with the Chair on identifying other committee members who will provide relevant expertise to the dissertation research project. The student should approach other faculty about serving on the committee only after consulting with the Chair.

The composition of the student's Dissertation Committee will adhere to all Graduate School Requirements and must have a **minimum of four members**. At least three members including the Graduate School Representative must be from UNC Charlotte.

1. The Dissertation Chair, who must be Program Faculty in the Epidemiology Ph.D. Program.
2. Graduate School Representative.
3. A third member with Program or Affiliate status in the Epidemiology Ph.D. Program.
4. A fourth member with Program or Affiliate status in the Epidemiology Ph.D. Program.

The Graduate School Representative is a member of the doctoral student's advisory committee, appointed by the Graduate School, who ensures that the doctoral student is treated fairly and impartially by their advisory committee and that University standards and policies are upheld. The Graduate School Representative must be from a department other than ECH at UNC Charlotte. Community members or faculty from another university who do not have a UNC Charlotte Graduate Faculty appointment may also participate as one of the required members of the Dissertation Committee. However, they must be verified for graduate faculty status by the Graduate School. Please consult the Program Director for details.

The student should meet with each potential Committee member and confirm their willingness to serve on the Dissertation Committee. Committee members work with students to establish the rationale for the project, refine the scope, and ensure the feasibility of the dissertation research project. Students should work with their committee members as methods and content experts in reviewing drafts of the dissertation proposal chapters.

To have the Dissertation Committee officially appointed, the student must complete (obtain necessary signatures) and submit the "Appointment of Doctoral Dissertation Committee or DNP Scholarly Project Committee" form. The newest versions of the forms are on the [Graduate School's website](#).

Developing the Dissertation Proposal

The student, in conjunction with the Dissertation Committee, will agree on the dissertation topic. Topic Approval Meetings are highly encouraged but are not required. These meetings

help ensure the committee is actively involved and agrees to the direction and scope of the proposal.

Following the Topic Approval, the student writes the Dissertation Proposal and prepares for the Oral Proposal Defense. Students should consult with their Dissertation Chair(s) and Committee early in the process to determine whether the "traditional" or "three manuscripts" approach is most applicable to their proposed dissertation research.

The dissertation proposal for both options consists of three chapters and other elements:

1. Introduction to the problem, including the importance of the problem, the significance of the proposed research, the research question, and hypotheses. Assumptions being made that might influence the study should also be included as a section. The originality of the research and its potential to advance knowledge or theory must be explicitly explained in this chapter.
2. Conceptual model and literature review. It provides a critical appraisal of the literature and synthesizes it into a conceptual framework or model, which serves as the source of the study's hypotheses or research questions.
3. A detailed methods section including sampling, recruitment, measures, data analysis, and limitations. All variables or constructs should be described. The quantitative or mixed methods methodological approach should be fully described. All variables, constructs, or scales need to be presented along with their measurement. Details on the data collection procedures must be given. The chapter also needs to explain how the hypotheses and/or research questions will be tested/explored, with an explanation of the data analysis plan. Students can include mock tables for presenting anticipated data and analyses. Doctoral students must propose using at least two high-level analytical methods in their dissertation proposal to demonstrate their ability to conduct advanced epidemiological research. These advanced methods may include, but are not limited to, multilevel analysis, structural equation modeling, spatial analysis, negative binomial or Poisson regression, or survival analysis. Using basic linear or logistic regression analysis without an advanced analysis component is not sufficient to advance to doctoral candidacy. The ultimate goal of the dissertation is to contribute new knowledge to the field of study. By incorporating advanced analytical methods into the research proposal, students can demonstrate their readiness for conducting high-quality research and making a meaningful contribution to the field of epidemiology. Overall, this chapter should demonstrate scholarly rigor and originality.
4. Students should include appendices for any of the following that are applicable to the proposed study: questionnaire or interview guide, invitations to participate in the study, informed consent forms, codebook or data dictionary, analysis codes, data request forms, or approval letters, e.g., IRB approvals, Data User Agreements, etc.
5. Reference list. The format to be used for references and citations is chosen by the student in consultation with the Dissertation Chair. This format is used throughout the dissertation process.
6. Students who have chosen the three-manuscript option for the dissertation may use systematic review with meta-analysis or narrative synthesis as one of the three

manuscripts.

7. At the time of proposal defense, students must provide a brief document outlining the three manuscripts.

Students provide the overall idea for the dissertation, including major concepts to be investigated, measures to be used, and strategies for primary or secondary data analysis. The dissertation must be original, scholarly research that makes a meaningful contribution to the development of knowledge in epidemiology and to the student's area of specialty. Students are expected to take and maintain primary responsibility for conceptualizing and developing the research questions, methods, and analysis, as well as for carrying out the dissertation research plan. Students should approach the dissertation as an independent research activity, supported and enhanced through collaboration with the Dissertation Chair and Committee. Committee members work with students to establish the rationale for the project, refine the scope, and ensure the feasibility of the dissertation research project.

