



DOWNSTATE
HEALTH SCIENCES UNIVERSITY

SPH Doctoral Student Handbook

Welcome to the Program

Welcome to the School of Public Health at the State University of New York's Downstate Health Sciences University. Located in the heart of Brooklyn, Downstate Health Sciences University has a rich legacy of excellence in education, research, and community service. Our School of Public Health stands at the forefront of public health education, with a focus on urban and immigrant populations. Our exciting vision is one full of hope, possibility, challenges, and eventually, greater health equity for all.

Our mission is to improve the health status of urban and immigrant populations through training of the next generation of diverse public health leaders, through the conduct of innovative research that ensures health equity, and by putting into practice evidence-based policies and other interventions that support healthy communities.

The School of Public Health is nationally accredited by the Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH). Our faculty are nationally recognized public health leaders in their specialties and apply this expertise through teaching, research, and service. Doctoral study often includes interprofessional collaboration, and our location within the only academic medical center in Brooklyn, coupled with longstanding relationships with community-based organizations, government agencies, academic medical centers and hospitals, and healthcare industries ensures that our students are actively engaged in service learning and applied training. Our doctoral graduates have gone on to influential leadership positions in these different settings.

We hope your time with us will prove fulfilling and valuable.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kitaw Demissie".

Kitaw Demissie, MD, PhD

Dean and Professor, School of Public Health

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Program administration

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Dr. Bruno serves as Chair of the Community Health Sciences department. In addition to your faculty advisor, Dr. Bruno can answer questions on any aspects of the program for CHSC doctoral students.

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Dr. Geer serves as Chair of the Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences department. In addition to your faculty advisor, Dr. Geer can answer questions on any aspects of the program for doctoral students in the Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences concentration.

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Dr. Helzner serves as Chair of the Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics. In addition to your faculty advisor, Dr. Helzner can answer questions on any aspects of the program for doctoral students in the Epidemiology concentration.

Aimee Afable, PhD, MPH

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Dr. Afable supports all aspects of the DrPH Applied Practice Experience (APEX) and is the central point of contact for APEX planning, implementation, and deliverables.

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Dr. Wilson serves as Chair of the Committee on the Doctoral Program and can assist with general inquiries about program requirements and milestones and is available to discuss successes and barriers to program progress.

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Mr. Colón supports course scheduling, course add/drop forms, questions on tuition and other payments, requests for UUP signatures, graduation clearances, commencement applications, and other DrPH student services.

General policies and guidelines

The SPH Doctoral Handbook guides processes and sets expectations specific to the doctoral program. For complete details regarding University policies, students' rights and responsibilities, the academic calendar and associated deadlines, campus services, expectations for student conduct, and other important information, consult the [SUNY Downstate Health Science University's Student Handbook](#). The SPH Doctoral Dissertation Handbook, provides details on specific processes and expectations related to the dissertation. These handbooks contain information that pertains only to the current academic year. SUNY Downstate Health Sciences University reserves the right to alter existing rules and regulations and academic programs, as deemed necessary by the institution and expressly reserves the right to (1) to change or modify its schedule of tuition and fees; (2) withdraw, cancel, or reschedule, modify any course, program of study, degree or any requirement or policy in connection with the foregoing; and (3) change or modify any academic or other policy. Essential changes of information in this Student Handbook will be published in newsletters or other University publications. Each student is responsible to ascertain current information pertaining to their program, particularly regarding degree requirements, by consultation with the student's Faculty Advisor, Department Chair, the Office of Student Affairs, the Registrar's Office, and other offices as appropriate. In preparing this Handbook, we have made every effort to provide accurate information.

Description of the doctoral program

For students entering in September 2023 or later, completion of the doctoral degree requires a minimum of 45 credits, and includes satisfactory completion of the following milestones:

- All foundational and concentration course requirements, and elective courses (36 credits).
- The [Applied Practice Experience \[APEX\]](#) (3 credits).
- A [Qualifying Examination \[QE\]](#) (0 credits).
- Doctoral [Dissertation](#) (6 credits).

Students entering the program prior to 2023 also complete 45 credits based on the requirements in place at the time of their matriculation into the program. Students should consult with their faculty advisor to clarify these requirements.

