



SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

UNIVERSITY *of* WASHINGTON

Department of Epidemiology

PhD Student Handbook

2014 and earlier



University of Washington School of Public Health

Department of Epidemiology



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University of Washington [Map](#)

This handbook describes the academic requirements and policies for the Department of Epidemiology PhD degree. The contents of this handbook are a supplement to the requirements and policies of the [University of Washington](#), the [UW Graduate School](#), and the [UW School of Public Health](#). Epidemiology students are responsible for knowledge of, and adherence to, the policies and requirements of all four entities.

The Department of Epidemiology reserves the right to update the information published in the Handbook as necessary. All information is correct at the time of publication.

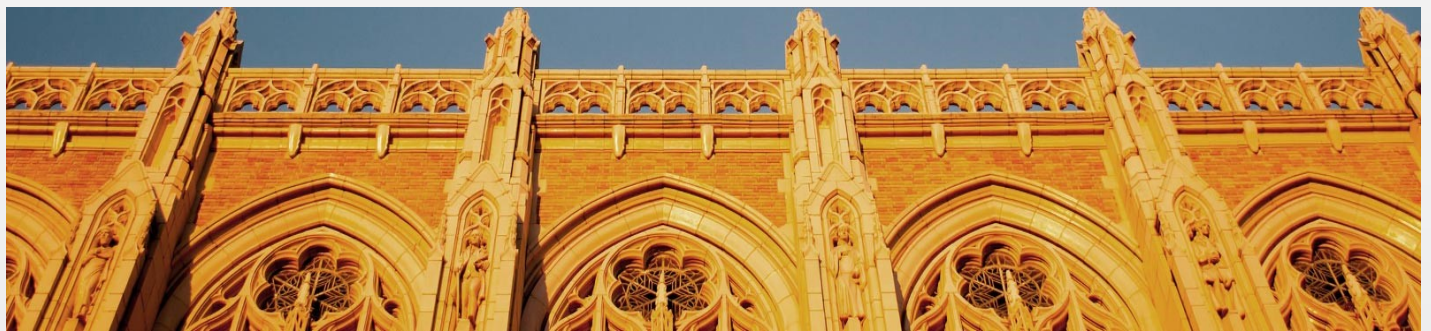


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The PhD program provides the most rigorous training in the conduct of epidemiologic studies. It differs from the MS degree program primarily in the requirements for coursework in advanced methods and grant writing, as well as the nature and scope of the dissertation project, which in turn determines the amount of time necessary to complete the program.

Four to five years is usually necessary to obtain the PhD degree, depending most substantially on the complexity of the dissertation project's data collection period. The Graduate School requires that all work for the doctoral degree be completed within 10 calendar years of enrollment or of the beginning of the student's master's degree (if used to waive 30 of 90 required credits for the PhD).

A series of courses is required, which must be supplemented by sufficient elective courses and independent study/research for the student to earn at least 90-quarter credits (60 credits with relevant master's degree). In addition, the student must pass the Preliminary Examination, and the written and oral General Examination, complete a research-based dissertation (to include study design, data collection, analysis, and writing), and defend the dissertation in a public seminar before his/her Doctoral Supervisory Committee .



The Doctor of Philosophy degree offered in the Department of Epidemiology has a unique set of degree competencies.

[PhD Degree Specific Competencies](#)

All Epi PhD students must fulfill the following credit and GPA requirements:

1. At least 90 total credits are required (30 credits from a recent, health related master's degree from another university may be applied toward this total)
2. At least 18 credits must be numerically-graded, UW graduate courses.
3. Minimum passing course grade: 2.7



A student who receives a grade lower than 2.7 in a required course must retake the course and earn a 2.7 or better in order to graduate. A student who receives a grade below 2.7 in an elective course is not required to retake it; however, the course will not count toward a degree.

4. GPA required to graduate: 3.0

A graduate student must maintain a cumulative GPA of 3.0 to graduate. If a student falls below a 3.0 GPA for a quarter, the Graduate Program Director will review his or her academic record and decide whether to take "No Action", write a "Warn Letter" or place the student on probation until the quarterly and cumulative GPA's are restored to 3.0.

PhD Epidemiology Course Requirements

All courses with an * must be taken for a numerical grade.