The student is expected to initiate and hold regular, substantive meetings with the Dissertation Chair(s) to discuss progress, conceptual issues, and methodological challenges.

Students are encouraged to work with their Dissertation Chair(s) as primary reader(s), sharing multiple drafts of individual chapters. At a minimum, the student must meet with the committee Chair(s) at least once a month.

- a) The student should provide the Chair(s) with at least two weeks' notice between being given any written material and the return of comments and feedback on that draft.
- b) The student and the Chair(s) will negotiate the scope of each subsequent draft, which will be submitted to the Chair(s) for comments and feedback.

Students are expected to initiate and hold meetings with Committee members as needed to keep them informed of progress and to seek assistance and guidance on substantive issues faced by the student.

- a) The student should provide the Committee member with at least two weeks' notice between being given any written material and the return of comments and feedback on that draft.
- b) The student and the committee member will negotiate the scope of each subsequent draft to be submitted to the Chair(s) for comment and feedback.

Scheduling the Dissertation Proposal Oral Defense

Students, upon agreement of the Dissertation Chair(s), will schedule the proposal defense, taking into account the availability of the other Committee members. All committee members

must be present for the oral defense of the proposal, unless prior arrangements have been made. Graduate School guidelines regarding Committee member attendance must be followed.

The student will submit to all Committee members a final draft of the proposal no later than 2 weeks before the oral defense date.

- a) Students who do not have a Dissertation Proposal defense within 2 semesters after passing the Qualifying Examination are encouraged to discuss the situation with the Program Director or the Dissertation Chair(s) and make a substantive plan to make adequate progress within the following semester.
- b) Students should keep in mind the Graduate School time limit. All courses, including accepted transferred credit(s) that are listed on the candidacy form, cannot be older than nine years at the time of graduation. Courses that exceed this time limit must be revalidated or retaken, whichever the graduate program decides necessary, if they are to count in a degree program.

Defending the Dissertation Proposal

The proposal defense is an open-session presentation to the student's Dissertation Committee and faculty, as well as students in the doctoral program. The audience will ask questions, and after the student has responded to their questions, non-committee members will be excused.

The oral defense generally lasts between 90 and 120 minutes.

- a) The session will begin with a 20-30 minute presentation of the proposed research by the student. The presentation should provide an overview of the planned dissertation research, demonstrate the student's ability to conduct the research as an independent researcher, and highlight the originality and rigor of the planned empirical work.
- b) Following the student's presentation, the Dissertation Committee members will have an opportunity to ask the student questions related to the proposal and specifics about conducting the proposed research. The questioning should verify the student's knowledge of methodology and ability to conduct research.
- c) The student will be excused from the meeting after the questioning period concludes, allowing the committee to discuss the merits of the proposal.
- d) The student will return to the meeting to receive the committee's comments and any required modifications to the research plan. The committee may use a portion of this time to problem-solve with the student about modifications to the proposal that would enhance the possibility of the dissertation research being successful.

It is generally expected that all committee members and the students attend the proposal defense in person. However, if, for any reason, a committee member on the student is unable to attend in person, remote participation is appropriate. [Graduate school requires](#) that all committee members participate in the proposal defense, in person or virtually.

Approval of the dissertation proposal constitutes a contract between the student and the committee. Any substantive change in scope, research questions or hypotheses, analytic approach, or format requires the consensus of the committee and could necessitate another proposal defense.

Grading the Dissertation Proposal

At the conclusion of the oral portion, the Dissertation Committee will hold an executive session to collectively complete the grading rubric and arrive at a final grade.

A detailed grading rubric is provided in the shared Dropbox folder.

The overall written and oral proposal defense outcome is graded as Pass, Pass (contingent upon revisions, and Fail. A Pass (contingent upon revisions) requires additional substantive revisions, as determined by the committee and completed within 6 months. If students fail the proposal defense, they can redefend it only once. The entire proposal can be redefended only once; this option is at the sole discretion of the Dissertation Committee, **in consultation with the Program Director**.

Regardless of total score, receiving a "not acceptable" rating for any criterion of the written or oral sections constitutes a failing grade. For the written section, typically, a score of 18-13 constitutes a pass, with minor revisions; a score of 12-10 constitutes a conditional pass, with substantial revisions; and a score of 9-6 constitutes a fail. For the oral section, typically a score of 9-7 constitutes pass; a score of 6-5 constitutes pass, with room for improvement; and a score of 4-3 constitutes fail.

If the student's performance is marginal in part or in whole, the Dissertation Committee may choose to require substantive revisions to the proposed research or may require preliminary pilot data collection to verify the feasibility of the full dissertation research before proceeding to full data collection. The Dissertation Committee will determine whether:

- a) Changes will require additional work but not a subsequent defense (i.e., "Pass (contingent upon revisions)")
- b) Changes may require a subsequent defense (i.e., "fail"); however, this option is at the discretion of the Dissertation Committee in consultation with the Program Director.

Students may not advance to conducting the dissertation research until the Dissertation Proposal Defense has been passed.

