
PhD Degree Overview

Student operational protocols and academic requirement descriptions

NOTE: Milestone exam (Overview, Comprehensive, Dissertation Defense) and PhD faculty committee formation/approval details are accessible in the **PhD Dissertation Guidelines** section of the Student Handbook.

Epidemiology doctoral degree programs include:

- Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) 72 credits
- [\(Joint\) Doctor of Medicine/Doctor of Philosophy \(MD/PhD\)](#) 72 credit PhD program

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Degree Purposes

PhD in Epidemiology

The 72-credit PhD degree is designed to provide the individual with an advanced level of academic preparation to conduct epidemiological research, and to teach, supervise and mentor students in epidemiology. This includes concentrated training in epidemiological concepts and methodology and the completion of a research-based dissertation.

MD/PhD in Epidemiology

The [Medical Scientist Training Program \(MSTP\)](#) of the University of Pittsburgh and Carnegie Mellon University was established in 1983 to offer exceptionally talented individuals the opportunity to undertake a physician-scientist training program tailored to their specific research interests.

This program allows students to initially pursue an MD degree at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine for two years and apply to the Epidemiology PhD program during the second year of study, with the goal of completing it in approximately three years. After earning the PhD, students return to the School of Medicine to finish the final two years of their medical training.

Completion Timeframes

- PhD degree completion timeframes vary, but usually are 3 – 6 years, as some students are working professionals while others attend Pitt Public Health on a full-time basis.
- MD/PhD joint degree students generally complete the requirements of both programs in 6 – 8 years.

University of Pittsburgh Statute of Limitations policy indicates that PhD students must complete their degree requirements within ten concurrent years of their matriculation terms, or within eight years if applying credit from a previously earned master's degree with advisor approval.

Research credit registration before and after completing the Preliminary, Overview, Comprehensive Milestone Exams:

With their academic advisors' approval, students may register for one of the following three courses, depending upon their academic progress, to proceed with dissertation research.

The **PhD Dissertation Guideline** section of the Student Handbook provides more milestone exam information.

COURSE	TITLE	CREDITS	STUDENT STATUS	PREREQUISITES	OTHER INFORMATION
EPIDEM 2210	Special Studies	01.0 – 15.0	Full or part time	None	Students may register for EPIDEM 2210 to begin work on their dissertations (with advisor authorization) if they have <u>not</u> yet passed <u>all</u> of these exams: Preliminary Overview, and Comprehensive Exams.
EPIDEM 3100	Research & Dissertation	01.0 – 15.0 credit	Full or part time	Passing of the Preliminary,	At this stage, all required

	for the Doctoral Degree	option. Minimum of 3 is required or FTDR 3999 registration prior to graduation. Discuss credits taken with advisor.		Overview, <u>and</u> Comprehensive Exams.	coursework for the degree may not be completed and/or 72 credits might not yet have been earned.
FTDR 3999	Full-Time Dissertation Research	No credits (0)	Candidates are considered full-time	Completion of all coursework required for the degree, at least 72 credits earned, and all three sections of the Preliminary Exam passed	Substitutes for EPIDEM 3100 in meeting graduation requirements Special (lower) reduced tuition rate is assessed.

OTHER DOCTORAL PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS AND EXPERIENCES

[Pitt Public Health Academic Integrity Module Completion](#)

Department of Epidemiology Required Internal Review Board (IRB) Module Completion

- This online training must be completed during the first term of study.
- Completion certificates and reports generated by the IRB system must be submitted to the Epidemiology Student Services Offices by students to meet I doctoral program graduation requirements.
- Student Services will forward information to new students concerning this requirement, and explain how to access the modules.
- Contact the student services manager and program administrator with IRB questions.

Teaching Practicum

Doctoral students are expected to fulfill a teaching experience requirement by enrolling in the Teaching Practicum course (EPIDEM 2215). Students must act as a Teaching Assistant (TA) in one of the following designated Department of Epidemiology required core courses. These are not compensated opportunities, but were instead created to develop and expand valuable teaching-related foundational skill.

NOTE: Although students may choose to serve as a TA in an elective Epidemiology course to obtain additional teaching experience, they may **not** serve as a TA in an elective class to fulfill their Teaching Practicum requirement.