EPI METHODS

EPI 512*	Epi Methods I (4 cr)	Autumn, Year 1
EPI 513*	Epi Methods II (4 cr)	Winter, Year 1
EPI 510	Epi Data Analysis (3 cr)	Winter, Year 1
EPI 514*	Application of Epi Methods (4 cr)	Spring, Year 1
EPI 528*	Exposure Measurement in Epi (3 cr)	Spring, Year 1
EPI 536*	Categorical Data Analysis in Epi (4 cr)	Autumn, Year 2
EPI 537*	Survival Data Analysis in Epi (4 cr)	Winter, Year 2
EPI 515*	Topics in Epi Methods (4 cr)	Spring, Year 2

BIOSTATISTICS

BIOST 517*	Applied Biostatistics I (4 cr)	Autumn, Year 1
BIOST 518*	Applied Biostatistics II (4 cr)	Winter, Year 1

DISSERTATION

EPI 584	Dissertation Research Seminar (2, 1 cr/qtr)	Autumn & Winter Year 2
Epi 588	Prep & Writing Research Proposals (2 cr)	Spring 2
EPI 800	Thesis (27 cr minimum)	Years 2-5

EPI ELECTIVES

Three Epi Elective courses listed on the [Epi Course Planning Sheet](#) (as specified below)

- One EPI Infectious Disease course marked "I" on the Epi Course List
- One EPI Non-Infectious Disease course marked "NI" on the Epi Course List
- One additional EPI Elective course of at least 2 credits from the Epi Course List

SPH ELECTIVES

Three additional School of Public Health courses of at least 2 credits each. Non-SPH courses containing significant public health content can be used to fulfill this requirement, with approval from Graduate Program Director.

NON-COURSE REQUIREMENTS

In addition to the course requirements detailed on the previous page, PhD students are required to fulfill three main, non-course requirements to complete the degree (Preliminary Exam, General Exam, Dissertation/Final Exam), as well as submitting regular progress tracking information. Each of the three requirements involves a sequence of steps which can be found in more detail [here](#).

Preliminary Exam

After completion of the basic course sequence in Epidemiology (EPI 512-513), doctoral degree aspirants must take and pass the Departmental PhD Preliminary Examination. This examination is intended to test the student's ability to apply epidemiologic principles and methods that have been presented during the first year of didactic instruction. The examination is given once a year on the first Wednesday after Spring quarter. It must be taken in Seattle. No make-up examinations are allowed. Students generally take the exam after the first year. Those who feel they are not ready to take the exam may wait a year. However, this option should only be used if necessary, because it can delay completion of the degree.

A committee of departmental faculty members composes and scores the examination and evaluates each student's performance. Every committee member grades each question and then the scores are averaged. The members do not know the identity of the exam takers during the grading process. If a student believes that the grading of a Preliminary Examination question should be modified (as a result of an alternate way to look at question, unclear wording, part of an answer not taken into account, etc.), he or she may appeal in a written memo to the Preliminary Examination Committee. The appeal should be delivered to the Chair of the Committee no later than a month after the distribution of the results. The appeal will be reviewed by the entire Committee.



The preliminary exam may be taken a maximum of two times. Students who fail to pass a second time are not eligible to continue in the doctoral program. Those who pass are then eligible to take the General Examination to qualify for formal candidacy to the PhD degree.

Should a student not pass the Preliminary Examination on the first attempt, it is strongly recommended that he or she meet with Graduate Program Director, engage a tutor, sit in on EPI 512-513 again, and attend the review sessions again in the spring.

General Exam

Part I: Written Exam

Part II: Oral Exam

The General Examination administered by the student's Doctoral Supervisory Committee, and deals primarily with the general topic of the student's dissertation. It is designed to:

- Measure the student's ability to analyze and synthesize information,
- Determine whether the student has sufficient breadth of knowledge of the topic of his/her dissertation, including a clear understanding of the biology of the disease under investigation; and
- Evaluate whether the student has adequate knowledge of recent advances and important epidemiologic problems, as well as other disciplines (e.g. biostatistics or genetics) relevant to the student's dissertation project.

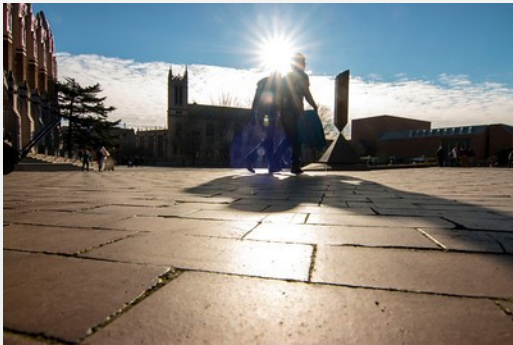
For more detailed discussion of the General Exam see [Appendix I](#).

Dissertation

The topic of the dissertation is chosen by the student, with substantial input from his/her Doctoral Supervisory Committee. Flexibility is allowed in the choice of topics. Studies of disease etiology are usually conducted, but studies to evaluate preventive measures, prognostic factors, or health care programs may also be acceptable. The development of a satisfactory dissertation project often requires a significant time commitment. Thus students are strongly encouraged to begin searching for a research topic during the first year of the program.