Candidacy

The dissertation topic may only be proposed after the student has passed the Qualifying Examination. A doctoral student advances to candidacy after the dissertation proposal has been approved by the student's Dissertation Committee and the Graduate School. **Candidacy must be achieved at least six months before the degree is conferred.**

After successful defense of the Dissertation Proposal, students submit forms as required by the Graduate School and listed at <http://graduateschool.charlotte.edu/current-students/forms>. Students, in collaboration with the Dissertation Chairperson, should be prepared to bring the correct form to the Oral Proposal Defense for signatures at the time of the defense.

Submitting Graduate School Forms

Doctoral Student Forms are submitted electronically through DocuSign unless otherwise noted. For more information, see <https://graduateschool.charlotte.edu/current-students/graduation-clearance/doctoral-checklist>. A copy of each form will be included in the student's program file. The newest versions of the forms are on the [Graduate School's website](#).

Human Subjects Considerations

If human subjects will be used in the dissertation research, the "Proposal Defense for Doctoral Dissertation and/or Master's Thesis" requires the attachment of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. Students are expected to work closely with their Dissertation Chair to prepare and revise the required IRB documents, forms, consents, and protocols. All dissertation-related materials must comply with ethical review guidelines current at the time of review. Students are required to submit all required documents for review and receive formal approval prior to beginning any research involving human subjects.

Conducting the Dissertation Research

The student should maintain regular contact with the Dissertation Committee Chair as the student implements the dissertation proposal. Students will plan, conduct, analyze, and interpret an original research project as described in the research proposal. Whether students collect primary data or analyze secondary data, they must follow all applicable Human Subject Protection protocols.

Writing the Dissertation

While the student writes the dissertation, s/he is required to maintain continuous enrollment in HSRD 8901 for dissertation study until the dissertation is completed. The continuous enrollment requirement begins in the semester after the dissertation proposal is approved. Students conducting dissertation research should meet regularly with their Committee Chair and other members of the committee. At a minimum, the student must meet with the Committee Chair at least once each semester. Students are encouraged to work with their dissertation Chair as a primary reader, sharing multiple drafts of individual chapters. Students

should work with their Committee members with methods and content expertise to review dissertation chapter drafts.

The dissertation must be original, scholarly research that makes a meaningful contribution to the development of knowledge or theory in epidemiology and to the student's area of specialty. Students are expected to take and maintain primary responsibility for conceptualizing and developing the research questions, methods, and analysis, as well as for carrying out the dissertation research plan. The student should approach the dissertation as an independent research activity, supported and enhanced through collaboration with the Dissertation Chair and Committee.

Students have two options for the format of the dissertation. They may choose either the traditional five-chapter format or the three-manuscript format (which also has five chapters). The breadth, depth, and rigor are the same for both formats. The student chooses the format in close collaboration with the Dissertation Chair and the Dissertation Committee. The choice of format occurs during the proposal development stage and cannot be changed once the dissertation proposal has been approved. Each of the two formats is detailed below.

The traditional five-chapter dissertation format

Chapter One: Introduction. This chapter provides an introduction to the problem, including the problem statement, its importance to public health, the significance of the proposed research in addressing the problem, and the research questions and hypotheses. The importance of the problem to the field of public health should be explicit. The originality of the research and its potential to advance knowledge or theory must be explicitly explained in this chapter. Assumptions that might influence the study should also be included as a section.

Chapter Two: Conceptual Model and Literature Review. A thorough and critical appraisal of the literature relevant to the problem is provided. This should include any theories or conceptual models that have been applied or are relevant to the problem. The literature review should focus on developing hypotheses to be tested and/or addressing research questions. The chapter should conclude with the hypotheses and/or questions. The conceptual framework driving the research should be described and diagrammed.

Chapter Three: Methods. The methodological approach, quantitative or mixed methods, should be fully described. For quantitative studies, all variables, constructs, or scales that are used need to be presented along with their measurements. All interview or focus group guides must be explained for mixed methods studies. Details on data collection procedures must be included. The chapter also needs to explain how the hypotheses and/or research questions were tested/explored, with an explanation of the statistical analyses. Procedures for the protection of human subjects must be included. Overall, this chapter should demonstrate scholarly rigor and originality.

Chapter Four: Results. All results of statistical analyses must be presented. Descriptive findings are usually presented first, followed by bivariate, and then multivariate. Results can also be organized by hypotheses and/or research questions.

Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations. This chapter should include a brief summary of the findings, a discussion of the results with respect to the literature that was previously reviewed, the strengths and limitations of the research, a discussion of the implications of the research for policy and practice, and suggestions for future study.

References: The format to be used for references and citations is chosen by the student in consultation with the Dissertation Chair.

Appendices: Appendices may include any of the following which are applicable to the study: a questionnaire or interview guide, invitations to participate in the study, informed consent forms, data request forms, or approval letters.

The Three-Article Dissertation Format

A departure from the traditional dissertation project, the three-article dissertation entails special preparation and formatting considerations.

