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Ph.D. in Public Health Sciences Student Handbook

2025-2026

Disclaimer: This Handbook describes the program, policies, and practices of the UNC Charlotte Ph.D. program in Public Health Sciences. 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 Public Health Sciences Ph.D. program are governed by the policies described in this Handbook.



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UNC Charlotte Public Health Sciences Program

Overview

The focus of the PhD in Public Health Sciences is to train researchers and professionals with skills essential to address contemporary public health problems at the individual, community, and population levels.

Drawing on the social-ecological framework, public health is an interdisciplinary field encompassing public health practice in the community; scientific research utilizing theoretical perspectives from disciplines such as anthropology, economics, geography, gerontology, medicine, nursing, psychology, and sociology; and 5 core areas of endeavor: environmental and occupational health, biostatistics, epidemiology, social and behavioral health factors, and health policy and administration.

Additionally, 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.

Mission of the UNC Charlotte Public Health Programs

Advance health equity and well-being in an urbanizing world.

Program Vision and Values

The Program Mission Statement reflects the consensus of our faculty and both internal and external stakeholders. Our Public Health Programs mission supports and reinforces the mission of the Department, College, and University, and is likewise supported by the mission of its constituent degree programs. The values are embodied in our curricula and in the manner in which students, alumni, and stakeholders are engaged in ensuring the ongoing evolution of public health programs.

Vision Statement. Healthy communities partnered with responsive population health systems.

Values. Collaboration, community engagement, diversity, innovation, professionalism, health equity, and social justice.

Collaboration. We value creative, team-based, interdisciplinary, and multidisciplinary approaches to improve the public's health.

Community Engagement. We value public engagement and work with communities to build and foster lasting relationships.

Diversity. We celebrate the value of multiple backgrounds, views, and orientations to meet the public health needs of all population groups.

Innovation. We embrace idealism, excellence, entrepreneurship, and creativity to generate solutions that improve the health and well-being of all.

Professionalism. We follow a code of conduct guided by integrity, ethical standards, and respect for others.

Health Equity. We believe that all people have the right to live in environments that optimize health and well-being.

Social Justice. We advocate for fair and equitable opportunities for all members of society.

The UNC Charlotte Public Health Programs implements its mission through a set of complementary and reinforcing instructional, research, service, and diversity goals. These values then provide the framework for defining, assessing, and evaluating students and the curricula.

The Ph.D. Program in Public Health Sciences

Overview

Public health is a broad field encompassing many disciplines, activities, and stakeholders, and focuses on serving entire populations, ranging 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. Currently, the Ph.D. in Public Health Sciences offers a single concentration in behavioral sciences.

The Ph.D. program in Public Health Sciences is designed to prepare students to work with researchers, clinicians, and community partners in addressing public health problems from a multidisciplinary perspective. Emphasis in the program is on research methods, including statistical analysis, survey design, and scale development, as well as professional skills related to ethics, research conduct, and teaching. Students choose a formal concentration, which includes required courses, and an individualized specialty content area comprised of elective courses.

Administratively located in the Department of Epidemiology and Community Health (<http://www.publichealth.uncc.edu>), the Ph.D. in Public Health Sciences is interdisciplinary and consistent with the nature of public health. This approach allows the Public Health Sciences Ph.D. Program to incorporate multiple perspectives and draw on the strengths of scholars from diverse disciplines.

The Ph.D. Program in Public Health Sciences 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 Public Health Sciences 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; however, most full-time students complete the program

within 5 years, depending upon the design of their dissertation research. Graduates are prepared to work in academia, conduct large-scale public health research projects, or work in government or health-related venues.

Mission of the Doctoral Program in Public Health Sciences

The focus of the Ph.D. in Public Health Sciences is to generate researchers, scholars and health professionals with skills essential to address current and future public health problems at the individual, community and population level, with an emphasis on social determinants health, and as related to the promotion of health and well-being and the prevention of disease and disability among diverse and vulnerable populations. A primary emphasis of this doctoral degree is on working with the community in multidisciplinary teams to understand and develop programs that address the broad social-ecological factors that influence health behavior and thus health outcomes.

The Ph.D. program values knowledge generation that contributes to achieving social justice and health equity, community engagement to promote well-being across the life span, professional and academic integrity and ethics, interdisciplinary collegiality and collaboration, and academic and practice innovation and excellence in achieving optimal health outcomes.