Goals

- To assure that the student has experience in a broad range of skills needed by practicing epidemiologists
- To contribute to knowledge in the field of epidemiology



Scope

- Formulation of a hypothesis and specific aims
- Development of the research design and methods
- Planning the conduct of the project
- Obtaining human subject's approval
- Collection of data
- Analysis of data
- Interpretation of results
- A written report of the investigation

Format Options

- A single study (for example, with chapter titles: Introduction and Background, Methods, Results, Discussion)
- Two or more chapters as potentially publishable research papers (i.e., within each chapter, sections should include: Background, Methods, etc.). However, the dissertation must have only one set of preliminary pages, such as table of contents, abstract, and list of references
- A combination of these formats with two or more publishable papers as chapters (e.g., with chapter titles, Introduction and Background, Methods, Paper Topic I (with results and discussion), Paper Topic II with Results and Discussion, and Conclusions)
- When chapters are written as publishable papers, appendices are used to report more detailed methods and analyses than would be presented in a paper
- There is no minimum or maximum number of pages for the dissertation

For more detailed discussion of the Dissertation see [Appendix II](#).



PhD Epidemiology Non-Course Requirements

All forms requiring submission to the Epi PhD Dropbox can be linked to directly from the Epi PhD Dropbox. Further instruction for completing and submitting deliverables associated with non-course requirements can be found there as well.

PRELIMINARY EXAM*

PROGRESS TRACKING

Requirement	Procedure	Timing	Requirement	Procedure	Timing
Confirm participation	Respond to email call to sign up	Spring, Year 1	Signed Progress/Plan Form	Epi Students Canvas site	Due every Autumn and Spring
Take Exam	To be announced	1st Wed after Spring Quarter, Year 1	Funding Update	Epi Students Canvas site	Due each Spring

GENERAL EXAM

DISSERTATION/FINAL EXAM

Requirement	Procedure	Timing	Requirement	Procedure	Timing
Run degree audit	Via MyGrad	1 quarter prior to Written Exam	Human Subjects Discussion form	Epi Students Canvas site	When chair identified
Identify Chair and Committee	Epi Students Canvas site	As soon as committee is formed, ideally by the end of Year 2	Short Proposal	Epi Students Canvas site	
Set Written and Oral Exam Dates	Confirm with Committee		Long Proposal	Epi Students Canvas site	
Take Written Exam	Consult with committee	End of Year 2 or beginning of Year 3	IRB approval or exemption	Epi Students Canvas site	
Submit Request for Oral General Exam	Via MyGrad	At least 1 month prior to Oral Exam	Identify Reading Committee	Epi Students Canvas site	
Take Oral Exam, submit signed warrant	Epi Students Canvas site	Due by last day of quarter of exam	Run degree audit	Via MyGrad	1 quarter prior to Final Exam
			Set Final Exam date	Confirm with committee	
			Submit Request for Final Exam	Via MyGrad	At least 1 month prior to exam
			Take exam, submit signed warrant	Epi Students Canvas site	
			Submit Dissertation, Cmte approval form, Earned Doctorates Survey	Via ETD	Due by last day of quarter

Degree Overview

The following is a typical timeline for completing all Epidemiology PhD degree requirements. Though the years and terms for completing some requirements will vary from student to student, the sequence in which the non-course requirements are fulfilled should, with some flexibility regarding submission of IRB approval/exemption, follow the table below.

	Fall Quarter	Winter Quarter	Spring Quarter	Summer Quarter
Year 1	Coursework	Coursework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coursework Confirm Prelim Exam participation 	Take Prelim Exam
Year 2	Coursework	Coursework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coursework Identify a dissertation Chair, and committee Identify a dissertation topic 	
Year 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Submit Human and Animal Subjects Form Submit Short Proposal Degree audit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Submit IRB approval/exemption Submit Long Proposal Take General Written Exam Set General Oral Exam date Request General Oral Exam in MGP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dissertation research/writing Take General Oral Exam Submit signed Warrant 	Dissertation research/writing
Year 4	Dissertation research/writing	Dissertation research/writing	Dissertation research/writing	Dissertation research/writing
Year 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dissertation research/writing Choose Reading Committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dissertation research/writing Set Final Exam date Degree audit Request Final Exam in MGP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete Final Exam Submit signed Warrant Submit dissertation and approval form Complete Survey of Earned Doctorates 	

GRADUATE CERTIFICATE PROGRAMS

Graduate Certificate Programs: Any student enrolled in a graduate degree program at the University of Washington who meets the prerequisites and qualifications may apply for a graduate certificate program. There is usually time to earn one graduate certificate during the standard time frame to earn an epidemiology degree.

Rules governing all certificate programs:

- The Graduate Certificate will appear on the student's transcript
- At least 9 credits applied toward the certificate must be taken for a numeric grade
- Up to 6 credits may overlap with the student's degree program if they are elective credits for both programs
- Core degree requirements may not be used in fulfillment of a certificate program
- A cumulative GPA of 3.0 is required for all courses counting toward the certificate, and a grade of 2.7 or above is required for any individual course.