Chapter 1: Introduction: This chapter contains an introduction to the problem, including the problem statement, the importance of the problem for public health, the significance of the proposed research in terms of addressing the problem, and the research questions and hypotheses. The importance of the problem to the field of epidemiology should be explicit. The originality of the research and its potential to advance knowledge or theory must be explicitly explained in this chapter. Assumptions being made that might influence the study should also be included as a section. The introduction should explain why the previously published or publishable papers were chosen, including a substantive discussion of the relationship between the various articles and parts of the research that tie them together.

Chapter 2: Article 1: The chapter/article must be complete and prepared for submission to a specified peer-reviewed journal. The article should include subsections and formatting appropriate for that peer-reviewed journal (e.g., Introduction, Methods, Results, Conclusions). It should also include the Reference List and Appendices (if applicable) for Chapter/Article 1.

Chapter 3: Article 2: The chapter/article must be complete and prepared for submission to a specified peer-reviewed journal. The article should include subsections and formatting appropriate for that peer-reviewed journal (e.g., Introduction, Methods, Results, Conclusions). It should also include the Reference List and Appendices (if applicable) for Chapter/Article 2.

Chapter 4: Article 3: The chapter/article must be complete and prepared for submission to a specified peer-reviewed journal. The article should include subsections and formatting appropriate for that peer-reviewed journal (e.g., Introduction, Methods, Results, Conclusions). It should also include the Reference List and Appendices (if applicable) for Chapter/Article 3.

Chapter 5: Overall Conclusion: A final chapter should be included, briefly summarizing the dissertation findings presented across the articles in reasonable detail, and discussing implications for public health policy and practice, as well as potential research extensions. This chapter should present an integration and synthesis that emphasizes findings across the papers, as well as research and practice implications. The conclusion should include a general discussion, applications, and ideas for future research that emerge from the three separate articles as well as from the dissertation as a whole.

General References. The format to be used for references and citations is chosen by the student in consultation with the Dissertation Chair. References are for Chapters One and Five only since each article has its own reference list.

Appendices: Appendices may include any of the following, which are applicable to the study: a questionnaire or interview guide, invitations to participate in the study, informed consent forms, data request forms, or approval letters.

Special Considerations for the Three-Manuscript Format

The three-manuscript dissertation option is a departure from the traditional dissertation format and requires special considerations. Students should discuss this option with their dissertation chair as early in the process as possible. Outlined below are some of the important requirements for the three manuscript formats. These include, but are not limited to

- Minimum of three articles
- Coherence between articles. The articles that make up the dissertation must clearly justify their use in context. All articles must relate to the theme of the dissertation as a whole without overlapping so heavily that the inclusion of an article makes its existence redundant.
- Authorship and quality. Each article must be of publishable quality, as determined by the student's dissertation committee. Previously published work may be used, but the student must be the first author, and **previously published articles are limited to a maximum of one (1) prior to the proposal defense**. This includes any work that has been accepted for publication. Students should consult with all members of their Dissertation Committee if they intend to use previously published work.
- The draft of the manuscript included in the final dissertation shall be the draft agreed upon by the dissertation chair or designated committee member who provides expertise on the content of that particular manuscript. It is expected that this draft of the manuscript will be suitable for sharing with the entire committee, although it may still require additional editing and revisions. This is the version of the manuscript that the student will be rated using the Final Dissertation Defense Rubric Report. It is expected that committee members will provide additional edits and suggestions to be included in the draft manuscript that will be submitted for publication.
- Proper copyright permission must be obtained from the copyright holder before a student uses their previously published material, as required by law. This may

- include multiple authors' releases where applicable.
- More information can be found in the [Graduate School Three Article Dissertation Guidelines](#). Additionally, students should review [the Doctoral Students Checklist](#) and contact Graduate Completion Specialist with any questions or concerns about dissertation formatting.

Defending the Dissertation

Each candidate must pass a final examination of the contents of the dissertation. Sometimes called the "dissertation defense" or the "dissertation oral," this is the culminating activity of doctoral studies. The dissertation defense is scheduled when the dissertation Chair and the student concur that the student has a final product that meets with the initial Committee member approval. Typically, the Dissertation Chair and Committee should not schedule the defense until they are reasonably confident that the dissertation is likely to be approved, either as-is or with relatively minor revisions.

The dissertation defense is open to all members of the University community and must be announced to the campus. The announcement of the final defense can be disseminated through the [Academic Affairs listserv](#) or the posting of flyers on campus. The announcement of the dissertation defense should include identification of the student's full name, the date of the defense, the location of the defense, the time of the defense, the title of the dissertation, the name of the Chair of the Dissertation Committee, and a brief abstract of the dissertation. Doctoral students should complete the form for the Academic Affairs listserv at least two weeks prior to their defense date. The student also must provide the Ph.D. Program Director with the dissertation defense announcement information **at least two weeks before the final examination**. The final examination is open to the university community.

