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Purpose of this Document

This Program and Policy Handbook contains rules, regulations, policies and guidelines of the PhD Program established by the Division of Epidemiology, Department of Family Medicine and Population Health, and the School of Medicine at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU). It is the responsibility of every student to read and familiarize her/himself with the information contained herein as well as to work with a faculty Advisor in order to maintain a proper plan of coursework.

This handbook serves as the guiding bulletin throughout your degree process, so it is important to keep this document on file. Changes to the Program that may affect this bulletin will be communicated to students, and a revised version will be issued as required.

If the guidelines and policies in this handbook conflict with the policies and procedures established by the VCU Graduate School, precedence will be given to the policies of the VCU Graduate School.

University and Program Overview

Virginia Commonwealth University

As the premier urban, public research university in Virginia, VCU’s mission is to advance knowledge and student success through its commitments to:

- an engaged, learner-centered environment that fosters inquiry, discovery and innovation in a global setting;
- research that expands the boundaries of new knowledge and creative expression and promotes translational applications to improve human health;
- interdisciplinary collaborations that bring new perspectives to complex problems and mobilize creative energies that advance innovation and solve global challenges;
- health care that strives to preserve and restore health for all people, to seek the cause and cure of diseases through groundbreaking research, and to educate those who serve humanity;
- diversity that provides a climate of inclusion, a dedication to addressing disparities wherever they exist, and an opportunity to explore and create in an environment of trust;
- sustainable, university-community partnerships that enhance the educational, economic and cultural vitality of the communities VCU serves in Virginia and around the world.


School of Medicine

The mission of the School of Medicine is to provide preeminent education to physicians and scientists in order to improve the quality of health care for humanity. Through innovative, scholarly activity and a diverse educational context, the School seeks to create and apply new knowledge, and to provide and continuously improve systems of medical and science education. Furthermore, it is our mission to develop more effective health care practices to address the needs of the diverse populations we serve, and to provide distinguished leadership in the advancement of medicine and science.

More information can be accessed at [http://www.medschool.vcu.edu/about/index.html](http://www.medschool.vcu.edu/about/index.html).
Division of Epidemiology – Department of Family Medicine and Population Health

The Division of Epidemiology has been training public health students for over 20 years, resulting in more than 400 graduates. The Division is a research-intensive unit with close ties to faculty in Departments across VCU as well as public health practitioners in state and local health department settings. Philosophically, we believe in fully immersing students into their chosen career path as quickly as possible in the training experience. Linking didactics immediately to context is extremely important for adult learners.

Our Division also firmly believes in the value of creating a community of learning that values diversity. Toward that goal, we participate in “pipeline” educational programs to make visible careers in public health. We also actively work to create opportunities for students to work across degree programs, across years in training, with other VCU Schools and Programs, and with the community. Through applied research positions, seminars, and journal clubs, students from all backgrounds come together as teams to work toward achieving their educational goals.

The research programs in the Division are diverse and reflect the diversity of our faculty. Our philosophy in research is grounded in team science. We believe discovery occurs more quickly when teams representing different disciplines work together to solve public health problems. Cross-fertilization of ideas beyond disciplinary boundaries leads to more rapid discoveries and translation of science to practice and policy to promote population health.

PhD Program Mission Statement

The mission of the PhD Program in Epidemiology is to serve the citizens of Virginia by educating and training students to become independent, competent and self-directed research scientists so they can conduct outstanding clinical and population-based research. Students will learn methods for studying disease etiology and prevention in populations and evaluating interventions, diagnostic tests and treatment efficacy; they will implement such methods in an independent research study under the mentorship of an experienced epidemiology researcher.

Upon graduation, students will be able to define specific research questions or hypotheses; work either independently or in collaboration with other academic institutions, programs or organizations; design and conduct the appropriate research studies to address the questions/hypotheses; clearly communicate the findings to appropriate audiences; and guide the use of such findings in clinical practice and public health policy.

PhD Program Governance

The PhD Program is administered by the Division of Epidemiology housed in the Department of Family Medicine and Population Health. The Program is governed by the Graduate Program Director and Director of Educational Programs with assistance from the Director of Educational Programs and the following committees:

- The Division Curriculum Committee made up of faculty and PhD student members who review course evaluations and proposed course offerings
- The PhD Admissions Committee comprised of Division of Epidemiology faculty members to assess PhD Program applications, strategies for recruitment, and assure that admission standards are in compliance with University and School of Medicine standards
The PhD Comprehensive Exam Committee comprised of Division of Epidemiology faculty who create and grade the written comprehensive exams.

- Ad hoc committees that evaluate the program resources, the direction of the program and best practices

**University Policies**

**Important VCU Policies**

All VCU students should be aware of certain VCU policies particularly applicable to students. For a complete listing of university policies, visit [http://www.students.vcu.edu/policies.html](http://www.students.vcu.edu/policies.html).

**Guidelines for Student Conduct**

VCU faculty play a critical role in helping to build an environment that is conducive to the academic success of our students. As you know, VCU has policies and procedures designed to create an environment conducive to academic excellence. One of these policies and procedures can be found in a document entitled “Guidelines for Faculty Members Regarding Student Conduct in the Instructional Settings.” This document is available at [http://www.policy.vcu.edu/sites/default/files/Faculty%20Guide%20to%20Student%20Conduct%20in%20Instructional%20Settings.pdf](http://www.policy.vcu.edu/sites/default/files/Faculty%20Guide%20to%20Student%20Conduct%20in%20Instructional%20Settings.pdf). A student code of conduct is available at [http://www.students.vcu.edu/studentconduct/parents/student-code-of-conduct/](http://www.students.vcu.edu/studentconduct/parents/student-code-of-conduct/).

Understanding these guidelines will help you to encourage classroom behavior that does not detract from the quality of each student’s educational experience. Please read the document and think about your role in promoting a University culture based on mutual respect and civility.

As a reminder, both faculty and students should turn off cell phones and pagers while in the classroom.

**VCU Honor System**

VCU recognizes that honesty, truth, and integrity are values central to its mission as an institution of higher education. The Honor System is a VCU policy built on the idea that a person’s honor is his/her most cherished attribute. A foundation of honor is essential to a community devoted to learning. Within this community, respect and harmony must coexist. The VCU Honor System defines the highest standards of conduct in academic affairs.

The Honor System states that faculty members are responsible for:

- **Understanding the procedures whereby faculty handles suspected instances of academic dishonesty.** Faculty members are to report any infraction of the VCU Honor System according to the procedures outlined in our policy.
- **Developing an instructional environment that reflects a commitment to maintaining and enforcing academic integrity.** Faculty should discuss the VCU Honor System at the onset of each course and mention it in course syllabi.
- **Handling every suspected or admitted instance of violation of the provisions of this policy in accordance with procedures set forth in the policy.**

The Honor System policy in its entirety can be found in the 2014-15 VCU Insider or reviewed at: [http://www.students.vcu.edu/studentconduct/parents/honor-system/](http://www.students.vcu.edu/studentconduct/parents/honor-system/). The Honor System must be upheld...
and enforced by each member of the VCU community. The fundamental attributes of our community are honor and integrity. We are privileged to operate with this Honor System.

**VCU Americans with Disabilities Act Notice**

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 requires VCU to provide a "reasonable accommodation" to any individual who advises us of a physical or mental disability. If you have a physical or mental limitation that requires an accommodation or an academic adjustment, please go to the Americans with Disabilities web site: [http://www.ada.gov/](http://www.ada.gov/)

**VCU Statement on Safety**

What to know and do to be prepared for emergencies at VCU:

- Sign up to receive VCU text messaging alerts ([http://alert.vcu.edu/signup/index.php](http://alert.vcu.edu/signup/index.php)). Keep your information up-to-date.
- Know the safe evacuation route from each of your classrooms. Emergency evacuation routes are posted in on-campus classrooms.
- Listen for and follow instructions from VCU or other designated authorities.
- Know where to go for additional emergency information ([www.vcu.edu/alert](http://www.vcu.edu/alert)).
- Know the emergency phone number for the VCU Police (828-1234). Report suspicious activities and objects.

**Immunizations**

The Code of Virginia (Section 23-7.5) requires all full-time students to provide documentation of their immunizations. All students attending VCU must submit a completed VCU Certificate of Immunization. Students who cannot provide documented evidence of all required immunizations must see their health care provider, health department or Student Health Services to complete all requirements. Questions and concerns should be communicated with Student Health Services; contact information can be found on their web site: [http://www.students.vcu.edu/health/immunizations/](http://www.students.vcu.edu/health/immunizations/).

The VCU Certificate of Immunization is available at the immunization web page or directly at [http://www.students.vcu.edu/media/student-affairs/ushs/docs/SHS1516-02CertificateofImmunization.pdf](http://www.students.vcu.edu/media/student-affairs/ushs/docs/SHS1516-02CertificateofImmunization.pdf).

In addition to submitting the VCU Certificate of Immunization, students whose work or research will bring them into contact with individual patients or patient populations are required to submit the VCU Health Science Student Immunization Requirements form, available on the VCU Immunization web page at [http://www.students.vcu.edu/health/immunizations/](http://www.students.vcu.edu/health/immunizations/) or directly at [http://www.students.vcu.edu/media/student-affairs/ushs/docs/SHS1415-24Ammendments8.pdf](http://www.students.vcu.edu/media/student-affairs/ushs/docs/SHS1415-24Ammendments8.pdf).

**University Resources**

**Academic Resources**

*Academic Calendar*

Students will find detailed information on academic calendars for the next four academic years, the VCU holiday schedule, and a general calendar of VCU events. The following is a direct link to the VCU Academic Calendar [http://academiccalendars.vcu.edu/](http://academiccalendars.vcu.edu/).
Bulletins

On the Graduate Bulletin web site, students can find information on the latest academic bulletins, as well as links to archived bulletins from previous academic years. The “Epidemiology, Doctor of Philosophy” link will produce a basic overview of course requirements for the degree, plus a sample curriculum for the first two academic years (pre-dissertation). More information can be accessed by using this link: http://www.pubapps.vcu.edu/bulletins/.

VCU Libraries

The VCU Libraries web site provides many resources for students in all disciplines. Information concerning hours of facilities, online research tools, borrowing, renewing, reserving and requesting materials from other universities and institutions can be found on their facility specific sites. In addition, students can access helpful information and training resources with regards to search engines, research tools and resources, as well as dissertation and thesis submission. Online chatting with library professionals and one-on-one consultations are also available. Check out all of the libraries capabilities by visiting http://www.library.vcu.edu/.

Student Services Centers – Financial Aid and Records & Registration

The VCU Student Services Center provides assistance with issues regarding financial aid and records and registration on both VCU campuses. Services on the MCV Campus are limited to financial aid, and it is recommended that students start with the School of Medicine Financial Aid Office for assistance (see “Financial Aid” section in this handbook.) Full services, including records and registration, are available on the Monroe Park Campus. Additional information regarding the student services office location, transcript requests, specific financial aid information, academic forms and degree requirements can be found at http://www.enrollment.vcu.edu. On the MCV Campus, the Student Services Center is in the VMI Building at the corner of 10th and E. Marshall Streets. A map of this location is available at http://www.maps.vcu.edu/mcv/vmibldg/.

The Associate Dean and Dean’s Office

This web site provides information on the function and contact information for the School of Medicine Dean and all of the key Associate Deans. To access this information, visit http://www.medschool.vcu.edu/about/deansoffice/index.html.

International Student and Scholar Services

The Global Education Office provides information to international students and scholars to find the appropriate suite of services tailored to their needs. Services include programs for academic success for international students, international admissions, immigration services, and connecting international students with external community partners. For more specific information visit: http://www.global.vcu.edu/students/index.html.

Special Services for Students

The Division for Academic Success on the MCV Campus works closely with students who have a documented disability to excel in academic endeavors. Resources that can be found at this web site include a handbook for students with disabilities that outline rights, responsibilities, and accommodations procedures for students with disabilities. Students interested in receiving services from this office should visit the following web site for details: http://das.vcu.edu/.
**VCU Writing Center**

The Writing Center offers online or in-person consultations on report writing for all VCU students. The website also outlines SafeAssign, a service employed by VCU to prevent plagiarism across VCU. Students can access more information by visiting the University College’s website.

**Preparing Future Faculty Program**

This program provides a series of short courses and professional development opportunities for graduate students interested in pursuing careers in higher education. Courses ranging from 1-2 credits are available on topics such as The Academic Profession, Internship/Externship in Professional teaching, and Teaching, Learning, and Technology in Higher Education. Courses may be taken individually or to earn a certificate. Information can be found at [http://www.graduate.vcu.edu/development/faculty.html](http://www.graduate.vcu.edu/development/faculty.html).

**Health and Wellness**

**VCU Wellness Resource Center**

The Wellness Resource Center (The Well) provides information for students on how to live a healthy lifestyle. Programs designed to maintain health include educational programming, norm-setting social marketing approaches, peer education, policy advocacy, community coalitions, and individual counseling. The Well publishes “The Stall Seat Journal” which can be found in restrooms throughout the Monroe Park Campus. Visit their website ([http://www.thewell.vcu.edu/](http://www.thewell.vcu.edu/)) to find out how to volunteer or to learn about the health resources available for students.

**University Counseling Services**

University Counseling Services offers a variety of services, including one-on-one therapy sessions, case management and referral services, consultation and outreach, and psychological health support to international students. To schedule an appointment or learn more about services offered, visit [http://www.students.vcu.edu/counseling/](http://www.students.vcu.edu/counseling/).

**VCU Recreational Sports**

VCU “Rec Sports” offers sports and recreational programs, group exercise classes, outdoor trips, club sports, and certification programs. Here you will also find information on the many health and fitness facilities on both the Monroe Park and Medical campuses, including amenities, locations, and hours of service. Membership information is also provided at [http://www.recsports.vcu.edu/](http://www.recsports.vcu.edu/).

**VCU Student Health Services**

All students may use resources provided by Student Health Services while enrolled full-time in coursework. Clinical and pharmacy services as well as routine and international travel immunizations are available. For more information about services and hours for the health clinic, immunization office, and pharmacy, go to [http://www.students.vcu.edu/health/](http://www.students.vcu.edu/health/).
Campus and Student Life

VCU Card

The VCU Card is the official identification card for VCU and Health System. While on the Monroe Park or Medical campuses, all students, faculty and staff are required to carry their VCUCard, which provides easy access to residence halls, libraries, online resources, bus systems, meal plans, and departmental offices. The VCU Card web site provides information regarding how to obtain or replace lost cards, rules concerning use, how to deposit Rambucks, and procedures for linking Wells Fargo accounts to a student’s card. More information can be found on the VCU Card web site https://vcucard.vcu.edu/.

Parking and Transportation

Students can find information on parking and other transportation options on the VCU campuses including: how to obtain a parking permit, maps of parking lots and garages, information about campus shuttles and maps, including the Campus Connector, which offers regular service between the Medical and Monroe Park Campuses. Information is available at http://www.parking.vcu.edu/.

Parking and Transportation also provides information regarding Zimrides (shared commuting) and Zipcar rentals. Interested students can obtain a GRTC Bus Pass at reduced price. For more information, visit: https://zimride.com/vcu.

Larrick Student Center

The Larrick Student Center is a one-stop spot for food, coffee, exercise, and student lounge space; it houses Jonah’s dining hall, the MCV Campus Recreation and Aquatic Center, Starbucks, and several meeting rooms for special events. Information regarding hours, special events, room reservations, and event planning resources as well as up-to-date building operational hours and menus can be found on the Larrick Student Center web site: http://www.usca.vcu.edu/facilities-dining/larrick-student-center/.

Hunton Student Center

At Hunton, students can find private study space, a computer lab, dining, and lounge space. Information concerning the center’s operational hours, menus for the food court, event calendar and directions for room reservations are on the web site at: http://www.usca.vcu.edu/facilities-dining/hunton-student-center/.

VCU Bookstore

There are two bookstores located on the VCU campuses, one at 610 North 10th Street (MCV Campus) and another at 1111 West Broad Street (Monroe Park Campus). Most books for courses taught through the public health Departments/Divisions can be purchased at the MCV Campus bookstore. Both bookstores offer a variety of supplies and VCU campus gear, as well. To view book and supply availability visit the VCU Bookstore’s web site (http://vcumedical.bncollege.com/webapp/wcs/stores/servlet/BNCBHomePage?storeId=55553&catalogId=10001&langId=-1).
VCU Technology Services

Technology Services provides a multitude of services for students including e-mail support, the helpIT Center, free software, software download information, seminars and trainings, as well as wireless network security aid. To learn about all of the resources Technology Services organizes, visit: http://ts.vcu.edu/.

VCU Dining Services

Here you will find information on locations of campus dining services, menus, function catering, nutrition information, and hours of service. There are three campus dining options on the MCV Campus; all are located in and around the MCV hospital area. Visit the Dining Services site to learn more about meal plan options and daily food menus (http://www.campusdish.com/en-us/CSMA/VirginiaCommonwealth).

Office of Multicultural Student Affairs

The Office of Multicultural Student Affairs (OMSA) is a resource for all VCU students, as well as faculty and staff. The primary mission of OMSA is to assist traditionally underserved and/or underrepresented student populations (i.e. race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender) through advising, support, program development, retention, mentoring and by promoting an appreciation of diversity throughout the campus community. More information can be accessed on OMSA's official web site (http://www.omsa.vcu.edu/).

VCU Residential Life and Housing

VCU “ResLife” provides students with several housing options on the MCV Campus. Applications for housing, rates, contracts, policies for University student housing can all be found on their web site: http://www.housing.vcu.edu/.

VCU Maps

Interactive maps of the Monroe Park and MCV Campuses can be found on the VCU Maps web site (http://www.maps.vcu.edu/) by simply entering the name of a VCU building or address.

VCU Police

Students can access information about bike registration programs, defense training, lost and found, emergency situation response, and much more when visiting the VCU Police’s web site (http://www.police.vcu.edu/). The VCU Police emergency number is 804-828-1234; this phone number should be used when reporting any kind of emergency that occurs on or in VCU Property. For non-emergency situations that should be reported to the VCU Police, dial 804-828-1196.

VCU Security Escort

The VCU Police Department maintains this web site, which provides information on the Security Escort Services and Emergency Reporting Telephone System to assist students and other VCU community members with traveling to and from campus safely. VCU Security Escort Services are free of charge to students and can be accessed by calling 828-WALK. More information about this service can be found on the Security Escort web site (https://police.vcu.edu/services/security-escort-service/).
**Career Center**

The Career Center provides a multitude of preparatory services to help students in career planning. Students can receive career planning tips on how to interview, write a resume or curriculum vitae, evaluate positions offered and more. Visit the Career Centers web site (http://www.careers.vcu.edu/) to find information regarding job openings and with general career counseling help.