COURSE CATALOG NUMBER	COURSE TITLE	TERM OFFERED
2110	Principles of Epidemiology	Fall & summer
2160	Epidemiology of Infectious Diseases	Spring
2170	Chronic Disease Epidemiology	Fall
2180	Fundamentals of Epidemiological Methods	Spring
2181	Design and Conduct of Clinical Trials	Fall
3183	Reading, Analyzing, & Interpreting Public Health Medical Literature	Spring
2185	Introduction to SAS	Fall
2186	Introduction to R for Public Health	Fall
2189	Epidemiological Methods of Longitudinal and Time-To-Event Analyses	Fall
2192	Causal Inference in Epidemiological Methods	Spring
2193	Machine Learning and Bayesian Analysis in Epidemiological Research	Fall
2230	Secondary Data Analysis: A Capstone Course	Spring
2260	Epidemiological Basis for Disease Control	Fall
2600	Introduction to Molecular Epidemiology	Spring
2921	Grant Writing	Fall

In rare circumstances, a Teaching Practicum requirement waiver is granted. Students should discuss this with their advisors and be able to provide detailed justification for their request. If the teaching practicum exemption is approved by an advisor, the student should ask the Epidemiology student services manager for assistance with processing an official waiver request.

- Eligibility/course assignments
 - Students must have completed the course for which they will be a TA (or an equivalent course with permission of the instructor).
 - Doctoral students who are **non-native speakers of English** and whose undergraduate degree programs were not taught in English (as the official language of instruction) must take and pass the University's [English Comprehensibility Exam](#) prior to registering for EPIDEM 2215. More information about the test is available in the **General Policies & Procedures** section of the Student Handbook.
- Student responsibility
 - Contact faculty of selected course to determine if teaching assistance is needed.

NOTE: The Epidemiology Department Director of Doctoral Programs or course instructors may also contact students regarding some Teaching Practicum opportunities.
 - Participate in [University seminars/workshops](#) (New TA Orientation programming) providing teaching assistance training as announced by the department, if course instructor approves the Teaching Practicum experience request.
 - Register for 2 credits of EPIDEM 2215 in the Student Services office for the term in which the Teaching Practicum will be done.
 - Download a [Teaching Practicum Agreement form](#) from the Department of Epidemiology Web site. This form identifies parameters of the experience, and must be completed by the course instructor and signed by both students and instructors.
 - Discuss the experience with the instructor upon completion and complete and sign a [Teaching Practicum Student Evaluation form](#). This form allows students to document their assessment of their Teaching Practicum experiences.

- Obtain instructor's signature on the Teaching Practicum Student Evaluation form.
 - Remind instructor to complete and sign the [Teaching Practicum Instructor Evaluation form](#). Sign this form after discussing it with the course instructor.
 - Return all forms to the Student Services Offices (5117 PUBHLT or 5115 PUBHLT) or to smithl@pitt.edu or git13@pitt.edu for retention by the department.
- Instructor responsibility
 - Meet with students interested in fulfilling their Teaching Practicum experiences in their course.
 - Complete a [Teaching Practicum Agreement form](#) while meeting with the student, specifying the parameters of the experience.
 - Ensure the TA experience includes at least 30 minutes of lecturing or leading review sessions in front of the class. The amount of work for the TA should be equivalent to work in other 2-credit courses.
 - TA responsibilities should not include setting up A/V equipment, photocopying, or other clerical tasks. The teaching practicum is designed to provide students with exposure to basic teaching skills, such as preparing lectures, leading discussions, and grading.
 - Discuss experiences with students at the end of the course.
 - Complete a [Teaching Practicum Instructor Evaluation form](#) at the end of the course to document student performance and any suggestions for improvement.
 - Obtain student signature on the Instructor Evaluation form.
 - Enter grade (H [Honors], S [Satisfactory] or U [Unsatisfactory]) into the PeopleSoft grade roster for EPIDEM 2215 during appropriate grading period for current term (entering grades on the Instructor Evaluation form without **also** entering them electronically or via a Grade Change Request form will **not** post them to student records). The Student Services manager and program administrator will notify faculty when electronic grade rosters are open each term.

- Remind students to submit the Teaching Practicum Agreement and both Instructor and Student Evaluation forms to the Student Services office (5117 PUBHLT or 5115 PUBHLT) or to smithl@pitt.edu or git13@pitt.edu for departmental retention.