Program Goals

The program has goals in three areas: instructional, research, and service, which are inherent in the field of public health.

- **Goal 1 (instructional):** prepare graduates with critical thinking, theory, and analytical skills that enable them to independently conduct ethically sound research on population health factors across a variety of public health and community settings;
- **Goal 2 (instructional):** prepare independent scientists and scholars with writing skills necessary to obtain appropriate research funding and for scholarly peer-reviewed publication;
- **Goal 3 (research):** prepare graduates to independently design and conduct rigorous and ethically sound quantitative and qualitative research regarding public and concentration-specific health problems, and analyze the data;
- **Goal 4 (service):** prepare graduates with communication skills necessary to disseminate public health knowledge to the community/layperson, practitioner, academic, and scientific audiences; and
- **Goal 5 (service):** instill graduates with enthusiasm for interdisciplinary collaboration and principles necessary to engage in culturally competent research with a diverse range of participants and colleagues.

Core Competency Goals of the Ph.D. Program in Public Health Sciences

Graduates from the Ph.D. Program in Public Health Sciences will gain core knowledge and skill competencies common to all doctorally-trained public health research professionals. The Ph.D.

in Public Health Sciences with a concentration in Behavioral Sciences focuses on training doctoral level researchers in the discipline of health behavioral research as it relates to primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention of disease and disability. The framework underlying the outcomes and competencies of this behavioral training is largely adopted from the American Academy of Health Behavior (AAHB) outcomes of doctoral level training (American Academy of Health Behavior Work Group on Doctoral Research Training, 2005). However, there is considerable overlap between the AAHB and the American Schools and Programs in Public Health (ASPPH) DrPH competency development project model (ASPH, 2009). These outcomes guide doctoral training in Public Health Sciences in the Department of Epidemiology and Community Health. They determine the breadth and depth of knowledge that students must obtain to graduate with a doctoral degree, regardless of their area of concentration.

Ph.D. Core Competency Outcomes

The Ph.D. program in Public Health Sciences program committee has developed the following six competencies that Public Health Sciences Ph.D. graduates will demonstrate during their coursework, research and teaching experiences, fieldwork, and dissertation.

1. Design theory-based public health interventions that take into account social, ecological, cultural, and life span factors.
2. Develop original research questions and design rigorous qualitative and quantitative research studies that address those questions.
3. Demonstrate effectiveness in disseminating research findings in both oral and written form to diverse audiences.
4. Apply principles of responsible conduct of research (RCR) to identify, analyze, and effectively address ethical issues when working with diverse populations.
5. Demonstrate proficiency in teaching using current instructional strategies
6. Synthesize and critically appraise evidence-based research promoting health in populations.

The Concentration in Behavioral Science

Public health, by its very nature, is interdisciplinary and includes scientists, practitioners, and community partners from a broad spectrum of disciplines and organizations working together to improve the health of populations. As more and more health problems are recognized as stemming from social issues such as poverty and crime, and as the prevention and treatment of those problems become the responsibility of the individual as well as the community, the need for trained researchers in the social and behavioral sciences with a public health focus becomes even more critical (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2006). Virtually every health issue in the US has a behavioral component, whether viewed from the level of the individual, family, healthcare provider, or the larger healthcare system.

The ability to address social and behavioral factors across multiple levels requires a breadth and depth of methodological skills, which include basic quantitative approaches as well as

qualitative techniques. An increasing focus of public health, social, and behavioral research is on community-based participatory research (CBPR), acknowledging the need for community participants to establish public health priorities and approaches to developing and testing solutions to health problems (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2003). Multiple institutes within the National Institutes of Health have program announcements to solicit CBPR proposals.

The concentration in Behavioral Sciences emphasizes the investigation of health determinants related to the prevention and management of disease and disability among diverse and vulnerable populations in the United States. Working with the community in multidisciplinary teams to understand and develop programs that address the broad social-ecological factors influencing health behavior and, consequently, health outcomes is the primary emphasis of this concentration.

The Ph.D. in Public Health Sciences coursework, with a concentration in behavioral sciences, has a dual emphasis on qualitative and quantitative methods, as well as the development, application, and measurement of theory to understand the social and cultural factors that influence health behavior. Graduates are prepared to work in academia, conduct large-scale behavioral research projects, or work in government or health-related venues.