**Student Groups, Associations, and Societies**

**Student Groups**

The Office for Student Organization Development provides resources and services to help students establish and maintain student organizations. The office provides leadership training, information on obtaining financial support for student organizations, as well as a listing of volunteer opportunities. For more information, visit: http://www.usca.vcu.edu/slic/student-organizations/.

**MCV Campus Student Government Association (SGA)**

The MCV Campus SGA is the governing body of the MCV Campus of VCU. The organization plans social and community service events for the entire MCV Campus, advocates for students and voices concerns, and provides funding programming done by other student groups. For more information, visit: http://www.mcvcampussga.com/home

**Public Health Student Association (PHSA)**

The Public Health Student Association (PHSA) involves public health graduate students in service and social activities and gives a voice to student concerns.

**Virginia Public Health Association (VAPHA)**

The Virginia Public Health Association (VAPHA) is an organization that strives to bring together private and public health practitioners to improve the health of Virginia’s population. The VAPHA web site contains information about the Virginia Public Health Association. It lists volunteer opportunities, events, public health related career and education opportunities, policy and advocacy, and resources for public health in Virginia. The web site also provides the ability to register as a member or to donate to the VAPHA. Specific information for this organization can be found at: http://vapha.org/.

**American College of Epidemiology (ACE)**

The American College of Epidemiology is an organization of epidemiologists that serves the interests of the profession and its members through advocating for issues pertinent to epidemiology, a credential-based admission and promotion process, sponsorship of scientific meetings, publications and educational activities, and recognizing outstanding contributions to the field. Specific information for this organization can be found at: http://acepidemiology.org/.

**American Public Health Association (APHA)**

As the world’s oldest public health organization, the American Public Health Association (APHA) is dedicated to ensuring the safety and wellbeing of all Americans. The APHA web site provides a wealth of information
regarding member benefits, publications, national events and initiatives, and the organization’s publications, just to name a few. More information can be found on their web site: http://www.apha.org/.

**Society for Epidemiologic Research (SER)**

The SER is committed to keeping epidemiologists at the vanguard of scientific developments. To this end, the Society sponsors the American Journal of Epidemiology and Epidemiologic Reviews, as well as the annual SER meeting which includes the John C. Cassel Memorial Lecture and contributed papers, symposia, and posters on a wide range of epidemiologic issues. SER was created in 1967 with the purpose of engaging students and new researchers with senior faculty in a meaningful way. More information can be found on their web site: http://www.epiresearch.org/index.php

**Other Professional Organizations**

Students and faculty also belong to professional organizations that are most relevant to their specific content area and research interests.

**Alumni Societies**

All Public Health graduates may join the MCV Alumni Association. Details pertaining to membership dues, volunteer events, and alumni news can be found on the Alumni Association’s web site: http://www.vcu-mcvalumni.org/index.html. In addition, the Public Health Program has a VCU Public Health Alumni Facebook page.

**Division of Epidemiology, Department of Family Medicine and Population Health**

**The Office Building**

**Mailing Address of One Capitol Square**

830 East Main Street (8th floor)  
PO Box 980212  
Richmond, VA 23298-0212

**Important Phone Numbers**

Security desk phone number: 804-628-6329  
Main Division phone number: 804-828-9785

**Student Mailboxes**

Student mailboxes are located on the 8th floor immediately within the suite entrance, next to the faculty mailboxes. Students may use the Department PO Box address for mail related to their graduate work and may receive the following in their student mailboxes:

- Bulletins from School of Medicine  
- Society mailings
• Registration for conferences
• Professional journals and research-related mailings

**Sending Mail to VCU Departments**

To send information via the interoffice mail system, use an interoffice envelope. Write the staff/faculty member’s name and P.O. Box number on the envelope, and put it in the VCU Mailbox located near the student/staff mailboxes.

**How to Address Mail Sent to You**

Envelopes and small packages can be mailed via US Postal Service using the Division’s P.O. Box:

830 East Main Street  
PO Box 980212  
Richmond, VA 23298-0212

Couriered packages or those being delivered in-person (e.g., FedEx or UPS) should be addressed to the Division’s physical address:

830 East Main Street  
8th Floor  
Richmond, VA 23219

**Gaining Access to the Building and Floor**

Building operating hours are from 7:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m. on weekdays. The building is officially closed on weekends. Doctoral students as well as full-time staff and faculty have the ability to gain after-hours access to One Capitol Square and the 8th floor using key fobs and their VCU ID cards. Please see the “Evening and Weekend Access” section for specific information on doors to use after normal operating hours.

**Access to the Building during Non-operational Hours**

Each student will receive only one key fob during their academic tenure with the Division. It is the student’s responsibility to ensure that the key fob is safeguarded until it is to be returned. If the key fob is lost or damaged, the student will have to pay $20 for a replacement.

The 8th floor doors are locked until 8:00 a.m. on weekdays. To gain entry prior to that time, swipe your VCU ID against the card readers outside the main 8th floor door or one of the two alternate doors, as appropriate. **Please note:** If entering the 8th floor on a Saturday, Sunday, University holiday, or after 5:00 p.m. on weekdays, please DO NOT use main suite entry doors; use the alternate doors (to the sides of the main suite entrance). Using the main door will leave the door unlocked until the next business day, compromising suite security.

Contact the Director of Educational Programs (see the “Faculty and Staff” section in this handbook for contact information) about having your VCU ID added to the security system to gain access to the 8th floor after operating hours. If you ever have to purchase a new VCU ID, you will have to request that your card information be updated to retain access to the floor.

**Evening and Weekend Access Policy**
The Department of Family Medicine and Population Health’s Division of Epidemiology has an established policy for the appropriate times to be in One Capitol Square. While the building is open 24 hours, 7 days a week, it is the policy of the department that faculty, staff and students should only be in the building between the hours of 7 AM and 12 midnight.

Employees, including faculty, staff, and students are not to be in the building between 12:00 midnight and 7:00 AM. Building management considers normal work hours to be Monday – Friday, 7:00 AM – 6:00 PM. Anyone who enters the building outside of this time must sign in and out at the front desk and must leave before midnight.

Graduate students who are not employees in One Capitol Square and who wish to remain in the building after normal work hours (for purposes such as computer lab use) must be in the building prior to the building closing time of 6:00 PM. These students will not be allowed to re-enter the building once they leave after 6:00 PM.

Violations of this policy may result in after-hours access being revoked.

**Exceptions**

Any exceptions must be pre-approved by the supervisor and department administrator.

**Computer Lab**

The Division computer lab is located in Room 827 on the 8th floor. Computer lab policies are as follows:

- Computers for graduate student use only.
- Use student space on servers.
- Back up work on personal media: files on servers are deleted at the end of each term
- Printing limited to course work only.
- No food or drink around computers. Report broken equipment immediately to the Graduate Programs Coordinator. For contact information for the Graduate Program Coordinator, see the Faculty and Staff section in this handbook.

**Gaining Access to the Computer Lab**

Access to the computer lab is available any time the lab is not in use for class. Class times are posted next to the door to the computer lab at the start of each term. The access code for the computer lab is 241.

**Poster Plotter**

The Division has a poster plotter and can print posters for students presenting at refereed conferences with sufficient advance planning. Last-minute requests will likely not be fulfilled. Submit files to the Graduate Program Coordinator. For contact information, look under the “Faculty and Staff” heading in this handbook. Files must be submitted a minimum of one week in advance of the date that the poster is needed. Files should be submitted in PowerPoint format and set for a poster size of 42 by 56 inches. All comments and notes must be deleted (or they will print on the poster). Any images on the poster must be of high resolution; low-resolution photos will be pixelated on the printout and therefore are unsuitable.
**Copier and Fax Access**

Students may use the copier and fax machine for work-related items only; this includes both needs of the PhD candidacy process and research projects. Ultimately, scanning is highly preferred over using the copy machine.

**Scanning Documents**

Due to State and Federal laws, the Division is required to manage official University records and be able to respond to Freedom of Information Act requests, subpoenas and other legal discovery proceedings for e-mail records of University employees. Under current arrangements with Google, the Division cannot directly access student accounts for scanning documents; therefore, students are not permitted to scan to their personal e-mail accounts on any university-owned equipment. Students must scan documents to the Divisions’ MPH e-mail or their Faculty Advisor’s account installed on the Kyocera printer/scanner. Scanned documents can be retrieved by logging into the MPH Lotus Notes e-mail account; the username is mph and the account password is stud3ntAccess. To log into the account utilize either of these links: [http://www.ts.vcu.edu/](http://www.ts.vcu.edu/).

**EPI Beverage Service**

Use of the beverage services (coffee, tea, etc.) and use of the refrigerator is available to PhD students.
Emergency Information

Emergency Evacuation Plan

One Capitol Square is equipped with an emergency alarm system that displays a flashing light if an emergency is occurring on a floor other than the one you are on. If the emergency is on your floor, lights flash and an audible alarm sounds. If this happens, evacuate the building. When exiting the building, always use stairwells; never use an elevator. After evacuating the building, meet in the Capitol Square Park by the Bell Tower building; the Bell Tower is located in the Capitol Square Park near the intersection of Bank and 9th Streets. Turn left when exiting the building, turn left onto 9th Street and walk up the hill to the next intersection. Cross 9th Street and Bank Street, entering Capitol Square Park by the gate at the corner. The Bell Tower is a short distance inside the Capitol Park grounds.

Representatives on the 5th and 8th floors will ensure evacuation during an emergency situation. Lori Davis of the Biostatistics Department (room 5048) is responsible for the 5th floor, and Lisa Anderson, Director of Educational Programs, is responsible for the 8th floor. If you have any questions concerning emergency procedures, please follow up with either previously listed individual.

Reporting an Emergency in the Building

If there is an emergency in the One Capitol Square building, contact the security desk for assistance via phone 804-628-6329. Tell the Security Guard your location and type of emergency.

Maintenance Issues

Broken or malfunctioning equipment should be reported to the Graduate Program Coordinator. For contact information, look under the “Faculty and Staff” heading in this handbook.

Faculty and Staff

Academic Program Faculty and Staff

Saba W. Masho, MD, MPH, DrPH
Graduate Programs Director
E-mail: Saba.Masho@vcuhealth.org
Phone: 804-628-2509

The Graduate Program Director oversees the direction of the PhD and MPH Programs. She serves as the ultimate authority for decisions related to coursework and PhD and MPH Program policies and governance before they are forwarded to the Chair if necessary.

Lisa S. Anderson, MPH
Director of Educational Programs
E-mail: Lisa.S.Anderson@vcuhealth.org
Phone: 804-628-2512

The Director of Educational Programs facilitates the implementation of both the PhD and MPH Programs but works more closely with the MPH Program.

Shana Ryman, MSEd
Graduate Programs Coordinator
The Graduate Programs Coordinator is primarily involved with the day-to-day operations of the MPH Program, but she coordinates the following PhD Program-related items: distribution and collection of all Division course evaluations, submission of course information in e-Services, and coordination of the Division and Public Health Seminars and related professional development for PhD students with invited speakers.

Maria V. (Vicki) Humphreys, MBA, CRA  
Administrator, Research and Graduate Program Operations  
(Division Administrator)  
E-mail: vicki.humpreys@vcuhealth.org  
Phone: 804-628-2227

The Division Administrator handles grant, fiscal, and human resources issues for the Division of Epidemiology and Department of Family Medicine and Population Health.

Division Faculty and Staff Directory

Contact information for Faculty and Staff can be accessed by visiting the Division’s web site.  
Research Areas for Division Faculty – Assistant and Associate Professors

| Behavioral and Cancer Epidemiology            | Dr. Resa M. Jones          |
| Genetic Epidemiology                          | Dr. Elizabeth Prom-Wormley |
| Maternal and Child Health                     | Dr. Saba Masho             |
| Race/ethnic and gender disparities;           | Dr. Derek Chapman          |
| Maternal and Child Health                     |                            |
| Psychiatric Epidemiology                      | Dr. Shawnita Sealy-Jefferson|
| Traumatic Brain Injury                        | Dr. Briana Mezuk           |
|                                             | Dr. Juan Lu                |

Division Student Lists

A complete listing of current MPH and PhD students can be accessed on the Division’s web site by selecting the “Students” link within the Division Directory. Profiles of students can be found on the web site as well.  
http://familymedicine.vcu.edu/epidemiology/phd/students/  
http://familymedicine.vcu.edu/epidemiology/mph/students/

Graduate Bulletin

All graduate students are governed by the administrative polices in the VCU Graduate Bulletin. Each student is responsible for familiarizing her/himself with the Graduate Bulletin, as noted in the excerpt below from the bulletin.

The VCU Graduate Bulletin web site documents the official admission and academic rules and regulations that govern graduate education for all graduate programs at the university. These policies are established by the graduate faculty of the University through their elected representatives to the University Graduate Council.
It is the responsibility of all graduate students, both on- and off-campus, to be familiar with the Graduate Bulletin as well as the academic regulations in individual school and division publications and on program web sites; however, in all cases, the official policies and procedures of the University Graduate Council, as published on this Graduate Bulletin web site and on the Graduate School web site, take precedent over individual program policies and guidelines.

The archived copies of current and past bulletins (catalogs) reflect all policies and procedures in effect at the beginning of the stated academic year. The online Bulletin is updated regularly to reflect changes that occur throughout the academic year.

Students who maintain continuous enrollment are subject to the curricular requirements of the bulletin in effect at the time of admission, and to subsequent policy changes approved by the University Graduate Council for immediate implementation.

Students who do not maintain continuous enrollment must reapply for admission and will be subject to the requirements of the bulletin in effect at the time of readmission, and to subsequent policy changes approved by the University Graduate Council for immediate implementation. (See policy on Exceptions.)

Graduate students should contact the Graduate School at any time regarding questions relating to graduate study at VCU.

The bulletin is in effect when a student matriculates is the bulletin of record. Students should reference the bulletin for specific guidance on curriculum policies. The Graduate Bulletin is accessible on the VCU main page by clicking on “Academic Programs” and selecting “Bulletin,” or at http://bulletin.vcu.edu/graduate/.

**Enrollment and Attendance**

**Enrollment Status**

Epidemiology PhD students are required to be enrolled full-time each semester. For the Fall and Spring semester, full-time enrollment requires registration of ≥ 9 academic credits each semester. Part-time enrollment is defined as enrollment in 8 or fewer academic credits in a semester. For the Summer semester, full-time enrollment requires registration of ≥3 academic credits.

**Attendance Policy**

Regular attendance is necessary to keep up with all class instruction and assignments, and students are expected to attend all classes unless unavoidable circumstances (e.g., student illness, family emergency) prevent attendance. Students are responsible for communicating with the instructor if special arrangements are necessary regarding test re-scheduling due to unavoidable class absence. Students who are aware of unavoidable absences in advance (e.g., attending a funeral) are expected to contact the Course Director about the absence and make arrangements for submission of assignments due during the missed class. Students wishing to observe a religious holiday of special importance must provide advance written notification to each instructor by the end of the second week of classes in each term. See the section titled “Paid Leave” for information on leave granted as part of the student assistantship.
Registration

Registration Overview

Students are responsible for checking course registration each term to ensure that they have registered for the appropriate number of credits in each course and selected the appropriate courses and course sequence. **It is critical to observe the registration drop/add dates.** The Graduate School holds students responsible for checking their registration records for the correct course selection and number of credits per course. Curriculum planners are available in Blackboard and in the appendix of this document to guide students through the requirements of the doctoral program. Students also are encouraged to consult with their faculty Advisor and the Graduate Program Director for guidance. Students should communicate and/or meet with their Advisor prior to registering for courses to ensure that their course choices match their coursework and degree plan.

All doctoral students/candidates must meet the Program registration requirements to receive benefits linked to assistantships (tuition and fees, stipend). All students must register by the University add/drop period ending as dictated by the VCU Academic Calendar (see below). Students registering for online courses or courses outside of the School of Medicine must inform the Division Administrator prior to registration, as online courses and some courses outside of the School incur additional tuition fees that are not covered by the tuition benefit. For example, students should not register for courses in executive-style programs, such as the School of Business’ Fast Track MBA (FMBA) Program, because tuition for such courses will not be covered.

Depending on the timing of the registration, these course registrations may not be immediately apparent to the Division Administrator in making tuition payments, thus potentially leading to underpaid tuition and a possible hold on a student account. Students who receive a student bill should contact the Division Administrator to resolve the issue. For contact information for the Division Administrator, see the Faculty and Staff section in this handbook.

Registration Process

Deadline for Registering for Courses

Each term there is a registration (drop/add period) deadline established by the University; these dates can be found in the VCU Academic Calendar ([http://academiccalendars.vcu.edu/](http://academiccalendars.vcu.edu/)). The University also establishes an add/drop period in which students may enroll in or withdraw from as many classes as they like without penalty; these specific dates can also be found on the Academic Calendar. It is extremely important to adhere to these registration dates because the University and the Graduate School may not allow augmentations to registration details after the add/drop period. In addition, your academic tuition funding is reliant upon successful completion of full-time status registration.

How to Register for Courses

All students must register for courses in e-Services, the online academic and employee database. e-Services can be accessed via the VCU Portal or by using the following web link: [https://ssb.vcu.edu/proddad/twbkwbis.P_WWWLogin](https://ssb.vcu.edu/proddad/twbkwbis.P_WWWLogin).

Courses can be searched by subject and the five-digit Course Reference Number (CRN). All courses that have a standard number of credits can be registered for through e-Services. For courses that are variable in credit or that are degree/program restricted, you will have to follow other registration guidelines (see below). If you
need assistance with registering for classes through E-Services, please contact the Director of Educational Programs.

Course Overrides

Students who wish to enroll in a course that is not offered by the Division should first communicate with their Advisor about the course and how it fits into the curriculum plan. If the course is approved for study, then students should contact the professor of the course to determine if a course override is required. Students should never ask for a course override without prior approval from their Advisor or the Graduate Program Director.

Students who obtain advisor and Graduate Program Director for a course override for a course that is offered by the Division should communicate with the Director of Educational Programs to begin the process. The Director of Educational Programs can enter an electronic override using the student’s identification number (V-number) and will inform the student when the override is entered and online registration may proceed. If an override is needed for a course taught by another department the student must work with that department’s faculty to obtain the override.

Variable Credit Courses

Certain courses in the doctoral program have variable course hour options (courses that list 1-3 or 1-6 credits). These courses include EPID 692: Independent Study, EPID 696: Special Topics, and EPID 697: Directed Research in Epidemiology. To register for a variable credit course, follow the instructions for variable credit course registration, found in the Appendix. Contact the Director of Educational Programs (see the “Faculty and Staff” section in this handbook for contact information) if you need assistance.

