Ph.D. Program in Health Services Research
University of Maryland, College Park

Last Updated May 2025

Contents

INTRODUCTION

The doctoral program in health services research provides interdisciplinary training in research and policy analysis relevant to the planning, management, and evaluation of health care services and policy. The program requires 53-56 credits, depending on whether the student enters with an MPH degree. Students take 8 required courses that cover theory and methods relevant to the field, a 1 credit research ethics course, and a 1 credit statistical programming course. Students without an MPH take a foundational public health course. Together with their advisor, students select 5 elective courses that allow for specialization. The area of specialization is specific to the student, but might include health economics, policy analysis, health equity, or outcomes research. Students must pass a qualifying exam and then a dissertation proposal defense. After the dissertation proposal defense, students enter candidacy and take dissertation credits that culminate in a doctoral dissertation and an oral dissertation defense. The program's credit bearing requirements are complemented by a set of non-credit bearing expectations.

Completion of the Doctor of Philosophy degree in health services research signifies that the student is capable of leading independent research that has the potential to influence the academic literature and/or a specific identifiable practice environment.

Department Organization and Leadership

The program is housed in the Department of Health Policy and Management in the School of Public Health. The department also offers masters programs via in-person and online offerings and maintains a robust research portfolio. A complete listing of department faculty and staff is provided on the department webpage. The primary contacts for the PhD program are:

ROLE	Name	Contact
Department Chair	Jie Chen	jichen@umd.edu
Director of Graduate Studies	Melvin Seale	mseale@umd.edu
PhD Program Director	Michel Boudreaux	mhb@umd.edu
Assistant Director of Finance	Bianca Garcia	bgarcia1@umd.edu
Business Coordinator	Claudia Aragon	caragon@umd.edu

GENERAL GRADUATE SCHOOL POLICIES

The program follows all graduate school policies, which are described in full in UMD's academic catalogue. Other useful information can be found on the graduate school website, including all necessary forms and a calendar of their deadlines. Not all policies and procedures pertinent to PhD students are described here (e.g. academic integrity), but are described in full at the links above.

Continuous Registration

Students enrolled in the program must adhere to the Graduate School's continuous registration policy which requires that students register for credits in each term, except winter and summer, until they graduate. Students defending their dissertation in a summer/winter term, must register for credits during that term or seek a waiver.

Academic Standing and Minimum Grades

The program follows the UMD graduate school policy on academic standing which requires maintaining a 3.0 GPA in all graduate level classes. Students falling below a 3.0 will follow the probation procedures outlined by the graduate school. Students do not earn credit for courses in which they receive a D+ or lower grade.

Tuition and Fees

The schedule of tuition and fees is posted on the graduate school website. Please note that some schools and colleges at UMD charge non-standard tuition. Tuition charges above the standard tuition schedule are not covered by tuition remission benefits.

Enrollment Status

The graduate school classifies student enrollment as either full or part-time. This designation is mainly used to determine financial aid (FAFSA based loans and grants). However, GRAs must be enrolled full time. In almost all circumstances, PhD students are enrolled full-time, even if they have off-campus employment. The full vs. part-time designation is based on the number of "graduate units" the student accumulates per semester (not counting winter and summer). A student must obtain 48 units to meet full-time status and these units are accumulated through a combination of course-equivalent credits and graduate assistantship work.

The number of graduate units earned for each course varies by the course number. Most formal coursework taken by PhD students are listed as 600-800 and earn 6 graduate units per credit hour (i.e. 8 units are earned in a typical 3 credit course). 400-499 classes can count towards the program's credit total, but accumulate fewer units (4 per credit hour). Dissertation (HLSA 899) and pre-dissertation (HLSA 898) credits earn 18 units per credit hour. For each 10 hours of graduate assistantship responsibility, the student accumulates 12 units. For example, a student working 20 hours per week as a graduate assistant must enroll in enough credits to accumulate an additional 24 units to reach full-time status. A student working 10 hours per week as a graduate assistant must enroll in 36 units and a student working no hours as a graduate assistant must enroll in the full 48 units to reach full-time enrollment.

PhD Candidacy
After the dissertation proposal defense, the student's advisor can grant a student permission to apply for candidacy. After the advisor has approved it, the student must fill out the graduate school's candidacy form and have it signed by their advisor and the graduate program director. The graduate program director then sends it to the registrar. The major benefit of candidacy is that it allows a student to enroll in flat rate dissertation credits (see below). RA's and TA's also receive a raise when they enter candidacy. You must notify the department business office when your candidacy form is approved to obtain your raise.

Leave of Absence
The program follows the Graduate School's leave of absence policy. A student may obtain a leave of absence for up to 2 semesters for reasons of birth, adoption, care giving, health, financial hardship, and military service. During the leave, time limits and enrollment requirements (see above) are paused.

Health Insurance
All full-time graduate students must have health insurance. All students are eligible for the Student Health Insurance Plan. Graduate assistants are eligible for the State of Maryland Employee Health Plan. Please consult the Graduate School's website.