Behavioral Sciences Overview

As one of the core areas of public health, the behavioral sciences focus on understanding and influencing the social determinants that affect health behavior within populations, societies, and communities. Medicine is concerned with individuals and uses a biomedical approach to heal patients who have disease “...public health regards the community as its patient. ...Public health focuses on preventing illness.” (Schneider, 2006). As in other fields, public health researchers and practitioners use a biopsychosocial approach to health and illness. The population focus of public health, however, distinguishes the aims of public health activities and research from other disciplines, and spans across institutions, communities, geography and culture in an effort to improve human health. Thus, public health researchers and faculty come from diverse backgrounds in medicine, psychology, sociology, nursing, anthropology, geography, gerontology, and economics.

The behavioral sciences concentration is guided by the social ecological model (McElroy & Jezewski, 2000). An emphasis on behavioral sciences encompasses more than just examining individual health behaviors related to disease to include social determinants of health including: family structure (marriage, divorce, childbearing), the environment (air quality, built environment, workplace, neighborhood), changes in policy (Medicare prescription benefit or welfare to work programs), and changes in social conditions (increased crime, literacy, immigration) (Braveman, Egerter, & Mockenhaupt, 2011; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2006). These interactions occur at multiple levels of the ecological model (see Figure 1): individual, microcultural and macrocultural (McElroy & Jezewski, 2000). Research and knowledge about behavioral influences on health and illness must necessarily examine the

multiple social contexts and interactions that can influence an individual's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. Examining the multilevel causes of disease to improve health and prevent illness is at the forefront of our nation's strategy to improve population health (Mabry, Olster, Morgan, & Abrams, 2008).

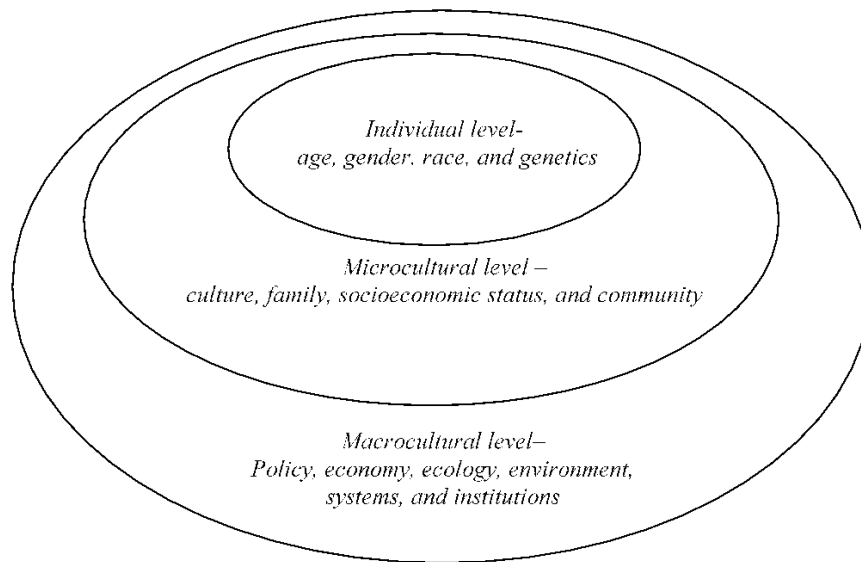


Figure 1. Figure 1: Analytic domains in the experience of health and illness (Note: Redrawn and modified from McElroy and Jezewski, 2000.)

References: Braveman, Egerter, & Mockenhaupt, 2011, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2006. Mabry, Olster, Morgan, & Abrams, 2008, McElroy & Jezewski, 2000, Minkler & Wallerstein, 2003, Schneider, 2000

PhD Student Resources Dropbox Folder

A Dropbox folder titled “*PhD Student Resources*” has been shared with all PhD Public Health Sciences 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 Public Health Sciences 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 study or the second year 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. 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 Dissertation Chair will also guide the student in selecting additional Dissertation Committee members. Note that dissertation advisors must be members of the Ph.D. in Public Health Sciences Program Faculty or Affiliate members of the Ph.D. in Public Health Sciences Faculty, with a Program Faculty member serving as co-chair of the Dissertation Committee.