Registration Policies

Transfer Credit

Students may request transfer of graduate level courses completed at other institutions or at VCU for credit toward their doctorate. Any courses considered for transfer may not have been used to meet the requirements of another degree or certificate program. According to VCU Graduate School policy, no more than 30% of the didactic degree credits, or 12 credits, may be transferred. Requests must be made in writing to the Graduate Program Director. Students submit a formal written request (an e-mail message is suitable) and must include the official transcript from the institution(s) where the course(s) was taken and should include each course syllabus and information on whether the course was taken on a term or quarter basis.

Requests will be reviewed by the Graduate Program Director. Students will be notified of the outcome of the review by e-mail. If the transfer request is approved, the Graduate Program Director will submit a formal request to the Graduate School. Once the request is approved, the transfer credits will be added to the student VCU transcript.

More information about this policy can be found by accessing the following web page: http://www.pubapps.vcu.edu/bulletins/graduate/?uid=10045&iid=30078&did=20038
Auditing Graduate Classes

Class size permitting, students may register for courses on an audit basis with approval of the faculty advisor. Auditing a course means students enroll in courses, but do not receive academic credit upon completion of the courses. Students who register on an audit basis are subject to attendance regulations of that class and, unless otherwise specified at the discretion of the instructor, are subject to the same course requirements as other students in the class.

Audit students are charged the regular rate of tuition and fees. An audit course is counted as part of students’ term load in terms of classification as full-time students. Courses taken for audit, however, do not satisfy minimum enrollment requirements for students receiving graduate teaching or research assistantships, graduate fellowships, or university graduate scholarships.

Students may register for audit only during add/drop and late registration periods as a new registration and not as a change from credit to audit. Changes in registration status from audit to credit or from credit to audit will not be approved after the last day of add/drop registration. The grade of AU is not included in the calculation of the GPA.

More information about this policy can be found by accessing the following web page: http://www.pubapps.vcu.edu/bulletins/graduate/?uid=10045&iid=31069&did=20038.

Withdrawal from Courses

To withdraw officially from VCU courses (after the drop/add period), students must submit complete Official Withdrawal Forms to the Office of Records and Registration by the official withdrawal date as published in the official VCU Academic Calendar. Students may also withdraw online via VCU e-Services. Failure to complete this process may result in the assignment of failing grades in all or some of the courses.

A grade of withdrawn (W) will be recorded on the permanent student academic record for all courses from which students officially withdraw. More information about this policy can be found by accessing the Graduate Bulletin at: http://www.pubapps.vcu.edu/bulletins/graduate/?uid=10045&iid=31071&did=20038.

Grade Review Procedure

If a student thinks that a grade is inaccurate, the situation should be discussed with the faculty member who is teaching the course. This will allow the faculty member to explain how the final grade was determined and, if an error is detected, to submit a change of grade.

If the student still thinks that the grade was assigned unfairly, a written appeal should be submitted to the Graduate Program Director. Upon receipt of the written appeal, the Graduate Program Director shall provide the student with a copy and explanation of the Grade Review Procedure and shall ensure that the requirements of the Grade Review Procedure are followed. For more information concerning this matter access the Grade Review Procedure Policy on the following web page: http://www.pubapps.vcu.edu/bulletins/graduate/?uid=10045&iid=30071.

Leave of Absence

Students who must interrupt their program of study for legitimate reasons (e.g., long-term family illness, service in military reserves) may request a leave of absence from the Graduate Program Director. The request must be submitted in writing (e-mail is appropriate) and explain the need for the absence as well as the
absence start and end dates. Students given approved leave of absence will not be able to access VCU resources such as e-mail during their leave, nor will they be able to register for courses. Access to VCU resources will be restored shortly before the end date of the leave of absence.

It is important for students going on a leave of absence to provide the Graduate Program Director with contact information, including a non-VCU e-mail address and a phone number where the student may be reached while on leave.

For more information visit: http://www.pubapps.vcu.edu/bulletins/graduate/?uid=10045&iid=31071&did=20038.

Withdrawal from Program

Graduate students in good academic standing, as written in the Graduate Bulletin and by individual graduate programs, may request to withdraw from a graduate program at any time. Students should notify the Graduate Program Director as soon as possible of the intent to withdraw from the Program. The effective term of withdrawal is recorded as the end of the last term of active registration. The Graduate School may require students to pay tuition costs back to the University.

Withdrawal from the Program does not constitute a withdrawal from course work. Students who wish to also withdraw from classes should do so according to the procedures in the “Withdrawal from classes” section of the Bulletin (http://www.pubapps.vcu.edu/bulletins/policies/?uid=10045&iid=31088). Prior to withdrawing from the Program students must speak with their academic Advisor and the Graduate Program Director.

Standards

Course Grades

Course work quality is measured by the four-point grade system with the following equivalents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Symbol and Meaning</th>
<th>Grade-point Value per Semester Credit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P/F (Pass/Fail)</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I (Incomplete)</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PR (Progress)</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S/U) Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W (Withdrawal)</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AU (Audit)</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Grade of Pass (P)

This grade is awarded for certain courses to denote satisfactory completion of requirements. The grade of P is not included in the calculation of the GPA.
Grade of Incomplete (I)

If, because of circumstances beyond his or her control, a student is unable to meet all the requirements of a course by the end of a term, the mark of incomplete (I) may be given. The awarding of a mark of I requires an understanding between instructor and student as to when and how the course will be completed. This understanding must be recorded on an Incomplete Grade Assignment Form that is submitted instead of a final course grade. The maximum time limit for submission of all course work necessary for removal of an incomplete is the end of the last day of classes of the next term following the term in which the incomplete was incurred. More information about this policy can be found at: (http://www.pubapps.vcu.edu/bulletins/graduate/?uid=10045&iid=30071)

Grade of Progress (PR)

The mark of PR may be assigned only in courses approved for such grading. Unlike the mark of I, PR will not automatically be changed to a failing grade at the end of the succeeding term. The grade of PR is not included in the calculation of the GPA.

Grades of Satisfactory (S), Unsatisfactory (U) or Fail (F) in thesis and dissertation courses

All thesis and dissertation credits are to be graded each term as satisfactory (S), unsatisfactory (U) or fail (F). Receipt of the grade of U is formal notification to the student of unsatisfactory progress. A student who receives a final grade of F in the thesis or dissertation will be terminated from the graduate program. A grade of S or U is not included in the calculation of the GPA. A grade of U is a permanent grade. Future satisfactory performance is reflected in the assignment of the grade of S in subsequent terms.

Grade of Withdrawal (W)

The grade of W indicates that the student has officially withdrawn from a course or has been administratively withdrawn for nonattendance.

To view course grading information in more depth, visit the “Grading System” section on the following web page: http://bulletin.vcu.edu/undergraduate/undergraduate-study/academic-regulations-general-degree-requirements/grading-marking-system/.

Course Exemptions

No course exemptions will be given to students matriculating into the Doctoral Program unless agreed upon by the Graduate Program Director. Students seeking course exemptions should communicate directly with the Graduate Program Director.

Nine Credit Minimum Exemption

Registration for less than the minimum required number of credit hours may be permitted for students in the final stage of completing a doctoral dissertation. Such an exemption must be requested by their faculty advisor with approval of the Graduate Program Director and the Office of Graduate Education. Students will be made aware if their request is approved.
Probation

Probation will be given to students who have not achieved successful completion of academic standards as outlined in their bi-annual review (See the “Advising” section in this document for more details). Students who are placed on probation will receive a formal notice and will be required to meet with their faculty Advisor and the Graduate Program Director to determine further actions and plan of study.

Course grading scale

The grading scale in each course depends on the professor’s preferences. No matter the grading scale, all letter grades reflect the Graduate School’s letter-to-grade-point value per term credit as noted previously in this document.

Course Prerequisite

Certain courses require prerequisite coursework; prerequisites should be listed in the course schedule in e-Services along with other course requirements.

Grade Submission

It is the responsibility of the course instructor to submit coursework grades. Coursework grades are due within one day of the last final exam. Specific dates for submission can be found on the Academic Calendar.

Satisfactory Progress

Students must continue to make satisfactory progress toward their degrees. Unsatisfactory grades and unprofessional conduct are areas that may warrant review for possible termination from their programs. Specifically, students may not receive a D or F in a course or more than one grade of C in order to fulfill degree requirements.

At the end of each term, graduate faculty advisors and the Graduate Program Director will review the academic progress of all graduate students in the Program. The academic standing of any graduate students who receive more than one grade of C or grades of D or F will be reviewed for possible termination from their programs. Although the grade of U is not included in the calculation of the graduate GPA, graduate students who receive one or more grades of U will be considered for possible termination. Students earning grades below a may be reviewed by the School of Medicine’s MCV Graduate Committee, chaired by the Associate Dean for Graduate Education.

Students who have completed all minimum degree requirements but who are out of compliance with minimum graduation requirements (i.e., graduate grade-point average, 50 percent 500-/600-level course work, etc.), may be allowed, with the permission of their graduate faculty advisor, Graduate Program Director, academic Deans/Dean designees and the Graduate School to take additional course work to meet minimum University Graduate Council graduation requirements. Requests for such actions must be processed via the special action form according to the instructions articulated in the “Exceptions Policy” in the Graduate Bulletin. Students will have a maximum of one calendar year to complete such additional requirements. At the end of that time, if students are still out of compliance, they must be terminated from the Program for lack of academic progress.
Transcript Policy

Official transcripts of students’ academic records will be issued only by the Office of Records and Registration upon written request of the students.
Credit for Independent or Directed Coursework

Directed Research in Epidemiology

The Directed Research in Epidemiology coursework (EPID 697) should begin after a student has completed the written comprehensive exams and has been cleared to begin preparation for the oral proposal of their dissertation. Students should enroll in the minimum amount of credits required to meet the Graduate School’s minimum credit requirements to remain a full-time student. To register in a Directed Research course, students must have advisor approval. Follow the procedure described in this handbook’s appendix for variable credit course registration.

Independent study

Independent Study courses are developed when a student wishes to study a topic that is not covered by an existing VCU course. Students often register for an Independent Study course in the first two years, particularly in the first summer semester. If a student wishes to pursue independent study coursework, s/he must communicate with her/his Advisor to determine what type of study would fulfill methodological or substantive elective requirements. Once a decision has been made, the student must develop an Independent Study Plan that includes the learning objectives, reading list, expected deliverables, schedule for the Independent Study, and whether the course is to be taken as a methodological or substantive elective. The Independent Study Plan must be sent to the Director of Educational Programs, who reviews it and forwards it to the Graduate Program Director for review and approval as fulfilling the elective. Approval of the Independent Study Plan must be obtained before a student can register for credit or pursue the project. See the Appendix to this Handbook for a template of the Independent Study Plan.

Sufficient advance planning is necessary to register for an Independent Study course. Students and advisors should be planning for such courses by the middle of the semester prior to the one in which the Independent Study will be pursued (e.g., for a summer semester independent study, begin planning by March 1st). Students and advisors typically determine a topic for the course (e.g., “Independent Study: Epidemiological Approaches to Psychiatric Pharmacoepidemiology”) and provide it to the Director of Educational Programs so that the specific section of the Independent Study can be placed on the university course schedule for registration. To establish and register for an Independent Study course, students must have advisor approval and must have completed an Independent Study Plan. Use the template in the appendix of this handbook and refer to the variable credit course registration instructions in the appendix.

Student Records and Access Systems

GradTrak

GradTrak is the School of Medicine’s automated system for tracking student records and progress in a degree program. The program identifies students and Advisors and information related to student progress toward degree completion. GradTrak is accessible through VCU’s access portal, available through “myVCU “on the VCU home page. Look for the School of Medicine tab to locate GradTrak. GradTrak will be used heavily during the dissertation phase of a student’s degree.

The GradTrak portal is divided into two categories “Program Information and My Forms”. The “Program Information” category displays the completion of degree candidacy requirements including technical standards, comprehensive exams (written candidacy), Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) training, oral
dissertation proposal (oral candidacy), and dissertation defense (final exam). In this category a student can access:

- Program details (registration status, GPA, etc.)
- Degree candidacy information
- Graduation details
- Course history
- Matriculation information
- Other various academic details

In the “My Forms” category a student can access:

- Degree candidacy forms
- Technical Standards form
- Graduation application forms

Students can also create their Advisory Dissertation Committee and schedule their oral dissertation proposal and final defense

e-Services

This system is multi-functional in that it is used for:

- Course registration
- Financial aid and accounting information
- Transcript requests
- Updating personal contact information
- Viewing final grades
- Accessing employment information

Blackboard

The Division uses Blackboard not only for course materials, but to provide information on the following:

Announcements related to:

- Special research seminars
- Workshops
- Logistical information such as computer lab closings
- Opportunities to meet with visiting faculty members
- Requests for student feedback about the Program and Division

Critical reference materials for the PhD Program, such as:

- Guidelines for the dissertation process
- Important forms
- Handbook
- Curriculum planners
- Course listings
- Program milestones
- Competencies
If you ever need help using any of these online sources, please contact the Director of Educational Programs (see the “Faculty and Staff” section in this handbook for contact information)

**Advising**

**Bi-Annual Review of Graduate Student’s Progress**

The Division of Epidemiology PhD Program faculty conduct a bi-annual review of student progress that results in an advising letter that is sent to students in January and June of each year. This letter assesses student progress to date and provides guidance on next steps to take in the Program. Students are responsible for reviewing these letters carefully and responding to any guidance provided or contacting the Graduate Program Director if they have questions about the letter.

**Appointment of Advisor**

Students are assigned an Advisor prior to matriculating into the Program. The faculty Advisor holds the primary responsibility for monitoring the development of the student in the Program and providing the appropriate guidance and counsel essential to the scholarly development of the student. Duties of the Advisor include:

a. The Advisor shall have responsibility for guiding the student's academic program.

b. The Advisor shall develop a plan for the student's didactic course work with the student.

c. The Advisor shall oversee the advisee’s work (20 hours per week) in support of the faculty research program.

d. The Advisor shall, on the basis of the student's didactic and scholarly program and dissertation topic/methods, identify faculty members to comprise the student's Dissertation Committee and elicit their agreement to serve, with the Advisor serving as the Chair of the Committee. The members of the student’s Dissertation Committee are generally determined after the student passes the written comprehensive exams and begins working on the dissertation proposal. Dissertation Committee members serve as both an examining and consultative body, functioning to assist the development of the student. Committee members hold a special responsibility as a source of counsel for the student.

Note that due to the School of Medicine practice, student advisors may not be listed accurately in GradTrak until after the student has successfully completed written comprehensive exams and submitted an initial Admission to Candidacy form. Prior to this time, the Graduate Program Director may appear as the student’s advisor in GradTrak.

**Guidelines for Changing an Advisor**

Students meet with their assigned Advisors for initial planning of their program of study and to explore the student's area of interest. The Advisor and student continue to meet regularly throughout their tenure to discuss interests and work on research. If a student changes their course of study so that it is no longer aligned with that of their Advisor, a change in Advisor may be appropriate. However, if this occurs, the Advisor and the student should communicate about options to maintain their original pairing or working with other faculty members.

Once PhD students have begun work on their dissertation, changing Advisors should be rare, and limited to major ethical problems or substantial shifts in areas of interest. A student who wants to change an Advisor must first meet with the Graduate Program Director to discuss issues and reasons for wanting to change Advisors. Subsequently, requests to change Advisors must be made in writing to the Graduate Program
Director and should include an explanation for the change. The Graduate Program Director will review the request and will determine if the limited circumstances for changing Advisors are met. The Graduate Program Director will notify the student upon assignment of a new academic Advisor.

Role of the Doctoral Advisor

Overall, a Doctoral Advisor should remain committed to the life-long mentoring of the graduate student and be committed to the education and training of the graduate student as a future member of the scientific community. More content specific roles are as follows:

Dissertation

- Be committed to the research project of the graduate student. Help to plan and direct the graduate student’s project, set reasonable and attainable goals, and establish a timeline for completion of the project.
- Recognize the possibility of conflicts between the interests of externally funded research programs and those of the graduate student. The Advisor will not let these interfere with the student’s pursuit of his/her dissertation research.
- Be committed to meeting one-on-one with the student on a regular basis.
- Help the graduate student select a Dissertation Committee and assure that this committee meets to review or at the very least discusses the graduate student’s progress.
- Be knowledgeable of, and guide the graduate student through the requirements and deadlines of his/her graduate program as well as those of the institution, including teaching requirements and human resources guidelines.

Conducting Research & Publications

- Discuss authorship policies regarding papers with the graduate student. Acknowledge the graduate student’s scientific contributions to research, and work with the graduate student to publish his/her work in a timely manner prior to the student’s graduation.
- Discuss intellectual policy issues with the student with regard to disclosure, patent rights and publishing research discoveries.

Career

- Lead by example and facilitate the training of the graduate student in complementary skills needed to be a successful epidemiologist, such as oral and written communication skills, grant writing, animal and human research policies, the ethical conduct of research, and scientific professionalism.
- Encourage the graduate student to attend scientific/professional meetings and make an effort to secure and facilitate funding for such activities.
- Provide career advice and assist in finding a position for the graduate student following his/her graduation.
- Provide honest letters of recommendation for his/her next phase of professional development. Be accessible to give advice and feedback on career goals.

Responsibilities of the Advisee

Academic

- Acknowledge that as a student, your primary responsibility is the successful completion of your degree.
• Meet regularly with your Advisor and provide him/her with updates on the progress and results of your activities and experiments.
• Be knowledgeable of the policies and requirements of the graduate program, graduate school, and institution and commit to meeting these requirements, including teaching responsibilities.
• Comply with all institutional policies, including academic program milestones.
• Attend and participate in meetings, seminars and journal clubs that are part of your educational program.

**Dissertation**

• Work with your Advisor to develop a dissertation project. This will include establishing a timeline for each phase of your work. Strive to meet the established deadlines designated by you and your Advisor.
• Work with your Advisor to select a Dissertation Committee. Be responsive to the advice and constructive criticism from the Dissertation Committee.

**Research**

• Comply with both the letter and spirit of all animal-use and human-research policies at VCU.
• Participate in the University’s Responsible Conduct of Research Training Program and practice those guidelines in conducting your dissertation research as well as that of your Advisor.
• Discuss policies on authorship and attendance at professional meetings with your Advisor. Work with your Advisor to submit all relevant research results (i.e., dissertation-related and other) that are ready for publication in a timely manner prior to your graduation.