Regardless of year of program entry, some students may require more than 45 credits to complete the program if additional time is taken for any component of the program or if any component of the program needs to be repeated.

Doctoral program timeline

Although students have a maximum of ten years to complete the DrPH degree, the program is designed to be completed within six years. During this time, students will progress through a set of [milestones](#) including successful completion of courses (foundational, concentration core, and electives), an applied practice experience (APEX), a qualifying examination, dissertation proposal, and a dissertation. It is expected that doctoral students take a minimum of six credits of coursework in the Fall and Spring semesters during the coursework phase of the program.

Sequence of program milestones

The table below provides a guideline for completion of program milestones. Some students may require additional time for some milestones. Students should create a timeline for completion of each requirement with their faculty advisor. Students must also meet with their faculty advisor to review whether prerequisites for each milestone have been met before progressing to the next.

Program milestone	Recommended timeline
Successfully complete foundation, concentration and elective courses	Complete at least two 3-credit courses in each of the Fall and Spring semesters in years one and two, and in the Fall semester of year three
Initiate and complete the Applied Practice Experience (APEx)	Develop APEx in the first semester of year two of the program; sign up for and complete APEx by the end of the Fall semester of year three
Pass the DrPH Qualifying Examination (QE)	Complete the QE by the Spring semester of year three
Develop and present a Dissertation proposal	Develop and present a dissertation proposal under the guidance of the Dissertation Committee in year four of the program
Complete and defend the Dissertation	Complete the written dissertation and the oral dissertation defense in the Spring semester of year six

Doctoral coursework and competencies

All program elements are structured around a set of program competencies. Successful completion of doctoral program milestones, including coursework, the APEx, qualifying examination, dissertation proposal, and dissertation, demonstrate mastery of these doctoral competencies.

Foundation courses

All doctoral students complete four 3-credit courses, typically in the first Fall and Spring of the program, which address doctoral-level [foundational competencies](#).

Course number	Course name	Credits
HPMG 7200	Public Health Management and Ethics	3
BIOS 7200	Quantitative Research Methods for Public Health Practice	3
PUBH 7200	Public Health Policy and Politics Seminar	3
PUBH 7201	Study Design in Public Health Practice	3

Concentration core courses

In addition to foundation courses, students take an additional four 3-credit courses, specific to their doctoral concentration and which address doctoral level [concentration-specific competencies](#).

Community Health Sciences Concentration Core Courses

Course number	Course name	Credits
CHSC 7202	Methods of Community Intervention and Research	3
CHSC 7203	Program Evaluation: Theory, Practice and Research	3
CHSC 7201	Qualitative Research Methods for Public Health Practice	3
CHSC 7204	Seminar in Health Promotion	3

Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences Concentration Core Courses

Course number	Course name	Credits
EOHS 7300	Advanced Topics in Occupational Health	3
EOHS 7202	Advanced Topics in Risk Assessment and Management	3
EOHS 7206	Environmental and Occupational Epidemiology	3
EOHS 7203	Environmental Health Policy and Management Systems	3

Epidemiology Concentration Core Courses

Course number	Course name	Credits
BIOS 7203	Advanced Applied Regression Analysis	3
EPID 7201	Advanced Epidemiologic Research Methods I	3
EPID 7202	Advanced Epidemiologic Research Methods II	3
EPID 7205	Outbreak Investigation and Management	3

Elective courses

In addition to the required foundational and concentration core courses, students select elective courses that align with their professional goals. These electives may include concentration core courses from another doctoral concentration area or electives from other concentrations. Students must meet with their program advisor to discuss elective courses and to ensure that all prerequisites are met prior to course enrollments.

Applied practice experience (APEX)

Overview

During the Applied Practice Experience (APEX), students apply and translate knowledge, theory, and skills learned in the classroom into practice within a professional public health setting. The APEX is a planned, supervised, and evaluated field-based experience that can take place in a variety of agencies and organizations. Students work with preceptors and their faculty advisor to design an APEX that will strengthen doctoral level foundational and concentration-specific public health competencies, complement the student's professional interests, and advance career goals. Students typically begin planning for the APEX in the second year of the program. Students enroll in the APEX course in the semester in which they plan to complete all APEX requirements and after having completed at least 15 credits of foundational and concentration core coursework. In addition, students may be required to complete additional coursework in order adequately address competencies that will be applied during the APEX prior to starting activities. Decisions regarding any additional prerequisite coursework are determined in consultation with the student's faculty advisor and the [Associate Dean for Community Engagement](#). All students must complete the APEX regardless of their history of public health work experience.