Course Requirements and Options

The program requires 63 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. Core public health courses in methods (15 credits).
2. Professional seminars (9 credits).
3. Concentration courses (12 credits) – currently, only the Behavioral Sciences concentration is available.
4. Specialty content focus (9 credits).
5. Dissertation (18 credits).

As defined in the Graduate Catalog, a semester course load totaling nine credit hours is considered full-time. 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 less than nine hours is considered part-time.

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

Core Public Health Courses: Methods (15 credits)

HLTH 8201	Introduction to Quantitative Research Design (3)
HLTH 8270	Applied Biostatistics: Regression (3)
HLTH 8271	Applied Biostatistics: Multivariate (3)
HLTH 8281	Measurement and Scale Development (3)
HLTH 8282	Health Survey Design and Research (3)

Core Public Health Courses: Professional Seminars (9 credits)

HLTH 8601	Ethics in the Public Health Profession (3)
HLTH 8602	Communicating and Disseminating Research (1)
HSRD 8882	Seminar in Health Outcomes (1)
HSRD 8883	Seminar in Grant Proposal Writing (1)
HLTH 8603	Teaching Portfolio (3)

Concentration Courses- Behavioral Sciences (12 credits)

HLTH 8220	Theories and Interventions in Behavioral Science (3)
HLTH 8221	Qualitative Research (3)
HSRD 8261	Healthcare Program Evaluation, Outcomes and Quality (3)
HLTH 8223	Social Determinants of Health (3)

Specialty Content Courses (9 credits)

Specialty content areas are developed in consultation with the doctoral student's advisor and make use of expertise and course offerings on the UNC Charlotte campus. Specialty content areas can focus on a specific population (e.g., older adults/gerontology or maternal and child health (MCH)), a health issue (e.g., AIDS), or an approach (e.g., psychology). A specialty content area should cover literature related to: health and social policy issues, epidemiology of a health condition/population, relevant theories or approaches related to the condition/population, and/or current topics in the area.

Coursework in the specialty content focus must be at the 8000 level; however, under certain circumstances, 6000-level courses may be approved as electives. Courses at the 5000 level will not be accepted as graduate courses. Students may take courses at the 4000 or 5000 levels as electives; however, these courses do not contribute to fulfilling the required program course requirements.

Listed below are examples of areas students may choose to provide depth in an area of special interest within the Behavioral Science concentration:

- Aging/long-term care
- Chronic disease management
- Health disparities
- Health promotion
- Maternal and child health
- Mental health
- Research methods

Students may define an area of interest not listed pending approval of the Program Director, Dissertation Committee Chair/faculty advisor, and other faculty as needed. A student may also select another relevant area of interest, provided it can be fulfilled with existing graduate courses or through independent study courses with Public Health Sciences Ph.D. faculty.

Dissertation (18 Credits)

HLTH 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” Progress is contingent upon making an appropriate degree of progress during the semester, as evidenced by communication with and products submitted to the Dissertation Chairperson.

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 Program Director if there is a circumstance that 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 requirements of the Public Health Sciences Ph.D. program.**

Graduate Certificate Opportunities

With careful course selection, students can also earn a Graduate Certificate in a specialty area, often with minimal additional coursework. Graduate certificates are available in Gerontology, Communication Studies, Applied Ethics, Emergency Management, Africana Studies, Gender, Sexuality & Women’s Studies, and Health Informatics. Please consult the Graduate School website for more information (<https://graduateschool.uncc.edu/>)

Transfer Credit

Effective AY 2026-27, students in the PhD program in Public Health Sciences (PHS) may transfer up to 21 graduate-level credits from a regionally accredited university toward a doctoral degree, provided that the transferred courses sufficiently cover the content required in the PHS PhD program. 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. Course transfer requires approval of the PHS PhD Program Director in consultation with the Program Committee and the Graduate School. Courses taken to fulfill the master's level prerequisite public health courses do not count toward the 63 credit hour total.