The Graduate School requires that the dissertation must be submitted to the committee at least two weeks before the date of the final examination in which the dissertation is defended. Guidelines for the preparation of the dissertation are available from the Graduate School and on the Graduate School website.

The dissertation defense is a public research presentation in which the student formally presents the research, its results, interpretation, and implications.

As with proposal defense, it is generally expected that all committee members and the student attend the proposal defense in person. However, if, for any reason, a committee member or the student is unable to attend in person, remote participation is an appropriate alternative. Graduate school requires that all committee members participate in the proposal defense, in person or virtually.

Non-committee audience members may ask questions. When these questions are concluded, the audience will be excused, and the Committee members will engage in asking questions. When all questions have been put forth, the student will be excused, and the committee will

make its determination. The outcome of the exam is pass or fail. A passing evaluation might include conditions for revisions prior to the final acceptance of the dissertation. A failing evaluation results in the student's dismissal from the program. No student is permitted to defend their dissertation more than twice.

The final defense is graded using the Final Defense Rubric found in the shared Dropbox folder. The scoring of the defense results in either a Pass, Pass (contingent upon revisions) or Fail.

At the conclusion of the dissertation defense, the **"Final Defense Report"** form is signed by the entire Dissertation Committee. The form is submitted electronically through DocuSign.

The physical form of the dissertation is governed by the University. Dissertations must conform to required margins, paper type, and so forth in order to be accepted by the Graduate School. The student should consult these resources at The Graduate School early in the dissertation process: Manual of General Formatting Requirements for Dissertations and Theses and other resources available at the [Dissertation & Thesis Formatting webpage](#) through the Graduate School.

Grading of Dissertation Credits

Dissertation credits will be formally graded each semester with a grade of either SP (Satisfactory Progress) or UP (Unsatisfactory Progress). The Program Director will contact dissertation committee chairs to obtain their assessment of the student's progress each semester. Students are encouraged to review the [updated grading policy](#).

Support Opportunities for Ph.D. Students

Graduate Assistantships

Exceptionally qualified full-time students may be offered graduate assistantships in the form of research assistantships, teaching assistantships, or instructor-of-record positions. The award of the assistantship is based on the Graduate School guidelines and is contingent upon the availability of funds.

The assistantship provides a stipend (salary), currently \$20,000 per year, for a 9-month academic year position with a work commitment of 20 hours per week (excluding university holiday periods). Students with assistantships will assist faculty with research, teaching, and/or service. The Epidemiology Ph.D. program offers students the opportunity to teach selected undergraduate courses, such as HLTH 4104 Epidemiology, under the supervision of the course faculty member. The Epidemiology Ph.D. program strives to match student research interests with those of the faculty with whom they are assigned for the graduate assistantship, although this cannot be guaranteed in every instance. The award package covers resident and non-resident tuition (as relevant) and covers the University's student health insurance program. More information can be found at the graduate school's [Student Funding and Assistantships](#)

[website](#). Students with assistantships must maintain good academic standing (B or better – GPA ≥ 3.0).

If a student has a Graduate School-funded GA position provided by the PhD program, students are expected to be working on campus. If you cannot come to campus on a regular basis, you must inform the Program Director. Accommodation will be considered on a case-by-case basis but are not guaranteed.

Professional Responsibilities of Students with Graduate Assistantships

Graduate assistantships are intended to serve as an extension of the teaching and research mission of the Epidemiology Ph.D. program and the College of Health and Human Services by giving students experience in research and teaching in a mentorship relationship with faculty. Students with assistantships will also gain experience in fulfilling academic service needs and, in this way, will learn more about becoming a productive and successful member of an academic community. While serving in on- or off-campus graduate assistantships, students are representatives of UNC Charlotte. As such, they will act with total professionalism at all times.

Graduate assistants are expected to provide service to the Epidemiology Ph.D. program, the College, the University, and the community. Such service can include: attending orientation for 1st-year Epidemiology Ph.D. students (for 2nd-year students and above); mentoring 1st-year doctoral students; attending faculty candidate research presentations; meeting with faculty candidates during times scheduled for students; service as an officer or active member of the Public Health Sciences Ph.D. student organization; membership on departmental, College, or University committees; assisting the Program Director with occasional information gathering required by the Epidemiology Ph.D. program and the College; performing service in the community as a representative of the Epidemiology Ph.D. program, and so forth. Although success in the Epidemiology Ph.D. program is primarily judged by scholarship, the Epidemiology Ph.D. program takes the student's record of service into consideration when recommending students for fellowships and grants, including travel grants, tuition support, and competitive dissertation-year fellowships at the University.

All graduate assistants are required to provide monthly reports of their work schedules and productivity as a requirement for retaining the graduate assistantship.

Graduate assistantships are typically arranged for 9-month commitments. Graduate assistants receive University holidays.

Graduate assistants enrolled in GASP (Graduate Assistant Support Plan) must register for a minimum of 9 graduate credit hours each term. Students with support from the GASP must maintain at least a 3.0 GPA to be eligible for continued support.