Time until Degree
The graduate school requires students to enter candidacy within 5 years of admission and limits the total time to degree of 9 years. Extensions may be granted through a waiver process.

Graduate School Forms
The graduate school requires 4 forms that have specific deadlines. A summary of required forms is provided in the table below. A list of all forms is provided on the grad school website. A list of deadlines is also provided.

Form	Timing
Application for Candidacy	After proposal defense
Committee Nomination	6 weeks before dissertation defense
Application for Graduation	Start of semester of graduation
Dissertation Submission	After dissertation approved

THE PROGRAM

Competencies
The program's credit and non-credit bearing requirements are built around four competencies:

1. Foundational knowledge in the organizational, policy, economic and social factors that influence health and health services delivery;
2. Advanced research skills that are sufficient to develop and execute an independent project in health services research;
3. Demonstrated ability to complete an independent project in health services research;
4. Oral and written communication skills appropriate for the dissemination of knowledge in health services research to both academic and professional audiences.

Milestones
There are 4 major milestones in the program.

Milestone	Usual Timing
Formal Coursework	First 2.5 Years
Qualifying Exam	Summer of 2nd Year
Proposal Defense	3rd or 4th Year
Dissertation Defense	4th or 5th Year

Satisfactory Progress
Students must meet minimum standards of satisfactory progress each year to be permitted to continue. Satisfactory progress includes maintaining academic standing (see above), maintaining enrollment status (see above), and demonstrated progress towards the requirements described below, as documented in the student's annual progress report (described below). Failure to meet satisfactory progress may result in dismal from the program.

Credit Bearing Requirements of the Program
Students are ultimately responsible for tracking their progress towards the credit bearing requirements of the program, in consultation with their advisors. UAchieve is a useful resource for ensuring you are on track.

Students must take a minimum of 53 credits that include 10 required courses, 5 elective courses, and at least 12 dissertation credits. Students that enter the program without an MPH must also take SPHL600: Public Health Fundamentals and complete a minimum of 56 credits.

The course schedule below describes the course requirements and the typical sequence they are taken. While students may deviate from this schedule, they are encouraged to stay on track. In some circumstances a student may have existing expertise in a given topic area and wish to replace a required course with an alternative. Such students should consult with their advisors.

Waivers are sometimes permitted if they are granted prospectively. However, students still must meet the credit total and the alternative course must support the program's training goals.

Course Schedule

Term	Number	Title	Credits
Fall, Year 1	HLSA711	Health Economics and Analysis	3
Fall, Year 1	HLSA731	The Social Construction of Health and Health Service Delivery	3
Fall Year 1	EPIB650‡	Biostatistics I	3
Spring, Year 1	HLSA725	Econometrics in Public Health	3
Spring, Year 1	HLSA715	HSR Data Lab	1
Spring, Year 1	HLSA723	Policy Analysis and Advocacy	3
Spring, Year 1	Electives	Various	3
Fall Year 2	Electives	Various	3
Fall, Year 2	Electives	Various	3
Fall Year 2	HLSA732	The Evolving US Health System	3
Spring, Year 2	Electives	Various	3
Spring, Year 2	Electives	Various	3
Spring, Year 2	HLSA727	Causal Inference in HSR	3
Spring Year 2	SPHL612	Research Ethics	1
Fall Year 3	SPHL600*	Public Health Fundamentals	3
Fall, Year 3	HLSA765	Dissertation Proposal Development Seminar	3
Prior to Candidacy	HLSA898†	Pre-Dissertation Credits	As Needed
After Candidacy	HLSA899	Doctoral Dissertation Research	12
TOTAL			53-56

‡ Students who have advanced statistical training may waive out of this course and take another methods focused class. Speak with your advisor.
* Taken only by students without an MPH
† Taken only by students that need to maintain enrollment status

Pre-Dissertation Credits: HLSA 898
Pre-dissertation credits (HLSA 898) are only taken by students that are not taking a sufficient number of formal coursework credits to maintain enrollment status. These credits are often taken by advanced students who have finished their formal course work, but have not yet defended their dissertation proposal and have not been admitted to candidacy. These credits do not count towards the required credit total and provide no benefit towards graduation, other than maintaining enrollment status. Students should never take more than the minimum number of 898 credits than are required to maintain enrollment status. A student working 20hrs/wk as a graduate assistant and not taking any courses needs to enroll in 2 898 credits in fall and 2 in spring to maintain full-time enrollment. A student working 10hrs/week as a graduate assistant

and those not working as a graduate assistant would take 3 898 credits per term. Students should never take 898 credits in winter or summer and should never take more than 3 in a given semester. Please consult with your advisor before enrolling in 898.