Time Limits for Completion

Students must pass all sections of the comprehensive exam within one year of finishing their required coursework. Students may not defend their dissertation proposal before passing all components of the comprehensive exam. Students must pass their dissertation proposal defense within 6 months of passing the comprehensive exam. Students must pass their dissertation defense within five years of the proposal defense, but not 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 (for both fall and spring semesters) for their thesis, dissertation, project, or directed study until the work is completed. Students are not required to enroll in any summer term unless they are using campus facilities or completing degree requirements during 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's requirement for continuous enrollment during the final term prior to graduation, when all degree requirements (including the dissertation) have been completed. This course is non-graded, and credit for this course does not count toward the degree. It may be repeated once. Doctoral students who are not utilizing 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 credit and passed all milestones except 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 to be submitted in the Banner system.

If students are to have an active Dissertation Committee and utilize University resources, doctoral students are required to continue enrolling in 3 dissertation credit hours, even though they have already completed the 18 dissertation credit hours.

Dissertation Research Credits Application

Before registering for dissertation research credits, students must complete the “Dissertation Research Application” located in the shared Dropbox folder. The Program Director must then approve this application. 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, the timeframes for submission, 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 a student would be reinstated by the program 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 doctoral study; it is unlikely that the Public Health Sciences 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 course selections. 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.uncc.edu>). All changes must be approved and submitted prior to sitting for the Comprehensive Examination.

Annual Progress Report

Doctoral students and candidates are evaluated annually to ensure they are making sufficient progress toward completing 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 year, students will complete a checklist of scholarly activities and submit their curriculum vitae, accompanied by a formal cover letter that highlights significant academic accomplishments 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 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 Public Health Sciences Ph.D. Program Director. All materials are due by April 15. Download the forms 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 submitting various forms, such as Admission to Candidacy and Application for Graduation, are available in the [Academic Calendar](#). Students should note that the dates for submission of candidacy forms and applications for graduation occur very early in each semester. For example, for the May graduation, the dates for the Application for Graduation and the final date for the Application for Candidacy typically occur in the third 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. Refer to the Academic Calendar for the exact dates applicable to 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 continuous if the student is enrolled in one or more courses in successive semesters until 21 hours are earned. Continuous enrollment in the fall and spring semesters is sufficient for 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 interact regularly with faculty and peers by regularly participating in courses, 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 his/her academic record and progress on the dissertation with the chair of his/her Dissertation Committee. If the Chair 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.

Comprehensive Examination

Introduction

The comprehensive examination in the Ph.D. program in Public Health Sciences will assess students' critical thinking skills and ability to apply and synthesize knowledge acquired during the doctoral coursework to progress in the program. The comprehensive examination is a major milestone in the student's academic journey. It ensures that the student has acquired a solid foundation of knowledge in the discipline before advancing in the program. The student is expected to be familiar with the area of their research, including scholarly articles, major theories, controversies, and methodologies. Students must successfully complete all core coursework to be eligible to take the comprehensive examination.

Examination Format and Guidelines

The written comprehensive examination will take place in August and December/January of each year (exact dates to be announced to students at least two months in advance). The comprehensive examination is a take-home, open book, open-notes, written examination. Students will have 10 days to complete the examination. Students are not allowed to seek help from any individual or internet bot, such as but not limited to ChatGPT, Bard, or similar AI-based algorithms. All examinations will be subject to plagiarism AI detection software. If the comprehensive examination committee suspects any violation of the academic integrity code or seeks clarification of a student's 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 (HLTH 8901).

Each comprehensive examination committee will consist of three members. Students who plan to take the comprehensive examination will be asked to provide the program director with the name of their identified content person, who will be the Chair of the committee. The program director will nominate the other two committee members.

The comprehensive examination question may ask the student to write a grant application in NIH format, conduct a scoping review, and/or perform a secondary data analysis, and then write a manuscript in their area of research.

The Comprehensive Examination Committee has determined that the following courses may be included in the examination:

- HLTH 8201: Introduction to Quantitative Research Design
- HLTH 8270: Applied Biostatistics: Regression
- HLTH 8271: Applied Biostatistics: Multivariate
- HLTH 8281: Measurement and Scale Development
- HLTH 8282: Health Survey Design and Research
- HLTH 8220: Theories and Interventions in Behavioral Science
- HLTH 8221: Qualitative Research in Behavioral Sciences
- HLTH 8223: Social Determinants of Health
- HSRD 8261: Healthcare Program Evaluation, Outcomes and Quality