The additional, specific requirements for any Graduate Certificate program may be found on the program's website (application requirements, course and credit requirements). See the Graduate Certificate Programs link above for the website containing a listing of all programs and links to program websites.

Helpful Resources and Information



How do I waive a course? Instructions/waiver form on [Epi Students](#) Canvas site.

Can I transfer previously earned graduate credits? You may transfer up to 6 graduate, quarter credits (4 semester credits) with approval of the Epi Department and the Graduate School. First complete the waiver form linked above and submit to Epi Student Academic Services. If approved by Epi, then petition the Graduate School through [MyGradProgram](#). Up to 12 credits earned as a [Graduate Non-Matriculated](#) student may be applied to a UW degree program.

How can I find a tutor? Email Kevin Schuda in the Epi SAS Office at ep-course@uw.edu. Free writing tutoring can be scheduled through the [Health Sciences Library](#).



I'm looking for funding. Where can I search? Start with the [Epi Student Opportunities](#) website. A few other resources can be found on the [Student Funding](#) Graduate School webpage and the [Graduate Funding Information Service](#) (GFIS) webpage.

Can I request a leave of absence? Yes, if you are in good standing, aren't in your first or graduation quarter, aren't in your PhD General of Final Exam quarter, and have a current, signed Progress Plan form on file. You can find more policy detail [here](#). You should submit a petition through [MyGradProgram](#).



Does the Epi Department fund travel to conferences? Any Epi student presenting a paper or poster at a major conference in the field may [apply for limited travel funds](#). There are also travel funds available through GFIS linked above.

Where can I find information about:

[Tuition costs](#)? Contact info for Student Fiscal Services can be found [here](#).

[Course Registration](#)? Contact info for the Registration Office can be found [here](#).

[Washington State Residency](#)? Contact info for the Residency Office can be found [here](#).



Are there resources for helping enhance the mentoring relationship between me and my advisor? A meeting with the Epi Graduate Program Director is often helpful. The Graduate School [Mentoring](#) website also provides information and resources.

Are there mental health professionals I can speak with on campus? The [Counseling Center](#) offers mostly free services including brief counseling sessions, assessments, referrals, and crisis intervention. The [Health and Wellness](#) department also provides mental health support for students.



Get Involved!

STUDENT REPRESENTATION

[Graduate & Professional Student Senate](#): The Graduate and Professional Student Senate (GPSS) is the official student government representing the 15,000 graduate and professional students at the University of Washington.

[Epidemiology Department Student Representatives](#): These positions provide you the opportunity to represent your fellow Epidemiology students in areas such as our curriculum, admissions, diversity, and social opportunities. Contact any representative at the link above to present ideas for improvement in the department or to inquire about becoming a representative yourself.



DIVERSITY

[Samuel E. Kelly Ethnic Cultural Center](#): Home of the Office of Minority Affairs and Diversity, works to enrich the collegiate experience through resources and opportunities focused on increasing and promoting diversity on campus. The Graduate Opportunities and Minority Achievement Program [GO-MAP](#) specifically focuses on the graduate student experience.

The [Intellectual House](#) provides a multi-service learning and gathering space for Native American students, faculty and staff, as well as others from various cultures and communities to come together in a welcoming environment to share knowledge.

RECREATION

The [Intramural Activities/Waterfront Activities Center](#) offer opportunities for students to take classes, participate in intramural sports, take advantage of the recreation center (pool, basketball, racquetball, weight training, indoor track, tennis, climbing wall, and more). The WAC rents canoes and rowboats.



SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH SEMINARS AND EVENTS

View the [School of Public Health Events Calendar](#) to find an extremely wide variety of public health related events and seminars both on and off campus, as well as links to individual SPH department calendars.



REGISTERED STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS

The [EPIDEMIOLOGY STUDENTS GROUP](#) is an official UW Registered Student Organization. On the [Student Activities Office](#) website you can search the complete listing of UW RSO's and learn more about registering a new student organization.

Appendix I: General Exam

The General Examination may be taken only after the short proposal has been presented to the faculty, the NIH-style long proposal has been completed, and before data collection for the dissertation research has begun. Under no circumstances may the General Examination be taken once data collection is complete.