Dissertation Credits: HLSA 899
After the student is admitted to candidacy, they will automatically be enrolled in 6 credits of HLSA 899 in each semester (not counting winter and summer) until they graduate. These credits confer full-time enrollment status, regardless of graduate assistantship hours. A student must have a total of 12 899 credits to graduate. If you are attempting to graduate on an abbreviated timeline, speak to your advisor about the right approach to accumulating the necessary dissertation credits. There is flat-rate tuition charge for 899 credits (see above).

Electives
The five electives help the student specialize in a given area and develop the unique skills that will be needed for their specific dissertation project. Areas of specialization in HSR are typically affiliated with a disciplinary tradition (e.g. economics, sociology, political science, public affairs, biostat, epi, etc). Students, in collaboration with their advisors, are permitted wide latitude in choosing elective courses that meet their specific needs. They may take any course that is eligible for graduate credit (course numbers 600 and above or 400 level courses, provided the course did not contribute towards an undergraduate degree) that is offered at UMD or through the Washington Consortium, a coalition of 14 universities in the DC metro that allow cross-registration.

Students should be aware that not all UMD colleges and schools charge standard graduate tuition (see above). Any difference between a school's tuition and the standard tuition will be charged to the student and will not be covered by a graduate assistantship's tuition remission benefit, unless special accommodations are made. See the non-standard tuition page.

The tables below list some *example* electives. They are *suggestive* only and students are encouraged to search for courses themselves. The methods courses are appropriate for any area of specialization. In addition to speaking with other graduates students and their advisors, students are encouraged to search the course schedule via Testudo. They may also consult the Diamondback's AI supported search tool – make sure to toggle the "Include Graduate Courses" button in the top-right corner. Students should work closely with their advisors when choosing electives.

Potential Departmental Electives

HLSA714 Economic Evaluation of Medical Care
HLSA721† Using Demographic Data for Health Policy Analysis
HLSA611† Introduction to Health Equity
HLSA787 Health Equity Practice, Policy, and Research
HLSA780 Qualitative Methods for Health Services Research
HLSA 716 Pharmaceutical Policy and Economics
HLSA XXX* Current Topics in Health Care Management
HLSA XXX* Behavioral Health Policy

† These classes are designed for MPH students, but can be useful as electives taken early in the program for students that need to build foundational skills.
* These classes are currently being designed and should first be offered in Spring 2026.

Potential Content Electives Offered Outside of the Department

ECON641 Microeconomic Analysis
ECON626 Empirical Microeconomics
PLCY640 Microeconomic and Policy Analysis
PLCY688F State, Local & Non-Profit Financial Management
PLCY745 Human Health and Environmental Policy
PLCY698A Poverty Measurement and Alleviation
PLCY689Z Strategic Management for Non Profit and Public Organizations
PLCY670 Public Budgeting & Financial Management
PLCY699D Examining Social Identity & Pluralism in Public Policy
PLCY737: Strategies of Equality Restriction
PLCY631 Governance: Leadership, Management and Accountability
PLCY630 Normative and Political Dimensions of Public Policy
URSP810 Contemporary Metropolitan Issues
URSP688O US Housing Policy & Planning
ANTH612: Hypermarginality and Health Inequity
ANTH624: Women's Health: Ethnographic Approaches to Reproduction and Politics
ANTH611: Anthropology of Im/migration and Health
SOCY685 Sociology of Ideology
SOCY660 Theories of Social Psychology
SOCY632 Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods
SOCY627 Migration

SOCY630 Population and Society
SOCY641 Leadership in Diverse Organizations
SOCY643 Power and Status in Organization
SOCY661 Social Stratification

Potential Methods Electives Offered Outside of the Department

EPIB697 Public Health Data Management
EPIB652 Categorical Data Analysis
EPIB635 Applied Multilevel Modeling of Health Data
EPIB655 Longitudinal Data Analysis
EPIB651 Applied Regression Analysis
EPIB637 Social Epidemiologic Methods in Health Equity Research
EPIB622 Social Determinants of Health
MIEH760: Spatial Epidemiology
GEOG788Q: Selected Topics in Geography; Studying Social Networks: Theory, Methods, and Analysis
GEOG788Z: Selected Topics in Geography; Topics in Data Visualization with Processing and Applications in R
GEOG656 - Programming and Scripting for GIS
DATA641 Natural Language Processing
SURV745: Practical Tools for Sampling and Weighting
SURV632: Cognition, Communication and Survey Measurement
SURV662 An Introduction to Small Area Estimation Methods
SURV631 Questionnaire Design
SURV751 Introduction to Big Data and Machine Learning
SURV615 Statistical Modeling and Machine Learning I
SURV621 Fundamentals of Data Collection I
SURV626 Sampling
SURV627 Experimental Design and Causal Inference
SURV720 Total Survey Error and Data Quality I
SURV726 Multiple Imputation
SURV740 Fundamentals of Inference
EDMS703: Quantitative Applications for Education Policy Analysis
EDMS623: Applied Measurement: Issues and Practices
EDMS655: Introduction to Multilevel Modeling
EDMS646: General Linear Models I
ECON672: Program Analysis and Evaluation
BIOM603: Biostatistics III
SOCY611 Introduction to Demographic Methods