If a student does not have an assistantship, the Graduate School does not impose any limitations on either part-time or full-time employment. Students with assistantships are limited to no more than 20 hours of total weekly employment. Thus, students with

assistantships of 20 hours per week are not permitted to have additional employment. Students with assistantships who consider taking part-time teaching positions at the University must consult with the Program Director, as in this situation, the number of hours devoted to the assistantship must be reduced to limit total weekly work hours to 20.

All graduate assistants will have performance evaluations conducted each semester. The supervisor will complete the "Graduate Assistant Evaluation Form" each semester to evaluate progress and performance. These forms are due to the Ph.D. Program Director by December 1st for the Fall semester and April 15 for the Spring Semester. Teaching assistants' performances will be additionally evaluated by their students. The teaching assistant's supervisor should administer this evaluation form to students enrolled in the class such that it can be completed anonymously.

Rescinding Graduate Assistantships

This section outlines the policy regarding the rescinding of graduate assistantships for PhD students whose GPA falls below 3.0 or who receive a grade of C or UP in any course during their graduate studies. The purpose of this policy is to maintain academic integrity and high standards within our PhD programs in Epidemiology and Public Health Sciences, ensuring that students are adequately prepared for their research and eventual contributions to their fields. This policy applies to all PhD students currently holding graduate assistantships, including teaching assistantships (TAs) and research assistantships (RAs) funded by grants, the Graduate School, the Department of Epidemiology and Community Health, or any other sources across the University.

1. The graduate school requires that students maintain a GPA of at least 3.0 to retain their graduate assistantship funding. A PhD student whose GPA drops below 3.0 in any semester may have their graduate assistantship terminated immediately, and the student will not be considered for future graduate assistantships in the PHS and Epidemiology PhD Programs.
2. Instructors teaching in the PhD program are encouraged to notify the program director and/or the student's supervisor if a student is not succeeding in the course by mid-semester.
3. A PhD student on a graduate assistantship who receives a C or a grade of "UP" in any course must inform their academic advisor and the PhD program director via email **within one week**, explaining the reason behind the unsatisfactory performance. Failure to notify may result in termination of graduate assistantship, if applicable, or cancellation of registration.
4. The program director will review the student's academic record and consult with the course instructor to understand the context of the grade.
5. The student will be required to meet with their academic advisor and the program director to discuss the grade and its implications.
6. The program director and/or supervisor, in consultation with the department chair, will notify the student of the final decision and any conditions for continuing the

assistantship, if applicable, via email within two weeks of receiving the student's initial notification.

A PhD student who receives two C's or a U is suspended from the program, and a graduate assistantship, if applicable, is terminated. The student has the right to appeal within **five business days** of receiving the final decision. The appeal must be submitted in writing via email to the PhD program committee, explaining the circumstances surrounding the unsatisfactory grade(s) and providing supporting documents. The letter must also outline the steps the student will take to improve their academic grades. The PhD Program Committee will consult with the student's academic advisor and/or supervisor before making the final decision. The committee's decision on the appeal will be final.

Conference Support and Travel

Professional development funding is available to full-time and part-time students. Support can include conference registration, air and ground travel, food, and lodging. Special State budget criteria apply to students who do not hold assistantships; although their conference travel may be fundable, students who do not have assistantships must consult with the appropriate administrative staff about the budget criteria details. Podium and poster presentations will be given equal priority; however, student conference travel receives the highest priority.

- Students need to discuss potential uses of professional development funds with the program director **at least 45 days** before the event.
- Students working on travel budgets should consult with the appropriate administrative staff. Students may contact the program director for current contact information. It is the student's responsibility to develop the initial travel budget and itinerary.
- Download the travel application form from the shared Dropbox folder and submit it, along with any supporting documents, to the program director for approval.
- Students arranging conference travel are responsible for making flight reservations, identifying a hotel, registering for the conference, and making any related reservations or arrangements.
- Students are encouraged to work closely with the appropriate administrative staff regarding these arrangements. However, it is the student's responsibility to make reservations for flights, lodging, and conference accommodations.
- Particularly, in an era of tight budgets, conferences that might be viewed by the public as taking place in resort areas or related travel destinations will not be funded. Showing appropriate restraint in the budget request can increase the likelihood of funding; this can be demonstrated by sharing costs among students (e.g., shared lodging, selecting low-cost accommodations, etc.).
- Students receiving conference travel support are expected to provide all required receipts and evidence of conference attendance (e.g., boarding passes) to the appropriate administrative staff within one week of returning from the conference.

Students are expected to seek funding from the UNC Charlotte Graduate & Professional Student Government (GPSG). Students will not be reimbursed for support dollars that would

typically be funded by GPSG travel funds. Travel forms are available at <https://gpsg.uncc.edu/travel-funding>.

Failure to complete and submit the Annual Progress Report will result in funds being withheld.

We cannot guarantee funding for all travel requests. Please do not assume that you have received a travel award until the Ph.D. Program Director has notified you.