Written General Examination:

The Written Examination is the first step of the General Examination. A student does not need to be registered to take the Written Exam, but must be on leave officially if not registered during the academic year. See the [Graduate School website](#) for information regarding on leave requirements and procedures. The Exam generally consists of 1 or 2 questions from each Doctoral Supervisory Committee member, tailored to the student's individual dissertation topic, with 2-3 weeks usually allowed to complete the written part. However, committees are free to depart from this model, if appropriate. The Committee members then review the written work in order to determine whether or not the student is sufficiently prepared to proceed to the Oral General Examination. A student who, in the judgement of her/his Committee, performs poorly on the written portion of the General Examination may be required to complete a second written portion in attempt to address the deficiencies identified in the first written portion before the Oral Examination is scheduled. In addition, the Committee members may require additional course work, or other educational experiences (e.g. independent study), to remedy perceived deficiencies in any relevant area. If the performance on the written examination, whether after one or two attempts, is sufficiently poor, the Committee may decide not to allow the student to proceed with the Oral General Examination. A decision not to allow the student to proceed to the Oral General Examination effectively means that the Committee believes that the project is either infeasible, inappropriate, or that the student is not sufficiently prepared to proceed with the proposed work. Under such circumstances, the Committee is dissolved and the student must identify a new dissertation topic (and corresponding Doctoral Supervisory Committee) to continue in the PhD program.

Oral General Examination:

Eligibility: The Oral portion of the General Examination consists of a defense of the NIH-style dissertation proposal and the written examination, and is scheduled after the written exam is submitted. To be eligible to take the Oral General Examination, a student must be registered for the term the Oral General is taken, and have approval from her/his Doctoral Supervisory Committee. If the exam occurs between quarters, the student must be registered for the upcoming quarter. In addition, the student must have completed a minimum of 60 credits (30 credits with prior recent, relevant Master's), including all the departmental course requirements by the end of the quarter of the Oral Exam. All incomplete grades must be cleared and grades turned in by the quarterly grade deadline. It is the student's responsibility to make sure that the applicable faculty member has turned in the grade for an incomplete that has been finished. A student who is registered for 1 credit will be charged for 2 (unless he or she is using the faculty/staff tuition exemption to register for 1 course credit numbered under 600). Graduate School policies for the General Examination are available [here](#).

Scheduling: Each student should poll his or her Committee to set up a date, time and place that is convenient to the Committee members. This should be done well in advance because faculty members travel extensively and have other commitments. At least 4 members of the Committee must be present, including the Chair and GSR. Members, except the GSR, may be present by audio/video conferencing if previously arranged with the Committee. If there will be costs associated with audio/video conferencing, the student must locate a Committee member willing to use his/her UW budget number (or budget number from cooperating institution where the exam is held) to pay the charges. A **substitute GSR** may be selected from among non-Epidemiology Graduate Faculty members in case the GSR cannot attend at the last minute. The student must notify Epi Student Academic Services and the Graduate School at uwgrad@uw.edu prior to the exam if the GSR is replaced. If the Chair is not present at the last minute, the exam must be rescheduled for a later date. A student who wishes to take the exam via audio/video-conferencing must follow these [directions](#).

Appendix I: General Exam (cont.)

Official Oral Exam Request: After setting up a meeting time and place for the Oral General Examination with the Doctoral Supervisory Committee members, students submit a Request for the General Exam via [MyGrad Students](#). If there are changes to the committee, you must notify Epidemiology Student Academic Services prior to requesting the Exam. **The student must submit the request at least three weeks prior to the Oral Examination.** In order for the Request for the General Exam to be approved the student must have submitted the signed Long Dissertation Proposal Approval Form via the [Epi Students](#) Canvas site, and must also confirm that all members of the committee approve the scheduling of the Oral General Exam. Epi Student Academic Services will email the Warrant for the General Exam to the student before the Oral Exam. The student must print and give the Warrant to the chair prior to taking the exam. If the student has not completed the requirements (stated above) to be eligible for the Oral General Examination, the warrant will not be provided to the student.

Results of the Oral General Examination: After the Oral General Examination, the committee indicates on the warrant whether the student passed, should be re-examined, or failed. All committee members who are present at the exam should sign the warrant. If a member is not in attendance, he or she should not sign the warrant. A member present by audio/video conferencing must email the Committee Chair and epi@uw.edu that he or she was present for the entire exam, referencing the time and date, and his or her vote. The absent members' names will still appear on the warrant, but the signature line should be left blank. Students should make a copy of the signed warrant in case the original is lost. The student should make sure that the signed warrant is uploaded to the Epi Students Canvas site no later than the last day of the quarter (earlier preferred). If the student passes, candidacy is then awarded at the beginning of the next quarter. A student who passes the Oral Exam between quarters will not be a candidate in the upcoming quarter, but will have to wait until the following quarter to achieve candidacy (e.g. if a student passes in early September, he or she will not be a candidate until Winter Quarter). If the student must be re-examined, he or she has one more chance to pass. In case of re-examination, the Doctoral Supervisory Committee will make appropriate recommendations for further courses, reading or research to address the deficiencies. A student who does not pass after the second attempt may not earn a PhD in Epidemiology at the UW. Students may not take the Final Examination in the same quarter as the General Examination.