Examination Grading

Questions will be graded independently by the comprehensive examination committee members and the content expert nominated by the student using a scoring rubric. Each examiner will grade the exam as Pass (70% or above), Conditional Pass (60% to 69%), or Fail (less than 60%). If the student receives a Conditional Pass, the committee may ask the student to resubmit part of their response within a stipulated time period. It is expected that each examiner will provide a narrative evaluation of students' answers in addition to the letter grade. The committee members will meet virtually or in person to discuss and vote on the student's performance on the examination. The committee members may ask the student to join the meeting to seek clarification of their responses if needed. For a student to pass the examination, they must receive a Pass from two of the three committee members. Should two or more committee members assign a failing grade, the student is required to repeat the exam in the subsequent semester. If the student fails a second time, they will be dismissed from the program.

Students may not register for HLTH 8901 until they have successfully passed their comprehensive examination. If a student does not pass the comprehensive examination on their first attempt, they 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 comprehensive 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 public health. The research must make a distinct, original contribution to the field of public health research. Students cannot register for dissertation credits until they have passed their comprehensive 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 public health research within the candidate's chosen field of concentration as judged by the candidate's doctoral Dissertation Committee. The dissertation is the culminating research experience of the Public Health Sciences Ph.D. program.

"Original contribution" implies that the body of work undertaken and intellectual contribution of the research is the candidate's own. It is expected that the candidate will be an expert in the contributions of other scholars to provide a foundation for his or her original research.

"Significant contribution" implies that the result of the dissertation scholarship notably advances a useful area of public health 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 or two manuscripts to scholarly peer-reviewed journals.

Doctoral candidates should demonstrate competent application of theory and research methods that are appropriate to the research question in their area of study; research methods include qualitative or quantitative methods, or mixed methods.

Download the rubric used to assess the quality of the dissertation proposal from 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 rules and regulations established by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). No research may be conducted prior to submission of the appropriate forms and receipt of the proper approvals. Completing a Dissertation allows the candidate the opportunity to demonstrate 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, and IRB Board. If at any time the candidate has uncertainty about the originality of their work, they may consult a plagiarism detection service such as Turnitin 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

The student must identify who will serve as the Dissertation Chair and confirm the faculty's willingness to serve as Chair. The selection and/or invitation of a Dissertation Chair should be discussed in consultation with the Program Director and/or faculty advisor. 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, as well as a handful of others. Faculty are aware of their graduate faculty status. The Dissertation Chair must be a Program Faculty member in the Public Health Sciences PhD Program. If a committee has co-chairs, at least one member must be Program Faculty in the Public Health Sciences PhD program. The other co-chair can also be Program Faculty or Affiliate Faculty in the Public Health Sciences PhD Program.

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

Chair's Responsibilities

The Dissertation Chair plays an important role in guiding the student throughout the dissertation process. The dissertation chair 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.
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 will guide the student in formulating their Dissertation Committee and through the dissertation process. Having identified a Chair 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 throughout the dissertation process. Some of these include:

1. Maintain regular and open communication with the dissertation chair to keep them updated on 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 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.
7. Have the dissertation chair review DUAs before submitting them for approval.
8. Establish a good working relationship with your dissertation chair.
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.

1. The Dissertation Chair, who must be Program Faculty in the Public Health Sciences PhD Program.
2. Graduate School Representative.
3. A third member who is Program or Affiliate faculty in the Public Health Sciences PhD Program.
4. A fourth member who is Program or Affiliate faculty in the Public Health Sciences PhD 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 Epidemiology and

Community Health at UNC Charlotte. Only one member of the Dissertation Committee may participate who does not have a UNC Charlotte Graduate Faculty appointment – such as a community member or faculty from another university. This person could be a fifth member of the committee.

The student should meet with each potential Committee member and confirm his/her 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 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 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 and Committee early in the process to determine whether the “traditional” or “three manuscript” 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 that might influence the study should also be included as a separate 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 methodological approach, whether qualitative or quantitative, should be fully described. All variables, constructs or scales need to be presented along with their measurement. For qualitative studies, all interview or focus group guides need to be explained. 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. 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: questionnaires or interview guides, invitations to participate in the study, informed consent forms, data request forms, or approval letters.
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 must provide a brief document outlining the three manuscripts.