**Assistantship & Career**

• Work on average 20 hours a week for your Advisor to fulfill your assistantship requirements.
• Maintain a high level of professionalism, self-motivation, engagement, scientific curiosity, and ethical standards.
• Discuss policies on work hours, sick leave and vacation with your Advisor and/or supervisor. Consult with your Advisor and/or supervisor in advance of any planned absences.
• Complete an initial Individual Development Plan (details provided below) during the Summer after your first year and share results with your Advisor. Revise this plan annually and meet with your Advisor to discuss it.
• Acknowledge that it is primarily your responsibility to develop your career following the completion of your doctoral degree. Seek guidance from your Advisor, career counseling services, Dissertation Committee members, other mentors, and any other resources available for advice on career plans.

Additional Mentor and Mentee Responsibilities retrieved from the AAMC Compact Between biomedical Graduate Students and their research Advisors document can be found here: [http://www.medschool.vcu.edu/media/medschool/documents/AAMCGraduateStudentAdvisorCompact.pdf](http://www.medschool.vcu.edu/media/medschool/documents/AAMCGraduateStudentAdvisorCompact.pdf).
Program Requirements

Registration Status

Full-time students must register for a minimum of 9 graduate credits (each semester) in the Fall and Spring terms and 3 graduate credits for the Summer term. Enrollment must be continuous during the training period. Full-time status permits registration for 15 credit hours. University policy considers registration for >15 credits in Fall or Spring or 6 credits in the Summer term as an “overload”, which is subject to additional tuition cost. However, PhD students should never encounter this overload of 16+ credits in a given term.

Registration for less than the minimum required number of credit hours may be permitted for students in the final stage of completing a doctoral dissertation. Such exemption must be requested by the Faculty Advisor with approval of the Graduate Program Director and the School of Medicine Office of Graduate Education. Request for such an exception is made by submission of a Special Action form prepared by the Director of Educational Programs and signed by the Graduate Program Director. Such exemption is not automatic.

On occasion, students may be conducting degree work at a site distant from the institution. Under such circumstances, registration for a reduced number of credit hours may be permitted with the approval of the Office of Graduate Education. Students have an obligation to maintain continuous enrollment during such periods.

Core Curriculum and Grade Point Average Requirements

Students are required to maintain a Grade Point Average (GPA) of 3.5 to remain in good academic standing with the Division. Any graduate student who receives multiple grades of C or a grade of D or F will be reviewed for possible termination from the Program. Although the grade of U is not included in the calculation of the graduate GPA, graduate students who receive one or more grades of U will be considered for possible termination. Students earning grades of U or below a B will be reviewed by the School of Medicine’s MCV Graduate Committee, chaired by the Associate Dean for Graduate Education.

Career Planning and Individual Development Plans

Students should speak with their Advisor for advice on their future career path. The School of Medicine provides resources related to this topic; they can be retrieved from the following web page: http://www.medschool.vcu.edu/graduate/careers/index.html.

As part of training and career planning, students are required to visit the My IDP Science Careers web site each year, starting in the summer semester after the first year. The Individual Development Plan (IDP) helps students explore career possibilities and set goals to follow the most appropriate career path. Each student is required to update the IDP assessment each year and meet with her/his Advisor to discuss the results. Students also must provide the Director of Educational Programs with a copy of the IDP assessment and the date of the meeting with their advisor at the time of the meeting. My IDP Science Careers can be accessed via http://myidp.sciencecareers.org/.

The IDP becomes part of the student file and may be used as a tool to prepare in advance of meetings of the Student Advisory Committee. The IDP will deal with the near term objectives related to the completion of the PhD and the longer term preparation for each student’s career after completion of doctoral training. This requirement is School policy as described in the VCU Bulletin: (http://www.pubapps.vcu.edu/Bulletins/prog_search/?uid=10046&iid=30114&did=20020)
The environment in the Division of Epidemiology and the School of Medicine is geared to provide training that enables students to mature as independent research scientists. In the course of that training, students develop a broad range of skills (including problem solving; dealing with failure; communicating orally, in writing, and in other media; identifying meaningful problems; developing hypotheses related to addressing said problems; and devising methodologies/strategies to test their validity), which have applicability and are valued in a broad range of career options inside and outside of academe.

Most faculty members have experience in one category of academia (a doctoral research intensive institution) and, even with the best of intentions, are not necessarily equipped to provide the fully meaningful counsel on the most satisfying career path for students to follow. As an institution, VCU provides students with the resources and the incentive to plan for a meaningful future. However ultimately, the individual responsible for the identification of a meaningful plan for achieving a successful career path is the student.

**Time to Degree**

The doctoral degree must be obtained within seven years of matriculation. It is expected that full-time students will satisfy all requirements within four to five years.

**Program Re-admittance**

If students do not meet program expectations and/or if 7 years elapse, students will not be re-admitted to the PhD Program. A formal letter will be sent to those students who will not be re-admitted.

**Responsible Conduct of Research Training (RCR)**

The University requires all graduate students to complete at minimum one Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) course to ensure that they receive adequate training to foster an environment of uncompromising integrity and ethical conduct. In addition to the University requiring RCR training, certain national funding organizations (NIH, NSF) require it as well. All courses offered through the Office of the Vice President of Research (OVPR) meet RCR educational requirements for NSF, NIH, and VCU. Students select one of the courses offered through OVPR to satisfy this requirement. These courses include:

- OVPR 601: Scientific Integrity
- OVPR 602: Responsible Scientific Conduct
- OVPR 603: Responsible Conduct of Research

More information about RCR requirements and course registration can be found on the following sites: [www.research.vcu.edu/responsible_conduct/](http://www.research.vcu.edu/responsible_conduct/)

**Teaching Experience**

All doctoral students are required to serve as a teaching assistant for at least one term before graduation. Students should talk with their Advisors to determine the course most appropriate for their teaching assistant role. In addition, the Graduate Program Director may approach a student and their advisor with an opportunity.
Curriculum

A minimum of 41 credit hours of formal course work and at least 18 credit hours of directed dissertation research will be required for the doctoral degree in Epidemiology. Students will be required to complete:

- Three core courses focusing on epidemiological methods (nine credit hours)
- Two core courses focusing on biostatistical theory and methods (six credit hours)
- Four terms of journal club (4 credits; EPID 690 – 1 credit/term)
- Four courses of methodological electives tailored to specific student research needs (12 credits), including EPID 649 – Analysis of Health Data Sets, Fall Term of 1st year
- Three elective courses in a related substantive area, at least one relating to the biological processes associated with the student’s chosen substantive area (9 credits)
- At least one course in Responsible Conduct of Research (i.e., research ethics; see previous section in this handbook) (1-3 credits)
- At least one course to provide practical research skills development tailored to the student’s needs (e.g., grant writing, applied research methods) (2-3 credits)

Resources for suggested course sequences, curriculum planner, and course offerings per term can be found in the appendix of this document.

Core Courses

The five core courses in the PhD program are as follows:

- EPID 650 Epidemiologic Methods for Research
- EPID 651 Intermediate Epidemiologic Methods for Research
- EPID 652 Advanced Epidemiologic Methods and Data Analysis
- STAT 643 Applied Linear Regression (matriculation Fall 2016 and onward)
- STAT 744 Regression II (matriculation Fall 2016 and onward)
- BIOS 547 Applied Data Analysis in Public Health I (matriculation Fall 2015)
- BIOS 548 Applied Data Analysis in Public Health II (matriculation Fall 2015)
- BIOS 553 Linear Regression (matriculation prior to 2015)
- BIOS 554 Analysis of Variance (matriculation prior to 2015)

Specific information regarding Core Course Descriptions can be found on the VCU Courses web page (http://www.pubapps.vcu.edu/vcucourses/Default.aspx).

Potential Methodological and Substantive Electives

Students should communicate with their Advisor about their plan of study and which courses could be applied to the substantive and methods elective requirement. Each course a student takes can only be applied as either a substantive or methods elective; one course cannot be applied to both requirements.

Please keep in mind that the following list of possible electives is an overview of courses that PhD students have taken in the past. Other electives could be approved for each individual student as appropriate to their plan of study. Students should talk with their Advisor prior to enrolling in a class that is not included in the following list to ensure it would qualify for an elective. On occasion, Special Topics courses are offered by the Division and other departments at VCU; these courses are typically only offered once every few years. If there is a particular subject that interests a student that is offered by no department at VCU, an Independent Study course may be created. Students wishing to pursue independent study should speak with their Advisor and reference the independent study section of this document. More in-depth course descriptions and
prerequisites can be found on the VCU Courses directory (http://www.pubapps.vcu.edu/vcucourses/Default.aspx).
Biostatistics

**BIOS 567 Statistical Methods for High-throughput Genomics Data I**
3 credits. Prerequisites: BIOS 524 and 546; and BIOS 544 or 554; or permission of instructor. Provides a detailed overview of all aspects pertaining to the preprocessing and analysis of data from high-throughput genomic experiments, such as normalization techniques, expression summaries, quality control assessments and data reduction methods. Presents strategies for class and identification of important molecular features. Includes hands-on experience using statistical software for processing and analyzing genomic data.

**BIOS 571 Clinical Trials**
3 credits. Concepts of data management and statistical design and analysis in single-center and multicenter clinical trials. Data management topics include the collection, edition, and validation of data. Statistical design topics include randomization, stratification, blinding, placebo- and active-control groups, parallel and crossover designs, and power and sample size calculations. Statistical analysis topics include sequential and group sequential methods.

**BIOS 572 Statistical Analysis of Biomedical Data**
3 credits. Statistical methodology for data sets frequently encountered in biomedical experiments. Topics include analysis of rates and proportions, epidemiological indices, frequency data, contingency tables, logistic regression, life-tables and survival analysis.

**BIOS 631 Mixed Models and Longitudinal Data Analysis**
4 credits. Introduction to the multivariate distributions; sampling, estimation and inferences for multivariate normal model. Multivariate theory and applications of the normal mixed models, generalized linear mixed models, mixed models for categorical data, nonlinear mixed models and multiple imputation methods for missing data. Multivariate applications of the generalized estimating equations.

**BIOS 632 Multivariate Analysis**
3 credits. One-and two-sample multivariate tests; invariance: MANOVA, MANCOVA and multiple design models; nonparametric methods; inference with covariance matrices; principal components; factor analysis; discriminate analysis; clustering.

**BIOS 647 Survival Analysis**
3 credits. The analysis of survival (or failure time) data, with/without censoring. Actuarial and life-table methods, nonparametric and parametric estimation of survival functions, and comparison of survival curves; regression methods, such as the Cox proportional hazards model; competing risks; sequential models; applications to clinical trials.

**BIOS 671 Nonlinear Methods**
3 credits. Prerequisite: BIOS 554. Nonlinear modeling is an important tool for biostatisticians working with clinical and pre-clinical applications of dose responsiveness. Addresses issues regarding estimation, inference and experimental designs associated with nonlinear models. Special attention is paid to sigmoid-shaped models and threshold or piecewise models. Both the generalized nonlinear least-squares and quasi-likelihood estimation criteria are developed for these models. In addition to the usual univariate data structure, nonlinear mixed models are described and illustrated with examples. Includes hands-on experience with available SAS software for data analyses.
BIOS 691, Special Topics: Introduction to Spatial Data Analysis
3 credits. The objective of this course is to introduce students to the statistical methods and software tools necessary to analyze spatial data in order to address research questions in Public Health. This course will focus on the application of commonly used spatial statistical methods and geographic information systems (GIS). The goal of this course is for students to have the knowledge and skills to effectively conduct an analysis of spatial data, including data management and manipulation in a GIS and application of appropriate statistical methods. This course is intended for graduate students who have had one year of graduate-level Biostatistics or Statistics courses covering probability and linear and logistic regression.

Center for Clinical and Translational Research

CCTR 550 Foundations of Clinical and Translational Research: The Intersection of Theory and Application
3 credits. Focuses on the unique challenges that confront the clinical and translational scientist who is involved in the process of developing, implementing, completing and disseminating the results of rigorous research. In the framework of clinical and translational sciences, the student will be introduced to methodological skills such as problem definition, literature review, design choice (framework for the selection of the optimal quantitative and qualitative approaches), data collection, data processing and dissemination of findings. An integral feature of this course is the leadership of the interdisciplinary teaching team whose expertise and perspective will contribute to providing real-world insights into the complex theoretical parameters of clinical and translational research.

CCTR 692 Clinical Trials: Design Implications
3 credits. The goal is to sharpen the methodological skills in designing experimental studies for clinical investigators. The course addresses theoretical and practical methods in designing clinical trials with emphasis on design implications and development of individual study protocols. The course focuses on designing intervention studies to achieve research objectives by selecting appropriate study samples, end points and trial designs. Specific topics include efficacy versus effectiveness trials and critiquing clinical trial protocols, with emphasis on evaluating strengths and weaknesses of the trial design.

Epidemiology

EPID 603 Public Health Policy and Politics
3 credits. Provides an understanding of the public health policy development process, the influence of politics and special interest groups on this process, and current governmental policies for the provision of major public health services. The legislative process is a major focus of the course.

EPID 620 Cancer Epidemiology
3 credits. Covers general principles of carcinogenesis and the genetics of cancer; domestic and international patterns in cancer incidence and mortality; cancer surveillance and screening, and their relation to cancer prevention; epidemiologic characteristics and risk factors for cancers to the lung, breast, prostate, gastrointestinal tract, pancreas, bladder, endometrium, ovary, cervix and skin, as well as cancer in children and young adults; and the public health implications of cancer. Additional focus on critical evaluation of different methodological approaches used in cancer research and potential biases inherent given study designs.

EPID 622 Maternal and Child Health
3 credits. Prerequisites: EPID 571, BIOS 547-548, minimum grade of B and EPID 547-548, minimum grade of B. Covers general principles of carcinogenesis and the genetics of cancer; domestic and international patterns in cancer incidence and mortality; cancer surveillance and screening, and their relation to cancer prevention; epidemiologic characteristics and risk factors for cancers to the lung, breast, prostate, gastrointestinal tract,
pancreas, bladder, endometrium, ovary, cervix and skin, as well as cancer in children and young adults; and the public health implications of cancer. Additional focus on critical evaluation of different methodological approaches used in cancer research and potential biases inherent given study designs.

**EPID 646 Epidemiology of Psychiatric and Substance Use Disorders**
3 credits. Introduces the descriptive and analytic epidemiology for major mental disorders of childhood, adulthood, and late adult life. The course will address three main topics: (1) conceptual and methodological considerations in psychiatric epidemiologic research, (2) the descriptive epidemiology of major psychiatric and substance use disorders, and (3) the analytic epidemiology of major psychiatric and substance use disorders. The course will also examine issues of classification and the nosology of psychiatric disorders as well as operational case definitions and the measurement techniques for field surveys and risk factor research. Students will become familiar with epidemiologic surveys appropriate for risk factor research for psychiatric and substance use disorders.

**EPID 648 Behavioral Epidemiology**
3 credits. Covers behavioral epidemiology and its role in public health. Students will be able to identify and explain the appropriate methods for measuring health-related behaviors and related psychosocial constructs; critically analyze the appropriateness of methods used within published studies on behavior as well as determine appropriate methods for behavior-related research questions; and apply behavioral theory/models to current public health problems including, but not limited to, intervention development and evaluation.

**EPID 649 Analysis of Health Datasets (selective course taken by all students)**
3 credits. Epidemiologic research, health services research and social/behavioral science research very often conduct “secondary analysis” of existing population-level datasets, as well as different forms of health care data. Students will download, link, and analyze several data sets to understand the advantages of these data.

**Gerontology**

**GRTY 601 Biology and Physiology of Aging**
3 credits. Biological theories of aging; cellular, physical, systemic and sensory change; health maintenance.

**GRTY 602 Psychology of Aging**
3 credits. Psychological adjustment in late life; special emphasis on personality, cognitive and emotional development; life crises associated with the aging process.

**GRTY 603 Social Gerontology**
3 credits. Focuses on the sociopsychological and sociological aspects of aging. Various sociopsychological and social theories of aging will be discussed. The course will provide a broad overview of several general topics such as the demography of aging, politics and economics of aging, and cross-cultural aspects of aging. The course will offer an in-depth analysis of particular role changes that accompany aging.

**GRTY 604 Problems, Issues and Trends in Gerontology**
4 credits. Covers a broad range of topics of critical interest to practitioners, policymakers and researchers working with older persons. Explores how societal trends affect the health and social services systems. Recognizes the importance of interdisciplinary approaches to the study of aging issues: Insights from practitioners and the knowledge of researchers will be combined to investigate viable responses to emerging trends. Provides a multifaceted view of these issues based on research expertise and practical experience. Students will experience a visit to the General Assembly and will follow and critically evaluate current aging-related legislation in state government.
GRTY 606 Aging and Human Values
3 credits. Identification and analysis of value systems of the aged, exploration of religious beliefs; death and dying; moral, ethical and legal rights; human values and dignity.

Healthcare Policy and Research

HCPR 720 Economics of Health Disparities
3 credits. This doctoral-level survey course is designed to study the causes and consequences of population health disparities from an economic perspective. In addition to studying theories and current approaches from health, labor, public and stratification economics, students will also integrate perspectives from other disciplines, including sociology and psychology. Students will be expected to complete problem sets, in-class presentations and a research paper that will demonstrate the ability to use theoretically grounded approaches to the empirical study of health inequality. After completing this course, students should have an understanding of the economic approaches to health disparities and how to apply these approaches to empirical research.

HCPR 730 Survey Research Methods and Analysis for Health Policy
3 credits. Prerequisite: ECON 612 or equivalent or permission of instructor. This course is intended to familiarize students with the design and use of surveys for health services research and health policy; to understand the strengths and limitations of health surveys; and to compare and contrast health surveys with other data sources such as administrative records, claims data and electronic medical records. The course is designed to focus more on the applied use of health surveys for research and less on the theoretical aspects of survey and sample design. Class lectures and assignments are designed to guide students incrementally through the actual development and completion of a research project using publicly available survey data.

Human Genetics

HGEN 501 Human Genetics
3 credits. Provides a comprehensive examination of the fundamentals of human genetics. Explores topics including Mendelian and non-Mendelian inheritance, pedigree analysis, cytogenetics, aneuploid syndromes, cancer, gene structure and function, epigenetics, gene expression, biochemical genetics and inborn errors of metabolism.

HGEN 603 Mathematical and Statistical Genetics
3 credits. Provides an introduction to the rudiments of theoretical and applied mathematical population genetics including the segregation of genes in families, genetic linkage and quantitative inheritance. Emphasizes the methods used in the analysis of genetic data.

HGEN 617 Genetic Analysis of Complex Traits
3 credits. Prerequisite: introductory biostatistics or permission of instructor. Introduces the theory and practice of analysis of complex human traits. Provides a solid grounding in the fundamental concepts, study designs and analytical strategies for this evolving and important area.