Research Support

Support is conditional on the availability of funds. Funds can be used to cover expenses directly related to the conduct of dissertation related research, such as statistical software license, participant incentives, travel to data collection sites, and specialized data analysis courses which are not available at UNC Charlotte.

Priority will be given to students who have defended a dissertation proposal and who have the support of their dissertation advisor.

UNC Charlotte Student Resources

Center for Graduate Life and Learning

To be successful, graduate students must do more than excel in their academic work. Success requires that students develop skills like public speaking, professional writing, and financial literacy. The Graduate School sponsors professional development opportunities for graduate students through the Center for Graduate Life. The Center features teaching seminars, writing workshops, sessions on research skills, programs on writing a dissertation, and more. In addition to gaining new skills, students have the opportunity to network with peers from across disciplines. These workshops are covered through the usual tuition and fees, without additional cost. You can find details about the Center for Graduate Life at: <https://gradlife.charlotte.edu/>

The Graduate School at UNC Charlotte also offers a broad array of other professional development activities, including career fairs, funding opportunities, and special guest speakers, throughout the year. Public Health Sciences Ph.D. students are updated about these opportunities through email announcements from the Ph.D. Program Director.

Career Services

The UNC Charlotte Career Center "is committed to providing Qualifying, innovative services, and resources for diverse populations of students, alumni, and employers that prepare UNC Charlotte graduates for the competitive global market." The office is located at 150 Atkins Building. This office serves students who need assistance in successfully transitioning from college or graduate school to their chosen field or career. Information is available at <http://career.charlotte.edu/>

Student services offered by the Career Center include workshops on career planning, internships, writing resumes and cover letters, and effective interviewing.

Disability Services

The Office of Disability Services works with current undergraduate and graduate students along with prospective students to ensure equal access to UNC Charlotte's campus and educational programs. All services are dependent upon verification of eligibility. Once approved for services, students receive appropriate and reasonable accommodations, which are based on the nature of an individual's disability and documented needs. Their contact information is 704-684-0040, website: <http://ds.charlotte.edu/>

Counseling Center

The UNC Charlotte Center for Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) offers individual counseling to assist students with concerns of a personal nature by helping them develop better-coping strategies, resolve conflicts and handle crisis situations. Typical concerns are depression, anxiety and stress, relationship issues, identity development, substance use

problems, and eating and body image issues. Further information is at:

<http://caps.charlotte.edu/>

Also available is a staff psychiatrist, through the Student Health Center, to assess whether medication may be helpful in addressing the student's concern or for follow-up on previously prescribed medications. The psychiatrist will write prescriptions when appropriate and follow up with students to make adjustments to medications as necessary. Further information is available at: <https://studenthealth.charlotte.edu>

Students who wish to consult with our psychiatrist should contact the Student Health Center directly at 704-687-7400. Students can also discuss a referral to psychiatry with a counselor at the CAPS. The counseling and psychiatry services are supported by the usual tuition and fees and are available without additional cost.

Ombudsman Services

The Ombudsman for the Graduate School is a faculty member who helps graduate students and members of the Graduate School community navigate and manage conflict in a constructive way. The Ombuds is an advocate for fairness who listens to graduate students' concerns and helps students achieve a greater understanding of the problem and possible solutions and looks for information and resources applicable to the situation. Students should contact the ombudsman as soon as a concern develops. Concerns can include almost any issue arising within the university setting, including personal and academic concerns. Further information is available at [Ombudsman | The Graduate School | UNC Charlotte](#)

Professional Student Organizations

Graduate and Professional Student Government (GPSG)

The purpose of the GPSG, according to the by-laws, is to serve as an appropriate voice on campus for graduate students, to meet the various needs of graduate students, and to establish a liaison between graduate faculty, graduate students, and the University. The UNC Charlotte GPSG is here to serve as an advocate for students, and it will be as strong and effective as the passion and participation of its members; thus, your active participation will ensure that your issues are heard and addressed.

Graduate Public Health Association (GPHA)

The purpose of GPHA is to foster an environment that contributes to the enhancement of the academic and professional concerns, goals, and careers of public health students and others at UNC Charlotte interested in the professions of Public Health. See <https://publichealth.charlotte.edu/student-resources/student-organizations> for more information.

The GPHA also is the official voice of students in the governance and continuous quality improvement processes within the graduate public health programs. While students are always welcomed and encouraged to directly contact faculty and administrators with course and/or program concerns and suggestions, the GPHA provides an official voice with representatives on the Graduate Public Health Programs Committee. Doctoral students are encouraged to participate in GPHA as leaders.

Doctoral Student Responsibilities and Code of Ethics

Code of Student Academic Integrity

Students enrolled in any educational program in CHHS are required to demonstrate the highest ethical standards. These requirements pertain to both academic and professional behavior.

All Epidemiology Ph.D. students are required to read and abide by the Code of Student Academic Integrity (<https://legal.charlotte.edu/policies/up-407>). Please especially note: you are held accountable to this Code even if you violate it inadvertently.