Competency in Communications

Students matriculating are required to submit at least two abstracts about their research and give at least two oral or poster presentations at Dean's Day, the Epidemiology Department annual poster session, or scientific conferences. A [Communications Competency Requirement Record form](#) must be completed and submitted to the Student Services Offices (5117 PUBHLT or 5115 PUBHLT) or smithl@pitt.edu or git13@pitt.edu to document fulfillment of this requirement.

Data Collection, Measurement, and Management Requirement Record

Epidemiology PhD students must develop proficiencies in data collection, measurement, and management as part of their dissertation work or other graduate-level experiences outside of the classroom. Academic advisors should meet with their advisees to discuss options and develop or demonstrate this proficiency

This requirement must be fulfilled prior to student graduation.

- Experience options

Two or more of the following are required:

- Surveillance (i.e. systematic collection/recording of disease data for the purpose of monitoring over time)
- Primary collection of new data to define an exposure or outcome
- Obtaining and generating new data from existing specimens, tests, or large datasets
- Chart or electronic record abstraction
- Questionnaire or survey design and validation
- Data management (i.e. monitor progress of data collection, examine data for errors and apply correction, merge and maintain large datasets, design and assess quality control measures, etc.)

- Requirement form completion and submission
 - Advisors should complete a [Primary Data Collection, Measurement, and Management Requirement Record form](#) to document student experience or training plans, and both advisors and students should sign as indicated. Forms should be submitted to the Epidemiology Student Services Offices (5117 PUBHLT or 5115 PUBHLT), or smithl@pitt.edu or git13@pitt.edu.

Independent Development Plan (IDP) annual submission

The Epidemiology IDP form is accessible on the [Forms](#) page of the Epidemiology Website.

The School of Public Health requires that all doctoral students in the school receive guidance on their progress and development on an annual basis. Each department must document that this activity has taken place.

RESPONSIBILITY	ACTION / POLICY
Students	Schedule meetings with their academic advisors in spring term.
	Complete the Epidemiology Individual Development Plan form together with their advisors. The form will be forwarded to students by the Student Services manager and program administrator in a reminder e-mail, or students will be directed to download it from the Department of Epidemiology Web site.
	Forward form copies to advisors before meetings.
Students and Advisors	Discuss current skill levels and develop goals and/or a plan to address these skills in the coming year. Outline the agreed-upon goals on the Individual Development Plan form. Sign and date the form.
Students	Submit completed form copies to advisors, and retain copies for their future reference. E-mail forms to the Student Services staff git13@pitt.edu .
	Be prepared to discuss completion of prior year goals and new goals for the coming academic year when meeting with advisors in the following spring term.

Doctoral Student Profiles – Epidemiology Website

This section of the Epidemiology Website was created to showcase the academic and research accomplishments of our continuing doctoral students, inspire new PhD students, and invite communication and collaboration among Epidemiology students, faculty, postdocs, and alumni, as well as epidemiologists and public health professionals, prospective employers, and friends of the department globally.

- New PhD students will be contacted by the Epidemiology student services manager and program administrator about submitting profile information.
- Continuing PhD students should update their profile details at least annually by e-mailing updates to the Student Services Office (git13@pitt.edu). Update reminders will be forwarded by the student services manager in spring term.
- Graduating PhD student profiles will be removed from the site by the Student Services staff.

DOCTORAL STUDENT FUNDING OPTIONS

[Graduate Student Researcher \(GSR\) / Teaching Assistant \(TA\) Appointments](#)

Funding option descriptions

GSR

GSRs in the Epidemiology Department provide doctoral degree students with paid training opportunities. These opportunities typically arise from financial support from research grants secured by faculty affiliated with the department. In a GSR appointment, students complete research-related activities to meet the project goals of the specific research project. Under guidance from a faculty mentor, students receive training on the research activities required. Financial support is provided to students with GSR appointments to assist with costs related to the training activities for which the funds were awarded.

The primary goal of a GSR or TA appointment is to provide financial support to the graduate student. Students also benefit from valuable exposure to research and class management environments, and networking opportunities.

Due to funding limitations, GSR appointments are not guaranteed to all accepted doctoral applicants or continuing PhD students. Prospective and continuing students should be prepared to rely upon their own sources of financial support if appointments are not available.

