

PhD in Public Health Sciences

Faculty Advising

We believe that students thrive when they can engage in advanced study knowing that their progress and interests are supported. We employ a comprehensive advising system for School of Public Health PHS PhD students that incorporates academic and career advising, peer support, and professional development to support student success in the program as well as in their future careers. The PhD Program Director provides coaching and advice throughout a student's tenure at the School of Public Health regarding matters of policies, procedures, and academic life at Washington University. New students are admitted under a primary faculty mentor who serves as their Faculty Advisor throughout the duration of the program. While only one faculty member typically serves as a student's lead advisor, students are encouraged to develop several additional substantive advisors. These advisors work with the student to further articulate areas of interest and to identify relevant social science and methods coursework, to develop research and teaching experiences, and/or to become members of the student's Dissertation Committee (consult the Dissertation Process tab of this page (p.)).

Peer support is also formally integrated into the professional development seminar as well as informally incorporated through a variety of social and academic gatherings. These efforts ensure that first-year students have adequate support in the various aspects of adjusting to the school and in making an informed decision about coursework and other aspects of the doctoral program.

Faculty advisors take primary responsibility for the Qualifying Exam process (consult the Qualifying Exam tab of this page (p.)). Second-year students work actively with their primary advisors and with other engaged faculty advisors to clarify and develop their area of specialization and to collect a body of research to synthesize for the Qualifying Exam. The primary advisor (chairperson) will assist the student with identifying faculty members for the Qualifying Exam Committee and with selecting courses to meet program requirements. Usually, the person who chairs the Qualifying Exam Committee also serves as the Dissertation Chair.

Each year, the advisor and the student complete an assessment of progress that identifies strengths as well as any planned efforts to address barriers to success. This process also assists the student with identifying the timeline for major program requirements (e.g., qualifying exam, proposal, dissertation).

Faculty Advisor Responsibilities

Submission of Annual PhD Student Academic Progress Report

The Annual PhD Student Academic Progress Reports are due in the spring of each year. The Program Manager collects information through the following processes. First, the student completes a self-assessment of progress and then submits the form and their CV, which is sent to the faculty advisor/chair for review and completion. Faculty advisor feedback and a review of the student's transcript provide additional information to be incorporated into a signed letter from the Program Director summarizing the student's progress and making recommendations for the coming year. The final signed letters are emailed to the student and the faculty advisor and stored electronically by the Program Manager.

PhD Forms

There are several forms required to document milestones in the program. These require timely review and approval by the faculty advisor once they have been submitted by the student.

Mentored Teaching and Research Experiences

All forms must be completed online by the student and authorized via electronic signature by the appropriate parties for approval. This includes the course instructor who supervises the experience, the primary advisor, and the Program Director.

Qualifying Exam (p.)

Prior to beginning the dissertation, students must demonstrate mastery of the literature in a given area that provides the backdrop for the dissertation proposal. The Qualifying Exam reflects an understanding of the larger area of interest, the assessment of the state of the student's knowledge, and gaps in the scientific literature. The forms associated with the Qualifying Exam include the Committee Approval Form and the Final Grade Change Form.

Doctoral Dissertation Research (p.)

After the Qualifying Exam has been successfully completed, students begin the dissertation process. This includes proposing an empirical approach for addressing an important question identified by the student and then conducting research and disseminating its results under the mentorship of the Dissertation Committee. The process aims to demonstrate the student's mastery of a specific field of knowledge and their capacity for original scholarly work. There are forms associated with various steps of the dissertation process,

including the Notice of Title, Scope, and Procedure of Dissertation Form; the Dissertation Committee Approval Form; the Dissertation Defense Notification Form; and the Dissertation Defense Exam Approval Form.

Change of Advisor

The relationship between an advisor and an advisee is critical to the success of a student in a PhD program. If a situation arises in which it is determined that the existing advisor/advisee relationship should be terminated, either by the advisor or the advisee, the student will enter into a three-month probationary period so that the student can identify a new dissertation research advisor. The student will continue to receive the customary stipend (if appropriate) and allowances until an advisor for the dissertation research is identified or for three months, whichever comes first. After the three-month period, the student will either have established a new advisor/advisee relationship or, at the discretion of the program, may be provided a second three-month probationary period. At the end of either probationary period, the student may be dismissed from the program as not having made the appropriate academic progress. A third probation will not be permitted. A student is able to appeal the probation decision following the appropriate procedures as outlined in our policies section.

Best Practices for Inclusive Mentoring

As part of the School of Public Health's PHS PhD Program community, our faculty are committed to acting with integrity and using best practices in their work with our doctoral students. Below is a useful checklist to inform the mentoring approach.

- Develop a communication plan with the advisee (e.g., a regular meeting schedule, the big-picture purpose of meetings, expectations regarding communication outside meetings).
- Clarify roles, expectations, and boundaries of the advisor/advisee relationship.
- Create an advisement meeting schedule to regularly check in with the advisee.
- Unforeseen events may occur that require adjustments to the check-in schedule, but advisors should provide timely notice for any large gaps in availability due to extended travel for research or sabbaticals. Sabbaticals are typically one semester in length and do not require a change in advisor, but they do require an agreed-upon means of a student receiving feedback and getting any necessary forms approved.
- Discuss the student's learning style, needs, and interests.
- Discuss the mentor's learning, teaching, and advising styles.
- Develop a plan to help the student develop competencies (e.g., teaching, presenting at conferences, academic writing and publication)
- Promote an environment of psychological safety in which the advisee is able to develop and grow.
- Periodically evaluate the advisor/advisee relationship, and make adjustments as needed.

Note: The PHS PhD Program Director and Program Manager are happy to answer questions at any time. The program also hosts information sessions and updates about our PhD Program periodically throughout the academic year, including mini-sessions held during faculty meetings and at all-school assemblies.