Elements of the APEX

To satisfy the APEX requirement, students complete a minimum of 150 hours of fieldwork and develop at least two work products at an approved APEX site. Students engage in activities that benefit the hosting organization and strengthen five pre-selected doctoral level competencies. The competencies must include at least one competency drawn from the list of foundational [leadership, management & governance competencies](#). In addition, students complete a self-reflection presentation. The [Doctoral APEX Handbook](#) details the requirements for the APEX. Questions regarding the APEX should be directed to the [Associate Dean for Community Engagement](#).

Qualifying examination (QE)

Overview

The purpose of the QE is to demonstrate mastery of the range of doctoral public health competencies covered in the DrPH curriculum. Doctoral students are scheduled to take the qualifying exam in the semester after which the following conditions are met:

- Completion of all foundation, concentration, and elective courses.
- Minimum GPA of 3.0.
- Completion of all APEx requirements.

In some circumstances, and with advisor approval, students may take the qualifying examination in the semester in which they are completing a final elective course. A student cannot take the qualifying exam while they are completing the APEx.

Format and grading

The QE typically occurs mid-semester in the fall and spring. The exam takes place on campus over the course of two days and lasts approximately six hours per day. One day focuses on competencies covered in the DrPH foundation courses and the other day on competencies covered in the DrPH concentration core courses.

For the concentration exam, students answer four out of six essay questions, focused on the four [concentration core courses](#). Each question applies concentration-area content to a specific real-world situation.

The foundation exam has two sections:

- Section One contains four questions which span the four [foundation courses](#). Students are required to respond to two of four questions.
 - One from either BIOS 7200 Quantitative Research Methods for Public Health Practice or PUBH 7201 Study Design in Public Health.

- One from either HPMG 7200 Public Health Management and Ethics or PUBH 7200 Public Health Policy and Politics Seminar.
- Section Two of the foundation exam involves developing a critique of a research article. This critique will involve responses to approximately ten questions. The questions focus on core doctoral competencies and are not specific to a content area.

Answers are scored utilizing rubrics, and each section is graded Pass/Fail by an SPH faculty subcommittee. Students do not receive individual feedback on the exam. A student who does not pass one or both sections of the qualifying exam will be permitted one retake of the foundation and/or concentration section(s) the next time the qualifying exam is given. In the event of a retake, the student will need to register for another dissertation credit for that semester. If a student fails one or both sections of the exam after this retake, the case will be referred to the [SPH Committee on Student Evaluation, Promotion, and Honors](#), and the student will be recommended for dismissal from the program. Details of the SEPH review and processes for appeals are included in the [SUNY Downstate Health Science University's Student Handbook](#).

Advancement to doctoral candidacy

Doctoral students advance to candidacy upon successful completion of the Qualifying Examination. The [Committee on the Doctoral Program](#) reviews the status of all doctoral students who sit for the qualifying examination and notifies the student, the student's advisor, and the chair of the student's department of transition from doctoral student to doctoral candidate. Doctoral candidates spend the remainder of the program on development and completion of the doctoral dissertation.

Dissertation

Overview

The dissertation serves as the culminating project for doctoral candidates and is the final requirement for the program. During dissertation development, students apply and integrate competencies attained in the doctoral curriculum and apply them to a topic of applied public health significance. The dissertation process results in a high-quality written product and oral presentation that are consistent with advanced doctoral-level study, has practical implications for public health programs, policies, or systems, and demonstrates a student's mastery and ability to synthesize and apply doctoral-level competencies to an applied public health issue. The dissertation can take the form of program or policy evaluations, assessment of risk and protective factors for disease or injury, development and pilot testing of public health interventions, policy analyses, needs and asset assessments, development of public health manuscripts, or other formats reflecting advanced doctoral level study.

Elements of the dissertation

The dissertation is a multi-stage process that involves several steps, including:

- Selection of a minimum of three doctoral-level [foundational and concentration competencies](#) (with at least one from each category selected) that will be applied and synthesized in the project.
- Development of a dissertation committee and identification of a committee chair.
- Formal written dissertation proposal and oral defense of the dissertation proposal.
- Written dissertation.
- Oral defense of the dissertation.
- Submission of a final written dissertation.