Auditing Classes

Students may opt to audit a class which means they register for the course, but obtain no credit. They often will not receive a grade and the course does not count towards their enrollment status, GPA, or progress towards degree completion. However, they are still charged tuition for the course. Because of the tuition charge, auditing a class is not cost-effective. Within the department students instead should inquire with a course instructor if they can sit-in on the course (which will not generate a tuition charge). Most department faculty are happy to accommodate such a request, but they might be less eager to do so if it is a small course and they need your registration to meet minimum enrollment requirements. Students that sit-in do not automatically receive ELMS access, but they can be granted "observer" status. Speak with the course instructor about that. Students may also inquire about sitting in on courses outside of the department, but outside faculty might be less willing to accommodate.

Non-Credit Bearing Requirements of the Program

In addition to credit bearing requirements, there are five non-credit bearing requirements, described in the table below.

Requirement	Typical Timing
Annual Progress Report	Spring of each year
Regular Attendance at Departmental Seminars	On-going
Qualifying Exam	Summer of 2nd year
Dissertation Proposal and Proposal Defense	3rd or 4th year
Dissertation and Dissertation Defense	5th Year

Annual Progress Report
In the spring of each year, students submit a progress report that is reviewed and signed by their advisor. This report provides an opportunity for the student to reflect on their progress and set goals for the coming year, in collaboration with their advisor. This document also provides evidence of "satisfactory progress" required by the program (see above). Failure to submit the report will be taken as evidence that the student is not making satisfactory progress. The form must be submitted between May 1 and June 1 of each year.

Regular Attendance at Departmental Seminars
The department hosts a regular seminar series, interviews job candidates that give research seminars ("job-talks"), and occasionally holds special ad-hoc talks. These are essential activities in PhD student training. They provide the opportunity for students to hear about on-going work in the field, to meet external researchers, and to observe speaker and audience behavior (both good and bad) during a professional academic talk, an activity that students will eventually be responsible for. Students are expected to attend these events on a regular basis. The program understands that students *occasionally* might have other responsibilities that prevent their

attendance and students do not need to seek permission if they will miss a single event. Students might also have a course conflict, which they should check in with their advisor about. However, if attendance at departmental events is consistently low, attendance will be taken and those not attending on a regular basis will be considered to not be making satisfactory progress.

Students are encourage to present in the regular departmental seminar and advisors may strongly suggest it. However, it is not a requirement of the program.

Qualifying Exam
All students must take and pass a qualifying exam. Most students take the exam in the summer of their second year, after most formal course work has been completed. While the format of the exam is subject to change, it always requires students to demonstrate mastery of the material covered in the major required courses (711, 723, 725, 731, 732). The exam typically includes an empirical section (requiring the analysis of data) and a section covering domain expertise. Details on the exam are distributed in the early spring (January/February) to the cohort that will sit for the exam that coming summer. These details will include policy regarding the format of the exam and its possible outcomes (i.e. pass, revision, fail). Students who fail the initial exam are typically afforded the opportunity to retake it and the policy for this is laid out in the details provided to the cohort sitting for the exam. Failure after all retake opportunities have been exhausted and as outlined in the exam policy, will be taken as evidence that the student is not making satisfactory progress.

Dissertation Proposal and Proposal Defense
All students write a dissertation proposal that outlines the goals of their dissertation, motivates the importance of the proposed work, reviews the institutional background and prior literature informing the project, and details a feasible analytic plan sufficient for answering the research questions outlined in the proposal. Students work closely with their dissertation chair (see below) in developing the proposal and will often also seek advice from other faculty that will serve on their dissertation committee. HLSA 765 provides a structured opportunity to make substantial progress on the proposal and students that enter that course with a project idea in mind will find the experience to be particularly productive. However, the proposal might (and often does) deviate in a substantial way from the material produced in HLSA 765.

Once the chair and student agree that the proposal is finished, a proposal defense is scheduled. The proposal defense is typically attended by the student's entire dissertation committee (see below) and students are highly encouraged to include the entire committee in the proposal defense. However, the graduate school has no official rules about the composition of the proposal examination committee and the student's chair has discretion in what they will require. Once the student speaks with their chair about the expected composition of the committee, it is the student's responsibility to invite members to participate. The proposal document is typically sent to the proposal committee at least 10 business days in advance of the proposal defense.

The proposal defense may be in-person, virtual, or hybrid and the chair has ultimate authority in determining the medium. However, in-person meetings are highly encouraged. Whatever the

medium, it is ultimately the student's responsibility to handle the logistics of the meeting, including reserving a room, sending calendar invitations, distributing a virtual meeting link, etc.