TEACHING ASSISTANT (TA)

TA appointments in the Epidemiology Department provide a selected number of doctoral students with training opportunities in course development, implementation, implementation, and assessment. These appointments arise from educational funds to support departmental courses. In a TA appointment, students work with faculty, providing assistance to a specific course(s). Financial support is provided to students with these appointments to assist with the costs related to this educational training.

- Eligibility
 - All Epidemiology doctoral students and newly accepted doctoral applicants are eligible for GSR or TA appointments. Selection for an appointment is commensurate with experience and availability of appointments.
- How to request appointment consideration
(PhD accepted applicants / continuing unfunded doctoral students)
 - Contact the Epidemiology student services manager and program administrator smithl@pitt.edu or the doctoral program director costacout@edc.pitt.edu for details.
- Supervision & evaluation
 - GSR and TA supervisors are the student's GSR advisor, the Epidemiology doctoral program director, or another qualifying member of the Epidemiology faculty.
 - Students and faculty are required to meet within the first month of the first GSR or TA appointment term to discuss, complete and sign a [GSR / TA Objectives Form](#) (downloadable from the Department of Epidemiology Web site) so that a clear understanding of responsibilities and goals is set forth. This form must be completed and submitted to the Student Services Office, and should be submitted thereafter at the beginning of each academic year if the GSR or TA appointment is continued.

- Students and faculty must meet to discuss progress in meeting objectives and goals annually, and must submit a [GSR/TA Evaluation Form](#) (downloadable from the Department of Epidemiology Web site), to the Student Services Offices (5117 PUBHLT or 5115 PUBHLT), or smithl@pitt.edu or git13@pitt.edu . The Student Services staff will remind faculty to submit this form at the appropriate time during the term.
- GSRs and TAs must attend Epidemiology Seminar (EPIDEM 2250) in each fall and spring term in which they hold an appointment.
- Appointment timeframe & renewal
 - Appointments are typically for two terms (fall & spring [8 months, September – April]) subject to performance consideration and funding availability.
 - 20 hours per week must be devoted to GSR and TA responsibilities as identified by GSR and TA supervisors.
 - Summer term appointments are subject to performance consideration and funding availability.
- Coursework/enrollment requirement
 - Epidemiology Department GSR's and TAs must maintain full time student status by enrolling in 9 – 15 credits or FTDR 3999 (full-time dissertation research in fall and spring terms if they qualify and wish to focus only on dissertation research).
 - Students with summer term appointments are **not** required to register for credits or FTDR 3999 if they also have an appointment in the preceding spring or following fall term.
- Compensation & benefits
 - Stipend
 - Set by Department within range established by University policy
 - Current stipend is posted to the [Department of Epidemiology Web site](#).
 - GSR and TA full tuition scholarships for up to 15 credits or FTDR 3999

- Student Activity Fees identified on e-bills must be paid by students, and payment receipts must be forwarded to the Student Services Office (5115 PUBHLT or git13@pitt.edu) and Once receipts are received, tuition coverage will be applied.
- Health insurance
 - Free individual coverage to students with appointments
 - Insurance applications must be submitted annually. Contact the Student Services Offices (5117 PUBHLT or 5115 PUBHLT), or smithl@pitt.edu or git13@pitt.edu) with questions.
 - Family coverage available at student cost.
 - Vision and dental policies are available at student cost.

Training grant (trainee) appointments

Students or accepted applicants who are US citizens or permanent residents may contact [designated representatives of training grants](#) associated with the Department of Epidemiology to determine if any funded appointments are available.

University student employment opportunities

Available employment positions may be reviewed at the University of [Pittsburgh Human Resources Website](#).

Students should communicate with their academic advisors and instructors to inquire about hourly-paid student employment positions.

Local/regional employers may have available positions, including the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center

GRADUATION CERTIFICATION

Students should meet with their advisors and contact the Epidemiology student services manager and program administrator smithl@pitt.edu to learn about the process for ensuring they have met all departmental graduation requirements and verifying that all supporting documentation has been submitted.

Students may e-mail Student Affairs staff stuaff@pitt.edu with questions about school-level graduation requirements and forms, and to submit inquiries about their dissertation's compliance with University formatting standards.

Detailed school graduation policies and procedures are included on the [Pitt Public Health Web site](#).

- The student services manager and program administrator certifies all master's and doctoral program students for graduation on behalf of the Department of Epidemiology.