Requirements, expectations, and supporting details of the dissertation are provided in the SPH Dissertation Handbook.

Graduation and commencement

Graduation deadlines

Students who have completed all program requirements by **April 15th** in an academic year are eligible to graduate in May of that academic year. An announcement of the dissertation defense, organized by the chair of the student's dissertation committee, must be made at least four weeks prior to the scheduled defense date, and the dissertation must be successfully defended by **April 1st**.

Each Spring semester, students receive an email from Downstate's Office of the Registrar requesting applications for graduation and for commencement. It is the responsibility of each student intending to graduate to respond to the email and to file their application by the requested deadlines.

Deliverable	Deadline *
Announcement of dissertation presentation to SPH community (four weeks in advance of defense date)	March 1
Successful completion of dissertation defense	April 1
Submission of final dissertation and DrPH Dissertation Approval Form with student and committee members signatures to the Committee on the Doctoral Program	April 15
Submission of SPH application for graduation to Downstate's Office of the Registrar	Date TBD

**If the deadline falls on a weekend or holiday, the deadline is the next business day*

Participation in commencement ceremony

Graduating students are encouraged to participate in the annual SPH Commencement, held in May of each year. Students are permitted to participate in commencement activities and have their names listed in the program only once and in the academic year in which they graduate from the program. Students apply to participate in commencement at the time that they apply to graduate.

Appendices

Academic calendar

Course schedules are sent out to students each semester prior to the start of the enrollment period and are [posted online](#). Students must adhere to deadlines for registration, class start and end dates, deadlines for adding and dropping courses, and deadlines for course withdrawals.

Active program status

The School of Public Health has a policy not to retain inactive students. To remain active, doctoral students must maintain continuous registration every Fall and Spring from the start of the program until completion of all program milestones, unless granted a [leave of absence](#). Upon successful completion of all coursework, the QE, and APEx, students must register for a minimum of one dissertation credit (PUBH 8001) in the Spring and Fall until the dissertation proposal and dissertation requirements are completed. Students who are inactive for two Fall and/or Spring semesters, whether consecutive or non-consecutive, will be recommended for administrative withdrawal from the program. There is no appeal for this determination. Registration for [summer credits](#) is permitted, but not required, and is not included in the assessment of inactive status.

Annual doctoral student survey

All active DrPH students are sent a survey in the Spring semester of each academic year. The purpose of the survey is to better understand doctoral program needs and assets and to inform continuous quality improvement in the curriculum. All doctoral students are expected to participate in the survey.

Auditing of doctoral courses

Auditing of doctoral courses is typically not permitted. Only matriculated students who meet prerequisite course requirements and who have registered for the course are permitted to attend.

Certification of responsible conduct of research training

Doctoral students are required to adhere strictly to all ethical standards and requirements related to the conduct of research and should work with their faculty advisors to ensure compliance with all research requirements prior to engaging in any research. This requirement includes:

- Compliance with responsible conduct of research training
- Assurance that all research activities have been submitted to the [DHSU Institutional Review Board](#), and are either approved or granted exemption before conducting any research activities,
- Maintenance of adequate protection of all data storage and data collection efforts.

Changes in doctoral concentration

Students who wish to change their doctoral concentration will need written approval from both the Department Chair of the current concentration and from the Chair of the Department within the requested concentration; the written approvals from both chairs should be sent to the Chair of the SPH Doctoral Program Committee. Following receipt of approvals, the student should complete and submit a [Program Transfer Form](#) to the [Chair of the Committee on the Doctoral Program](#), with a copy to the [Assistant Director of Enrollment & Onboarding Management](#). The Assistant Director for Enrollment and Onboarding Management will work with the university Office of Student Affairs to process the request. Students who are approved to change concentration areas are required to successfully complete all required courses for the new concentration. Requests to change concentration areas must be completed in advance of the Qualifying Examination.