The goal of proposal defense is for the committee to provide constructive feedback to the student about their proposed project. The defense typically consists of a 30-45 minute presentation by the student and a 20-60 minute period of Q&A in which each committee member is provided a chance to ask questions and raise issues. The graduate school has no requirement that the proposal defense be public or that it be advertised and typically only the proposal committee and the student are in attendance. However, the student, with chair approval, may choose to make it public.

After the presentation and Q&A period, the proposal committee will confer in private about the outcome of the defense. The committee may decide to allow the student to proceed to candidacy without revision or they might request revisions to the proposal prior to entering candidacy, with or without another proposal meeting. However, the chair is ultimately responsible for determining if the student may proceed to the dissertation phase after the proposal defense and, in collaboration with the graduate program director, has sole authority in determining if the student may enter candidacy after the proposal defense. After conferring with the committee and after the student has exhausted all revision opportunities, the chair may determine that the student is not prepared to enter candidacy and may recommend to the PhD program director that the student has failed to meet satisfactory progress. This is an exceedingly rare event.

A suggested template for the proposal is provided in Appendix 1. While the student has discretion in determining the content and organization of the proposal in consultation with their chair, **all students must include a statement asserting that they have completed CITI training and outline if IRB approval has been obtained or detail a plan for obtaining such approval. Students and their chairs are NOT allowed to determine themselves if the project does or does not qualify as human subjects research. They must, at a minimum, submit a human subjects research determination form to the IRB prior to working on the project.**

Dissertation Committee
Consistent with graduate school policies, students must have a dissertation committee composed of at least 5 graduate faculty members, 3 of which must be full members. One of the committee members is the student's dissertation chair (typically their advisor). Per department policy, the chair must be a tenure-track or tenured member of the faculty of the Department of Health Policy and Management and professional track faculty are not eligible to serve as co-chair.

One of the committee members must serve as the representative of the graduate school dean (the "dean's rep"). The dean's rep must be a tenured faculty member outside of the department (they can be from SPH or any college/school at UMD, College Park). The major role of the dean's rep is to ensure that the dissertation chair follows all of the rules and policies governing the dissertation process and advocates for the student in the event they are not. They are almost always also a voting member of the committee. However, they need not be. If they are not a voting member, then the committee would have at least 6 members (5 voting members and the

rep). The voting status of the dean's rep is left to the discretion of the advisor, the student, and the rep.

Per department policy at least 2 of the remaining members must be tenure or tenured track faculty from the department. Typically, the final member is also a tenure track or tenured faculty member from the department. However, students, in consultation with their advisor may choose a professional track faculty or a faculty member from another department. Occasionally, a student will want a dissertation committee member that is not a member of the graduate faculty (e.g. a practitioner from outside of UMD or an academic from another university) and such members can be nominated to the graduate faculty and can serve as voting members on a dissertation committee. This process can take up to 2 weeks. Speak with your advisor.

In summary, dissertation committees are composed of:

- 3 TTK (tenured or tenure-track) faculty members from our department
  - One of these members is the chair
- A Dean's Representative (a tenured faculty member from another department at UMD, College Park)
- 1 (or more) additional member(s). This person can be another TTK or professional-track faculty member from HPM or another UMD, College Park department or a "special member" external to UMD, College Park.

The dissertation committee must be approved by the graduate school. To seek approval, the student must submit the [nomination form](#) at least 6 weeks prior to the dissertation defense. Prior to the approval of the nomination form, the student may change their dissertation committee for any reason with the approval of their chair and there is no formal paperwork that needs to be filed with the graduate school. The student may also change their dissertation chair, but the new chair must ultimately sign the committee nominating form. After the committee nomination form has been approved, the graduate school must approve the new committee members. Speak with the PhD program director for details on this process.

The dissertation committee nomination form requires the student to indicate the expected dissertation defense date. Therefore, it is best to submit the form no approximately 6 weeks prior to the defense, after the defense has actually been scheduled.

The student should first select their dissertation chair and then work in collaboration with the chair in choosing the remaining committee members. Both the student and the chair must agree to the composition of the committee.

Dissertation
All students write a dissertation. Dissertation topics in HSR are diverse and could include anything from an analysis of the quality or effectiveness of a health care service, an evaluation of a health related policy, or a study of a broad societal process (e.g. racism) relevant to health or health system performance. Theoretical orientations are also diverse. Different techniques may be used and can include qualitative and/or quantitative approaches.

However, all dissertations in the program must satisfy two essential criteria. First, all work in the dissertation must reflect the intellectual leadership of the student. While the student's mentors will provide substantial support, the work must be the students. Second, the dissertation must produce novel evidence that the dissertation committee determines could potentially make an impact on the academic literature or on a specific, identifiable practice environment. While this is an inherently subjective standard, a useful guideline is that part or all of the work could be published in a journal that is of equal quality to a standard outlet in HSR (e.g. Health Services Research, Medical Care, Health Affairs, etc.).