Violations include the following:

Cheating - Intentionally using or attempting to use unauthorized materials, information, notes, study aids, or other devices in any academic exercise. This definition includes unauthorized communication of information during an academic exercise.

Fabrication and falsification - Intentional and unauthorized alteration or invention of any information or citation in an academic exercise. Falsification is a matter of altering information, while fabrication is a matter of inventing or counterfeiting information for use in any academic exercise.

Multiple submissions - The submission of substantial portions of the same academic work (including oral reports) for credit more than once without instructor approval.

Plagiarism - Intentionally or knowingly presenting the work of another as one's own (i.e., without proper acknowledgment of the source). The only exception to the requirement of acknowledging sources is when the ideas, information, etc., are common knowledge.

Abuse of academic materials - Intentionally or knowingly destroying, stealing, or making inaccessible library or other academic resource material. Typical Examples: Stealing or destroying library or reference materials needed by other students.

Complicity in academic dishonesty - Intentionally or knowingly helping or attempting to help another to commit an act of academic dishonesty.

Applicable Policies

Epidemiology Ph.D. students are expected to be knowledgeable about and abide by the policies of the CHHS and UNC Charlotte.

- The policies for CHHS can be found in the CHHS Handbook, located at: <https://health.charlotte.edu/node/1547>
- The Graduate School policies are located at: <https://graduateschool.charlotte.edu/faculty-and-staff-resources/academics-and-policies>

The University level policies can be found at: <https://legal.charlotte.edu/policies/university-policies>

University policies that are highly relevant for Public Health Sciences Ph.D. students include, but are not limited to

- The Code of Student Responsibility (<http://legal.charlotte.edu/policies/up-406>);
- The Code of Student Academic Integrity (<https://legal.charlotte.edu/policies/up-407>);
- Sexual Harassment Policy and Grievance Procedures (<https://legal.charlotte.edu/policies/up-502>);
- Information Technology Services' Standard for Responsible Use (<https://itservices.charlotte.edu/iso/standard-responsible-use>)
- Authorship Policy and Resolution Procedures (<https://legal.charlotte.edu/policies/up-318>)

Students are highly encouraged to review the policy on authorship before the submission of a manuscript. The policy intends to provide a straightforward approach to authorship practices to prevent or resolve disputes.

Note: Both the Graduate School and the College of Health and Human Services have adopted policies requiring students to demonstrate knowledge and awareness of academic integrity violations and policies. **All newly admitted doctoral students are required to enroll in the online non-credit course GRAD 8990 –Academic Integrity.** This course must be successfully completed before registering for the next semester.

Doctoral students are typically expected to thoroughly understand academic integrity issues due to their undergraduate and master's-level education. As a result, the Epidemiology Ph.D. program simply expects academic integrity. A doctoral student who commits any violations listed above may be dismissed from the Epidemiology Ph.D. program.

Appeals and Complaint Process

To resolve course disputes, students are directed to first discuss the issue with the course instructor. If the issue is not resolved at that level, it should be brought to the Program Director (program, faculty conduct-related matters) or the Ph.D. Program Committee (course content, workload) via the Ph.D. Program Committee Student Representative. If the issue cannot be resolved, the Department Chair (faculty conduct-related matters) should be consulted. If the professor of the course in question is the Ph.D. Program Director or the dispute is with the actions of the Program Director, the issue should be brought directly to the Department Chair. Students can also reach out to the graduate student ombudsperson to navigate their challenges or concerns. See [Ombudsman Services](#) in the UNC Charlotte Student Resources section of this handbook or visit: [Ombudsman | The Graduate School | UNC Charlotte](#).

Laptop Policy

In addition to compliance with the UNC Charlotte Information Technology Services' Standard for Responsible Use policy described above, the program requires students to have access to a personal laptop or desktop computer with a webcam and microphone. Students may be required to bring a laptop to class at the discretion of the professor. If students do not have access to a personal laptop for required coursework, the J. Murray Atkins Library has PC and Mac laptops available for 24-hour loan periods. Laptop rentals are located on the first floor of the library near the main entrance and are available on a first-come, first-served basis. A valid UNC Charlotte ID card must be presented for laptop rentals.

Email Communication Expectations

For most students, email will be the primary source of communication between the program director, faculty, and advisors. Students are expected to check their email on a regular basis during the semester and periodically throughout the off sessions. It is crucial for students to read the entire email, not just the subject heading, to ensure content is not misunderstood.

iThenticate

The Graduate School requires all doctoral students to submit their dissertations to iThenticate, a plagiarism detection service. This tool checks documents against published items, so this process should educate and protect students from inadvertent plagiarism.

This must take place prior to the final defense, and doctoral dissertation committees are expected to review the resulting *Similarity Report* along with the final, pre-defense draft of the dissertation. Committee members will now sign the *Final Defense Report* not just to indicate that the student has passed his or her final defense, but also in order to verify the originality of the dissertation.

Visit the [iThenticate](#) tab under Current Students on the Graduate School webpage to learn more. Training videos are available there for students and faculty.