Committee on Student Evaluation, Promotion, and Honors

The roles, functions, and procedures of the SPH Committee of Student Evaluation, Promotion, and Honors (SEPH) are detailed in the [SUNY Downstate Health Science University's Student Handbook](#). Doctoral students in academic difficulty, with academic integrity infractions, who have applied to graduate in a given academic year are reviewed by SEPH. SEPH also reviews doctoral students who are eligible for

honors or awards. All written communications to doctoral students from the SEPH Committee are also copied to the Chair of the Committee on the Doctoral Program.

Committee on the Doctoral Program

The Committee on the Doctoral Program fosters the ongoing development and evaluation of activities and processes that support the SPH doctoral degree programs. The Committee develops and implements standards, policies, and procedures for the doctoral program. The Committee members are selected by the Dean of the School of Public Health, and committee recommendations are advisory to the Dean. The committee membership consists of three faculty members who hold a primary appointment in the School of Public Health, representing each of the academic concentrations offering a doctoral degree, a [Committee Chair](#) who is a faculty member with a primary appointment in the School of Public Health, the SPH Associate Dean for Education, and an SPH doctoral student. Functions include:

- Develop and update annually, an SPH Doctoral Program Handbook and ensure consistency with the Downstate Student Handbook.
- Set doctoral program admission requirements and support the annual admissions process.
- Set policies related to maximum time to doctoral program completion.
- Work with department chairs and the SPH Committee on Educational Policy and Curriculum (EPC) to review and make recommendations on the doctoral curriculum.
- Set guidance on the general content, frequency, and procedures of the [Qualifying Examination](#) (QE) and oversee administration of the Qualifying Examination.
- Set procedures and policies on advancement to [doctoral candidacy](#).
- Set guidance on the requirements and quality standards for the dissertation.
- Set procedures on the composition and qualifications of dissertation committee members and review and approve committee membership.

- Monitor doctoral student progress and implement processes to support student progress.
- Review, provide approvals, and facilitate processing of requests for [Leaves of Absence](#), [Change of Concentration](#), and requests for a [Doctoral Timeline Extension](#).
- Study and propose the need for doctoral degrees in each SPH department.
- Develop and monitor an evaluation plan for the doctoral program.
- Prepare an annual report on the SPH Doctoral Program.
- Conduct doctoral program curriculum retreats biannually and on an ad hoc basis in response to identified needs and opportunities.

Email communications

It is a university policy not to communicate with students through personal e-mail accounts. Students are responsible for communicating with the University faculty and professional staff through their Downstate e-mail address and for checking their email regularly.

Extension requests for doctoral program completion

Students experiencing delays or obstacles to doctoral education progression (e.g., health issues, family responsibilities, delays in research) and who will not complete their degree within the ten-year maximum can submit a Doctoral Timeline Extension Request Form in the Spring semester of tenth year. The student must initiate the extension request, meet with their faculty advisor, and review the completed form, and submit the signed extension request form. The [Chair of the Committee on the Doctoral Program](#) will review the form for evidence that the doctoral student is actively addressing modifiable obstacles to degree completion and has proposed a realistic timetable for degree completion. The doctoral committee chair will also suggest additional resources and interventions to advance the student's timely progression. The review process may also include a meeting with the student and faculty advisor. Decisions regarding the extension will be sent in writing to the doctoral student, the faculty advisor, and the Department Chair. Approved extensions are granted for either 12 or 24 months, beginning at the start

of the academic year in June and ending at the end of the academic year in May. If the degree is not completed when the extension expires, students have the option to seek an additional extension. If a subsequent extension request is not approved and the maximum time to doctoral study has been exceeded, the student will be recommended for dismissal from the program. A student may appeal the recommendation for dismissal in accordance with the SPH [Committee on Student Evaluation, Promotion, and Honors](#) appeals process.

Grading system

Instructors assign a letter grade reflecting the performance of each student in DrPH foundation, concentration core, and elective courses. Grade points are assigned to each letter grade based on a 4.0 system and the number of credits per course. Cumulative grade point averages are calculated each semester. The Applied Practice Experience (APEX) and dissertation credits (PUBH 8001) are graded as pass (P) or fail (F).

Average	Letter Grade	Grade Points
96-100	A	4.00
90-95	A-	3.67
85-89	B+	3.33
80-84	B	3.00
75-79	B-	2.67
70-74	C+	2.33

Average	Letter Grade	Grade Points
60-69	C	2.00
<60	F *	0.00
	WF **	0.00
	WP	None
	P	None
	I ***	None

* If a course with an “F” or a “WF” is successfully repeated, the “F” or “WF” appears on the transcript but is not counted in the GPA.