The dissertation can be written as a single monograph or as 3 distinct academic papers. If the 3 paper format is chosen, all 3 papers must be related in some way (e.g. all relating to the same conceptual model). Within these options, the specific organization of the dissertation is left to the discretion of the student and their advisor. A suggested template is provided in Appendix 2. All dissertations must conform to the style specifications of the graduate school and students are encouraged to use their [templates](#).

Throughout the dissertation process, students work closely with their advisors. With one exception (see below), there are no formal rules concerning the student and advisor's communication with the dissertation committee during the dissertation process. The advisor might request that the student regularly communicate progress to the committee (in person or via email) or they might not. Regardless, the student is encouraged to reach out to their committee at any point when they have specific questions that a committee member is qualified to advise on.

Committee Notification of Major Changes to the Dissertation Plan
Every project evolves and students are not expected to follow every detail of the analytic plan described in the dissertation proposal. However, the dissertation should in general follow the plan (research questions, data sources, and methods) outlined in the proposal. If there are major changes, the student, in collaboration with the advisor, must formally notify the dissertation committee and provide the committee with the opportunity to meet as a group or individually. The format of this notification is up to the advisor and student. For example, it might include a tracked-changes version of a specific aims page highlighting what has changed or it might be a short report summarizing what was originally proposed, what changed, and why. The committee does not need to convene in the event of major changes, but the student and their advisor must inquire if any member would like to convene and must honor any request to do so. The dissertation advisor is responsible for ascertaining if a change qualifies as a major departure requiring committee notification.

Inclusion of Previous Published Content
The program follows the graduate school policy on the inclusion of previous published content authored by the student, in the dissertation. It is left to the discretion of the dissertation chair.

Dissertation Defense
Once the advisor and the student determine that student is ready to schedule the dissertation defense they may do so, provided that they are in [good academic standing and have met all other program requirements](#). After a time has been selected, the student submits the committee

nomination form to the graduate school. This must be done at least 6 weeks prior to the dissertation defense. A student wishing to defend in early April, typically schedules the defense and submits the nomination form in early February.

The complete dissertation must be sent to the entire dissertation committee at least 10 business days prior to the defense. Committee members may or may not provide formal feedback on the dissertation prior to the defense. A student, in collaboration with their chair, may or may not provide a formal response to feedback prior to the defense.

The dissertation defense must be in-person and held on campus. Waivers can be granted by the graduate school in exceptional circumstances. The dissertation chair is responsible for advertising the defense (its time, location, and title at a minimum) to the faculty and students of the department. This is typically done via email and must be done at least 1 week in advance of the defense. The student (with the advisors assistance) is ultimately responsible for handling the logistics of the meeting (e.g. reserving a room).

The defense itself consists of two parts. The first part is a public presentation by the student, lasting 30-60 minutes. During the public presentation, public members of the audience (everyone but the dissertation committee) may ask questions. Committee members may not ask questions in Part 1. During Part 2, each member of the dissertation committee will be invited to ask questions of the student. Part 2 is closed to the public, except the dissertation committee and members of the graduate faculty. Students in the department are not permitted to attend Part 2. Part 2 typically lasts 30-60 minutes. The advisor in collaboration with the student and their committee may opt to make Part 2 open to graduate students in the department, if they wish. However, the default policy is that it is private.

After Part 2 has concluded, the committee then deliberates in private. The graduate school outlines a range of permissible outcomes of the defense ranging from Pass (without revision) to Unsatisfactory (resulting in dismissal from the program). See the graduate catalogue for details. While the graduate school permits an Unsatisfactory outcome, that has never occurred in the program. Advisors and committees typically do not allow a student to defend if they perceive any risk that such an outcome might occur. However, it is a very common outcome for the committee to request revisions to the dissertation before it is accepted.

After the chair and the committee approve the dissertation (by signing the Report of the Examining Committee), the student then submits the dissertation to the graduate school for publication. See the catalogue for details.

Graduation Application and Timing
At the beginning of the semester the student intends to graduate, they must apply for graduation using an online form. There are specific deadlines for submitting this form that vary by semester.

In order to have the degree conferred in a given semester, the dissertation itself must be accepted by the graduate school several weeks before the end the semester. There are specific deadlines for submitting that vary by semester. Prior to submitting the dissertation, the student must also allow for adequate time to make revisions requested by the committee and time to handle

revisions requested by the graduate school pertaining to formatting needed for publication. Because of these timelines, students wishing to have their degree confirmed in the spring semester will typically defend in March or early April.

If a student misses the graduate school submission deadline, their degree might not be conferred until a subsequent semester and the student may have to pay tuition in that future semester (even if it occurs in summer). Furthermore, many employers require that the degree be conferred prior to the start of employment. Students should work closely with their advisors on the timing of the defense.