HGEN 619 Quantitative Genetics
3 credits. The effects of genes and environment on complex human traits with emphasis on: Genetic architecture and evolution; non-genetic inheritance; mate selection; developmental change; sex-effects; genotype-environment interaction; resolving cause from effect; design of genetic studies, statistical methods and computer algorithms for genetic data analysis.
HGEN 620 Principles of Human Behavioral Genetics
3 credits. The theory of genetic and nongenetic transmission considered in relation to the design, analysis, and interpretation of studies to identify the principal genetic and environmental causes of behavioral variation. Included will be analysis of intelligence, personality, social attitudes, and psychiatric disorders.

Nursing

NURS 502 Advanced Nursing Practice: Pharmacotherapeutics 3 credits. Develops the requisite knowledge of pharmacotherapeutics necessary for the safe pharmacological management of common patient problems by the advanced practice nurse.

Pharmacy

PHAR 688 Applied Pharmacoepidemiology Research Methods
3 credits. Provides an overview of the field of pharmacoepidemiology and its relationship to health care and research. Topics including selecting data sources, study design, data manipulation and analytical issues relevant to the conduct of pharmacoepidemiology research are covered. Students complete exercises to reinforce these topics, as well as prepare a formal project proposal. Research studies are also reviewed to help students develop skills in the critical evaluation of the pharmacoepidemiology literature.

Social and Behavioral Health

SBHD 610 Behavioral Measurement
3 credits. Introduces students to theories and applications of measuring constructs in social and behavioral sciences. Examines test theories, processes involved in developing tests and the standards against which tests are compared.

SBHD 630 Theoretical Foundations of Social and Behavioral Health
3 credits. This course addresses the theoretical foundations of social and behavioral health, discussing both classic and emergent theories. The course begins with an overview of theoretical concepts, constructs and variables; how to construct theoretical statements; and how to evaluate social science theories. The majority of the course is spent describing theories and models at the individual, interpersonal and community level and evaluating their utility in changing health behavior.

SBHD 631 Disseminating, Adopting and Adapting Evidence-based Prevention Programs
3 credits. Preventive interventions that have been evaluated and found to be effective should serve as the standard for community-based public health practice. This advanced seminar will examine theories relevant to the diffusion of these evidence-based interventions (EBI), EBI dissemination procedures and policy, and evaluation of EBI adoption, fidelity monitoring and adaptation.

SBHD 632 Health Disparities and Social Justice
3 credits. This seminar is designed to provide students with an understanding of the concept of health disparities, reasons for disparities and how social factors contribute to disparities in health care and outcomes. The material will cover the research and theories in contemporary medical, epidemiologic and social justice literature.

SBHD 633 Structural Equation Modeling
3 credits. Introduces students to principles and applications of structural equation modeling for testing theories in social and behavioral sciences. Examines latent variables with continuous and discrete distributions,
multi-method measurement modeling under the latent variable framework, latent variable modeling of longitudinal measurement designs and testing meditation and moderation using structural equation modeling.

SBHD 634 Patient-Provider Interaction
3 credits. Prerequisite: doctoral student or M.P.H. student in social and behavioral health or permission of instructor. Provides students with an advanced introduction to the current theoretical and practical approaches to researching patient-provider interaction. Through exploration of current theory and case studies in practical research, the course develops a comprehensive approach to conducting high-quality, theory-driven research exploring both physician- and patient-focused observational and interventional research. Students are provided with instruction on qualitative, quantitative and mixed-method approaches to such research.

SBHD 635 Community-Based Participatory Research
3 credits. Prerequisite: doctoral student in social and behavioral health or permission of instructor. This seminar provides students with an understanding of the theories, principles and strategies of conducting CBPR. This class will meet once a week for approximately three hours. Although some lectures will be presented, the main format for the class will reflect the participatory as well as critical reflectiveness required to conduct CBPR. Co-learning will be emphasized against a backdrop of health research. The second major component of this class will be an interactive and hands-on field experience where students will experience the context and learn the methods to use when conducting participatory research for health. Students will work closely with a community partner and will use participatory research methods to address a community partner need.

SBHD 637 Program Evaluation
Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. Prerequisite: doctoral student in social and behavioral health or permission of instructor. This course examines the methods frequently used to determine whether -- and how -- health-related programs are achieving their objectives. Several types of evaluations will be covered, with a focus on process and outcome evaluations. Skills and knowledge relevant to evaluation strategies will be addressed, including the fundamentals of framing evaluation questions, selecting a study design and result dissemination strategies. Students will learn how to judge the quality of evaluation designs, distinguish appropriate from inappropriate evaluations and be given the opportunity to apply the principles and techniques of evaluation science to the creation of a detailed evaluation plan. Materials will be presented in several ways, including lectures, guest lectures, in-class exercises, student presentations, classroom discussions and written assignments.

SBHD 638 Applications in Qualitative Research Methods
3 credits. Prerequisite: doctoral student in social and behavioral health or permission of instructor. This course will cover theories, principles and applications to enable high quality research using qualitative research methods. This course will educate students on theories of qualitative research, different methodologies used to gather qualitative data and practical applications of these theories and methods to guide research development in this area. Students will be given the opportunity to analyze published research, conduct qualitative analyses using previously collected data, code and quantify qualitative data, and develop their own plans for a research project.

Sociology

SOCY 656 Social Network Analysis
3 credits. Provides a solid introduction to the theoretical foundations, basic measures and common applications of Social Network Analysis. Begins with overview of what it means to practice SNA and discusses the implications and use of SNA as social science methodology. Using online discussions and standard SNA
methodological tools, students will engage in peer discussions and complete a series of practica designed to introduce the SNA methodology.

**Urban Studies and Planning**

**URSP 621 Introduction to Geographic Information Systems**

3 credits. Introduces the components, capabilities, and functionalities of Geographic Information Systems. In addition to the concepts upon which GIS is based, how it works and what it does, this course introduces cartographic techniques necessary to design and construct effective maps with an emphasis on thematic mapping. It also examines the processing, compilation and symbolization of spatial data and the application of related analytical techniques.

**USRP 622 Community Socio-Economic Analysis using GIS**

3 credits. Introduces students to data sources and database management for community analysis using geographic information systems. Includes an overview of database structures, public domain software and data resources, descriptive statistical analysis, population projection, graphic presentation of data, and principles of cartographic design.

**USRP 625 Spatial Database Management and GIS Modeling**

3 credits. Introduces principles and applications of Geographic Information Science and GIS to transportation. Students discuss the fundamental scientific principles of capturing, representing, integrating, processing and analyzing digital geographic information about transportation infrastructure and systems. Concentrates on the applications of GIS-T software, tools and related technologies to transportation planning, intelligent transportation systems, environmental and hazards analysis and logistics.

**URSP 627 GIS Applications in Decision Analysis**

3 credits. Covers GIS tools and techniques in relation to 3D visualization, decision analysis, program evaluation and Internet-GIS. Emphasizes the integration of exploratory/predictive spatial analyses and 3D visualization into the decision-making process. GIS tools and techniques are used to automate decision analysis and facilitate future visioning in analyzing and visualizing decision actions.

**Women’s Studies**

**WMNS 620 Theorizing Sexuality**

3 credits. This course examines and explores constructions of human sexuality (sexualities) and theorizes how these constructions operate within contemporary culture.

**Responsible Conduct of Research and Practical Research Skills Development Courses**

**Allied Health Professions**

**ALHP 716 Grant Writing and Project Management in Health Related Sciences**

3 credits. Examines fundamentals of allied health grant writing and proposal preparation in the health related sciences, including funding source determination, responding to an RFP, basic elements of a proposal, proposal review procedures and allocation processes. Requires development of a complete proposal and critique of existing proposals.
**Biostatistics**

**BIOS 610 Research Processes and Methods for Health Professions**
3 credits. Prerequisite: BIOS 531 or permission of instructor. Focus on research processes, methods and research proposal (RO1) writing for the health professions. Course will emphasize conceptual underpinnings of research; the continuum of methodologies, including qualitative data collection; and development of a relevant research question -- all toward writing a fundable proposal. Topics include framing a relevant research question, writing a problem statements and aims, synthesizing and critiquing relevant literature, project management, developing project budget and justification, as well as critically reviewing grants and serving on a mock study section.

**Center for Clinical and Translational Research**

**CCTR 520 Fundamentals of Research Regulation**
2 credits. Focuses on the regulations that govern translational and clinical research. There will also be a series of discussions on the influence of international policies and research guidelines on the conduct of research. Topics include, but are not limited to, the history and current role of the FDA and the OHRP within the research arena; informed consent regulations relevant to federally funded research i.e., the common rule; informed consent regulations relevant to investigations conducted in support of a new drug application or an expanded marketing indication; good clinical practice guidelines; international conference on harmonization (ICH) conduction of research guidelines; HIPAA rules and regulations relevant to the conduction of research on human subjects; fiscal accountability/responsibility; and clinical trial registration and results reporting guidelines.

**Gerontology**

**GRTY 608 Grant Writing**
2 credits. Provides the skills necessary to research and write a grant. Explores how to find grant funding opportunities through both private and public sources. Describes the process of preparing a proposal including writing the narrative and preparing a budget.

**Graduate School**

**GRAD 601 Academic Profession**
2 credits. Designed to introduce graduate students to the roles and responsibilities of faculty members in institutions of higher education. Through readings, discussion and conversations with faculty members from a variety of settings, students will learn about the changing social expectations for higher education, the diverse settings in which faculty work and strategies for developing and presenting marketable academic skills.

**Office of the Vice President for Research**

**OVPR 601 Scientific Integrity**
1 credit. A survey of contemporary issues relating to responsible conduct in research. Topics include academic integrity, mentoring, authorship and peer review, use of humans and animals in biomedical research, ownership of data, intellectual property, conflict of interest, scientific record keeping, collaborative research, research misconduct and genetic technology.

**OVPR 602 Responsible Scientific Conduct**
1 credit. Priority registration to postdoctoral trainees and graduate students; others by permission of instructor. A survey of contemporary issues relating to responsible conduct in research. Topics include
research integrity, mentoring, authorship and peer review, use of humans and animals in biomedical research, ownership of data, intellectual property, conflict of interest, scientific record keeping, collaborative research, research misconduct, and genetic technology.

**OVPR 603 Responsible Conduct of Research**

1 credit. Restricted to graduate or professional students, with preference given to Preparing Future Faculty students. Registration requires permission of PFF Program office. This course is designed to provide a learning experience that will enable students to develop and refine skills needed to solve problems involving relevant topic areas of responsible scientific conduct and to clearly articulate ethically and legally acceptable solutions to problems posed about scientific conduct. Content of the course includes relevant guidelines, policies and laws bearing on the conduct of scientific research including those dealing with scientific authorship, use of humans and animals in research, conflict of interest, data ownership, scientific record keeping, collaborative research, and ownership, protection and use of intellectual property in the arena of scientific research. Conventions and normative behavior related to responsibilities in the scientific mentor-trainee relationship will also be covered.
Stages in Degree Completion

Overview

- **Complete Coursework requirements**

- **Comprehensive Examinations**
  - Meet with Graduate Program Director to discuss comprehensive exams and exam dates
  - Complete Written Methods/Substantive Exam

- **Complete Take Home Exam**

- **Oral Dissertation Proposal**
  - Plan to apply for dissertation grant
  - Submit Admission to Candidacy form (top portion) through Graduate Program Director to formally identify faculty Advisor in GradTrak
  - Determine dissertation paper topics
  - Select and invite Dissertation Committee members
  - Add Dissertation Committee members to your student GradTrak record
  - Draft dissertation proposal including methods for dissertation papers
  - Finalize drafts of dissertation proposal
  - Receive approval of Committee members to proceed with oral dissertation proposal
  - Schedule oral dissertation proposal exam in GradTrak as soon as possible but no later than 10 business days before the examination date
  - Obtain Committee signatures and Graduate Program Director signature on oral proposal scheduling form; allow time for Graduate Program Director to review your proposal
  - Submit oral dissertation proposal materials to the Office of Graduate Education and Director of Educational Programs no later than 2 full weeks before the examination date
  - Send room reservation details and technology requests to the Director of Educational Programs as soon as possible but no later than 2 full weeks before the examination date
  - Prepare oral dissertation proposal materials for presentation to Committee
  - Complete Oral Dissertation Proposal Exam with Committee
  - Learn Committee’s decision concerning oral dissertation proposal
  - Make corrections to the dissertation proposal document(s) based on feedback and edits stipulated by Committee

- **Dissertation Process**
  - Submit fully completed Admission to Candidacy form through Graduate Program Director to apply for degree candidacy (after successful completion of oral dissertation proposal exam)
  - Begin dissertation research
  - Obtain Advisor and Dissertation Committee approval of dissertation materials in “all but” final format
  - Schedule dissertation defense in GradTrak as soon as possible but no later than 10 business days before the examination date
  - Obtain Committee signatures on dissertation scheduling form
  - Submit dissertation materials to the Office of Graduate Education and Director of Educational Programs
  - Send room reservation details and technology requests to the Director of Educational Programs as soon as possible but no later than 10 business days before the examination date
  - Prepare dissertation defense materials for presentation
- Conduct dissertation defense presentation (1st hour is open to the public; remaining time is private with Committee)
- Learn Committee’s decision concerning dissertation defense and edits to be made to the dissertation document(s)
- Make corrections to the dissertation document(s) based on feedback and edits stipulated by Committee
- Upload final dissertation document to the VCU Digital Archives
- Publish dissertation with VCU Scholar’s Compass
- Complete e-Survey of Earned Doctorates
- Obtain necessary signatures on the ETD Approval form and submit the original form with receipts to the SOM Office of Graduate Education showing (1) proof of dissertation upload to VCU Archives, (2) proof of dissertation upload to the VCU Scholar’s Compass, and (3) completion of the e-Survey of Earned Doctorates.
- After 1-2 days, receive signed ETD Approval form and other documentation (receipts of document uploads, completion of Survey of Earned Doctorates) from SOM Office of Graduate Education
- Submit original ETD Approval form and accompanying documentation to the Office of the Dean of the VCU Graduate School, located on the Monroe Park Campus.

Examinations

In order to advance to doctoral candidacy, the student must pass both the written comprehensive examinations (Methods/Substantive and Take Home) and an oral dissertation proposal exam. The written comprehensive examination will be given to students prior to initiating the third academic year in the Program. The written comprehensive examination is largely based on material covered in required course work and its application to theoretical and practical problems. Students meet with the Graduate Program Director in January of their 2nd year to discuss the Exam. It is suggested that students form a study group and study at least one day per week during the term prior to the examinations in preparation.

Grading of the written comprehensive examination will be pass/fail. Grades are on a scale from 0-100. Students need to receive 80% or better on the majority of questions on both the Methods and Substantive sections of the exam to receive a passing grade. Students need to receive 80% or better on the Take Home Exam to receive a passing grade. If necessary, students can re-take the comprehensive exam once. In re-taking the exam, students will complete sections for which they received an assessment of “did not pass.” For the re-take, logistics and expectations will be the same as for the original examination section. Students will be informed at the start of the spring semester of the original exam dates as well as the scheduled dates for re-taking the exam.

The oral examination, which follows within six months of successful completion of the written examination(s), is administered to assess the ability of the candidate to integrate information and display an appropriate mastery of problem solving capabilities.

Written Comprehensive Exam

The written comprehensive exam consists of two components: Methods and Substantive On-site Exam and Take Home Exam. This exam will assess students’ ability to synthesize and apply epidemiological and biostatistical methods.
Methods and Substantive On-Site Exam

For the Methods and Substantive On-site Exam, a formula sheet will be available. The Division will provide pencils/pens and a laptop (no Internet access is allowed) with Excel, PowerPoint, and Word installed. A flash drive will also be provided as appropriate. Students should bring a calculator. Also, blue books will be distributed in case students want to provide any answers in writing.

Methods – Morning Session

The morning session covers epidemiologic methods and will cover all materials introduced in EPID 650, 651, and 652 as well as the required biostatistics courses (BIOS 547 and 548).

Substantive – Afternoon session

The afternoon session covers the student’s substantive area. The student’s Advisor will provide a reading list from which question(s) for the afternoon portion of the exam will be derived. The Substantive section is written by the Advisor and covers advanced/specialty topics aligned with the student’s area of interest.

Take-Home Exam

For the Take-Home Exam, each student will be provided questions and a data set from which the student will need to analyze data to provide answers. As such, the Take-Home represents an applied portion of the comprehensive exam. The objectives of the Take-Home exam are to test a student’s knowledge and logic thinking through a problem and to ensure that the student is prepared to move on to the next phase in the program. The Take-Home Exam will be due approximately five to seven days after the completion of the Methods and Substantive On-Site Exam. Specific deadlines will be provided when this portion of the test is administered. When submitting the completed take-home exam, students must include all hard copies of materials and all supplies (e.g., flash drives) that were provided to them at the start of the exam.

Upon a student’s successful completion of the written comprehensive exam, the Graduate Program Director will submit an initial Admission to Candidacy form that will allow for formal assignment of the student’s faculty advisor in GradTrak. This submission is necessary to enable the student to later enter Dissertation Committee members in GradTrak. For details, see:

Dissertation Requirements

Overview

The dissertation process begins after the second year of study when the student begins to think about Dissertation Committee members (alongside their Advisor) and paper topics. It is a laborious process but can be successfully completed with the aid of the Advisor, Dissertation Committee and program faculty and staff.

Dissertation Committee

Committee formation discussions should begin in a student’s second year of study. Invitations and committee appointments should occur no later than the summer after a student has passed the comprehensive exams and prior to the oral dissertation proposal. The composition of the Dissertation Committee shall be such that significant areas of the student’s scholarly program are represented in the expertise of the faculty members. The committee should consist of a minimum of four members as follows: the student’s Advisor; one other
member of the graduate faculty of the Division of Epidemiology; and at least two other members of the graduate faculty from other VCU departments. In certain circumstances a fifth Committee member may be included if that member offers unique expertise that is relevant to the student’s dissertation research. Care should be taken to ensure that senior faculty members are included in the committee, particularly if the Advisor is junior faculty (Assistant Professor).

A faculty member who is not a member of the VCU graduate faculty may be appointed to a student’s Dissertation Committee if approved by the MCV Campus Graduate Committee. One external Committee member may be appointed (and up to two if the Committee has five members) to the Committee if the person’s expertise is necessary to represent a significant area of the student’s dissertation research.

Designations of Dissertation Committee members must be submitted by a student through GradTrak. Faculty members from the University may or may not be in the system to be selected as committee members. If a faculty member is not in the system, or a student is requesting an outside individual to be a committee member, then the student must enter all required information manually into GradTrak. The student must then forward a request to the Graduate Program Director for the addition of the desired individual to the School of Medicine Graduate Faculty. The request should include a brief statement of how the faculty member or outside individual enhances the committee, and a copy of the proposed Committee member’s curriculum vitae. The Graduate Program Director will then submit a request for the addition of the faculty member or outside individual to the MCV Campus Graduate Committee for approval. Approval of the addition will be displayed in GradTrak.