Students provide the overall idea for the dissertation, including the major concepts to be investigated, the measures to be used, and a strategy for analyzing primary or secondary data. The Dissertation must be original, scholarly research that makes a meaningful contribution to the development of knowledge or theory in public health and to the student's area of specialty. Students are expected to take 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 to discuss progress, conceptual issues, and methodological challenges.

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

- a) The student should provide the Chair 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 will negotiate the scope of each subsequent draft to be submitted to the Chair for comment 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 they face.

- 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 for comment and feedback.

Scheduling the Dissertation Proposal Oral Defense

Students will schedule the proposal defense upon agreement with the dissertation chair, taking into account the availability of the other Committee members. Unless prior arrangements have been made, all committee members need to be present for the oral defense of the proposal. Graduate School guidelines regarding Committee member attendance must be followed.

The student will submit a final draft of the proposal to all committee members at least two weeks prior to the oral defense date.

- a) Students who do not have a Dissertation Proposal defense within 2 semesters after passing the Comprehensive Examination are encouraged to discuss the situation with the Program Director or the Dissertation Chair and make a substantive plan to make adequate progress within the following semester.
- b) Students should be aware of the Graduate School's 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, as well as faculty and 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 methodology knowledge and ability to conduct the research.
- c) The student will be excused from the meeting after the questioning period concludes to permit 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.

The proposal defense may be conducted in person or online via Zoom. 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 full agreement 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.

Download the detailed grading rubric, which addresses three CEPH Competencies, from 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**.

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 Comprehensive 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 successfully defending the Dissertation Proposal, students submit the required forms as listed by the Graduate School 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 forms are at 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. Regardless of whether students collect primary data or analyze secondary data, they must follow all applicable protocols for Human Subjects Protection.

Writing the Dissertation

While the student writes the dissertation, s/he is required to maintain continuous enrollment in HLTH 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 as methods and content experts in reviewing drafts of the dissertation chapters.

The dissertation must be original, scholarly research that makes a meaningful contribution to the development of knowledge or theory in public health and to the student's area of specialty. Students are expected to take 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-chapter manuscript format (which also has five chapters). The breadth, depth, and rigor are the same for both formats. The format is chosen by the student 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, the importance of the problem to public health, the significance of the proposed research in addressing the problem, the research questions, and the 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 separate section.

Chapter Two: Conceptual Model and Literature Review. A thorough and critical appraisal of the relevant literature is provided. This should include any theories or conceptual models that have been applied or are relevant to the problem. The literature review should be focused on developing hypotheses to be tested and/or research questions to be addressed. 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, qualitative or quantitative, should be fully described. For quantitative studies, all variables, constructs, or scales that are used need to be presented along with their measurements. For qualitative studies, all interview or focus group guides need to be explained. 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 subject 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: 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 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 separate 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, Method, 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, Method, 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, Method, Results, Conclusions). It should also include the Reference List and Appendices (if applicable) for Chapter/Article 3.

Chapter 5: Overall Conclusion: A final chapter must be included, briefly summarizing in reasonable detail the dissertation findings as presented across the articles, and discussing implications for public health policy and practice, as well research extensions. This chapter should present an integration and synthesis that emphasizes findings across the papers and 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: 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 early in the process. Outlined below are some of the important requirements for the three manuscript format. These include, but are not limited to:

- Minimum of three articles
- Coherence between articles. The articles that comprise the dissertation must have a clear justification for their inclusion in the 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 decided 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 prior to a student using their previously published material, as required by law. This may

- include multiple author releases where applicable.
- More information can be found in the [Graduate School Three Article Dissertation Guidelines](#). Additionally, students should contact the 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 referred to as 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 the initial approval of the committee members. 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 Public Health Sciences Ph.D. Program Director will receive the dissertation defense announcement information at least 2 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 three 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 makes a formal presentation of the research, its results, interpretation, and implications. As with the proposal defense, all members of the Committee must usually be present at the defense, either in person or on Zoom. 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. Once all questions have been addressed, 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, which can be 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 University governs the physical form of the dissertation. 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, 2017-2018, 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 students’ 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 follows the Graduate School guidelines and depends on the availability of funds.

The assistantship provides a stipend (salary), currently \$20,000 per year for a 12-month 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 Public Health Sciences Ph.D. program provides students with an opportunity to teach selected undergraduate courses offered by the Department of Epidemiology and Community Health under the supervision of the course faculty member. The Public Health Sciences 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.