ADVISING AND MENTORING

On admission to the program all students are assigned an academic advisor. Every attempt is made to match the student and faculty based on research interests, conditional on faculty availability. The purpose of matching the student with an advisor at the start of the program is to ensure that every student has a dedicated faculty contact that can help the student get oriented to the program and to campus life. However, the student may change advisors at any point for any reason, they only need agreement of the new advisor. If a student opts to change advisors, they should notify the PhD program director so that their record can be updated. However, a student does not need permission from their current advisor, the program director, the department chair, or the director of graduate studies to change advisors. Faculty only want what is best of the student and will not have hard feelings if a student opts to change advisors. Even if they did, the student only gets one chance at graduate school and should do what is best for them.

The academic advisor is responsible for helping the student identify elective courses and navigate other program requirements in relation to the student's desired career path. While it is common that the academic advisor will also help the student identify funding opportunities, it is not the academic advisor's individual responsibility to fund the student. It is ultimately the student's responsibility to secure adequate funding (see below).

While it is common for the academic advisor to also serve as the student's dissertation chair it is not a requirement and students should think carefully about choosing a dissertation chair.

If the student obtains a dissertation chair that is different from their existing academic advisor, the chair becomes the advisor. An appropriate dissertation chair should be familiar with the topic of the dissertation and the techniques that will be used in the dissertation. The dissertation chair and the student will work very closely together on the dissertation, so the chair and the student should be a capable of sustaining a productive working relationship.

Committee members also provide an essential mentoring role and students are encouraged to engage them throughout the dissertation process. Furthermore, while the academic advisor/dissertation chair is the student's primary mentor and the dissertation committee often forms the rest of the mentoring team, every faculty in the department is dedicated to the success of each student. Students are encouraged to get to know all of the faculty as each faculty member will have something unique to contribute to the student's growth and development.

It is the student's responsibility to initiate contact with their academic advisor and dissertation chair. The faculty respect the priorities and desires of the students and as such will assume if a student does not contact them, they do not want mentoring. Faculty members have many responsibilities and some are better and worse at promptly replying to emails. The student should not hesitate to send multiple follow-up emails if the advisor is not responding. However, if a student is unable to get in touch with their advisor over an extended period of time, they should contact the PhD program director.

If a student is unresponsive to an advisor's attempt to communicate with them over a sustained period of time, they are at risk of failing to meet satisfactory progress.

FUNDING AND GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIPS

The department follows all the university policies regarding graduate assistants. Graduate assistantships are essential components of PhD student training. Experiences as a graduate assistant will often do more to propel a student's career than performance in course work. It is through these experiences that students gain practical experiences in research and teaching.

While it may vary from student-to-student and cohort-to-cohort, a typical student will be offered a funding package at admission in conjunction with a graduate assistantship. These packages typically require up to 20 hours per week of graduate assistantship service that will continue for the first 2 years the student is enrolled in the program. The packages include a stipend, tuition remission, and health insurance benefits. Graduate assistantship responsibilities during this period will include a mix of teaching assistant (TA) and research assistant (RA) hours. Each student will be assigned a supervisor/mentor for this work. The supervisor/mentor may or may not be the student's advisor.

After this period of funding, students typically seek additional years of funding through 1 of 3 general categories of funding. First, students may obtain a research assistant (RA) position working for a faculty member (a "PI") on an external grant or contract. PI's are individually responsible for recruiting students into these positions. Some PIs may broadly advertise the position. Some may informally recruit a student through the network of students they know. Students that have useful skills (statistical programming, competent writing, specific content expertise) and proactively get to know the faculty and express interest in a PI's research agenda tend to be more successful at obtaining an externally funded RA position. Externally funded RA positions can last for different lengths of time and can be "hourly" or can include benefits (tuition remission, health insurance, etc). Students may obtain these positions within or outside of the department. There is no centralized listing of all available RA jobs on campus, but many are listed on the University's human resources website. While it is unusual, a student in their first two years that is supported by a recruitment funding package may opt to forfeit (or supplement, see below information on overloads) some of that funding in order to work on a grant funded project.

Second, students may obtain their own funding through a fellowship, dissertation grant, or some other mechanism that directly funds the student. Potential funders include the NIH, AHRQ, foundations, and internal University of Maryland awards. The department maintains a list of

potential sources on its website. The graduate school also lists both internal and external sources of funding.[1]

Third, the department may have open positions beyond those dedicated to students in their first 2 years of enrollment, depending on its budget. Rising 3rd year and more advanced students may apply for these positions. Public postings for these positions are typically made in the spring for positions starting the following fall. These department funded positions are separate and distinct from PI funded RA jobs. Students that have performed well in their previous graduate assistantship work (particularly as TAs) are generally more successful in obtaining these positions.

Overloads
The university considers 20 hours of RA/TA work per week as "full-time". However, in some circumstances that student can work additional hours via "overload". Speak with your advisor for additional details. International students have stricter rules than domestic students.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Conflict with colleagues (peers, faculty members, a graduate assistant supervisor, etc) is an unpleasant, but normal experience in any organization. Students are encouraged to work conflicts out directly with their colleagues. In the event a student does not feel comfortable resolving an issue or finds their efforts to be unsuccessful, they are encouraged to bring their issue the PhD program director. The department also maintains an anonymous feedback form. The graduate school has a number of resources available to students who wish to report issues to an entity outside of the department. The program takes harassment, bias, and other forms of discrimination seriously. If you experience harassment or bias or witness harassment or bias, please inform the PhD program director, the department chair, the director of graduate studies or any university employee you feel comfortable speaking with.