**Role and Duties of the Dissertation Committee**

The Dissertation Committee functions as an Advisory body to ensure timely progress toward degree completion. The Committee conducts the Oral Dissertation Proposal Exam and the final dissertation defense and serves as a consultative body to provide scholarly counsel.

The student's Dissertation Committee shall work with the student's Advisor in guiding the student's graduate dissertation and shall meet/communicate on a regular basis. The Dissertation Committee must collectively meet with the student prior to administration of the oral dissertation proposal and dissertation defense to properly prepare for these milestones. Meetings between the student and individual Committee members are strongly encouraged to ensure that the student understands each Committee members’ comments and feedback during the oral dissertation proposal and dissertation defense processes. The student's Dissertation Committee shall conduct the oral dissertation proposal and dissertation defense.

**Content of the Dissertation Documents**

The student must conduct a substantial original investigation suitable for submission under the supervision of the Advisor and prepare three dissertation papers suitable for publication reporting the results of this research and analyzing its significance in relation to existing scientific knowledge. At least one of the dissertation papers must be submitted to a peer-reviewed journal before a student can schedule the final defense of the dissertation research.

The body of experimental work to be incorporated into the dissertation is subject to approval of the student’s Dissertation Committee. The Dissertation Committee should, therefore, be formally consulted throughout the dissertation process, and especially as the research project nears completion, to ensure that Committee members agree with respect to the material deemed necessary and sufficient for incorporation into the dissertation. The dissertation documents should follow the guidelines provided by the VCU Graduate School. Specific details can be retrieved from the Graduate School’s web site:
http://www.graduate.vcu.edu/student/thesis.html. Students should consult with their Committee Chair about the Division’s specific dissertation guidelines.

**Oral Dissertation Proposal Exam**

After passing the written comprehensive examinations the student is eligible for an Oral Dissertation Proposal Exam. Students should work closely with the Advisor to determine scheduling. The proposal exam should be conducted within six months of successful completion of the written comprehensive exams, with the goal of proceeding to candidacy by the end of fall term of the student’s third year.

Prior to scheduling the Oral Dissertation Proposal Exam, a student should have drafted the background and methods for each of the three dissertation papers (see Format section below) and received approval of topics, methods, etc. from their Dissertation Committee members. The Oral Dissertation Proposal Exam is conducted by the student’s Dissertation Committee and is chaired by a graduate faculty member designated to represent the MCV Campus Graduate Committee. The designated proposal chair serves as a voting member of the examining committee.

**Scheduling of Oral Dissertation Proposal Exam**

The oral dissertation proposal should not be scheduled until the entire Dissertation Committee has agreed that the student’s research has progressed to the appropriate stage. Once all committee members have agreed on a date and time to hold the oral proposal exam, the student should log in to GradTrak and submit an oral examination date. For specific scheduling details, students can access the document titled, “Oral Exam Scheduling Process for MS/PhD students” at the following link: http://www.medschool.vcu.edu/media/vcu-medicine/content-assets/documents/graduate-ed/OralExamSchedulinginGradTrak.pdf

A “Notice of Comprehensive Examination Form” found in GradTrak must be signed by all Committee members and the Graduate Program Director and returned to the Office of Graduate Education at least 2 full weeks 10 prior to the oral proposal exam date. So, for example, if the exam were scheduled for Monday, April 21st, the form should be delivered to the Office of Graduate Education by Monday, April 7th, allowing a full two weeks between the submission date and the scheduled oral exam date. Committee members and the Graduate Program Director must see the final dissertation proposal materials before signing the form, since the signatures on this form verify that these faculty are aware of the scheduled proposal date and have received electronic copies of dissertation proposal materials. Students should budget time for review of the dissertation proposal by committee members and the Graduate Program Director. In addition, it is highly suggested that students communicate in advance with Committee members to determine their availability to sign the form and plan to collect all necessary signatures at least 3-5 days prior to the oral exam materials submission deadline, considering that Committee members have busy schedules and may be on travel during this time (or if an external Committee member outside the Richmond area is involved). A printed copy of the dissertation proposal, along with the “Notice of Comprehensive Examination Form” must be delivered to the Office of Graduate Education at least 2 full weeks prior to the schedule proposal date. A scanned copy of the dissertation proposal documents should also be sent to the Director of Educational Programs. If any unusual circumstances arise that could prevent submission of the form by the deadline (e.g., unexpected student illness, extreme weather events), contact the Graduate Program Director for guidance.

It is best to submit one Notice of Comprehensive Examination form, but on rare occasion, it may be necessary to collect signatures on more than one form. In extenuating circumstances, more than one form may be submitted if this is the only way to obtain the signature of a Committee member who, for example, has a travel schedule that will not accommodate the timing needed to obtain her/his signature on one form.
An announcement of the candidate’s name, department/program and the time and place of the examination shall be posted at least 10 business days (2 full weeks) in advance of the proposal. The Director of Educational Programs is responsible for posting this Notice of Comprehensive Examination Form and for informing other public health departments of the examination. The Oral Dissertation Proposal Exam is typically open to only the students’ Dissertation Committee. If other faculty, staff or students attend, members in attendance may ask questions of the candidate, but their questions shall not be presented until after the Dissertation Committee has completed its questions. Faculty members other than those on the dissertation committee shall not vote on the success or failure of the student. If a student fails the oral examination, the student may be reexamined with the approval of the MCV Campus Graduate Committee. (See the section, “Minimum Grade Requirements,” for details.)

**Format of Oral Dissertation Proposal Documents**

The structure of the oral dissertation proposal documents should follow the guidelines for a federal grant application, such as those for the National Institutes of Health or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The proposal should be no more than 40 pages (not including bibliography and appendices), 12-point font, double-spaced and if the three paper format is selected should include the following:

- **Title** - including student's name and Advisor and committee members
- **Table of contents**
- **Specific aims**
- **Background (comprehensive background)**
- **Paper 1**
  - Research questions
  - Brief paper-specific introduction
  - Innovation
  - Methods including specifics regarding sampling and sample size
  - Analytic strategy
  - Strengths/limitations
- **Paper 2**
  - Research questions
  - Brief paper-specific introduction
  - Innovation
  - Methods including specifics regarding sampling and sample size
  - Analytic strategy
  - Strengths/limitations
- **Paper 3**
  - Research questions
  - Brief paper-specific introduction
  - Innovation
  - Methods including specifics regarding sampling and sample size
  - Analytic strategy
  - Strengths/limitations
- **Ethical issues / IRB considerations**
- **Timetable**
- **Bibliography** - not included in the 40 page limit
- **Appendices if appropriate** - not included in the 40 page limit
Also, in preparation of writing the dissertation, read the formatting requirements of the VCU Graduate School to ensure that you are following the guidelines. [http://www.graduate.vcu.edu/media/graduate-school/docs/pdf/ThesisandDissertationManualUPDATED5-18-16.pdf](http://www.graduate.vcu.edu/media/graduate-school/docs/pdf/ThesisandDissertationManualUPDATED5-18-16.pdf)

**Preparation for Oral Dissertation Proposal Exam**

During the months leading up to the Oral Dissertation Proposal Exam, the student and committee members work closely to finalize the presentation and drafts of the dissertation proposal document. Distribution of the oral dissertation proposal documents to the Dissertation Committee and Graduate Program Director should occur at least 10 business days in advance of the on-site Oral Dissertation Proposal Exam. Final copies of all oral dissertation proposal materials, including handouts of presentation slides, necessary for the oral presentation are to be provided to the Dissertation Committee on the day of the scheduled proposal. While in-person participation in the proposal exam is not required for all Committee members, it is expected. While the student and Advisor must be present, if the physical presence of a Committee member is not feasible, teleconference, Skype, or video conference can be used. The student should plan on the following time frames for the dissertation proposal oral exam:

- Oral presentation by student ~45 minutes
- Oral exam – questions from Committee ~45 minutes
- Committee deliberation ~15 minutes

Room reservations and technology requests for the oral dissertation proposal should be arranged through the Director of Educational Programs when the presentation date is scheduled in GradTrak. Any technological needs (e.g., wireless presentation remote, conference calling, etc.) necessary for the presentation should also be communicated with the Director of Educational Programs at least a week in advance of the presentation. No more than 30 slides are advised for the 45 minute presentation. Students are advised to practice their presentation in the scheduled room a few days in advance to familiarize themselves with equipment and ensure that all technological resources work properly. If, during the course of the oral dissertation exam, technological issues arise, contact the Director of Educational Programs, who will be available during the exam. Students should not bring food to the oral exam for their committee members.

**Minimum Grade Requirement**

To pass the oral proposal exam, the student must receive a favorable vote from Committee members with no more than one negative vote. Typically this means a minimum of three favorable votes for a committee of four, or, for a committee of five, four favorable votes. Upon successful completion of this oral examination, the student may proceed to candidacy and begin the research as outlined in their proposal. The oral examination must be completed successfully at least six months before submission of the dissertation.

Should a student receive a failing grade for the exam, the oral dissertation proposal may be presented again, but only upon approval by the MCV Campus Graduate Committee. The request for such approval is brought to the MCV Campus Graduate Committee by the Graduate Program Director. The Advisor is responsible for consulting with the Dissertation Committee to determine if the request for approval is appropriate and communicating the request to the Graduate Program Director. The Graduate Program Director is responsible for informing the Office of Graduate Education of the intent to seek the approval of the MCV Campus Graduate Committee. The Committee renders a decision on such a request in the course of its regularly scheduled meetings.
**Admission to Degree Candidacy**

To be admitted to doctoral candidacy, the student must successfully complete the written examinations and the fully completed Oral Dissertation Proposal Exam organized by the Division. Upon satisfactory completion of degree candidacy requirements, a student must submit a final Graduate School “Notice of Admission to Master’s or Doctoral Degree Candidacy” form, with all sections completed, to the Graduate Program Director. Both the Graduate Program Director and the school’s Dean or Dean’s designee must sign the form to confirm the student’s eligibility for admission to degree candidacy and forward it to the Graduate Dean for final approval and recording of admission to degree candidacy. The Graduate Dean will formally notify the student of admission to degree candidacy.

The degree candidacy form must be submitted **before** the student formally begins the final dissertation project **but no later** than the term preceding the term in which the student graduates. Failure to submit the degree candidacy form in a timely manner may delay graduation.

Specific guidelines for completing the “Notice of Admission to Master’s or Doctoral Degree Candidacy”
http://www.medschool.vcu.edu/media/medschool/documents/GSCandidacyFormsSOM102014forGradTrak.pdf

**Dissertation Defense**

Upon completion of all required coursework and the research project, the student must submit their dissertation including all three dissertation papers to the entire Dissertation Committee for approval. In general, the dissertation will include: a background chapter, one chapter for each of the three papers, and a summary chapter that synthesizes the findings and explicates the implications of the research. While the Committee should be receiving drafts of the dissertation throughout the process, the entire penultimate dissertation documents must be given to the Committee at least 10 business days prior to the defense date. All Committee members must approve the work in “all but” final form as satisfactory for the defense. All students are required to produce three publishable manuscript style papers prior to graduation. It is expected that at least one will have been submitted to a journal prior to the defense while the other two can still be in review by co-authors.

**Scheduling the Dissertation Defense**

Students must work with the Dissertation Committee to determine a commonly available date and time for the defense. Plan in advance and be prepared to send several dates and times to find a time when all Committee members are free. The student and Advisor must be present. While in-person participation in the dissertation defense is not required for all Committee members, it is expected. If the physical presence of a Committee member is not feasible, teleconference, Skype, or video conference can be used. The dissertation defense must be scheduled through GradTrak as soon as possible but at least 10 business days prior to the defense date; the Office of Graduate Education will not approve the scheduling of defense dates on short notice. Specific deadlines for the term a student is defending their dissertation can be found on the School of Medicine web site under the “Degree Completion” section: (http://www.medschool.vcu.edu/graduate/student_res/degree_completion/). All Dissertation Committee members must sign the scheduling form confirming receipt of the dissertation materials and the defense date. The completed scheduling form and a hard copy of the dissertation document must be delivered to the Office of Graduate Education at least 10 business days prior to the scheduled defense date. If a student encounters
difficulties in scheduling their examination (i.e. difficulty in identifying a site, committee member participation, etc.) they should contact the Office of Graduate Education to seek assistance.

After a student has scheduled a final dissertation defense, the Director of Educational Programs will post an announcement of the final defense to include the name and department of the candidate together with the title of the dissertation and the day, place and time of the dissertation defense.

**Preparation for the Dissertation Defense On-Site**

Distribution of the dissertation documents to the Dissertation Committee, the Director of Educational Programs, and Graduate Program Director should occur at least 10 business days in advance of the dissertation defense. In addition, copies of all dissertation presentation materials are to be provided to the Dissertation Committee and the Director of Educational Programs on the day of the scheduled defense. Room reservations and technology requests should be arranged through the Director of Educational Programs when the defense date is scheduled in GradTrak. Any technological needs (e.g., wireless presentation remote, conference calling, etc.) necessary for the presentation should also be communicated with the Director of Educational Programs at least a week in advance of the presentation. Students should not bring food to the final defense for their committee members and/or other attendees. The Division provides refreshments after the defense presentation and private meeting with committee members are complete.

**Dissertation Defense Implementation**

The dissertation defense is conducted by the student’s Dissertation Committee, chaired by the Advisor and is open to the public (e.g., faculty, students, staff, public health stakeholders, community members, etc.). The subject matter of the examination is limited to the content of the candidate’s dissertation and related areas.

If extenuating circumstances limit the availability of a Committee member, contact the Associate Dean of Graduate Education as soon as the problem becomes known.

**Minimum Grade Requirement**

During the dissertation defense, the Committee evaluates the student’s research and demonstrated ability to present the rationale for the study, the work conducted, and its interpretation as well as field questions regarding their research. The Committee votes to determine if the dissertation defense was satisfactory (pass/fail). The dissertation document is subject to committee approval as well (see below).

A favorable vote of the Dissertation Committee with no more than one negative vote shall be required to indicate that the candidate has passed the final oral examination. All Committee members must vote. The outcome of the dissertation defense is reported to the Office of Graduate Education. If the outcome is negative, the dissertation defense may be conducted again with the approval of the MCV Campus Graduate Committee. Advance approval is requested in writing by the department on behalf of the candidate.

The student’s Dissertation Committee either will or will not approve the dissertation documents as acceptable following the dissertation defense. Approval of the dissertation as acceptable is indicated by the signature of all members of the Dissertation Committee on the signature page of the dissertation. Approval of the dissertation by the Dissertation Committee must be unanimous.

**Dissertation Completion**
A candidate should make all necessary corrections to the dissertation document as determined by the Dissertation Committee. Once the necessary edits have been completed and approved by the Dissertation Committee, the candidate must upload the dissertation document to the VCU Digital Archives. The student must then:

- Obtain original signatures from their Advisor, Committee members and the Graduate Program Director, in black ink, on one “ETD Approval form”.
- Submit the following to the School of Medicine Office of Graduate Education by the specified deadlines:
  - Original “ETD Approval form”
  - Receipt documenting dissertation submission to the VCU Digital Archives
  - Graduation Application form with the signatures of the Advisor and Graduate Program Director in Part C
  - Updated academic transcript copy
  - Completed “Survey of Earned Doctorate Form”
  - Receipt documenting submission to VCU Scholar’s Compass

Once all of the required documents have been turned into the Graduate Education Office, the Associate Dean of Graduate Education will secure/execute signature of Dean of the School of Medicine on the “ETD Approval Form.” The student will be notified when the form has been signed; the student must then secure the signature of the Dean of the Graduate School (office located on Monroe Park Campus). After all of the signatures have been obtained on the “ETD Approval Form,” this form and all documentation received from the School of Medicine Graduate Education Office should be submitted to the VCU Graduate School.

**Documentation of Degree Completion**

If documentation of degree completion is needed before the end of the term in which the Candidate is graduating, contact the School of Medicine Associate Dean of Graduate Education. Degrees are awarded at the end of the term (not the date of Commencement). “Degree awarded” will NOT appear on an official transcript until a few months after the term of graduation.

**Exit Requirements**

All students are required to produce three publishable manuscript style papers prior to graduation. It is expected that at least one will have been submitted to a journal prior to the defense and the other two can still be in review by co-authors. All students must maintain a 3.0 GPA or better in all course work and a grade of ‘S’ for all research work. The doctoral degree must be obtained within seven years of matriculation. It is expected that full-time students will satisfy all requirements within four to five years.

More in-depth student resources concerning degree completion requirements can be found on the following School of Medicine web sites:

- Stages in Degree Completion
  [http://www.medschool.vcu.edu/graduate/student_res/degree_completion/](http://www.medschool.vcu.edu/graduate/student_res/degree_completion/)

- Graduate Program Checklist
  [http://www.medschool.vcu.edu/graduate/student_res/checklist/](http://www.medschool.vcu.edu/graduate/student_res/checklist/)

- Student Policies and Procedures
  [http://www.medschool.vcu.edu/graduate/student_res/](http://www.medschool.vcu.edu/graduate/student_res/)
Steps after successful dissertation defense


Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Submission Information
http://www.graduate.vcu.edu/student/thesis.html

VCU Graduate School Thesis and Dissertation Manual

In addition, students should be aware that access to the Division shared drive and grant-related drives will automatically end 30 days after graduation unless a student continues to work as an employee within the Division. The 30-day period allows graduated students time to finish up projects and follow up on any outstanding manuscript submissions. As students plan their graduation dates with their advisors, this VCU policy should also be discussed so that students and advisors are aware and can plan for discontinued access to these resources 30 days after the graduation date.

**Tuition, Fees and Billing**

**Tuition and Fees**

Graduate students registered for 9 to 15 credit hours are billed as full-time. Graduate students registered for more than 15 hours during any term are charged an overload fee above the full-time tuition rate on a per-credit-hour basis. Graduate students who are fully funded as graduate assistants or fellows on a 12-month stipend must register for at least 9 credit hours in Fall and Spring terms and at least 3 credit hours for Summer term. Course work must be taken for credit.

For more detailed information regarding tuition and fee charges, resources from Student Accounting may be helpful (http://www.enrollment.vcu.edu/accounting/tuition_fees.html).

**Billing**

Student bills may be viewed online through e-Services. Instructions on how to access this information can be found on the Student Accounting web site. (http://www.enrollment.vcu.edu/accounting/)

**Graduate Assistantship**

**Graduate Assistantship Overview**

The Doctoral Program in Epidemiology provides full student funding for four years contingent on good academic progress, including tuition and fees, and an annual stipend of $27,000. Graduate students in the School of Medicine are required to have health insurance coverage and provide documentation of this coverage, consistent with federal law and the School’s position in a major health sciences center.