Appendix II: Dissertation/Final Exam

Dissertation Committee (membership = 4 members minimum)

Chair: Usually the Chair will be the faculty member who is providing the majority of the scientific mentoring in the development and conduct of the student's dissertation project. A faculty member must fulfill 3 basic criteria in order to serve as Chair of an Epi Department Doctoral Supervisory Committee.

1. The Chair must be a [core Epidemiology faculty member](#).*
2. The Chair must have an earned doctoral degree (or foreign equivalent).
3. The Chair must be a member of the [Graduate Faculty](#) who is endorsed to chair doctoral supervisory committees. Don't assume a potential Chair is a member of the Graduate Faculty. Search at the linked page to be 100% sure.

*A faculty member with an adjunct, affiliate, clinical, senior lecturer or emeritus appointment may chair a Doctoral Supervisory Committee only with prior approval of the Graduate Program Director. In such cases, the Committee must include at least two other members who hold Core faculty appointments in Epidemiology. To request permission for this exception first check to be sure your proposed Chair is a member of the Graduate Faculty (few are). Then send a petition to the Assistant Director of Student Academic Services at epi@uw.edu providing the following information:

1. A brief description of the proposed project
2. A brief explanation of why the faculty member is especially appropriate to chair the committee based on the topic and his/her expertise
3. The names of the core Epidemiology faculty members who will also serve on the committee

The Graduate School Representative (GSR) is a voting member of the committee. Please note the following when selecting a GSR:

- The GSR should be selected by the student in consultation with the Committee Chair.
- The GSR may not have a primary, joint, or affiliate appointment within the Department of Epidemiology or the Committee Chair's primary or joint department(s). An adjunct faculty member may serve as the GSR if his or her primary department is not the same as the chair's primary department and he or she meets the other requirements listed here.
- The ideal GSR is a faculty member who has expertise relevant, but not necessary, to the dissertation project. Such a GSR will tend to have motivation to serve on the committee but have zero or minimal potential for conflicts of interest. The GSR must have no conflict of interest with the Committee Chair(s) or the student (e.g. budgetary, publication, research or personal). For example, budgetary conflicts of interest mean that the GSR cannot report to the Chair or receive a significant portion of his/her budget from the Chair. Similarly, the student may not choose a GSR to whom he/she reports or by whom he/she is supported.
- The GSR must be a Graduate Faculty member with an endorsement to chair doctoral committees.

The Doctoral Supervisory Committee profile must conform to the following criteria:

- At least two members of the Committee must hold appointments in the Epidemiology Department.
- At least one committee member must be an expert in the field most relevant to the dissertation topic. Such a committee member may be from any department (subject to other requirements regarding who may serve on doctoral supervisory committees).
- The majority of the members must be on the Graduate Faculty with at least three endorsed to Chair doctoral committees, including the Chair and GSR. Check the [Graduate Faculty Locator](#).
- At least three committee members must hold the rank of Assistant Professor or higher (whether Core, Research, Adjunct, Affiliate, Clinical, or equivalent rank at another institution).
- Appointing a non-UW affiliated committee member requires approval. To request permission for a non-UW affiliated committee member email the following information to the Graduate Program Director, Steve Schwartz (sschwartz@fredhutch.org)
 1. A brief description of the proposed project
 2. A brief explanation of why the person is especially appropriate to serve on the committee based on the topic and his/her expertise
 3. The proposed committee member's CV
- An individual currently matriculated in an Epidemiology degree program may not serve on an Epidemiology supervisory committee.

Appendix II: Dissertation/Final Exam (cont.)

Committee Formation

- Once committee members have been selected, submit the Chair/Committee Update Form via the Epi PhD Dropbox. If one of the members of the Committee is not affiliated with the University of Washington, that member's email address, and a copy of his/her CV must be submitted to Epi Student Academic Services at epi@uw.edu.
- A student may only officially form a Dissertation Supervisory Committee while registered. A master's student admitted to the PhD program may set up his or her committee informally, but not officially until after master's graduation.
- The Graduate School will send an official letter via email to confirm the formation of the Committee. This is the only official notification the student and committee will receive.
- To request a change to the Committee members, submit a revised Chair/Committee Update Form along with an explanation for the request via the Epi PhD Dropbox. The Graduate Program Director must approve the removal of any committee member or change to the Chair not requested by the member him or herself.
- The Doctoral Supervisory Committee should be officially established at least four months prior to the General Examination.
- The Committee will become inactive if the student fails to complete and pay for an official leave request for any non-registered quarter, except summer.
- Before scheduling the Final Exam students must appoint a Reading Committee. This is typically a 3 person subset of the full Dissertation Supervisory Committee consisting of the Chair and two other members. The GSR is usually not appointed to the Reading Committee. Visit the Graduate School website for a full discussion of the [roles and responsibilities of the Reading Committee](#).