Students with assistantships are eligible for the University's Graduate Assistance Support Plan (GASP). GASP provides a highly competitive multi-year support package to attract and retain top-tier graduate students at UNC Charlotte. The award package covers both resident and non-resident tuition (as relevant) and provides coverage under the University's student health insurance program fees. 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 PHS program, it is expected that the students will be working on campus. If you cannot come to campus on a regular basis, you must inform the Program Director. Accommodations 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 of 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 Public Health Sciences Ph.D. program, the College, the University, and the community. Such service can include: attending orientation for 1st year Public Health Sciences 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 Public Health Sciences Ph.D. program and the College; performing service in the community as a representative of the Public Health Sciences Ph.D. program, and so forth. Although success in the Public Health Sciences Ph.D. program is primarily judged by scholarship, the Public Health Sciences 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 of retaining the graduate assistantship.

Graduate assistantships are typically arranged for 9 month annual commitments. Graduate assistants receive University holidays, but are otherwise expected to work on their normal schedule throughout the 9-month period.

A graduate assistant must register for at least 9 graduate-level semester hours during each semester in which an assistantship is awarded. Graduate assistants enrolled in GASP must register for a minimum of 9 graduate credit hours each term. Students with support from GASP must maintain a minimum GPA of 3.0 to remain 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 as a means of evaluating progress and performance. The Fall Semester form is due for the Ph.D. Program Director by December 1st, and the Spring Semester form is due to the Ph.D. Program Director by April 15. 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. Download the forms from the shared Dropbox folder.

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 a student maintain at least a GPA of 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 student's supervisor in the event that a student is not succeeding in the course at mid-semester.
3. A PhD student on a graduate assistantship who receives a C or UP grade 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 chair of the department, will notify the student about the final decision and any conditions for the continuation of 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 are 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 supportive 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, but making reservations for flights, lodging, and conference reservations is the student's responsibility.
- 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 shown by sharing costs among students (e.g., shared lodging, selecting low-cost lodging, 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 licenses, participant incentives, travel to data collection sites, and specialized data analysis courses that 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.

Steps Involved

The process of applying for support includes the following:

1. Download and complete the research support form from the shared Dropbox folder. Provide the Ph.D. Program Director a brief description of the need and support requested.
2. Submit the form to the Program Director for signature and then route it to the appropriate administrative support person for processing.

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 the 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 addition 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 Public Health Sciences Ph.D. Program Director.

Career Services

The UNC Charlotte Career Center “is committed to providing comprehensive, 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 exists to serve students who need assistance in making a successful transition 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 upon 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: <http://www.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

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.

Charlotte Healthcare Executives Student Organization (CHESO)

CHESO is a chartered graduate student membership society for future healthcare executives from UNC Charlotte. CHESO is designed to meet its members' professional, educational, and leadership needs; to promote high ethical standards and conduct while providing opportunities for members to learn from one another as well as those in the healthcare executive profession.

The International Society for Pharmacoeconomics and Outcomes Research at UNC Charlotte (ISPOR-UNC Charlotte)

ISPOR is a nonprofit, international, educational, and scientific organization that promotes health economics and outcomes research excellence to improve decision making for health globally. ISPOR-UNC Charlotte is the local student network which provides an environment where students can share knowledge in pharmacoeconomics and health outcomes research; serve as a bridge in bringing together students interested in pharmacoeconomics and members of the pharmaceutical industry, health-related organizations, and academia; act as a resource for new students interested in pharmacoeconomics and outcomes research; and provide an opportunity for student chapter members to become familiar with the affairs of ISPOR as well as have representation in its affairs.

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 Public Health Sciences 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

Public Health Sciences 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 prior to registering for the next semester.

Doctoral students are typically expected to have a thorough understanding of academic integrity issues as a result of their undergraduate and master's-level education. As a result, the Public Health Sciences Ph.D. program simply expects academic integrity. A doctoral student who commits any of the violations listed above may be dismissed from the Public Health Sciences 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 PhD Program Committee (course content, workload) via the PhD Program Committee Student Representative. If the issue cannot be resolved, then the Department Chair (faculty conduct related matters) should be consulted. If the professor of the course in question is the PhD 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 ombudsman 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 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.