To receive a graduate assistantship stipend, students commit to working 20 hours a week with their Advisor as part of an experiential Program requirement. Graduate Assistantships are on a 12-month basis; specific dates for your assistantship can be found in your Graduate Research Assistant Contract, which is provided by the
Division Administrator. The experiences gained through this “apprenticeship” are tied to degree-related competencies. Students and faculty advisors are responsible for communicating regularly regarding the stipend-related assignments and locations where the work should be completed. Your advisor will identify appropriate tasks that likely will vary over time and may include, but are not limited to, support of research programs, serving as a teaching assistant, or taking on self-directed study necessary to enhance your knowledge and skill sets in applied experiences. Teaching assistantship hours count toward the weekly 20-hour stipend commitment.

Cultivating healthy mentor-mentee relationships is important to all faculty in the Division. Program faculty are committed to maintaining open lines of communication with PhD students and understand that the workload of student stipend-related hours and other factors may vary from week to week; however, on average, a 20-hour per week commitment is expected, with time spent in One Capitol Square offices as appropriate and as agreed upon with your advisor. If you are not getting your full experiential training (i.e., consistently spending less than 20 hours per week), please talk with your advisor and the Graduate Program Director to identify ways to add tasks and experiences to meet your commitment. On the other hand, if you are spending more than 20 hours per week on your stipend work, it is your responsibility to let your advisor know so he/she can ensure that your activities do not exceed 20 hours per week. If issues are not resolved after talking with your advisor, you should request a meeting with the Graduate Program Director and Division Administrator (see the “Faculty and Staff” section in this handbook for contact information).

All doctoral students must register for at least 9 credit hours in fall and spring terms. Students on 12-month assistantships must enroll for at least 3 credit hours for summer term or per the requirements of a student loan program, which may require more than 3 credits. Course work must be taken for credit. If there are any issues related to your student bill, please contact the Division Administrator (see the “Faculty and Staff” section in this handbook for contact information).

Restriction on Other Employment

For each year that you are in the program and on a 12-month assistantship, you are expected to be available to work with your Advisor an average of 20 hours per week from August 25 of the start of the academic year to August 24 of the following year. You must be available to work when VCU is open, even when classes are not in session, except for Spring Break. Specific holidays on which students are not required to work can be found on your Graduate Research Assistant Contract and on the VCU Academic Calendar: (http://academiccalendars.vcu.edu/). In addition, students should communicate with their Advisor about student holidays and availability for leave. Graduate students receiving assistantships are not allowed to hold other paid employment unless they first receive permission from the Graduate Program Director.

Student Support Policy

There is no variance in the amount of support that students in this program receive. All student support is limited to four years of study. If pursuance of a degree will take longer than four years, the student must pay for remaining academic and university requirements with no aid from the Division.

Criminal Background Checks

All students will have a criminal background check conducted as per State regulations. The Division Administrator will assist you in completing this requirement.
**Stipend Payment Schedule**

The student stipend is taxable. The first paycheck should begin on September 16th, and payment thereafter will occur on the 1st and 16th of the month. If the regular pay dates fall on a weekend day, payment will be made on the preceding Friday. This will occur through August 24 of the following year. VCU payment schedules can be accessed on the Human Resources Holiday Calendar web site (http://www.hr.vcu.edu/news/holiday.html).

**Paid Leave Time**

Graduate students employed as graduate assistants in programs administered by the School of Medicine are eligible for 20 days paid leave in each appointment year in addition to designated University holidays. “University holidays” refer to days designated by University Human Resources as applicable to faculty and staff and include Winter Break holidays (as designated by Human Resources), which may require the use of leave days.

These leave days can be used for any combination of vacation and sick leave. Leave is not cumulative from one appointment year to the next. Work performed on site on University holidays may be added to paid leave by arrangement with the student’s advisor. All leave for vacation purposes must be approved in writing (e.g., via e-mail) at least 10 business days in advance by a student’s advisor, and, if the student is not a U.S. citizen, any travel outside of the U.S. must be approved by VCU Immigration Services.

Unapproved absences from the campus constitute unprofessional behavior which limits the timely progress to degree completion. This can be the basis on which a grade of “U” in Directed Research is awarded which, in turn, can be grounds for the loss of financial support and, ultimately, dismissal from the program.

**Family and Medical Leave**

Graduate students in programs administered by the School of Medicine may be eligible for unpaid family and medical leave (FMLA) for certain family and medical reasons in accordance with Federal and State law. FMLA includes leave for birth or adoption of a child. Eligible female and male individuals who experience the birth or adoption of a child are eligible for up to 480 hours of unpaid leave provided that the student’s advisor is notified of the intended leave period a minimum of 30 calendar days in advance. While this leave is unpaid, students may use paid leave time to cover leave for the birth or adoption of a child.

**Health Insurance**

Health insurance is required for all School of Medicine graduate students, who must provide documentation of coverage, consistent with federal law and the School’s position in a major health sciences center. VCU does not provide a university health plan. Insurance options may be chosen through the Health Insurance Marketplace (https://www.healthcare.gov/), as long as the student has health insurance. Students will be asked to provide documentation of health insurance coverage to the Division Administrator (see the “Faculty and Staff” section in this handbook for contact information). The Division of Epidemiology will inform students about the type of documentation acceptable for demonstrating insurance coverage and deadlines for providing this documentation.

http://www.students.vcu.edu/health/health-insurance/
**Dental Insurance**

Dental coverage is not provided by the Program. Interested students can contact the VCU Dental School about the Student-2-Student dental plan; this option is extremely affordable for students. More information is available on the VCU Dental School’s web site [http://www.students.vcu.edu/health/health-insurance/]. VCU Human Resources also provides contact information for Delta Dental of Virginia; this information can be retrieved at the following web site: [http://www.deltadentalva.com/default.aspx].

**Financial Aid**

Students may apply for financial aid in addition to the Graduate Assistantship provided by the Graduate School and the Division of Epidemiology. Financial aid information can be retrieved on the School of Medicine’s web site [http://www.medschool.vcu.edu/studentaffairs/financial_aid/index.html] or on the Financial Aid web site [http://www.enrollment.vcu.edu/finaid/].

All graduate student support is reported to the UES/Financial Aid Department and could reduce your eligibility for need-based financial assistance for which you may have applied. Once your enrollment for the correct number of credit hours is confirmed, the UES/Financial Aid Department will authorize your student account to be credited with the tuition assistance. The School of Medicine has its own Financial Aid office that handles graduate and medical students. The office is located on the 4th floor of the McGlothlin Medical Education Center (phone: 804-828-4006) or contact may be made via the web site at: [http://www.medschool.vcu.edu/studentaffairs/financial_aid/index.html].

**Funding Opportunity Resources**

**Scholarships**

The following resources on scholarships are available on line at VCU:

- **National Scholarship Office**
  [http://www.honors.vcu.edu/nationalscholar/index.html]

- **Elizabeth Fries Health Education Award**
  [http://www.cdcfoundation.org/elizabeth-fries-health-education-award]

- **Graduate Student Travel Grant Program**
  [http://www.graduate.vcu.edu/life/bulletin.html]

**Dissertation Grants**

All students are expected to apply for dissertation grants. Students should talk with their Advisor and should enroll in a grant writing course offered through the Center for Clinical and Translational Research or another VCU Department. International students may not be eligible for federal grants; however, international students are eligible for VCU Dissertation Grants and it is acceptable for the student’s Advisor to submit, for example, a R03 application that represents the student’s project (i.e., the student has written the proposal). If students are interested in communicating with past award recipients please contact the Director of Educational Programs for details. Students must work with the Division Pre-Award Specialist to submit their grant proposal if it is an external grant mechanism.
Students who are successful and garner dissertation grant funding should schedule a time to meet with the Division Administrator, the Division Post-Award Specialist, and the faculty Advisor. The purpose of this meeting is to ensure that all involved parties have a common understanding of the policies and procedures for the grant. Also, as students with dissertation grant funding approach graduation, they must plan for the official close-out of the dissertation grant. This planning will require another meeting with the aforementioned individuals to review policies and procedures related not only to the grant, but also related to the student’s access to the Division of Epidemiology and to Division-related resources after graduation.

**VCU Office of Research**
http://www.research.vcu.edu/research_development/funding.htm

**American Education Research Association**
http://www.aera.net/Default.aspx?TabID=10241

**VCU Graduate School Funding Information**
http://www.graduate.vcu.edu/life/bulletin.html

**VCU Libraries Grant Search Tips**
http://guides.library.vcu.edu/graduate-grants

**National Institute of Health (NIH)**
http://grants.nih.gov/training/F_files_nrsa.htm

**The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)**
http://www.cdc.gov/od/pgo/funding/grants/grantmain.shtm

**National Science Foundation (NSF)**
http://www.nsf.gov/funding/pgm_summ.jsp?pims_id=13453&0rg=SBE

**Grants.gov**
http://www.grants.gov/

**School of Medicine Resources**
http://www.medschool.vcu.edu/research/funding/index.html

*Note: It may be necessary to have completed RCR training when applying for specific grants.*

**Optional Practical Training**

For international students, Optional Practical Training (OPT) is a temporary employment authorization allowing 12 months of full-time work authorization related to a student’s academic program. OPT is an option for each higher degree level completed (e.g., a student can use 12 months of OPT after completion of master’s degree, and then be eligible for another 12 months upon completion of a doctoral degree). A student may request OPT during an academic program as well as after completion of the academic program. It is not necessary to have an offer of employment in order to apply for OPT.
For more information concerning eligibility criteria and application materials, please visit http://www.global.vcu.edu/students/immigration/f1/employment/. If you should have further questions that are not addressed in the forms located on the VCU Global Education Office web site, please contact their office directly via phone (804) 828-8471 or e-mail geo@vcu.edu.

Non-Curricular Requirements

VCU ID

All students must obtain a VCU ID from the VCU Card office. A student’s first ID is free, and any subsequent copies will cost $20. Students should bring an official government-issued ID to verify their identity. If a student attempts to get an ID before the start of the term, he/she should bring a copy of his/her course schedule to the office as well.

VCU Alert

(See VCU Statement on Safety under “Important VCU Policies.”) VCU has an established an alerting system to notify students, staff, and faculty of emergencies, university closings, street closings, computer shutdowns, etc. Students may register to receive alerts via text message at . This web page also displays any current alerts, links to resources for emergency response, and can be consulted for information such as late openings or university closings due to inclement weather.

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI)

Students are required to enroll in and complete the Basic CITI, Refresher CITI and the IRB Learner Group Refresher Courses. Please keep in mind that some Advisors may suggest additional training for their mentees. More information about what these courses address and entail can be found on the VCU Office of Research’s web site http://www.research.vcu.edu/human_research/conducting.htm. To enroll in these courses, students should visit the CITI web site (https://www.citiprogram.org/). Depending upon a student’s past experience, it may be possible to transfer a CITI course taken at another institution to a student’s VCU record. If credits are transferred, a student may have to renew program training if their credentials expire; if this is necessary, the student should receive a reminder e-mail from the CITI web site with specific details.

Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) Training

All students will be enrolled in the VCU/VCUHS HIPAA Training (through Blackboard) and are required to complete all tests in this training. Students are expected to complete this in a timely fashion once beginning the program. Information regarding VCU and HIPAA procedures can be found on the VCU Office of Research web site, http://www.research.vcu.edu/human_research/hipaa-guidance.htm.

Division and Public Health Seminars

Attendance

The Division offers weekly seminars, with target audiences alternating between MPH students and PhD students. Epidemiology PhD students are expected to attend all of the doctoral Epidemiology Seminars (equating to approximately 50% of the seminar series). In addition, students will attend periodic special seminars as appropriate to respective training and research areas. Students should discuss with their advisors the appropriate seminar plan based on their research agenda and develop a written plan each academic year.
regarding attendance at seminars other than those offered by the Division, such as in other VCU departments and at refereed conferences. The advisor should approve this plan. The schedule and location of each Division of Epidemiology seminar can be found on the Division of Epidemiology Seminar web site: http://familymedicine.vcu.edu/epidemiology/seminars/ or the Public Health Seminar web site: http://www.publichealth.vcu.edu/seminars/index.html.

Presentations

In addition, each doctoral student is expected to present in the seminar series once each year (four times over the course of typical PhD training). The purpose of this requirement is to provide students with experience in presenting and getting feedback on research ideas in a public forum. The topic and depth of information covered will depend on the student’s level of education and research progress in the program, as described below.

- **First year students**: A 20-minute presentation on their research or planned research. The focus of these presentations can be empirical or conceptual. These presentations occur in the spring semester of the 1st year.
- **Second year students**: A 20-minute presentation on either an in-process empirical research project and/or a methodological issue. These presentations occur in the spring semester of the 2nd year.
- **Third and fourth year students**: A full 50-minute seminar presentation on their empirical research, including in-progress work. These presentations occur at any point in the 3rd or 4th year.

**Division Committees**

The Division has several committees in which students may participate, including the Division Curriculum and Assessment Committees as well as the Epidemiology Seminar work group. The Division Curriculum Committee is responsible for ensuring that curriculum meets the standards set forth by the Master of Public Health and PhD Programs’ mission, vision, and goals and suggesting new courses that address new best practices and research methods. The Assessment Committee is responsible for, among other things, conducting ongoing assessments of student evaluations of instructors’ teaching performance and disseminating results to appropriate committees and faculty members as well as working with program alumni and public health stakeholders to ensure that the PhD and MPH programs are providing skills and knowledge desired by public health professionals. The Epidemiology Seminar work group plans for and secures speakers for the Division Seminar series for Fall and Spring terms. Other ad hoc committees may be formed for short-term work over the course of an academic year.

All committees meet regularly each month but meeting dates and times are scheduled according to the committee members’ schedules. It is highly suggested that students participate in at least one committee for a year; interested students should communicate with the Graduate Program Director, who will connect the student with the appropriate Committee Chair.

**Pre-dissertation research**

Students will work on their faculty Advisor’s research team in a paid capacity throughout their four years in the program to obtain practical experience in epidemiologic research. Through this work of 20 hours per week,
students will gain experience with different stages of research (e.g., grant writing, instrument development, data collection, data analysis, etc.).

Course Evaluations

Course evaluations are conducted near the end of each term in each class. All students are expected to submit a course evaluation form for each course in which they are enrolled. Responses are anonymous and only shared with respective course Instructors/Professors in aggregate form after grades have been submitted at the end of the term. Written comments are typed by staff so Instructors/Professors never see the actual handwritten comments.

Feedback Groups

The Division continually seeks to improve the Doctoral Program. One way to do this is through feedback groups that are arranged to elicit student feedback. A group session is held at least once a year and Information concerning group opportunities will come from either the Director of Educational Programs or the Graduate Program Director.

Student Responsibilities and Conduct

Communication with Students and E-mail

The Division and VCU have several ways of communicating with students. Students are responsible for establishing the required accounts and passwords to access these communication resources regularly.

E-mail is the primary form of communication between the VCU Graduate School, the Division and students. As stated in the VCU Graduate Bulletin, “all students are required to obtain an official VCU student e-mail account within one week of the beginning of the first term of enrollment and are responsible for reading in a timely fashion university-related communications sent to their official VCU student e-mail accounts.” The division cannot be expected to maintain an ongoing list of students’ personal accounts through Gmail, Yahoo, or other e-mail providers. Students must maintain and regularly check their VCU e-mail accounts.

In addition, the Division may post pertinent information on the EPI Blackboard site, or on bulletin boards and in common spaces, or the Division may place items in a student’s mailbox.

Inter-division E-mail Etiquette

Students will frequently e-mail their Instructors/Professors and classmates regarding course work and assignments. In addition, students will e-mail their Advisor and relevant research team members as part of their work. In addition, students should keep all informal and non-Program related communication limited to doctoral and master’s level students. Invitations to events that are not sponsored directly by the Division should not be communicated with faculty and staff via e-mail. If you have questions regarding what type of information can be communicated to faculty and staff via e-mail, please contact the Director of Educational Programs or the Graduate Program Director for clarification.
Grievance Procedures

Students who have concerns related directly to a class should initially address these with the Instructor/Professor. However, the PhD Program realizes that there may be times when this may not be appropriate. In these cases, the student should discuss the concerns with the Graduate Program Director. All students must be aware of the Graduate School Bulletin policies related to grievances (Listed under General academic regulations for all graduate students: http://www.medschool.vcu.edu/facultyaffairs/committees/vcugrievance/)

If further consultation is required after a meeting with the Graduate Program Director, the Director will advise the student on the appropriate path to follow in pursuing the concerns.

Laptops

All students will be issued a laptop computer for use. This laptop is the property of the Division of Epidemiology and should only be used for school or VCU work-related activities. These laptops are considered state property, so students should follow the guidelines as set forth by VCU Technology Services as well as State and Federal Guidelines. A full listing of policies for computer usage can be found on the VCU TS web site (http://ts.vcu.edu/askit/2311.html). Students will be issued their laptop by the designated Division staff member. Students will fill out a Request for Offsite PC Equipment Use and a VCU SOM Remote Access Request Form.

Students may not download or use illegal software applications or software that is not registered to them on their Division issued laptops. Students that desire software not provided by the Division should communicate with the Graduate Program Director. Also, students should limit the amount of documents stored to the C: drive; documents should be stored to the H: or shared drives located on the School of Medicine servers. Some students may be given access to their Advisors’ research drives.

If a student is not using her/his laptop and leaves it at her/his workstation, it should be locked by a Windows command. To lock the computer, access the Start Menu by pressing CTRL+ALT+Delete, and then choose log off, or click the Windows Logo key + L.

In addition, if a laptop is left over night in the workspace, it should be locked in a secure location (i.e., desk drawer). No laptops should be left on the docking stations or on a workspace. If a student’s workspace does not have the necessary components to be considered secure, then the student should contact the Graduate Program Director to determine a solution.

All laptops must be returned to the Department Administrator once all Dissertation Requirements have been completed. A formal date for the return of laptops will be communicated with students prior to the end of the term in which they graduate.

Internship and Fellowship Opportunities

Students interested in pursuing Internship and/or Fellowship Opportunities should communicate with their Advisor before committing themselves to any project.

Student Travel

If a student wishes to travel for academic reasons, s/he must communicate with her/his Advisor or work supervisor prior to making any commitments or plans because funding is not guaranteed. The Advisor or
supervisor may or may not have the specific funds to provide to students for travel. An Advisor or supervisor may choose to communicate with the Graduate Program Director regarding funding opportunities for the interested student if they do not have funds to support the student. The Division of Epidemiology will provide support for one trip per doctoral student per year, typically to attend and/or present at a refereed conference. The request for student travel funds may or may not be approved depending on available funding and prior student travel funding and conference attendance in a given fiscal year. Additionally, travel scholarships are offered through the VCU Graduate School; more information is available at: http://www.graduate.vcu.edu/life/bulletin.html.