** WP refers to “withdraw pass” and WF to “withdraw fail”.

** *Please refer to the section on [Incomplete grades](#)

Incomplete grades

Incomplete grades can be assigned by a course instructor when a portion of the requirements of a course have not been submitted in time to assign formal course grades and the course instructor determines that the missing course deliverables are due to unavoidable circumstances. For a student to receive an incomplete, the following steps must be followed:

- To request an Incomplete, the student consults with the course instructor as soon as they know that they will not be able to complete course requirements and in advance of the last day of the semester.
- The student and course instructor discuss the reasons for the request. If the incomplete is agreed upon, the student and instructor discuss a timeline for completing course deliverables. The course instructor then enters an incomplete grade for the course.
- The agreed-upon timelines are communicated in writing to the student via their Downstate email, with a copy to the student's faculty advisor, and with the following considerations in mind:
 - A student with an incomplete in a course that is a prerequisite for another course is not permitted to register for that course until the incomplete is resolved. Academic advisors will not grant a PIN to enroll for these courses.
 - For DrPH foundation, concentration core, and elective courses, and for the DrPH APEX, a student must complete all requirements within one year of the first day of the semester in which an incomplete is assigned. If an "I" is not resolved within the agreed upon timeframe, the course grade will be calculated based on completed coursework at the end of the timeframe.
 - For DrPH dissertation credits (PUBH 8001), an incomplete grade is assigned if a student does not submit a completed and signed PUBH 8001 Doctoral Progress Review Form by the last day of the semester. An incomplete not resolved within four weeks of the end of the semester in which an incomplete is assigned will be converted to an "F". Additional details on DrPH dissertation credits are provided in the SPH Doctoral Dissertation Handbook.
 - When a final grade is determined, the instructor changes the "I" to the final assigned grade.

Leaves of absence

Students may request a leave of absence while matriculated in the School of Public Health. The leave of absence is typically granted for one year, as described in the [SUNY Downstate Health Science University's Student Handbook](#). A [Leave of Absence Form](#) should be completed and submitted via email to the [Assistant Director of Enrollment & Onboarding Management](#) with a copy to the [Chair of the Committee on the Doctoral Program](#). The Assistant Director for Enrollment and Onboarding Management will work with Downstate's Office of Student Affairs to process the request. For DrPH students, the leave of absence does not extend a student's academic time in the program. DrPH students nearing the end of the program [timeline](#) for graduation, exclusive of any leaves of absence, should work with their advisor to assess whether to request an [extension](#).

Maximum credits per semester

It is university policy that doctoral students may register for no more than 15 credits per semester. Additional maximum credits apply for doctoral candidates taking PUBH 8001; refer to the SPH Doctoral Dissertation Handbook for additional details.

Program advisement

In the first semester in the SPH doctoral program, students are assigned an academic advisor by the Department Chair. Advisors are full-time SPH faculty members with a primary appointment in the student's concentration area. At a minimum, doctoral students are required to meet with their advisor at least once prior to the start of each Fall semester and again prior to the start of each Spring semester. In addition to providing general guidance, the advisor provides support to the student in the following areas:

- Advising on course selection and approvals for course registration.
- Identifying and addressing barriers to completion of curricular milestones.
- Supporting selection of a dissertation committee.

The academic advisor may serve as a member or chair of a doctoral student's dissertation committee, but this is neither a requirement nor expectation. Further details on roles and composition of the doctoral dissertation committee members are provided in the SPH Doctoral Dissertation Handbook.

Student records

The SPH is in full compliance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (Buckley Amendment), which gives students access to educational records. Students may arrange to review their program records by making an appointment with the Assistant Dean for Student Affairs in the School of Public Health's Office of Student Affairs.

Summer course registration

Doctoral students are required to register for credits in the Fall and Spring to maintain an [active status](#) in the program. Although not required, students may choose to register for credits over the summer if they intend to take one or more doctoral courses, to complete the APEX, or to work on the dissertation. A student who plans to defend their dissertation during the summer must be registered for dissertation credit hours during the summer session.