Once the Doctoral Supervisory Committee is formed, the role of the student's previous advisor is dissolved. The Chair becomes the new advisor. It is the responsibility of the Committee to ensure that the student's course work is appropriate and adequate for the area of Epidemiology that the student is pursuing and that the student has involvement to a satisfactory degree in each of the elements of the dissertation project. The Committee may require additional courses beyond departmental requirements (including ESL classes) to provide an appropriate knowledge base or correct deficiencies.

The Committee is also responsible for ensuring that the student has met departmental and Graduate School requirements at each stage of the dissertation process. However, each student bears the responsibility of knowing, understanding, and completing these requirements.

If a student does not make satisfactory progress towards his/her degree, the Committee, in consultation with the Graduate Program Director, may choose to place the student on "warn" or probation status. The student then has another chance to meet the requirements of the Committee. If a student has been warned or placed on probation and still fails to make satisfactory progress, the Committee may choose to disband. In that case, the student will have to find other willing faculty members, which may include selecting a new dissertation topic, in order to earn a PhD from the Department. The Committee may also choose to place the student on final probation, which gives the student one quarter to meet the benchmarks required by the Committee or Department or be removed from the Epidemiology doctoral program.

Appendix II: Dissertation/Final Exam (cont.)

Data Collection Requirement

The goal of associating the data collection requirement with the dissertation is to ensure that training and experience in data collection are: 1) designed and organized, though not necessarily carried out, by the student as the “Principal Investigator” of his or her own research project; and 2) mentored by his/her committee. The data collection requirement has considerable flexibility within this goal, but in all cases the student must be responsible for the collection of new data components as part of the dissertation research. “Collection of new data” may include one or more of the following: subject interviews, medical record abstraction, laboratory measures on newly collected or stored specimens, or linkage of data sets, and is subject to the approval of the student’s Committee. A student should check with the Graduate Program Director regarding any questions he or she has as to whether or not his or her dissertation project meets the data collection requirement. Meta-analyses and other quantitative reviews do not satisfy the data collection requirement. Similarly, a dissertation project may not consist solely of non-quantitative research (e.g., review papers and qualitative studies); such work could, however, be a component of a larger dissertation project in which quantitative testing of hypotheses using individual-level data is conducted. For PhD students without experience in design and implementation of primary data collection through questionnaires or abstraction of records, the Supervisory Committee should ensure that the student gains experience in these types of data collection through the dissertation, from other research, or through an ancillary study to the dissertation project.

Committee Meetings and Dissertation Proposals

First Meeting with Supervisory Committee: It is recommended that each student arrange a preliminary meeting with his or her Committee, during which time he or she will discuss a draft dissertation proposal that has been circulated previously to Committee members. The Committee has the opportunity to make suggestions and require changes. The Committee, therefore, makes decisions about what constitutes an acceptable proposal. Also at this meeting, the student provides a list of courses taken and a completed [PhD Requirements Checklist](#). The Committee discusses any additional coursework it will require of the student.

Short Dissertation Proposal for Faculty Review: Prior to taking the Oral General Examination, the student must prepare a 3-5-page short proposal. Consult the [PhD Short Proposal Format](#) for the requirements, which are strictly enforced. The short proposal will be made available for all faculty to review online. The goal of the review is to inform all faculty of the proposed project, and allow the opportunity for faculty members to provide feedback. This may include constructive suggestions and information about resources of which the student may not be aware.

Short proposal reviews will happen once each month. To begin the Faculty Review process, the student must submit the short proposal to the Graduate Program Director via email by the first day of the month in which s/he would like the proposal reviewed. The student should coordinate with his or her Committee Chair as to which month is appropriate for submission. The Graduate Program Director will review the proposal to ensure that all of the required elements are present. Suggested and/or required changes will be communicated to the student. After the student makes any necessary revisions he or she must submit the revised version, along with a cover page that includes: name, project title, chair and committee member names, Chair’s signature, and the date, via the [Epi Students](#) Canvas site. The proposal will then be uploaded by the Epi Student Academic Services Office to a Short Proposal Review Dropbox for faculty review. Once the faculty review process is closed, feedback, if any, will be provided to the student and his/her committee chair.

NIH-Style Long Dissertation Proposal: In addition to the short proposal for the faculty review, the student must develop and present to his or her supervisory committee an NIH-Style Long Dissertation Proposal. The strict requirements can be found on the [Epi website](#).

An NIH-style proposal must be given to the committee members prior to the formulation of the general examination, since the committee members will design examination questions based on the proposal. The Committee typically meets with the student at least once following the submission of NIH-style proposal to address any issues and further discuss the project. After the discussion, the student is excused and the committee discusses possible questions to include on the General Examination. The student must submit a signed Approval of Long Proposal Form via the Epi Students Canvas site before requesting an Oral General Exam in MyGradProgram.