When a student has been approved for travel funding, s/he should communicate directly with the designated staff person to arrange travel details. Contact the Director of Educational Programs for the staff member’s name. For the Director of Educational Programs’ contact information, look under the “Faculty and Staff” heading in this handbook. The staff member arranging travel requires written confirmation that travel funding was granted and any information that pertains to the cost of the travel expenses. Travel arrangements need to be communicated with the designated staff member no less than three weeks prior to the expected travel period. If a situation arises that does not allow a student to submit information within this time frame, the student should communicate with the designated staff member directly about the possibility of travel.
Student Recognition

Student Research Awards

The School of Medicine sponsors several annual programs to draw attention to the continuing achievements of graduate students and to recognize their accomplishments in advance of the awarding of their degrees. Information on student recognition can be found here: http://www.medschool.vcu.edu/graduate/recognition/index.html

In addition to the awards and events on the School of Medicine link above, graduate students may be nominated for membership in the Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society or the Alpha Epsilon Lambda Society by the Graduate Program Director. Further information about Phi Kappa Phi is available at http://www.vcu.edu/phikappaphi/index; for information on Alpha Epsilon Lambda, visit: http://www.graduate.vcu.edu/life/association.html.

The School of Medicine also has two awards for recognition of scholarly achievement: the C.C. Clayton Award and the Marian Waller Scholarship. Details on both awards are available at http://www.medschool.vcu.edu/graduate/recognition/index.html.

Division Graduation Recognition Event

Each spring prior to the University’s graduation ceremony, the Division hosts a recognition event for all Program graduates (Epidemiology Doctoral and MPH). Event details will be communicated each spring as details are finalized.

Graduation Ceremony

All PhD graduates will be hooded during the University-Wide Commencement Ceremony in May. Advisors (or a designee) are expected to be present at the ceremony to hood their graduating student.
Appendix: Program Resources

Stages in Degree Completion Proposed Timeline

PhD Course Competencies

Suggested Course Sequence

Curriculum Planner

Independent Study Plan Template

Course Offerings per Term

Variable Credit Course Registration
# Stages in Degree Completion Proposed Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Term Completed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Comprehensive Examinations—Year 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting to discuss comprehensive exams</td>
<td>Spring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determination of comprehensive exam dates</td>
<td>Spring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written On-site exam conducted</td>
<td>Summer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissemination of Take Home exam materials</td>
<td>Summer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collection of Take Home exam materials</td>
<td>Summer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grading of comprehensive exam materials</td>
<td>Summer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Announcement to student of comprehensive exam grades</td>
<td>Summer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Oral Dissertation Proposal Exam—Years 2-3</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning to apply for dissertation grant</td>
<td>Spring/Summer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review and revise myIDP Science Careers Individual Development Plan</td>
<td>Summer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determine dissertation paper topics</td>
<td>Spring/Summer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Select and invite Dissertation Committee members</td>
<td>Spring/Summer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Draft proposals of dissertation papers</td>
<td>Summer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finalize drafts of dissertation proposal</td>
<td>Fall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receive approval of Dissertation Committee members to proceed with oral dissertation proposal exam</td>
<td>Fall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schedule oral dissertation proposal exam in GradTrak</td>
<td>Fall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obtain committee signatures on oral proposal exam scheduling form</td>
<td>Fall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submit oral dissertation proposal materials to the Office of Graduate Education and Director of Educational Programs</td>
<td>Fall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Request room reservations and technology</td>
<td>Fall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare oral dissertation proposal materials</td>
<td>Fall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct oral dissertation proposal exam</td>
<td>Fall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissertation Committee informs student of Committee’s decision</td>
<td>Fall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submit dissertation grant after passing oral dissertation proposal exam</td>
<td>Fall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dissertation Requirements—Year 3</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apply for degree candidacy</td>
<td>Spring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Begin dissertation research</td>
<td>Spring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dissertation Requirements—Year 4</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obtain Advisor and Dissertation Committee approval of dissertation materials in “all but” final format</td>
<td>Spring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schedule dissertation defense in GradTrak</td>
<td>Spring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obtain committee signatures on dissertation scheduling form</td>
<td>Spring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submit dissertation materials to the Office of Graduate Education and Director of Educational Programs</td>
<td>Spring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Request room reservations and technology</td>
<td>Spring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare dissertation defense materials</td>
<td>Spring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct dissertation defense</td>
<td>Spring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task</td>
<td>Season</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committee informs student of committee decision and edits to be made to the dissertation document(s)</td>
<td>Spring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make corrections/revisions to the dissertation document(s)</td>
<td>Spring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upload dissertation to the VCU Digital Archives and obtain receipt</td>
<td>Spring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publish dissertation in VCU Scholar’s Compass and obtain receipt</td>
<td>Spring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obtain necessary signatures on the ETD Approval form</td>
<td>Spring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete Survey of Earned Doctorates</td>
<td>Spring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deliver original ETD Approval Form, graduation application, receipts from VCU Digital Archives and VCU Scholar’s Compass, Survey of Earned Doctorates to the School of Medicine’s Office of Graduate Education</td>
<td>Spring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After School of Medicine Dean’s Office signatures are obtained, collect all forms and take to the Office of the Graduate School Dean on Monroe Park Campus P</td>
<td>Spring</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# PhD Course Competencies

## 1 Theory and Context

1. a. Demonstrate knowledge of the physiologic processes important in understanding pathogenesis of disease.

1. b. Explain epidemiologic theories of disease causation, theories of bias in epidemiologic research, as well as general framework and other theories to understand distributions of disease occurrence.

1. c. Demonstrate an in-depth understanding of at least one of the theories or frameworks that form the basis for epidemiologic research.

1. d. Appropriately link theoretical framework to the design, conduct, and interpretation of epidemiologic research.

## 2 Study Design

2. a. Construct and develop novel epidemiological research questions.

2. b. Explain conceptual definitions of determinants, outcome variables, and confounders in ways consistent with the theoretical framework guiding the research.

2. c. Create and develop key variables such that misclassification and measurement error are minimized.

2. d. Demonstrate proficiency in the selecting the most appropriate study designs in epidemiologic (e.g., ecological studies, randomized trials, cohort, case-control, time series, difference-in-difference) such that bias is minimized and efficiency maximized.

2. e. Demonstrate proficiency in the construction of a primary data collection tool.

2. f. Explain the impact of measurement issues (misclassification and measurement error) on validity of the study, select the most appropriate measures during the design phase, and apply correct techniques for adjustment in analysis.

2. g. Explain what confounding is, how to identify potential confounders, strategies for prioritizing concerns regarding confounders, and ability to minimize confounding through design and analysis.

2. h. Understand selection bias in the context of cohort and case-control studies, explain ways to minimize selection bias, and recognize when correction techniques are viable and/or necessary.

2. i. Understand required elements to estimate sample size and apply methods to provide valid estimates of parameters for sample size equations.

2. j. Demonstrate knowledge of the impact of bias owing to loss of study participants and methods to minimize such bias, including the ability to devise retention strategies.

## 3 Analysis

3. a. Estimate and interpret measures of disease or event frequency and to understand the inter-relationship between measures.

3. b. Estimate and interpret crude and model-based measures of association.

3. c. Demonstrate proficiency in selecting the appropriate measure of association for the specific study.

3. d. Demonstrate understanding of statistical reasoning including distributions, probability, sampling, methods of comparing means, and approaches to estimating relationships among variables as applies to epidemiological research/data analysis.

3. e. Implement analytic techniques to control for confounding.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3. f.</th>
<th>Parameterize regression models, evaluate diagnostics of the model and interpret model-based measures of association</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3. g.</td>
<td>Evaluate and interpret the extent to which a factor modifies the relationship between determinant and outcome under study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. h.</td>
<td>Apply advanced statistical methods appropriate for student research needs (e.g. hierarchical modeling, mixed-effects models, categorical data analysis, analytical techniques for evaluating spatial data).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. i.</td>
<td>Use techniques to estimate causal effects from non-experimental study designs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. j.</td>
<td>Conduct sensitivity analyses to understand the robustness of findings in light of sources of bias</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4 Effective communication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4. a.</th>
<th>Demonstrate effective communication skills across disciplines, framing questions appropriately and implementing active listening skills.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4. b.</td>
<td>Demonstrate proficiency in scientific writing (manuscripts, review of manuscripts, rebuttals to reviewers, grant writing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. c.</td>
<td>Effectively deliver oral presentations (e.g., scientific presentations to professional audiences, lectures to students and other teaching) including the appropriate use of audio/visual technologies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. d.</td>
<td>Effectively communicate scientific information to multiple audiences (lay audiences and policy-makers) for the purpose of translating science into policy and practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. e.</td>
<td>Demonstrate proficiency in leading discussions (e.g. journal club, seminar, brainstorming sessions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. f.</td>
<td>Construct and orally pose scientific questions related to research (e.g. discussant, ask questions, etc.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 5 Data Management and Practical Research Skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5. a.</th>
<th>Demonstrate familiarity with the availability, structure, and appropriate procedures to access datasets for epidemiologic research.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5. b.</td>
<td>Implement methods for assessing the strengths and limitations of data sources for evaluating specific study questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. c.</td>
<td>Demonstrate expertise in the management of complex relational and hierarchical databases including merging, appending, aggregating and transposing data structures; documenting and recoding variables, and converting data across different analysis software applications.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. d.</td>
<td>Apply appropriate weighting schemes to population-based datasets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. e.</td>
<td>Explain security issues, HIPAA practices, and other privacy regulations affecting data access and security requirements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. f.</td>
<td>Execute methods for processing primary data including developing systems for data entry and validation, data cleaning and documentation (internal and external systems)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. g.</td>
<td>Conduct thorough searches of the medical literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.h.</td>
<td>Effectively use citation managers, presentation software, and spreadsheets.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 6 Ethical Behaviors, Administrative Skills, and Personal and Professional Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>6.a.</th>
<th>Demonstrate understanding of federal regulations and guidelines regarding the conduct of research with human subjects.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.b.</td>
<td>Explain ethical principles and their application to public health research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.c.</td>
<td>Recognize potentially vulnerable populations and identify appropriate course of action for protection and advocacy on their behalf.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.d.</td>
<td>Identify potential conflicts of interest and roles that may arise in research and develop strategies for addressing and managing these conflicts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.e.</td>
<td>Follow guidelines for appropriate publication of findings, including issues of authorship, confidentiality, academic freedom and provide appropriate citations and credit for the work of others.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 7 Leadership skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>7.a.</th>
<th>Formulate a leadership style based on self-awareness of values, strengths, and limitations, effectively differentiating between personal responsibilities and tasks for delegation.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.c.</td>
<td>Value diverse perspectives, demonstrating equitable treatment of others and effective conflict negotiation skills.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### PhD Program Suggested Plan of Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semester</th>
<th>Course Title</th>
<th>Credits</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fall 1</strong></td>
<td>STAT 643 Applied Linear Regression</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EPID 649 Analysis of Health Datasets (methods selective)</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td></td>
<td>EPID 650 Epidemiologic Methods for Research</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
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<td>EPID 690 Journal Club</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Spring 1</strong></td>
<td>STAT 744 Regression II</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
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<td>EPID 651 Intermediate Epidemiologic Methods for Research</td>
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<td>EPID 690 Journal Club</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Methods or Substantive elective</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Summer 1</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>or Methods or Substantive elective</td>
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<td><strong>Fall 2</strong></td>
<td>EPID 652 Advanced Epidemiologic Methods and Data Analysis</td>
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<td>Two Methods and/or Substantive area electives</td>
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<td></td>
<td>OVPR 602 Responsible Scientific Conduct (or Advisor-approved substitute)</td>
<td>1 required (up to 3 if substitute course selected)</td>
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<td>Three Methods and/or Substantive area or methods electives</td>
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<td><strong>Fall 3 – to final defense</strong></td>
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# Epidemiology PhD Curriculum Planner

41 Credits Minimum (Excluding Dissertation Work)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Courses by Term</th>
<th>Cr</th>
<th>Term/Year Taken</th>
<th>Recommended</th>
<th>Sem/Yr</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>REQUIRED COURSES</strong></td>
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<td>STAT 744</td>
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<td>Second</td>
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<tr>
<td>OVPR 602 (or Advisor approved substitute)</td>
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<td>Second</td>
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<td><strong>Other</strong></td>
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<td>EPID 697</td>
<td>Variable; min. 18</td>
<td>As appropriate and every term after achieving Candidacy;</td>
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<td>Sem/Yr</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Practical Research Skills Elective</strong></td>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>Sem/Yr</td>
<td>Grade</td>
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</table>

* For students matriculating before fall 2015.

**NOTE:** The PhD Program reserves the right to change course offerings.
Independent Study Plan Guidelines

Provide a plan for the independent study course that includes the following elements.

Independent study topic:

Student:

Faculty facilitator:

Semester and year: (e.g., Spring 2015)

Relevance of independent study to student’s graduate training:

Briefly state the relevance of the planned study to your graduate program study and training.

Per VCU academic policy, independent study courses may not address topics covered by existing VCU courses. In developing this Independent Study Plan, the student and advisor are responsible for thoroughly search the VCU course database to identify possible courses that overlap with the intended independent study.

I certify that we have thoroughly searched the VCU course database and that the independent study course reflected in this plan does not duplicate any existing VCU course. (Please initial.)

_______  Student

_______  Advisor

Indicate if this Independent Study will serve as a methodological or substantive elective.

___  Methodological elective

___  Substantive elective
Goals and objectives:

List at least one goal and at least 3 supporting objectives per goal for this learning experience. Submit the plan by email to the Division of Epidemiology’s Director of Educational Programs, copying your faculty advisor/independent study facilitator. This plan is due no later than the first day of classes in the semester when the independent study will be conducted.

Applicable program competencies:

Working with your faculty advisor/independent study facilitator, list the competencies for your degree program (MPH or PhD) that apply to this experience. (Note: Will attach a full list of competencies to the document for reference and have separate documents for PhD and MPH programs.)

Semester plan:

Describe the plans for the independent study to be completed in the semester. Include the following:

1. Full list of publications from which readings are to be completed, in bibliographic form
2. Assignments/products to be completed (e.g., written reports, data analysis, meeting/event attendance)
   a. Describe each assignment
   b. Provide expectations for each assignment
   c. Describe how the faculty facilitator will evaluate each assignment
3. A time line or schedule of specific tasks, assignments, or products, to include:
   a. Due dates for each item
   b. Scheduled meetings with faculty advisor/independent study facilitator

Use the following table for your time line and add rows as needed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task/Assignment/Activity</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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</tbody>
</table>
SIGNATURES

Faculty Advisor:
Name: __________________________________________________________
Signature: _________________________________________________________
Date: ___________________________

Student:
Name: __________________________________________________________
Signature: _________________________________________________________
Date: ___________________________

Director of Educational Programs:
Name: __________________________________________________________
Signature: _________________________________________________________
Date: ___________________________

Graduate Program Director:
Name: __________________________________________________________
Signature: _________________________________________________________
Date: ___________________________
# Course Offerings per Term

## Core Courses & Required Curriculum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Number and Name</th>
<th>Fall</th>
<th>Spring</th>
<th>Summer</th>
<th>Substantive Methods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>STAT 643 Applied Linear Regression</td>
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<tr>
<td>STAT 744 Regression II</td>
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<tr>
<td>EPID 649 Analysis of Health Data Sets</td>
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<tr>
<td>EPID 650 Epidemiologic Methods for Research</td>
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<td>EPID 651 Intermediate Epidemiologic Methods for Research</td>
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<td>EPID 652 Advanced Epidemiologic Methods and Data Analysis</td>
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<td>EPID 690 Journal Club</td>
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## Methodological and Substantive Electives

### Biostatistics

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Number and Name</th>
<th>Fall</th>
<th>Spring</th>
<th>Summer</th>
<th>Substantive Methods</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BIOS 553 Linear Regression</td>
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<td>BIOS 554 Analysis of Variance</td>
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<tr>
<td>BIOS 567 Statistical Methods for High-throughput Genomics Data I</td>
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<td>BIOS 571 Clinical Trials</td>
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<td>BIOS 572 Statistical Analysis of Biomedical Data</td>
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<td>BIOS 631 Multivariate Analysis I</td>
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<td>BIOS 632 Multivariate Analysis II</td>
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<td>BIOS 647 Survival Analysis</td>
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<td>BIOS 671 Non-linear Methods</td>
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### Center for Clinical and Translational Research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Fall</th>
<th>Spring</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CCTR 550 Foundations of Clinical and Translational Research</td>
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<td>CCTR 692 Clinical Trials: Design Implications</td>
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### Epidemiology

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<tr>
<td>EPID 620 Cancer Epidemiology</td>
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<td>EPID 622 Maternal and Child Health</td>
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<td>EPID 646 Epidemiology of Psychiatric and Substance Abuse Disorders</td>
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<td>EPID 648 Behavioral Epidemiology</td>
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### Gerontology

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<tr>
<td>GRTY 601 Biology and Physiology of Aging</td>
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<td>GRTY 602 Psychology of Aging</td>
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**Additional electives could be approved by academic advisor or Graduate Program Director**

***A single course can only be considered as either substantive or methods, it cannot be applied to both categories for graduation requirements.***
Variable credit registration in eServices

1) Register for the class as usual. Note that the credit hours (Cred) for the class will be highlighted:
2) Click on the highlighted credit hours (Cred) for the class. That will take you to the Change Class Options screen:

You may change a selected class which has variable credits, within the university's published registration deadlines. Change the credit hours and then click "Submit Changes". Then click "Return to Previous" and also click on "Submit Changes" on that screen. The change to your credit hours will then appear.

**TEST COURSE - VARIABLE CREDITS**

Course: 34063 BIOC 691 999
Credit Hours (1.000 to 4.000): 1.000
Grade Mode: Standard Letter
Course Level: Graduate

Submit Changes  Reset

Return to Previous
3) Follow the directions on this screen. You may change the credit hours for the variable credit course using the Credit Hours field. The appropriate range for that course will be displayed. After changing the credit hours, click "Submit Changes". Your changes are not yet complete!! Next you must click "Return to Previous" to return to the previous page, then submit your changes again:
4) After clicking “Submit Changes” again on the Add or Drop Classes screen, your changes are complete:

### Current Schedule

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- **Total Credit Hours:** 3.000
- **Billing Hours:** 3.000
- **Minimum Hours:** 0.000
- **Maximum Hours:** 19.000
- **Date:** Oct 20, 2015 01:15 pm

### Add Classes Worksheet

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[Submit Changes] [Class Search] [Reset]