TRAVEL GRANTS AND DISSERTATION ENHANCEMENT AWARDS

The department provides small travel grants that support student travel to conferences where they will present research findings. These awards are meant to supplement and not substitute for other sources of travel funding (e.g. from the conference organization, from the student's advisor, or from the graduate school). The department also provides small grants to support dissertation research. Funds can be used for any material expense, such as data, transcription, software, etc. To be eligible for a dissertation enhancement award, the student must be able to demonstrate that they have applied for other dissertation funding or have a credible plan to do. Information on the travel grant and dissertation enhancement award can be found on the department webpage.

---

[1] Also see https://apps.grad.illinois.edu/fellowship-finder, https://curf.upenn.edu/sites/default/files/2023-08/International%20Student%20Scholarships.pdf, and
https://www.fic.nih.gov/Funding/NonNIH?type=predoctoral&search=policy

UNIVERSITY RESOURCES

Enrollment at the University of Maryland entitles students to a large number of resources. A few of the frequently used resources are:

- University Libraries (journal access, workshops, A/V equipment, print holdings, etc.)
- Google Suite (email, calendar, drive, docs, etc).
- Institutional Zoom account (video conferencing)
- Institutional Box account (file sharing)
- Free or Discounted Software
- Remote computing with many software programs.
- High Performance Computing Cluster
- Grant proposal development services
- Recreation Centers
- Student Clubs
- Intramural Sports
- Off-campus Housing Resources

Appendix 1. Suggested Proposal Outline

Students and their advisors have discretion in the organization of the dissertation proposal. The only specific requirement is that the student affirm that they have completed CITI training and provide evidence that have obtained or have a credible plan to obtain IRB approval for the proposed work. There are no formatting or style requirements, but students should work closely with their advisor on appropriate formatting.

1. Introduction/Specific Aims (1-3 pages)
    a. Briefly introduce the topic and motivate its importance
    b. State project objectives and hypotheses clearly and concisely, typically in an ordered list
    c. Briefly preview proposed data and methods
2. Background (15-30 pages)
    a. Describe pertinent institutional background, for example, if a policy is to be evaluated what regime existed prior to the policy's introduction, why was the policy implemented, were there challenges to implementation, etc.
    b. Critically synthesize existing literature
    c. Describes a conceptual model that is rooted in theory and supported by existing evidence (some may prefer this to be placed in Approach)
3. Approach (10-20 pages)
    a. Restate project objectives
    b. Describe data (its source or collection plan), variables, analytic samples, and any information pertinent to the their quality or interpretation
    c. Describe analytic techniques
    d. Describe potential challenges and their potential solutions and limitations that cannot be solved
    e. Describe resource needs and plans, i.e. if funding is needed to purchase data or computing resources, how will it be obtained? Are their data protection rules that must be accommodated using university resources? Etc.
    f. Human Subjects Protections (half-page, **required**)
    g. Timeline to graduation (half-page)
4. References Cited

Appendix 2. Suggested Dissertation Outline

Students may write a single monograph or a "3 paper" dissertation. All dissertations must adhere to the style guidelines required by the graduate school. Beyond that, the student and their dissertation chair may exercise their discretion on the specific organization of the dissertation. For example, even if a 3-paper dissertation is chosen, a student and their chair might choose to have a single chapter on background and a single chapter on data, to avoid redundancy. Others may choose a 3-paper dissertation in which each chapter is a stand-alone, journal style manuscript. Below is one possible outline for a 3 paper dissertation with stand-alone papers.

1. Introduction/Specific Aims (1-5 pages)
   a. Briefly introduce the topic and motivate its importance
   b. State project objectives and hypotheses clearly and concisely, typically in an ordered list
   c. Briefly preview proposed data and methods
   d. Provide a roadmap to the remaining chapters
2. Background and Conceptual Model (20-30 pages)
   a. Institutional Background
   b. Critically Synthesize Literature
   c. Present a conceptual model rooted in theory and supported by the empirical evidence
3. Paper 1 (15-40 pages)
   a. Introduction (lit review components can be abbreviated)
   b. Methods
   c. Results
   d. Conclusions
4. Paper 2 (15-40 pages)
   a. Introduction
   b. Methods
   c. Results
   d. Conclusions
5. Paper 3 (15-40 pages)
   a. Introduction
   b. Methods
   c. Results
   d. Conclusions
6. Conclusions (5-20 pages)
   a. Restate objectives
   b. Summarize results, synthetizing across papers
   c. Provide overarching conclusions, synthesizing across papers
   d. Implications for Policy and Practice
7. References
8. Appendices