Appendix II: Dissertation/Final Exam (cont.)

Human Subjects Approval

The Graduate School requires a graduate degree student to discuss Human Subjects requirements with his or her Supervisory Committee Chair. Both the student and his/her Chair must sign the "Use of Human and Animal Subjects for UW Graduate Student Theses and Dissertations" form and return it to Epi Student Academic Services before the student may earn EPI 800 Dissertation credits and before the student's committee may be formed officially. The form is available on the [Graduate School website](#).

Those aspects of a student's dissertation project that potentially involve human subjects (e.g., subject identification and recruitment, data and/or specimen collection or analysis) must be reviewed and approved in accordance with UW [HSRC policies and federal regulations](#) before they may be initiated. Unless the project qualifies as "Exempt" under these regulations, the review and approval process can take several months, so the student should begin the process as early as possible. Most dissertations will require human subject review and approval, rather than exemption, even if the project funding the research already has received approval. The Certificate of Exemption and approval application forms can be found on HSD website above. Research that has received IRB approval from a cooperating institution does not require re-approval through the UW. Here is a [detailed list](#). If a project is only approved by a non-cooperating institution, UW approval/exemption is required. A project involving data/subjects from another country must be approved by the appropriate authority in that country as well as by the UW.

If a student has a question about the applicable process for his/her dissertation research, he/she should email the question to the [Human Subjects Division](#). Each student is responsible for maintaining documentation of his/her project's approval throughout the course of the dissertation/thesis work and through graduation. A student must upload to the Epi PhD Dropbox, prior to beginning his or her dissertation research, the IRB cover page(s) which should include the approval or exemption number, start and end dates of approval (including any extensions), name of the principal investigator and title of the approved project. The student must write his or her name on the copy of the cover page(s) if not included.

Appendix II: Dissertation/Final Exam (cont.)

Final Examination (a.k.a. Dissertation Defense)

To be awarded the PhD, a student must successfully present and defend his/her dissertation topic at the Final Examination. The student must arrange with the committee members an acceptable date, time and location for the Final Examination. All the members must approve the time, date and place before the student requests the final exam even if a member will not be present. At least four of the committee members must attend the Final Examination, including the Chair and the Graduate School Representative.

Request for Final Examination: The student should request the final exam via [MyGrad Student](#) at least 3 weeks in advance of the examination. The Department of Epidemiology conference room (F-359) is the preferred location for final examinations. Students who expect to finish in Spring Quarter and wish to participate in the commencement ceremony should consult the [Commencement website](#) for appropriate deadlines, which are early in the quarter. The Graduate School website also lists their [procedures and regulations](#). Members, except the Chair and GSR, may be present by audio/video conferencing, subject to [Graduate School guidelines](#). If there will be costs associated with audio/video conferencing, the student must locate a committee member willing to use his/her UW budget number (or budget number from cooperating institution where the exam is held) to pay the charges.

Last Minute Absence of GSR or Chair: The GSR may be replaced by another Graduate Faculty member endorsed to chair doctoral committees from outside the Epidemiology Department if the GSR does not show up at the last minute. Check the [Graduate Faculty Locator](#) by entering the faculty member's last name. If he or she appears with an asterisk, he or she may serve as a substitute GSR. Epi Student Academic Services and the Graduate School (uwgrad@uw.edu) must be notified in advance of the Exam if the GSR is replaced. However, if the Chair is unable to attend for any reason, the Final Examination must be rescheduled through the Graduate School.

Final Examination Agenda: The following agenda is typical of a doctoral defense in this department, but the committee is free to depart from this model as deemed appropriate:

- The student presents a seminar-style version of his or her dissertation research (40-50 minutes).
- Questions are taken from the audience (and/or Committee, at the Committee's preference).
- The audience is dismissed.
- The Committee asks questions in closed session with the student.
- The student is dismissed, but asked to wait outside.
- The Committee discusses the student's work and decides whether or not to grant the PhD.
- The Committee notifies the student of its decision.
- The committee members mark the warrant appropriately and sign it. Only those members present in person should sign the form.

A member present by audio/video conferencing, must send the Committee Chair and epi@uw.edu confirmation of his/her attendance during the entire examination including the time and date of the examination, and his/her vote (pass, reexamine, fail).

The student is responsible for making sure the signed warrant is uploaded to the [Epi Students Canvas site](#) by 5:00 pm on the last day of the quarter (earlier is recommended). If the student does not perform satisfactorily, the Committee may permit (but it is not required to permit) a second examination and recommend further study. Although the Graduate School allows a student to take the Final Examination 3 times, the Epidemiology Department only allows it to be taken twice. If the student fails the second time, he or she will not be able to earn a PhD in this Department.